Examining the Impact of Workplace Supports: Work-Family Fit and Satisfaction in the U.S. Military

Jennifer M. McFadyen  Jennifer L. Kerpelman*  Francesca Adler-Baeder

Abstract: The current study sought to discover whether workplace support provided by Army Family Team Building (AFTB) of the Department of the Army was associated with changes in individual knowledge of basic Army lifestyle information, and whether such changes influenced a sense of fit and satisfaction with the Army. Data were collected from 69 Army wives. Findings support the notion that AFTB does increase a basic level of knowledge about the Army, and that this increase positively influences fit. Fit also mediated the relationship between knowledge gain and satisfaction. Implications for the general work-family interface are discussed.

Key Words: family support, military families, work-family fit.

In recent years, the impact of the workplace on families and the reciprocal impact of families on the workplace has been a topic of interest in many disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and organizational behavior (Barnett, 1998). The workplace and families traditionally have competing interests, and underneath the conflicts lay a series of social and cultural values and a perception of the give and take between the two institutions. It is helpful to consider that families, in the same way as the workplace, are a “greedy institution” (Coser, 1974) in that the demands they make on members can and do cause conflicts in other areas.

The interface between work and family—the “fit” between these two institutions—is a focus for social scientists and family practitioners because of their interconnectedness, and situations of balance or conflict have implications for individual and family functioning in both domains (Eckenrode & Gore, 1990). Recently, interest has been in factors that impact the work-family interface. For example, the Families and Work Institute conducted the Business Work-Life Study (Galinsky & Bond, 1998), which surveyed a representative sample of 1,057 for-profit and not-for-profit companies, and the 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce (Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg, 1998), which surveyed a representative sample of employees in the U.S. labor force regarding issues related to workplace supports (programs and policies) and the impact on individual functioning. These studies found that employees...
with more supportive workplaces had higher levels of job satisfaction, more commitment and loyalty to the company, and a stronger intention to remain with their companies. More than half of the companies provided work-life educational seminars that addressed work and family issues; however, these were not examined independently for their impact on individual and relationship functioning, but they were included as part of the overall package of workplace supports. Others have conducted similar research (e.g., Scharlach, 2001; Warren & Johnson, 1995). An exception is a study by Kagan and colleagues (1995) that examined specific effects of a workplace-provided psychoeducational program on stress reduction for emergency medical service employees over a three-year period. Evidence of a positive impact on preventive mental health outcomes for workers was found. The implementation and empirical study of the impact of workplace-sponsored education programs that address the work-family interface on individual and relationship functioning in both domains continue to be a developing area of research. Our purpose here was to examine the theoretical premise that increases in knowledge about the workplace gained in the context of workplace-sponsored resources (i.e., educational programs), positively impact perceptions of fit between work life and family life, and in turn increase satisfaction with the workplace.

Our test of this theoretical premise is conducted within the context of the Army and its families, focusing on civilian wives’ participation in an Army-sponsored program as it relates to increases in knowledge about the Army, perceptions of fit between military and family life, and satisfaction with the military lifestyle. It has been argued that the complexities of any social system are present in military family studies (McClure, 1999). The interface of two greedy institutions like families and the military is a prime setting to examine the nature of relationships between work and family domains (Bourg & Segal, 1999), and promises implications for nonmilitary work-family environments.

**Work-family Fit**

Work-family fit is a relatively new perspective applied to the work-family interface that goes beyond prior linear models of positive and negative spillover (e.g., Barnett, 1998; Bolger, Delongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). Work-family fit proposes that individuals vary in their abilities and needs just as the workplace varies in its demands and supports. This perspective suggests that both the workplace and families contribute to the feeling or perception of fit between them (Pittman, 1994; Teng, 1999). Teng and Pittman (1996) highlighted the notion of fit as the critical point of interface for families; it gets at the multiple facets of the work and family dilemma and synthesizes the various approaches to the problem of work and family conflict. They noted that when family expectations are consistent with job demands and the entire family is prepared to cope with those demands, overall fit is enhanced. Fit also is enhanced when work is perceived to provide rewards and supports that are consistent with family needs and goals. If a family as a unit is not prepared and is unable to cope with demands, or the workplace is not perceived to supply the resources needed, family members likely face difficulties as work challenges arise. Teng and Pittman presented a conceptual model of work-family fit that specifically illustrates these two dimensions (see Figure 1).

