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A MIXED-METHODS EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SELF AND ADAPTIVE COPING IN MILITARY WIVES

Abstract

Purpose: Previous research indicates that identity relates to use of specific coping strategies. Exploring the relationship between self and coping in military wives is crucial to understanding how they manage military lifestyle-related stressors. The researcher hypothesized that levels of emotion-focused coping (EFC) strategies in managing stressors will be related to higher degrees of well-being and individuals who endorsed the most mature identity status and higher degrees of self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, and mastery will report greater use of EFC. Role conflict was hypothesized to predict greater use of problem-focused coping (PFC) strategies. **Methods:** 202 participants completed an online survey containing standardized scales and two open-ended questions. Quantitative data was analyzed via Pearson correlations and multiple regression analysis. Qualitative questions explored ways these women perceived sense of self influencing coping. Qualitative data was analyzed via thematic analysis. **Results:** Well-being was negatively correlated with EFC but positively correlated with PFC. Multiple regression analyses revealed EFC had positive relationships with achieved identity status and role conflict. PFC had positive relationships with moratorium status, self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, and mastery. Qualitative analysis indicated that participants view acceptance, self-reliance, flexibility, seeking social support, and cognitive reframing as helpful. Certain aspects of self were helpful in facilitating adaptive coping. **Conclusions and Implications:** Findings suggest that PFC may be adaptive for military wives. Those higher in “achieved” status and role conflict may cope less adaptively than those with “moratorium” status and high self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, and mastery. Social workers can assist military wives in promoting adaptive coping strategies.

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A MIXED-METHODS EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE
SELF AND ADAPTIVE COPING IN MILITARY WIVES

Amy Preston Page

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In

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Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

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SELF AND ADAPTIVE COPING MILITARY WIVES

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Amy Preston Page

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my husband, **Jonathan Page**, who provided me this opportunity in every single way. You made each and every aspect of this process possible.

The work is also dedicated to **the many women who call themselves military wives**. I hope I have done my part to make this life even a little bit easier for those who come after me.

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ABSTRACT

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Purpose: Previous research indicates that identity relates to use of specific coping strategies. Exploring the relationship between self and coping in military wives is crucial to understanding how they manage military lifestyle-related stressors. The researcher hypothesized that levels of emotion-focused coping (EFC) strategies in managing stressors will be related to higher degrees of well-being and individuals who endorsed the most mature identity status and higher degrees of self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, and mastery will report greater use of EFC. Role conflict was hypothesized to predict greater use of problem-focused coping (PFC) strategies. **Methods:** 202 participants completed an online survey containing standardized scales and two open-ended questions. Quantitative data was analyzed via Pearson correlations and multiple regression analysis. Qualitative questions explored ways these women perceived sense of self influencing coping. Qualitative data was analyzed via thematic analysis. **Results:** Well-being was negatively correlated with EFC but positively correlated with PFC. Multiple regression analyses revealed EFC had positive relationships with achieved identity status and role conflict. PFC had positive relationships with moratorium status, self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, and mastery. Qualitative analysis indicated that participants view acceptance, self-reliance, flexibility, seeking social support, and cognitive reframing as helpful. Certain aspects of self were helpful in facilitating adaptive

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The ability to cope effectively with life's challenges is essential to functioning adaptively and successfully. Indeed, Lazarus (1993) identifies the concept of coping as crucial for the study of psychological adjustment and health. Coping "consists of cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage psychological stress" (Lazarus, 1993, p. 237) and refers specifically to those efforts which occur in response to a perceived stressor, not those applied to the everyday challenges of life (Thoits, 1986). Coping is not only a way to minimize negative emotions associated with stressors; it is also an important factor in maintaining positive affect, even in the face of substantial difficulties (McCrae & Costa, 1986). A wide range of coping strategies may be needed when an individual encounters chronic or repeated stressors (Dimiceli, Steinhardt, & Smith, 2010; Patterson & McCubbin, 1984; Thoits, 1986), with some being more adaptive than others. Indeed, the term "coping" can be used to describe both healthy and unhealthy responses to a stressor (Lazarus, 1993; McCrae & Costa, 1986). In other words, the outcome of coping (i.e., whether it is considered effective and adaptive) is separate from the actual process of managing the stress related to an event (Lazarus, 1993).

Studies show that women disclose higher levels of stress than men, and they seem to have more difficulty utilizing effective coping strategies than men do (Aycock, 2011; Higgins, Duxbury & Lyons, 2010; Kessler & McLeod, 1984; Matud, 2004). Wives of military service members in particular face a wider range of challenges than do their civilian counterparts (Blue Star Families, 2015; 2017; Clever & Segal, 2013; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Green, Nurius, & Lester, 2013; Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Mulvey, 2008; Segal,

1986). Multiple researchers have discussed the impact of typical military stressors on military wives' emotional, physical, marital, or financial functioning (e.g., Aducci, Baptist, George, Barros, & Nelson-Goff, 2011; Blakely, Hennessy, Chung, & Skirton, 2014; Blue Star Families, 2016; Burrell, Adams, Durand, & Castro, 2006; Clever & Segal, 2013; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Eubanks, 2013; Green et al., 2013; Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Klein, Tatone, & Lindsay, 1989; Klodnicki, 2015; Mulvey, 2008; Padden, Connors, & Agazio, 2011; Park, 2011; Runge, Waller, MacKenzie, & McGuire, 2014; Segal, 1986). Yet one of the most fundamental but unrecognized difficulties these women confront relates to maintaining a healthy sense of self. The lifestyle of an Active Duty military wife constantly threatens to undermine her sense of identity (Eubanks, 2013; Robbins, 2002). Military wives are often expected to refer to themselves only in relation to their husbands (Blakely et al., 2014; Eubanks, 2013) or to place the needs of the service member or the military ahead of their own wellbeing (Blue Star Families, 2016, 2017; Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003). A military wife may have difficulty maintaining a consistent identity as she relocates numerous times, adapting to new personal and professional roles (Eubanks, 2013). Career interruptions negatively affect military wives' sense of self (Blakely et al., 2014; Dimiceli et al., 2010). Role confusion, conflict, or overload may occur as a result of the service members' frequent absences (Aducci et al., 2011; DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Drummet et al., 2003; Faber, Willerton, Clymer, MacDermid, & Weiss, 2008; Lapp et al., 2010; McCullah, 1978, cited in Robbins, 2002; Park, 2011; Patterson & McCubbin, 1984; Robbins, 2002; Verdelli et al., 2011; Wood, Scarville, & Gravino, 1995). Such role challenges lead to feelings of stress and frustration (Biddle, 1986). The military wife may also experience a sense that she

lacks control over her life (Aducci et al., 2011; Blakely et al., 2014; Davis, Ward, & Storm, 2011; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Klein et al., 1989; Lapp et al., 2010; Lehr, 1996; Mulvey, 2008; Robbins, 2002). The military wife may feel obliged to look to others for behavioral and emotional cues which may not reflect her true self as she constantly encounters social situations with which she is unfamiliar. Moreover, the experience of a military wife is frequently that of being silenced, invisible, forgotten, or less important than the needs of the military (Aducci et al., 2011; Blue Star Families, 2016, 2017; Davis et al., 2011; Lapp et al., 2010; Lehr, 1996; Marnocha, 2012; Nichols, Martindale-Adams, Graney, Zuber, & Burns, 2013; Park, 2011; Robbins, 2002). All of these experiences are likely to lead to stress and negative affect; therefore, effective coping strategies are essential for these women (Eubanks, 2013). Indeed, use of healthy coping mechanisms in military wives has been associated with higher levels of mental wellbeing than that associated with less adaptive coping mechanisms (Padden et al., 2011). Positive coping strategies may also have an impact on a military wife's ability to parent her children in an effective, supportive manner (DeVoe & Ross, 2012), as the emotional state of military wives is likely to influence the emotional state of their children (Lester et al., 2010).

Researchers have identified a connection between inherent dispositional traits or identity and use of specific coping strategies (e.g., Baker & Berenbaum, 2007; Berzonsky, 1992; Billings & Moos, 1984; Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989; Luyckx, Klimstra, Duriez, Schwartz, & Vanhalst, 2012; McCrae & Costa, 1986; Sadeh & Karniol, 2011; Scheier et al., 1986; Smith & Dust, 2006). Berzonsky (1992) emphasizes the importance of determining the impact that one's identity style (i.e., the "*processes* [individuals] use to form and maintain a sense of self-identity;" p. 772) has on that

person's ability to cope effectively with life's challenges. He asks whether the individual's approach to identity allows that person to manage the day-to-day struggles of living in an effective manner. In other words, the manner in which a person forms and maintains a sense of self may have an impact on his or her ability to negotiate adapting to a changing environment. For example, an individual who uses an informational orientation to identity, which involves seeking information and incorporating that new data into one's sense of self (Berzonsky, 1992), may be more likely to cope effectively with challenges. Those who approach identity from an avoidant orientation postpone making identity-related decisions and, as a result, may find their identity development subject to impulse and pleasure-seeking whims (Berzonsky, 1992). These individuals are less likely to cope effectively with life's challenges, as their core identities are so diffuse. Appropriate identity formation includes a high degree of exploration (both across a wide range of options and deeply into a particular option) and a high degree of commitment to an identity (Luyckz et al., 2012; Marcia, 1966). This type of identity formation may enhance the development of effective coping strategies, possibly as a result of the richness and complexity gained through the exploration required for a mature identity (Luyckx et al., 2012). While studies exist which examine coping mechanisms within the population of military wives (e.g., Dimiceli et al., 2010; Lapp et al., 2010; Padden et al., 2011; Westhuis et al., 2006; Wheeler & Stone, 2010), few, if any, studies have focused specifically on the impact that inherent character traits may have on how these women choose to cope with military lifestyle stressors. Research indicates that these traits likely play a role in an individual's choice of coping strategy, and Lazarus's (1993) distinction between selected coping mechanisms and outcomes (e.g., physical and mental well-

being) underscores the need to examine perceived effectiveness of particular coping strategies used. Such exploration could yield information about characteristics possessed by these women which help to protect them from the negative effects associated with their lifestyle.

The unique constellation of challenges faced by this population (Blue Star Families, 2015, 2016, 2017; Clever & Segal, 2013; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Drummet et al., 2003; Green et al., 2013; Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Mulvey, 2008; Segal, 1986) demands that these women engage constantly in the use of coping strategies. In order to enhance the quality of their own lives, the lives of their children, the lives of the service members to whom they are married, and to promote positive outcomes for the military as a whole (Blue Star Families, 2016, 2017; DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Dolphin, Steinhardt, & Cance, 2015; Eubanks, 2013; Green et al., 2013; Jans, 1989; Klein et al., 1989; Klodnicki, 2015; Lehr, 1996; Robbins, 2002; Runge et al., 2014; Verdeli et al., 2011; Westhuis, Fafara, & Ouellette, 2006; Wood et al., 1995), military wives need to implement healthy, adaptive coping skills. The present study seeks to answer the following questions: To what extent are identity status, self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, role conflict, and mastery related to a military wife's ability to cope adaptively with the stressors of the military lifestyle? In what ways, if any, do the unique challenges of the military lifestyle affect the manner in which these women cope with the challenges they face as military wives?

Chapter 2. Background and Significance

The Life of a Military Wife

Military wives face a unique set of challenges (Blue Star Families, 2015, 2017; Clever & Segal, 2013; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Drummet et al., 2003; Green et al., 2013; Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Mulvey, 2008; Segal, 1986). Fear for their husbands' safety, the impact of geographic relocations, the impact of being separated from their husbands, and the impact of being stationed outside of the United States can each have a negative relationship to some degree on wellbeing or satisfaction with the Army lifestyle (Blue Star Families, 2016; Burrell et al., 2006). Such challenges, if they are to be weathered, demand the use of adaptive coping mechanisms. Less adaptive coping strategies may be associated with poorer mental health and emotional adjustment; worsened effects of negative emotions; and higher degrees of neuroticism (Billings & Moos, 1984; Brown, Westbrook, & Challagalla, 2005; Mattlin, Wethington, & Kessler, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1986; Padden et al., 2011). Moreover, the study of adaptive coping is crucial to enhancing the quality of life for this population (Dimiceli et al., 2010).

One theme which has emerged in the literature regarding military wives is that of the numerous challenges they face. Another theme includes the collective emotional and cognitive experiences they share. Findings regarding struggles and strengths of these women are somewhat contradictory, and much of the research is performed through the lens of deployment (Runge et al., 2014). Less attention has been given to the wife's experience related to stressors associated with living the Active Duty military lifestyle overall (Green et al., 2013), although some literature on this topic does exist. Those studies focus on negative impacts of relocation, separation from family, feeling forgotten

or silenced, and career challenges (e.g., Aducci et al. 2011; Blakely et al., 2014; Blue Star Families, 2015, 2016, 2017; Davis et al., 2011; Lapp et al., 2010; Nichols, et al., 2013; Robbins, 2002). While much of this literature examines the impact that these stressors have on overall wellbeing in this population, this relationship seems to miss an important step: the methods used by these women to cope with these challenges. The literature's tendency to jump from lifestyle factors to wellbeing implies that the lifestyle itself is what determines outcomes. While external factors certainly may play a role in outcomes, these women do have control over the ways in which they manage these challenges. Understanding which coping strategies are more adaptive for this population will enable clinicians to support these women more effectively. Furthermore, understanding which inherent traits are associated with certain coping strategies will equip clinicians to identify additional areas in which they can promote self-reflection and growth.

Military wives' reactions to deployment. Arguably, the most frequently studied issue in the current literature is that of military wives' experiences of their husbands' deployments. In addition to the practical and readily observable challenges such as loneliness (Duvall, 1945) and functioning as a single parent (Aducci et al., 2011; Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Ross, 2016), military wives experience more subtle and personal obstacles when a husband deploys. Such challenges include preparing emotionally for periods of separation (Aducci et al., 2011; Lapp et al., 2010; Marnocha, 2012); knowing whether and when to disclose negative or stressful information to a husband when he is deployed, as "distracting" him might pose safety concerns (Joseph & Afifi, 2010); feeling misunderstood and silenced by civilians during a husband's deployment (Davis et al., 2011; Lapp et al., 2010; Ross, 2016); feeling that she accompanies her husband on

deployment but is not recognized as doing so (Aducci et al., 2011); lack of support from military-sponsored organizations (Runge et al., 2014); role confusion both during the deployment and upon the husband's return (Aducci et al., 2011; DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Drummet et al., 2003; Faber, et al., 2008; Lapp et al., 2010; McCullah, 1978, cited in Robbins, 2002; Park, 2011; Patterson & McCubbin, 1984; Robbins, 2002; Verdelli et al., 2011; Wood et al., 1995); caring for others both emotionally and physically with little or no reciprocated support due to husband's absence (Ross, 2016); attending to the needs of an injured husband (Nichols et al., 2013); and learning again how to live as a married couple after a deployment (Aducci et al., 2011; Drummet et al., 2003; Lapp et al., 2010; Ross, 2016). Global distress, depression, and anxiety levels among military wives whose husbands are deployed have been found to be significantly higher than these levels among a community sample, with a large proportion of their sample reaching a clinically significant level (Lester et al., 2010).

Challenges related to the overall lifestyle of the Active Duty military wife.

Day-to-day stresses of living the Active-Duty military lifestyle not related to deployments form another, smaller segment of the literature. One important distinction to make refers to the difference in lifestyle between the Active-Duty component of the military and the National Guard/Reserve components. While some experiences between the components may overlap (Lapp et al., 2010; Ross, 2016; Wheeler & Stone, 2010), the challenges discussed here are primarily associated with the Active Duty component, as this section of the community is seen as "full-time" military, as it were.

Normal family stressors, when combined with military lifestyle stressors, affect mental and physical wellbeing in military wives regardless of service members'

deployment status (Green et al., 2013). Other authors have called attention to military wives' experiences of sharing their marriages with the military (Aducci et al., 2011; Blue Star Families, 2016; Segal, 1986) and feeling that one's husband has a stronger bond with his comrades than with his wife (Aducci et al., 2011). Military wives report challenges in maintaining steady employment, appropriate wages, and career advancement due to the frequent relocations demanded by the military (Blue Star Families, 2015, 2016, 2017; Clever & Segal, 2013; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Eubanks, 2013; Runge et al., 2014). Indeed, researchers paint a rather grim picture for the fate of military wives. Military wives may experience greater distress than their civilian counterparts even without the impact of deployment. Green et al. found that their sample's means for global severity of psychological distress were significantly higher than those of typical community samples, regardless of husband's deployment status. The authors note that their findings are particularly concerning given the large number of supportive resources available to military families who live on or near military installations.

Segal (1986) describes the military as a "greedy institution," demanding much of service members and their families (p. 9) and identifies several of the core challenges faced by military wives as they negotiate their married lives. These demands are risk of injury or death of the service member, geographic mobility, separations from the spouse (both due to the service member's deployment and due to training, temporary duty assignments, etc.), residence in foreign countries, and normative constraints (e.g. "normative pressures on the behavior of spouses and children" [Segal, 1986, p. 22]). Segal contends that negotiating the cumulative effect of these demands is what makes the

military lifestyle different and more challenging than coping with the demands of a civilian lifestyle.

Managing the combination of these challenges effectively demands the use of adaptive coping in this population (Eubanks, 2013). As noted above, research on military wives has already shown that the military lifestyle leads to negative consequences for many aspects of military wives' emotional and physical wellbeing (e.g., Blakely et al., 2014; Burrell et al., 2006; Green et al., 2013; Runge et al., 2014). The military lifestyle may also have an impact on other areas of a military wife's life (e.g., perceived effectiveness as a parent); thus, a military wife's ability to cope effectively with the challenges of the lifestyle is of paramount importance to her children as well (DeVoe & Ross, 2012). What factors are associated with more positive outcomes for these women? More specifically, what strengths and individual traits do these women possess which may lead to the use of more adaptive coping mechanisms, thus leading to better outcomes?

Strengths of the military wife. Despite the challenges faced by military wives, these women possess numerous positive traits and abilities. Positive coping skills, personal growth in the face of adversity, independence, strong friendships, and great resilience are demonstrated by the results of several studies (Aducci et al., 2011; Blakeley et al., 2014; Davis et al., 2011; Lapp et al., 2010; Marnocha, 2012; Robbins, 2002; Runge et al., 2014; Wheeler & Stone, 2010). For example, despite their findings that some aspects of the military lifestyle (e.g., impact of separations from service members, of living overseas, and of fearing for service members' safety) have negative consequences for military wives' physical and/or emotional wellbeing, Burrell et al. (2006) also found

that other facets of the military lifestyle (e.g., impact of frequent relocations, the number of separations from the service member) was not associated with psychological wellbeing or marital satisfaction. The authors explain that the impact of the number of moves or the number of relocations experienced by a military wife affect her less than her actual experience of the move or the separation. In other words, the quality, timing, or reasons behind the moves and the separations seem more important than the actual number of such relocations. Runge et al. obtained qualitative data from a large sample of military spouses in Australia and found that participants had both positive and negative experiences with the military culture. Positive experiences included feeling supported by the military as a whole, opportunities for growth, pride in their partners' service, and appreciation of good pay and entitlements (Runge et al., 2014). Further study on what contributes to such adaptive coping and positive outcomes is warranted in order to enhance the factors which lead to adaptive coping.

Many of the studies discussed above have similar limitations, including small and fairly nonrepresentative samples, a concern which is noted by several of the authors (Aducci et al., 2011; Burrell et al., 2013; Davis et al., 2011; Green et al., 2013; Jans, 1989; Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Klodnicki, 2015; Lapp et al., 2010; Marnocha, 2012; Ross, 2016; Wheeler & Stone, 2010). Many of the participants are spouses of officers rather than enlisted soldiers, which is not representative of the makeup of the military as a whole (Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, 2014). Additionally, few of the studies take into consideration the importance of inherent character traits of these spouses such as identity status, self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, role conflict, and mastery in ameliorating the effects of these challenges. Any or all of these traits could

serve as protective factors in military wives' abilities to cope adaptively with the stressors they face.

Adaptive Coping

Stressors can occur at any time and can take practically any form. Stressors are events that are experienced as negative and can be either single occurrences or ongoing situations (Thoits, 1986). What is stressful for one person may or may not be stressful for another (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). When an individual faces a stressor, he or she employs one or more coping strategies in order to manage the situation and the intense emotions which may occur as a result (Dimiceli et al., 2010). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as "the process through which the individual manages the demands of the person-environment relationship that are appraised as stressful and the emotions they generate" (p. 19). Other definitions of coping include adjusting to a situation which one perceives as being threatening (Roger, Jarvis, & Najarian, 1993) and using one's resources to offset the effects of a stressful situation in order to maintain health (Billings & Moos, 1984). Pearlin and Schooler (1978) define coping as "the things that people do to avoid being harmed by life strains" (p. 2). Folkman and Lazarus (1980) emphasize the inclusion of efforts to manage both the emotions associated with the stressor as well as efforts to address or resolve the problem itself in defining coping. Coping and its related constructs have been the focus of research and clinical attention in some form for many years (Amirkhan, 1990; Ben-Zur & Zeidner, 1996; Carver, 1997; Coyne & Racioppo, 2000; Lazarus, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Scheier, Weintraub, & Carver, 1986), and coping has been described as a "key concept for theory and research on adaptation and health" (Lazarus, 1993, p. 234). The study of coping clearly has potential for

applicability to the vast majority of the world's population and particularly for military wives.

General conceptualizations of coping. The construct of coping has been conceptualized in two primary ways. One conceptualization has been with regard to defining the construct itself: whether coping is a trait (or style) or whether it is a process (Ben-Zur & Zeidner, 1996; Carver et al., 1989; Lazarus, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping as a trait or style implies that an individual tends to utilize the same cluster of coping mechanisms, with little regard to the demands of the situation (Carver et al., 1989; Lazarus, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Menaghan, 1982). Coping as a process (or coping efforts), however, refers to the idea that individuals choose which coping strategies they will use as they experience each new stressor (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1994; Menaghan, 1982; Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan, 1981) and to the actual thoughts and actions in which a person engages throughout the time that he or she continues to negotiate an ongoing stressful situation (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Indeed, Folkman and Lazarus (1980) describe this process-oriented approach to coping as “transactional in that the person and environment are seen in an ongoing relationship of reciprocal action, each affecting and in turn being affected by the other” (p. 223).

The second major conceptualization of coping concerns the classification of various coping mechanisms into two major categories. These two categories of coping, problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping, serve as the foundation for most of the literature on this topic (Baker & Berenbaum, 2007; Brown, Westbrook, & Challagalla, 2005; Higgins et al., 2010; Lazarus, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Sadeh

& Karniol, 2011; Thoits, 1986). Problem-focused coping refers to efforts an individual makes to change the actual problematic situation. Emotion-focused coping refers to the efforts made by an individual to temper the intense feelings associated with a stressful situation (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Thoits, 1995). Folkman and Lazarus note that individuals typically engage in problem-focused coping strategies when they feel that the situation itself can be modified or resolved in some way, while emotion-focused coping strategies are generally used in situations that the individual perceives as being unchangeable. Thus, a person's perception of whether she is in control of the situation may influence that manner in which that person chooses to cope with the stressor.

Although the two primary categories of coping strategies are present throughout the literature, some researchers have identified additional categories (e.g., Amirkhan, 1990; Billings & Moos, 1984; Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan., 1981; Roger et al., 1993). Others, according to Ben-Zur and Zeidner (1996), have identified subcategories within the two primary groupings (e.g., Carver et al., 1989). Of note is Carver et al.'s (1989) scale, titled the Coping Orientations to Problems Experienced Scale (COPE), which created "13 conceptually distinct scales" of coping mechanisms (p. 268). While each of the subscales can be grouped into either the problem- or emotion-focused categories, the delineation of additional subcategories allows for a more nuanced understanding of the functions served by particular coping strategies. Indeed, Carver et al. contend that the two large categories are frequently found to be too broad for capturing adequate information about the utility and mechanisms of coping. They state that what may appear to be a single act of coping may in fact contain multiple activities. Carver et al. argue that in order to study the implications a given coping strategy may

have on a person's ability to cope adaptively, each of the two primary coping categories should be delineated into more focused subcategories (e.g., active coping, planning, behavioral disengagement, etc.).

One potential factor in an individual's determination of whether to use problem- or emotion-focused coping strategies is the perceived controllability of the stressor (Carver et al., 1989; Lazarus, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Sadeh & Karniol, 2011). Researchers have found that when a situation is appraised as being more in the individual's control, he or she is more likely to utilize problem-focused coping strategies; in contrast, when the individual perceives that the situation is out of his or her control, that individual may be more likely to use emotion-focused coping strategies in order to manage the emotions associated with the event (Carver et al., 1989; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Lazarus, 1993). However, as noted by several researchers (e.g., Baltes, Zhdanova, & Clark, 2010; Carver et al., 1989; Mattlin, Wethington, & Kessler, 1990; Smith & Dust, 2006), despite the connection between situational factors and an individual's choice of coping, certain individual character and personality traits may also play a role in determining which coping mechanisms an individual chooses to utilize in any given scenario. Indeed, evidence exists to support this claim (e.g., Baltes et al., 2010; Berzonsky, 1992; Carver et al., 1989; Luyckx, et al., 2012; McCrae & Costa, 1986; Sadeh & Karniol, 2011; Smith & Dust, 2006; Wood et al., 1995). Even such demographic characteristics such as age, education level, and employment status have been shown to correlate with choice of coping strategy in previous studies (Billings & Moos, 1984; Padden et al., 2011; Smith & Dust, 2006), although other studies have found that age has no relationship with choice of coping strategy (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980).

The continuum of coping. Simply because one employs coping strategies, however, does not necessarily imply that one is managing the stressor in a particularly adaptive way (Lazarus, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Scheier et al., 1986; Thoits, 1995). Indeed, coping strategies need to be assessed separately from their degree of adaptiveness (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The idea of adaptive coping refers to the degree to which a particular coping mechanism is useful in promoting positive, healthy outcomes for an individual, specifically in social, physical, and emotional functioning (Lazarus, 1993). Pearlin and Schooler (1978) define effective coping as “the extent to which coping mechanisms reduce the relationship between role-strains and emotional stresses” (p. 17). Effective copers are those persons who experience stressors but do not experience a major increase in stress levels (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Effective coping is important in leading to solving problems, reducing negative affect, and helping individuals make progress toward goals (Brown et al., 2005). Crucial to effective adaptive functioning is an individual’s ability to meet both the need for managing the emotions associated with a stressor as well as the need to take steps to address the problematic situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Pearlin and Schooler (1978) state that a coping strategy’s effectiveness “cannot be judged solely on how well it purges problems and hardships from our lives. Instead, it must be judged on how well it prevents these hardships from resulting in emotional distress” (p. 8). When one focuses too much on one or the other aspect of coping, the outcomes may not be adaptive (Dimiceli et al., 2010). For example, if a military wife must find a new job after a relocation with her husband, simply using an emotion-focused coping strategy (e.g., expressing her feelings about needing a job to friends and family) is likely to be

maladaptive; she would need to implement a more problem-focused coping mechanism (e.g., updating her resume and contacting potential employers) in order to cope adaptively with the situation.

Several researchers caution against the idea that a given coping strategy is inherently adaptive or maladaptive, stating that the person-environment relationship determines what is needed to cope adaptively in a given situation (e.g., Ben-Zur & Zeidner, 1996; Lazarus, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Thoits, 1995). Indeed, Coyne and Racioppo (2000) point to the inconclusive findings in the literature regarding what coping techniques are more effective than others. The author acknowledges, however, that some coping strategies may lend themselves more readily to being maladaptive in most, if not all, situations (e.g., use of alcohol or illicit drugs in order to numb feelings). Additionally, some coping mechanisms are likely to be adaptive for short-term use, while others are likely to be more adaptive for longer-term use (Li, Seltzer, & Greenberg, 1999; Mattlin, 1990; Menaghan, 1982). For example, a military wife may use verbal expressions of frustration about her husband's erratic work schedule, and this may help her feel better in the moment; in order to cope effectively with this situation over a longer period of time, she may need to sit down with her husband on a weekly basis to map out their week rather than continuing to "vent" to her friends about the situation. However, extremes in any coping strategy are likely to be maladaptive across a variety of situations (e.g., a military wife's too-intense focus on and adherence to a schedule may prevent spontaneity and lead to rigid behaviors).

Despite the argument that the transactional nature of selecting a coping strategy is likely to prevent consensus on what actually constitutes adaptive coping (Folkman &

Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1993; Thoits, 1995), researchers have employed a variety of methods to determine what types of coping mechanisms can or should generally be considered adaptive. Many of these are theoretical (Menaghan, 1982). For example, Western ideals prize the ideas of independence, of addressing problems directly, and dominating difficult situations (Lazarus, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), so some theorists consider coping strategies which lead to these ends as being adaptive. Menaghan, however, underscores the need for empirical evidence to determine what coping mechanisms are adaptive.

As noted by Baker and Berenbaum (2007), substantial empirical support exists for the notion that problem-focused coping strategies are generally more adaptive than emotion-focused coping strategies (e.g., Baltes et al., 2010; Ben-Zur, 2002; Billings & Moos, 1984; Braun-Lewensohn & Bar, 2017; Brown et al., 2005; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Dolphin et al., 2015; Hornung, Lampert & Glaser, 2016; Li, Seltzer, & Greenberg, 1999; Mattlin et al., 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1986; Menaghan, 1982; Padden et al., 2011; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Roger et al., 1993), although in certain instances they are not considered adaptive (e.g., in individuals with low emotional self-awareness who impulsively engage in a problem-focused coping strategy without pausing to reflect on emotions associated with the stressor; Baker & Berenbaum, 2007). Research suggests that certain types of positive emotion-focused coping are adaptive as well, however, particularly in those individuals with little awareness of their emotions (Baker & Berenbaum, 2007) and in situations in which the individual has limited control over the stressor (Ben-Zur & Zeidner, 1996; Padden et al., 2011). Baker and Berenbaum go on to note that using emotion-focused coping to assess one's emotional state can help promote

more adaptive use of problem-focused coping at a later point (e.g., considering one's emotions in order to guide the decision-making process). Additionally, the concurrent use of a combination of problem- and emotion-focused coping strategies can also be considered adaptive. Several studies indicate that individuals frequently use multiple methods of coping for any given situation (Ben-Zur & Zeidner, 1996; Billings & Moos, 1984; Carver et al., 1989; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Mattlin et al., 1990; Patterson & McCubbin, 1984; Thoits, 1986). Mattlin et al., Pearlin and Schooler, and Patterson and McCubbin all found this approach to be adaptive.

In developing empirical support for what constitutes adaptive coping, researchers have employed a variety of methods. Some researchers have examined the relationship between choice of coping mechanism and severity of mental health symptoms (e.g., Billings & Moos, 1984; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Dolphin et al., 2015; Li et al., 1999; Mattlin et al., 1990). Others have examined the impact of coping mechanisms on emotional wellbeing, affect, exhaustion, or degree of emotional distress (e.g., Baker & Berenbaum, 2007; Ben-Zur & Zeidner, 1996; Higgins et al., 2010; Hornung et al., 2016; McCrae & Costa, 1986; Menaghan, 1982; Padden et al., 2011; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Menaghan also examined whether coping strategies actually reduced the problems reported by participants over a longer duration of time. Still others have studied the impact that choice of coping has on physical symptoms (e.g., Baker & Berenbaum, 2007; Ben-Zur & Zeidner, 1996; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Matud, 2004; Padden et al., 2011) or on work performance (Brown et al., 2005). Few researchers have directly assessed the adaptiveness of coping mechanisms by actually asking participants whether they found

their choices of coping strategies helpful or effective (e.g., McCrae & Costa, 1986). Moreover, while many researchers have found problem-focused coping strategies to be associated more frequently with positive outcomes than emotion-focused coping strategies, enough ambiguity exists among the findings to suggest that the combination of individual, situation, and coping strategy each contribute uniquely to determining the final outcome of the coping process. Examining the relationship between choice of coping mechanism in a particular situation and degree of wellbeing would be one way to examine whether particular coping strategies support self-reported positive outcomes.

Many factors may influence an individual's choice of coping strategy, and several variables may influence whether that strategy is adaptive for a given situation. External factors such as length of unemployment may lead to decreased use of adaptive coping strategies (Sadeh & Karniol, 2011). Other external factors such as controllability of the situation, type and duration of the stressor, or the people involved in the stressful situation may contribute to the adaptiveness of a particular coping strategy (Baker & Berenbaum, 2007; Matud, 2004; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Scheier et al., 1986). As noted by Higgins et al. (2010), women have been shown to use less adaptive coping strategies (i.e., emotion-focused) more frequently than do men (e.g., Aycock, 2011; Ben-Zur, 2002; Billings & Moos, 1984; Carver et al., 1989; Higgins et al., 2010; Matud, 2004; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Roger et al., 1993), although this may be more a result of the types of stressors they face than of the fact that they are culturally primed to use such strategies (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Kessler & McLeod, 1984; Matud, 2004). The degree of perceived stress may play a role in gender differences between choice of coping strategy. Aycock (2011) controlled for perceived stress in her sample of college students,

which eliminated gender differences in choice of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. Significant gender differences in avoidance coping remained, however. In light of findings that women report higher levels of stress than men do, interpretations of apparent gender differences in choice of coping strategy should be reexamined. Aycock states that the findings of her study support the supposition that higher usage of emotion-focused coping in women is an outcome of women perceiving greater degrees of stress than their male counterparts.

Internal factors play a role in a person's decision to use adaptive coping mechanisms as well. A substantial body of research shows a connection between individual dispositional characteristics and choice of coping strategy (e.g., Baker & Berenbaum, 2007; Baltes et al., 2010; Berzonsky, 1992; Billings & Moos, 1984; Carver et al., 1989; Luyckx et al., 2012; McCrae & Costa, 1984; Sadeh & Karniol, 2011; Scheier et al., 1986; Wood et al., 1995). Further, several of the researchers found correlations between these dispositional traits and specifically those coping mechanisms which the respective researchers determined to be adaptive. For example, higher degrees of self-continuity, which Chandler (1994), defines as a sense of oneself as maintaining a consistent identity throughout the course of time (as cited in Sadeh & Kaniol, 2011) were associated with higher rates of adaptive coping strategies in a sample of unemployed adults in Israel (Sadeh & Karniol, 2011). Carver et al. (1989) found positive correlations between optimism, self-esteem, hardiness, and the coping strategies they deemed adaptive (e.g., active coping and planning, positive reinterpretation of a stressful situation, and recognizing growth resulting from a stressful situation) in a sample of university undergraduate students. Optimism has been found to be correlated with

problem-focused coping, suppression of competing activities, seeking social support, and positive reinterpretation in a sample of male and female undergraduate students (Scheier et al., 1986). Extraversion and openness to experience were associated with adaptive coping strategies as well in a non-clinical sample of adults ranging in age from 24 to 91 years residing within Baltimore, Maryland (e.g., rational action, positive thinking, substitution, restraint, and humor; McCrae & Costa, 1984). Wood et al. linked optimism in military wives to their better adjustment to the stress of a deployment.

Researchers have also found associations between less desirable individual traits and maladaptive coping strategies (e.g., depression, trait anxiety, and neuroticism; Billings & Moos, 1984; Carver et al., 1989; Scheier et al., 1986; McCrae & Costa, 1984). Such maladaptive coping strategies include use of emotional discharge and avoidance strategies (Billings & Moos, 1984); behavioral disengagement from attempts to address a problematic situation, dwelling on and venting emotions, and use of denial (Carver et al., 1989); hostile reaction, feeling indecisive and passive, sedating oneself, and withdrawal (McCrae & Costa, 1984).

Several limitations exist in the body of literature related to adaptive coping. For example, while problem-focused coping strategies are generally considered adaptive, enough disagreement exists within the literature that one cannot take this assertion as true for every person or every situation. As argued by several researchers, many factors play a role in determining a person's choice of coping strategy as well as whether that strategy is adaptive. Indeed, Pearlin and Schooler (1978) argue that "[t]he most fundamental question to which we can address ourselves is whether coping merely creates within people the illusion that they are doing something of consequence or if, indeed, coping

does help to avoid or manage stress” (p. 8). Menaghan (1982) raises an important question: “[W]hat criteria are appropriate for judging whether a given coping style or effort is ‘effective?’...Our choices may powerfully govern our declarations of effectiveness” (p. 221). The present study will address this limitation through use of an exploratory analysis examining the correlation between reported coping strategies and overall wellbeing. Those coping strategies positively correlated with higher degrees of wellbeing will be considered more adaptive than those associated with lesser degrees of wellbeing. While McCrae and Costa (1986) caution against assuming that greater degrees of wellbeing automatically imply that coping strategies used were adaptive, the present study will include collection of qualitative data which is likely to provide additional information regarding the perceived efficacy of coping strategies used by participants.

Another limitation of the research in this area is that many of the studies cited above have examined a narrow segment of the population. Several of the studies assess nonrepresentative samples which were comprised either of college students (e.g., Baker & Berenbaum, 2007; Padden et al., 2011; Roger et al., 1993; Scheier et al., 1986; Smith & Dust, 2006) or primarily of White participants (e.g., Baker & Berenbaum, 2007; Billings & Moos, 1984; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Kessler & McLeod, 1984; Matud, 2004; Mattlin et al., 1990). Additionally, many of the studies cited above do not control for the type of stressor studied, which means that participants were describing their reactions to a wide range of stressors (Carver et al., 1989; Scheier et al., 1986). Because of the transactional nature of coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1993; Thoits, 1995), making a generalization about adaptive coping without regard to the type of situation encountered is a poor choice.

While none of the above studies examined coping among military wives, other studies have done so. Dolphin et al. (2015) surveyed 252 wives of service members in the Army to explore whether positive emotions experienced by these women during their husbands' deployments had a relationship with adaptive coping choices used during the soldiers' transition home. Basing their hypothesis on empirical evidence from the field of positive psychology, which indicates that positive emotions can serve to promote and enhance wellbeing, the authors asked respondents to complete a series of measures both during their husbands' deployments and again several months after the husbands' redeployment. The survey administered during deployment contained measures of marital satisfaction and positive emotions; the post-deployment survey measured coping strategies, resilience, and depressive symptoms. The authors used the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) to measure coping strategies, combining the 14 subscales into two broader categories: adaptive and maladaptive. Results from a path analysis indicated that positive emotions used during the deployment were directly associated with significantly higher rates of resilience and use of adaptive coping strategies ($p < .001$) during the period immediately following the soldiers' return home. Positive emotions during deployment also predicted lower levels of maladaptive coping ($p < .001$; Dolphin et al., 2015). The authors also report the indirect effects of positive emotions on levels of depressive symptoms in their sample. Adaptive coping served as a strong mediator between positive emotions and lower levels of depressive symptoms while maladaptive coping mediated less strongly between positive emotions and resilience. The authors note that the combined direct and indirect effects of positive emotions on depressive symptoms represent "54% of the total variance in depressive symptoms" (Dolphin et al., 2015, p.

29). The authors point to the ways in which their findings reveal areas for intervention with this population, commenting that previous research indicates that individuals with positive emotions tend to have greater openness, curiosity, and flexibility. This openness, they argue, would lend itself to use of more adaptive coping strategies such as positive reframing and problem solving. This supposition points to the possibility that more mature identity statuses (i.e., those in which the individual endorses high degrees of exploration) may similarly lend themselves more readily to adaptive coping strategies.

In another study focusing on coping in military spouses, Nichols et al. (2013) conducted a pilot study of a telephone support group aimed at teaching military wives coping skills the authors deemed effective (e.g., communicating with one's spouse, seeking social support, affect management). In their sample of 86 wives of service members (Active Duty, National Guard/Reserve, and Veteran) assigned to 14 telephone support groups, they found that participation in the telephone support groups was linked to improvements in depression and anxiety as well as perception of increased social support from other group members. However, participation in the group did not have a relationship with participants' perceptions of the quality of their marriages, reports of the efficacy of the family's overall coping, or the family's ability to communicate effectively. Nichols et al. (2013) examined differences between groups of participants whose husbands had been injured during a deployment (with resulting difficulties in caring for them) and those whose husbands had not. While participants with injured husbands did report improvement in the areas of anxiety, depression, and social support, their scores did not reach the level of those wives whose husbands had not been injured. This is particularly noteworthy, given the fact that, on average, their husbands had been home

from deployment two times longer than those wives whose husbands had not been injured. Among this sample, length of time home from deployment was as short as one month and as long as 80 months, thus showing the long-term impact that deployments can have on a military wife's mental health and ability to manage the challenges that occur as a result of a husband's deployment. Findings of this study indicate that the coping strategies taught to participants were effective for many, although the situation in which each person found herself (i.e., injured vs. non-injured spouse) had an impact on the degree to which the coping mechanisms were effective, as evidenced by the discrepancy in scores between the two groups. These findings underscore the value of the transactional theory of coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1993).

Padden et al. (2011) note the important role coping plays in sustaining positive wellbeing and health during a husband's deployment. In their sample, which included female spouses of Active Duty soldiers who were in the midst of a deployment during the time of data collection, participants reported using a wide range of coping mechanisms to manage a husband's deployment. Certain coping strategies appeared to be more adaptive than others. For example, Pearson's product-moment correlations revealed that use of optimistic coping behaviors (i.e., utilizing positive thinking about the stressor) were positively correlated with mental well-being in their sample, while emotive and evasive coping strategies were negatively correlated with mental well-being. The authors also measured physical well-being, which was negatively correlated with emotive and evasive coping strategies. The authors note, however, that physical well-being did not have a relationship with optimistic coping, and neither physical nor mental well-being had a

relationship with confrontive coping strategies (which the authors described as a problem-focused coping strategy in that the participant confronts the challenge and implements solutions). Additionally, age, length of time associated with the military, and number of previous deployments were also correlated with choice of coping strategy. Younger wives with younger husbands and less time affiliated with the military lifestyle (i.e., those of a lower rank) tended to use less adaptive coping strategies (e.g., evasive and emotive coping) and engaged less in more adaptive coping strategies (e.g., confrontive coping). However, the number of previous deployments experienced by the participants did correlate with greater use of adaptive coping strategies (e.g., confrontive coping). The authors also completed a multiple regression analysis with sociodemographic variables, mental and physical well-being, perceived stress, and each of the four coping strategies. The authors note that, while participants' levels of perceived stress accounted for a large portion of the variance in their mental well-being, use of evasive coping also contributed to the variance, indicating that this particular method of coping lowered the degree of mental well-being. This provides further support for the idea that emotion-focused coping strategies are generally less adaptive than problem-focused coping mechanisms.

Dimiceli et al. (2010) sought to determine the efficacy of particular coping mechanisms utilized by military wives in dealing with stressors, focusing specifically on the impact that controllability of the situation had on whether the coping strategies were effective. The sample consisted of 77 wives of Active Duty service members then-currently deployed with the 4th Infantry Division to a location determined to be dangerous (based on participants' descriptions). The study utilized a mixed-methods design, obtaining qualitative data from participants regarding what they perceived to have been

their most stressful experience in the previous 5 years; the study also included quantitative measures examining the degree to which the situation was stressful; the degree to which participants felt in control of the stressor; the coping strategies used to manage the stressor; physical illness symptoms; and symptoms of depression. Military wives in their sample reported using a wide range of coping mechanisms but used problem-focused coping strategies significantly more than emotion-focused strategies. The authors comment on the unexpected nature of this finding, as the types of stressors encountered by military wives are typically uncontrollable; moreover, this finding contradicts typical expectations that problem-focused coping is generally used when the situation is determined to be more controllable. In examining the impact that controllability of the stressor had on the effectiveness of the coping strategies used, the authors found that controllability had no relationship with the effectiveness of emotion-focused coping in reducing physical symptoms. Conversely, problem-focused coping only led to decreases in physical symptoms when participants perceived a low degree of controllability in the situation. With regard to degree of depressive symptoms, emotion-focused coping was associated with a small, nonsignificant increase in depression, but increased controllability and use of problem-focused coping were associated with lower degrees of depression. These findings also provide support for the hypothesis that problem-focused coping tends to be more adaptive than emotion-focused coping, even when one perceives a low degree of controllability in the stressful situation (Dimiceli et al., 2010). The authors comment that their unexpected findings may be understood in light of the slightly broader operational definition they used for problem-focused coping (e.g., positive reframing and seeking emotional or instrumental support were considered

problem-focused coping, even though they are not necessarily actions taken to solve the problem but actions taken to address negative consequences of the problem).

Westhuis et al. (2006) examined the role that ethnicity plays in the coping strategies employed among Active Duty military spouses. Of note is the researchers' goal of assessing the manner in which their participants coped with the everyday stressors of the military lifestyle, separated from the impact of deployment. Data was collected from participants during the year 2001, which was before the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom Operation Iraqi Freedom. While the focus on everyday stressors without regard to the impact of multiple rounds of deployment is unique among most studies of military spouses (and adds an alternative perspective to much of the research focusing on this group), findings should be interpreted with caution, as the impact of the two most recent conflicts on service members and their families cannot be ignored (Westhuis et al., 2006).

In order to assess the degree to which participants seemed to adapt to the demands of the military lifestyle, the authors developed a 12-item scale which asked participants "how well [they] thought they were able to manage...in the past 12 months" (Westhuis et al., 2006, p. 590). The authors report that their scale's reliability coefficient was .91. The scale included items such as, "Getting daily household tasks done," "Handling financial matters," and various items related to childcare (Westhuis et al., 2006, p. 590). Only 3 of the 12 items related to wives' attending to their own personal needs (e.g., "Obtaining needed transportation," "Taking care of their health," and "Handling their loneliness"), while all the others were focused on attending to the needs of the household (Westhuis et al., 2006, p. 590). This scale seems to underscore the assumptions that women, and military wives in particular, should focus more on the needs of their family than on their

own personal needs or growth. Independent variables for the study included a series of what the authors identified as protective and risk factors that potentially play a role in the degree to which one's coping strategies are adaptive (Westhuis et al., 2006). Protective factors included such items as keeping oneself well-informed about the Army, feeling that the Army is concerned about one's family, and attending military-sponsored support groups (Westhuis et al., 2006). Risk factors included items such as problems with work, affective challenges, challenges related to parenthood, etc. (Westhuis et al., 2006). These risk factors were grouped together in to what the authors termed the Problems Experienced Scale (PES). An initial analysis revealed that each independent variable was significantly related to scores on the coping scale (Westhuis et al., 2006). The authors report that they next performed a stepwise regression with all independent variables to assess which variables continued to have a significant relationship with scores on the coping scale. Finally, the authors performed a second set of stepwise regressions for each ethnic category to determine whether ethnicity played a role in the relationship between the independent variables and adaptability of coping (Westhuis et al., 2006).