Work demands may include hours spent at work, travel due to work, or the necessity of shift work. Examples of work rewards are adequate compensation, benefits such as healthcare coverage or on-site child care, and the more subtle feeling of care from the workplace evidenced in flex-time. Family abilities may be considered coping resources but also include the expectations that family members have of both the working family member and the workplace. Family needs reflect the goals of the family, such as financial security and emotional care of its members. Deficits in any of the dimensions have ramifications in the others, and the work-
family fit perspective represents the ongoing exchange between the two domains. These dimensions allow for varying work-family forms and contexts to be described using this model. The apparent advantage of this model is its focus on the union of these areas and their reciprocal impact (Teng, 1999).

Pittman (1994) proposed the notion of work-family fit as a mediator between the quality of work life and family life. His study of 422 Army couples in which the husband was the active duty service member and the wife a civilian found strong support for the mediation hypothesis. His findings also revealed that each partner’s attitudes indirectly affected the other partner’s attitudes, and the perception of fit between the workplace and family demands also affected those attitudes. Therefore, fit represents an individual assessment of the balance the family is achieving.

**Work-family fit and the Army.** Soldiers are more likely to perform responsively to their job requirements and experience increased morale when they believe that their families are able to cope with the stressors encountered in Army life (Burnam, Meredith, Sherbourne, Valdez, & Vernez, 1992). In short, the mission of the Army is more likely to be met by soldiers whose families are not a source of worry and concern to them or to their command. Additionally, it is considerably less costly to the Army to foster family adaptation in terms of human misery, commander’s time, and money (Segal & Harris, 1993).

**Military-family fit and adaptation.** Burke (1999) suggested that a good fit is characteristic of a family who is able to balance both the needs of the military and the physical, social, and emotional needs of family members. The unique stressors faced by Army families—such as the demands of separation, relocation, job unpredictability, and job danger—are countered by family coping abilities, the most salient of which appear to include communication skills and spouse ability to function independently.

Demographic factors, such as age, rank of soldier spouse, and presence of children, also affect family coping (Schumm, Bell, & Tran, 1994; Segal & Harris, 1993). The Army supplies numerous social supports, mostly through Army Community Services. Such social supports and resources are provisions made by the Army to address family needs, which may include education about the soldier’s mission and the institutional demands. The dynamic nature of the model for Army families suggests that, although Army demands influence family needs and coping abilities, Army families’ needs and coping abilities affect family members’ perceptions of the strain of Army demands and the helpfulness of resources that the Army provides.

Pittman, Kerpelman, and McFadyen (2004) elucidated the value of effective service delivery, coupled with the perception of care and concern by the unit of a soldier for a family during a deployment. The generalizability of the study to other Army families, illustrated through the careful replication of the structural model, supports the idea that the coping abilities of a family during a deployment affect the perception of the family’s functioning in terms of quality of life.
life (internal adaptation) and commitment to the Army as a way of life (external adaptation). Internal adaptation is associated with adaptation and coping within the family unit; external adaptation is associated with adapting to and coping with Army demands (Pittman et al., 2004; Russo, 1999).

**Fit and Satisfaction**

Policies and programs that increase a sense of fit with the workplace also are predicted to increase the satisfaction that family members have with the workplace. Bourg and Segal (1999) hypothesized that there should be a positive relationship between the perception of support of the organization by families and the perception of fit by families. By recognizing the legitimacy of family demands, the Army may allow both soldiers and their spouses to sustain mutually high commitments to both the military and the family institution. Results of the Bourg and Segal study showed that spouse satisfaction with the military was affected by the perceived degree of interference of the military job with family needs. Further, rank, age, and presence of a child positively affected the organizational commitment to the Army. Increased age was associated with decreased levels of Army-family conflict, and the presence of a child and the assignment to a combat unit increased reports of conflict. Bourg and Segal found that the variable with the greatest effect on the soldier’s commitment to the Army was his wife’s commitment to the Army.

Bowen’s (1989) early study tested assumptions underlying policy and program development for quality of life programs in the military. He hypothesized that increased satisfaction with the environment for families in the Army (i.e., supports for the family) would lead to greater overall satisfaction with the military as a way of life. The results from 24,217 active duty officers and enlisted personnel indicated significant variation by family type (i.e., civilian spouse with and without children, military spouse with and without children) in the relationship between member’s satisfaction with family life and his or her satisfaction with the military. Specifically, soldiers’ satisfaction with the environment for families was a significant predictor of their overall satisfaction with the military way of life in all but one of the four married household types: civilian spouse without children, controlling for military rank (officer/enlisted). In general, the more satisfaction members had with the Army’s environment for families, the greater their satisfaction with the military as a way of life.

Klein, Tatone, and Lindsay (1988) reasoned that social support provides stability and support for military wives in otherwise shifting environments, and even mediates successful adjustment to military life. They found that women who reported greater life satisfaction also reported greater social support from family and friends, greater internal locus of control, and lower levels of emotional distress or fear. Significant to the findings with regard to emotional distress and fear were that women with higher levels of these attributes tended to have fewer social contacts, and women who perceived greater support from friends showed less distress and fear. Further, one rather important finding was an indirect effect of a decrease in work-family conflict. Klein and colleagues suggested that supportive policies and practices create a “normative” environment that decreases the sense of competition between work and family, allowing the soldier to commit to both. Further, there was a significant effect of perceived Army policy and support for families on both conflict and commitment, suggesting that supportive policies and practices are vital ways to communicate that the Army and the family are not competitors for the service member’s time. According to Bourg and Segal (1999), resources expended in showing soldiers and soldiers’ families that they are both valuable assets to the Army increase a soldier’s commitment to the Army.

**Army Family Team Building**

Army-sponsored supports include formalized programs that seek to educate the families of soldiers
One such support is the Army Family Team Building program (AFTB) developed by military family members in 1993 and launched Armywide in 1995. AFTB is offered for families of soldiers, for soldiers themselves, and for civilian employees. Implicit in the program’s design is the assumption that improved knowledge about military life will improve a person’s sense of work-family fit and satisfaction with the military. The program is taught by trained volunteer instructors using a scripted curriculum to ensure fidelity that includes an introductory level (AFTB Level I), an intermediate level (AFTB Level II), and an advanced level (AFTB Level III). The introductory level, nicknamed “survival skills for family members” by volunteer instructors, provides participants with basic tools necessary to understand the structure of the Army and its jargon, thereby promoting better navigation of the system. It also focuses on improving knowledge of resources and benefits available in the Army community.

There is no explicit evidence that the program was built on empirical knowledge; a briefing by the chief of the AFTB program, Vicki A. Brown, indicates that the program “was developed by family members for family members” (Brown, 1996, p. 3) in response to lessons learned during Desert Shield and Desert Storm. The spouses who developed the program were supported in their efforts by the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center, the Army Command and General Staff College, and various Army commands, including the National Guard Bureau, the Army Reserve, and Training and Doctrine Command (Brown).

AFTB has been shown to positively influence the coping abilities and adaptation of family members who choose to use the program (Orthner, 2002) and is regarded as one of the more valuable family supports (Bell & Schumm, 2000). Orthner reported that involvement in AFTB is linked to improved connections to military agencies and knowledge regarding the Army. Further, those more likely to consider AFTB helpful are younger spouses with fewer years of experience with the Army.

**The Present Study**

The purpose of the current study was to examine the impact of improved knowledge about the military work environment on Army spouses’ perceptions of fit and satisfaction with military life. Specifically, our goals were to determine whether knowledge about military life, its structure, available resources and benefits, and perceptions of fit increased following participation in AFTB Level I, and whether these increases were maintained over time. In addition, the extent to which AFTB knowledge and fit affected satisfaction with military life was examined. Three hypotheses were posed: (1) Participants will show an increase in AFTB-related knowledge and will maintain those increases over time (H1); (2) After completing AFTB Level I, participants will show an increase in perceived fit between work and family, and this perception of fit will be maintained over time (H2); and (3) It is expected that both AFTB knowledge and fit will predict increases in satisfaction with military life, and fit will mediate the relation between AFTB knowledge and satisfaction (H3).

Previous studies have examined only workplace-sponsored education programs that address the family domain and the impact on worker functioning (e.g., Bond et al., 1998; Kagan et al., 1995). Therefore, this study uniquely contributes to the field by examining a workplace-sponsored education program focused on increasing family knowledge and support of workplace demands, and family use of workplace supports and its impact on individual perceptions of fit and satisfaction.