The PES entered the regression first for each ethnicity and for the sample as a whole, and analysis indicated that score on the PES accounted for the largest percentage of variance for each group. Thus, as participants reported greater numbers of problems, their adaptability was lower (Westhuis et al., 2006). This finding is not unexpected. However, the next variables to enter the regression for each ethnic group had to do with personal fulfillment and/or the spouses attending to their own needs. For example, for the sample as a whole, the next 3 protective factors to enter the regression were "I keep myself well informed about the Army," "Someone to listen to me at my current location,"

and “The opportunities for me to achieve personal goals” (Westhuis et al., 2006, p. 593). These protective factors were the next three for the White sample as well, and 2 of the factors entered the regression next for the African American and Hispanic samples. This finding indicates that when military wives attend to their own needs for information, self-fulfillment, and social connection, they are better able to cope adaptively with the everyday stressors of the Active Duty military lifestyle. Additionally, while attending to self seems to be of most importance to White military wives, issues of self are also important to African American and Hispanic military wives, although African American and Hispanic wives also rate other factors as highly important in coping adaptively (e.g., satisfaction with service member’s ability to serve the country and with job security, respectively). The authors conclude that ethnicity plays an important role as an intervening variable in determining which protective factors are most predictive of adaptive coping in their sample of military wives. Additionally, Westhuis et al. highlight the important part that actual challenges (e.g., financial challenges, parenting difficulties) play in the degree to which Active Duty military wives are able to adapt to the military lifestyle. The findings from this study also support the use of transactional theory (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1993) when assessing effectiveness of coping strategies.

Westhuis et al. (2006) state that they recruited participants using a stratified proportional sample from the population of 20,000 spouses of Active Duty soldiers stationed across the world. Their sampling procedures yielded a sample of 4,464 female spouses of Active Duty service members with children, which the authors report was fairly representative of the racial makeup of the military at the time (i.e., 75% White,

9.5% African American, 8.7% Hispanic or another race). This study has the largest sample among those focusing on the military spouse population presented here, and it is the only sample that was not a convenience sample. The nature of this sample serves to support the generalizability of the study's findings to a certain extent, although, as noted above, other limitations are important to recall in interpreting the findings. Another limitation of the sample is that the authors used data from a sample collected for a previous study; thus, they were not able to determine which variables were captured (Westhuis et al., 2006). The authors noted that other factors such as faith background or perception of discrimination within the military culture may play a role in adapting to the military lifestyle, but they were not able to include these variables due to the use of a preexisting data set. The authors also note the small size of the African American and Hispanic samples with children included in the study. They comment that this may not accurately portray the makeup of the Army as a whole.

Wood et al. (1995) explored whether certain social, familial, and psychological resources along with perceptions of a stressful situation and other competing demands would affect the coping choices and level of adaptation among military wives. They conducted a series of 4 in-depth interviews with 35 wives of Army soldiers before, during, and after a deployment. The researchers also report having attended numerous military-sponsored events in order to collect observational data about respondents' experiences during this time.

Those women who, according to the authors, seemed to "adjust more quickly" to the separation were those who were actively engaged with jobs, friends, their communities, and families (Wood et al., 1995, p. 223). Respondents described the

deepened friendships they formed with other wives in the unit and found them helpful. The authors also note that participants' ability to stay in contact with their husbands through constant phone calls was helpful as well, both in terms of addressing challenges as they arose and also ameliorate the loneliness of separation. In preparation for their husbands' return home, many of the wives reportedly turned their attention to readying the home and preparing themselves for the period of adjustment that they knew was coming (Wood et al., 1995). Notably, the authors comment that many of the women reflected upon their "increased independence and autonomy" as a change that equipped them to manage the challenges of the deployment (Wood et al., 1995, p. 224). Indeed, the authors added a classification titled "buoyant" to the report of their findings to describe "a strong personality and a positive, resourceful outlook that might have contributed to better adjustment" (Wood et al., 1995, p. 227). Findings from this study add support to the hypothesis that a strong sense of self may contribute to more adaptive coping.

One noteworthy strength of this study was that all the participants were married to enlisted service members rather than officers, a fact which is atypical in research on this population. Additionally, the researchers were given seemingly unlimited access to participants, likely because the study was conducted by researchers affiliated directly with the Army. This enabled the researchers to obtain data through observation of participants' environments and social interactions in addition to conducting interviews.

Patterson and McCubbin (1984) studied the relationship between choice of coping behaviors and what they refer to as gender-role orientation in a sample of 82 Navy wives with deployed husbands. The authors describe gender-role orientation in terms of masculinity, femininity, and androgyny. Examples of masculine traits included

independence and decisiveness. Feminine traits included gentleness and being helpful to others. Those respondents deemed androgynous scored high on both the masculine and feminine measures of the scale (Patterson & McCubbin, 1984). While this classification of certain traits “masculine” and “feminine” is clearly outdated and potentially offensive to the modern reader, the connection between the traits themselves and coping behaviors may be useful in understanding what factors contribute to adaptive coping. Patterson and McCubbin measured levels of distress in this sample both before and during the deployments in an effort to determine which coping behaviors were effective. Using a health inventory to assess a wide range of symptoms and use of substances (e.g., prescribed medication, cigarettes, alcoholic beverages), the authors measured changes in distress levels by reports of changes in reported mental health symptoms and changes in reported use of substances to manage symptoms.

The authors hypothesized that, because of the wide range of circumstances faced when a husband deploys, those women who seemed to possess the ability to engage in both “masculine” and “feminine” behaviors would engage in a more balanced set of coping mechanisms. They anticipated that this balance would predict lesser degrees of distress in these women. Specifically, they predicted that non-distressed women would report high use of each of the following categories: “(a) maintaining family integrity, (b) developing interpersonal relationships and social support, (c) managing psychological tension and strain, (d) believing in lifestyle and optimism, and (e) developing self-reliance and self-esteem” (Patterson & McCubbin, 1984, p. 99).

Findings only partially supported the authors’ predictions (Patterson & McCubbin, 1984). “Androgyny” did not have a significant relationship with non-distress

in their sample, and only two of the five coping patterns were significantly related to non-distress: believing in the military lifestyle/optimism and developing self-reliance and self-esteem. Additionally, the authors comment that one of the most striking differences between distressed and nondistressed respondents was the strong tendency for nondistressed respondents to use a “balanced coping strategy,” which the authors define as “a higher-than-average score on all five patterns” (Patterson & McCubbin, 1984, p. 100). Thus, use of a wide range of coping strategies seems adaptive, and use of certain coping strategies in particular were adaptive in this sample. Of particular importance for the present study is the relationship between developing self-reliance and self-esteem and adaptive coping. One could argue that a strong sense of self is a prerequisite for enhancing self-reliance and self-esteem. Indeed, Patterson and McCubbin (1984) note that this relationship indicates that this coping strategy enabled participants to “meet their own personal growth needs while simultaneously using this independence to maintain family life in the absence of their spouses (p. 102).

Several studies have focused specifically on the needs of National Guard/Reserve spouses rather than Active Duty spouses. While their experiences may not be completely generalizable to the population of Active Duty spouses (Marnocha, 2012), findings from these studies can have important implications for spouses of Active Duty service members. Indeed, experiences of National Guard/Reserve spouses overlap a great deal with the experiences of Active Duty spouses (Lapp et al., 2010; Ross, 2016; Wheeler & Stone, 2010). In a qualitative study of National Guard/Reserve spouses whose husbands were deployed, Lapp et al. (2010) explored these women’s perceptions of factors which increased stress levels and the strategies which they felt helped them to cope with those

stressors. Eighteen spouses (16 female and 2 male) living in the Midwestern area of the United States identified multiple stressors surrounding the deployments of their service members, including the waiting, anticipation, and uncertainty associated with the predeployment phase; anxiety, loneliness, increased responsibility, isolation, and more waiting during the actual deployment; and learning again how to live together once the service members returned home.

While the authors do not describe the coping mechanisms identified by their participants in terms of problem- and emotion-focused coping strategies, they can fairly easily be categorized as such. Coping strategies identified by participants included identifying “very concrete ways of beginning to negotiate” the experience of preparing for a husband’s deployment (Lapp et al., 2010, p. 54). Preparation and planning around a problem falls into the category of problem-focused coping strategies (Billings & Moos, 1984; Carver et al., 1989; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Such planning included identifying methods of maintaining communication between the service member and family during the deployment, arranging legal matters, and identifying responsibilities the at-home spouse would need to take on in the absence of the service member (Lapp et al., 2010). Seeking of social support is another problem-focused coping technique (Billings & Moos, 1984; Carver et al., 1989; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Seeking social support included staying connected to the service member, both emotionally and concretely, via technology and other communication tools (e.g., writing journals and making scrapbooks to give to the deployed parent). Participants also sought social support from other spouses experiencing deployment as well as from health care providers (Lapp et al., 2010). During the

reintegration phase, another problem-focused coping strategy, information gathering (Billings & Moos, 1984; Carver et al., 1989; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978), proved useful to participants. Social support also played an important role for participants in managing the service member's transition back into the family. Information-gathering was an important coping strategy for spouses as they prepared for their service members to return. Spouses prepared themselves by attending unit support meetings, communicating with other spouses about what to expect with the return home, and reading literature pertaining to easing the transition of service members into the family after deployment.

Emotion-focused coping strategies used by at-home spouses were relatively few, and they primarily took the form of avoidance. Spouses in this study reported avoiding news outlets and keeping busy as ways to avoid the negative feelings associated with the deployments of their service members (Lapp et al., 2010). These coping techniques echo the mental disengagement identified by Carver et al. (1989) as an emotion-focused coping strategy. While the numerous and varied coping strategies appeared helpful to participants, the authors did not systematically explore whether the strategies were, in fact, adaptive.

Wheeler and Stone (2010) explored the experiences of National Guard/Reserve spouses during the time of deployment. Participants in this qualitative study included nine wives of soldiers in the Army National Guard who identified as White, all of whom were married to officers or non-commissioned officers. Some stressors and symptoms identified within this sample were similar to those reported in Lapp et al. (2010) and included emotional distress (e.g., intense anxiety, anger, and loneliess) as well as physical

symptoms of distress such as vomiting. Participants also identified the experience of parenting without a partner present as a major stressor (Wheeler & Stone, 2010). However, other stressors were different from those identified by Lapp et al. Participants in Wheeler and Stone's study identified uncertainty regarding their spouse's plans to continue with the National Guard as a source of stress. Participants expressed feeling that the expectations they had regarding their spouses' engagement in the National Guard had not been honored. For example, one major recruiting strategy for the National Guard is the fact that the time commitment for service members is relatively minimal as compared to the demands of Active Duty. Participants reported feeling that the increased demand for rotating deployments had violated this understanding (Wheeler & Stone, 2010). The authors note that this concern had not been identified in previous research focusing on this population.

Coping strategies identified in Wheeler and Stone (2010) overlap quite a bit with the coping strategies identified in Lapp et al. (2010). As in Lapp et al., Wheeler and Stone do not classify the coping strategies identified by participants as either problem- or emotion-focused; however, they, too, can be categorized in this manner. Maintaining communication and seeking social support again fall into the problem-focused category. Participants reported such strategies were important means of managing the experience (Wheeler & Stone, 2010). Social support took both a problem-focused and an emotion-focused route: Participants discussed the concrete ways in which having family and friends provide support was helpful (e.g., providing advice), but they also identified spending time with loved ones as a source of comfort or diversion. Staying busy was also identified as prominent coping strategy (Wheeler & Stone, 2010) and seems to have

served the purpose of an emotion-focused coping mechanism as participants described staying busy in order to distract themselves from their feelings. Participants in this study identified additional strategies not mentioned in Lapp et al. as well: use of artistic and expressive pursuits and engagement in spiritual activities were identified as helpful tools to manage feelings. Wheeler and Stone note that use of artistic endeavors to cope with deployment was also new to the literature regarding this population.

Marnocha (2012) similarly examined the experience of military wives during their husbands' deployments. Her sample consisted of 11 wives of Army Reserve service members who were deployed at the time of data collection. These participants resided in the Midwest portion of the United States and identified themselves as White. Data regarding rank of their husbands was not reported. As in Lapp et al. (2010), Marnocha reported her findings in terms of stressors and coping strategies associated with each stage of deployment.

The predeployment phase led to feelings of emotional instability and apprehension (Marnocha, 2012). The deployment phase was associated with continued emotional upheaval, physical symptoms, loneliness, and taking on additional duties within the home. As in Lapp et al. (2010), Marnocha found that the reunification period was associated with the stressors of reintegrating the service member into the home. Coping strategies identified for each of the phases of deployment echoed the findings of both Lapp et al. and of Wheeler and Stone (2010). Preparing adequately for the husband's absence was an important coping technique in the predeployment phase. Staying busy, adhering to a routine, engaging in exercise, and avoiding news and information about danger were emotion-focused coping strategies (Billings & Moos, 1984; Carver et al.,

1989; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978) associated with the deployment phase. Marnocha highlights the importance of social support among her sample as well. Participants identified using several coping mechanisms in order to cope with the service member's return home which were not identified in Lapp et al. or in Wheeler and Stone. "Staying strong" and coming to terms with the reality of the deployment were coping strategies uniquely reported in this sample (Marnocha, 2012, p. 4). Prioritizing family time and intimacy upon the service member's return along with maintaining an optimistic view of the situation (e.g., the increased gratitude for the service member upon return from deployment) seemed to help participants negotiate the transition home effectively (Marnocha, 2012).

While the studies described above represent important advances with regard to understand the coping process among military wives, they do have important limitations. Padden et al. (2011) and Dimiceli et al. (2010) both engaged participants whose husbands were currently deployed at the time of the study. The majority of participants in Dimiceli's study identified deployment as the greatest stressor experienced within the last five years. The fact that their husbands were currently deployed may have influenced this finding. If participants' husbands were at home, these women may have identified other situations as more stressful than deployment. In other words, the fact that these women were "in the thick" of deployment may have biased their responses. Other military stressors may feel more stressful at different points in the deployment cycle.

Additionally, seven of the studies focus specifically on the impact that deployment has on the military wife. While deployment is, of course, an incredibly powerful stressor, only Westhuis et al. (2006) take into consideration the overall matrix of the military

lifestyle in their examinations of coping strategies. More research is needed on the cumulative effects of this unique lifestyle on whether these women employ adaptive coping strategies.

Another critical limitation of the studies is the inconsistent approach in exploring whether certain coping strategies are adaptive. Lapp et al., (2010), Wheeler and Stone (2010), and Marnocha (2012) focus primarily on identifying and describing the coping strategies used by these women with less exploration as to whether these strategies are consistently helpful. Dolphin et al., (2015) and Nichols et al. (2013) pre-determined which coping strategies were adaptive and which were maladaptive which is inconsistent with a transactional approach to coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1993). Only Dimiceli et al. (2010), Padden et al. (2011), Patterson and McCubbin (1984), and Westhuis et al., 2006) explored the extent to which certain strategies might be considered adaptive.

Most of the authors, with the exception of Westhuis et al. (2006), report small, nonrepresentative samples, either in terms of ethnicity or socioeconomic status. Lapp et al. (2010) and Wheeler and Stone (2010) focus on the experience on National Guard/Reserve spouses; while their data provide rich exploration of stress and coping strategies among this population, their participants' experiences may not be generalizable to Active Duty spouses (Lapp et al., 2010; Marnocha, 2012; Wheeler & Stone, 2010). However, as noted above, findings from studies involving wives of National Guard/Reserve components do frequently correspond to findings from the Active Duty population (Lapp et al., 2010; Ross, 2016; Wheeler & Stone, 2010). Additionally, three of the studies report a higher response rate from officers' wives than from enlisted wives.

Studies with larger samples and more diversity within those samples may yield more generalizable findings.

While most of the studies collected data on the number of deployments experienced by participants, only Padden et al. (2011) examined the impact that number of deployments previously experienced may have on choice of coping strategy. Additionally, none of the studies report data regarding cumulative length of all deployments experienced or the period of time over which the deployments occurred. Such data could yield important findings. For example, three one-month deployments over the course of 5 years might be perceived very differently from three 9-month deployments over the same period of time. Additionally, Padden et al. (2011) were the only researchers to report on the impact that parental status may have on choice of coping strategy. Dimiceli et al. (2010)'s was also the only study to examine the impact that perceived controllability of the stressor (akin to a personal sense of mastery) had on the choice of coping strategy.

Other factors which may influence a military wife's choice of coping strategy include number of geographic relocations and the length of time a woman has occupied the role of military wife. Geographic relocations have an important impact on military wives (Blue Star Families, 2015, 2016, 2017; Burrell et al., 2006; Clever & Segal, 2013; Drummet et al., 2003; Eubanks, 2013; Runge et al., 2014; Segal, 1986). The number of times a military wife has relocated may also have a relationship with whether she chooses to employ adaptive coping strategies. Experience gained from a larger number of relocations might lead to more adaptive coping methods, or the frustration of having to "start all over again" may prompt her to engage in less adaptive coping strategies.

The longer a military wife is married to a service member, the more challenges she is likely to face, particularly those challenges to her identity and sense of self. Length of marriage has been examined in multiple studies related to military wives (Aducci et al., 2011; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Duvall, 1945; Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Klein et al., 1989; Nichols, et al., 2013; Padden et al., 2011; Runge et al., 2014) and may have an impact on a military wife's decision to employ adaptive coping strategies. Military wives who have been married for longer periods of time may experience the frustration of years of feeling overlooked and may resort to less adaptive strategies in order to simply manage this frustration. Conversely, a lengthier marriage may have honed adaptive coping skills and may enable the military wife to persevere in maintaining a strong sense of self as she experiences a wide range of challenges and learns more about herself.

More studies are needed which examine the relationships between inherent dispositional traits and adaptive coping (Luyckx et al., 2012), particularly among military wives. Such traits, including those related to identity and sense of self, likely influence the manner in which an individual appraises a situation, which determines his or her selection of coping strategy (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Additionally, these traits may have an impact on whether the choice of coping strategy is adaptive for that person in that situation. Sadeh and Karniol (2011) note that much attention has been given to the study of maladaptive coping strategies, while less attention has been given to understanding adaptive coping. While understanding those factors which are associated with maladaptive coping is of great importance (particularly in assisting clinicians who seek to support clients in recognizing risk factors and working to overcome or manage those risk factors), exploring factors associated with adaptive

coping is arguably more beneficial. This is particularly true for those who embrace a strengths-based approach to research and practice. Such research will yield valuable information regarding what factors are associated with positive outcomes for individuals facing stressful situations.

Military spouses clearly use a wide range of coping strategies in response to the stressors associated with the military lifestyle, whether that lifestyle is Active Duty or National Guard/Reserve (Davis et al., 2011; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Lapp et al., 2010; Nichols et al., 2010; Padden et al., 2011; Patterson & McCubbin, 1984; Wheeler & Stone, 2010). Increased understanding of factors associated with adaptive coping would allow social workers to support military wives in their efforts to utilize coping mechanisms which will actually benefit them as they seek to manage life's challenges. The link between dispositional traits and choice of adaptive coping is particularly important for military wives due to the unique constellation of demands they face; not only do these women face the external challenges of living the military lifestyle, they also experience threats to their respective senses of self (Aducci et al., 2011; Blue Star Families, 2015, 2017; Davis et al., 2011; DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Eubanks, 2013; Faber et al., 2008; Lehr, 1996; Nichols et al., 2013; Park, 2011; Robbins, 2002; Verdelli et al., 2011). Such risks to sense of self could very well lead to habitual use of less adaptive coping mechanisms. Understanding the relationship between identity status, self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, role conflict, mastery, and adaptive coping would likely lead to more effective clinical interventions and more appropriate supportive programs for these women.

Identity Status

Adaptive coping is a construct which holds value for the vast majority of the population and for military wives in particular. Another construct of equal importance is that of identity formation. Ickes, Park, and Johnson (2012) write that “[a] healthy form of identity formation takes place when individuals purposely seek out and become rooted in who they think they are and what they are interested in” (p. 533). Sneed and Whitbourne (2003) describe the organizing capability of a well-defined identity. They note its dual functions of giving individuals a framework within which to “interpret their experiences” while maintaining the ability to “be altered by experiences” (Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003, p. 313). Sneed et al. (2012) underscore the importance of continuing to study issues related to identity even in later adulthood, despite the tendency in the literature to focus on identity in adolescence and young adulthood. A review of several pieces in the literature related to identity has revealed an important theme: while healthy identity displays stability across situations and time, of equal importance is an individual’s ability to adapt to the demands of differing situations and relationships while maintaining that stable, core self (e.g., Marcia, 1966; Robbins, 2002; Sands, 1996; Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003).

Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel, and Geisinger (1995) and Ickes et al. (2012) point to the vital role that Marcia (1966) has played in shaping the manner in which identity is assessed. Marcia (1966) explored the intersection of “crisis” and “commitment” in the process of identity formation. He cited Erikson’s (1956, 1963) model of “the identity crisis as a *psychosocial* task” (Marcia, 1966, p. 551, italics original) as the theoretical foundation for his work. In Marcia’s model, crisis is expressed as the process of choosing from a variety of options within several areas of adult life (e.g., choice of occupation,

religious beliefs, and political beliefs); an individual's level of commitment to an identity status was defined by "degree of personal investment" in the decisions made within such areas of functioning (Marcia, 1966, p. 551).

Marcia (1966) conceptualized four status levels of identity formation: achieved, foreclosed, moratorium, and diffusion. In Marcia's framework, a person who has an achieved identity status has been through a period of exploration and has come to a strong sense of commitment after considering a number of alternatives. Marcia describes the achieved identity status as giving a person a sense of stability regardless of any unanticipated changes in his or her situation or expectations. A person with a foreclosed status of identity is similar to the person with the achieved identity status in the degree of commitment to identity-related choices, but this person has not experienced the period of exploration and weighing of values. Marcia notes the heavy influence that this individual's parents have on his or her choices and beliefs, even once he or she has reached chronological adulthood. He describes this individual as having a high degree of inflexibility regarding personality and decision-making. A third identity status is that of moratorium. Those in this stage are in the process of actively exploring alternatives and have yet to make firm commitments to one ideology or occupation. The final identity status in Marcia's model is that of identity-diffusion. The individual in this state may or may not have experienced the crisis period. This person, according to Marcia, shows little interest in settling upon an occupation; he or she may either have little interest in settling on a system of beliefs or may show shallow interest in a wide range of belief systems without adherence to any one in particular. Marcia describes the achieved identity status and the diffused identity status as being on opposite ends of the identity status spectrum.

In order to assess the construct validity of his conceptualizations of the four identity statuses, Marcia (1966) examined the relationship between self-esteem and identity status in a sample of 86 male college students. While his findings do provide support for the construct validity of identity status, one should note the limitations to the study. The study was performed with a small sample of only male college students (Sands, 1996). Additionally, the author does not provide details regarding the demographics of the students, though one may surmise that students attending college during that time period came from similar, relatively affluent socioeconomic backgrounds. While the author does not reveal the range of ages of the sample, he notes that his focus is on development in late adolescence. The findings of this study may not be generalizable to women or to adults at different stages of life. The author also notes that the time between the two periods of data collection related to self-esteem was lengthy, which would allow for other factors to affect participants' levels of self-esteem.

The results of Marcia's (1966) study indicate that those individuals with achieved identity status were generally not affected as much by the conditions in the study as those with the other identity statuses, which the author notes supports the measures' construct validity. Marcia also hypothesized that identity status may be associated with stability of self-esteem over time, but this hypothesis was not supported. While this study did not yield full support for Marcia's hypotheses, it has influenced many researchers in conceptualizing the measurement of identity.

Ickes et al. (2012) tested Marcia's (1966) "claim that achieved identity status is associated with a stronger sense of self than are the three 'less mature' identity statuses" (p. 532). In their study of 290 undergraduate students (74 males, 214 females), the

researchers examined the relationship between sense of self and ego identity status while controlling for the variables of self-concept clarity and self-monitoring. The authors theorized that, while achieved and foreclosed identity status might present in similar ways outwardly (due to their mutual high levels of commitment, according to Marcia, 1966), the two statuses are characterized by an important difference. Ickes et al. argue that because those with achieved identity statuses have sought new experiences and struggled through the process of developing unique identities, they have a stronger sense of self and higher self-concept clarity than individuals with foreclosed identity statuses (who, according to Marcia [1966], have committed to an identity with little or no exploration). The authors found strong correlations between strength of sense of self and self-concept clarity. Scores in these areas were both positively correlated with endorsements of achieved identity status and negatively correlated with endorsement of the other three identity statuses. The authors performed two levels of analysis. Ickes et al. (2012) report that their first hypothesis was supported: Strength of sense of self is related to an individual's identity status.

In addition, as degrees of self-concept clarity increased, the likelihood of endorsing a diffused identity status decreased. These findings are consistent with the theory's description of a person with a diffused identity status as one who is neither exploring nor committed to identity-confirming ideals. As strength of sense of self increased, the likelihood of endorsing a foreclosed identity status decreased. These findings are consistent with Marcia's (1966) description of the foreclosed individual as one who has a high degree of commitment to an identity but has not engaged in a high degree of exploration about his or her personal beliefs. Those who have not engaged in

exploring and coming to terms with their own beliefs seem less likely to have a firm sense of themselves (Ickes et al., 2012). As strength of sense of self (or self-concept clarity) increased, the likelihood of an individual endorsing the moratorium status decreased. These findings align with the idea that an individual in the moratorium status would have low levels of commitment to any particular identities. The only personality factor assessed by Ickes et al. which had a predictive relationship with the achieved status was that of strength of sense of self.

The authors comment that their findings “suggest that age is associated with maturation in identity status” (Ickes et al., 2012, p. 541). The sample, however, consisted of college undergraduate students. While the sample may have had some diversity in terms of age, it was likely rather homogeneous in this regard. Using the same methodology with a different, older population (as in the present study) could yield results which support this supposition even more strongly.

Other studies have, in fact, examined the importance of identity in middle-aged and older populations (e.g., Beaumont & Pratt, 2011; Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003) using different theoretical approaches to measuring identity. Of note, however, is the fairly direct connection among the other approaches to identity and the statuses identified by Marcia (1966). Sneed et al. (2012) studied the relationship between identity, intimacy, and reports of well-being in middle-aged adults. Beaumont and Pratt examined the psychosocial balance between participants’ identity style, level of intimacy, and level of generativity in an older adult sample. They found that the maturity of participants’ identity styles was associated with the psychosocial balance between identity and intimacy. Sneed and Whitbourne explored the manner in which older adults adapted to

the process of aging. The authors assessed participants according to identity process theory which, they report, was developed in order to provide a lens through which to understand the changes that occur in individuals' lives as they move through the stages of adulthood. Sneed and Whitbourne indicate that the identity process an individual uses to cope with changes resulting from aging are associated with different degrees of openness to change and willingness to incorporate the changes into one's life. In both of these studies, identity style was associated with varying degrees of adaptive functioning, with the more mature identity styles positively associated with healthier functioning. Neither of the samples in these studies was particularly diverse. Most participants were White, and the participants in Sneed and Whitbourne's study were highly educated, with 73% of the sample reporting that they had received at least some college.

Identity status has also been studied in regard to its relationship with coping. Achievement status and moratorium status have been positively related to higher degrees of problem-focused coping strategies while foreclosure and diffusion statuses were related to lower degrees of problem-focused coping in a sample of college students (Grotevant & Adams, 1984). Berzonsky (1992) examined the relationship between identity styles and choice of coping strategies. Identity styles refer to the processes individuals "use to form and maintain a sense of self-identity" (Berzonsky, 1992, p.772). The individual with achieved identity status will employ an information-oriented approach to identity; the individual with foreclosed identity status will use a normative orientation; individuals with diffuse identity will use an avoidant orientation (Berzonsky, 1992). Berzonsky theorized that identity style would be associated with a different coping strategy when his study participants (171 undergraduate students recruited from

psychology courses) were faced with situations they perceived as threatening to their views of themselves. Participants endorsing the information-oriented identity style (i.e., achieved identity status) reported using more adaptive coping mechanisms (e.g., problem-focused, seeking social support, and “facilitative use of anxiety” [Berzonsky, 1992, p. 777]). Their responses were negatively correlated with maladaptive coping strategies (e.g., anxiety which inhibited action, wishful thinking, and distancing themselves emotionally from the stressor). Scores of those participants endorsing normative (e.g., foreclosed) and avoiding (e.g., diffuse) styles were positively correlated with maladaptive coping strategies and negatively correlated with adaptive coping strategies. Berzonsky notes that, proportionately, females in his sample were more likely to endorse an information-oriented identity style while males were more likely to endorse a diffuse/avoidant-oriented style. This finding suggests that females may have been more likely to utilize adaptive coping mechanisms than were males in this study, which contradicts much of the literature on coping.

Limitations of this study include the fact that the sample consisted of undergraduate students whose demographic information was not disclosed by the researcher. Additionally, Berzonsky (1992) does not indicate which identity style is used by individuals in the moratorium status, which prevents his approach from corresponding directly to that of Marcia (1966). Berzonsky identifies a limitation when he notes that identity is a complex concept comprised of many different components, an assertion which points to the difficulty in ever understanding identity completely. Moreover, he acknowledges that his own assessment of identity style only examined one aspect of the greater construct of identity.

Luyckx et al. (2012) also explored the relationship between identity and choice of coping strategy in a sample of college students. Basing their conceptualizations of identity on Marcia's (1966) identity statuses, Luyckx et al. utilized an expanded concept of identity processes in their study. Citing previous work (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, & Beyers, 2006), the authors explain that they maintained the concepts of exploration and commitment but expanded upon how those concepts were used. Luyckx et al. described the concepts of exploration in breadth (i.e., exploring a wide range of options); exploration in depth (i.e., after one has made a commitment to an identity, exploring that particular identity further); commitment making (i.e., actually committing to an identity); identification with commitment (i.e., embracing one's commitment as aligned with one's sense of self); and ruminative exploration (i.e., postponing decisions about identity commitment). Their findings support the hypothesis that identity is related to choice of coping strategy. Problem solving and seeking social support had positive relationships with each of the identity processes, with the exception of ruminative exploration; additionally, avoidance strategies were positively correlated with exploration in breadth and ruminative exploration (those considered to be less mature identity processes). Conversely, avoidance coping was negatively related to identification with commitment (a more mature identity status). In addition to correlational relationships, the authors found that identity process also had predictive value for choice of coping strategy over the course of multiple data collection points. Identification with commitment had predictive value for lower degrees of avoidance, while ruminative exploration predicted higher degrees of avoidance. Both exploration in breadth and depth led to higher degrees of problem solving, and exploration in depth predicted higher degrees of seeking social

support. The authors cite Berzonsky (1992) in noting that their findings indicate that as individuals move through the identity process in a mature and healthy way, they are more likely to engage in adaptive coping strategies. Despite the important findings presented by this study, its limitations should be noted. Primarily, the study was conducted at a university located in Belgium with a sample of mostly White participants. Additionally, the authors note that the sample was comprised mostly of students focused on two particular courses of study. The authors comment that their sample was primarily female and described this fact as a limitation. However, because the presents study focuses on female military spouses, this fact actually lends support to the current author's argument.

One important critique of Marcia's (1966) work (and by extension, the studies which built upon his findings) is that the idea of identity status may not be an appropriate way to conceptualize identity in women (Sands, 1996). Not only was Marcia's work built on Erikson, whose theories have been criticized for their male-centric viewpoint (Berzoff, 2011; Sands, 1996), but Marcia's study validating the construct of identity status included only males (Sands, 1996). Sands expresses concern that the achieved identity status, with its emphasis on independence and decisiveness (and which is considered the most healthy and mature identity status), is not appropriate for the more relationally-oriented female. While Sands cites studies which indicate that women develop their identity in different ways than men do, the studies discussed by the present author indicate that measuring identity status/style in women is appropriate. Several of the studies discussed above included samples which were comprised primarily of women participants (e.g., Beaumont & Pratt, 2011; Berzonsky, 1992; Grotevant & Adams, 1984) and in which a wide range of identity statuses were endorsed. No significant gender differences with

regard to identity status/style occurred in Beaumont and Pratt or in Berzonsky.

Additionally, Grotevant and Adams actually found that females endorsed achieved identity status more frequently than did their male counterparts. While women may be more relationship-oriented, studies support the notion that they can also explore and form identity commitments in an autonomous way. Indeed, Sands notes that the practice of assuming all women to be relationship-oriented runs counter to the postmodern viewpoint that women should not be categorized as “a singular group for whom connecting with others is an essential quality” (1996, p. 175). Indeed, women likely want to find a balance between being relationship-oriented and independent beings (Sands, 1996).

The studies discussed here all have similar limitations. Their samples are drawn either from a university sample or from the general population; none focus on the military population. Additionally, those studies that examined coping strategies did not have participants specify precisely what type of problem they were focusing on in their reports of coping strategies. Findings regarding gender were somewhat contradictory among the studies. While Berzonsky (1992) found that females were proportionally more likely to endorse more mature identity processes, neither Beaumont and Pratt (2011) nor Luyckx et al. (2012) found significant difference in identity styles or processes between male and female participants.

Therefore, it is possible that identity status in military wives plays an important role in whether they are able to cope adaptively with challenges of the military lifestyle. For those who come into a military marriage with moratorium or diffuse identity statuses, feeling out of control (Blakely et al., 2014; Davis et al., 2011; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Klein et al., 1989; Mulvey, 2008) and in second place, so to speak (Aducci et al., 2011; Blue

Star Families, 2017) may exacerbate immature responses and impede growth. For those women with foreclosed identity statuses, their lack of openness to new experience may clash with the flexibility so frequently demanded by the military lifestyle and lead to emotional turmoil both within herself and within her marriage. Each of these situations could affect her ability to cope adaptively with the challenges she faces.

Self-Concept Clarity

Self-concept clarity is a construct related to, but distinct from, that of identity. Campbell et al. (1996) define self-concept clarity as “the extent to which the contents of an individual’s self-concept (e.g., perceived personal attributes) are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and temporally stable” (p. 141). The authors go on to note, however, that identity differs from self-concept clarity in its depth and multi-faceted nature. Epstein (1973) likens the self-concept to a self-theory, the most basic purpose of which is “to optimize the pleasure/pain balance of the individual over the course of a lifetime” (p. 407). Another task of this self-theory identified by Epstein is that of consolidating all of the information from the experiences an individual has in a way that enables the person to cope effectively with his or her experience. The self-concept, according to Epstein, plays a vital role in an individual’s ability to cope with life’s challenges. The individual who possesses an “extensive self-theory will have concepts available for coping with a wide range of situations” due to the wide-ranging awareness of his internal state and capabilities (Epstein, 1973, p. 408). Thus, the degree of an individual’s self-concept clarity is likely to affect whether that person chooses to cope adaptively with life’s challenges.

Campbell et al. (1996) explored the relationship between self-concept clarity and various “personality dispositions” (p. 142) such as self-esteem, the Big Five personality traits (i.e., extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness, and neuroticism), and “chronic attention to the self (i.e., self-consciousness)” (p. 142) in a series of studies. The sample for the study reported here consisted of three separate groups of undergraduate students attending the University of British Columbia. The study took place over the course of three years, and each group within the sample participated in one of the three years. Despite the fact that participants were undergraduate students, ages ranged from 17 to 48 years. The researchers attempted to distinguish between the constructs of self-concept clarity and self-esteem, as they note the two have been linked in the literature. In order to do so, the authors developed the Self-Concept Clarity Scale (SCCS) and assessed it for various psychometric properties. Self-esteem, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and extraversion were found to have significant positive correlations with self-concept clarity, while neuroticism had a significant negative correlation with self-concept clarity (Campbell et al., 1996). Self-concept clarity was associated with several personality traits in a multiple regression analysis even when controlling for their correlations with each other (e.g., self-esteem, conscientiousness, and agreeableness).

Self-concept clarity has also been positively associated with various measures of psychological adjustment, including self-esteem and perceived social support (Campbell, Assanand, & Di Paula, 2003; Smith, Wethington, & Zhan, 1996). Self-concept clarity is associated with lower levels of neuroticism, anxiety, depression, and perceived stress as well (Campbell et al., 2003; Smith et al., 1996). Such relationships provide support for

the hypothesis that higher degrees of self-concept clarity are likely to have a positive relationship with adaptive coping.

Not only is self-concept clarity associated with certain personality traits (e.g., self-esteem, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and extraversion; Campbell et al., 1996), but it is also associated with life events. For example, exiting a particular role in one's life can lead to a reduction in self-concept clarity (Light & Visser, 2013). Such role exits can include leaving a job, graduating from school, and ending a romantic relationship. The authors theorize that roles provide structure in both relationships and in daily behavior and argue that exiting a role likely has a destabilizing effect on an individual's self-concept clarity. Their findings support this supposition. In light of these findings, military wives who constantly move into and out of different roles as a result of expectations associated with their husbands' ranks (Drummet et al., 2003), geographic relocations, deployments, and mission assignments may experience changes in their degrees of self-concept clarity, thus affecting their ability to cope adaptively with the stressors they encounter.

Smith et al. (1996) also evaluated the impact that self-concept clarity has on whether an individual chooses to engage in more or less adaptive coping strategies. In a sample of undergraduate students, lower degrees of self-concept clarity were associated with use of less adaptive coping mechanisms (e.g., mental and behavioral disengagement, alcohol and drug use, and engaging in denial). Conversely, higher degrees of self-concept clarity were associated with coping strategies such as taking action, reinterpreting the situation in a more positive way, and taking action to address the problem (i.e., more adaptive coping mechanisms). Of note is the fact that the authors measured the impact of

self-concept clarity on choice of coping in three types of situations: with regard to overall coping style, coping with a one-time stressor, and coping with an ongoing stressor. Their findings indicate that self-concept clarity plays an important role in choice of coping strategy across a wide range of potentially stressful scenarios. One should note, however, that the strength of the relationship did change in each of the coping scenarios, although the relationship remained significant for all three.

These studies each have important limitations. Two of the studies utilize samples of undergraduate students. While Light and Visser (2013) use a sample of adults which is representative of national demographics, their sample does not necessarily include adults affiliated with the military. Campbell et al. (1996) do not report on the ethnicity of their participants, although they do include the fact that the majority of their participants were female. Smith et al.'s (1996) sample was also primarily female, but they attended an Ivy League university and were also primarily White. Additionally, participants in this sample were asked to identify how they usually cope with challenges rather than discussing how they coped with a particular issue. Smith et al. also note that they did not include two scales related to social support from the coping measure they used; thus, they argue, their findings regarding the relationship between self-concept clarity and coping are incomplete, as social support is an important component of the coping process. Additionally, these studies either controlled for gender or fail to report whether significant differences exist between males and females regarding their degree of self-concept clarity.

Military wives face constant threats to their self-concept clarity. For example, multiple researchers describe the experience of their samples of military wives during

their husbands' deployments as feeling silenced and disenfranchised (Aducci et al., 2011; Davis et al., 2011; Lapp et al., 2010; Marnocha, 2012; Robbins, 2002). Davis also describes military wives' reports of feeling as though they are not in control of their own lives, despite their awareness of having made the choice to enter into marriage with a service member. Aducci et al.(2013) also comment that participants in their study expressed feeling that they "were not 'able' or not 'allowed' to show their emotion, dependence, vulnerability, fright, and worry, but instead were compelled to be stoic, strong, independent, and have it all together" (p. 244). Participants in Lapp et al.'s (2010) study expressed feeling that "their own sacrifices [during a husband's deployment] were being inadvertently reduced or dismissed" because they were "safe at home" (p. 60). Indeed, the researchers note that several participants thanked them specifically for their interest in military wives, as the participants felt that "no one, including their deployed spouses, had any idea of their own sacrifices" Lapp et al., 2010, p. 63). Robbins (2002) points to the "social pressure to be silent about personal beliefs, feelings, and thoughts" and these women's "struggle to find space and opportunity to voice their experience of a personal sense of self" (p. 4). Such dismissals of one's experience (i.e., feeling out of control, unacknowledged, or forced to suppress one's emotions) may have a detrimental effect on one's self-concept clarity. Findings such as those described in Smith et al. (1996) suggest that self-concept clarity likely plays an important role in a military wife's choice of coping strategy regardless of the situation. Whether she encounters a relatively short-term stressor such as her husband's unexpected overnight work schedule or one of the longer-term stressors such as relocation, career interruption, and deployment, her degree of self-concept clarity is likely to affect whether she chooses to employ an

adaptive coping strategy. Bolstering the self-concept clarity of military wives is likely to support their ability to utilize adaptive coping strategies when facing such challenges.

Self-Monitoring

Identity status and self-concept clarity are complemented by awareness of how one functions in relational contexts across a wide range of situations. Snyder (1974) describes the self-monitoring individual as “one who, out of a concern for social appropriateness, is particularly sensitive to the expression and self-presentation of others in social situations and uses these cues as guidelines for monitoring his own self-presentation” (p. 528). Snyder highlights the importance of the ability to self-monitor in maintaining appropriate relationships and social interactions. Mead (1934) notes the importance that placing oneself metaphorically in the mind of others has on an individual’s ability to select behavior appropriate to a given situation. Snyder (1974) lists the varied goals associated with an individual’s engagement in self-monitoring. Different situations call for different goals. The goals include communicating one’s true emotional state; communicating an emotional state which is not true to the individual’s actual feelings; hiding inappropriate feelings in order to “appear unresponsive and unexpressive” (p. 527); appropriately suppressing inappropriate responses and purposely conveying a more appropriate one; and presenting as though one is experiencing emotion when one is not. Military wives are likely to engage in high degrees of self-monitoring, as will be discussed below.

Lower degrees of self-monitoring were associated with increased experience of psychopathological symptoms as well as with greater likelihood of engaging in less adaptive coping styles such as emotion-focused or avoidance-focused strategies in a

sample of Polish university students (Huflejt-Łukasik & Czarnota-Bojarska, 2006).

Correspondingly, higher degrees of self-monitoring were correlated with higher usage of more adaptive coping styles (Huflejt-Łukasik & Czarnota-Bojarska, 2006). Büyükşahin (2009) examined the impact that self-monitoring has on coping strategies used within intimate relationships in a sample of Turkish undergraduate students. Self-monitoring was associated with use of a higher number of coping strategies overall. While degree of self-monitoring did predict which specific coping strategies the students used, the outcomes did not provide clear support for a relationship between degree of self-monitoring and whether the coping strategies were adaptive. For example, participants endorsing high degrees of self-monitoring reported engaging in more adaptive coping mechanisms such as putting more effort into the relationship, using humor, and seeking external support, but they also reported using drugs and alcohol in order to cope with relationship difficulties. Büyükşahin assessed the extent to which different genders endorsed higher or lower degrees of self-monitoring; gender did not have a significant impact on degree of self-monitoring in the sample. Gender did, however, have a significant impact on the types of coping strategies endorsed by participants. Males were significantly more likely to use alcohol or drugs as a means of coping than were females in this sample. Additionally, Büyükşahin notes that females in the sample were significantly more likely to use a greater number of coping strategies overall. Such coping strategies included pursuing support from others; drawing on religion; and self-bolstering. Interestingly, females were also significantly more likely than males to engage in both “negative and passive coping” as well as “positive and active coping” (Büyükşahin, 2009, p.712). According to the measure used in this study, negative and

passive coping includes techniques such as self-blame, avoiding social interaction, affect changes, and wishful thinking; positive and active coping includes techniques such as using stressors as an opportunity for growth and planning for and seeking ways to actively address the situation. This finding echoes those of other researchers, which indicate that military wives use a wide range of coping mechanisms when facing challenges (e.g., Davis et al., 2011; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Lapp et al., 2010; Nichols et al., 2013; Padden et al., 2011; Patterson & McCubbin, 1984; Wheeler & Stone, 2010).

A significant limitation to each of these studies is the generalizability to other cultures and to other age groups. For example, Huflejt-Łukasik and Czarnota-Bojarska's study focused on undergraduate students in Turkey, while Büyükşahin's sample included students from different universities in Poland. Huflejt-Łukasik and Czarnota-Bojarska controlled for gender in their analysis rather than exploring the difference between genders in the relationship between self-monitoring and coping strategies. The inconclusive findings also underscore the importance of further study regarding the relationship between self-monitoring and adaptive coping.

Public self-consciousness, a concept similar to self-monitoring, is the extent to which an individual focuses on the outward facets of the self, combined with awareness of the interplay between how one influences and is perceived by others (Huflejt-Łukasik & Czarnota-Bojarska, 2006). Public self-consciousness includes the person's "tendency to evaluate the self in terms of group or public standards" (Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003, p. 314). Sneed and Whitbourne found public self-consciousness to be positively associated with individuals' endorsement of both identity assimilation and identity accommodation. According to Sneed and Whitbourne, a person who uses the process of identity

assimilation has difficulty acknowledging the changes and limitations to his or her abilities which may result from increasing age. Such persons might possess a strong desire to maintain a consistent schema about him- or herself and has difficulty internalizing information and experiences which may contradict this image of self. In contrast, an individual who uses the process of identity accommodation tends to change his or her identity as needed to fit any situation that arises (Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003). Sneed and Whitbourne's findings suggest that those who are particularly concerned with how others perceive them may have less healthy forms of coping with the changes of aging. Additionally, Sneed and Whitbourne cite several studies which indicate that high levels of public self-consciousness are associated with depression, social anxiety, and neuroticism. Thus, high degrees of self-monitoring may create challenges for individuals dealing with change in a wide range of situations, including transitions associated with the military lifestyle.

Both self-monitoring and public self-consciousness emphasize a person's attentiveness to social cues and the degree to which he or she desires to adjust behavior to those cues. Such attentiveness may be adaptive or not, depending on the individual and on the context. A person could find this attentiveness to be useful and supportive of coping adaptively with life's challenges, or the person could find the constant awareness of others' expectations stifling and overwhelming. Self-monitoring plays a crucial role in the lives of military wives as they attach to and disconnect from various social, professional, and military-affiliated groups. Self-monitoring could serve as either a hindrance or a support to coping adaptively with the challenges faced by military wives. For instance, several of the goals of self-monitoring are consistent with military wives'

descriptions of concealing their true feelings and engaging in the protective buffering discussed earlier. Additionally, military wives frequently find themselves in a wide range of social situations, both familiar and unfamiliar; such group gatherings of military wives tend to mirror the ranks of their respective husbands, rather than allowing group dynamics to unfold in a manner more consistent with their own personalities (Drummet et al., 2003; Jans, 1989; Lehr, 1996). At such military-related social events, women may engage in self-monitoring behaviors as they look to each other for behavioral cues; they may modify their behavior or emotional expression in order to conform to what they feel others expect of them. When an individual is constantly seeking to adjust her behavior and emotional expression to her surroundings, as is often the case among military wives, she may begin to experience negative consequences of these behaviors. The feeling of holding oneself back is one that seems to permeate the rest of a military wife's experience, though it may only be brought into sharp relief during stressful periods such as deployment. The military wife may also feel the need to adjust herself to the needs or expectations of the service member to whom she is married. One example of this is the protective buffering described by Joseph and Afifi (2010), in which a military wife chooses not to disclose important but stressful information to her husband during his deployment for fear of the disclosure affecting his safety. Military wives' engaging in protective buffering has been correlated with negative physical and mental health symptoms (Joseph & Afifi, 2010).