**Method**

**Participants**

The sample was drawn from Army spouses attending Level I AFTB courses at two U.S. installations, one located in the southeast (n = 56) and one in the northeast (n = 13). Preliminary
analyses showed no differences in demographic or key study variables. The entire sample was composed of civilian wives of active duty soldiers. More than half of the participants (70%) were married to enlisted soldiers, and 64% had been married less than 3 years.

At Time 1, 69 participants responded to the survey, whereas Time 2 had 63 respondents. (The decline was due to those who left the class early but completed the Time 1 questionnaire. Reasons for early departure included medical appointments, employment responsibilities, and picking up children at school.) Time 3 included responses from 26 participants who completed both the Time 1 and Time 2 surveys and then returned the third survey by mail within 1 month after receipt. This 41% response rate is not unusual for mail surveys without the use of incentives (Dillman, 1991). Analyses between those in the group of 63 participants who completed the first two surveys but not the T3 survey \((n = 37)\), and those in this group of 63 who completed all three surveys \((n = 26)\) using rank, \(\chi^2 (1, N = 63) = .921, p = .34\), presence of children, \(\chi^2 (1, N = 63) = 2.660, p = .10\), and age, \(t(61) = .031, p = .98\), yielded no differences.

**Procedure**

Three Army installations on the east coast of the United States were contacted about the current study. Two of these installations permitted this study to be conducted on their premises. The AFTB managers from these installations agreed to assist the primary investigator by allowing the distribution of questionnaires during regularly scheduled AFTB Level I classes. Three questionnaires were administered to the participants. The first questionnaire (T1) was administered immediately before the start of the AFTB Level I course, the second questionnaire (T2) was completed at the conclusion of the Level I course, and the third questionnaire (T3) was mailed to participants several weeks later. The surveys were distributed to participants at six AFTB Level I classes at the southeastern installation, and to one AFTB Level I class at the northeastern installation. Two of the classes at the southeastern installation were arranged by individual units, both in response to impending deployment of soldiers. The remaining classes, including the course at the northeastern installation, were regularly scheduled by the AFTB program. The AFTB Level I courses may be taught in a single block of approximately 8 hours, or divided into two blocks. In this case, only one course (at the southeastern installation) was divided into two blocks of training over two evenings. Instruction time may vary slightly depending on class size, instructor pace, and contribution from the participants.

At the beginning of AFTB Level I courses, participants were invited to participate in the study. Following an explanation of the concept of the study and signing an informed consent form, AFTB students who agreed to participate were given an envelope containing a Personal Information Form, the T1 questionnaire, and the T2 questionnaire. The participants were asked to complete the Personal Information Form and the T1 questionnaire, and to place them in the envelope provided upon completion.

At the conclusion of the AFTB Level I course, each participant completed the T2 questionnaire and placed it in the envelope provided before returning it to the investigator. The T2 questionnaire was identical to T1 except for the extensive background information collected initially. The T3 surveys were mailed to the participants’ homes 5 weeks after their course completion. A cover letter outlined the purpose of the study, expressed thanks for participation, and asked participants to complete and return the survey in the stamped envelope provided. Completed surveys were returned within 1–4 weeks of receipt.

**Measures**

*Work-family fit.* Teng and Pittman (1996) developed the work-family fit battery to determine the linkages between work and family; Teng (1999) examined the reliability, validity, and dimensionality of the measure. The measure
assesses three dimensions: work demands, family abilities to meet work demands, and family needs and work rewards. Assessment of the measure showed strong internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .91$ for My Fit, .93 for Spouse Fit), and test-retest reliability ($$.73$$ for My Fit and .81 for Spouse Fit, $p < .01$). Data collected from the participants in the present study included both fit scales, but our emphasis was given to those scales that measured fit in terms of participant’s perception of the soldier-spouse’s workplace and family. Given that the dimensions of fit may have different implications, we examined them separately.