Conversely, however, self-monitoring could also be helpful to military wives who find themselves in new situations. Snyder (1974) notes the tendency for individuals to look to others for guidance in new situations. Younger military wives, especially those at

a new duty station, attending a military social occasion for the first time, or going through a husband's first deployment may look to older, more experienced wives for social and emotional cues. Additionally, relocation to a foreign residence can be a particularly confusing time for military wives (Drummet et al., 2003; Segal, 1986); self-monitoring can play an important role in adjusting to communication patterns and social norms. For those seeking guidance in social situations, self-monitoring could serve an adaptive purpose, providing a sense of structure and comfort. The findings of Huflejt-Łukasik and Czarnota-Bojarska (2006) seem to support the idea that a high degree of self-monitoring in military wives is likely to help them cope adaptively with the challenges of the lifestyle.

Role Conflict

Once a person knows who she is and how she relates to others through identity, self-concept clarity, and self-monitoring, she begins to inhabit various social roles in response to the relationships she forms and the demands of the situations she encounters. Society is comprised of individuals interacting with each other in a variety of roles who form relationships based on role transactions (Goode, 1960). Different cultures and groups within those cultures reinforce the types of roles to be performed as well as how the different roles will relate with the others (Marks & MacDermid, 1996). Roles are enacted through individuals' interactions with each other, which lead to a set of expectations being developed regarding predictable behavior associated with a particular role (Biddle, 1986; Stryker, 1968). Biddle notes that such roles are created and shaped through the expectations associated with those situations and relationships. Mead (1934) proposes that the self actually develops through participation in social interactions and

that one cannot know oneself without being in relationship with others. Moreover, roles have been described as “key units of social structure,” as they provide connections between individuals and the benefits which come from social interaction (Reitzes & Mutran, 1994). However, at times different individuals may hold varying and irreconcilable expectations for a person’s behavior (Biddle, 1986). As Netemeyer, Bokes, and McMurrian (1996) note, “The general demands of a role refer to the responsibilities, requirements, expectations, duties, and commitments associated with a given role” (p. 401). These differing demands may lead a person to undergo role conflict, which is the experience of having two or more roles with expectations or demands that contradict one another (Biddle, 1986; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Sieber, 1974). Military wives inhabit a number of roles, and the role of “military wife” may conflict with any of the other roles she occupies due to its particularly demanding nature.

Individuals may classify the different roles or identities they inhabit as more or less salient at any given moment, with the potential for conflict arising when an individual encounters a situation in which two roles seem equally important, as the roles likely demand mismatched responses (Stryker, 1968). Role conflict leads to the worsening of performance in one role due to the demands of another role (Buda & Lenaghan, 2005; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Goode (1964) and Sieber (1974) indicate that role conflict is a part of overall role strain (i.e., the idea that individuals are constantly at a loss with regard to meeting the demands of all the roles in their lives, even when they do not directly contradict one another). With the number of roles occupied by individuals increasing more and more, the importance of understanding the effects of occupying multiple roles increases as well (Kulik, Shilo-Levin, & Liberman, 2015).

Conflict occurring between multiple roles is likely to lead to stress (Aryee, Luk, Leung, & Lo, 1999; Biddle, 1986; Pearson, 2008; Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002), which underscores the importance of studying role conflict in relation to adaptive coping.

Researchers have had difficulty settling on a precise understanding of role conflict, however, specifically as compared to role overload (Biddle, 1986; Coverman, 1989). For example, Goode (1960) and Sieber include role conflict as well as role overload as components of role strain while Higgins et al. (2010) state that role overload is a type of role conflict. Role overload refers simply to an individual feeling overwhelmed by the sheer number of roles inhabited, not necessarily by any specific conflict between particular roles (Biddle, 1986; Coverman, 1989; Lang & Markowitz, 1986; Sieber, 1974). Theoretically, the larger the number of roles which one occupies leads to greater likelihood of role conflict (Buda & Lenaghan, 2005); however, research has not shown this to necessarily be the case (e.g., Baruch & Barnett, 1986). Coverman (1989) states that “[r]ole overload leads to role conflict only when the demands of the multiple roles make it difficult to fulfill the demands of another role” (p. 968). Thus, role overload can and should be distinguished from role conflict. Military wives may experience role strain or overload during a deployment, for example, as they try to manage responsibilities of both mother and father; worker and parent; friend and unit volunteer. These roles do not necessarily conflict with each other, but the problem is simply that the military wife has taken on too many roles.

Issues related to roles in general (i.e., role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload, etc.) have typically been studied through one of two contradictory lenses: that of the scarcity approach or the enrichment approach (Baruch & Barnett, 1986; Buda &

Lenaghan, 2005; Kulik & Liberman, 2013; Lenaghan & Sengupta, 2007; Marks, 1977; Pearson, 2008; Rittenour & Colaner, 2012; Ruderman et al., 2002). The scarcity approach refers to the idea that individuals do not have enough time or resources to meet the demands of all the roles they inhabit. This approach holds that the larger number of roles a person occupies, the more drained that person becomes (Baruch & Barnett, 1986; Buda & Lenaghan, 2005; Kulik & Liberman, 2013; Lazarus & Folkma, 1984; Lenaghan & Sengupta, 2007; Marks, 1977). The enrichment approach, on the other hand, indicates that the larger the number of roles a person holds, the more energy and benefits the person receives from the roles (Baruch & Barnett, 1986; Buda & Lenaghan, 2005; Kulik & Liberman, 2013; Kulik et al., 2015; Lenaghan & Sengupta, 2007; Marks, 1977). Because findings related to the support of either approach have been mixed and are therefore inconclusive (Buda & Lenaghan, 2005; Coverman, 1989; Kulik & Liberman, 2013; Lenaghan & Sengupta, 2007; Marks, 1977; Pearson, 2008; Ruderman et al., 2002; Sieber, 1974), further research needs to focus on the impact that inhabiting multiple roles may have on an individual's ability to cope effectively with stressors. If occupying a larger number of roles leads to conflict between two or more roles, that conflict is a stressor which may affect the manner in which a person copes. If, however, a greater number of roles leads to enhanced functioning, that higher degree of functioning could also have an impact on the way a person chooses to cope with other stressors. A military wife's decision to alter the number of roles in her life could serve either maladaptive or adaptive purposes. If she takes on the role of student during a husband's deployment to keep herself busy, for example, she might find that the time demands of this role conflict with her husband's expectation that she will be available when he calls, thus creating

more stress for her. If she finds that her new role as student allows her to engage in richer, more meaningful exchanges with her husband during his absence, then the additional role may serve as an adaptive means of coping with her sadness at his absence. Thus, further research is needed on the relationship between role conflict and adaptive coping, particularly among military wives.

Role conflict specifically has been shown to have significant relationships with a wide range of outcomes. Biddle (1986) theorizes regarding the negative impact that role conflicts can have on an individual's functioning in his or her workplace as well as the impact role conflict may have on a woman's ability to negotiate competing demands associated with career and domestic responsibilities. Role conflict may lead to negative outcomes regarding overall well-being (Aryee et al., 1999). For example, Kulik and Liberman (2013) found role conflict between work and family to be associated with higher degrees of distress both at work and at home within their sample of working mothers in Israel. Higher degree of role conflict is related to lower degrees of job satisfaction in married men and women in China and in the United States (Aryee et al., 1999; Coverman, 1989). Family satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and overall life satisfaction also decrease as role conflict increases in a Chinese population and among elementary and high school educators in the United States (Aryee et al., 1999; Netemeyer et al., 1996, respectively). Role conflict is also associated with higher levels of psychophysical symptoms in women (e.g., feeling tired, nervous, dizzy, and having little appetite; Coverman, 1989; Netemeyer et al., 1996) and with worker exhaustion (Hornung et al., 2016). Despite the negative impact role conflict frequently has on multiple areas of life, some evidence does exist which indicates that in certain instances role conflict may

lead to more positive outcomes. In a study of college students balancing their roles as students with their roles as paid employees, for example, Lenaghan and Sengupta (2007) found that the conflict of school interfering with work actually led to higher levels of positive affect within their sample. While the studies described here use different types of adult samples, none of them explores role conflict among military wives. Additionally, they focus only on the conflict between employment and family roles. They do not explore the conflict that might occur from the demands of a spouse's occupational expectations. They also do not explore the way that role might conflict with roles other than family responsibilities (e.g., friend, volunteer, member of a house of worship, student).

The evidence described above shows that, for the most part, role conflict leads to increased levels of stress or decreased levels of satisfaction in differing areas of functioning. Thus, studying role conflict in relation to choice of coping strategy is important, as coping responses occur in response to stressful situations (Dimiceli et al., 2010; Frazier et al., 2011). Several researchers have studied the connection between role conflict and coping strategies in different ways. For example, Aryee et al. (1999) examined whether particular coping mechanisms were adaptive in protecting against the negative effects of role conflict in a sample of parent-workers in Hong Kong, finding that certain types of problem-focused coping seem to protect against the negative impact of role conflict with regard to family-work roles. Hornung et al. (2016) studied the interaction between role conflict and coping strategies and the outcome of this interaction on workers' exhaustion in a sample of German government employees. High degrees of role conflict, role ambiguity, and control coping were related to lower levels of

exhaustion, while high levels of role conflict, role ambiguity, and support coping were related to higher levels of exhaustion. The authors liken the more adaptive support coping to the problem-focused coping identified as adaptive in other studies. Other researchers have studied the affect that coping strategies have on degree of role conflict. Baltes et al. (2011), for example, assessed the degree to which choice of coping strategy mediated the impact that personality characteristics had on perceived degrees of role conflict. Choice of a problem-focused coping strategy did mediate the relationship between personality characteristics such as agreeableness and conscientiousness and experience of role conflicts between work and family.

The studies described above have several limitations. One limitation comes in the form of the types of roles studied. Researchers and other authors have identified a number of role categories that may be inhabited by an individual. Such roles include family member, a member of a particular occupation or simply “worker,” an affiliation with political identities, parent, community member, friend, neighbor, spouse/partner, member of a religious group, feminist, volunteer, student, and one who engages in certain recreational activities (Eubanks, 2013; Kulik & Liberman, 2013; Reitzes & Mutran, 1994; Rittenour & Colaner, 2012; Ruderman et al., 2002; Stryker, 1968). Despite the identification of so many potential roles, researchers have primarily focused on role conflict with regard to two roles: worker and parent (Aryee et al., 1998; Brody, 1981, cited in Kulik et al., 2015; Lang & Markowitz, 1986; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Ruderman et al., 2002). Women occupy a wide range of roles in their everyday lives, including but not limited to work and family roles. Focusing exclusively on these two types of roles not only presents a limited picture of the way in which women operate, it

also increases the probability of missing important areas of conflict outside of these two (admittedly important) domains. Additionally, in assessing the roles which study participants inhabit, researchers frequently identify a set of roles *a priori* and ask participants to identify which of the roles they occupy (e.g., Kulik & Liberman, 2013; Reitzes & Mutran, 1994). While this allows for easier measurement and analysis, it likely leads to a large number of important roles being missed or misidentified (Marks & MacDermid, 1996). One important exception to this practice is Ruderman et al., who allowed participants to identify their own lists of roles. This allowed the researchers to capture information about roles which the participants deemed important to their lives, rather than making assumptions about which roles would be most salient to their participants. However, such a process is a more challenging method of assessing role conflict, as identified roles may be difficult for the researcher to categorize during data analysis.

Clear evidence exists that choice of coping strategy and role conflict have significant relationships with each other. Coverman (1989) points to her findings that the women in her study were able to negotiate multiple roles with little impact to their well-being and adds that, “Apparently, women are employing coping strategies which permit them to spend a great deal of time in [multiple roles] with minimal psychological cost” (p. 980). While several studies have examined the influence that coping has on affecting perceptions of role conflict or the interaction between role conflict and coping on other outcomes, little or no research exists specifically exploring the impact that role conflict may have on an individual’s choice of an adaptive coping strategy. Understanding “what kinds of personalities suffer or thrive under what kinds of conditions when confronted

with what kinds of multiple roles” (Sieber, 1974, p. 576) is an important and rich area for study. Gender may play an important role in developing further understanding of the interplay between role conflict and adaptive coping. Women may experience greater conflict between roles than do men (e.g., feeling that one must “choose” between being a good mother and a good employee). Additionally, women may feel more pressure than men do to “have it all” by inhabiting multiple, conflicting roles. Moreover, they may feel less able to say no to the demands associated with the roles in which they find themselves, particularly if saying no might have a negative impact on a husband’s career (as may be the case for military wives (Lehr, 1996). Studying the impact of role conflict on a person’s decision to utilize adaptive coping mechanisms will give researchers and clinicians tools to assist service recipients in selecting such adaptive coping strategies, particularly with regard to women.

Role conflict is particularly salient in military wives. Eubanks (2013) points to the variety of roles held by military spouses, both in their homes and in the communities in which they reside. Jans (1989) found that many military wives identify themselves within “the social role of ‘wife of’” a service member in the Australian military (p. 337). In Robbins’s (2002) qualitative interviews with eleven military wives, one theme which emerged among her participants was the idea of “military social life as a ‘game’ of altering roles as social environment requires” (p. 145). Constantly feeling as though one is playing at negotiating different role expectations could be frustrating and exhausting for anyone and particularly so for a military wife who already faces numerous stressors in her day-to-day routine associated with the military lifestyle. Many military wives experience a shift in roles during a husband’s deployment, possibly taking on additional

responsibilities typically maintained by her husband. Upon his return, the renegotiation of roles can be stressful for the wife, the husband, and the children (DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Drummet et al., 2003; Patterson & McCubbin, 1984; Wood et al., 1995). Aducci et al. (2011) note that military wives experience “multiple realities” (p. 233) and, indeed, “prided themselves with the multiple demands and roles that they shouldered mostly single-handedly while their husbands were sent to serve our country” (p. 237). Although some may take pride in balancing multiple roles, when any of these roles conflict with each other, stress is likely to occur. For example, some military wives find themselves in roles which come with a particularly high price: one military wife, married to a brigade commander, was expected to address certain needs of family members of deceased soldiers in her husband’s unit, simply because her husband was the commander. Another military wife disclosed that her friend’s husband had been killed during a military mission assigned by her own husband (Dimiceli et al., 2010). These roles (e.g., wife of a commander vs. friend) are clearly likely to lead to incredibly strong feelings of role conflict as well as intense negative feelings. Military wives may also feel tension between the role demands of being a military wife and the demands of being a parent. She may be mindful of the expectation that the mission comes first (Aducci et al., 2011; Blue Star Families, 2016; Drummet et al., 2003), while also strongly believing that putting the mission first is detrimental to the wellbeing of her child. The military wife may experience anger at yet another relocation that demands she uproot her family and enroll her children in yet another new school. Her husband may leave for deployment while she is pregnant, not able to return until after the birth of the child. She may feel a strong sense of conflict between her role of supportive military wife, avoiding reminding the service

member of how difficult delivering a child will be without her husband, and her need for emotional and concrete support with the birth of a new child.

Individuals inhabit many roles in life, and conflict between those roles has an important impact on functioning, particularly for women, who experience higher levels of stress than men and may have greater difficulty coping with those stressors for various reasons (Aycock, 2011; Higgins et al., 2010; Kessler & McLeod, 1984; Matud, 2004). Researchers have studied the impact that conflict between work and family role demands have on women (Aryee et al., 1998; Brody, 1981, cited in Kulik et al., 2015; Lang & Markowitz, 1986; Ruderman et al., 2002), but exploration is needed to examine the impact that conflict in other roles may have. For example, do the demands of being a military wife conflict with her role as an individual, mother, friend, neighbor, volunteer, professional, or church member? What impact do these potential role conflicts have on the type of coping strategies she chooses to employ? Does conflict between certain types of roles prompt her to use emotion-focused coping while conflict between different roles leads her to engage in problem-focused coping? Understanding this relationship would deepen understanding of factors which contribute to adaptive coping in this population, thus adding to clinicians' ability to support such adaptive coping behaviors.

Mastery

A feeling of control over one's life is considered a basic need (Frazier et al., 2011) and has a major impact on psychological health (Skinner, 1996). Mastery, which is defined as "the extent to which one regards one's life-chances as being under one's own control in contrast to being fatalistically ruled" (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978, p. 5), plays a

key role in human functioning. Mastery refers to an overall worldview of control rather than the controllability of any one specific situation and is comparable to other control-related constructs (Aycock, 2011; Li, Seltzer, & Greenberg, 1999). An important distinction to make is that mastery refers to the perceived control of events in one's life, not necessarily the actual control one has in a range of situations (Burger, 1989). The impact of a sense of mastery in a person's life is seen in several areas of functioning. It plays a crucial role in shaping self-concept and sense of well-being; mastery also shapes one's choice of coping mechanism (Aycock, 2011; Ben-Zur, 2002; Burger, 1989; Pearlin et al., 1981; Thoits, 1995). Examining the impact that a sense of mastery has on individual behavior will allow researchers and clinicians to identify ways in which "this powerful psychological variable" can be utilized more effectively (Burger, 1989, p. 254).

The relationship between mastery and self is crucial to understanding adaptive functioning. For example, Pearlin et al. (1981) argue that "the protection and enhancement of the self" is central to adaptive functioning and that "a diminishment of self" resulting from facing challenging situations in life is likely to lead to distress (pp. 339-340). Therefore, they argue, ongoing challenges that do not abate can serve as constant reminders of the individual's inability to change those situations; such unrelenting awareness of one's perceived shortcomings and lack of control can lead not only to lowered self-esteem but also to a reduced sense of mastery (Pearlin et al., 1981).

Mastery and other control-related constructs also play an important role in understanding the coping process. Much research exists to support this claim (Aycock, 2011; Ben-Zur, 2002; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Frazier et al., 2011; Li et al., 1999; Matud, 2004; Pearlin et al., 1981; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). The precise nature of this

relationship, however, is unclear. Several researchers have offered theoretical explanations of the ways in which mastery and coping may interact. For example, Folkman and Lazarus's (1980) stress theory holds that appraisal is "the critical determinant of the coping process" (p. 231). Part of the stress appraisal process is an individual's determination of the degree to which a situation is controllable. The stress appraisal process also includes assessment of the degree of threat the situation presents; assessment of one's psychological and social resources; and the meaning one makes of the stressful situation (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Pearlin et al., 1981). Because the process of appraisal involves deciding whether anything can actually be done to alter a stressful situation (i.e., the controllability of the circumstance; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus, 1993), one may surmise that an individual's sense of mastery (i.e., one's general views of his or her ability to control situations throughout life) is likely to have a strong influence on that person's choice of coping strategy in a particular situation. Moreover, one's global assessment of perceived control is likely to influence the way an individual situation is appraised (Frazier et al., 2011). Findings in Lazarus and Folkman's study support this assertion: In stressful situations in which study participants felt something constructive could be done to alleviate a problem, participants reported significantly higher usage of problem-focused coping; those situations deemed less controllable were associated with higher reports of emotion-focused coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Indeed, the researchers note that perceived controllability of a given situation was "the most potent situational [factor] in accounting for coping variability" (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980, p. 232). Thus, one can see one potential path through which mastery may contribute to choice of coping and in whether one's coping

response is actually adaptive: A person with a lower degree of mastery is likely to perceive many stressors as uncontrollable, which may prompt that individual to engage in less adaptive coping, as controllability has been shown to relate to coping strategy (Carver et al., 1989; Lazarus, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1980; Sadeh & Karniol, 2011).

Another potential explanation of the path between mastery and choice of coping strategy comes from Ben-Zur (2002). Ben-Zur speculates that mastery may operate in relation to coping strategy and wellbeing (i.e., adaptive coping) in two different ways: degree of mastery “may lead directly to positive (or negative) feelings through the related positive (or negative) cognitions that they entail” (p. 369). Alternately, she argues, the positivity or negativity of the thought processes may enhance or impede the selected coping behavior by leading to strategies which reflect the perceived controllability of the situation (Ben-Zur, 2002). Thus, a strong sense of mastery, theoretically, should correspond to a sense that one is able to cope adaptively with a wide range of challenges (Aycock, 2011).

While mastery and other control-related constructs may be related to the concept of coping, they are not the same. One such construct, present-focused control, refers to “a sense of one’s ability to cope,” which differs from the act of coping, which is comprised of “the specific thoughts and behaviors in which people engage when contending with life problems” (Frazier et al., 2011, p.752). Thus, assessment of the controllability of a situation is one component of determining whether one feels capable of coping with the situation.

Many factors may have an impact on one’s sense of mastery, including age (Li et al., 1999; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978); socioeconomic status and education (Ben-Zur,

2002; Li et al., 1999; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978); physical health (Ben-Zur, 2002; Li et al., 1999); social support (Li et al., 1999); and gender (Aycock, 2011; Matud, 2004). Stressful life events such as job loss can reduce one's sense of mastery (Pearlin et al., 1981). A lower degree of mastery has been shown to predict depression in male and female college students (Aycock, 2011) but is not a symptom integral to depression (Pearlin et al., 1981).

Gender appears to be a particularly salient predictor of one's sense of mastery, with women reporting significantly lower degrees of mastery than men (Aycock, 2011; Matud, 2004). This finding has particular importance for Active Duty military wives, who contend not only with so many "externally driven" changes in their lives (Klein et al., 1989, p. 466) but also with systemic-level structures that affect these women greatly but are "impervious to personal efforts to change them" (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978, p. 18). Lehr (1996) argues that the military has historically imposed both explicit and implicit demands on the wives of its service members and refers to these demands as the "structured subordination" and "institutionalization" of this group of women (paras. 4, 16). Recent research findings (e.g., Blakely et al., 2014) suggest that this feeling of subordination remains, however, despite important policy changes made in attempts to correct this attitude (Lehr, 1996). Moreover, for this group of women, the impact that a sense of mastery has on their ability to cope with challenges associated with the military lifestyle is of great importance, particularly in light of the fact that so many aspects of the lifestyle are both objectively and subjectively out of their control (Blakely et al., 2014; Davis et al., 2011; Klein et al., 1989; Lehr, 1996; Mulvey, 2008). Those military wives who have a stronger sense of mastery may fare better in navigating these challenges due

to their perception that life is generally in their control; conversely, the general expectation that one's life is under one's own control associate with a strong sense of mastery may, in fact, lead to greater emotional stress and an experience of conflict when facing all the expectations and circumstances that are imposed on them by the military.

General concepts of perceived control. While perceived control as an overarching construct has been the focus of much research (Skinner, 1996; Thoits, 1995), the concept of mastery has been studied less frequently. Indeed, in her extensive review of control-related concepts, Skinner omits the concept of mastery as a type of perceived control in her discussion (although she does include brief references to mastery as a form of competence; however, this definition is not pertinent to the present discussion). Most likely the reason for this omission has to do with the methodology employed in her search of the literature, which consisted of searching for articles with the word "control" in the title from a specific timeframe of a specific publication. However, despite the relative lack of attention within the literature to mastery specifically, findings related to other concepts of control may provide insight into the functioning of mastery. Skinner observes that the literature often uses different labels in measuring essentially the same construct; conversely, many constructs are grouped together under one term. Skinner states that both of these practices lead to confusion and difficulty integrating findings related to control effectively. The present author recognizes the nature of this confusion and seeks to provide an examination of the literature pertaining to perceived control generally as well as the literature related to mastery specifically.

Perceived control may be more important in determining well-being than is objective control. For example, as Frazier et al. (2011) point out, "[m]ost stressful events

are not objectively controllable in the sense that they are not desired or intended” (p. 750). Indeed, if a potentially stressful situation is actually within one’s power to change it, one is likely to do so, thus preventing the stressful situation from ever occurring. However, one’s perception of controllability may serve a protective function, helping to “blunt the emotional impact of persistent problems” (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978, p.12). Thoits (1995) comments that a sense of personal control might influence the person’s assessment of a stressful event as being less stressful. She also supposes that this high degree of personal control might even equip a person to avoid stressors altogether. Thus, perception of control may actually play a larger role in determining a person’s well-being than whether that person actually has the means to effect change in a given situation.

Control has been categorized in many ways throughout the literature. Perhaps the primary categorization is that of objective versus subjective control (Skinner, 1996). However, within the category of subjective control is another important means of categorizing control-related constructs: that of general perceptions of control versus situation-specific perceptions of control (Frazier et al., 2011; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Skinner, 1996). Much of the literature examining perceived control utilizes situation-specific measures with poor reliability or even none at all (i.e., measures that either report low alpha coefficients or are only one item in length; Frazier et al., 2011). In other words, measures are developed to examine perception of control in one specific situation and tailored to explore aspects of that situation. Frazier et al. note that, while use of such assessments is a worthwhile endeavor, these studies do not contribute to understanding the impact of perceived control across different situations in a person’s life. The authors underscore the need for measures of perceived control that can examine responses to a

wide range of situations (i.e., one that is generic enough to be applicable to different events in a person's life but still asks participants to focus on perceived control in one situation).

Another critique of the literature identified by Frazier and colleagues (2011) is their observation that most measures do not make any distinction among temporally-based aspects of control for a given situation. Frazier et al. (2011) explain their concept of temporally-based perception of control (which the authors note was originally explicated in Frazier et al., 2001) as follows: Past control refers to one's assessment of whether a previously-occurring event was under one's control. Present control refers to one's efforts to "try to control some current aspect of the event" (p. 750). Future control pertains to one's assessment of whether a potentially occurring negative event can be controlled or prevented from happening. Such a theoretical approach to perceived control allows for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between perceived control and adaptive functioning because situation-specific measures that do not tease out the impact that past, present, and future control may have on one's response to a stressor may "mask" the precise interaction of each variable (Frazier et al., 2011, p.751).

While Frazier et al.'s (2011) measure can be used across a wide range of situations, it still examines one's perceived control in one situation at a time. Indeed, the authors draw a distinction between their measure of temporal control and measures of general control, explaining that temporal control refers to "perceived control over different aspects of a specific event" (p. 751), whereas general control refers to one's global attitude toward perceived control. However, Frazier et al. do note the potential overlap between present control, which refers to one's sense of control in a present

moment, stating that “individuals who generally feel that they have control over their lives may also report more control over present aspects of a stressor” (Frazier et al., 2011, p. 751). While the theoretical approach described by Frazier et al. yields important findings about responses to particular events, examining global perceptions of control may lead to understanding of patterns in a person’s life. Thus, when exploring the impact of inherent character and personality dispositions on a person’s functioning (e.g., adaptive coping), a general-control theoretical approach is more appropriate. Moreover, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) describe situation-specific perceived control as a “process,” whereas general perceived control “refers to a stable antecedent variable” (p. 66). While the theory that perceived control works through the stress appraisal process (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984; Pearlin et al., 1981; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Thoits, 1995) coincides with a more situation-specific approach to perceived control, patterns of general control beliefs may hold predictive value for the appraisal process (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984; Frazier et al., 2011). Distinction between situation-specific perceived control and general control beliefs is of vital importance for construct and outcome clarity in research (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984; Skinner, 1996). While Folkman and Lazarus caution that general control beliefs assume a static nature regarding a person’s belief system, this limitation can be ameliorated somewhat by applying a measure of general perceived control to one’s response in a specific stressful event.

Relationship with adaptive coping. A high degree of mastery and overall perception of control may play an important role in helping people adapt to specific challenging situations in life, particularly those in which they have little objective or subjective control (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Skinner, 1996;

Thoits, 1995). As noted above, understanding the impact of perceived control across a wide range of events is crucial to understanding its role in adaptive functioning (Frazier et al., 2011). Mastery, which pertains to a global sense of control, is a concept that can be measured without regard to the specifics of a given situation. Frazier et al. (2011) report that their review of the literature indicates that present control (which the authors indicate has overlap with global measures of control) may be more adaptive than either past or future control. They posit that this adaptability may result from the fact that an individual may indeed “have more control over the present than over the past or the future: Present control focuses one’s energy on what can be controlled in an uncontrollable situation” (p. 750). Thus, mastery, as one type of global control, may be related to more adaptive outcomes.

In a study which included an examination of the relationship between coping and mastery, Pearlin et al. (1981) call attention to the fact that different situations affect people in very different ways. They attribute these differences to the unique responses individuals have to the situations they face. In other words, the way a person copes with a stressor affects the outcome of the situation for that person. The sample for their longitudinal study was comprised of community-dwelling adults in a Midwestern United States city. The authors report that their sample was representative of the city at the time, although they do not describe in precisely what ways the sample was representative. The study examined the manner in which “life events, chronic life strains, self-concepts, coping, and social supports come together to form a process of stress” (Pearlin et al., 1981, p. 337). Among a subsample (N=88) of the participants, the researchers identified job loss (i.e., a situation over which participants had no control) and economic strain as

the stressful life event and chronic life strain (respectively) for the purpose of the analyses. Data was collected in two waves which were four years apart. Based on their findings, the researchers proposed a model for understanding the stress process that factors in the direct and indirect impacts a stressful, uncontrollable event has on a person. Mastery was one variable assessed and incorporated into the model. Specifically, Pearlin et al. posit that the stressor of job loss results in economic strain (i.e., a role strain), which in turn lowers both self-esteem and a sense of mastery; the decline in these two areas of self-concept thus lead to depression (Pearlin et al., 1981). While depression did have a direct relationship to job loss in their sample, analysis revealed that both self-esteem and mastery functioned as mediating variables and accounted for increased variance in the relationship between stressor and outcome (Pearlin et al., 1981). The authors identify the selective nature of their model as a potential limitation, commenting that inclusion of other factors might have specified the process and relationships even further. One such factor was choice of coping strategy, as indicated by the authors' subsequent analysis.

Pearlin et al. (1981) next report that they explored the impact that active coping and social support might have on economic strain, depression, self-esteem, and mastery. In considering the main effects of coping and social support on the other variables, the researchers found no direct relationship between use of active coping, social support, and depression. However, both use of coping responses and experience of social support were found to "buttress one's sense of mastery when changes in economic strain and job disruption" were statistically controlled (Pearlin et al., 1981, p. 348). However, in order to determine the interactional effect of the mediating variables, the researchers performed an additional analysis. In this analysis, mastery was not affected by level of coping. In

other words, coping response did not have a protective effect on mastery. The authors summarize this finding thus: "...regardless of the level of coping, job loss reduces the sense of personal efficacy" (p. 349). These somewhat contradictory findings indicate that further research is needed regarding the relationship between mastery and adaptive coping. Despite the limitations of the study, which include the inability to fully determine directionality of relationships among variables (Pearlin et al., 1981) and lack of detailed information about sample demographics, this early work serves as a foundation in understanding the concept of mastery and the role it may play in the coping process.

Matud (2004) also examined the potential relationship between coping, mastery, and outcomes and included in her study a more nuanced assessment of the degree to which study participants felt in control of a stressful situation. In a sample of 2,816 Spanish male and female adults (female = 1,566) ranging in age from 18 to 65 years, Matud explored gender differences in stress and choice of coping style. One facet of measuring stress included asking participants to select applicable items from a series of potentially stressful life events which they might have experienced in the previous two years; participants were then asked to rate the controllability and undesirability of the events they had experienced. Women reported significantly more events as uncontrollable than did men and were also more likely to endorse use of emotion-focused coping strategies than were men. Higher numbers of life events described as uncontrollable (i.e., identifying more of the selected items from the list as less controllable) was positively correlated with reported psychological distress and with emotional inhibition. Lower controllability was negatively correlated with rational coping but had no significant relationship with detachment or avoidance coping (Matud, 2004).

Matud suggests that the use of more emotion-focused coping strategies may have led to the higher rates of psychological distress reported from the sample. She continues that “helping women to achieve a greater sense of control over their circumstances and to engage in problem-solving rather than emotionality when dealing with stressors, as well as changing the social circumstances that cause these reactions” would be of benefit to women. Therefore, one may expect that enhancing one’s sense of mastery would likely lead to more adaptive coping, particularly among women. While Matud’s study assessed participants’ feelings of control related to particular situations, the fact that participants were asked to rate the controllability of a wide range of situations across a fairly long time period (two years) indicates that the overall controllability of life stressors reported by participants may correspond to a global sense of mastery. In other words, participants who consistently rated a number of events in their lives as highly uncontrollable may experience low degrees of mastery overall.

Limitations of this study include the fact that participants were all from another country, which limits generalizability to the United States. Matud (2004) identifies the fact that the sample was a convenience sample as another limitation, although the size of and range of ages within the sample are both strengths of the study.

Li et al. (1999) examined the relationship between sense of mastery and choice of coping strategy in a probability sample of women who served in a caregiving role for their aging parents (N=115). The researchers sampled data collected in the first two waves of a larger longitudinal study taking place in a Midwestern state in the United States. The researchers report using Ryff’s (1989) Environmental Mastery Scale to assess “global feelings of mastery” among participants (p. 212). Those caregivers who endorsed

higher degrees of mastery were significantly more likely to use problem-focused coping strategies in stressful situations associated with the caregiving role while those who endorsed lower degrees of mastery were more likely to utilize emotion-focused coping strategies. Changes in depression over time were also measured. Women who endorsed more use of problem-focused coping strategies at the first wave of data collection showed decreases in depressive symptoms at the second wave of data collection. Li et al. report that those who endorsed lower degrees of mastery were more likely to report more depression during the first wave of data collection and subsequent increases in depressive symptoms at Wave 2 collection. This finding, combined with the others in the study, indicate that lower levels of mastery are likely to lead to the use of less adaptive coping mechanisms.

Li et al.'s (1999) study has many strengths, primarily its longitudinal design, which allowed for a temporal assessment of change in symptoms. One important limitation of the study, however, is that the authors do not explain the manner in which they instructed participants to complete the coping measure. They report using the COPE, which can be used to measure coping as a trait or as a response to a particular situation (Carver, 1997). Thus, it is unclear whether the researchers were asking participants to identify the manner in which they typically cope with stressors or the manner in which they coped with a discrete instance of stress related to the caregiving role. Another limitation of the study comes from its potential lack of generalizability. The authors note that only approximately 5% of their relatively small sample were non-White. Although the longitudinal design is a strength of the study, the authors note that the 18-month

period between waves of data collection is not particularly lengthy in the overall scheme of caring for an aging parent.

Mastery plays a role in choice of coping mechanism among college students as well (Aycock, 2011). In an examination of the relationships among coping resources, coping styles, social support, mastery, and depression in college students of both genders, Aycock found that women reported lower degrees of mastery than men and that mastery served as a predictor for depression in her sample, with significantly more women than men scoring high on a depression measure. Additionally, the findings suggest that mastery may play a stronger role in predicting depression in females (Aycock, 2011). Women reported engaging in coping on more occasions overall than did their male counterparts. Reported higher degrees of mastery were associated with less use of emotion-focused coping, while higher degrees of mastery were associated with greater use of problem-focused coping.

One important aspect of this study is that the author utilized measures which assess coping responses in a trait-oriented theoretical approach. Aycock (2011) cites Pearlin and Schooler's (1978) definition of coping resources, which states that coping resources refer to "the personality characteristics that people draw upon to help them withstand threats posed by events and objects in their environments" (p. 5). Coping styles, on the other hand, refer to the manner in which individuals typically utilize those resources as well as behavioral strategies to manage a stressor (Aycock, 2011). Interestingly, coping resources did not have as strong an impact on depression as did mastery, social support, and coping styles in female participants. The author offers a potential explanation of this finding: "If females feel as if they have little mastery over

their environments, they may not see internally-focused coping resources as being effective” (Aycock, 2011, pp. 68-69). Aycock continues by suggesting that the socialization of women may have an impact on the relationship between mastery and choice of coping in women: women (and particularly women of color) may have been socialized to assume they have no power in a situation even when they actually do. This leads to increased perception of events as stressful and uncontrollable, which may prompt women to engage in emotion-focused strategies more than other types of coping. These emotion-focused coping techniques may actually turn out to be more adaptive than problem-focused coping strategies due to the perception of reduced control (without regard to the degree of objective control a woman has over that situation).

One aspect of the study which the author identifies as a limitation is the fact that the sample was not representative of the demographics of college students across the United States. However, the lack of representativeness may actually be a strength as well (Aycock, 2011). The majority of study participants were African American, with White participants accounting for a large amount of the remaining sample. The fact that over 38% of study participants were African American serves to support the idea that mastery may be an important construct for individuals across cultural lines. Additionally, the author points to the lack of research focusing on coping mechanisms in individuals of color, noting that this study serves to fill a small piece of that gap in the literature.

While much of the literature supports the premise that a greater degree of perceived control generally leads to more adaptive outcomes, in some situations greater perceived control may actually be less adaptive (Burger, 1989). Burger notes that research findings which run counter to this general supposition are frequently dismissed

as unexplainable abnormalities. Skinner (1996) argues that contradictory findings regarding control are a result of confusion around terminology (i.e., measuring different constructs under the label of control rather than parsing out different terms for the different constructs). Burger, however, posits that the accumulation of so many unexpected findings indicate that greater perceived control may not necessarily always promote adaptive outcomes. Based on his review of the literature, Burger identifies three types of situations in which greater perceived control may not serve an adaptive purpose:

when it (a) leads to an uncomfortable level of concern for self-presentation, (b) decreases the likelihood that the person will be able to achieve desired outcomes, or (c) leads to an increase in predictability that draws the person's attention to the aversive aspects of the situation (Burger, 1989, p. 246).

In other words, when individuals are concerned that they will perform poorly in some way after being given control, a greater degree of perceived control may lead to poorer outcomes for that person. Additionally, when an individual decides that relinquishing control over a situation to another person may result in better outcomes, he or she is more likely to give up that control. The author provides one example of this phenomenon: control over the administration of a shot via hyperdermic needle. Burger suggests that individuals who give up control to a trained medical professional will likely experience better outcomes than if they maintained control over the situation themselves. Finally, when an individual feels in control of a situation, that control may actually bring focus to the distressful nature of the event, thus leading to less desired outcomes.

Examples of each of these scenarios can be found in the military community. A military wife who has relocated many times may be unable to finish college and is thus chronically unemployed. Were she to perceive this situation as being within her control, concern for self-presentation and decreased probability of success may lead to increased

feelings of distress and helplessness. However, the ability to distance herself from the “responsibility” of not finishing school or being able to find a job may promote a greater sense of well-being and lessen her feelings of guilt or inadequacy. An example of the third maladaptive outcome of increased control can be seen in the example of a military wife being given a choice as to when her husband leaves for deployment. The increased perception of control would almost certainly keep the fact of deployment and of her responsibility in the timing of that deployment present in her mind to a great extent. She is likely to agonize over the “best” time for her husband to deploy and would likely second-guess her decision on a regular basis, thus leading to a great deal of anxiety and psychological distress.

Mastery, perceived control, and adaptive coping in military wives. The impact of perceived control on choice of coping has been studied among military wives as well. The Active Duty military lifestyle is rife with conditions which seem to reduce a sense of control, either objectively or subjectively (Aducci et al., 2011; Blakely et al., 2014; Davis et al., 2011; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Klein et al., 1989; Lapp et al., 2010; Lehr, 1996; Mulvey, 2008; Robbins, 2002; Ross, 2016). Such conditions include a wide range of experiences: the inability to plan vacations during certain timeframes; the expectation of receiving a phone call at any moment with orders for immediate deployment (regardless of what is happening in the family’s life); pressure to conform to certain behavioral and cultural expectations; feeling beholden to remain available in case one’s husband calls when stationed overseas; feeling unable to openly grieve during a husband’s deployment; and being told where one will live and when one will move there (Aducci et al., 2011;

Davis et al., 2011; Drummet et al., 2003; Eubanks, 2013; Lapp et al., 2010; Segal, 1986; Robbins, 2002).

Perhaps no time is the feeling of powerlessness and lack of control more evident than during deployment. Davis et al. (2011) note that, despite participants' awareness of their conscious decisions to enter the military lifestyle, during a husband's deployment their "general feeling was one of being out of control and at the mercy of the military, their husbands, and even their own emotions" (p. 56). Participants apparently acknowledged their own roles in the experience of powerlessness, as they purposely sought to organize their lives during deployment around the possibility that their husbands might contact them, for fear that every communication might be the last (Davis et al., 2011). Aducci et al. (2011) equate the numerous uncertainties surrounding deployment with a feeling of powerlessness and described the life of an Active Duty military wife as "a disenfranchised existence" (p. 231). Military wives are aware that, during a husband's deployment, she may not even have control over how frequently she communicates with her husband (Mulvey, 2008) or who hears her communications with her husband, as the military may monitor any communications taking place over government channels (e.g., email accounts or telephone service connected to the military; Lapp et al., 2010).

Yet despite so many factors which may contribute to a feeling of powerlessness among these women, research indicates that some military wives are able to maintain a sense of personal control over their lives. Robbins (2002) describes the women who participated in her qualitative research as "independent and autonomous" with an "enhanced sense of personal power and control within the family system across time" (p.

129). Robbins attributes this sense of personal power to participants' coping adaptively with the "social isolation and periods of extreme loneliness" that so often accompany the life of a military wife (p.129). Participants identified specifically a sense of control over their responses to the role expectations placed on them in the military culture. For example, participants reported that they alone decided which military-related social events they would agree to attend rather than allowing others to dictate this to them (Robbins, 2002). Robbins notes that participants seemed able to discern in which areas of life they did have control and to focus efforts on exercising that control whenever possible. She writes, "They simultaneously know the power of personal choice in their responsibilities and the awesomely vast regions of life that are out of their control" (Robbins, 2002, p. 149). The stark difference between the personal empowerment described by these women and the feeling of powerlessness so many other military wives seem to feel underscores the need to explore the impact that a strong sense of mastery may have in helping military wives adapt to the challenges of the Active Duty lifestyle.

Klein et al. (1989) examined the relationship between locus of control, social support, emotionality, and life satisfaction in a sample of 60 wives of enlisted soldiers or non-commissioned officers. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 49 years and reported having experienced multiple relocations. Many were mothers, but the authors do not report demographics related to ethnicity. In assessing internal vs. external locus of control, the authors utilized a rather lengthy (40 items), presumably nuanced, measure. Among participants in the study, higher degrees of internal locus of control correlated positively with increased life satisfaction with the military lifestyle. The authors also collected qualitative data via interviews with the participants. Findings from this portion

of the study seemed to illuminate and add meaning to the data collected via quantitative measures. For example, when asked to identify which personality traits were associated with successful adjustment to the Active Duty military lifestyle, participants identified independence as one such trait. The potential connection between internal locus of control and a sense of independence may serve as predictors for better adjustment to the military lifestyle (Klein et al., 1989). The authors explain the possible relationship as follows: “It may be that the continued and major changes experienced by the typical military wife make particularly strong demands on self-reliance and responsibility” (Klein et al., 1989, p. 472). Thus, a global sense of mastery, a sense that one is generally in control of one’s life, may contribute to more adaptive coping when faced with the stressors associated with the military lifestyle.

The mixed-methods design of this study strengthens the impact of its findings. Participants were allowed to identify in their own words what they feel contributes to successful adaptation to the military lifestyle while the researchers collected quantitative data to identify statistical relationships among responses on the measures. Additionally, it is one of few studies on this population in which participants are primarily wives of enlisted personnel rather than of officers. Limitations of the study include the fact that no information about participants’ ethnicities was given and that convenience sampling was used.

Blakely et al. (2014) explored the impact on military wives of accompanying their husbands during service members’ overseas duty assignments. 13 wives of service members in the British military participated in an online discussion forum featuring a wide range of topics. Discussion topics, which the authors state were culled from a

previous literature review, pertained to the experience of accompanying the service member to an overseas duty station. Two new topics were posted each week for three months, and participants responded at their own discretion (Blakely et al., 2014). The authors highlight the fact that the online data collection method allowed participants to engage in the study from duty stations all over the world. Four themes emerged from data analysis, but the authors only discuss findings related to two of them: the themes of “Personality and personal meaning making” and of “Support” (Blakely et al., 2014, p. 389). Within the personality and personal meaning making theme, several subthemes were identified. One of those subthemes was titled “Loss identity/role/autonomy” (Blakely et al., 2014, p. 390). One example of this subtheme is illustrated powerfully via one participant’s comment: “[O]verseas I cease to have any authority at all” (Blakely et al., 2014, p. 390). Although Blakely et al.’s study focused on a very small number of wives of service members of the British military, this experience is likely familiar for many American military wives as well.

Dimiceli et al. (2010) explored whether particular coping strategies among military wives reduce negative health and emotional symptoms when dealing with an uncontrollable stressor. Specifically, the authors sought to explore whether a main-effects or goodness-of-fit hypothesis would be supported (e.g., whether problem-focused coping strategies are reliably more adaptive regardless of controllability or whether the adaptiveness of each type of coping fluctuates with the controllability of the stressor; Dimiceli et al., 2010). In order to measure controllability of a stressor, participants were asked to identify a specific stressor they had encountered within the previous five years and were then asked to rate the situation according to a 4-item measure of situation-

oriented control. Controllability was then explored as a moderating variable between the stressor and outcomes of somatic symptoms and symptoms of depression (Dimiceli et al., 2010). Analyses revealed that the goodness-of-fit hypothesis was not supported, as emotion-focused coping was not found to be more adaptive when navigating an uncontrollable stressor in their sample; nor was problem-focused coping found to be more adaptive when participants dealt with a controllable stressor. The findings thus support the main-effects hypothesis, which holds that problem-focused coping strategies tend to be more adaptive regardless of the degree of controllability perceived by the individual.

The combined findings from these studies indicate that mastery and perceived control may be potent indicators of the manner in which an individual chooses to cope with a given situation, although instances do exist in which this is not the case. Therefore, even in light of research findings which indicate that military wives' loss of perceived control affects them in negative ways (Aducci et al., 2011; Davis et al., 2011; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Lapp et al., 2010; Robbins, 2002), continued study is needed to understand the manner in which mastery may influence a military wife's choice of coping strategy as well as whether that strategy is adaptive. The fairly diverse nature of the samples in the above studies lends support to the idea that mastery and perceived control are important constructs to a wide range of individuals and particularly to women. However, the nature of the Active Duty military lifestyle presents its own set of challenges (Blue Star Families, 2015; Clever & Segal, 2013; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Drummet et al., 2003; Green et al., 2013; Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Mulvey, 2008; Segal, 1986). The very structure of the military as an institution and as a culture reduces the degree of objective control military

wives have over their lives and likely contributes to a lack of perceived control as well. This lack of control may prompt these women to cope in ways which are less adaptive simply because the stressors they so often face are simply not within their power to resolve. In addition to the stressors induced by the structure of the military as an organization, societal factors such as international conflict create individual- and family-level stressors as well in the form of family separation and the impact of combat on service members. The primacy of military career advancement imposes the stressor of multiple relocations, and the “mission first” mentality of the military necessarily creates a sense of inadequacy among spouses (Aducci et al., 2011; Blue Star Families, 2015, 2016, 2017; Drummet et al., 2003). The lack of control in so many aspects of life may enhance or diminish the role that mastery plays in adaptive coping among this population.