Three scales assessing fit were used. Demands of the workplace on the family were assessed with five items (How concerned are you about: amount of spouse’s work, time demands of spouse’s work, days/shifts of spouse’s work, spouse’s control over work conditions, and spouse’s problems with coworkers/supervisors? Cronbach’s $\alpha = .86$ at T1, .85 at T2, .82 at T3). Abilities of the family to meet demands were measured with four items (Ease with which family deals with: amount of spouse’s work each day, time demands of spouse’s work, days/shifts of spouse’s work, and spouse’s problems with coworkers/supervisors; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$ at T1, .87 at T2, .77 at T3). Rewards from the workplace to meet family needs were indicated by four items. (How well does spouse’s: income meet family needs, other benefits meet family needs, opportunities for promotion/advancement meet family needs, and unit support meet family needs? Cronbach’s $\alpha = .61$ at T1, .61 at T2, .53 at T3).

Satisfaction. Items adapted from the Survey of Army Families IV (Peterson, 2002) assessed the level of satisfaction that participants had with the respect and concern on the part of the Army toward families (To what extent are you satisfied with the following: the respect that the Army shows soldiers, the respect that the Army shows spouses, and the concern that the Army has for families? Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was .76 at T1, .92 at T2, .82 at T3). All items were scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction.

Knowledge related to AFTB. One multiple-response item tapped knowledge regarding specific elements taught during AFTB. The question was: There are many documents, procedures, and terms that are unique to the Army. At this time, how confident are you in your knowledge about the following? Included were items such as military pay entitlements, U.S. Army casualty notification procedures, the Chain of Concern, available community resources, and the Army rank and grade structure. Respondents indicated knowledge on a 5-point scale ($1 = $nothing$, 5 = a great deal$), with higher scores indicating greater overall knowledge (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .91$ at T1, .89 at T2, .79 at T3).

Control variables. Given past research findings that age, presence of children ($0 = \text{no children}$, $1 = \text{one or more children}$), and rank ($0 = \text{enlisted}$, $1 = \text{officer}$) influence satisfaction with Army life (Schumm et al., 1994; Segal & Harris, 1993), these variables were included as control variables in the analyses that focused on satisfaction.

Results

Analyses examined changes in knowledge and fit over time, and how fit and AFTB knowledge were related to satisfaction. Findings are presented by hypothesis.

H1 projected that participants would show an increase in AFTB related knowledge. Using the larger subsample that responded at T1 and T2, a paired $t$ test indicated that there were significant gains in knowledge about military life after completion of the course. A repeated measures within-subjects design was conducted using data from T1–T3, and revealed a significant difference in knowledge over time, Wilks’s $\lambda = .382$, $F(2, 24) = 19.38$, $p < .001$. The pattern of change was linear, $F(1,25) = 27.025$, $p < .001$, and quadratic, $F(1, 25) = 25.636$, $p < .001$, notable particularly for the very small sample analyzed ($n = 26$). As the quadratic pattern showed, level of knowledge increased from T1 to T2 and did not drop significantly at T3. Table 1 shows the mean changes over time for knowledge.
H2 predicted that a consistently positive change in fit would be found over time; it was anticipated that the strongest gain would occur at T2, immediately following the course, with a slight decline at T3. First, paired t tests were used to compare T1 and T2 data, showing that increases in perceived fit occurred only with the needs/rewards dimension. Perceptions of Army demands and family coping abilities to meet Army demands did not change after completion of the course. To examine changes in fit over the three time points, a repeated measures multivariate analysis (RMANOVA) was used. Only the needs/rewards dimension of fit showed a significant change from T1 through T3, Wilks’s = .702, $F(2, 24) = 8.424, p = .002$, and the pattern of change was linear, $F(1, 25) = 12.835, p = .001$ and quadratic, $F(1, 25) = 7.738, p = .01$. Perceptions of fit with regard to needs/rewards increased after the training, and this increase was maintained when assessment occurred between 6 and 9 weeks later. Thus, as was found for AFTB knowledge gains, there was a linear increase from T1 to T2, and a leveling off at T3 (see Table 2).

Satisfaction with the Army is reflected by a participant’s perception of how well the Army respects and is concerned about families. For H3, we posited that AFTB knowledge would predict satisfaction with the Army. We also expected that perceptions of fit would mediate the relation between knowledge and satisfaction.

Prior to running the hierarchical multiple regression analysis, the zero-order correlations were examined to determine whether conditions existed for potential mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986; see Table 3). Findings showed that AFTB knowledge at T2 was significantly correlated with T2 satisfaction. In addition, the three indicators of fit at T2 were significantly related to satisfaction. Finally, only one of the fit dimensions at T2 (i.e., needs/rewards) was correlated with knowledge at T2. Thus, the regression analysis would test for the possible mediation of the relation between knowledge and satisfaction by the needs/rewards dimension of fit.