Rationale for the Current Study

The relationship between identity status, self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, role conflict, sense of mastery, and adaptive coping has yet to be explored in military wives. The proposed study will examine whether identity status, self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, role conflict, and sense of mastery predict the degree to which female spouses of male military service members engaged in adaptive coping mechanisms to manage a previous military-related stressor. The proposed study will also explore the participants’ own perceptions of this relationship via use of qualitative research methods. The outcomes of the present study will yield important information for clinicians who serve this population, those who create programs tailored to meet the needs of military spouses, and those who create policies designed to benefit these spouses (Braun-Lewensohn & Bar, 2017; Runge et al., 2014). Klodnicki (2015) notes the lack of

comprehensive services available for military wives; understanding more about potential factors at play in use of adaptive coping could prompt existing program developers and service providers to consider a new aspect of the life of the military wife as they design services for this population. Enhancing adaptive coping within this population could help to buffer the effects of the challenging lifestyle associated with being a military wife. Specifically, research focusing on understanding the impact that dispositional traits may have on use of adaptive coping strategies is important (Smith & Dust, 2006) because of its usefulness in enhancing services aimed at bolstering such traits in order to improve individuals' functioning on a regular basis (Luyckx et al., 2012).

The findings of this study could promote awareness and change in larger aspects as well. Robbins (2002) argues that findings from studies pertaining to military spouses could be generalizable to spouses of individuals in different yet not dissimilar careers (e.g., police officers). This study could contribute valuable information to initiatives designed to promote the welfare of military families (e.g., Michelle Obama's and Jill Biden's "Joining Forces" Initiative). Moreover, the information generated from this study could lead to greater awareness within the military community of the need to recognize military wives as multi-faceted, compelling individuals with strengths and interests over and above those which serve to support their service members.

Despite the numerous stressors and challenges faced by this population, including direct challenges to their senses of self and related traits, many military wives maintain a strong sense of who they are and what they value (Robbins, 2002). It is possible that strength of identity status, self-concept clarity, degree of self-monitoring, mastery, and perception of role conflict play important roles in buffering these women against the

negative consequences of the Active Duty lifestyle. Thus, the present researcher hypothesizes that military wives who endorse the most mature identity status (i.e., achieved), higher degrees of self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, and mastery, and lower degrees of role conflict will report greater use of more adaptive coping strategies than those who endorse one of the three “less mature” identity statuses (i.e., foreclosed, moratorium, or diffused), lesser degrees of self-concept clarity and self-monitoring, and higher degrees of role conflict.

Chapter 3. Methods

Study Aims

The study's quantitative aims were as follows:

Quantitative aim 1: Determine which coping strategies are, in fact, adaptive for military wives. This was accomplished through an exploratory analysis of the quantitative relationship between coping strategies reported and scores on a measure of well-being.

Quantitative aim 2: Examine the extent to which identity status, self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, role conflict, and sense of mastery are predictive of whether female spouses of male Active Duty military service members engage in adaptive coping strategies.

The study's qualitative aims were as follows:

Qualitative aim 1: Explore in what ways, if any, the unique challenges of the military lifestyle affect the manner in which these women cope with the challenges they face as military wives.

Qualitative aim 2: Explore the ways these women perceived their respective senses of self to interact with their means of coping with the military lifestyle, if at all.

This study employed a mixed-methods, cross-sectional survey design. The quantitative portion of the survey contained demographic information and multiple scales measuring the previously identified concepts: identity status, self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, role conflict, sense of mastery, and coping strategies. Qualitative data was collected via two open-ended questions at the end of the survey that allowed participants to describe their experiences within the military culture as they pertained to the concepts in question.

The study examined the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Self-reported levels of emotion-focused coping strategies in managing military lifestyle-related stressors will be significantly and positively related to higher degrees of well-being while self-reported levels problem-focused coping strategies will be significantly and inversely correlated with well-being.

Hypothesis 2: Individuals who endorse the most mature identity status (achieved); higher degrees of self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, and mastery; and lower degrees of role conflict will report significantly greater use of emotion-focused coping strategies as opposed to those who endorse the three “less mature” identity statuses (foreclosed, moratorium, or diffused); lower degrees of self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, and mastery; and higher degrees of role conflict.

Hypothesis 3: Individuals who endorse the three less mature identity statuses; lower degrees of self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, and mastery; and higher degrees of role conflict will report significantly greater use of problem-focused coping strategies as opposed to those who endorse the most mature identity status; higher degrees of self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, and mastery; and lower degrees of role conflict.

Justification of Study Design

To date, research on adaptive coping in Active Duty military wives has not examined the effect that self-related concepts may have on the degree to which these women cope adaptively with stressors related to the military lifestyle. Themes captured in previous studies exploring the experiences of military wives served as the foundation for the hypothesis of the present study. Such themes included feeling forgotten, less important than the military, silenced, and invalidated (e.g., Aducci et al., 2011; Blue Star

Families, 2016, 2017; Davis et al., 2011; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Lapp et al., 2010; Robbins, 2002). Because much research related to the impact of sense of self in the lives of military wives has used qualitative methods only, the present study utilized validated self-report instruments for collection of quantitative data in addition to qualitative methodology. The use of a mixed-methods study design has enabled a new perspective to the literature regarding military wives.

Cross-sectional designs have been used to explore phenomena related to each of the variables as well as the population identified in the present study: adaptive coping (e.g., Baker & Berenbaum, 2007; Baltes et al., 2010; Billings & Moos, 1984; Braun-Lewensohn & Bar, 2017); Dimiceli et al., 2010; Mattlin et al., 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1986; Menaghan, 1982; Padden et al., 2011; Smith & Dust, 2006); identity (e.g., Beaumont & Pratt, 2011; Berzonsky, 1992; Ickes et al., 2012; Luyckx et al., 2012; Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003); self-concept clarity (e.g., Campbell et al., 2003; Campbell et al., 1996; Ickes et al., 2012; Light & Visser, 2013; Smith et al., 1996); self-monitoring (e.g., Büyüksahin, 2009; Huflejt-Łukasik & Czarnota-Bojarska, 2006); role conflict (e.g., Aryee et al., 1999; Buda & Lenaghan, 2005; Hornung et al., 2016; Kulik & Liberman, 2013; Kulik et al., 2015; Lenaghan & Sengupta, 2007); and military spouses (Burrell et al., 2006; Green et al., 2013; Jans, 1989; Joseph and Afifi, 2010; Klodnicki, 2015). Qualitative methods have also been used in exploring issues related to military spouses (e.g., Aducci et al., 2011; Davis et al., 2011; Faber et al., 2008; Lester et al., 2010; Robbins, 2002; Runge et al., 2014).

Plewis and Mason (2005) note the potential of a mixed-methods design to yield richer understanding of the data collected. Qualitative data analysis enables a researcher

to gain insight into what participants feel about a particular topic, why they feel the way they do, and under what conditions they experience such feelings (Basit, 2003). Inclusion of open-ended questions at the end of a survey of closed-ended questions allows for richer report while at the same time yielding brief enough responses for data to remain manageable by both respondent and investigator (Runge et al., 2014).

Use of internet surveys is efficient and cost-effective, particularly with populations that are geographically dispersed (Klodnicki, 2015; Rubin & Babbie, 2014; Sadeh & Karniol, 2011). Proctor et al. (2013) cite evidence (e.g., Gosling et al., 2014; Seligman et al., 2005) which supports the expectation that a survey delivered online will yield more diversity in the sample. This expectation was particularly important for the present study in light of the small, homogeneous samples reported in previous studies focusing on coping among Active Duty military wives. Online surveys have been used in studies examining similar concepts and populations (e.g., Braun-Lewensohn & Bar, 2017; Ickes et al., 2012; Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Klodnicki, 2015; Sadeh & Karniol, 2011). As noted by Klodnicki, online surveys demonstrate respect for the participants, allowing for relatively quick completion with minimal disruption to participants' lives. Online surveys can be anonymous, thus reducing risk to participants from a breach of confidentiality. While online data collection of qualitative data is unlikely to yield particularly lengthy responses, other studies have shown that such methods can, in fact, yield a fairly substantial amount of information to analyze (e.g., Blakeley et al., 2014; Runge et al., 2014).

Coyne and Racioppo (2000) note that research on coping “focuses too narrowly on the presumed goal of reduction of psychological distress and ignores the likelihood

that people approach difficult situations with multiple goals” (p. 658). Lazarus (1993) also calls attention to the frequent failure of researchers to identify what motivates individuals to manage stressful situations in a particular manner. In other words, Lazarus argues that researchers assume that reduction of distress is always the ultimate goal of coping. The present study’s use of a wellbeing measure addressed this concern to a great extent. Rather than examining lack of psychological distress, the measure used in the present study (Al-Janabi et al., 2012) looked at a global assessment of wellbeing, specifically referring to wellbeing in all aspects of the participants’ lives. Thus, whatever the individual’s unique goals were in coping with a stressor, whether those goals have been achieved were potentially addressed in a measure of global wellbeing.

While previous research indicates that problem-focused coping skills are generally more adaptive than emotion-focused coping, the possibility exists that problem-focused coping strategies may not be the more adaptive way to cope for the population of interest. Because of the unique clustering of challenges faced by the population of the present study (Blue Star Families, 2015, 2017; Clever & Segal, 2013; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Drummet et al., 2003; Green, Nurius, & Lester, 2013; Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Mulvey, 2008; Segal, 1986), lack of controllability with regard to the stressors they face (Aducci et al., 2011; Blakely et al., 2014; Davis et al., 2011; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Klein et al., 1989; Lapp et al., 2010; Lehr, 1996; Mulvey, 2008), and the intense emotions associated with challenges such as deployment and concern for husbands’ safety (Aducci et al., 2011; Davis et al., 2011; Faber et al., 2008; Lapp et al., 2010; Marnocha, 2012; Wheeler & Stone, 2010), the researcher theorized that emotion-focused coping may, in fact, serve a more adaptive purpose for this group of women. In order to assess whether

this would be the case, the study also included an exploratory analysis of the relationship between coping strategies reported and degree of well-being reported by participants. The Investigating Choice Experiments for the Preferences of Older People Capability measure for Adults (ICECAP-A; Al-Janabi, Flynn, & Coast, 2012) served to assess degree of well-being in the present study. This approach to measuring wellbeing may be particularly appropriate for military wives because of its potential to capture some of the impact that the prescribed nature of the military lifestyle may have on these women. In other words, military wives may not be living up to their potential, and they may feel that they don't even have the option to do so because of the limited control they have over their own lives (Aducci et al., 2011; Blakely et al., 2014; Davis et al., 2011; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Klein et al., 1989; Lapp et al., 2010; Lehr, 1996; Mulvey, 2008; Robbins, 2002). As in previous studies, positive relationships between choice of coping strategy and degree of various types of well-being indicated the degree to which that particular cluster of coping strategies was adaptive (e.g., McCrae & Costa, 1986; Padden et al., 2011; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978).

Sample Size and Participant Eligibility

Inclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria for the study was as follows: self-identified women who were legally married at the time of study participation to Active Duty/retired from Active Duty male service members (specifically, those retired within the previous 3 years) from any branch of the military whose husbands had served at least 5 years of Active Duty during the time of their marriage. The survey was administered in English. A sample size of at least 120 participants was determined to be sufficient to detect a medium-sized effect (.15) with a power of .9, given the model parameters. However, 202

respondents sufficiently completed the questionnaire to be included in the analysis.

Inclusion criteria were selected in order to ensure that participants would have experienced substantial time in the Active Duty military lifestyle, thus recalling on many experiences which they could synthesize when responding to survey items. Specifically, lengthier association with the Active Duty military lifestyle may have provided additional time for the relationship between the identified concepts to potentially influence choice of coping strategy. Female spouses who described having previously been Active Duty themselves (i.e., formerly part of dual-military marriages) were included because they indicated that they were no longer Active Duty.

Exclusion criteria. Women who were divorced from service members at the time of study participation were excluded, as the study sought to examine the relationships between the abovementioned variables with regard to current marriages. Women who were married to female service members or women who responded to survey questions in ways that suggested they were trans women were excluded. This choice was prompted by the likelihood that the experiences of those populations may be very different from those cisgendered women married to men, particularly in light of the military's historical adoption of the "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, which was repealed only in recent years. The researcher also chose not to include male spouses of military service members. The experiences of those individuals are also likely to be unique to those groups and should be studied separately as well. Wives of National Guard and Reserves were also excluded, as their experiences with the military lifestyle have been shown to be substantially different from those of the Active Duty military wife (Lapp et al., 2010; Marnocha, 2012;

Wheeler & Stone, 2010). Female spouses who were part of dual-military marriages during the time of data collection (i.e., currently Active Duty) were not eligible.

Recruitment

Recruitment occurred via multiple strategies. The researcher, who is a military spouse herself, utilized snowball sampling via email. The recruitment process began by communicating with the researcher's own acquaintances within the military community about the study. The researcher then asked those acquaintances to forward information about the study (along with a link to the online questionnaire) via email to their acquaintances (See Appendix J). Rubin and Babbie (2014) write that snowball sampling is indicated for usage when locating members of a population creates a challenge.

Military wives are quite a mobile population, and locating them had the potential to prove challenging. Snowball sampling is also indicated when members of the population interact with each other on a regular basis. While the current sample may be somewhat closer to the breakdown of the married Active Duty population than many other studies of this population (e.g., those noted previously), the sample was still disproportionately skewed toward officers' wives (see discussion section).

Employment of the following recruitment strategies in addition to snowball sampling was an attempt to help reduce the effects of these potential limitations. The researcher posted flyers in 2 public areas (a local coffee shop and a local community center) in a community close to military installations in the Washington, D.C area (where the researcher currently resides). The researcher attempted to post flyers in local grocery stores; a local restaurant, and a restaurant near a Southern rural Army installation but was not given permission to do so. (See Appendix I.) Aducci et al. (2011) and Amirkhan

(1990) used these types of locations in recruiting participants for their studies of both military-affiliated and civilian populations. Availability sampling is indicated for populations which have no full sampling frame or for which obtaining access to the frame would be “prohibitively expensive” (Monette et al., 2014). This recruitment technique is limited in that it may have led to a heavy concentration of participants whose husbands were stationed within the geographic region surrounding the home of the present researcher. The military installations in that area attract service members with particular mission assignments within the military; thus, those recruited in this way may not represent the experiences of wives whose husbands participate in different aspects of the military. The researcher attempted to address these limitations through the additional recruitment techniques described below.

The researcher also posted advertisements on the website craigslist.org as described by Joseph and Afifi (2010). (The text for the advertisements was the same as that on the flyers posted in public areas; see Appendix I.) This allowed the researcher to attract potential participants from a wide range of geographic locations, as the website is organized according to city. The researcher focused on cities in close proximity to multiple military installations. Included were such cities as San Diego, Sacramento, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, California; Austin, Dallas, and Houston, Texas; Raleigh, North Carolina; and Columbus, Georgia (among others). In addition to potentially widening the geographic reach of the study, posting onto the website is free of charge. This recruitment method was determined to be more likely to capture potential participants who were not socially connected to other members of the military community, as it is a website completely separate from that lifestyle.

The researcher also sought to recruit participants from Facebook pages and websites dedicated to military spouses (Klodnicki, 2015; Ross, 2016). (The verbiage in these advertisements was the same as that of the flyers and the advertisements posted on craigslist.org. See Appendix I.) Additionally, the researcher utilized *Military Spouse* magazine to recruit participants via participation in an interview with that publication which included the researcher's contact information. These methods sought to yield participants from a wide range of geographic areas and may have drawn a diverse range of respondents (e.g., different ages, ethnicities, ranks of husbands, etc.).

Procedure

The survey took approximately 30 minutes for each participant to complete. Data collection took place from April 20, 2017 through June 29, 2017. Respondents were not compensated for participation because, in order for the researcher to deliver compensation to them, respondents would have been required to disclose identifying information such as their name and email or mailing address. Because the researcher was recruiting respondents through her personal acquaintances, she explicitly asked potential respondents not to disclose to her whether they had, in fact, completed the survey. Knowing names of women who had completed the survey created the possibility for the researcher to inadvertently connect content of an open-ended response with what she knew about her acquaintances' history. Therefore, she decided not to offer compensation because this risk would have failed to fully protect anonymity.

Measures

Well-being. Well-being was measured using the ICECAP-A (Al-Jabani et al., 2012). This measure consists of five items which assess the degree to which individuals

perceive they have the capacity and opportunity to function well in various aspects of life. Those areas include autonomy, stability, attachment, achievement, and enjoyment (Al-Janabi et al., 2013). The capability approach to assessing well-being emphasizes the individual's perception that he or she has the choice and ability to function in particular ways, without regard to whether that person actually does so (Al-Jabai et al., 2013). In other words, the person may or may not feel that she is actually living up to her full potential for achievement, but the capability approach measures to what degree she would have the option to reach this full potential, should she elect to do so. The ICECAP-A (Al-Janabi et al., 2012) has demonstrated construct validity, as high scores on the ICECAP-A was positively associated with education level, employment status, involvement in a romantic relationship, income level, owning one's home, happiness, and major life events (Al-Janabi et al., 2013). Additionally, the measure showed a positive association with participants' reports of perceived freedom (i.e., feeling that they had control over decisions in their lives). These relationships indicate that those with stronger, healthier actual functioning also felt more capable of achieving well-being. The ICECAP-A also showed an adequate test-retest reliability after a two-week interval, with scores ranging from 0.52 on the autonomy subscale to 0.61 on the stability subscale (Al-Janabi, Flynn, Peters, Bryan, & Coast, 2015).

While the ICECAP-A was originally created to test whether health services were effective for patients receiving care in the United Kingdom, it was later normed on two separate general population samples within the UK (Al-Janabi et al., 2015; Al-Janabi et al., 2013), supporting its applicability for general populations in Westernized countries. For the current study, degree of capability was assessed as described by the authors, with

scores of all 4's, for example, "indicat[ing] full capability on all attributes" and scores of all 1's "indicat[ing] an absence of capability" (Al-Janabi et al., 2012, p. 173). Total scores were calculated according to the procedure for non-weighted scoring described in Keeley, Al-Janabi, Nicholls, Foster, Jowett, and Coast (2015): "summing ICECAP-A item scores, with four indicating full capability on an item and one indicating no capability on an item" (p 2321). (See Appendix C.)

Dependent Variable: Coping. Coping strategies were operationalized by participants' responses on the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997). Participants were asked to reflect upon the challenges they had faced throughout their time living the military lifestyle and to select one particular challenge to describe briefly, in 1-2 sentences. Participants were then asked to complete the Brief COPE based on how they handled that challenge. Asking participants to respond to memories of how they actually coped in the context of particular circumstances was consistent with the process-oriented approach to coping put forth by Folkman and Lazarus (1980), Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Lazarus (1993).

The Brief COPE is a 28-item scale which assesses 14 different coping strategies such as active planning around a stressor, emotional release, denying the reality of the situation, etc. (Carver, 1997). Two items pertaining to each type of coping strategy make up the 14 subscales. The Brief COPE is a modified version of the COPE (Carver et al., 1989), which contains 15 subscales, each representing a conceptually unique coping strategy. Carver notes that he chose not to include two subscales from the original COPE because they were either not constructive in previous studies or were considered redundant. Carver also modified three of the original scales in order to improve the

accuracy of the subscales. Finally, a self-blame subscale was created for the Brief COPE due to its reported relationship with poor adaptation to stressful circumstances (Carver, 1997).

Carver et al. (1989) assessed the psychometric properties of the full-length COPE and found it to have acceptable internal consistency for all but one of the scales. The full-length COPE also had appropriate levels of test-retest reliability in two samples of university students, with one sample retested after a six-week interval and the other tested after an eight-week interval. Finally, Carver et al. determined that the full-length scale showed both convergent and discriminant validity, as the scales determined to be more active coping and planning were correlated with personality traits generally considered to be adaptive, while those coping strategies which were considered less adaptive were negatively correlated with the more adaptive personality traits.

Of note is the fact that the sample used for this assessment was from an adult population (rather than a sample of university students) who were facing a substantial stressor (i.e., recovering from the destruction of a major hurricane; Carver, 1997). Carver also notes that the sample was a fairly diverse one, with ethnic/racial minority participants comprising 60% of the sample. These factors enhanced the generalizability of the scale. Participants completed the measure three times. The first assessment was completed a few months after the hurricane, with the second and third assessments occurring six months and one year later, respectively. (See Appendix B.)

After being shortened from its original version, the Brief COPE maintained an appropriate degree of internal consistency. Carver (1997) assessed alpha coefficients for each 2-item subscale and then averaged alpha reliability from all three assessments. He

found the average alpha coefficients to be higher than 0.50. The present researcher assessed internal consistency by separating items into two broad categories: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. The emotion-focused subscale had an alpha of 0.717 while the problem-focused subscale had an alpha of 0.833. Scores on the emotion-focused subscale ranged from 20-52 ($M= 33.9495$; $SD= 6.91995$). Scores on the problem-focused subscale ranged from 21-48 ($M= 36.37$; $SD= 6.42804$). Medians for each were 34 and 36, respectively. See Appendix B for categorization of items into problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. See discussion section for rationale on clustering items into problem-focused and emotion-focused subscales.

Independent Variables. Identity status was operationalized through scores on the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ; with language slightly modified to reflect “marriage” rather than “dating;” (Balistreri et al., 1995). In developing the measure, the authors used three samples of college students to assess the reliability and validity of the measure. The study also involved expert raters to determine which items appeared to measure commitment and exploration. The agreement among these experts was reported as being high (kappa coefficient of .76, $p < 0.01$). The authors also administered the scale to an additional sample of students to assess for test-retest reliability with a one-week time difference. The reliability coefficient for commitment was $r(40) = 0.90$, $p < 0.01$; for exploration the coefficient was $r(40) = 0.76$, $p < 0.01$. The authors describe these coefficients as “moderately high” (p. 187-188). Construct and predictive validity were measured as follows: The authors administered the EIPQ along with a measure for several personality variables to 211 out of 260 participants. Thirty participants completed another, validated measure of identity status along with the EIPQ. Nineteen of the

participants completed the EIPQ alone. The authors note that their measure “tended to classify individuals into the same statuses” as the other measure of identity, “providing evidence of concurrent validation” (1995, p. 188). The authors also note that “the analyses of variance and correlations with personality variables supported most of the expectations for construct validity” (1995, p. 188).

The range of scores on each subscale of the original measure was 16-96. Of importance is the fact that one item was inadvertently left off the exploration subscale in the present study, which affected the range of possible scores (i.e., 15-90). Balistreri et al. (1995) report that “the internal consistency estimates (coefficient alpha) for the commitment and exploration scores were .80 and .86, respectively” (p. 183), which the authors describe as “moderately high” (p. 187-188). Balistreri et al. do not report mean scores, but median scores in their study were 66.5 for the exploration subscale and 62 for the commitment subscale. Despite the missing item, median scores in the present study were very similar to those obtained from the normed sample.

Self-concept clarity was operationalized using the Self-Concept Clarity Scale (SCCS; Campbell et al., 1996). In developing the scale, the authors examined several psychometric properties of the measure. Over the course of three years, the authors used three samples of mostly traditional-aged college students (totaling several hundred participants) to examine test-retest reliability, construct validity, and internal consistency. Test-retest reliability was assessed by administering the scale to one subsample of original participants 4 months after the first administration and to another subsample 5 months after their first administration (Campbell et al., 1996). The correlations were .79 and .70, respectively, scores which the authors comment “revealed high levels of

temporal stability” (Campbell et al., 1996, p. 145). To assess for construct validity, the authors examined correlations of scores on a self-esteem measure with scores on the SCCS. The authors support the rationale of correlating these measures together by citing the “established empirical connection between clarity and self-esteem” (p. 142). Scores on the SCCS and the self-esteem measure had an average r of .61, which “provide[s] evidence for the SCC Scale’s construct validity” (Campbell et al., 1996, p. 146).

Campbell et al. (1996) also examined internal consistency and found that, for their 3 samples, it was very good with an average alpha reliability coefficient of .86. Other research has shown that internal consistency on this measure is typically good. In another series of 3 studies of mostly female undergraduate students, Campbell et al. (2003) found that the alpha coefficient averaged 0.90 across the studies. Smith et al. (1996), using a slightly older version of the measure, found the scale to have an alpha of 0.93 in a sample of 175 undergraduate students (82% female).

Self-monitoring was operationalized using the Self-Monitoring Scale (SMS; Snyder, 1974). Snyder assessed for the validity of the Self-Monitoring Scale through four different studies. In the first study, the author developed the scale and tested it in a sample of college students. The Scale had “a Kuder-Richardson 20 reliability of .70, and a test-retest reliability of .83 ($df=51$, $p < .001$, one-month time interval)” (Snyder, 1974, p. 530). The author also compared scores on the SMS to scores on “related but conceptually distinct individual differences measures” (Snyder, 1974, p. 530) to assess for discriminant validity. He found a weak negative relationship between scores on the SMS and scores on the other scales, indicating its distinctiveness from the other variables. Snyder (1974) then used the measure in three other studies, each of which

supported the validity of the scale. In the current study, respondents who scored above the median were categorized as high in self-monitoring, while those who scored at or below that point were deemed low in self-monitoring.

Role conflict was measured through a series of items created by the current researcher asking participants whether they perceive the role of military wife conflicting with the other roles they inhabit. The scale included items such as “The demands, expectations, and responsibilities of being a military wife interfere with my ability to work and/or perform well at my job on a day-to-day basis.” As Coverman (1989) notes, many researchers have measured role conflict in a similar manner.

Mastery was measured via the Mastery Scale (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). The Mastery Scale was created to assess individual traits which may serve as coping resources. The authors used factor analysis to determine the seven items which would comprise the scale (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). The Mastery Scale has been shown to have good internal consistency with alpha coefficients at 0.80 or above in two samples of college students, one of which was primarily White and the other primarily African American (Aycock, 2011; Frazier et al., 2011). Response options range from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating strong agreement (Aycock, 2011). The Scale includes items such as, “I have little control over the things that happen to me” and “What happens to me in the future mostly depends on me” (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978, p. 20). For the present study, 5 items were reverse-scored so that a higher score indicated greater degree of mastery.

Demographic Variables. Age was operationalized by including a survey question asking how old each participant was in years.

Husband's rank was operationalized by including a survey question asking participants what rank their husbands held at the time of taking the survey or held most recently in the service (i.e., his highest rank). Respondents were provided the following options from which to choose: E-1; E-2; E-3; E-4; E-5; E-6; E-7; E-8; E-9; W-1; W-2; W-3; W-4; W-5; O-1; O-2; O-3; O-4; O-5; O-6; O-7; O-8; O-9; O-10. (The letters represent "Enlisted," "Warrant Officer," and "Officer," respectively, with the numbers corresponding to the progression of ranks. Thus, for example, an "E-1" is a private, while an "O-6" is a Colonel.) Husband's branch of service was operationalized by including a survey question asking participants of which service branch their husbands were most recently members. For example, if a service member joined the Marines and later joined the Army, the participant would list "Army." Respondents were provided the following options from which to choose: Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, Navy.

Number of geographic relocations was operationalized by including a survey question asking participants how many times they had relocated due to their husband's receiving orders for a Permanent Change of Station since they were married.

Number of deployments was operationalized by including a survey question asking participants how many times their husbands had been deployed (for combat- or noncombat-related missions) since the couple was married. Length of time since husband's return from first deployment during the marriage was operationalized by asking participants how long ago, in months, her husband had returned from his first deployment during the marriage. Length of time since husband's return from most recent deployment was operationalized by including a survey question asking how many months had elapsed since a husband's return from most recent deployment (if husband had, in

fact, deployed). Cumulative duration of deployments was operationalized by including a survey question asking the total length of time, in months, the husband had spent deployed throughout the marriage.

Length of marriage was operationalized by including a survey question asking participants how many years they had been married. Parental status was operationalized by including a survey question asking participants whether they were parents. The survey made no distinction between children born naturally to participants, stepchildren, or adopted children, thus allowing the participant to determine for herself whether she was a parent. Length of transition to parenting role was operationalized by asking at what age the participant had first become a parent. Number of deployments as a parent was operationalized by asking participants how many deployments they had experienced since becoming a parent.

Education level was operationalized by including a survey question asking participants the highest level of education they had completed. This question included the following list of options: Some high school; High school diploma; Some college; Associate's degree; College graduate; Master's degree; Higher than a Master's degree.

Employment status was operationalized by including a survey question asking participants what their current employment status was. This question included the following list of options: Not employed/not seeking employment; Not employed, seeking employment; Employed part-time/contract work; Employed full-time; Retired; Student.

Race was operationalized by including a survey question asking participants with which race/ethnicity they identified. Participants were presented with the following list of

options from which to choose: Caucasian; African-American/Black; Latina; Asian/Pacific Islander; Native American; Multiracial; Other.

Qualitative data collection. Two open-ended questions were included at the end of the survey. They are listed below.

- How, if at all, has living the military lifestyle affected the way you cope with the challenges you face as a military wife?
- How, if at all, has your sense of self (in other words, your sense of who you are and how you operate in relation to others) affected the way you cope with the challenges you face as a military wife?

Data Analysis

Quantitative. Because the researcher examined the relationships between multiple variables, both bivariate analysis and multivariate regression analysis was utilized. The researcher conducted a Pearson correlation coefficient between each coping subscale of the Brief COPE scale and the ICECAP-A to assess the extent to which scores on each subscale were associated with higher scores on the well-being measure. Ordinary least squares linear regression was used to estimate the relationship between each coping subscale and all of the independent variables while controlling for demographic variables of employment, education, race, husband's rank, and age. Missing data was addressed by using listwise deletion. The quantitative data analysis was completed before conducting analysis on the qualitative data.

Qualitative. The analysis of qualitative data from the open-ended questions at the end of the survey provided illumination and expansion of the findings generated from the quantitative measures (Plewis & Mason, 2005; Runge et al., 2014). Analysis of the

qualitative data was guided by a phenomenological approach that deepened the understanding of the quantitative findings, a process which provided structure and direction to the analysis (Aducci et al., 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Plewis & Mason, 2005; Runge et al., 2014). Incorporating the findings from the quantitative analysis into analysis of the qualitative data provides a true integration of the findings from each of the two methods of data collection.

The phenomenological approach to understanding qualitative data delves into the meaning assigned to a particular experience by the individuals who live that experience (Creswell, 2012; Lapp et al., 2010; Padgett, 2008). Phenomenological interpretations explore the manner in which an individual's daily life is constructed (Schwandt, 2000). Creswell summarizes the ideas put forth by Edmund Husserl, whose writings laid the foundation for the phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2012): the task of analyzing data from a phenomenological perspective is to identify "the essential, invariant structure" (Creswell, 2012, p. 52) of what is discussed in the data. This structure is referred to as the essence of the experience or the meaning attached to the experience by participants (Creswell, 2012; Padgett, 2008). The present study seeks to fill a gap in the literature related to military wives through its use of a phenomenological approach (Robbins, 2002) to examine participants' perceptions of the manner in which living the military lifestyle and their respective senses of self have affected the coping techniques they use. Such a focus on the lived experiences of these women as they seek to effectively manage the stressful nature of the overall military experience contributes a unique perspective to knowledge.

The researcher utilized thematic analysis techniques in analyzing the data. This process enabled the researcher to identify themes which seemed to embody the experience of coping adaptively with the Active Duty military lifestyle. Thematic analysis is particularly appropriate in exploring data from a phenomenological perspective, as it “can be an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings, and the reality of participants” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 9). This ability to capture the essence of a lived experience is in keeping with the goals of phenomenological research (Creswell, 2012; Lapp et al., 2010; Padgett, 2008). Thematic analysis is flexible in that it can be used within multiple theoretical approaches to accomplish a number of analytical goals (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis allows the researcher to determine whether she will explore themes present across the entire data set (with more breadth but less depth) or discuss in great detail a smaller number of themes identified within a subset of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Because the present study explored a topic that is relatively unexamined in the literature, identification of themes across the entire set of data was a more appropriate method, as this provided “a rich overall description” of participants’ experience rather than a more narrow focus on a few intermittent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 11). Another advantage of using thematic analysis is its ease of applicability, particularly for new researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and it has been used to examine qualitative data pertaining to military wives in previous studies as well (e.g., Blakely et al., 2014)

Braun and Clarke (2006) delineate the process of applying thematic analysis to a set of qualitative data. They identify the first step as immersing oneself in the data set through reading the content with an active goal of identifying patterns and generating

potential meaning. Next, the critical process of initial coding begins (Basit, 2003; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Plewis & Mson, 2005). A code is “a feature of the data...that appears interesting to the analyst” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 18). Coding allows the researcher to “separate data into categories and to see processes” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 127). Codes also allow the researcher to begin identifying meaning within the data (Basit, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Once the researcher identified general codes in the data, she moved on to line-by-line coding, a process in which she identified themes in each line of text in order to critically analyze smaller fragments of the data (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz further explains the rationale behind the next steps of the coding process: This second round of coding enables the researcher to examine the data from a different perspective than that used in the initial coding. Those codes which appeared multiple times within the data, as well as those codes which clearly had greater salience than other codes, were then grouped together into conceptually clustered matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process also “condenses and sharpens” the analysis by focusing the researcher’s attention on those codes which emerge as more valuable to understanding the data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138).

Sensitizing concepts were used to guide the process of coding the qualitative data. These sensitizing concepts included concepts related to identity status, self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, role conflict, and mastery (Miles & Huberman, 1994) as operationalized in the quantitative measures used in the survey. Sensitizing concepts were also drawn from qualitative literature pertaining to military wives and included the following: developing awareness of personal strengths (Aducci et al., 2011; Davis et al., 2011; Drummet et al., 2003; Lapp et al., 2010; Runge et al., 2014; Wheeler & Stone,

2010); confusion and clarification regarding role changes during and after deployments (Aducci et al., 2011; DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Drummet et al., 2003; Faber, Willerton, Clymer, MacDermid, & Weiss, 2008; Lapp et al., 2010; McCullah, 1978, cited in Robbins, 2002; Park, 2011; Patterson & McCubbin, 1984; Robbins, 2002; Verdeli, Baily, Vousoura, Belser, Singla, & Manos, 2011; Wood et al., 1995); feeling forgotten, silenced, misunderstood, or less important than the military (Aducci et al., 2011; Blue Star Families, 2016, 2017; Davis et al., 2011; Lapp et al., 2010); negotiating the balance between self and social being within the realm of the military culture (Robbins, 2002); experiencing intense emotions and uncertainty (Aducci et al., 2011; Davis et al., 2011; Faber et al., 2008; Lapp et al., 2010; Marnocha, 2012; Wheeler & Stone, 2010); and improving and developing better coping strategies over time (Davis et al. 2011; Runge et al., 2014). These sensitizing concepts, which are related to military wives' experiences of identity, the challenges they face, and the manner in which they cope with those challenges, also provided structure and direction to the data analysis. The researcher, however, maintained a stance in which she was open to allowing new concepts and theoretical orientations to emerge (Charmaz, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

After completing the coding process, the researcher organized those codes into groups of themes, which involved examining the manner in which individual codes were related to each other (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once the researcher reduced the data to a series of themes and sub-themes (Creswell, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2006), she reviewed the themes for accuracy, inclusiveness, and representativeness of the data as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once themes were determined to be accurate and reflective of the entire data set, the researcher defined and named the themes, which Braun and Clarke

(2006) refer to as “identifying the ‘essence’ of what each theme is about (as well as the themes overall), and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures” (p. 22).

Clear operational definitions provide consistency and clarity as the researcher progresses through the analytical process (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Protection of Human Subjects

The researcher obtained approval from the University of Pennsylvania’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) before commencement of the study. The researcher did not need the approval of any military-related review panels, as she did not recruit participants on a military installation, did not utilize her husband’s rank in any way, and did not include any current service members in the study.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their beginning the survey. The online survey was structured in such a manner that the informed consent document appeared immediately upon the participants’ opening the survey link. Consent was confirmed by the participants’ clicking a box which indicated that they had read and understood the information provided about the study and agreed to participate. Participants were not allowed to move through to the survey without indicating their consent first (See Appendix A).

Risks to the participants included emotional discomfort during or after completion of the survey, particularly if participants were made aware of concerns they had not considered prior to their participation in the study. As noted above, the researcher provided general instructions to aid participants in the process of seeking counseling services, should they have felt the need to do so. Participants likely did not gain benefits from the study other than the awareness that they were contributing to knowledge about a

group of which they are members. Because the survey was completed online via a survey-management website and the researcher did not collect any identifying information about participants, participation in the study was anonymous; therefore, no violation of confidentiality can occur. Accordingly, the IRB approved this study as exempt reviewed.

Chapter 4. Quantitative Findings

Sample Characteristics

Sample characteristics are detailed in Table 1. Ages of participants ranged from 21 years to 60 years with a mean age of 35.62 years ($SD = 7.55$ years). The majority of respondents (85.1%) identified as Caucasian. Just over half of respondents indicated that they were married to officers while the remainder were married to enlisted service members. Average length of marriage in this sample was 12.07 years ($SD=6.93$ years). Over half of respondents were employed either part-time or full-time while nearly 11% were unemployed. Over 75% of respondents had a Bachelor's degree or higher. On average, respondents had relocated because of their husbands' military service 4.39 times ($SD=3.31$), with the number of moves ranging from 0 to over 20. Respondents had experienced an average of 4.22 deployments ($SD=5.06$), with the number of deployments ranging from 0 to more than 20.

Table 1
Sample Characteristics

Variable	n	%
Husband's branch of service		
Army	93	46
Navy	39	19.3
Marines	15	7.4
Air Force	52	25.7
Coast Guard	2	1
Husband's rank		
Officer	104	51.5
Enlisted	98	48.5
Employment status		
Employed (FT or PT)	104	51.5
Not employed, not looking	62	30.7
Not employed, looking	22	10.9
Student	13	6.4
Retired	1	0.5

(continued)

Variable	n	%
Education		
Master's degree or higher	65	32.1
Bachelor's degree	88	43.6
Associate's degree	19	9.4
Some college	22	10.9
High school diploma	4	2
Race		
Caucasian	172	85.1
Latina	14	6.9
Asian/Pacific Islander	6	3
African-American	3	1.5
Multi-racial	2	1
Other race	5	2.5
Variable	Mean	SD
Number of years married	12.07	6.934
Number of relocations	4.39	3.31
Number of husband's deployments	4.22	5.061

Note. N=202

Descriptives for Scale Data

Detailed descriptive statistics for each scale are presented in Table 2. Scores for the emotion-focused subscale of the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) range from 16-64. In the current sample, scores ranged from 20-52 with a mean score of 33.95 ($SD=6.92$), which is below the midpoint of 40 for the subscale. Scores on the problem-focused subscale ranged from 12-48. The mean score of 36.37 ($SD=6.43$) for the current sample is above the midpoint of 30 for the subscale. The range of non-weighted sum scores on the ICECAP-A (Al-Janabi et al., 2012) was 5-20. The mean for the current sample was 15.07 ($SD = 2.48$), indicating that women in this sample averaged higher wellbeing than the midpoint of 12.5 for this scale. The range of scores on each subscale of the original Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ; Balistreri et al., 1995) is 16-96. However, one item was inadvertently left off the exploration subscale in the present study, which affected the

range of scores (i.e., 15-90). Scores averaged higher than the midpoint of 56 for the exploration subscale ($M=64.18$; $SD=10.73$) and the midpoint of 52.5 for the commitment subscale ($M=63.01$; $SD=9.06$) in the present study. The most frequently endorsed identity status was “moratorium” with 40.1% of the present sample falling into this category. “Foreclosed” status was next with 26.7% of the sample endorsing this identity status. The range of possible responses on the Self-Concept Clarity Scale (SCCS; Campbell et al., 1996) is 16-60. The mean score for the SCCS in the present study was 41.37 ($SD=10.77$), above the midpoint of 38 for the scale. Scores on the Self-Monitoring Scale (SMS; Snyder, 1974) range from 25-50. The mean score for the current sample was 35.59 ($SD=3.95$), under the scale’s midpoint of 37.5. The range of scores on the Role Conflict scale was 7-28. Scores for the current sample averaged below the midpoint of 17.5 ($M=15.46$; $SD=4.95$). Score range for the Mastery Scale (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978) was 7-28. The mean score for the present sample was 20.05 ($SD=4.08$), above the midpoint of 17.5.

Table 2
Descriptives for scale data

Measure	Mean	SD	Median
Brief COPE			
Emotion-focused	33.95	6.92	34
Problem-focused	36.37	6.43	36
ICECAP-A	15.07	2.48	15
EIPQ			
Commitment	63.01	9.06	63
Exploration	64.18	10.73	65
SCCS	41.37	10.77	42
SMS	35.59	3.95	35
Mastery	20.05	4.08	20
RCS	15.46	4.95	15

Note. N=202; Brief COPE = Brief Coping Orientations to Problems Experienced Scale; ICECAP-A = Investigating Choice Experiments for the Preferences of Older People Capability for Adults; EIPQ = Ego Identity Process Questionnaire; SCCS = Self-Concept Clarity Scale; SMS = Self-Monitoring Scale; Mastery = Mastery Scale; RCS = Role Conflict Scale

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 was that self-reported levels of emotion-focused coping strategies in managing military lifestyle-related stressors will be significantly and positively related to higher degrees of well-being while self-reported levels problem-focused coping strategies will be significantly and inversely correlated with well-being. Hypothesis 1 was not supported. A Pearson correlation revealed that emotion-focused coping was significantly and inversely correlated with well-being ($r = -0.39$, $p < 0.01$) while problem-focused coping was significantly and positively correlated with well-being ($r = 0.44$, $p < 0.01$).

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 was that individuals who endorse the most mature identity status (achieved); higher degrees of self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, and mastery; and lower degrees of role conflict will report significantly greater use of emotion-focused coping strategies as opposed to those who endorse the three “less mature” identity statuses (foreclosed, moratorium, or diffused); lower degrees of self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, and mastery; and higher degrees of role conflict. Hypothesis 2 was partially supported. As detailed in model 1 of Table 3, multiple regression analysis revealed that individuals who endorsed the achieved identity status reported significantly greater use of emotion-focused coping ($p < 0.01$) than those who endorsed each of the other identity statuses. However, model 1 of the regression analysis also revealed significant, inverse relationships between emotion-focused coping and both self-concept clarity and mastery ($p < 0.05$) as well as a significant, positive relationship between emotion-focused coping and role conflict ($p < 0.01$). No significant relationship existed between emotion-focused coping and self-monitoring.

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 was that individuals who endorse the three less mature identity statuses; lower degrees of self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, and mastery; and higher degrees of role conflict will report significantly greater use of problem-focused coping strategies as opposed to those who endorse the most mature identity status; higher degrees of self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, and mastery; and lower degrees of role conflict. Hypothesis 3 was partially supported. As detailed in model 2 of Table 3, “moratorium” status was significantly related to problem-focused coping in the multiple regression analysis ($p < 0.05$), but no other identity statuses were associated with problem-focused coping. However, model 2 also revealed significant, positive relationships between problem-focused coping and self-concept clarity ($p < 0.05$), self-monitoring ($p < 0.01$), mastery ($p < 0.05$), and Caucasian race ($p < 0.05$). No significant relationship existed between problem-focused coping and role conflict.

Table 3:

Regression analyses for emotion-focused and problem-focused coping

Model 1: Relationships between independent/control variables and Emotion-Focused Coping

Variable	B (Standard Error)	β	t
SMS	0.15 (0.12)	0.08	1.28
Mastery	-0.31 (0.14)	-0.18	-2.20*
RCS	0.39 (0.11)	0.27	3.47**
Moratorium	1.61 (1.17)	0.11	1.38
Foreclosed	2.04 (1.29)	0.13	1.59
Achieved	4.45 (1.50)	0.22	2.98**
SCCS	-0.10 (0.05)	-0.16	-2*
Employed	-0.31 (0.88)	-0.02	-0.36
College graduate	-0.83 (1.09)	-0.05	-0.76
Caucasian	-0.35 (1.25)	-0.02	-0.28
Married to officer	-1.06 (0.95)	-0.08	-1.12
Age	-0.10 (0.06)	-0.10	-1.53

Adjusted R² for Model 1 = 0.32

Model 2: Relationships between independent/control variables and Problem-Focused Coping

Variable	B (Standard Error)	β	t
SMS	0.36 (0.12)	0.22	3.12**
Mastery	0.36 (0.14)	0.23	2.58*
RCS	-0.08 (0.11)	-0.06	-0.74
Moratorium	3.05 (1.18)	0.24	2.59*
Foreclosed	1.36 (1.30)	0.10	1.05
Achieved	2.32 (1.51)	0.12	1.54
SCCS	0.11 (0.05)	0.18	2.06*
Employed	0.15 (0.88)	0.01	0.18
College graduate	0.32 (1.10)	0.02	0.29
Caucasian	3.53 (1.24)	0.19	2.85*
Married to officer	1.12 (0.95)	0.09	1.18
Age	-0.08 (0.06)	-0.10	-1.36

Adjusted R² for Model 2 = 0.18

Note. * significant at 0.05 level; **significant at 0.01 level

Chapter 5. Qualitative Findings

In this chapter, an overall summary of themes from the qualitative data are presented. Themes were identified in accordance with sensitizing concepts reported in the literature: developing awareness of personal strengths (Aducci et al., 2011; Davis et al., 2011; Drummet et al., 2003; Lapp et al., 2010; Runge et al., 2014; Wheeler & Stone, 2010); confusion and clarification regarding role changes during and after deployments (Aducci et al., 2011; DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Drummet et al., 2003; Faber, Willerton et al., 2008; Lapp et al., 2010; McCullah, 1978, cited in Robbins, 2002; Park, 2011; Patterson & McCubbin, 1984; Robbins, 2002; Verdeli et al., 2011; Wood et al., 1995); feeling forgotten, silenced, misunderstood, or less important than the military (Aducci et al., 2011; Blue Star Families, 2016, 2017; Davis et al., 2011; Lapp et al., 2010); negotiating the balance between self and social being within the realm of the military culture (Robbins, 2002); experiencing intense emotions and uncertainty (Aducci et al., 2011; Davis et al., 2011; Faber et al., 2008; Lapp et al., 2010; Marnocha, 2012; Wheeler & Stone, 2010); and improving and developing better coping strategies over time (Davis et al., 2011; Runge et al., 2014).

In addition to the sensitizing concepts described above, coping strategies as delineated in the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) were also identified in qualitative data. Table 4 details the number of respondents who reported use of strategies that aligned with each of the 14 subscales on the Brief COPE.

Themes are categorized into three domains: lifestyle challenges; coping strategies and the salience of self in relation to coping; and the lived experiences of wives coping with the military lifestyle. The first domain, lifestyle challenges, included deployment-

Table 4:

Number of women who reported using coping skills outlined in the Brief COPE

Emotion-focused subscale	Frequency	Problem-focused subscale	Frequency
Denial	0	Acceptance	34
Self-distraction	4	Instrumental support	19
Substance use	4	Emotional support	40
Behavioral disengagement	7	Positive reframing	30
Venting	5	Planning	11
Humor	6	Active coping	47
Religion	8		
Self-blame	1		

and career-related difficulties as well as difficulties related to the process of acclimating to the military lifestyle. Themes within the second domain included coping strategies such as the importance of cognitive reframing, flexibility, humor, and the utility of building on previous experiences to cope with the military lifestyle. Themes related to the importance of self in relation to coping included the positive impact of sense of self on coping; the positive impact of an intrinsic motivation to cope adaptively; and the importance of self-determination and self-reliance for military wives in coping with the lifestyle. The final domain, lived experiences, includes themes related to the high price that some pay when coping adaptively with the military lifestyle and the paradoxes these women experience.

In order to fully understand the nuances of coping and the interaction of coping with identity and sense of self among female military spouses, an understanding of the nature and context of the challenges these women face is needed. Thus, discussion of identified themes includes a summary of the most salient challenges faced by respondents. Next, themes related to the ways in which these women coped with challenges of the lifestyle are presented. Notably, the overwhelming majority of

respondents indicated that the experience of living the military lifestyle had, in fact, affected the manner in which they coped with challenges inherent to this of this way of life and that their sense of identity was integral to their capacity to navigate these experiences. Finally, themes related to the lived experiences of these women are presented.

Challenges

Challenges related to deployment-induced separations, career development, and acculturating to the military lifestyle affected these women most substantially. While a range of other challenges were noted, including dealing with effects of multiple relocations (separate from the impact of relocation on employment opportunities) and difficulty maintaining a social support network, these were more manageable than the effects of deployment separation, difficulties with career development, and acculturation to the military lifestyle. Accordingly, the following section describes themes included in the three categories of challenges that had the greatest impact on respondents.

Deployment: The world keeps on turning. Relatively few cited simply “deployment” as a challenge in and of itself. Rather, respondents tended to describe something specific about the context in which the deployment took place (e.g., immediately after a relocation, during a particular point in their children’s development, or multiple deployments in short succession) or the fact that the impact of the husband’s absence radiated out into their lives, making everything more difficult. Though loneliness and fear for the service member’s safety did emerge in the data, these concerns were not mentioned as often as one might expect, given previous research (e.g., Davis et al., 2011; Duvall, 1945; Joseph & Afifi, 2010). Instead, respondents seemed to view the primary

deployment-related challenge to be managing the chaos, upheaval, and feeling of “going it alone” in the face of life’s burdens during a husband’s deployment. Specifically, many women described feeling that life’s demands did not wait simply because their husbands were away; the world continued to turn regardless of the fact that they were now solely responsible for managing life’s tasks.

Many respondents found that life trudged on during a deployment in ways both mundane and momentous, regardless of whether they wanted it to or not. They described the impact of a husband’s absence on completing everyday parenting or household tasks. Managing children, dealing with household maintenance, selling a home, and managing one’s own health needs were all responsibilities that were affected by a husband’s absence. Even something as seemingly routine as transportation became more complicated during a husband’s deployment. Respondent 138, who had moved three times and experienced 3 of her husband’s deployments during her 7 years of marriage, recalled an early experience:

Our first duty station was Italy and we had bought a beater car since we did not ship one. Within three weeks of moving there, my husband was going to deploy and he had to teach me how to drive the manual car [b]efore he left or I wouldn't be able to get around while he was gone.

Not only had she relocated to another country, but she was compelled to re-learn the skill of driving a car in that new country in a very short time frame; otherwise she would have faced very real limitations in her ability to be self-sufficient during his absence.

A number of women described how major life and life-altering events did not wait simply because of a deployment. Occurrences such as the death of a loved one, the birth of an infant, or a child’s illness barreled into these women’s lives without regard for the fact that these women were managing such events alone. None of these events, even

those which were catastrophic, resulted in exemptions from duty for the service member: deployments happened regardless of what was going on at home. What is notable is that the stress associated with major life events was compounded by the deployment separation, leading to a phenomenon known in the literature as cumulative stress (Green et al., 2013). For example, Respondent 14, age 28 and married for five years, described one such instance:

Sending my husband to war after we [buried] his cousin, who was killed in action. I then stayed at a duty station without a strong enough support network.

Not only was she directly confronted with the very real consequences of armed conflict as she sent her husband off to war, but she did not have the support needed to effectively manage what must have been an incredibly difficult experience.

Respondent 191, a 33-year-old woman whose husband was a Naval officer and had deployed twice during their marriage, reported:

Gave birth while my husband was deployed - I wasn't sure when he would get the news, and he did not get to meet her in person until she was 5 months old.

In addition to giving birth and caring for a newborn without her husband present, she did not get to decide or even know when he would find out about the birth, much less meet the baby.

Finally, Respondent 165, married 22 years with 5 relocations and 5 of her husband's deployments behind her, described the challenges of parenting a special needs child:

Spouse deployed for long periods, repeatedly (in combat roles) while our daughter was extremely ill. I had to be her main source of support by myself.

Parenting any child alone would be taxing, and the multiple relocations and inconsistent presence of the other parent likely made this task even more difficult.

Interestingly, most of these women did not explicitly describe the emotional impact of experiencing such critical events during a husband's absence. Rather, the situations were described very matter-of-factly. Perhaps they preferred to avoid delving into extensive recollection of painful experiences. Alternately, the lack of sentiment may have been a reflection of a steely resolve developed from dealing with such difficult circumstances on their own.

In contrast, Respondent 178, who had relocated 13 times and endured 6 of her husband's deployments during their 21-year marriage, did elaborate on her emotional experience of complicated grief:

The most difficult challenge as a military wife has been the loss of my parents just a few months apart. Living so far away and unable to go home because of responsibilities to my own family that my spouse could not step in and help due to being deployed. Not having the support or understanding from peers or anyone who has walked in those difficult shoes.

While losing both parents in such a short period of time would have been difficult even with her husband present to support her, her grief was likely compounded by the fact that she was unable to travel home to be with her family because of her husband's absence. Indeed, without him available to cover her responsibilities so that she could travel home to be with family, her only option was to grieve from afar, separated from her loved ones. She may have faced additional compounding factors related to the many relocations she had experienced; as she noted, she did not receive the empathy she needed from those around her.

The world did not stop for the women in this sample simply because of a husband's absence from the home. In the same vein, the military did not modify or adjust its expectations because of significant life events at home. Instead, these women were

forced to continue pressing on, figuring out how to manage the rest of their lives without the concrete and emotional support their husbands could have provided if they had been physically present.

Career challenges. Career-related challenges were particularly frustrating for many of these women. Twenty-one per cent of respondents reported a career-related challenge. Within the theme of career challenges, two sub-themes were identified: the catch-22 of trying to work as a military wife and the negative impact on unrequited career aspirations on the sense of self.

The Catch-22. Respondents described difficulty finding jobs due to multiple relocations; moreover, if and when employment was obtained, respondents noted that their careers had “taken a hit” in one or more ways. These women were in a constant, direct struggle between the demands of the military and their desire to pursue a career. Try as they might, they rarely came out of that struggle ahead.

Several women described starting over at what they perceived to be “the bottom” each time they moved. Respondent 35 had relocated 4 times during 12 years of marriage. A college graduate, she wrote,

The biggest [challenge] I've faced concerns employment. It's incredibly frustrating to be at the bottom every time we move. I feel like I make gains professionally just to take two steps back each time we move.

Another commented on the stressful nature of “[h]aving to re-license in each new state” in order to teach. Even teaching, such a seemingly portable career, had challenges. Many expressed disappointment over their careers taking the back seat to the careers of their husbands, either due to relocations and new assignments or because of the demands the military placed on the service members and the family. For example, Respondent 72, age

35, holds an Associate's degree and had relocated with her husband 3 times during their 15 years of marriage. She described what she found to be a no-win situation with regard to the tension between her husband's career needs and her own:

For once, my career is on a forward path, but my husband is understandably miserable with the constant immoral management practices at this base and is actively trying to get orders.¹ If successful, I will have to nearly start over in my career, and if not, continue to feel the stress of his job affecting our family.

This spouse has resigned herself to the idea that her husband's dissatisfaction at work would invariably take precedence over her own professional development and fulfillment. Either outcome was likely to produce a substantial, negative effect on her or on the family. Similarly, Respondent 180, a 44-year-old college graduate employed full-time, also felt she had encountered a situation that demanded sacrifice. She had relocated with her husband, an officer in the Air Force, 7 times during their 20-year marriage. She described an unrequited career path due to the competing and conflicting demands of her husband's position:

I could have been a general if I hadn't become a military wife because I gave up my active duty career and let my husband choose our assignments.

She added, "I have sacrificed my career in order to have a family." Though she ostensibly made her own choice to forgo a career in order to find fulfillment in different aspects of life, her response reveals a sense of wistfulness or perhaps even regret; whichever option she chose, she would have lost something.

Many women faced barriers in balancing their career advancement with the potential impact such efforts would have on home life in the face of their husbands' demanding employer. Several indicated that they had been forced to leave a job because

¹ "Trying to get orders" in this instance refers to the service member attempting to obtain a reassignment to a new position or duty station.

the demands of the military conflicted with the needs of their own jobs and families. In these instances, the women felt they just couldn't win the battle against the military.

Respondent 203, age 28 and married for 5 years, described a particularly frustrating example:

I resigned from a job because of the inflexible schedule that was causing marital issues from having opposite schedules. That same month my husband deployed unexpectedly, making the resignation irrelevant.

The military's demands had led to her resignation, and its subsequent demands made that very resignation unnecessary.

Respondent 116, age 29, described the limitations her husband's career demands as an Air Force officer had placed on her during 9 years of marriage, which had included 5 relocations and 5 deployments:

Because of the military my husband has been very much backed into a corner as far as finding outside employment from the military. It's unfortunate that he's not able to work in a career field outside of the military and make wages that he makes working active duty. Because of this I am unable to get a job, I stay at home with our children and I am very much confined to the schedule he's required to keep.

Career-related challenges were of great importance to these women. Regardless of whether their careers had been affected by relocations or by competing demands of the military lifestyle, many found that their career aspirations and development had been thwarted as a result of being married to a service member. Moreover, regardless of whether they tried to work or resigned themselves to giving up a career, these women found themselves getting a raw deal.

Bound by the military: Unrequited career aspirations and the self. Career progression was clearly important to many of the women in this sample. However, as noted above, the strictures placed on them by the military lifestyle frequently led to

unrequited career aspirations. Several indicated that, when these opportunities for career progression were denied to them, they felt a blow to their self-concept. Self-esteem and wellbeing were also affected by these limitations.

Of note was the fact that several women indicated that their careers were critical to their sense of self. One stated explicitly that her ability to maintain a successful career had contributed to her strong sense of self. Others described the impact that changes in employment status have had on their self-concept. For example, Respondent 7, married for 18 years to an Army officer, holds an Associate's degree and had enjoyed career advancement for a time. However, after marrying a service member her trajectory changed:

Before becoming a Military Spouse I enjoyed my career and excelled quickly. When I had my twins I was unable to keep a reliable schedule due to my [husband's] deployment so eventually I had to stop working. My children are now [tweens] and [I] Have went too many years with no training in my field and feel sad my career is over.

At the age of 41, she felt her career was over. She concluded by adding, "I am no longer confident or relevant."

Respondent 63, 30 years old, had been married for 6 years to an Army officer. She had relocated 5 times and wrote that she feels "very worthless as a military wife" due in part to the disconnect between having a college degree and the poor career options available to her. Indeed, several respondents made similar comments. For example, Respondent 29, age 35, elaborated on the anguish her career difficulties have given her after 13 years of marriage to an enlisted Airman:

... I've learned to temper my goals in life, for now. It's often very lonely, exhausting and (at times) depressing. There is a phrase that women are to work like they don't have a family, and raise their family like they don't work. I don't think anything is more true of a working military spouse. If you want to be taken

seriously and not just be "cute" that you want to work ... it's hard. I'm [nowhere] near where I imagined I'd be 13 years into a career. We're overseas and I'm making the best of a bad situation ... but in my head it's not enough and I'm a failure. I try not to let people (especially my family) know I think this, but it's hard. I have multiple master degrees and real-world experience, but here I am as a secretary. I'm scared about retirement. My husband will want to slow down, but my career/life haven't happened yet. I feel like my life is just one big holding pattern. I can't do "self-care" - I work 8-5, my husband is on 12's 6 days a week. I'm keeping our heads above water and that's it. We've been doing this for years and it's exhausting.

Though she was doing her best to make the most of her options, she was stuck trying to keep her head above water.

Respondent 43 had been married for 7 years to an enlisted soldier. She holds a college degree and was employed part-time at the time of data collection. She expressed feeling "hopeless and a loss of control" and elaborated on the connection between her lost career potential and her sense of self:

...I used to be driven and motivated to have a fruitful career. I had zero intention of living a lifestyle at all involving the military. Now I am at the behest of my [husband's] job.

These well-educated women felt they had little or no say in many aspects of their lives, particularly their career prospects. They clearly perceived the impact of this lack of control. Respondent 29 felt like a failure while Respondent 43 reported feeling hopeless. They both noticed the disparity between their capabilities and the small number of opportunities that were available to them. Respondent 29 was, as she stated, trying to make the best of things while Respondent 43 described herself as previously "driven and motivated." Somehow, though, along the way these factors had not been enough to buffer them from the negative effects of the limitations they faced.

Acculturation to the military lifestyle: Breaking in is hard to do. A third particularly salient challenge emerged for these women: attempting to acculturate to the

unique culture of the military. This challenge manifested in several important ways: a loss of self from being considered “just” a military wife; the frustration of feeling that they simply did not fit the culture; the feeling of being unimportant to the military; and the negative impact of the military culture on coping.

I am just the military wife. Quite a few women expressed feeling they had lost a sense of self as a result of living the military lifestyle. The very nature of the lifestyle seemed to present a challenge to some, who commented that the frequent moves and ever-changing routines of the lifestyle created difficulty in maintaining a sense of self. Respondent 123 felt that the lifestyle had imposed a sense of adaptability to the point that it had become difficult for her to know herself. She had moved 6 times during her marriage to an officer in the Air Force. A college graduate who was employed part-time at age 30, she wrote that the military lifestyle makes it

very difficult to have my own identity. I joke with my husband that we are in a polygamist marriage with the military. That first wife makes the decisions and I have to decide what to do with my own relationship with my husband. This often means I have to forfeit my own ambitions and wants. There have been times where I don't think I could have stayed married (specifically to someone in the military) if it were with anyone else besides my husband. My family is the sole reason I put up with this. You are expected to hold down the fort. This means when the basement is flooded, you're depressed with a newborn, you still have to figure out a way to clean and fix up the mess. Carrying your baby in one hand if you need to. You will be homeless at times. You may even have to give up a beloved dog. You will need to spend time apart from your best friend and lover to be utterly alone in a new area. You learn to adapt and react. You find creative ways to come to some sort of solution that keeps your family together. Life carries on and will carry on without you. I have an obligation to my family and am responsible for keeping them strong.

Despite her ability to find humor in her situation and the sense of determination present in her response, she still felt discouraged and subsumed by her husband's career:

I don't know who the hell I am. I wanted a career but as a military spouse my career of choice was not going to happen. I never wanted my self identity to be

someone's wife but that's where I've found myself. I'll be a damn good one and a good mother. [Mothers] are tough like that.

Several women expressed having no sense of who they were at all and no sense of hope that this would change. These responses were characterized by grim resignation or wistfulness. For example, Respondent 27, age 42, wrote,

I am an Army Wife not myself anymore. I follow the need[s] of my husband whatever they are.

Respondent 163 described the impact of the lifestyle on her sense of self as well as the ways in which she tries to mitigate that impact after having relocated 4 times in 5 years of marriage to an officer in the Air Force:

I tend to be a type-A, pretty sure of myself person outwardly. However, moving so often and lacking those deep relationships, leads to a lot of self-doubt. Do they like me? I did it differently at this other place, so do they think I'm stupid? Who will be my friend? Am I deserving of good friends? Do other people feel this way when they start over at a new place?...

She grapples with such questions in order to find her footing amidst the constant changes and the lack of grounding that comes with deep friendships.

A few women felt that they were at the beck and call of the military's whims. For example, Respondent 43 felt that she was at the behest of her husband's job. Others remarked that they were defined by their status as a military spouse. Several described the feeling of waiting for their time to come or putting their goals on hold while their husbands were in the military. Respondent 156, age 39 and married to an enlisted Airman for 13 years, described her experience of

Feeling disconnected and like life is not my own... like everything I want to do takes backseat to all the things he HAS to do.

For these women, the military had eclipsed their identities. Their lives had been destabilized and put on hold to the point that they had become lost in the shuffle.

You were not issued a family. Several women felt that the military simply does not care about family members, prioritize their needs, or view them as valuable members of the military community. Respondent 168, age 35, has a Master's degree and had been married to an enlisted sailor for 7 years. She commented,

In many settings, the spouse is only the spouse. There have been times when I've gone to the doctors and they've asked me for the ssn¹. I asked if they wanted mine or his, and they have told me "we don't care about yours". Each time it is said, is a blow to ego and made me feel less important. This has led me to be quieter in social situations.

Respondent 72, age 35 and married for 15 years to an enlisted Airman, had relocated 3 times and experienced over 20 of her husband's deployments. She described her experience of fighting the losing battle against the military:

"You were not issued a family." This [echoe]s in my head any time I am unhappy with the [way the] military affects my life. I do what I can and keep moving with each situation. There are programs to help, yet, most times, when you do reach out, they really aren't all that willing to help and usually make you feel like an inconvenience.

She had effectively been punished for seeking the support offered by the military.

Respondent 114, age 29 and married to an enlisted Airman, described feeling that her mental health needs were not a priority for the military. She wrote,

I don't feel like mental health is important in the military. I have PTSD, depression, anxiety, and Borderline personality disorder. I often don't feel comfortable with the military.

Some even expressed a sense of de-humanization, explaining that they were treated as lowly dependents or even as numbers, not an entity unto themselves.

Respondent 65, age 34 and married to an enlisted Airman for 14 years, wrote,

¹ "Social Security Number." Spouses and children of service members access military-sponsored services through providing the Social Security Number of the service member (also known as the sponsor).

I've just accepted that all I am (in this state of life) is his wife.

A particularly chilling description of the military's perceived lack of concern for spouses came from Respondent 10. She had been married for 9 years, during which time her husband had deployed 3 times. She detailed at length both the struggles she has faced as caregiver to a husband with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as well as her fury toward the military for failing to provide adequate support for the spouses in her situation; this combination of factors ultimately led her to engage in a suicide attempt:

...Dod and VA¹ have known about the secondary [effects] of PTSD and have done little to nothing to educate caregivers/spouses with all they have known. Has one military spouse [actually] worked with or been in consultation with their [husband's] doctors for the benefit of the whole family? When [he] was active duty, not one doctor would talk with me about anything health related regarding my soldier, we were just the Military Spouse. The military was a culture of fear and reprisal with all the military cuts and discharges taking place. Maybe if I had, had better knowledge, education, about all these things prior I might not have ended up where I am today. Yet, we are blamed for not knowing, what we didn't know, before we knew it. As military spouses we handle so much trying to stay on top of everything, including educating ourselves to the best of our ability, despite the time and circumstances each of us are encompassed by the supporting roles of our family and the military. We are not Doctors, Mental Health Professionals, or Medical Professionals for the most part. I guess what upsets me is they (Dod and the VA) knew and did nothing. Total neglect leaving us to handle so many situations we, for the most part, aren't trained for or educated on to know what to do in these circumstance[s]...

She recounts several instances of seeking support for the anxiety and trauma-related symptoms she experienced as a result of caring for a husband with PTSD, many of which were not effective for her. Indeed, she recalls examples in which counselors failed to accurately identify what she was experiencing and, in some cases, seemed to minimize the importance of her symptoms:

¹ "Dod" refers to the Department of Defense; "VA" refers to the Office of Veterans Affairs.

...I didn't start out with PTSD, it developed over time. For me it began with an Anxiety disorder, that went undiagnosed despite the treatment I sought at various times while we were active duty. Because many of these counselors/ therapists were not trained in trauma recovery, I continuously heard, "Oh it sounds like you just need some additional emotional support right now" or "it sounds like you have some depression, maybe you need a pill for that". No one talks about the hyper-vigilance we develop over time due to circumstances out of our control, yet we are compassionate, forgiving, try to be understand[ing] and supportive, because we are military wives and despite everything we love and support our soldiers, their mission, and the missions of the US Military...

Despair and a sense of rejection are palpable throughout her lengthy response. From her words emanates a sort of grim acceptance that, to the military, she is nothing but collateral damage:

The only help for me is that which I sought for myself with the help of my parents, because I am just a "Military Spouse" and if I was a Veteran, one of the 22 a day, then I might matter. I have learned my value doesn't matter in the scope of the mission, not unlike many soldiers feel once they are discarded from the Military as well. Our families don't matter either. There are not real resources to support us in anyway, far fewer than there are for our Veterans and look how they have been treated. I have little to no access to legal support. My husband is now retired and cut me off financially and just trying to qualify for any support is virtually impossible, there is no one there to help me help myself, so why bother right. We are part of the "Acceptable Loss Ratio", collateral damage that has been left in the dark and disregarded. Some days, I still struggle with whether or not I can continue to fight, because despite this tiny ounce of hope, the despair and total physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion is so debilitating...And in the continued "Silence" and utter lack of resources you think to yourself "What do I possibly have left to live for," Maybe all I have left is the hope I can share my story, save another family from this type of desolation, save a life, raise awareness and hope in the end whether I am dead or alive something I did mattered.

While she noted that her parents supported her emotionally and that attending a trauma and recovery-focused therapy was beneficial, she was still uncertain how long her recovery would last. She ended her remarks by reinforcing her enmity toward the military for imposing a culture that devalues spouses.

Military misfits. Some women found that certain aspects of their identities had a negative impact on their ability to cope with the lifestyle. Many spoke in some way to the

pressure these women felt in trying to play the part of the military wife and the negative consequences they might face if they did not do so. They found this pressure burdensome or even oppressive. In some ways, these women felt they were being held to some abstract ideal of a military wife's behavior. While for some, playing the part of military wife manifested as a coping strategy for navigating the cultural expectations of the lifestyle, it was not an easy fit for most of the women who reported engaging in the charade. For others, the difficulty came not so much in terms of trying to fit into the expectations of the culture; rather, they had simply come to believe that who they were was a bad fit for the military way of life.

Several felt that they had difficulty fitting in with other military spouses.

Respondent 69, age 33, holds a Master's degree and had relocated 5 times during her 8-year marriage to an Air Force officer. She commented specifically on the frustration she feels when she is not allowed to be herself in a social situation. A small number of women described a keen awareness that their words and behavior had the potential to affect their husbands' careers. They put pressure on themselves to speak more cautiously or to behave in a way that they felt was expected of them. Respondent 118, married for 7 years at 27 years old, described her internal struggle to embody the ideal military wife:

I am a bit harder on myself being that I try to be prim and proper at all times. I want my actions to be a positive reflection of my military spouse.

Two respondents wrote of the pressure to put on a brave public face even when enduring personal strife. Respondent 146 was 26 years old and married to an officer in the Air Force. She wrote,

There is a big part of me that believes I should act and express emotion in a certain way because of my husband's military rank.

She felt that she had to conform to certain expectations around emotional expression simply because of her husband's professional status.

Respondent 36 felt that she could not find the answer to satisfying others, despite her efforts to do so. A college graduate who was employed full-time, she reported that she was then experiencing a second deployment with her husband and described her experience of others' responses to her coping strategies:

It seems very all or nothing. If you're upset or scared, you're told to suck it up - "you know what you married into". If you're quiet and "sucking it up," you must be happy your husband's gone. Some people are incredibly supportive, but a lot of what you hear is negative...

She felt that she was not allowed to cope with deployments in certain ways and that she would be judged for her response regardless of whether she chose to express her emotions. She felt that whatever response she displayed was bound to be judged as wrong.

Two women felt that the only way they might find friends was by adjusting their behavior to fit in. Respondent 59, age 43, wrote,

As much as [I] have in common with other military families and the shared experience..in so many ways [I] also never really feel like [I] fit into any group, even if [I] am able to blend in and fake it.. I always feel like [I] am not really going to find others who are really like me.

She felt this way even after 17 years of marriage to a service member. Respondent 118 was 27 years old and had been married to an enlisted Airman for 7 years. She described her efforts to adjust her behavior to what she perceives as the expectations of the military culture:

I have had to learn and memorize what is accepted and what isn't accepted in the military world as it relates to being a military spouse. The main reason for doing this is that with every move, I have to start over and make new friends at the new location. One way to easily find yourself without friends is [if] you are doing

something wrong in military terms. If I wasn't in the military, I'm sure I would handle things differently even if we were moving quite as often.

She has found a connection between fitting into the cultural expectations and coping with the struggles of establishing friendships. She stated clearly that this practice is not consistent with her natural inclinations.

Respondent 104, married to an enlisted soldier, even feared the negative repercussions her husband might face if she spoke about certain topics:

...Having to always keep in mind that my speech in public may affect my husband's career has caused me to be much more quiet and measured than I was before we got married.

Respondent 159, age 29 and a graduate student, indicated that she frequently encounters others' expectations that she will experience certain emotions during her husband's absence:

...Others assume my husband's absence means to invariably put me on an emotional suicide watch of sorts for lack of better terms, so I find myself extremely frustrated by the need to constantly mediate my speech to ensure that others believe that I'm "okay." It's absurd, yet it occurs regularly...

She did not even feel allowed to experience the absence of her husband in her own way; she had to monitor her emotional expression because others assumed that her husband's deployment would throw her into the depths of despair.

Some women did not necessarily feel the need to play the part of a military wife. Rather, they felt the negative impact of certain characteristics not fitting easily into the demands of the lifestyle. Introversions, a desire to be judicious in developing friendships, and a tendency to self-doubt were characteristics that respondents experienced as a poor match for the lifestyle, thus making coping with the challenges more difficult.

Respondent 93, for example, described the difficulties that manifested as a result of a poor fit between her natural tendencies and the demands of the lifestyle:

I became a hermit, honestly. I felt stuck because I lost my sense of self. It was extremely isolating at first and that hammer came down right after I had our first child, a premie, so all of that change at once was very difficult. I don't usually reach out to people. I reach out to information. I'm normally an introvert so the constant moving around and having to establish new relationships, just made me give up on the friendship front. I think that parts of this life exposed areas that I didn't have an ability to cope. I am strong [in] establishing our home, our family, our lives, but because of how I am, I cannot make connections with people so I've pretty much been isolated the last 7 years.

Her inclination toward introversion clashed with the revolving door of friendship-building that the lifestyle demanded. Despite her ability to navigate other challenges of the lifestyle, her ability to cope with the social challenges had led to her social isolation.

Negative impact of the military lifestyle on coping. For some women, living the military lifestyle negatively affected their coping strategies. While their number was rather small relative to those who reported enhanced coping, their responses revealed powerful experiences. A few reported that the military lifestyle had prevented them from utilizing healthy coping strategies they had used before marrying a service member. Specifically, several mentioned the difficulty they had in finding a support system. These negative experiences included interactions with other military spouses as well as seeking support from professional or military-sponsored systems. Respondent 37, age 31, had been married to an Army officer for 6 years. A college graduate, she had been through 3 relocations and 3 of her husband's deployments. She wrote:

It has made it difficult to cope with certain things because of the lack of support I have had throughout my husband's career. People, [especially] other military spouses, are flaky and talk a good talk. However, whenever hubby would deploy, I found myself alone many times. I have grown to be a very cold, negative person and it's hard to look at myself in the mirror. With the weight of all our home consists of, I find it hard to take the time for myself. If I do, I feel guilty for it.

There really is no support in the emotional challenges I've had to face over the years because hardly anyone apart from my husband has given a damn. They act like they do for show but behind closed doors, it's fake.

Her experiences have created a cynicism that upsets her to the point that she finds it difficult to look at herself in the mirror. This lack of trust in others may have prevented her from utilizing other adaptive coping mechanisms as well; perhaps, for example, if she had instrumental support from others she might feel more comfortable taking time for herself.

A few women commented on the general lack of services (effective or otherwise) available to military spouses. Respondent 146, 26 years old and married to an officer in the Air Force, described her disappointment in the minimal availability of services for military spouses:

In my short time as a military spouse, I have learned the military community is not as loving and supportive as I believed it would be - at least in our current situation. I have found it incredibly difficult to work full time and get support from base, because many base offerings are only available during the normal workday. With my husband deployed, I have needed support and not received it from base and the military friends we have made so far. I have delved deeper into relationships at work, and joined civic organizations to ease the loneliness...

She holds a Master's degree and was employed full-time at the point of data collection. Though she had found support in the civilian community, she had been poorly served by the programs offered on base because of her work schedule. Apparently, the military culture expects spouses of service members to be available during typical working hours, which was frequently not the case for the women in this sample.

Coping and Well-being

Positive effects of the military lifestyle on coping. For many of the women in this sample, the impact of the military lifestyle on their coping responses was a positive

one. For example, quite a few described the lifestyle as either having enhanced their resiliency or having brought into awareness the fact that they already were resilient. Respondent 67, age 42, is a college graduate married to an officer in the Marine Corps. She had relocated 7 times and experienced 4 of her husband's deployments. She attributed this resilience to the fact that "[m]ilitary wives are just not as intimidated by basic life challenges, since most of us have lived through long deployments, dangerous MOS's,¹ moving logistics, making new friends, and parenting military kids." Similarly, many stated that the lifestyle had served to make them stronger or to help them realize how much strength they already possessed. Respondent 176, who had experienced 15 deployments during 8 years of marriage to an enlisted sailor, described the lifestyle as making her "stronger in ways that [she] could never have imagined."

Those who had grown up in military families or had been service members themselves described those experiences as helpful specifically because they felt they had known what to expect before marrying a service member. Respondent 113, who at age 29 had been married to an enlisted Airman for 5 years, wrote,

Being prior military myself, I feel like I was better [equipped] to handle the military lifestyle as a wife.

Others mentioned that the lifestyle had given them a better sense of perspective in life and an appreciation of their families and husbands' safety, allowing them to better determine what challenges warranted a stress response. For example, Respondent 196, age 35 and married to an Army officer for 13 years, described several ways in which the military lifestyle had given her a sense of perspective:

¹MOS is an acronym for "Military Occupational Specialty," which refers to the specific functions service members fulfill in the military

...It teaches you to really appreciate your relationship, marriage, family, community. It is the ultimate proof that everything is relative. All problems you face daily are always countered with the "he's alive" "we have each other and our family" mantras that remind you that no problem is that big as long as your marriage is strong. It also teaches you thankfulness [every day] to be lucky enough not to have lost your soldier. The military life really teaches you perspective!

Coping strategies and self in relation to coping. Descriptions of coping with the military lifestyle fell into two broad domains: explanations of actual coping strategies used and the interaction between self and coping. Within each of these domains, several themes emerged.

Themes within the domain of coping strategies included the following: cognitive reframing and finding new meaning within the challenges of the lifestyle; the need for flexibility in navigating the unexpected twists and turns of the military lifestyle; seeking and providing social support; working toward personal goals in order to distract oneself from stressors; using humor to provide a sense of perspective; building from previous experiences; seeking meaning through faith; and exercising self-compassion.

Within the domain of self in relation to coping, several themes emerged. Those themes included the following: the positive role that a strong sense of self plays in adaptive coping; the importance of self-determination; the relevance of self-reliance; and the importance of an intrinsic motivation to overcome challenges.

Three core concepts undergirded the two domains. Acceptance, purposefulness, and agency were woven throughout the responses. They were particularly important in describing the specific coping strategies used by these women. For example, genuinely coming to terms and finding peace with whatever situations they faced was a foundational step in moving forward with adaptive coping responses. Additionally, those

who coped adaptively chose consciously and purposely to engage in particular coping strategies, determined to push through to a successful outcome on the other side. Those who coped adaptively sensed that they were able to make their own choices, even within the strict confines of the military lifestyle. This sense of agency was fueled by a firm knowledge of self and the important role that this strong sense of self played in navigating the challenges they faced. Themes within the coping strategies domain are examined first. Themes within the self in relation to coping are then examined.

Coping strategy: Finding new meaning. One manifestation of adaptive coping took the form of finding new meaning or purpose through challenges faced, particularly those related to career. Quite a few women expressed feeling that the lifestyle had given them opportunities to reframe challenges as opportunities for growth and development. Such positive reframing led to changes in how they viewed themselves as well.

Some respondents described ways in which the career limitations of the lifestyle had prompted them to view themselves and their situations differently. Acceptance of things beyond their control laid the foundation for these women to find new meaning or new opportunities for themselves. For example, some respondents expressed appreciation for the fact that their lifestyle had allowed them to focus on aspects of their lives other than earning money and individual career advancement. Respondent 46, age 29 and a college graduate, described a shift in her thinking after she left the workforce:

I went from working 50-60 [hours] a week in a great field full of potential to housewife [and] stay at home mom while spouse is in a military school. It is a reality check that it is about family over self. And army over self. You (even as a spouse) are part of something so much larger than yourself.

Respondent 176, as noted above, had experienced 15 deployments during her 8-year marriage. She described actively and intentionally prioritizing tending to her children

during those many deployments over trying to maintain a job. She felt a sense of peace about this choice:

...I put my career and aspirations on hold for my family and I'm ok with that, I'll get my time. When my husband deployed I became a stay at home mom because it's not fair to our kids to have both parents gone all the time. I want them to know that what their Daddy does he does to keep them and everyone safe. Their [Dad's] a hero and that's special. We also want them to know no matter what we will always be together and we [are] here to support them. They didn't ask for this and they don't understand why things happen sometimes so it's our job to make sure they know everything will be ok...

She has accepted delayed career gratification in order to focus on ensuring the wellbeing of her children.

Respondent 34 even expressed a sense of relief that the military lifestyle had moved her toward staying home with her children during the 10 relocations and more than 20 deployments that had taken place during 21 years of marriage:

I am grateful that I am a military spouse because it made the calculus of not working and staying home with my children easier and I would not change that for anything. The money I would have made was minimal since I would be changing jobs every 2-3 years. I sacrificed a career for my husband's but the things I gained were more fulfilling for me than any job could be. My marriage is solid, my kids know that I care for them first and I was able to economize to save money we would have spent if I was working. Most women my age and younger would think I was brainwashed by a man and kept as a slave to him in my home but I have had the freedom to pursue what I wanted and nurture my children. I also supported my husband's vocation.

She explicitly speaks to the deliberate nature of her choices. While she acknowledges having sacrificed her career, she has found fulfillment in shifting her focus to tending to the needs of her family. Meanwhile, Respondent 75, age 28 and looking for work, saw the opportunities that the military lifestyle had given her to adjust her definition of success:

Initially, my sense of self battled with my role as a military wife. I saw myself as a career-driven individual that had a very clear picture of what I wanted out of life. I was an administrative professional that worked with other professionals. I

learned my sense of self had to change to accommodate a military life. My self worth was tied to my ability to earn income in a particular environment. Living overseas drastically changed what type of work environment was available to me. I was no longer wearing heels in a professional business office. Instead, I found myself in a childcare facility - even though I have no children and had never spent any real time with them. Eventually, I came to understand that my self worth wasn't tied to where I was, or even what I was doing. I became an instrumental member of the management team which allowed me to thrive. It showed me that I can succeed in many environments - I just have to find my niche.

Rather than focusing on the limitations placed before her, Respondent 75 was able to reframe her expectations of what made for a successful career.

These women came to a place of genuine acceptance which then prompted a conscious decision to lean in to the limitations of the lifestyle as they moved forward in life. This approach provided a new kind of personal fulfillment or a recognition that previous priorities needed to shift. Their willingness to adapt and find new meaning provided them with a positive outlook on the impact the lifestyle had on them. In other words, rather than allowing themselves to feel defeated by their limited career prospects, these women responded by exploring different priorities and allowing their goals to evolve. While these responses were relatively few when compared to those who experienced deep frustration with career-related challenges, they offer a glimpse into the powerful coping strategy of cognitive reframing that was effective for these particular women.

Some women described an eagerness to use the challenges as opportunities for development and eagerly sought the goodness in any situation confronting them. They were open to whatever life had in store for them. For example, Respondent 193, age 40 and married to an Army officer for 16 years, explained the way she eagerly tackles new situations:

I may doubt my abilities in the moment, but when I let the emotional wave pass...put on the big girl panties...and get on with _____...(fill in the blank with any number of hard things we do as military spouses) I find that I am full of courage, heightened problem solving abilities as compared to many of my civilian counterparts, and have an increased sense of independence. I'm proud of the personal growth I've seen in myself. I'm thankful for the ways it has broadened my view of life and the world around me. To use a phrase from the military (chaplain specific counseling in particular), I have tried to train myself to "hunt the good stuff." Another move? Great...I get to explore and find new adventures in a new place. Deployment? A chance to dig deep and watch our marriage grow. Lack of professional continuity? I wrote a book ([title redacted]). I took part time college teaching that I loved. I have written for many online publications. I have volunteered and become interested in many new endeavors I probably would have never discovered during our civilian ministry years. Potential school snafus for my three kids? Homeschool them! I could go on and on...

She has developed an approach to the lifestyle that allows her to continually evolve and grow on her own terms, even when so many things in her life are not under her control.

Similarly, Respondent 143 commented on ways the military lifestyle has enhanced her natural sense of optimism and promoted development of resourcefulness, gratitude, and perspective:

[I] was already a see the glass half full kind of person before the [military], but after living this life I'm able to see it half full and figure out how to share the glass with others, how to pack it properly, how to make that glass work in new homes. I mean this life is crazy, but if you continue to approach it as new opportunities to learn and grow then you've got a shot at staying a little bit sane. Does it drag you down. You bet, I've had some huge lows, but I know as long as I continue to turn to those that have more experience than I do in this military path I can learn their lessons, their hard and great times...I think I'm more open to meeting people now because of the military, I look at different lifestyles and backgrounds with open eyes and [an] open heart. It has made me a better person and I hope a better Mom for my kids. Showing them more than just a small community bubble, we are giving them a view of the world...

She embraced opportunities to grow and learn, seeing this as a vital piece in "staying a little bit sane" amidst the chaos of the lifestyle.

Respondent 177 described her personal evolution over the course of a 13-year marriage. She reported that her husband has been deployed 20 times during those 13 years, with most of the deployments occurring in the last decade. Initially, she had felt the need to put her life on hold during her husband's absences, but at some point she realized the negative impact this approach was having on her:

I react much differently now, as a 35 [year] old, than I did as a 25 [year] old. My husband didn't really start deploying until I was 25 and home alone with our newborn son. I spent years feeling stuck. Always waiting for real life to start when he got home. But, he was never home. There was always another TDY¹ or deployment. While, I was waiting for him to come home and make me whole again, I missed out on living my life. I was always supporting him, but nobody was supporting me and my dreams. A lot of that had to do with me. I had to believe in myself before anybody else could. It stinks, but what I have come to terms with is the fact that if your significant other is active duty, just that fact makes them inherently unreliable. I can not rely on my husband for anything (well, the paycheck, but not him physically). So, now he is deployed again and we now have two kids. But, before he left this time, I already pay all of the household bills, take the children to school and activities, do all of the yard maintenance, do all of the house cleaning and make all of the meals. There is no deployment prep. I've already got it covered. I have to have it covered whether he is deployed or not.

She had grown from a mindset of waiting for life to begin into a determination to make her own life, with or without her husband there to join her in it.

While several women described the experience of constantly growing and adapting, others felt they were settling into a new, better sense of who they were.

Respondent 79, age 37 and married to an Army officer for 18 years, captured both of these experiences:

This is a work in progress. Many [of] my challenges have caused me to question who I am and what I stand for, but at the end of the day I am more sure than ever before about who I am and what I am about.

¹"TDY" is an acronym for "temporary duty," meaning a short-term assignment in a different geographic area

She balances the need to grow with a strong sense of who she is.

A deepened sense of empathy, concern for others, and ability to see the world from a different perspective was also a frequent theme. For example, Respondent 51, 30 years old with 5 relocations during 8 years of marriage to an Army officer behind her, wrote:

I've learned so much about myself in my interactions with people from all walks of life. I had to learn more about myself to know how to relate to people from different backgrounds. Why certain things made me uncomfortable/angry/upset helped me to figure out how I could better help others.

Knowing herself enabled her to connect more positively with those around her, and her exposure to different peoples helped her learn more about who she is.

These women remained open to letting their experiences inform and shape who they became. They embraced the opportunities they were given in order to learn and expand their horizons. Their responses reveal a sense of satisfaction and pride in having cultivated a new sense of self through the varied experiences and encounters which had been afforded them.

Coping strategy: Rolling with the punches. Another important adaptive coping strategy was the flexibility respondents utilized in coping with the stressors of the military lifestyle. This is not surprising, given the unpredictable nature of military life. Phrases such as “roll with the punches” or “roll with it” were used by 7 different women to describe how they had come to cope with the challenges of the lifestyle.

Several women described having learned over time to maintain flexibility, indicating that military marriages came with a type of learning curve. Indeed, Respondent 30, a 26-year-old graduate student married to an Air Force officer for 5 years, described her increase in flexibility using a humorous phrase popular in military culture:

Even though I still feel uptight and upset at a lot of challenges, I'm a lot more "Semper Gumby" than I used to be. I approach non-military challenges that way as well. I just roll with it...

This flexibility manifested itself in multiple ways: Several women described feeling compelled to have numerous plans in place so they could turn on a dime, so to speak, and deal with the last-minute changes of the lifestyle. In the same vein, others reported having to be ready for anything that might be thrown at them. Another manifestation of flexibility was resourcefulness or creativity in coping with the ups and downs of the lifestyle.

Having multiple plans in place at any given time enabled some women to accommodate the whims of the military. Respondent 176, for example, described the mental agility needed to manage the lifestyle's tendency to change demands unexpectedly:

...Most people have a plan for life, but in our life you have to have multiple plans and then be prepared to change everything at a [moment's] notice...

Respondent 198, who at age 26 holds a college degree and has been married for 8 years to an enlisted soldier, described the ever-revolving process of planning:

Military [situations] are going to happen in military life. PCS¹, deployment, etc. You plan, adjust and move on. Then you plan, adjust, and move on...

Despite all the planning, unexpected events still surfaced regularly for the women in this sample. Surprises came in the form of relatively small daily hassles (e.g., a husband being held at work for several hours without warning) or much bigger surprises such as learning at a very late date that they would be moving to an entirely different duty

¹ "PCS" in this context refers to relocating due to the service member's receipt of orders to a new duty station. The acronym stands for "Permanent Change of Station."

station from the one they had been planning for. Another category of surprise was a husband's sudden deployment. Respondent 168 wrote that her husband deployed only two weeks after a relocation. Respondent 133, age 28 and married for 9 years to an enlisted sailor, recounted another such sudden deployment:

We moved to a new duty station and many furniture items were delivered broken. I wasn't worried about replacing and building new ones because we had been told we had at least a month before he would deploy; he ended up having one week of "possibly but not likely" leaving before he flew out with 24 hours' notice.

In describing how the lifestyle has affected the way she copes, she added,

It has taught me to have no expectations and accept that plans frequently change. I'm more flexible about dealing with challenges, but I have learned to appreciate the high value of 1-3 really good friends that I can trust when I need to cry over something that is terrible or laugh at the irony of Plan A changing to plans B, C, G, and then finally back to A before it actually happens...

Her response highlights the erratic nature of the lifestyle and implies that, in some ways, the constant changes border on the absurd. Similarly, Respondent 178 wrote,

The military lifestyle has taught me that nothing is ever permanent. You can count on nothing. It has taught me to be more independent and to be flexible and go with the flow. The more rigid I am the more I set myself up for failure and disappointment.

These women had learned to expect the unexpected and were able to quickly adapt when the rug was pulled out from under them, so to speak.

Many also expressed recognition that they had very little control over many aspects of their lives, a reality which necessitated creativity in coping with various challenges. This led to enhanced flexibility in the ways these women appraised various situations. Several commented that this fact led them to focus on what they could control.

Respondent 8, 32 years old, had been married to an enlisted soldier for 5 years. During

that short time period she had relocated 3 times and endured one of her husband's deployments. In describing the ways her sense of self had affected her coping, she wrote,

To accept the reality of situations beyond my control and do what is in my realm of control to make the best possible life for myself.

Others described finding ways to reframe challenging situations. Respondent 170, married for 5 years to an enlisted Airman, touched on many of these themes in her response:

Living a military lifestyle has affected the way I cope with situations. Different situations need to be handled differently. Not every situation is the same [and] not every person is the same either. I have learned and grown so much as a person living this lifestyle. It really does take a special "breed" of person to be a military wife and have a successful, long marriage. Just knowing that there are certain situations that are completely out of your control is one step in the right direction, such as PCS'ing, and most all things that go along with that...

Acceptance was paramount in negotiating the ups and downs of the lifestyle, as many indicated that they accepted the limitations of the military life and adapted their responses accordingly. Respondent 64, who at age 25 had been married for 5 years to an enlisted Marine, captured the important role that acceptance of the lifestyle plays in maintaining the flexibility needed to cope:

I've learned to take things more in stride. I do not have control over every single thing in life. I have learned to be more easy going in all aspects of life as a result of living the military lifestyle.

The recognition of the lack of control in her life fuels her mindset of taking things in stride. Respondent 75 indicated that acceptance is the first step in changing the way she views a particular challenge rather than trying to change the challenge itself:

I used to be much less flexible. I spent my energies fighting against situations that I didn't agree with - to change decisions I didn't like. Now, I am much more likely to accept these situations and immediately take action to make the best of it. I am much more able to see myself as the variable as opposed to the situation.

Coming to terms with the reality of any given situation enables her to adjust her viewpoint and to plan accordingly.

For some women, flexibility turned into resourcefulness. Respondent 93, age 27 and married for 7 years to an enlisted soldier, described the unexpected challenges she encountered early in her marriage:

My husband and I got married after OSUT¹ prior to arriving at his first duty station. We hadn't even found a place to live before he was told he'd be deploying 4 months later. I spent 2 months sleeping on a deflated air mattress while waiting for HHG² because we could [not] afford super glue to fix it and he was not told about the resources available for incoming families...

She continued by explaining that acceptance of the limitations of the lifestyle prompted her to develop her resourcefulness and take matters into her own hands:

It was trial by fire and how [I] learned that I had to do things on my own and not expect him to be around. I became resourceful and learned how to fix things myself. The army nonsense made me into a researcher. I look up regulations rather than taking things at face value because advice has been wrong too many times...

She learned to take matters into her own hands and to find information for herself so that she could address situations more directly and efficiently.

These women never knew what they were going to encounter, and at the same time they had learned from experience that even what they thought they could count on could not necessarily be trusted. An image comes to mind of these women simultaneously dodging arrows pitched at them while trying to find their footing in shifting sands. While such a balancing act has great potential to overwhelm anyone, these

¹ "OSUT" stands for one-station unit training. It is a lengthy period of training that takes place at the beginning of one's military career.

² "HHG" stands for household goods and refers to all the items in one's home that are packed and shipped during a military relocation.

women recognized that acknowledging this reality was the first step in navigating the challenges successfully. Coming to terms with the volatile nature of the lifestyle and learning to expect the unexpected served them well as they dealt with the circumstances in which they found themselves. Accepting their lack of control fueled the varied coping responses needed to respond adaptively to the wide range of circumstances they faced. Whatever response was needed was prefaced by an acknowledgment of reality. The flexibility needed to adapt to any given situation was, paradoxically, both an outcome of navigating the lifestyle as well as a helpful means of coping with it.

Coping strategy: Seeking and providing social support. Women who coped adaptively with the lifestyle frequently commented on the importance of obtaining and providing social support. While some women seemed to lean heavily on one strategy or the other, several did not necessarily find these coping strategies to be mutually exclusive. Both seeking and providing support offered their own rewards when framed positively.

Leaning on others. Not surprisingly, many respondents reported that the lifestyle had made them either more willing to seek help from others or more appreciative of that help, particularly when it came from other military spouses. Respondent 101, age 53, had been married for 33 years. During her marriage she had relocated 12 times, and her husband had deployed 8 times. She spoke to the deepened appreciation of support from others she had developed over her decades living the military lifestyle:

I have learned to accept help when it is offered. I discovered through the nearly 30 years as a Navy spouse that I cannot do it all, or do it all alone. One can be resilient and "get through it", or one can reach out and get assistance, offer assistance to others and build a network. Through deployments, births, deaths,

moves overseas and CONUS¹, a military wife cannot go it alone. We need each other and we hold each other up. We all succeed when we band together.

Several respondents found social support effective specifically for emotional encouragement. Others sought social support in identifying problem-solving strategies, managing tasks, or covering responsibilities. Some spoke to the different purposes that various types of friendships serve in different circumstances. Underlying these responses was the decision to actively pursue support rather than passively wait for others to offer it. This proactive approach served them well. Respondent 205, for example, described this resolve:

I also learned to ask for help and give help without judgement. To invest in people who invest in you. It takes a village and every duty station I CREATE mine. I don't expect it. I create it.

Her determination to create a village at every duty station is particularly noteworthy in light of the fact that she reported having relocated 7 times in 9 years of marriage to an Army officer.

Respondent 30, age 26 and married to an officer in the Air Force for 5 years, felt that her skill in navigating social situations in a fluid manner was positive; indeed, she indicated that her ability to pick up on social cues and adjust herself accordingly afforded her the opportunity to build a social support system:

...as sleazy sounding as this is, I'm a really good schmoozer. It's a skill I've picked up when dealing with military spouses and their high ranking spouses, and [it's] something that makes me an invaluable asset to my husband. It also enables me to make connections with the right people when the going gets tough, as I've built a network of people I can fall back on.

She obviously derived practical benefits from adjusting to the social cues of those around

¹An acronym for "continental United States," meaning a non-international duty assignment

her.

For some respondents, the sense of shared experience with other women in the military community formed an unspoken bond that provided both support and guidance. Respondent 106, age 32 and on her 6th relocation in 9 years of marriage, implied that she finds comfort in the fact that other military spouses would be so attuned to her experiences that she could simply reach out to them and not need to explain much at all:

...When things get really rough, I take it one day at a time and even one hour at a time if I have to. I also have fellow army wives from duty stations past who get exactly how I feel, so when I need someone to understand without having to explain everything I have a handful of people who I can contact for love and support.

This shared experience enabled her to jump right in to the support without having to provide the backstory of a situation; her friends already knew what she needed.

Respondent 131 acknowledged a tendency to doubt herself and sought practical support through obtaining the guidance of other military wives:

When I am facing a situation I like to get [advice] from other women who have dealt with the same issues to see how/what they did and why it was best for them. Then I try to apply their [advice] to my situation.

A few women mentioned the importance of carefully selecting friends and recognizing that different friendships might serve different purposes at different stages in life. A small number of respondents even implied that they had come to view friends as family since they were separated from their own. Respondent 70, age 45, had experienced 7 relocations and 6 deployments during her marriage to an officer in the Marines. She described the important roles that different types of friendships play in meeting her emotional needs:

...We make friends fast and hard. There's not a lot of time to test the waters or cultivate newfound friendships. I call it "dating the neighbors". After 22 years I

don't really want to date the neighbors anymore but it's a necessity. I have great friends all over the world but day-to-day, personal interaction is still required by me for a healthy attitude and life. Facebook is no substitute for real-life, real-time support and camaraderie. I've become more selective and quicker with my filtering process for making (and keeping) friends. Quality friendships are invaluable.

Despite her reluctance after so many years to put forth the effort involved in meeting new people, she recognized the value of doing so and maintained her disciplined practice of "dating the neighbors." She also distinguished between her long-lasting friendships with those who lived far away and the friendships that seemed to serve more of an immediate purpose. She had fine-tuned her process through over two decades of living the military lifestyle. Respondent 70 speaks to the evolution in her views on the value of different relationships:

...My friends in the local area are not usually "heart level" like my best friend of 20+ years. However, situational friends are better than none. I previously thought having situational friends made a person shallow to use such people for support. A counselor enlightened me that it can be a mutual "using" of each other for bursts of support as needed. This was a drastic change of how I viewed friends and myself in them...

These women recognized that immediate instrumental support from those around them was as important as long-distance emotional support from family or from lifelong friends; thus, they acted to seek those proximal relationships.

In contrast to those women who eagerly embraced the benefits of social support, some respondents felt compelled to seek social support despite a reluctance to do so. Although they understood it would be helpful, they simultaneously found it uncomfortable. Respondent 159 detailed at length her level of discomfort with the act of seeking social support when it was not an organic experience:

I was always a very independent, positive, can-do attitude type of individual and I rarely asked for help unless I was sure that I could not accomplish something

myself. In the rare instances I asked for help, it was always from immediate family. This was no longer an option once I became a military wife. With my husband deployed, a sudden severe illness warranting a hospital visit overnight meant I had two options: call 911, or call somebody who was an acquaintance/friend in the local area. This was extremely uncomfortable for me, to be driven to the hospital feeling essentially alone, while my husband was over 7,000 miles away. ... I have to invent, and flexibly accept very uncomfortable support systems, if I am to have any support at all. At times, it is far easier to be alone, than to accept such uncomfortable types of support, and it is a conscious, emotionally tiring choice to ask for and accept the uncomfortable support. Even support can be draining to a military wife. That's likely not often considered, because "make friends," "stroller off stress," and a multiplicity of cliché programs are lobbied at us as wives...

She clearly felt a notable disconnect between what the military assumes is helpful for military spouses and what she finds helpful for herself. However, despite this disparity, she chooses on occasion to seek the support in order to ensure that her needs are met.

Supporting others. Several respondents also wrote of the importance that helping others had for them. Some seemed to view it as a kind of "paying it forward," but most of the women indicated that it was a natural outcome of the lifestyle, something that was simply a pragmatic necessity. Helping others also provided a sense of purpose and an opportunity to contribute to the community for some women. Several described seeing this as their role in the military lifestyle. Perhaps they felt that, while other opportunities had been taken away from them, they could still find purpose in supporting others. Specifically, some felt that they had a duty to smooth the way for those coming after them, to help them avoid the same challenges they had faced. Indeed, Respondent 70, age 45 and married for 21 years to an officer in the Marines, detailed this approach in her response:

I feel so fortunate to have had women in my life (other spouses of older Marines) who gave me support and demonstrated how to live this life successfully. I try very hard to be there for the younger spouses when they have difficulty or questions. Since I do not work outside the home, I feel like this is my role much

of time within the military. I certainly do not have all the answers but am more than happy to offer a shoulder to cry on, a suggestion or two, or just a glass of wine and chance to whine and unwind.

As she had been supported and mentored, so too did she support and mentor others.

Respondent 135, who had experienced 3 relocations and 4 deployments during 7 years of marriage to an enlisted sailor, described a challenging period of time she and her husband had faced and then added,

Actually, because of that situation, because of how little support I had and how miserable and alone I felt ...I have volunteered to become an ombudsman with my husband's command. As a way to reach out and help other spouses to make sure that no one else ever feels that way...

She sought to protect others from the struggles she had endured.

Respondent 146, age 26, wrote about the lack of support she had received during her husband's deployment as well as her resulting decision to make things better for others:

...Now that we have experienced our first deployment, and felt the need for more support, we have vowed to do more for the significant others and family members of deployed military in the future.

These women appreciated the support provided by others while simultaneously working to make things better for those coming behind them. Though they may have had times when they felt frustrated or alone, they discovered how to channel those frustrations into efforts to support others and contribute to the wellbeing of their fellow military wives.

Perhaps their decisions to support others helped them cope by affording them opportunities to find purpose and value in the difficulties they had faced alone.

Coping strategy: Distraction through working toward goals. A few women indicated that working toward a personal goal such as running a half-marathon (Respondent 66, age 39 and married for 10 years to an enlisted soldier) or focusing on

work were things that might take their minds off of stressors. Respondent 21, married for 10 years to an enlisted Marine, had been through 6 relocations and 2 of her husband's deployments during her marriage. Employed full-time with some college experience, she wrote,

I always try to encourage the younger wives I meet to be a little [more independent] by actually finding a career or a job so they get out of the house and have something to take [their] mind off of the everyday stresses of being a military spouse I learned that is the best thing.

In addition to providing relief through distraction, these activities and goals may have helped these women feel grounded in their personal development and priorities.

Coping strategy: Laughing to keep from crying. Humor served as a way to put difficulties into perspective. While humor offered a means of distancing oneself from stress or discomfort, it also afforded an opportunity to remember which challenges were worthy of a stress response. For example, Respondent 189, a 38-year-old college graduate married to a Marine officer for 13 years, explicitly described her use of humor as a "defense mechanism" in order to manage the discomfort she experiences when her life choices and priorities (e.g., her decision not to have children and to prioritize work over military events) were questioned by other military spouses. In this approach, one can observe the interplay between her strong sense of who she is and her choice of coping strategy: She is comfortable in her own choices, but she uses humor to distance herself from others' discomfort with her choices.

Respondent 128 incorporates humor into how she sees herself as well as how she has navigated the military lifestyle during her 24 years of marriage (which had included 19 relocations). She described a situation that had occurred when living in Poland during her husband's overseas duty assignment:

Laughing at myself or situations makes everything better. There's not a gal in the world who can be as awkward as myself in difficult situations. I provide myself with a lot of things to laugh about in my old age. Know anyone who accidentally made the pizza delivery guy kiss their hand? This gal right here! My Polish was non-[existent], and while he handed me the pizzas, I tried to get him to take the tip I had in my hand. He misunderstood and thought I was making him kiss my hand, I dropped the coins into his as he bent over my hand, and we both just froze for a second as we both realized what was happening. So awkward, but the pizza was delicious. So, to make it short, I try to find something to laugh about... In the end, chips, salsa, homemade taquitos and a good laugh turn around most bad days into good ones.

The earlier portion of her response had included a list of the many substantial obstacles she had faced during her time at this duty station, including finding appropriate schooling for her children and a place of worship for her family and others. However, the contrast between the long list of very real difficulties and the lighthearted nature of the latter portion of her response reveals the way such a humorous situation allowed her to find a sense of relief among the many stressors she endured. A humorous response also reminded her that many frustrations are relatively minor.

Respondent 30 even included humor in the way she described moving away from the use of self-blame as a coping strategy; she included a tongue-in-cheek statement and even an emoticon to ensure the reader knew that she was being playful, a tactic which seems to indicate a high degree of self-awareness:

...I also blame myself and my spouse a lot less than I used to when I first became a military spouse. I put a lot of the blame on the military when this stuff arises, even if not all of it is the military's fault :)

She obviously recognized that the military was not necessarily the source of all her problems, yet she was able to playfully use the military as a scapegoat in order to shift away from the potentially less helpful strategy of blaming herself or her spouse for

frustrations. In this manner, having the military as a third member of the marriage may have provided an opportunity to relieve oneself of emotional burdens.

Coping strategy: Building on previous experiences. Some women reported that previous life experiences such as living on their own before marriage had prepared them to cope well with the lifestyle. Respondent 184, who holds a Master's degree and was married at the age of 38, captured the impact of both inherent character traits as well as previous life experiences:

I am a rather independent person. Prior to marriage, I had a career and lived by myself for 15 years. Not much about the military lifestyle really phases me, except the frequent moving and starting over making friends. I avoid any typical military spouse drama and politics, if at all possible. I view the challenges of moving, being apart from your spouse, etc as necessary evils that are a part of life and need to be dealt with in a straightforward manner.

Clearly, she found her maturity and life experiences helpful, as she simply draws upon her comfort in living alone for much of her adult life. Respondent 49, age 44 and married to an enlisted sailor for 19 years, also captured the value of both inherent traits and life experience:

I think having ... graduated college, and worked in my job field, before I was married made it less stressful for me. This is in comparison to those spouses that I have befriended that were married right after [high school] or college. Being more independent and not being married until I was 25 (i.e. having already been out on my own) made it easier for me to have to deal with, and get what I needed from, the different parts of the military during moves (because the military member is NEVER around during a PCS when you need them) and deployments...

She reported having experienced over 20 of her husband's deployments and 5 relocations during her marriage. Moreover, having experienced an independent lifestyle prior to marrying a service member served these women in good stead; they were already accustomed to functioning autonomously. Perhaps such experiences had also enabled

them to develop their own sense of self and priorities, which may have helped them later as they managed the stressors of the military lifestyle.

Coping strategy: Seeking meaning through faith. Another coping strategy used by these women was identification with a religious faith. Several reported a deepening of spiritual beliefs and reliance on faith in order to deal with factors they could not remedy through their own efforts. For example, Respondent 49, who had experienced 5 relocations and over 20 of her husband's deployments, described the deepening of her faith during her marriage:

...I have always been a Christian, but I will say that I have become stronger in my faith. Sometimes walking with faith is the only way you get through the craziness that you can't control.

Her faith supported her as she navigated the complicated situations in her life over which she had no say. In a related manner, Respondent 144 actually defines who she is through her faith, which in turn affects the way she navigates challenges such as the 3 relocations she had experienced during her 16-year marriage:

I don't think the military lifestyle has affected the way I cope with the challenges I face as a military wife. I think my spiritual growth and faith affects the way I cope the most... I have spiritually grown over the years which helps me realize who I am to God. That is what helps me cope. I don't even like saying cope because I treat each and every military move as a move orchestrated by God knowing that this is where we need to be and this is where He needs us at this appointed time. I give a lot of time to each and every local church we join...

Moreover, her faith provides her with a framework for finding purpose and order in the chaos of the lifestyle. Respondent 167, age 29, also linked her faith to her enhanced sense of self in describing the ways in which living the military lifestyle affected the ways she copes with the challenges it presents. She had experienced 3 relocations and 3 deployments during her 11-year marriage to an enlisted sailor, and she wrote,

It has taught me to be more resilient than I ever believed I could be. It showed me I could operate by myself way more than I thought I could. It allowed me to loosen a grip on the things I once believed I should have control over. It allowed me to trust my God with a deeper faith than I could have otherwise.

Again, faith served as a buffer from the stress that a lack of control might create.

Coping strategy: Allowing self-compassion. Some women commented on the importance of giving themselves permission to vent their emotions. This permission served as a form of self-compassion, a relatively infrequent but important form of coping for some of the women in this sample. Those respondents who reported use of venting and other forms of emotional release typically described it as one small aspect of a larger coping repertoire, something to enable a sense of release but not intended as a primary means of coping. Respondent 128, 46 years old with 19 relocations behind her, described the ways in which she gives herself permission to feel what she feels and to get it out:

Exercise the depression or anxiety away. Don't dwell on the home of record, or you'll waste the home of now. Every day is an opportunity to change what didn't work the day before, even incrementally, even during the dark days after he redeploys home. It's ok to cry in the shower so the kids won't hear. It's ok to not like where you're at right away. Giving myself time to accept where I'm at and what I want to do next has always helped...

She offers herself both physical and emotional catharsis, then moves on to other coping strategies such as cognitive reframing. She gives herself permission to take the time she needs to adjust to her circumstances and recognizes the value which that time holds for her.

The manner in which respondents wrote about their use of venting implies an awareness that, while venting may not actually address the problem at hand, it did provide a needed release of emotion that allowed the individual to move on to the next step of the coping process. For example, Respondent 143 wrote,

...Do I sometimes cry and wish my husband was home for dinner, yes. But I also then breathe in the realization that I am a stay at home mom and live in a house we bought and have a really great marriage and family.

She allowed herself to express emotion through crying, yet she recognized that staying in that emotional space would not be helpful. Engaging in reframing and thoughts of gratitude provided more meaningful relief from the stressor.

Similarly, Respondent 141, a college graduate who was employed full time and had been married to an enlisted sailor for 11 years, also allowed herself a brief opportunity to vent before moving toward other coping strategies:

.. I may give myself a day to be upset or a weekend pity party or a moment to worry about the change but after that you just have to move forward...

Perhaps these women felt comfortable enough with themselves to allow such an indulgence in a coping strategy that they realized would not necessarily solve any particular issue but nonetheless met an emotional need. They were mindful of using venting judiciously and purposefully. This self-compassion may have given them the space needed to take the emotional edge off of a situation in a way that enabled them to move on to more directly address the matter at hand. Moreover, they recognized the importance of moving past the release in order to progress into a place of acceptance and action.

Self in relation to coping: Self-determination. Some respondents were determined to do what was best for themselves and their families despite anything the military might have to say to the contrary. This manifested when women chose to push back against the military's demands in order to meet their own needs or the needs of their family members. Respondents described direct clashes between concrete tasks or responsibilities from different aspects of their lives (e.g., work vs. military commitments)

as well as conflicts between the more abstract roles they saw themselves inhabiting and their views of the role of military wife. A few instances of conflict between the role of mother and the role of military wife were reported. For example, Respondent 4, who had relocated 5 times during a 17-year marriage, wrote,

When being assigned to a new place I have to think about my kids and their education levels. I need to be where they will thrive and get the best shot at a great education. It is not always good for the army to think about these things. They figure we will work through the issues once we move. I decided to refuse a duty station and move to a place with better school for our kids.

However, the majority of respondents endorsing concrete role conflict indicated that, in some way, their ability to work had come into conflict with their role as a military spouse. Reasons for this included relocations, an unforgiving schedule of the service member, or general expectations for the life of a military wife. As noted previously, Respondent 203 reported that she'd had to leave a job due to the conflict with her husband's work schedule. She went on to describe the evolution of her coping strategies:

I have honestly become a stronger person from being a military spouse. Before becoming a military spouse I was the type to complain about my life situation and think there was nothing that I could do to fix it. Once you become a military spouse and your husband deploys or goes away for training for extended periods of time you have no choice but to grow up and be responsible. To cope with the military life challenges I learned that you need to connect with other military spouses, they become your family and your support system. They understand the trials you must endure and the frustrations you carry even without discussing them. I have also learned the best way for me to cope is to throw myself into work, my hobbies and get out of the house to attend events and be in the company of friends.

Despite what was perhaps a shorter-term loss in the conflict with the military, she felt that she had gained a great deal of strength and agency in negotiating the conflicts she faced.

Respondent 144 described an instance of conflict between her role as career-minded employee and her role as military wife, stating that

...I am a college graduate with a career and it took two months to find a very temporary job, two more months to find another longer-term but temporary job, and more than a year to find a 'permanent' job. Permanent meaning until the next military move.

As noted above, her reports of coping through her faith indicates that perhaps she felt the conflict she faced was out of her control, so she turned to her faith for support.

Self in relation to coping: Proud self-reliance. Many respondents took pride in a sense of self-reliance, implying that they were pleased with their ability to develop or to maintain a high degree of self-sufficiency. Several reported having brought a “do-it-yourself” attitude to the military lifestyle, either because they had been raised that way or because it was an inherent outlook. Indeed, many respondents described themselves proudly as “independent,” “strong,” and “confident.” Quite a few, however, reported that self-reliance had developed as a result of living the military lifestyle. Some expressed feeling surprised at the skills they had developed while others found it simply a natural, pragmatic consequence of the situations in which the military so frequently put them. For example, Respondent 174 who, at age 32, had been married to an enlisted soldier for 12 years, had relocated 4 times and experienced 3 of her husband’s deployments. She wrote,

It has taught me to stand on my own two feet, not to depend on my husband or anyone else coming in to fix everything because there's not always someone around.

Respondent 153, age 34, had been married for 15 years. During her marriage she had experienced 3 relocations and 5 deployments. She holds a high school diploma and reported working full-time at the point of data collection. She listed the varied ways in which she had become self-reliant as a result of navigating the military lifestyle:

Being a military wife you have no choice but to learn resiliency. You learn that not everything is the end of the world and that you are stronger, smarter and more capable of doing most things than you may have ever thought or dreamed. I have

fixed broken cars on my own. I have had to do my fair share of home repairs myself while my spouse is gone. I have also learned amazing communication skills. I have learned how to communicate with a spouse who is gone for long stretches of time...

Several respondents described their development of self-reliance through the lens of personal growth. For example, in addition to experiencing self-reliance as a natural outcome of the lifestyle, Respondent 153 also described the ways in which this necessary self-reliance helps to uncover her inner strength:

When stuff happens or things get tough is when I see inside myself all the potential and capabilities I have...

Respondent 82, age 36 and married to an enlisted soldier for 9 years, elaborated upon the ways in which the lifestyle has led to her increased self-reliance:

There are so many unpredictable situations that arise in the military that are beyond your control, regardless of what you do (when you PCS, where you are on the housing list, waiting months for a repay for travel expenses, etc); you can either choose to stress out and lose it, or find ways to cope and do the best you can to fix the problem. I choose to do the latter. Being a military wife has caused me to be more self-sufficient, a better problem solver and to learn to cope with unsettling and frustrating situations in a manner that doesn't negatively impact my family or those around me.

She continued by describing the ways in which this increased self-reliance has changed the way she views herself as well as the ways in which she interacts with others:

My sense of self has actually increased since becoming a military wife. I've become more confident in who I am (though I'm sure age has played a significant role in this as well), feel I'm more competent in finding solutions to problems (because I've had to and I didn't really have a choice in it), and am kinder and more empathetic to those around me because I realize they may be facing intense stressors that no one's aware of ...

Interestingly, she reported that her enhanced self-reliance and self-confidence had given her more empathy toward others. It might have been easy for her to have hardened toward others who seemed less capable of managing the challenges on their own; instead,

she reported a softening toward others and an awareness of the impact that her method of coping might have on those around her. She appeared surprised at her personal growth but has used this growth to help her understand others.

Respondent 100, a 36-year-old college graduate married to an Army officer for 13 years, had relocated 5 times and experienced 5 of her husband's deployments. She described her personal evolution:

I feel very confident as a military spouse and I feel like I have learned to be independent and "tough" as a single parent when my husband is away. A lot stronger than I would have been had he never deployed or had we not had the experiences we've had in the military for over a decade.

She appreciated the idea that her personal development had occurred in response to being forced by the lifestyle to navigate challenging situations on her own. Respondent 107 also reported a personal evolution. She disclosed that, for a period in her marriage, she had fallen into using alcohol to manage the chronic stress she had experienced in the military lifestyle. However, she continued by reporting that, in addition to replacing alcohol with seeking support from those around her, she has also found opportunities to develop through the demands of independence:

I find my sense of self grows stronger the longer I'm a military spouse. This lifestyle forces me to be very independent at times, and I'm learning more each day how strong I am as a woman, a mother and a spouse.

Respondent 149, 44 years old, had been married for nearly 3 decades to an officer in the Air Force. During her marriage she had relocated 4 times and experienced 3 of her husband's deployments. A college graduate who was seeking employment at the time of data collection, she commented on the irony of being called a dependent when the lifestyle had required her to grow into such a self-sufficient person:

Being a military wife (25 [years]) has taught me to be independent (even though the military calls us [dependents]), flexible, adaptable, and adventurous. I feel that it has helped me positively cope with virtually any challenge I am presented with. I wouldn't change it for anything. It has taught me to be effective and efficient.

Respondent 120 described proudly the ways in which she has become more self-sufficient during her 5 years of marriage to an Army officer:

I often say that being a military wife has 'made a man out of me.' I have realized I can do anything and everything on my own, rarely relying on the help of my spouse. Whether it be home repairs, child rearing, getting through emotional battles, etc. Before this, I would reach out to family when I needed help. Now that that isn't an option, I've really seen myself in a new light. I cope better now than 4 years ago...mostly because I gave up all expectations and started dealing with things as they are, rather than how I thought they should be.

Similarly, Respondent 121 described having come to terms with the necessity of independence and occupying multiple roles at once. At age 31, she had been married to an Army officer for 8 years. A college graduate, she was neither employed nor seeking employment and wrote:

I have discovered, that I am more [independent] than I have ever thought. That I can take on the role of mom and dad, good cop and bad cop. Many times as an Army wife you have little to no say over things and must adapt and choose to keep rolling along or you won't be able to live a happy life. I've learned to roll with the punch[es], and not to fight them, because [in] the end it makes for a better life for the whole family. Sometimes you have to sacrifice what you want in life for your [husband's career].

Once again, acceptance played an important role in adaptive coping for these women.

They had come to terms with the realization that, in many cases, they only had themselves to rely upon.

Self in relation to coping: Sinking is not an option. Frequently, respondents described an intrinsic determination to push through challenges; this phenomenon was accompanied by a strong resolve to refuse allowing a deployment or associated obstacles to halt their progress toward life plans. Respondent 171 wrote that she parents two

children with special needs, attends graduate school full-time, and serves as “a full-time volunteer state communications coordinator for an international disaster relief organization.” She reflected upon her determination to thrive despite the challenges she faces as a military wife:

Two words come to mind. Resilience and grit... I've learned how to do so many things on my own that it has made me incredibly independent. I have learned a variety of skill sets I don't believe I would've otherwise been interested in or needed to spend time on. Everything from plumbing to electrical, automobile repair, navigating homebuying, dealing with multiple sick children in hospitals hundreds of miles from home alone... sure, I've taken advantage of a couple of programs provided by the military specifically the airmen and family readiness center but overall it's pretty much been experience based. To be a military spouse is to sink or swim and sinking is not an option.

Respondent 41, age 36, stated that she had continued attending law school while parenting two children during her husband's time at sea, which totaled 7 deployments in 11 years. Respondent 140, age 58 and married 24 years, stated that she'd had to continue running her own physically demanding business despite a significant injury during her husband's absence:

Trying to run a business, husband deployed, 2 boys in school and breaking my collar bone. It's a horse business so involves a lot of physical movement. Not having people that you know well enough to help with day to day things for weeks. New or casual friends may help for a day but 6 or 8 weeks while you heal most are a no show.

Respondent 205 gave birth to two of her three children and finished a master's degree program during her husband's absences. She described her determination to ensure that her needs were met:

So much is out of your control. I realized early on I had to be the positive force in my life. And learn to roll with more than most people can handle....

Respondent 188, who had experienced 7 relocations and 10 deployments during 23 years of marriage, wrote,

We moved across the country while my husband was in South Korea. We had two children, one had just graduated from high school, I had to drop her off at college by myself, establish our new home at our new base, and get my other teenage daughter into a new high school. At the same time finding a new job...

She continued by describing the mindset she had adopted in order to maintain the ability to achieve goals over two decades of marriage to an enlisted Airman:

I have taken the stance of, 'this is what you do as a military spouse'. You love your husband and family and while he is gone you hold down the fort, so to speak. You are the head of the household, you are the mom and dad, you are the leader in the home. You just do what you need to do. You just do it so your kids will [have] a normal life and be well adjusted. You just do it.

Her response clearly reveals her acceptance of the realities she faced as well as her determination to do whatever needed to be done to ensure her family's needs were met. She also managed to address her own career needs, even amidst the upheaval of so many drastic changes all at once. This mindset has served her well: her acceptance has become an internalization of the mindset, which, as she describes it, normalizes her experience and provides a sense of manageability. "Just doing it" implies that "it" can, in fact, be done.

Similarly, Respondent 46, age 29, also described the mindset she had developed after more than a decade of marriage:

It makes you resilient. You may be scared and not want to do [something] alone -- but tough-- you do [it] anyway. It makes you independent. It makes you think ahead for Option B if life turns. It tests your patience...

Some women refused to let their careers fall by the wayside. They believed that, despite the lifestyle demanding that they put their careers on hold, they might be able to resume employment at some point. Respondent 19, age 43 and married to a Navy officer for 17 years, had experienced 7 relocations and 7 deployments. She described the very

real limitations these experiences imposed on her, yet she seemed to have plans to resume work at some point in the future:

...My husband is a pilot and his schedule changes day to day. It was frustrating to plan anything. Unfortunately, we now make plans and do them with or without him. We can't put our life on hold and don't. And one of the biggest challenges for me was giving up my career. With his ever changing schedule and the demands of my children's extracurricular schedule, it was less stress for me to let my job go. We can't control his schedule and their extracurricular activities provide a lifeline to the kids for making connections in new places. That was the priority so my career is placed on hold for now.

She no longer puts her daily life on hold, and she indicates that she will return to work at some point.

Moreover, despite the numerous obstacles presented to them from being married to a service member, many respondents were unwilling to let such obstacles deter them from doing whatever they wanted or needed to do. They accepted the reality of whatever situations they faced and then set their sights on moving forward to accomplish their goals accordingly.

Self in relation to coping: The positive feedback loop. Interestingly, several women described a kind of feedback cycle that led to personal development and evolution, commenting that living the military lifestyle had helped them to develop confidence and a sense of perspective (in other words, a deeper sense of who they are and what they find important), which in turn helped them to cope with the challenges they faced. For example, Respondent 64 wrote,

I have always felt independent. Losing a sense of control after marrying the military negatively affected this at first, but over the years has reinforced my independence. While I may not have control over where I live, I have control over how I respond to things. I can take care of things at home when I need to and can handle whatever life throws my way.

The shift in relative importance she placed on control in her life seemed to guide her into a new understanding of the concept: while she may not be able to control her circumstances, she could maintain her independence through controlling her response to those circumstances.

Another example of this feedback cycle came from Respondent 146. Though at age 26 she was one of the younger respondents, she demonstrated a keen self-awareness, both in terms of who she is and what type of support she needs in order to manage her husband's deployment:

Throughout this deployment I have felt like a big part of me is lost - I can't get the support needed from base and other military friends, but those I work with and my family do not fully understand what I am going through. I want to be independent of my spouse in certain ways so his being gone does not hurt so much. I have learned I am emotionally stronger than I thought I could be, and that I do not need people to understand what I am going through to help me. Just being there for me to complain, or to fill my time for a bit, is a huge help for me.

Again, the feedback cycle prompted an evolution in her sense of self: She has recognized new aspects of her identity as well as a new understanding of what she needs from others to cope well with the challenges of the military lifestyle.

Self in relation to coping: Involuntary evolution. While personal evolution was generally a highly valued process, some women felt pushed to evolve, adapt, and cope in spite of a preference to the contrary. This involuntary evolution offered mixed blessings. Despite certain benefits gained from change such as increased flexibility, strength, or resourcefulness, these women also felt discomfort with the process. For example, Respondent 142 was 38 years old and had been married to an enlisted sailor for 5 years. She commented that she had learned to assert herself more, yet she felt this was not a skill she should have had to develop:

I have learned to stand up for myself more but I still don't like that I should have to do that...

Respondent 159, age 29 and married to an enlisted soldier for 5 years, described her experience of evolution through maintaining the strong sense of herself she brought to her marriage while also realizing that she had grown and transformed in response to her experiences. A graduate student, she wrote that she has always been independent and confident, but she also described the varied ways in which she has evolved over the course of her life in a military marriage. In some ways, her evolution has come about because of conscious self-reflection:

My sense of self has also changed significantly as I realize I wish to seek deep, analytical introspection, and during my husband's extended absences (field time, leadership schools, and deployments), I am relegated to counseling as my only confidential source of this introspection to progress personally....

In other ways, however, her evolution occurred in response to navigating challenges. She described, for example, having to interact with military systems during her husband's absences through use of a Power of Attorney. When met with resistance, she responded with more assertiveness:

I also learned how to cease sugar coating words and to speak bluntly and with aggressive tones in order to effectuate needed results in certain situations. Using a Power of Attorney to do business in my husband's absence requires not asking for things to be done, but effectively commanding them to be done, via the legal authority endowed upon me by my husband via the POA. I face less judgment and opposition when I reveal my intellectual and emotional prowess in navigating complex legal circumstances. This is even more pronounced when I reveal my knowledge of the ranks, and a great number of DoD regulations...

Her response reveals her ability to consciously "turn on" different facets of her personality in order to fuel problem-solving. Her sense of pride and perception of herself as a powerful force to be reckoned with came through in her response. Seemingly, a number of such instances strung together led to a shift in how she sees herself:

...I'm like to say that still the same woman I was prior to becoming a military wife. However, I have acclimated and made enough changes that old friends have remarked at how much more sharp, decisive, and "hard" that I have become in certain situations. My family doesn't understand my constant balancing act, and never comprehends that the military dictates my life, not only my husband's. I do understand these things. So, I have become different. The reality is that I have become half-military. This is through sharing one life with my active duty husband, through employment as a civilian servant in the DoD, and through situational evolving, which has changed all but the core values of who I am. I'm not sorry or resentful. But, I am different.

While she had a conscious desire to grow through self-exploration and reflection, she seemed less enthusiastic about the evolution brought about through the challenges she had faced. Her references to the "constant balancing act" she faces and the ways in which the military "dictates" her life imply that this evolution came about because of powering through difficult circumstances.

Respondent 83, who had relocated twice and experienced 2 deployments since marrying 5 years previously, described her experience of being forced to evolve even though she may not have been inclined to do so:

I am a quintessential Type A person. I've always made plans, had plans for plans, had 5 year plans for my own career path...then I met my husband. The first 2-3 years he was active duty I resisted most of what the Army's plans had in store for us. I would [wrestle] in my mind and frequently say, "Why would they do this to us? We've/you've been through so much already. They won't give us a break." Now nearing 6 years of him being active duty, I almost feel broken. The Army and their plans for you and your husband come first and there's nothing you can do about it. It gets to a point where it just beats you down if you try to fight it, and you learn to not ever make plans, book flights or RSVP to something more than a week out. As a Type A person, it has been a real test of my patience. I have turned to behavioral health therapists and books to learn skills to cope with this lifestyle. One of the best practices I have discovered is meditation and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT). DBT has taught me different ways to cope with overwhelming emotions and distress such as Radical Acceptance. (I know I sound like I'm trying to sell/promote something, but I swear this has really helped me!) Radical Acceptance has taught me that whatever the Army demands of us or my husband, it cannot be changed or controlled, and all we can do is accept it and decide how we react. I've always liked having control over where life takes us, but I've

learned to try my best to go with the flow and accept the challenges we face as opposed to fighting or complaining about them.

Her response reveals her inner struggle: She recognized the importance of becoming more flexible, yet she also continued to grapple with her preference to have structure. She recognized that developing a stronger sense of flexibility was effective and necessary, but it had not been a comfortable fit for her. Ultimately, however, she has come to appreciate the important role that acceptance plays in managing frustrations with the lifestyle.

Respondent 171 described herself as a “rough stone” whose edges had been worn down over time through the challenges she had faced in the military lifestyle. While she reported increased resourcefulness in navigating difficulties, her response indicates that this was not necessarily an evolution she had sought out, nor does she think that her new self is without drawbacks:

...Having experienced as many setbacks as I have in being forced to work through them on my own in an unfamiliar environment with little to no [safety net] has improved my agility to solve [problems. It] has increased my [patience] and stamina in difficult situations and I've learned many healthy coping skills and leadership attributes. Over the years I discovered that helping others through the situations I had faced further increased my resilience. [I]n a way it's made me harder. Maybe a little bit more difficult for the average non-military spouse to connect to. I do find my level of empathy for non-military spouses has decreased. I can't bring myself to feel bad with or relate to non-military spouses when they have a small disturbance and completely melt down.

She recognized that, while her empathy has deepened in some ways, in other ways she has become “harder” and less tolerant of those outside the military community.

Self in relation to coping: The positive impact of sense of self on coping. Many women reported that having a strong sense of self was helpful in coping with the challenges of the lifestyle. Certain inherent character traits and knowledge of one's priorities were ways in which a strong sense of self positively affected coping.

A natural fit. Some respondents simply stated that one or more of their inherent personality traits, such as adaptability or independence were a good fit for the lifestyle. Respondent 50, age 38 and married to an enlisted member of the Coast Guard for 7 years, wrote,

My adaptive nature helps me take a new situation and make it work for me. How can I change my outlook on the situation[?]

Respondent 89 had experienced 6 relocations and 2 deployments during 11 years of marriage to an Army officer. After describing her ability to make the best of the situations in which she finds herself, she added,

I feel that I can adapt to most any situation which helps me deal with the constant changes in military life.

Respondent 105 was 30 years old and had been married to an enlisted soldier for 8 years. She holds a Master's degree and was employed full-time at the point of data collection. She elaborated on the role her natural independence has played in her ability to cope with the lifestyle:

I see myself as [a] pretty independent person, so I do believe that has positively impacted the way I cope with things as a military wife. I don't try play the "poor me" or victim card. Everyone has their days where they feel like everything is just "happening to them" but overall I strive to operate independently so I can cope with challenges whether my husband is here, or 6000 miles away.

She recognized that, although she faced instances of discouragement, relying on her independence regularly equipped her to address the demands of the lifestyle whether or not she had to do so on her own.

Know thyself. Knowing one's values and priorities was also helpful in determining what to worry about and what to let go. Knowing one's limits and signs of distress were also reported as key ways in which a strong sense of self was helpful in

coping. Respondent 206 had experienced 4 relocations and 3 deployments during her 10 years of marriage. She summarized the ways in which the balance of knowing herself while staying open to growth has strengthened her ability to cope with the struggles of military life:

There's a quote (that I cannot remember who originally said it), "Know thyself." While I am open to change and keep an open mind about many things, I have a strong sense of who I am as an individual, wife, mother, military spouse, etc. I am steadfast in my moral and ethical beliefs. I feel more than comfortable speaking up if I see that something is wrong. I feel comfortable seeking out the appropriate resources for myself and others when the situation calls for it. I feel as though this lifestyle has certainly given me the strength and confidence to be an independent individual and to be supportive of those in need.

Her strong sense of self enabled her to determine her values and to advocate for what she knows to be right and what is needed for others and for herself.

Self in relation to coping: Selective empathy. A small number of other women felt that they had deepened their ability to empathize with others, although, as with Respondent 171, this empathy did not always extend to those outside the military lifestyle. Respondent 52, 46 years old, had been married to an Army officer for 15 years. She had relocated with him 12 times and had experienced 11 of his deployments. She wrote,

My tolerance for "first world problems" is VERY low. People who knew me before I got married would probably say I have lost a lot of empathy, but the fact is I have become more empathetic, but only for things that truly matter. We have seen real suffering and sacrifice as part of the military community so I tend to have less patience with people who complain about [insignificant] issues.

While she may value the new-found ability to empathize with others, that empathy was developed through witnessing the deep pain and sacrifice of those around her. This newfound empathy was perhaps an unintended consequence of the lifestyle, a trait

developed as a result of her exposure to profound suffering. However, as noted above, the empathy only extends to those facing similar difficulties.

Lived Experiences: Caught Between a Rock and a Hard Place

The high price of adaptive coping. Quite a few women felt an enormous amount of pressure to cope adaptively with the lifestyle in any way possible, either because the consequences were going to be severe if they did not or because they were simply not given a choice in the matter. While their outcomes were positive, those outcomes had not come without feeling the pressure of the potential ramifications of poor coping.

Respondent 190 captured this pressure to cope effectively in order to avoid larger problems:

...When things "crash" in military life, the ramifications can be much more dire and lasting than they would potentially be in a more stable environment. In that way, I feel that there is more pressure to overcome challenges efficiently and quickly because there will be more coming at you and you don't want a buildup of things to deal with.

Respondent 195 succinctly summarized the pressure these women felt to confront challenges when they did not necessarily feel that they were equipped to do so:

Sometimes I may not have the confidence or energy to tackle an obstacle but being in the military more often than not you cannot pull the covers over your head and avoid the situation...

In contrast with those discussed earlier who seemed eager to jump in and figure out solutions, these women felt that they had no choice but to engage in certain coping strategies. Several women were aware that their choice of coping strategies was a trade-off, offering some benefit but not necessarily the best fit for themselves. Nearly all of these responses pointed to an inner conflict around the process of coping, perhaps prompted by the intense pressure these women felt to cope well.

Reluctant self-reliance. For some women, increased self-reliance emerged as a response to necessity rather than out of a sense of pride in one's independence. Quite a few felt forced to rely on themselves because efforts to seek support had been unfruitful or because sources of support were simply not available. Rather than describing their self-reliance in upbeat, positive terms, these women were frustrated that they had been forced to rely on themselves due to the lack of support from others and from the military infrastructure. Several reflected upon ways in which the military had let them down when they had sought information or support. For example, Respondent 165, 46 years old and married for 22 years to an enlisted soldier, had experienced 5 relocations and 5 of her husband's deployments. She felt forced by a lack of support she experienced to rely on herself to manage challenges. However, her frustration was coupled with the decision to ensure that she gets through difficulties:

I have become cynical about many things. I don't count on anything but myself and the resources I have in the moment. I am highly resourceful and competent - can manage just about anything on my own. I have less faith in the decency of other people than I used to. I struggle with burnout. I often feel that the strategies that are in place to support military families are superficial and insincere. When it comes down to it, my success depends on me and no one else. My greatest source of support is other military spouses. In some cases, with the challenges I have faced, I have failed to cope effectively, and it feels like there has been no one in my court to support me through those periods. There is no soft landing. I have to make it for myself. I started out believing that the military was a great organization that presented a lot of benefits, but now I have come to realize that this is only true for certain families in certain situations. It has not been for mine.

The lip service of the military had led her to a place of cynicism and decreased trust in others. While she had managed to overcome the struggles she faced, it had not been a positive experience. Similarly, Respondent 150, who at age 33 had been married for 5 years to an enlisted soldier, had also been moved toward a less trusting state:

Living the military lifestyle has affected the way I cope with the challenges of being a military wife by making me more guarded in my emotions and in my relationships with others. Losing my husband so often to work, training, and deployment, and the lack of emotional support I received during these times, have made me more cautious about getting attached to people, and made me feel like I can only count on myself and have to get through everything alone.

These women had developed a wary determination to persevere. Rather than embracing their independence, they viewed it as a response to the disappointments they had faced. They had seen the negative impact of seeking social support and had enhanced their self-reliance in response. Their perceptions of social support had changed and, while they had grown through the challenges, that growth had not come without a cost.

Sacrifices for self-protection. A few women were conscious of a trade-off in their approach to coping. In other words, they had chosen a coping strategy that worked to a certain extent but had contributed to difficulties in other ways. Specifically, these women had sacrificed certain rewards in order to protect themselves from certain stressors.

Respondent 80 commented that she had consciously given up her career in order to cope more effectively with the lifestyle. In contrast to those who gave up careers because they had been forced to do so by the incompatibility with the lifestyle, she described her choice in terms of trading in her career goals to create a happier lifestyle for herself:

I have let go of some of my independence as well as former career directions because it takes all of my energies to focus on my family and creating a healthier, more relaxed and flexible self.

Even though she holds a Master's degree and had likely made significant investments of time and resources to earn that degree, she appeared to find sacrificing her career necessary to cope effectively with the lifestyle.

Three respondents described coping through purposefully avoiding potentially problematic situations. For example, Respondent 189, age 38 and married to an officer in the Marines for 13 years, indicated that she avoids social gatherings which she anticipates are likely to center on gossiping or arguing. She also described instances in which she felt uncomfortable attending military spouse-related events because she had constantly been questioned about missing previous events or why she and her husband did not have children. She wrote that she had previously tended to “hide behind a fancy job title to answer questions of why [she was] not at spouse events or having children.” This strategy, while potentially preventing her from finding needed social support, also shielded her from stressors that resulted from a tension between her life choices and the cultural norms of having children.

Respondent 186, age 33, elaborated upon her conscious choice to cut herself off socially because she was “sick of making good friends only to have them PCS shortly after meeting them and then lose them in the distance.” She had experienced 4 relocations during 10 years of marriage to an enlisted soldier. While she reported use of active coping strategies, including seeking social support from friends and professional support from marriage counselors and other mental health providers, she still had given up on the possibility of maintaining long-lasting friendships within the military lifestyle. However, rather than continuing to expose herself to the pain of losing friends to relocations, she protected herself by closing herself off:

...I've turned in to a bit of a hermit because it's easier to keep myself together if I don't open the door to opportunities.

The build-up of challenges she faced prompted her to simply avoid adding on to her stress levels. Perhaps an enhanced self-awareness from her experiences with professional

supports enabled her to detect this stressor as something she needed to avoid in order to keep her stress at a manageable level.

Respondent 112 purposefully avoided certain groups of spouses in the military lifestyle as a result of having developed awareness of who would and would not be a good fit for friendship:

...I try not to get too involved with too many people. I'm a natural introvert, and very independent, so while I will get involved and will participate, I don't get too in depth with "those" wives. I have gotten to the age where I can recognize my people, and who I will be friends with and instantly recognize which I will not. That's one way I face challenges. The challenge of making friends...

Perhaps this was an outcome of the 4 relocations and 4 deployments she had experienced during her 7 years of marriage. Though she was only 31 years old, so many upheavals in such a short time may have given her the degree of savvy necessary to assess potential friends so quickly.

Several women felt that they do not fit into the expectations of the lifestyle.

Respondent 37, however, also had a sense of determination not to let this feeling change who she was, explaining,

I know who I was and am now. I don't trust people in general. I fake a smile so I don't ruin anything for my husband. I try but when I see others not returning the effort, I move on. If that means I keep to myself, I do.

While she was willing to play the part of military wife to a certain extent in order to support her husband's career, she was also quick to draw back from those who did not respond in kind. She had resigned herself to tolerating a certain degree of loneliness in order to protect herself from repeating negative outcomes she had experienced during her husband's deployments.

These women traded off the benefits of social support in service of protecting themselves from additional stressors. Self-knowledge enhanced these women's abilities to avoid situations that they anticipated would lead to stress. They had enough experiences and enough insight to recognize that trying to manage such situations was not an effective use of their energy. They were willing to forgo the potential benefits of social support in an effort to minimize negative outcomes for themselves. In other words, they had given up trying to cope with these challenges and had instead moved on to managing resources.

A life of paradoxes. Several women attempted to navigate paradoxes they faced in trying to cope adaptively with the military lifestyle. Some of these contradictions were internal while others occurred in connection with their social environments.

Internal paradoxes occurred when women held conflicting truths about themselves simultaneously. For example, Respondent 16, age 29 and employed part-time, wrote that she had learned to "take things as they come" yet described feeling both independent and "also tied to the military," which, as she indicated, always seemed to win. Respondent 137, age 41 and married to an officer in the Air Force for 13 years, had relocated 4 times and experienced one deployment. After commenting on the difficulty she has in asking for assistance with daily tasks when she is in a new place and does not know anyone, she wrote, "I feel very alone but I am very capable [of] surviving challenges." Her strong sense of self clashed with her intense loneliness.

Respondent 9, age 30, holds a college degree and had been married for 10 years to an enlisted Airman. She had relocated 4 times within those 10 years and described two important dichotomies within herself:

I know who I am pretty well, even if parts of me don't always make sense in relation to each other. I know I can make deep friendships easily, but that I'm terrified of them, because the second I do, we'll move or they will.

Her resolute sense of self existed in conjunction with recognizing that aspects of her personality may not always coexist easily. Additionally, her ability to form strong bonds with others conflicted with her fear of losing those close friends to a military relocation. Moreover, despite having lived the military lifestyle for 10 years, she still experienced these inner paradoxes.

Another paradox that emerged was the experience of specific personality traits both enhancing and hindering one's ability to cope with the lifestyle. For example, Respondent 203, who holds a college degree and was employed part-time, described her stoicism as helpful in terms of being able to manage intense emotions without the need to rely on support from others; however, this tendency also led to difficulty in seeking support from others when it was actually needed. Additionally, Respondent 87 cited her independence as helpful; however, that strong independent streak also seemed to butt against the strictures of the lifestyle. She had been through 11 relocations and 9 deployments during 24 years of marriage to an Army officer and wrote,

I am outgoing and comfortable in my own skin--I believe I have a strong sense of self. This has benefited me in navigating social and volunteer situations as a military wife, but has also sometimes caused friction when my personal values and goals do not align with my military [communities'] expectations for leadership spouses.

Respondent 186 described her strong sense of self as helpful in managing the challenges of the lifestyle but also creating more difficulty:

I am very secure in myself as an individual. Add in my husband and our children and our lifestyle and it becomes a constantly churning whirlpool. I believe my sense of self has helped me, but it also harms as well. I have a strong desire to work and support myself - not rely on my husband to be the sole income earner in

the family. I have a strong desire to work in my field and help others - this is what I went to school for and it hurts to not be able to do that after finding that is what I wanted to do and earning the degree to back it up. I feel knowing that I could support myself outside of our military life, should divorce or injury/ETS¹ happen, is a huge booster to my sense of self. At the same time, it also adds to my sometimes other extreme feelings of worthlessness because I cannot find a job that works with my family, my [husband's] career needs and our current location.

For Respondent 135, self-reliance was useful during certain phases of marriage to a service member but created challenges during others:

More often than not, I feel as though I do better alone. This definitely helps during months long deployments when I have to basically live alone. But in the same sense, it also affects homecoming as I then have to learn to reintegrate and live with another human being who's been gone for 7 to 9 months. It definitely gets weary after a few years and has made me question our relationship and the things I thought my entire life.

These women recognized that certain personality traits served as both assets and hindrances in their coping efforts. Such dualities led to friction, feelings of worthlessness, and questioning of their marriages. They struggled with determining whether such traits ultimately tipped the scales of coping effectiveness toward help or hindrance.

For many women in this sample, coping came with a cost. For example, those who felt compelled to cope adaptively with the lifestyle may not have truly felt the benefits of adaptive coping strategies if they felt backed into coping in these particular ways. In other words, despite generally positive approaches to coping, the feeling of being forced to cope in any given may have undermined any benefit they might have experienced. The same may have held true for those women who encountered paradoxes or who engaged in coping trade-offs: they did not fully enjoy the benefits of coping, yet they did not feel the negative effects fully either.

¹ "ETS" refers to the expiration of a term of service

For most of these women, the experience of living the military lifestyle had an enormous influence on the ways they coped. Growth and awareness of personal strength contrasted with a sense of being beaten down by the experiences and expectations they encountered. Similarly, increased appreciation for social support occurred in contrast with a determination to take care of things on one's own. Inner conflicts and confusion had yet to be untangled. Those who felt compelled to cope in certain ways each appeared to be at different points in their struggles. Some remained somewhat hopeful for positive outcomes while others were still uncertain: would they overcome the challenges they faced, or would, as Respondent 16 noted, the military win?

Summary

The women in this sample faced a wide range of challenges, with the most salient being the unrelenting effects of a husband's deployment; career challenges that created no-win situations and the resulting impact on these women's sense of self; and the difficulty many women had in acculturating to the military way of life. The women in this sample described using many different coping strategies to manage these challenges. These included cognitive reframing and finding new meaning within the challenges of the lifestyle; the need for flexibility in navigating the unexpected twists and turns of the military lifestyle; seeking and providing social support; working toward personal goals in order to distract oneself from stressors; using humor to provide a sense of perspective; building from previous experiences; and exercising self-compassion.

These women also found a sense of self was an important factor in coping with the challenges of the military lifestyle. Specifically, the importance of self-determination;

the relevance of self-reliance; and the importance of an intrinsic motivation to overcome challenges fueled adaptive coping for the women in this sample.

Woven throughout the responses that revealed adaptive coping was a sense of acceptance, agency, determination, and positive thinking. These women jumped in feet first, embracing the challenges they faced and choosing to confront them head-on. They were eager to learn and grow throughout the process and projected a confidence in their ability to rise to the occasion. Moreover, the lens through which these women viewed their coping strategies had an important effect on the way these women viewed themselves and the trajectories of their lives.

Chapter 6. Discussion and Conclusions

Quantitative findings yielded partial support for hypotheses. Well-being was negatively associated with emotion-focused coping but positively associated with problem-focused coping. Emotion-focused coping had significant, positive relationships with achieved identity status and role conflict as well as significant inverse relationships with self-concept clarity and mastery. Problem-focused coping had significant positive relationships with moratorium identity status, self-concept clarity, self-monitoring, and mastery.

Both quantitative and qualitative analyses revealed that respondents utilized a wide range of coping strategies in navigating the challenges of the lifestyle. Many coping strategies described in qualitative responses reflect the subscales of the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997): acceptance, planning, positive reframing, seeking social support, and taking some form of action were cited frequently in the qualitative data as coping strategies used. To a lesser extent, qualitative responses referred to the use of detachment, distraction, venting, humor, and religion. However, noticeably rare or entirely absent were reports of denial, self-blame, giving up the effort to cope, or avoidance via substance use. Moreover, problem-focused coping strategies were described much more frequently than were emotion-focused coping strategies (See Table 4). However, this notable imbalance between reports of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping in the qualitative data does not quite align with the fact that mean scores of both emotion-focused and problem-focused subscales on the Brief COPE were fairly similar.

Interactions between Coping and Well-Being

Quantitative analyses revealed that problem-focused coping correlated significantly with well-being, which indicates that problem-focused coping was more adaptive for this population. In contrast, emotion-focused coping was inversely correlated with well-being, indicating that those coping strategies were not adaptive for the women in this sample. These findings are reflected in the qualitative data in two primary ways: the first is that qualitatively, respondents generally described that problem-focused coping strategies were helpful. The second is that, as noted above, many of the respondents reported using problem-focused coping, either on its own or in addition to emotion-focused coping. Respondents typically felt that problem-focused coping strategies enabled them to rise to the challenge of whatever situations they faced. Many responses reflected a “can-do” spirit as these women described the ways they navigated the various challenges of the lifestyle. These observations support the quantitative findings that problem-focused coping was more adaptive for this sample than was emotion-focused coping.

Several problem-focused coping strategies listed in the Brief COPE (1997) appeared in qualitative data and were particularly helpful for the women in this sample. Acceptance played a major role in adaptive coping for these women. Acceptance manifested as both a conscious act and also as an underlying mindset. It laid the foundation for many of the women to take steps toward addressing the challenges they faced. Planning and taking action were, in turn, also important problem-focused coping strategies for this group. While they might not have been able to change the circumstances in which they found themselves, these women were able to plan for the

consequences of a stressor or to work within their circumstances. Similarly, cognitive reframing was a vital coping strategy for these women, perhaps due to the limited influence they had on their situations. Specifically, the ability to change thoughts about their circumstances offered an important means of addressing problems that could not always be changed concretely. Seeking emotional and instrumental social support was a particularly helpful problem-focused coping strategy, but only when the act of seeking was fueled by a positive view of social support.

Religious coping, humor, and venting were exceptions to the general finding that problem-focused coping was more adaptive. For the most part, qualitative responses indicated that these emotion-focused coping strategies were helpful. Religious coping offered a form of non-concrete social support. Both religious coping and humor served as a way to put challenges into perspective. Specifically, respondents found a sense of comfort and guidance from their religious beliefs. Although the broader coping literature supported placing religious coping with emotion-focused coping strategies (as discussed below), the idea that respondents found comfort from their faith echoes Dimiceli et al.'s (2010) definition of problem-focused coping as coping that goes beyond simply managing the emotions. In addition to the sense of emotional release that laughter likely gave respondents, humor allowed them to reserve more intense feelings for situations that warranted them. Thus, it is possible that, for these women, religious coping and humor served to facilitate the process of cognitive reframing. Venting offered an opportunity for these women to "take the edge off" their feelings so that they could move on with the process of coping. It operated in this sample as a first step in the adaptive coping process.

According to quantitative analyses, 40.1% of respondents fell into “moratorium” identity status, which was significantly and positively related to problem-focused coping. Alternately, the smallest percentage of the sample (15.1%) fell into the “achieved” status, which was correlated only with emotion-focused coping. These data show that a large portion of respondents were coping adaptively while responses from relatively few were associated with use of maladaptive coping strategies. However, no significant relationship existed between the remaining 44.5% of the sample (i.e., those who fell into “foreclosed” and “diffused” statuses) and either type of coping strategy.

Despite the lack of significant relationships between identity status and either emotion- or problem-focused coping strategies for such a large portion of the sample, qualitative analyses showed that, for the most part, these women have coped adaptively over the course of their time in the military lifestyle. This is supported by the relatively high mean score on the well-being subscale: 15.07 out of a possible range of 5-20. Thus, respondents’ descriptions of coping adaptively in the qualitative data are consistent with the high degree of wellbeing they reported on average in quantitative measures.

However, the discrepancy remains that for nearly half the sample, no significant relationship between identity status and either type of coping strategy existed. Several potential explanations for this incongruity exist: One explanation could be the fact that Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) as used in the present study asked respondents to describe coping responses to one situation without asking them to specify either a time frame for that situation or whether the response actually fit respondents’ typical coping strategies. In other words, perhaps respondents were recalling a challenge they had faced long ago, during a time in their lives before they had grown into “achieved” status after exploration

and commitment to a sense of self. Similarly, respondents' actual coping strategies might have evolved since the time of the challenge described on the Brief COPE. For example, respondents might have selected a challenge from the very beginning of their military lives, a time before more adaptive coping mechanisms had evolved. Qualitative responses, then, would reveal a discrepancy with quantitative analyses because the qualitative questions implicitly asked respondents to reflect on the overall impact of the lifestyle and sense of self on coping throughout the duration of their time with the military.

Another potential explanation for the discrepancy might be the specific choice of challenge described on the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997). For example, respondents might have selected a situation specifically because it stood out in some way. Perhaps they recalled the situation as poorly handled or particularly well handled; or they recalled that specific situation because it did not quite align with their normal coping patterns. Selection of such a unique challenge might have contributed to the disagreement. Further elaboration on the potential impact of these factors will be presented in the discussion of the methodology.

Alternately, respondents simply may have had difficulty interpreting and describing their coping as maladaptive in their open-ended responses. Respondents might have felt fairly comfortable simply selecting an option on a standardized measure asking to what extent they engaged in any particular coping strategy, whereas they may have felt less comfortable reflecting on and interpreting the impact of the lifestyle and of the sense of self on coping if that reflection led to a self-assessment that coping responses had generally been maladaptive. As noted by Stone et al. (1998), "retrospective reports may

be more subject to distortion based on participants' beliefs about their coping styles or by their after-the-fact appraisals of their coping" (p. 1678). While a few respondents did acknowledge that they had coped poorly with the lifestyle, perhaps respondents generally had difficulty disclosing coping choices which had turned out badly. These women might have been understandably reluctant to concede having handled situations in a way they did not like.

Achieved status and emotion-focused coping. Quantitative analyses revealed a significant positive relationship between achieved identity status and emotion-focused coping. This finding presents an interesting juxtaposition with the overall picture painted by qualitative analyses as described above, particularly in light of the fact that many women explicitly stated that having a strong sense of self was crucial to coping well with the military lifestyle. However, an examination of qualitative themes provides context for the apparent disparity. Few responses included references solely to emotion-focused coping strategies. Instead, most respondents used a combination of emotion-focused and problem-focused coping techniques (see Table 4). Possibly they knew the importance of using a wide range of coping strategies in order to effectively manage the challenges of this lifestyle. Respondents may have recognized in themselves the need to release emotion or to avoid adding to their stress levels as part of a larger calculus of managing limited emotional resources; indeed, this was borne out in the data, specifically through the themes of "Allowing self-compassion" and "Laughing to keep from crying." To do so would likely require a high degree of self-awareness and the availability of a wide range of coping strategies, as illustrated in the themes of "Know thyself" and "Rolling with the punches."

While emotion-focused coping strategies were reported rarely in comparison to problem-focused coping strategies in the qualitative data, those that were reported most frequently were venting, religious coping, distraction, and humor. Reports of venting included verbalizing frustrations to friends or allowing oneself to express emotions physically. As noted above, venting allowed women to take the edge off of the intense emotions they experienced in order to move on to addressing the matter at hand; they were not stymied by their venting. Several women commented on the need to move past venting and on to dealing with whatever situation they faced. This degree of self-awareness would likely come from an individual who had engaged in much exploration and had a strong commitment to self, as would be the case for women who fell into the achieved category.

Those who reported using religious coping (prayer, participation in a faith community) indicated that the challenges of the lifestyle had strengthened their faith or had led to increased use of this coping mechanism. While respondents did not necessarily state explicitly that a strong sense of self was tied to use of religious coping, certain responses indicated that the two might be linked, which may help to understand the significant relationship between achieved identity status and emotion-focused coping.

The lived experience of making sacrifices for self-protection may also provide context for the relationship between achieved status and emotion-focused coping. Such experiences as described by these women (e.g., avoiding making friends or avoiding certain social situations) may correspond to the strategy of giving up trying to cope, a subscale on the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997). These women were willing to sacrifice the benefits of friendship in order to protect themselves from social disappointments. Such

avoidance was likely an effort to conserve emotional resources, which is a choice that would likely require a strong self-awareness.

Some of the respondents reported use of distraction (e.g., focusing on work, training for a half marathon) as a coping strategy. Perhaps the link between an achieved identity status and this type of emotion-focused coping can be understood through viewing these types of distractions as activities that contributed to a feeling of personal accomplishment or success.

Several women mentioned feeling distressed when they perceived that who they were as a person was not a good fit for the lifestyle. As detailed in the “Military misfits” theme, some felt pressure to fit the ideal image of the military wife while others were careful to present a certain public self that did not always match their internal experiences. Others felt that their personalities were simply not a good match for the demands of the lifestyle. As illustrated in the theme of “A life of paradoxes,” still others were frustrated specifically when they felt that they were not allowed to be themselves in particular social situations; for example, Respondent 87 found that her values did not always match what others in the military community expected from her. This may have led to use of emotion-focused coping strategies as well, particularly for those who endorsed the achieved status. By definition, a person who has an achieved identity status has come to a place of firm commitment after much exploration (Marcia, 1966). Such an individual would be unlikely to try to change who she is in order to fit in, so she might be more likely to try to manage the emotions associated with the situation.

Self-concept clarity, problem-focused coping, and emotion-focused coping.

Self-concept clarity was significantly and positively associated with adaptive, problem-

focused coping and also significantly but inversely associated with emotion-focused coping. Thus, this concept is closely linked with respondents' choices of use of certain coping strategies. While quantitative findings pertaining to the relationship between achieved identity status and choice of coping strategy did not fit easily with themes that emerged from qualitative analyses, the quantitative relationships between self-concept clarity and each subscale of coping strategies dovetailed nicely with qualitative analyses. In order to understand factors which may have contributed to significant findings for self-concept clarity and coping, a dissection and re-examination of such concepts will be presented.

Self-concept clarity is defined as “the extent to which the contents of an individual’s self-concept (e.g., perceived personal attributes) are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and temporally stable” (Campbell et al., 1996, p. 141). In order to understand the influence of self-concept clarity on coping strategies in military spouses, an examination of the role that self-concept itself may have played in these women’s coping will be discussed first.

The basis of self-concept clarity is the self-concept. Epstein (1973) writes that the self-concept is a theory of one’s self and that the primary purpose of that self-theory is “to optimize the pleasure/pain balance of the individual over the course of a lifetime” (p. 407). Epstein (1973) also notes that one major role of a self-concept is to consolidate all of the information from the individual’s life experiences in a way that enables the individual to cope with life’s challenges. He goes on to state that

an individual with an extensive self-theory will have concepts available for coping with a wide variety of situations. He will be aware of more facets of his feelings, abilities, and personality characteristics than an individual with a narrow

self-theory. Accordingly, he should be more flexible and open to new experience (Epstein, 1973, p. 408).

In other words, a rich, complex self-concept fosters adaptive coping through offering the individual many inner resources on which to draw. The women in this sample frequently cited a strong sense of self as vital in coping adaptively. Furthermore, they elaborated on specific ways that strength of self contributed to adaptive coping (e.g., certain inherent traits, the personal evolution that came from living the military lifestyle, developing a sense of perspective, and knowing their priorities). Indeed, several even cited consciously building on life experiences as a means of coping adaptively with the stressors of the lifestyle. These women obviously drew upon the many facets of “feelings, abilities, and personality characteristics” described by Epstein above (1973, p. 408).

While the foundational construct of self-concept may have played a role in adaptive coping for these women, the focus of quantitative analyses was the construct of self-concept clarity. Campbell et al. (1996) describe self-concept clarity as “a characteristic of people’s beliefs about themselves” (p. 141). Again, this definition of self-concept clarity aligns well with qualitative responses from those women who emphasized the importance of a strong sense of self in coping adaptively with the military lifestyle. Not only did many of the women in the sample have rich, complex self-concepts, they were also very clear about what those self-concepts were. Several respondents stated explicitly that they knew who they were – and that they were willing and able to continue evolving and growing, as evidenced in the themes of “Finding new meaning,” and “The positive feedback loop.” Such clarity enabled them to recognize which friends would be a good fit for them, to recognize their needs and limitations, and to recognize which specific strategies would be effective. As reflected in the themes of

“Proud self-reliance” and “Sinking is not an option,” even particular mindsets were shaped by what they had experienced and, by extension, who they were. Thus, those who had a rich, complex self-theory as well as clarity about that self-theory were more likely to have a rich store of inner resources upon which to draw and awareness of what those resources were.

A clear sense of self, particularly when that self was rich and complex, enabled these women to draw on their inner resources to navigate wide-ranging situations in ways that suited their needs and preferences. This clarity of self-concept likely fueled these women’s ability to maintain their self-determination and proud self-reliance, to seek and provide social support, and to truly embrace the mindset that sinking was not an option. Clearly a strong sense of self was necessary for these women to embrace their independence and individual power as they fiercely pushed forward with their lives.

Moratorium and problem-focused coping. Moratorium status had a significant positive relationship with problem-focused coping. In exploring ways that a moratorium identity status might interact with choice of problem-focused coping, one clue presented itself: the potential malleability present among those who fall into the moratorium status. A person who has explored or reflected upon a sense of self but has not yet settled on a firm identity may be better equipped to accept the reality of a challenging situation and subsequently reframe her outlook on that challenge, as illustrated by the theme of “Finding new meaning.” This malleability may have enabled these respondents to alter their perceptions of challenges in order to accept the reality of a situation and shape their responses accordingly. Acceptance also seemed to be the first step in some respondents’ ability to face challenges head-on, whether their next steps were to gather information, to

create a plan, or to find aspects of the situation they could control, as evidenced in data from the “Roll with the punches” theme.

Additionally, the ability to grow and evolve in response to new challenges and to find new meaning may also speak to the importance of the malleability present among those who endorse moratorium status. Because one of the major challenges identified was perceiving a poor fit between oneself and the military culture, perhaps those women who remained open to exploration were able to grow and find new meaning in their lives. Indeed, two of the qualitative themes speak directly to this possibility: “Finding new meaning” and “The positive feedback loop” each illustrate the important role that personal evolution played for these women.

Self-monitoring and problem-focused coping. Quantitative analyses revealed a significant positive relationship between self-monitoring and problem-focused coping. Several women felt a sense of pressure to fit in or to adhere to some sort of standard placed upon them by the military culture. The definition of self-monitoring seems to encompass a sense of going along to get along, as it were. In other words, the very process of self-monitoring might be its own version of coping. For example, several of the women mentioned that they adapt their behavior or emotional expression specifically to address the needs of a situation or to make friends or seek social support. As noted in the qualitative data, Respondent 30 explicitly cites her ability to “schmooze” as crucial to building a network of friends who may be helpful in the future. As described in the “Military misfits” theme, others recognize the impact that their behavior may have on the careers of their husbands and adjusted accordingly. Possibly self-monitoring is a step in the coping process for these women who are placed in new social circumstances, within a

very defined culture, on a regular basis. These women also encounter a wide range of systems, from the spouse social or support groups to the larger military bureaucracy. One can easily see how a person would need to tailor her behavior and affect expression to adjust to the climate around her in order to get her needs met.

Mastery, problem-focused coping, and emotion-focused coping. Mastery was significantly and positively related to problem-focused coping. It was also significantly and inversely associated with emotion-focused coping. Mastery was thus strongly connected with choice of coping strategy for these women. The definition of mastery is “the extent to which one regards one’s life-chances as being under one’s own control in contrast to being fatalistically ruled” (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978, p. 5). The women in this sample who coped adaptively frequently found ways to bring a sense of control to their lives. In particular, the importance of a sense of mastery came through in the themes of “Self-determination,” “Proud self-reliance,” and “Sinking is not an option.” Such intrinsic motivation to cope well and dedication to maintaining agency in their lives were vital to the adaptive coping process for these women.

A strong sense of agency fueled many choices for these women regardless of the particular type of coping strategy they employed. Those women who coped adaptively with the lifestyle had typically made an active choice to engage in the strategies they used. They also found ways to reframe their thoughts about the challenges they faced or to change the way they viewed themselves in relation to the challenges. Moreover, those women who whole-heartedly chose their responses to life’s stressors, those who deliberately reframed challenges as opportunities, those who embraced personal evolution, those who took pride in their self-reliance, and those who intentionally sought

aspects of their lives they could control were those who coped most adaptively with the stressors of the military lifestyle. As illustrated in the themes “Self-determination” and “Proud self-reliance,” these women made their own fates regardless of the circumstances in which they found themselves.

Role conflict and emotion-focused coping. The significant relationship between role conflict and the less adaptive emotion-focused coping seems intuitive, even at face value: the very experience of conflicting roles seems indicative of a problem. However, looking beyond the surface allows another possibility to emerge. Role conflict added a layer of stress to an already challenging way of life for these women. As described in the themes “Catch-22,” for example, the types of conflict described were seemingly intractable: clashes between the immovable force of the military and the roles that were obviously of great importance to these women (e.g., employee). Perhaps this feeling of fighting a losing battle prompted the use of emotion-focused coping in order to alleviate the stress of dealing with a conflict that was unlikely to relent.

While role conflict was significantly associated with emotion-focused coping in quantitative analysis, not everyone who described an experience of role conflict in the qualitative data described use of emotion-focused coping. The reverse was also true. Additionally, even where overlap between the two constructs existed, only a small number of respondents included description of emotion-focused strategies exclusively; rather, several of those who experienced some form of role conflict indicated that they used both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping. Perhaps this is another instance in which a wide range of coping strategies was important. When problem-focused coping was reported in qualitative responses for these women, such strategies included seeking

social support, acceptance, and reframing, all of which would fit with the idea that the problem itself could not be changed but the person's response to it could be. However, three women also reported using more direct problem-solving approaches, including changing to careers that were more compatible with the lifestyle.

General discussion of findings. One perplexing outcome of quantitative analyses was the fact that achieved identity status did not operate in the same manner that high self-concept clarity did. These constructs, while obviously different, were hypothesized to have similar relationships with coping responses in the quantitative analyses. However, self-concept clarity was associated with problem-focused coping while achieved status did not relate to problem-focused coping. Self-concept clarity was inversely associated with emotion-focused coping while achieved identity status was positively associated with emotion-focused coping. The question remains, then, what the specific distinction between an "achieved" identity status and a high degree of self-concept clarity is.

One might assume that an individual who had engaged in a high degree of exploration and had firmly committed to an identity would have a rich self-concept as well as clarity about it. This may not be the case. Perhaps self-concept clarity somehow gives room for flexibility and adaptation in a way that high commitment to an identity does not. What might be the difference between a self-concept that is "clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and temporally stable" (Campbell et al., 1996, p. 141) and an identity status that is high in exploration and high in commitment?

Perhaps the two measures themselves can provide some insight into the differences between these constructs. The Self-Concept Clarity Scale (SCCS; Campbell et al., 1996) is comprised of questions that relate almost exclusively to one's internal

consciousness. Items such as “I spend a lot of time wondering about what kind of person I really am” and “I seldom experience conflicts between the different aspects of my personality” relate entirely to what the person thinks about herself. In contrast, the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ; Balistreri et al., 1995) asks the individual to reflect on her interaction with her external environment. For example, items such as “When I talk to people about religion, I make sure to voice my opinion” and “I have evaluated many ways in which I fit into my family structure” refer more to the person’s engagement with the broader world in an effort to find her place in it. While the EIPQ does have items that assess internal self-reflection, perhaps the external-facing items contribute to the distinction in quantitative analyses. Another potential factor in the differential outcomes could be the type of information each measure is attempting to capture. As indicated by its name, the EIPQ (Balistreri et al., 1995) assesses the process by which individuals come to their respective identity statuses. However, the SCCS (Campbell et al., 1996) is more a measure of individuals’ current states of respective self-concept clarity.

A particularly intriguing finding was the fact that moratorium status and self-monitoring behaved in similar ways in relation to respondents’ choices of coping strategies. Moratorium status is associated with high exploration but low commitment while high self-monitoring is the ability to tune in to social situations and to shape one’s own behaviors in a way that allows the person to fit seamlessly into the moment. Possibly, then, self-monitoring and moratorium could be seen as “two sides of the same coin.” A woman’s attunement and ability to adapt to a wide range of social situations might overlap with her having engaged in a high degree of exploration without

committing to a sense of firm identity. This may also provide a richer understanding of the association of role conflict with emotion-focused coping. In other words, those who are good self-monitors and who have engaged in exploration but not landed on a self may be less likely to experience role conflict because they are not committed to a firm identity; they may not have narrowed themselves into particular roles, or maybe those roles are less central to how they define themselves.

The relationship between role conflict and less adaptive coping may be somewhat intuitive, as role conflict is not an experience typically associated with positive outcomes (Aryee et al., 1999; Coverman, 1989; Hornung et al., 2016; Kulik and Liberman, 2013; Netemeyer et al., 1996). This relationship may shed light on the relationship between achieved identity status and less adaptive coping. Several of those with a strong sense of self bristled at the strictures of the lifestyle. A person with a high level of commitment to an identity might attempt to maintain carefully defined roles, which could lead to increased difficulty (or at least discomfort) with the need for flexibility that this lifestyle demands. Therefore, one could surmise that the converse is also true: those who were more malleable and able to adjust to situations were able to cope more adaptively with the lifestyle.

These potential explanations of the differences between quantitative and qualitative findings highlight the importance of using a mixed-methods approach. Each method of data collection served as a balance for the other, bringing forward important questions and observations that might not have been possible with only one method of data collection and analysis.

Qualitative findings outside of quantitative analyses. Several themes emerged from qualitative analyses that were not directly addressed by quantitative measures. These themes seemed to provide a more nuanced aspects of some of the coping mechanisms measured by the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997). For example, careful selection of friends and sacrifices for self-protection occurred in response to past negative experiences of social support as well as a sense of managing emotional resources. While many respondents described an openness to making new friends and a desire to seek any social support that might be available, several women indicated that they had become more discriminating in deciding with whom they formed friendships. Providing social support to others also emerged as a key aspect of coping for several respondents, which is not captured by the Brief COPE. Women found purpose and meaning in the opportunity to support their peers and smooth the way for those coming after them.

A focus on self-reliance was another frequently cited method of coping in this sample and is not adequately captured by the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997). As noted above, self-reliance was eagerly embraced by many women, but it frequently occurred out of necessity when other forms of support had proven unhelpful. While self-reliance may be akin to the problem-focused subscales of active coping and planning, incorporating the importance of self-reliance in studies of this population provides a more complex way of interpreting the meaning of these subscales, particularly in light of the types of challenges faced by these women.

Situating Findings within the Larger Literature

Coping. Many of the findings from the present study echo the findings of previous research on military spouses. The most frequently occurring overlaps occurred

in three primary areas: the nature of adaptive coping strategies for this population; the impact of the lifestyle on personal development and sense of self; and the lack of adequate support provided by the military.

Much of the literature suggests that, despite facing a wide range of challenges, military wives frequently employ adaptive coping strategies (e.g., Aducci et al., 2011; Braun-Lewensohn & Bar, 2017; Davis et al., 2011; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Robbins, 2002), with coping generally improving as length of time affiliated with the military increases (e.g., Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Padden et al., 2011; Runge et al., 2014; Wood et al., 1995). This is in keeping with the findings of the present study, in which the combination of quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that these women generally feel they have coped adaptively. Additionally, as noted above, giving these women the opportunity to reflect upon the ways in which their coping strategies have evolved over time allowed exploration of the ways in which their coping strategies grew in effectiveness, despite the sense from some respondents of having been somewhat pummeled by the lifestyle.

However, in interpreting these findings, two points of caution are advised: self-selection into such studies as this one may be one driving factor behind the sense that military wives generally cope adaptively (Burrell et al., 2006). Additionally, in light of findings from Blue Star Families (2017) that the impact of the military lifestyle on family members is a primary reason for service members' choice to discontinue military service, perhaps the very population of military wives as a whole is, in a sense, self-selecting. In other words, perhaps those whose husbands stay in the service longer are those women who have managed to cope more adaptively with the lifestyle. This may be especially

true for the present sample since inclusion criteria required that husbands of respondents had served at least five years in the military.

In keeping with the broader literature on coping, problem-focused coping strategies were found to be more adaptive for this sample (e.g., Baltes et al., 2010; Ben-Zur, 2002; Billings & Moos, 1984; Braun-Lewensohn & Bar, 2017; Brown et al., 2005; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Dolphin et al., 2015; Hornung et al., 2016; Li et al., 1999; Mattlin et al., 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1986; Menaghan, 1982; Padden et al., 2011; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Roger et al., 1993). Specific coping strategies frequently reported in both the present study and in the literature on military spouses' coping include the use of acceptance, positive thinking, and reframing (e.g., Blakeley et al., 2014; Braun-Lewensohn & Bar, 2017; Davis et al., 2011; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Dolphin et al., 2015; Mulvey, 2008; Padden et al., 2011; Patterson & McCubbin, 1984; Robbins, 2002; Runge et al., 2014; Wood et al., 1995). Planning was also cited in the present study and in the literature as an adaptive coping strategy (e.g., Dolphin et al., 2015; Lapp et al., 2010; Marnocha, 2012). The importance of social support arose frequently in current findings as it does in the literature (e.g., Aducci et al., 2011; Blakeley et al., 2014; Davis et al., 2011; Green et al., 2013; Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Lapp et al., 2010; Nichols et al., 2013; Robbins, 2002; Ross, 2016; Runge et al., 2014; Wood et al., 1995). These coping mechanisms may be so prominent in this population because of the important role they might play in dealing with the stressors associated with major life changes, even when so many of which are not in the person's control. For example, acceptance of a deployment or relocation may be the only real option for these women, as they are unlikely to be able to prevent these changes from taking place. However, they are able to begin planning for

and around the upheaval that such changes will inevitably cause. As noted by respondents, while they may not be able to change circumstances, they may be able to change the way they think about them and prepare for them. Seeking social support may assist them in this process, as it may enable them to determine what resources are available to them. Similarly, seeking emotional support from others may enable these women to see reframe a challenge. As Pearlin and Schooler (1978) note, seeking social support may set the person on the path of determining next steps in the coping process. Moreover, despite the uncontrollable nature of so many of the stressors they faced, the women in this sample frequently found ways to address the “offshoot” challenges in a direct manner.

Alternately, two emotion-focused coping strategies emerged in both the present study and the literature of coping in military spouses as pieces of the larger coping landscape for these women: judicious use of venting as a coping strategy (Davis et al., 2011; Lapp et al., 2010) as well as use of distraction or staying busy to cope with deployments (e.g., Davis et al., 2011; Lapp et al., 2010; Marnocha, 2012; Wood et al., 1995). As discussed previously, these strategies provided a sense of release and an opportunity to redirect attention away from a stressor to something more positive.

The impact of living the military lifestyle produced a sense of personal growth and an enhanced sense of self for many of the respondents. This is a theme that occurs in other research on this population (e.g., Aducci et al., 2011; Blakeley et al., 2014; Davis et al., 2011; Marnocha, 2012; Robbins, 2002; Runge et al., 2014; Wood et al., 1995). Additionally, the importance of self-reliance and autonomy appears often in the literature (Aducci et al., 2011; Lapp et al., 2010; Patterson & McCubbin, 1984; Robbins, 2002;

Wood et al., 1995). The frequency of such findings may provide additional insight into the fact that nearly half of the present sample fell into the “moratorium” identity status; a sense of growing and adapting and maintaining flexibility are important factors in coping with the lifestyle across studies. Moreover, findings from the broader literature on coping among military wives as well as those from the current study suggest that these women generally feel that they come away from challenges stronger and more independent.

Identity status. As noted above, the most frequently endorsed identity status was moratorium with 40.1% of the present sample falling into this category. Foreclosed status was next with 26.7% of the sample endorsing this identity status. The remainder of the sample was fairly evenly split between diffused status (17.8%) and achieved status (15.3%). Thus, in keeping with the theoretical foundations laid out by Balistreri et al. (1995), 42% of the sample indicated that they have settled firmly on a sense of identity while 58% indicated they had not yet done so. Alternately, considering the combination of “achieved” and “moratorium” statuses indicate that 55.4% of respondents have at least explored options for a sense of self, whether or not they have firmly embraced who they are. Fewer than 20% of respondents indicated they had neither explored nor confirmed a sense of who they are.

The proportional breakdown of respondents into each of the four categories is different from the breakdown reported in Schwartz, Mullis, Waterman, and Dunham, (2000). In that study of two samples of mostly female undergraduate students (N=113 and 196), a comparable percentage of respondents endorsed the achieved identity status (19.5% and 15.1%, respectively). However, a larger portion fell into foreclosed status (25.7% and 41% for each sample, respectively). Just over 26% and 16% endorsed

moratorium status, a much smaller percentage than the present sample. Just over 28% and 27.8%, respectively, endorsed the diffused status, a higher proportion of their sample. The differences are somewhat striking, given that the present sample is likely a good deal older than the two samples of undergraduate students; one would, therefore, have expected a larger proportion of respondents to fall into the achieved identity status. However, respondents in the current sample are potentially more likely to have had a wider range of experiences, thus explaining the greater degree of exploration than respondents from Schwartz et al. Additionally, the adaptive nature of maintaining a flexible sense of identity for the present sample may have contributed to the disparity between them and the sample from Schwartz and colleagues.

Self-concept clarity. Means for the SCCS (Campbell et al., 1996) are not reported frequently in the literature. However, Campbell et al. did report the means on the scale for each sample of undergraduate students they utilized in assessing the psychometric properties of the measure. As noted above, participants were asked to take the measure more than once over the course of several months in order to measure test-retest reliability. While the measure produced good reliability over time, the authors comment on the fact that mean scores decreased with each exposure to the scale. Mean scores were as follows: Sample 1a: $M=41.67$ ($SD=8.11$); Sample 1b: $M=39.27$ ($SD=8.49$); Sample 1c: $M=38.25$ ($SD=8.23$). Thus, despite the difference in average age between the two groups, the mean of the present sample is comparable to the highest mean score in Campbell et al. (1996). This is not surprising in light of findings from qualitative analysis.

Mastery. Mean scores on the Mastery Scale (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978) are not reported frequently in the literature. Aycock (2011) reported a mean score of 27.10 ($SD=5.4$) on the Mastery scale (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978) in a sample of undergraduate students, much higher than the mean for the current study. The mean score for the present sample was 20.0498 ($SD= 4.08$). Despite the fairly high mean score on the Mastery Scale and the sense of agency that emanated so strongly from qualitative responses in the present sample, the mean score from Aycock's sample was still much greater. This difference is interesting and could perhaps be explained by the differences in age and life experience between a group of undergraduate students and a group of military wives.

Military wives. A striking observation is that the experiences of the military spouse community do not seem to have changed much at all from studies conducted as long as 30 years ago (e.g., Patterson & McCubbin, 1984). In addition, the inadequate support provided by the military was a concern that arose in the present study as well as findings from several recent studies (e.g., Blakeley et al., 2014; Green et al., 2013; Ross, 2016; Runge et al., 2014). As Green et al. (2013) comment,

It deserves to be said that the military provides considerable programming and support for families...The military has also demonstrated an awareness of family needs through different referendums and calls for policy and programming. The findings from this study then are perhaps even more striking given the existence of these support effort...Collectively, these findings argue the value of increasing the effectiveness of supports, both formal and informal (p. 764).

Indeed, as recently as 2011, the Obama administration sponsored an interagency report focused on identifying and addressing the needs of military families (Interagency Policy Committee [IPC], 2011). Despite these efforts, however, findings from the present study lend credence to their recommendation that improved effectiveness of military

programming is warranted, particularly in light of respondents' perceptions that they frequently only rely on themselves to address their challenges.

Generalizability of Sample

Sample characteristics. The Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense's (DoD; 2016) data indicate that the mean age for military spouses across branches is 31.5 years, slightly younger than the mean in the current sample. Members of the present sample are also older on average than other samples from comparable studies (e.g., Dimiceli et al., 2010; Dolphin et al., 2015; Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Klodnicki, 2015; Padden et al., 2011). This is not surprising, given that inclusion criteria excluded participants whose marriages were less than 5 years at the time of survey completion. DoD data does not provide information on race/ethnicity of military spouses, but findings in this regard from other studies are somewhat comparable. For example, percentages of respondents identifying as Caucasian in other studies of this population range from 66% to 80% with percentages of other ethnicities broken down differently within each study (Dimiceli et al., 2010; Dolphin et al., 2015; Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Klodnicki, 2015; Padden et al., 2011).

The breakdown of officer/enlisted spouse in the current sample does not reflect the composition of the military as reported by the DoD's most recent demographics report (2016). The total Active Duty population is 82.3% enlisted (N=1,070,653) and 17.7% officer (N=230,790). 51.1% of enlisted service members are married while 69.6% of officers are married. Therefore, 77.3% of married Active Duty service members are enlisted and 22.7% of married Active Duty service members are officers (Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, 2016). DoD data does not break down

percentages of enlisted/officer marriages according to gender, but overall 87.1% of married Active Duty service members are male (Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, 2016). Therefore, precise comparisons of the breakdown between officer/enlisted in the current sample to the Active Duty population are not possible.

DoD (2016) does, however, offer breakdowns by gender according to branch of service. Overall, 40.6% of male married service members are in the Army; 23.3% of male married service members are in the Navy; 12.2% of male married service members are in the Marines; 24% of male married service members are in the Air Force. The present sample is therefore fairly representative of the proportion of male service members who are married (See Table 1).

Employment rates among the current sample were similar to those described elsewhere. For example, DoD (2016) data indicates that 41% of military spouses were employed either part-time or full-time in the civilian sector (i.e., non-dual military couples). Thirty-four per cent of spouses in DoD data were neither employed nor looking. Twelve per cent reported they were not employed but were seeking employment. DoD data did not include responses of “student” or “retired” in its report. (See Table 1.) Blue Star Families (2017) found that 47% of respondents who identified as military spouses were employed either full- or part-time while 28% were unemployed but seeking work. Twenty-six per cent of their sample was not employed but not looking for work. Blue Star Families does not report data for those who identify as students or those who specifically identify as retired.

DoD (2016) does not provide information about military spouses’ education levels. However, education levels in the current sample are generally higher than samples

in previous studies (e.g., Dimiceli et al., 2010; Dolphin et al., 2015; Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Klodnicki, 2015; Padden et al., 2011) and may not be representative of the broader military wife population.

Several important limitations of comparing the sample in the present study to the data compiled from the Department of Defense (2016) exist. One is that the present sample specifically limited participation to those wives whose husbands had served in the military for at least 5 years during the time of their marriage; DoD data includes marriages of all lengths and all lengths of military service in its data. Another limitation is that DoD data includes dual-military marriages while the present sample does not. DoD data also does not report education or employment rates among military spouses according to gender identification or sexual orientation, so its percentages include male spouses of female service members, male spouses of male service members, and female spouses of female service members. Additionally, DoD data only includes those currently serving whereas the present sample includes wives of Active Duty service members as well as spouses of service members who retired within the last 3 years. However, situating sample characteristics among DoD findings along with samples from other studies may provide a fuller assessment of the generalizability of current findings.

Strengths and limitations

Sampling strategies. Due to the requirement that participants' husbands had served at least 5 years in the military, the sample may be biased toward those whose husbands are/were "career" military rather than those who serve for shorter periods of time. This may have left out an important portion of the wives of service members. Despite this limitation, the segment of the population who are married to "career" service

members is perhaps more likely to feel the effects of the lifestyle; thus, the findings of the present study are likely to be more applicable to those women. Additionally, findings from this study are not necessarily generalizable to women who are married to members of the National Guard/Reserves. Findings from this study are also not generalizable to women who have divorced from service members.

Monette et al. (2014) note that snowball sampling will likely exclude those members of a population who do not actively participate in the social interactions of that group (e.g., military wives who do not attend unit-sponsored events, those who do not have friends in the military community, etc.). Another limitation of this recruitment technique was that the sample contained a disproportionate number of officers' wives, as the current researcher is acquainted mainly with women who fall into this category. Wives of officers comprised 51.5% of the sample while wives of enlisted service members comprised 48.5%. As noted above, this does not reflect the composition of the military as reported by the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense's most recent demographics report (2016).

The internet-based recruitment strategies limited the sample somewhat to individuals who have access to the internet and were technologically savvy (Klodnicki, 2015; Sadeh & Karniol, 2011). However, according to the Pew Research Center (2018), approximately 90% of Americans use the internet. Additionally, those who have joined Facebook pages and those who visit websites or read magazines geared toward military spouses were likely socially connected to the military community in some way; recruitment via these channels did not allow for participants who were disconnected from the military community. Recruitment via public posting of flyers and the interview

published in the magazine may have addressed the limitations associated with access to the internet. Posting flyers and recruiting via craigslist.org may both have captured responses from women who were less connected to the military community. An important limitation for each of these recruitment techniques is the fact that the researcher was not able to measure response rate. The varied nature of the recruitment methods, however, were efforts to yield a large, diverse sample, in which the study was successful.

Quantitative measures. For the present study, the researcher had to determine which item pairs on the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) would be grouped into each of the two broader categories of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. Carver does not provide guidance on this matter. However, he does include theoretical rationale and empirical evidence from his development of both the Brief COPE and the full-length COPE (Carver et al., 1989) to classify most of the subscales into two broader groups. He refers to the groups as more adaptive and less adaptive. Factor analyses indicated that the substance abuse, behavioral disengagement, denial, self-blame, venting, self-distracting, and religion subscales should be categorized together and as less adaptive (Carver, 1997; Carver et al., 1989). Active coping, planning, and positive reframing loaded onto one factor (what Carver [1997] terms adaptive).

While Carver (1997) was easily able to categorize most of the subscales on the Brief COPE into two categories, a few of the subscales were less clearly classified. For example, the two items on the acceptance subscale loaded onto two different factors. One loaded onto its own factor while the other loaded onto active coping with a “strong secondary loading” on acceptance (Carver, 1997, p. 97). Despite this ambiguity in

developing the Brief COPE, an exploratory analysis of the full-length COPE (Carver et al., 1989) had revealed that acceptance was correlated with active coping, planning, and positive reinterpretation. In a second-order factor analysis it loaded with positive reinterpretation again. Therefore, the present researcher grouped it with the other adaptive coping subscales. Interestingly, Carver makes no mention of where the humor subscale should be placed, either theoretically or empirically. The present author determined that humor is used to distance oneself from emotions associated with a problem, so it was placed with those items Carver deemed less adaptive. Finally, the seeking emotional support and seeking instrumental support subscales both loaded onto one factor but were not clearly associated with either the more or less adaptive clusters. Carver describes these subscales as seeming to bridge the gap between the more and less effective coping categories, theorizing that their effectiveness may depend even more heavily on the situation in which they are utilized than the other subscales. In the original COPE, a 2nd order factor analysis placed them on a factor with the "focusing on and venting emotion subscale." However, a review of the coping literature resulted in the author's decision to place both seeking social support subscales with the problem-focused coping mechanisms, as described below.

Because of the ambiguity surrounding placement of social support items onto either subscale, the researcher considered removing these items from the analyses. Additionally, ambiguity exists regarding whether social support should be considered a coping strategy or considered to be coping assistance (Thoits, 1986). Certainly an important distinction exists between the construct of social support *per se* and the act of seeking social support as a coping strategy: "social support might be usefully

reconceptualized as coping assistance, or the active participation of significant others in an individual's stress management efforts" (Thoits, 1986, p. 417). Others differentiate between the act of seeking social support and social resources such as the number of supports a person has, the frequency of contact with those supports, and the closeness and quality of those relationships (Aycock, 2011; Billings & Moos, 1984; Thoits, 1995). However, while Thoits defines social support as coping assistance, she and others (e.g., Pearlin et al., 1981) also point to the overlap in functioning between social support and coping strategies such that the two are frequently used in tandem. Theoretical arguments exist to support classifying the act of seeking various forms of social support as coping rather than as a construct on its own. For example, Pearlin and Schooler (1978) argue that seeking advice "may be seen as responses potentially preparatory to acting on the situation" (p. 6). After a careful review of the coping literature, the present researcher chose to include the seeking emotional support and seeking instrumental support subscales in the analysis because they pertain to the respondents' choice of strategy to pursue social support rather than the support itself.

After deciding to include seeking social support as an act of coping, the question remained as to whether seeking social support should be categorized along with emotion-focused coping, problem-focused coping, or separated and analyzed as its own subset of coping strategies. Empirical evidence exists to support the idea of removing social support from groupings with other strategies. For example, in factor analysis, social support-related subscales frequently loaded onto their own factors (e.g., Amirkhan, 1990; Carver, 1997; Carver et al., 1989; Scheier et al., 1986). However, despite these separate loadings, social support items also loaded onto other coping factors (e.g., Ben-Zur &

Zeidner, 1996; Roger et al., 1993) or were associated with items deemed to be either problem-focused or emotion-focused (e.g., Baker & Berenbaum, 2007; Carver et al., 1989; Mattlin et al., 1990; Scheier et al., 1986). This ambiguity prompted consideration as to where seeking social support should be placed within the analyses.

Amirkhan (1990) offers a potential explanation for instances in which social support loads onto its own factor: “The strategy of Seeking Support seems to tap a primal need for human contact in times of duress, for reasons beyond whatever material aid, advice, or distraction that contact might provide” (p. 1073). However, this rationale is in keeping with Dimiceli et al.’s (2010) definition of problem-focused coping which includes actions “whose value exceeded merely reducing distress” (Dimiceli et al., 2010, p. 357). This definition supports the present researcher’s choice to include seeking social support with problem-focused coping.

Another argument for creating a separate category of social support was that the effectiveness of any attempt to obtain support relies on the response of the other person or entity as well as the availability of potential supports (Amirkhan, 1990; Mattlin et al., 1990; Scheier et al., 1986; Thoits, 1986). While this is an important point, one could certainly make the same argument for any coping strategy. For example, the effectiveness of creating a plan to address a stressor is contingent upon whether the plan can be or actually is carried out. Attempts to restructure the way one thinks about a challenge may or may not actually work. These different outcomes underscore the importance of viewing coping as a situational transaction and measuring the outcome of the efforts separately from the efforts themselves (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1993), as in the present study. In other words, inherent in this approach to

coping is the potential that any strategy may or may not be effective for a given situation. Therefore, the author did not view this argument as justification for removing seeking social support from the analysis.

The coping literature suggests that the groupings of the subscales described above reflects the general classification of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. Dimiceli et al. (2010), in particular, comment on the difficulty of placing seeking social support and positive reframing into one or the other groupings. However, basing their groupings on “the most commonly used supersets” in the literature, they categorized subscales on the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) according to the following definitions: problem-focused coping included “strategies used to directly address the stressful situation or whose value exceeded merely reducing distress” (Dimiceli et al., 2010, p. 357). Emotion-focused coping included “strategies used to reduce or manage one’s emotional reaction and feelings of distress” (Dimiceli et al., 2010, p. 357). The present researcher used these definitions to guide placement of items which did not have clear empirical support for categorization from Carver (1997) or Carver et al. (1989).

Understanding the limitations of coping measures in general is key in identifying the ways in which a study can compensate for those limitations. Coyne and Racioppo (2000) identify numerous limitations to the use of coping checklists. One primary concern is asking participants vague questions about the coping mechanisms they use for a poorly defined scenario. Coyne and Racioppo (2000) note that questions as broad as “How do you cope with cancer?” are frequently used in studies on coping (p. 657). While the present study did use a coping checklist, the items on the list were very specific, and the participants were asked to identify a particular instance of stress they had personally

experienced during their association with the military lifestyle. This approach is similar to that used by Mattlin and colleagues (1990), who asked respondents to identify a series of stressful events that they had experienced during the previous 12 months and then to select which particular situation they had experienced as the most stressful. An important distinction between that approach and the one of the current study was that in the present investigation participants were not asked to identify the most stressful situation they had experienced. Rather, participants were simply instructed to select one stressful experience. While each participant may have selected the experience she viewed as most stressful, this approach also allowed for the possibility of selecting a challenge for other reasons (e.g., a challenge they felt they had managed effectively, a challenge they felt they had handled poorly, a challenge that was still distressing them, etc; Thoits, 1995).

Another important limitation of the present study was the use of retrospective reflection on coping strategies used. Coyne and Racioppo (2000) note that using this method does not allow the direction of the relationship between degrees of distress and coping strategies reported to be determined. They argue that, for example, emotion-focused coping strategies are frequently associated with higher degrees of distress; however, the lack of directionality means that generating meaning from such findings is nearly impossible (Coyne & Racioppo, 2000). The authors posit that if a stressful situation did not lead to emotional distress, one would not need to employ emotion-focused coping strategies. Thus, presence of a relationship between the two does not necessarily imply that it is the emotion-focused coping which led to negative affect; rather, the negative affect is quite possibly what precipitated the use of the emotion-focused coping. The present study sought to address this limitation through its use of a

wellbeing measure. As noted above, participants who coped effectively with stressors presumably reported higher degrees of wellbeing. Thus, the retrospective nature of the study was actually a benefit because it allowed for enough time away from the stressor/implementation of coping to assess more accurately the direction of the relationship (i.e., whether the coping strategies were adaptive, thus leading to higher degrees of wellbeing later on; Mattlin et al., 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1986). Indeed, both quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that many of these women coped adaptively.

A second limitation associated with retrospective accounts of coping strategies is their potential for inaccuracy (Stone et al., 1998). For example, participants in a study examining the accuracy of retrospective accounts of coping strategies compared to concurrent recording of employed coping strategies either over- or under-endorsed a wide range of coping methods used (Stone et al., 1998). A sample of primarily White, employed, married, middle-aged participants were more likely to under-report use of cognitive coping techniques (e.g., diverting attention from a stressor) and over-report use of behavioral coping strategies (e.g., identifying and following a plan to address a problem). Overall, an average of 30% of the participants under-reported use of coping strategies; similarly, an average of 30% of participants over-reported use of coping strategies (Stone et al., 1998).

While concurrent reports of coping strategies may yield more accurate data about the precise number and type of coping strategy used, such a technique would not allow for exploration of whether those coping strategies were adaptive. In other words, reporting of moment-to-moment instances of coping during the stressor would not allow for the exploration of the outcome associated with those coping techniques. Indeed, Stone

and colleagues (1998) note that they are not asserting that one means of assessment in the area of employed coping strategies is superior to the other; rather, they state that the aims of each inquiry should guide the selection of assessment tool. They argue, for example, that retrospective assessments of coping may be better suited to research in which information about the outcome of the stressor plays an important role. Certainly an average of 30% inaccuracy is noteworthy; however, in keeping with Stone et al.'s recommendations, the broader aims of the present study (i.e., determining whether a coping tool is adaptive in the long-term) necessitated the use of retrospective reflection.

Another limitation associated with retrospective coping checklists is the range of stressors participants may utilize in their reports of coping (Coyne & Racioppo, 2000). While the present study did not specify one particular type of stressor for participants to assess, the researcher did narrow the field of inquiry to stressors associated with the military lifestyle. Identifying one specific situation which all study participants have experienced would have been nearly impossible, and even if the researcher could identify such a situation, not all of the participants would necessarily perceive it as stressful. Thus, narrowing the choice to a range of experiences was the most appropriate means of assessing adaptive coping within a particular group. An additional benefit of this approach was that it allowed the researcher to gain insight into the wide range of challenges that respondents had faced. This approach yielded information that will likely be useful in driving future research as to what experiences military wives actually find stressful.

To date, no measure of role conflict has been created that would adequately capture the potential impact of role conflict as it manifests among military wives. The

researcher therefore created a measure for the study. One strength of doing so was the ability to incorporate concepts directly pertinent to the population. However, the measure was not normed on any samples; therefore, no comparisons to other samples are possible.

As noted above, while providing the researcher with important information about correlations between identity status and coping strategies, the EIPQ (Balistreri et al., 1996) may not be the most appropriate measure for determining the degree to which military wives experience an adequate sense of self. The literature on identity typically holds that a healthy, mature sense of identity is characterized by a strong sense of self-continuity as well as the ability to adjust as needed to a given situation (e.g., Beaumont & Pratt, 2011; Ickes et al., 2012; Luyckx et al., 2012; Marcia, 1966; Robbins, 2002; Sands, 1996; Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003). This assumption did not necessarily hold true for the present sample. An achieved identity status, typically considered to be the most mature, was associated only with emotion-focused coping, while moratorium status was associated with the more adaptive problem-focused coping. This latter finding is in keeping with Grotevant and Adams (1984).

Several factors may account for this finding. First, psychometric measures are founded on theories, and theories are products of the times in which they were created (Applegate, 2000). The measures used in the present study each assume the Western ideal of prizing individuality, and one of the measures explicitly cites Erikson's (1963) theory of the development of ego identity as its theoretical foundation. Both the strengths and the limitations of these theories have been carried forward in subsequent theoretical writings and development of scales if they were not addressed. Berzoff (2011) identifies the implicit gender assumptions present in Erikson's theories (e.g., a woman's identity is

only fulfilled once she is married). The researcher was mindful of these assumptions and sought to counteract them through the use of qualitative data collection in order to enable the participants to provide their thoughts and opinions about the constructs in their own words. However, it is possible that gender assumptions may have affected the quantitative outcomes in the present study.

Another potential explanation of the poor fit between the measures and the population studied may be due to the unique needs of the military population. In particular, the items used to measure commitment on the EIPQ (Balistreri et al., 1996) may not necessarily translate well to the military community. For example, asking a military wife whether she has definitively decided on the occupation she wants to pursue may not be applicable if she knows that she is unlikely to have a steady career. Similarly, a military wife's decision to alter her vocational goals may not necessarily reflect a lack of commitment; rather, such alterations may simply be an adaptive coping response to the employment challenges she faces, as evidenced in respondents' descriptions of no-win situations detailed under the "catch-22" theme.

Expecting a military wife to hold fast to strong political opinions may be unrealistic, especially since so much of her life may be dictated by political decisions at high levels (e.g., a decision for the nation to go to war or decisions about veteran benefits). Furthermore, measuring commitment in military wives by asking them how willing they are to voice their opinions about topics such as religion may not be adequate since they are so frequently thrust into social situations with people they barely know. This may be in keeping with the idea that self-monitoring is a valuable personality trait or

even an adaptive skill set for this population because they may need to determine whether such opening would be well-received by those around them.

Asking a military wife to view family roles consistently may be inappropriate, given that role shift is a major aspect of the deployment cycle (Aducci et al., 2011; DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Drummet et al., 2003; Faber, Willerton, Clymer, MacDermid, & Weiss, 2008; Lapp et al., 2010; McCullah, 1978, cited in Robbins, 2002; Park, 2011; Patterson & McCubbin, 1984; Robbins, 2002; Verdeli, Baily, Voursora, Belser, Singla, & Manos, 2011; Wood et al., 1995) and that the ability to “roll with the punches” is so important to coping with the lifestyle, as evidenced by qualitative findings from the present study. Military wives may have difficulty describing the type of marital relationship that is best for them if their husband is constantly in and out of the home. Furthermore, the traditional gender role expectations of the military may create confusion or lack of clarity around the way respondents feel men and women “should” behave.

Many respondents mentioned shifting priorities or an enhanced sense of perspective, as captured in the theme “Positive effects of the military lifestyle on coping,” which is reasonable given the emotional intensity associated with the military lifestyle; when one’s life is in a constant state of flux because of relocations and deployments, issues that are important today may not be important the following week. Similarly, a military wife wouldn’t necessarily expect to seek the same qualities in a friend throughout her life since, as qualitative analyses revealed, what she needs from friends is likely to change so drastically depending on location and other events happening at any given time. Despite these concerns, however, the use of the EIPQ (Balistreri et al., 1996)

yielded important findings, particularly in combination with qualitative data: the role that malleability and openness to growth may play in adaptive coping for these women.

Methodology. One limitation of a cross-sectional design is its inability to identify causal relationships (Aryee et al., 1999; Baruch & Barnett, 1986; Bearon, 1989; Ben-Zur, 2002; Billings & Moos, 1984; Buda & Lenaghan, 2005; Campbell et al., 2003; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Frazier et al., 2011; Higgins et al., 2010; Karney & Crown, 2007; Kulik & Liberman, 2013; Lenaghan & Sengupta, 2007; Lester et al., 2010; Marks & MacDermid, 1996; Mattlin et al., 1990; Matud, 2004; McCrae & Costa, 1986; Netemeyer et al., 1996; Padden et al., 2011; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Pearson, 2008; Ruderman et al., 2002; Smith & Dust, 2006; Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003; Strine et al., 2008). Additionally, the use of this design did not permit the researcher to examine the relationships among the variables over time, as a longitudinal study would (Aryee et al., 1999; Beaumont & Pratt, 2011; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Higgins et al., 2010; Klodnicki, 2015; Kulik & Liberman, 2013; Mattlin et al., 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1986; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Westhuis et al., 2006).

Several aspects of the study's design sought to mitigate these limitations. First, use of cross-sectional data that examines present functioning alongside past coping strategies may enable the researcher to infer some degree of causality (Mattlin et al., 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1986). McCrae and Costa (1986) justify the use of cross-sectional data as follows: "Because the assessment of well-being came at the end of the year in which events had occurred...it might be seen as an index of how successfully they had coped" (p. 391). While no specific time limit was placed for participants in this study, the directive on the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) instructed participants to consider

a challenge they had faced in the past rather than one they were presently managing. A drawback to this reasoning was the possibility that stressors other than the ones selected by each respondent may have had a more notable effect on the person's wellbeing at the time of data collection (McCrae & Costa, 1986).

The collection of qualitative data from participants was an additional effort to compensate for the limitation of lack of longitudinality. The data collected in this manner allowed the researcher to discern some degree of directionality among the variables. For example, the open-ended questions used in this survey asked participants to reflect upon their experiences throughout their time in the military lifestyle, which yielded temporally contextualized data. Indeed, as noted above, this led to a richer examination of the interactions between quantitative and qualitative findings.

General limitations of the data collection method include the following: Self-reports did not allow for triangulation of other perspectives (e.g., reports from family members, direct observation) and were subject to the limitations of participants' self-awareness, accuracy, and willingness to disclose pertinent information (Billings & Moos, 1984; Dimiceli et al., 2010; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Kulik et al., 2015; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Matud, 2004; Shedler, Mayman, & Manis [cited in Sneed & Whitburne, 2003]; Smith & Dust, 2006; Stone et al., 1998). Despite these limitations, however, self-report data collection was the most appropriate method for obtaining information about variables pertaining to dispositional traits and internal experiences of participants (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lenaghan & Sengupta, 2007; Luyckx et al., 2012).

Another limitation was that anonymity of participants precluded any follow-up from the researcher after collection of data; nonetheless, the researcher views the

anonymity of participants as paramount in collecting the data, as this protected not only their own privacy, but may have allayed any fears that responses might have negative effects on their service member husbands (Klodnicki, 2015). This presumably higher comfort level may have led to more honest and thorough responses from participants.

One limitation of including open-ended questions at the end of a quantitative study was the inability of the researcher to determine why participants may have chosen not to answer these questions (Runge et al., 2014), particularly in an anonymous study that did not allow for any follow-up from the researcher. Despite this concern, previous studies provide data which supported the assumption that many or all participants would complete these questions, thus providing rich data (e.g., Dimiceli et al., 2010; Runge et al., 2014). Indeed, in the present study, only 24 of 202 respondents (11.88%) chose to leave at least one of the open-ended questions completely unanswered. Only 9 participants (4.46%) chose to leave both open-ended questions completely unanswered. Additionally, the usefulness of the rich data obtained from the open-ended questions compensated for this limitation.

While adding in the longitudinal nature of the open-ended questions helped address the limitations of cross-sectional data, doing so may have created an additional limitation in the form of a disparity between quantitative and qualitative data, as previously described. This limitation might have been addressed in a few ways: the researcher might have asked respondents to specify the time frame in which the challenge reported on the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) had occurred. Additionally, the researcher might have asked respondents to recall a challenge faced during a specific time frame (e.g., more recently). The first might have given the researcher an additional means of

capturing the changes that occurred in the sample over time. The latter might have yielded a different proportional breakdown in terms of relationship between identity status and type of coping.

Findings highlight the debate within the coping literature around whether coping strategies tend to be more situational or more dispositional (Ben-Zur & Zeidner, 1996; Carver et al., 1989; Lazarus, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The discrepancy between quantitative and qualitative findings from this study seem to support the idea that coping is more situational than dispositional. However, this does not imply that individuals do not have a typical style of coping. Indeed, the qualitative responses indicate that these women view themselves as having a typical coping repertoire despite their ability to adjust it as needed to the demands of a situation. In fact, several responses explicitly stated that they were unable to use their preferred coping strategies due to the nature of the lifestyle.

Despite this potential limitation, the structure of the present study is ultimately in keeping with the approach called for by Lazarus (1993):

What I am urging, in effect, is not an extreme contextualism in the study of coping but an effort to examine contextually influenced as well as stable relationships between a person and the environments, which that person pays attention to and chooses, where possible, or must deal with when there is no possibility of choice. I believe we must try to place process measures of coping within the larger framework of a person's life and ways of relating to the world. An approach that doesn't supplement contextual measurement of coping with an attempt at synthesis into a whole person is bound to be too limited. This is, I believe, the most serious weakness of a process approach to coping (p. 243).

Put simply, while the findings between the quantitative and qualitative analyses in the present study may not align perfectly with each other, this discrepancy could be the very richness for which Lazarus advocated. Coping is neither purely situational nor purely

dispositional, particularly for a population that faces so many sudden changes from one day to the next. Therefore, the efforts to capture a fuller picture of the coping landscape for these women, while somewhat untidy or confusing, may depict more accurately the way these women experience their lives.

Qualitative analyses. A phenomenological approach to qualitative data analysis requires the “bracketing,” or setting aside, of one’s own personal experiences in order to approach the data from a stance free of prejudgments about how individual participants’ realities are constructed (Creswell, 2012). However, bracketing one’s own experience does not indicate that the researcher comes to the data with the complete blank slate which is recommended in so many types of qualitative studies (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2012). Instead, the researcher approaches the data with the expectation that he or she will be examining the meanings attributed to a phenomenon by research participants; the researcher also brings “a strong orienting framework” to data analysis (Creswell, 2012, p. 86). Braun and Clarke (2006) describe this approach as theoretical thematic analysis and “more explicitly analyst-driven” (p. 12). While Braun and Clarke caution that this approach is more compatible with a deep exploration of multiple sub-themes, the fact that the research questions in the present study address relatively unexplored material supports the researcher’s decision to focus on overall themes across the data set.

The researcher used several techniques to set aside her own experiences and to examine the meanings attributed by these women to their experiences. As noted above, the researcher began qualitative analysis with a series of sensitizing concepts gleaned from the existing literature and also allowed new and unique codes to emerge from the data. One concrete example of how the researcher enabled new codes to emerge was

providing constant reminders to herself to “find the stories that have not been told.” The researcher also sought to mitigate for the potentially disproportionate impact that emotional responses to the data may have on analysis. To do so, the salience of codes was tracked through both the frequency of occurrences as well as emotional salience. In an effort to manage emotional responses appropriately, the researcher tracked her own affective responses to qualitative data and processed these reactions in writing and in verbal communication with her advisers. Additionally, she consciously sought contrasting findings to the codes she identified in an effort to provide balance.

Two themes identified in qualitative analysis are rather similar: the “catch-22” of career-related challenges and the lived experience of being “caught between a rock and a hard place.” While the two idioms used to identify these themes may seem quite similar at face value, important distinctions exist between the two. Both phrases imply a feeling that one is facing two equally difficult options, but “catch-22” takes the issue a bit further: it implies that a solution to one issue can only come when the other issue no longer holds true. In other words, the lived experience of feeling caught between difficult choices in the lifestyle generally does not necessarily preclude the potential of positive outcomes. Indeed, as noted in that section of the previous chapter, many women had positive outcomes overall despite the process having been difficult. However, with regard to the “catch-22” of career challenges specifically, inherent in the challenge was the feeling of finding oneself in a no-win situation.

Implications for social work practice

Findings from this study may inform a range of social work interventions at both the direct practice and policy levels. In light of findings that a high degree of exploration

was associated with adaptive coping in this sample, social workers may consider providing treatment that promotes self-reflection, exploration, and conscious attempts to incorporate the different experiences these women have into a sense of self that still allows for the malleability that was important in coping adaptively with the lifestyle. Active Duty military wives are likely to have been exposed to a wide range of cultures, geographic locations, and lifestyles. Social workers in direct practice can make use of such exposure in supporting a military wife as she considers new aspects of herself gained through these experiences. Such strategies could include supporting a military wife in identifying and organizing her values and priorities; developing her own interests, skills, hobbies, and ways of contributing to her community; reflecting upon qualities she admires in others and would like to develop in herself; or examining her own life experiences for evidence of growth and learning.

Additionally, therapeutic strategies that promote use of acceptance, cognitive reappraisal and reframing may be beneficial for these women, given the findings from this and other studies that such coping strategies are adaptive for military wives (e.g., Green et al., 2013; Nichols et al., 2013). In doing so, however, social workers should be cautious to avoid glib comments such as generic remarks about the power of positive thinking; doing so may serve to trivialize the real suffering that frequently occurs within this population. Rather, social workers should support these women in finding their own sense of personal meaning within the military lifestyle (Mulvaney, 2008) and contributions to their communities at large. In light of findings pertaining to the importance of flexibility in coping with the lifestyle, social workers can promote awareness of the transactional nature of coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus &

Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1993; Thoits, 1995) and support these women in consciously considering the needs of each situation as it is confronted and addressed.

Regardless of the type of treatment provided, however, social workers should prioritize listening attentively, attuning themselves to the voices of military wives, and validating their experiences in order to avoid inadvertently silencing them (Davis et al., 2011; Lapp et al., 2010). While individualizing treatment is always a primary consideration, it is of the utmost importance for a group that has been de-humanized and ignored in many ways. Additionally, developing realistic treatment goals is critical for these women, as noted by Davis et al. For example, as these authors note, the military lifestyle, particularly amid the deployment cycle, is a bit of an emotional roller coaster. They argue that, rather than focusing treatment on ending the roller coaster, those who work with this population should accept the roller coaster and support these women as they attempt to navigate such challenges. A similar approach may prove fruitful for social workers as they assist these women with other challenges they face such as career problems and multiple relocations.

Treatment strategies should promote the use of problem-focused coping while seeking to minimize the use of emotion-focused coping (Braun-Lewensoh & Bar, 2017). However, caution should be exercised so as to avoid stigmatizing the use of certain coping strategies that may serve a useful purpose in the lives of these women. Supporting these women in conceptualizing the importance of a broad range of coping strategies may prove effective in treatment. As noted by Ross (2016), no one coping strategy will serve to address the varied needs of this diverse group of women. Rather, this study supports the assumption that the mindset behind the coping strategy is of more influence in

determining adaptive outcomes. Thus, tailoring interventions through identifying individual needs, strengths, and resources is crucial in supporting these women to cope adaptively with the lifestyle.

Lapp et al. (2010) call for use of a strengths-based approach to treatment with this population, which coincides with the current finding that many of these women view themselves as strong and independent. Such an approach would not only capitalize on the very real strengths these women possess; it would likely resonate with them as well. Social work interventions that respect this fierce determination to take care of things by oneself while also promoting seeking of social support may be difficult to achieve. However, if a social worker can assist a military wife in achieving this important balance, treatment gains may be forthcoming. Providing services that promote self-determination and independence alongside enhancing social support is in keeping with social workers' values of respecting the dignity and worth of all individuals as well as the value of human relationships (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2017). Therefore, social workers are particularly well suited to work with this population.

Social workers' use of the person-in-environment perspective is also valuable in promoting adaptive coping in military wives. As evidence from this study suggests, the ability to adjust to new physical, social, and cultural environments is of paramount importance for these women in coping well. Social workers are uniquely positioned to offer a clinical perspective that will incorporate an appropriate appreciation for the importance that culture plays in daily functioning for these women (NASW, 2017). Social workers should also maintain a stance of cultural humility, keeping in mind that these women are "the experts on their own military-related experiences and struggles

who can inform both the research world and service providers of their specific strengths and needs” (DeVoe, Ross, & Paris, 2012, p. 150).

Policy changes should also incorporate genuine attunement to the very real needs of wives of military service members, seeking their input and guidance on creation and implementation. As called for by Nichols et al. (2013), the military bureaucracy should focus more on the concerns directly pertinent to these women in addition to their focus on the service members. Career support is a critical need for this population. Previously, the Obama administration commissioned an inter-agency report identifying the needs of the military population as well as objectives to meet those needs through use of wide-ranging federal resources (IPC, 2011). Specifically, career support for those with varying levels of education would be both meaningful and helpful. The federal government identified several options to promote employment for military wives: prioritizing them for federal employment; establishing connections with large employers that have locations nationwide in order to raise awareness of the needs and strengths of this population; and advocating for streamlining of state licensing demands to ease the strain of relocating (IPC, 2011). Taking these recommendations a step further might include enhancing reciprocity for licensure across states as well. Additionally, the federal government should foster connections with non-profit organizations that provide networking and training opportunities for military wives. Specific steps could include inviting these organizations to attend career-related events on military installations, which would help to raise awareness of the existence of these organizations. Social workers should advocate for policies that promote such actions across the span of multiple administrations.

Expanding childcare options (Blue Star Families, 2017; Braun-Lewensohn & Bar, 2017; IPC, 2011), would provide concrete support that may facilitate career opportunities as well as lift the burden these women face during trainings and deployments. Military child-care facilities may have burdensome waiting lists; creating additional facilities or more fully staffing existing facilities (IPC, 2017) would likely address the concerns raised by the current study through enabling these women to maintain the flexibility needed to stay employed. Additionally, as noted by one of the respondents in the current study, services that are intended to support military spouses or promote social engagement are often provided only during working hours. Staggering work shifts or adding weekend hours to such programming might make such services more accessible to these women.

Additionally, institutional attitudes toward military family members may play a key role in designing services to support them. Robbins (2002) calls for enhanced “institutional respect and validation of military wives’ abilities to cope with multiple sources of stress” (p. 255). Such respect and validation should be the foundation of all services provided by the military. Indeed, IPC (2017) states explicitly that feedback from members of the military community will drive its assessment process. Even so, many of the women in the present study perceived that they were not valued by the military, which presents a troubling barrier to their coping.

Finally, social workers are particularly well suited to serving this population in light of the core ethical values of the profession. Of particular salience are the values of dignity and worth of the person and the importance of human relationships. In addition, the values of integrity and competence are also of particular value in working with these

women. Because so many military wives have had negative experiences when seeking services and have faced threats to their sense of identity and of worth, the integrity and competence of social workers who serve these women is of the utmost importance. Establishing trust, following through on proposed interventions, and solid understanding of the culture in which these women live and of the challenges they face is vital to supporting them as they seek to cope adaptively with the lifestyle.

Directions for future research

As illustrated in the qualitative themes of “You were not issued a family,” “Negative impact of the military lifestyle on coping,” and “Seeking and providing social support,” military support programs are frequently perceived as ineffective for these women. Treatment approaches such as telephone support groups may be promising means of enhancing the coping strategies of military wives (Marnocha, 2012), but continued research in developing and measuring the effectiveness of military-sponsored programming is warranted (DeVoe et al., 2012; Ross, 2016). The frequent identification of employment as a challenge indicates that research should explore which factors or programs are associated with better professional outcomes for these women. One methodology that might be particularly effective for military wives is community-based participatory research, which would foster opportunities for these women to contribute their valuable voices and perspectives to developing resources aimed at meeting their needs (DeVoe et al., 2012). In addition to the creation of actual programming that would more effectively meet needs, such opportunities would give these women the chance to find new meaning and purpose; to seek and provide social support; to enhance feelings of agency and self-determination; and would likely foster personal growth.

While both social support and the importance of self-reliance emerged as key findings in the present study and in the broader literature on military wife coping, none of the studies examined the ways in which these two different approaches to social support might interact with each other. Further research on the potential interactions between self-reliance and social support could provide insight into this potential relationship and its impact on choice of coping strategies. Additionally, research focusing on the potential relationship between self-monitoring, moratorium status, and role conflict could deepen understanding of the ways in which these constructs interact to promote adaptive coping. Semi-structured interviews to examine such themes in more depth could yield richer understanding of the ways in which these concepts may interact with each other to influence choice of coping strategies for these women.

The potential limitations of using the EIPQ (Balistreri et al., 1996) to capture strength of identity suggest that future research may benefit from use of a different, more nuanced measure of identity status such as that of Luyckx et al. (2012). Perhaps research could focus on developing a measure that more accurately captures healthy identity development in this population through incorporating themes that emerged from qualitative data such as the importance of flexibility and willingness to evolve; the challenges associated with acculturating to the military lifestyle; and the salience of personal agency and determination.

Intervention research focusing on treatment techniques that promote adaptive coping while attuning to contextual factors germane to the military lifestyle would likely benefit this population as well. Cognitive-behavioral interventions, as well as variations such as acceptance and commitment therapy, may be of particular benefit as they

promote the cognitive reframing and perspective-taking cited by many of the respondents as helpful in coping with the challenges of the lifestyle.

Finally, in order to determine whether self-selection was, in fact, a factor in the perceived effectiveness of these women's coping strategies, research on coping strategies used by women who are divorced from service members or whose husbands served shorter terms of service could be conducted.

Conclusion

Findings from this study paint a portrait of strong, capable, and adaptable women who are able to tolerate a great deal of ambiguity and sudden change in their lives. Despite the fact that, on average, the women in this sample experienced approximately 8 major life events such as a relocation or a husband's deployment in approximately 12 years of marriage, all the while dealing with the constant daily hassles of the lifestyle, many of the women in this sample maintained a positive outlook and the ability to navigate challenges successfully. For many, a strong yet flexible sense of self plays a crucial role in the way these women cope with the challenges they face as military wives. Specifically, mindset is key: the ability to reframe challenges as opportunities; a willingness to evolve and grow; the ability to maintain a sense of perspective; and maintaining a strong sense of agency and determination enabled these women to thrive in the face of adversity. Social workers should familiarize themselves with the unique experiences and needs of this group of women in order to provide interventions that promote adaptive coping for these remarkable women.

Appendix A

Informed Consent Template

Title of the Study: A Mixed-Methods Examination of the Relationship Between the Self and Adaptive Coping in Military Wives

Principal Investigator:

Amy Page
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You are being asked to participate in a research study which examines concepts related to identity and to adaptive coping among current and past military wives. The study is an online survey and should take approximately 20 – 30 minutes to complete. You will be asked to respond to a series of items by clicking on the response option that most closely corresponds to what is accurate for you. These items will pertain to the manner in which you perceive yourself and your identity, the way you perceive certain roles in your life, your overall sense of well-being, and coping. You will also be asked to respond to two open-ended questions which will ask about similar concepts. When you have completed the survey, simply close the window in your Internet browser to exit.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate at all, and you may discontinue your participation at any point by simply exiting the survey. Neither you nor your spouse will receive any penalties or lose any benefits for choosing not to participate in the study or for choosing to discontinue participation. You are unlikely to benefit from this study in any way other than knowing that you have contributed to knowledge about military wives. Information gained from this study may benefit other military wives, as mental health providers and program

developers may increase the effectiveness of their services based on the findings of this study.

The survey is completely anonymous. You will not be asked for any identifying information, and the researcher will not be able to identify which Internet IP address corresponds to which set of responses. Risks of the study include possible experience of emotional distress. Should you experience emotional distress which you feel warrants professional intervention, you are advised to contact your health insurance provider to obtain a referral to counseling/mental health services. The study may have unforeseeable risks associated with it as well, though this is unlikely.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or about your rights as a participant in research, you may contact the principal investigator directly at amypage@sp2.upenn.edu.

By clicking "I agree" below, you are indicating that you have read, understood, and agreed to the information provided above. You are also indicating that you are a current female spouse of an Active Duty/retired male service member (if retired, then retired within the previous 3 years) from any branch of the military whose husband has served at least 5 years of Active Duty during the time of your marriage. You are also indicating that you are over the age of 18 years. If any of these items are not true for you, please discontinue participation in the study at this time.

I agree

Appendix B

BRIEF COPE*

(Carver, 1997)

We are interested in how people respond when they confront difficult or stressful events in their lives. There are lots of ways to try to deal with stress. Think of the military-related stressors you have encountered throughout your time as a military wife (e.g., moving, deployments, looking for jobs, feeling unsupported by the military, feeling that others did not understand your experiences, etc.). Please select **ONE** of these challenges and write a brief (1-2 sentences) description of the challenge. Then respond to the following items with that challenge in mind. In other words, how did you cope with that military lifestyle-related stressor? This questionnaire asks you to indicate what you did and felt when you experienced that stressful event. Obviously, different events bring out somewhat different responses, but think about what you actually did when you confronted that stressor related to living the military lifestyle.

Then respond to each of the following items by clicking one number for each, using the response choices listed just below. Please try to respond to each item separately in your mind from each other item. Choose your answers thoughtfully, and make your answers as true FOR YOU as you can. Please answer every item. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers, so choose the most accurate answer for YOU--not what you think "most people" would say or do. Indicate what YOU did when YOU experienced that stressful event related to the military lifestyle.*

Please write a brief (1-2 sentences) description of the challenge you faced:

- 1 = I did not do this at all
- 2 = I did this a little bit
- 3 = I did this a medium amount
- 4 = I did this a lot

1. I turned to work or other activities to take my mind off things.
2. I concentrated my efforts on doing something about the situation I was in.
3. I said to myself "this isn't real."
4. I used alcohol or other drugs to make myself feel better.
5. I got emotional support from others.
6. I gave up trying to deal with it.
7. I took action to try to make the situation better.
8. I refused to believe that it has happened.
9. I said things to let my unpleasant feelings escape.
10. I got help and advice from other people.
11. I used alcohol or other drugs to help me get through it.
12. I tried to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive.
13. I criticized myself.
14. I tried to come up with a strategy about what to do.
15. I got comfort and understanding from someone.
16. I gave up the attempt to cope.

17. I looked for something good in what was happening.
18. I made jokes about it.
19. I did something to think about it less, such as going to movies, watching TV, reading, daydreaming, sleeping, or shopping.
20. I accepted the reality of the fact that it had happened.
21. I expressed my negative feelings.
22. I tried to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs.
23. I tried to get advice or help from other people about what to do.
24. I learned to live with it.
25. I thought hard about what steps to take.
26. I blamed myself for things that happened.
27. I prayed or meditated.
28. I made fun of the situation.

*Instructions modified to fit online format and study population.

Problem-focused coping items: 2, 5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 20, 23, 24, 25

Emotion-focused coping items: 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, 26, 27, 28

Appendix C**Investigating Choice Experiments for the Preferences of Older People – Adult
(ICECAP-A)****Al-Janabi, Flynn, and Coast, 2012**

The next five questions focus on your overall quality of life. Please indicate which statements best describe your overall quality of life at the moment by selecting ONE choice for each of the five items below.*

1. Feeling settled and secure
 - a. I am able to feel settled and secure in **all** areas of my life.
 - b. I am able to feel settled and secure in **many** areas of my life.
 - c. I am able to feel settled and secure in **a few** areas of my life.
 - d. I am **unable** to feel settled and secure in **any** areas of my life.

2. Love, friendship and support
 - a. I can have **a lot** of love, friendship and support.
 - b. I can have **quite a lot** of love, friendship and support.
 - c. I can have a **little** love, friendship and support.
 - d. I **cannot** have **any** love, friendship and support.

3. Being independent
 - a. I am able to be **completely** independent.
 - b. I am able to be independent in **many** things.
 - c. I am able to be independent in a **few** things.
 - d. I am **unable** to be at all independent.

4. Achievement and progress
 - a. I can achieve and progress in **all** aspects of my life.
 - b. I can achieve and progress in **many** aspects of my life.
 - c. I can achieve and progress in **a few** aspects of my life.
 - d. I **cannot** achieve and progress in **any** aspects of my life.

5. Enjoyment and pleasure
 - a. I can have **a lot** of enjoyment and pleasure.
 - b. I can have **quite a lot** of enjoyment and pleasure.
 - c. I can have **a little** enjoyment and pleasure.
 - d. I **cannot** have **any** enjoyment and pleasure.

*Instructions modified to fit online survey format.

Appendix D**ITEMS FOR EGO IDENTITY PROCESS QUESTIONNAIRE***

(Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel, & Geisinger, 1995)

Listed below are a number of statements describing behavior. Please indicate how you feel about each statement.

Example: Politics are very important in my life.

Click on 1 if you strongly disagree.

Click on 2 if you disagree.

Click on 3 if you slightly disagree.

Click on 4 if you slightly agree.

Click on 5 if you agree.

Click on 6 if you strongly agree.

1. I have definitely decided on the occupation that I want to pursue. (C)
2. I don't expect to change my political principles and ideals. (C)
3. I have considered adopting different kinds of religious belief. (E)
4. There has never been a need to question my values. (E)
5. I am very confident about what kinds of friends are best for me. (C)^a
6. My ideas about men's and women's roles have never changed as I became older. (E)
7. I will always vote for the same political party. (C)
8. I have firmly held views concerning my role in my family. (C)
9. I have engaged in several discussions concerning behaviors involved in marital relationships (E)
10. I have considered different political views thoughtfully. (E)
11. I have never questioned my views concerning what kind of friend is best for me. (E)
12. My values are likely to change in the future. (C)
13. When I talk to people about religion, I make sure to voice my opinion. (C)
14. I am not sure about what type of marital relationship is best for me. (C)
15. I have not felt the need to reflect upon the importance I place on my family. (E)
16. Regarding religion, my beliefs are likely to change in the near future. (C)
17. I have definite views regarding the ways in which men and women should behave. (C)
18. I have tried to learn about different occupational fields to find the best one for me. (E)
19. I have undergone several experiences that made me change my view on men's and women's roles. (E)
20. I have consistently re-examined many different values in order to find the ones which are best for me. (E)
21. I think what I look for in a friend could change in the future. (C)
22. I have questioned what kind of marriage is right for me. (E)

23. I am unlikely to alter my vocational goals. (C)
24. I have evaluated many ways in which I fit into my family structure. (E)
25. My ideas about men's and women's roles will never change. (C)
26. I have never questioned my political beliefs. (E)
27. I have had many experiences that led me to review the qualities that I would like my friends to have.(E)
28. I have discussed religious matters with a number of people who believe differently than I do. (E)
29. I am not sure that the values I hold are right for me. (C)
30. I have never questioned my occupational aspirations. (E)
31. The extent to which I value my family is likely to change in the future. (C)
32. My beliefs about marriage are firmly held. (C)

Scoring the EIPQ

Items comprising the Commitment Scale:

1, 2, 5(not there), 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 21, 23, 25, 29, 31, 32

Items comprising the Exploration Scale:

3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 15, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 26, 27, 28, 30

Reverse-score the following negatively-worded items:

4, 6, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 21, 26, 29, 30, 31

To score, reverse the numerical values for the negatively-worded items (1→6, 2→5, 3→4, 4→3, 5→2, 6→1).

Then sum the items for each scale separately. The range of possible scores is from 16 to 96, with higher values indication greater commitment/greater exploration.

*The present researcher has received permission from the corresponding authors to modify instructions to fit the online format and the sample population. Permission was also given to change references to “dating” to “marriage” in order to more appropriately reflect the experiences of the sample.

^a This item inadvertently left off of survey

Appendix E**SELF-CONCEPT CLARITY SCALE**

(Campbell, Trapnell, Heine, Katz, Lavalley, & Lehman, 1996)

For the following items, please click on the number which corresponds most accurately to your level of agreement with the statement.*

- 1=Strongly disagree
- 2= Somewhat disagree
- 3=Neither agree nor disagree
- 4=Somewhat agree
- 5=Strongly agree*

1. My beliefs about myself often conflict with one another.^a
2. On one day I might have one opinion of myself and on another day I might have a
3. different opinion.^a
4. I spend a lot of time wondering about what kind of person I really am.^a
5. Sometimes I feel that I am not really the person that I appear to be.^a
6. When I think about the kind of person I have been in the past, I'm not sure what I was really like.^a
7. I seldom experience conflict between the different aspects of my personality.
8. Sometimes I think I know other people better than I know myself.^a
9. My beliefs about myself seem to change very frequently.^a
10. If I were asked to describe my personality, my description might end up being different from one day to another day.^a
11. Even if I wanted to, I don't think I could tell someone what I'm really like.^a
12. In general, I have a clear sense of who I am and what I am.
13. It is often hard for me to make up my mind about things because I don't really know what I want.^a

^aReverse-keyed item

*Precise instructions not available from the authors. Current researcher created instructions for participants to follow.

Appendix F**SELF-MONITORING OF EXPRESSIVE BEHAVIOR**

(Snyder, 1974)

The following statements concern your personal reactions to a number of different situations. No two statements are exactly alike, so consider each statement carefully before answering. If a statement is TRUE or MOSTLY TRUE as applied to you, click the response marked "True." If a statement is FALSE or NOT USUALLY TRUE as applied to you, click the response marked "False." It is important that you answer as frankly and as honestly as you can. Your answers will be anonymous.*

1. I find it hard to imitate the behavior of other people. (F)
2. My behavior is usually an expression of my true inner feelings, attitudes, and beliefs. (F)
3. At parties and social gatherings, I do not attempt to do or say things that others will like. (F)
4. I can only argue for ideas which I already believe. (F)
5. I can make impromptu speeches even on topics about which I have almost no information. (T)
6. I guess I put on a show to impress or entertain people. (T)
7. When I am uncertain how to act in a social situation, I look to the behavior of others for cues. (T)
8. I would probably make a good actor. (T)
9. I rarely need the advice of my friends to choose movies, books, or music. (F)
10. I sometimes appear to others to be experiencing deeper emotions than I actually am. (T)
11. I laugh more when I watch a comedy with others than when alone. (T)
12. In a group of people I am rarely the center of attention. (F)
13. In different situations and with different people, I often act like very different persons. (T)
14. I am not particularly good at making other people like me. (F)
15. Even if I am not enjoying myself, I often pretend to be having a good time. (T)
16. I'm not always the person I appear to be. (T)
17. I would not change my opinions (or the way I do things) in order to please someone else or win their favor. (F)
18. I have considered being an entertainer. (T)
19. In order to get along and be liked, I tend to be what people expect me to be rather than anything else. (T)
20. I have never been good at games like charades or improvisational acting. (F)
21. I have trouble changing my behavior to suit different people and different situations. (F)
22. At a party I let others keep the jokes and stories going. (F)
23. I feel a bit awkward in company and do not show up quite so well as I should. (F)

24. I can look anyone in the eye and tell a lie with a straight face (if for a right end).
(T)
25. I may deceive people by being friendly when I really dislike them. (T)

*Instructions modified to fit online survey as well as the anonymous nature of the study.

Note: Items keyed in the direction of high SM.

Appendix G
Role Conflict

Please click the response which corresponds to what degree you find each of the following statements to be true for you. 1 = not true at all, 2 = somewhat/sometimes true, 3 = very/frequently true, and 4 = almost always or always true.

1. The demands, expectations, and responsibilities of being a military wife interfere with my ability to work and/or perform well at my job on a day-to-day basis.
2. The demands, expectations, and responsibilities of being a military wife interfere with my ability to work and/or perform well in my career overall.
3. The demands, expectations, and responsibilities of being a military wife interfere with my ability to meet all the needs of my family (both nuclear and extended) in the way I feel is best.
4. The demands, expectations, and responsibilities of being a military wife interfere with my ability to be a good friend to others.
5. The demands, expectations, and responsibilities of being a military wife interfere with my ability to actively participate in my community/neighborhood.
6. The demands, expectations, and responsibilities of being a military wife interfere with my ability to fulfill my personal needs (e.g., for recreation, relaxation, personal growth).
7. The demands, expectations, and responsibilities of being a military wife interfere with my marital relationship.

Appendix H**Mastery Scale**

(Pearlin & Schooler, 1978)

How strongly do you agree or disagree with these statements about yourself? Please click the option that corresponds to your response. 1=strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree.*

1. There is really no way I can solve some of the problems I have.
2. Sometimes I feel that I'm being pushed around in life.
3. I have little control over the things that happen to me.
4. I can do just about anything I really set my mind to.
5. I often feel helpless in dealing with the problems of life.
6. What happens to me in the future mostly depends on me.
7. There is little I can do to change many of the important things in my life.

*Instructions modified to reflect online format.

Appendix I

Text for recruitment flyers to be posted publicly and recruitment advertisements to be placed on websites

Are you the wife of a military service member currently on Active Duty or retired/discharged within the last 3 years? Did your husband serve on Active Duty for at least 5 years during the time you have been married to each other?

If so, you may be eligible to participate in an online survey as part of research for a doctoral dissertation studying the way military wives handle the challenges associated with living the military lifestyle.

To learn more, simply click on this link:

www.xxxxxxxxxxxxxx.com

Participation is completely voluntary, and you will not be penalized for any reason should you choose not to participate. If you have any questions or concerns or you would simply like to know more about the study, you may contact the researcher directly:

Amy Page
amypage@sp2.upenn.edu

Appendix J

Text of the recruitment email researcher will send to her acquaintances, introducing the study

Hello [name of individual],

As you may know, I am currently working toward a Doctorate in Clinical Social Work at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Policy and Practice. I am seeking the assistance of you, my friends and acquaintances, in completing my dissertation, which focuses on the relationship between military wives' sense of self and how they cope with the stressors of the military lifestyle.

At the bottom of this email you will find a link to a completely anonymous online survey. This survey is intended solely for current female spouses of Active Duty/retired male service members (specifically, those retired within the previous 3 years) from any branch of the military whose husbands have served at least 5 years of Active Duty during the time of their marriage. If you fit this criteria and think you would like to participate, simply click on the link to learn more about the study. Once you have read the information provided there, you may choose to continue with the survey by clicking on the "I agree" button, or you may choose not to participate by simply closing the browser window. Neither you nor your spouse will be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate in the study for any reason.

Whether or not you choose to participate, please forward this email to any of your friends or acquaintances whom you think would be appropriate for the study. If you have any questions or concerns about this project, you may contact me at amypage@sp2.upenn.edu.

Thank you very much!

Amy Preston Page

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