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<tr>
<th>Table 1. Change Over Time in AFTB Knowledge</th>
<th>Table 2. Change Over Time in Fit Dimensions (Demands, Abilities, Needs/Rewards)</th>
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*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
T1 satisfaction, presence of children, and rank were entered as control variables in step 1, given their significant bivariate relations with the dependent variable. T2 AFTB knowledge was entered in step 2, and the three indicators of T2 fit were entered in the third and final step of the analysis. Model 1 in Table 4 shows that the control variables, especially T1 satisfaction \((\beta = .49, p < .001)\), accounted for 35\% of the variance in T2 satisfaction, \(F(3, 59) = 10.402, p < .001\). The results for Model 2 indicated that T2 AFTB knowledge \((\beta = .23, p < .05)\) contributed another 5\% of variance to satisfaction with the respect/concern that the Army has for families at T2, \(F(4, 58) = 9.543, p < .001\). When the fit variables were added in Model 3, \(F(7, 55) = 7.764, p < .001\), the relation between AFTB knowledge and satisfaction was fully mediated by the fit indicator of needs/rewards \((\beta = .37, p < .01)\). That is, the standardized coefficient drops from .23 to .08 and becomes nonsignificant (see Table 4). The addition of these fit indices explains an additional 10\% of the variance in satisfaction.

Table 3. Bivariate Correlations: T1 and T2 Satisfaction, T2 AFTB Knowledge and Fit, and Demographic Variables

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<td>.85</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.61</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*\(p < .05\). **\(p < .01\).

Discussion

Our overall purpose was to determine the general impact of improved knowledge about the workplace on participants’ perceptions of work-family fit, with the idea that an increased sense of fit might affect perceptions of satisfaction with the Army as a workplace. The fit perspective suggests that individuals and families vary in their needs and abilities, just as the workplace they are part of varies in its demands and rewards, and that fit is an individual assessment of work-family balance (Pittman, 1994). However, the model allows for the consideration that the individual assessment of work-family balance may change by improving the knowledge about demands and rewards that may promote a better sense of fit.
Knowledge gains and perceptions of fit increased after participation in AFTB Level I, and these increases were maintained over time. Our indicator of fit most influenced by the AFTB course was the perception of needs/rewards. In terms of adaptability for a family, the increased perception of rewards that meet family needs may come through an increased knowledge of resources and benefits available to a family through the military community. Knowledge of formal supports (Rohall, Segal, & Segal, 1999; Russo, 1999) is noted as important to family adaptation to the military. It may be that increased awareness of formal and informal supports learned through AFTB instruction affects the positive change in the sense of fit as family members gain knowledge and confidence in accessing those supports. That is, family members may become more knowledgeable of the range of available Army benefits, opportunities, and supports—including some they may have been unaware they were receiving—and thus they acquire a new appreciation of how Army rewards meet family needs.

The absence of change in the other two indicators of fit (demands, abilities to meet demands) may suggest that the gain in knowledge about the Army initially increases fit in terms of needs and rewards. However, over time, knowledge gained from AFTB and applied to Army life experiences may lead to subsequent increases in fit in terms of perceived demands and abilities, because family members may use this knowledge to reframe their definition of demands, or to take steps to improve their skills for meeting demands. It also is reasonable to acknowledge that those families who are unable or unwilling to meet higher demands may opt out of military service.

### Satisfaction
Knowledge gained by participants positively influenced their satisfaction. Bowen (1989) hypothesized that increased satisfaction with the environment for families in the Army would lead to greater overall satisfaction with the military as a way of life. Our finding that satisfaction with respect and concern was positively influenced by knowledge supports Bowen’s note that other satisfiers, particularly community factors, may mitigate feelings of dissatisfaction with Army life because of stressors unique to the lifestyle. Army Family Team Building is a community resource available to family members.

Perceptions of fit mediated the relation between AFTB knowledge and sense of satisfac-

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### Table 4. Regressions for Testing Mediation Effects of AFTB Knowledge, Fit, on Satisfaction (respect/concern) at T2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
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<th>Model 2</th>
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<th>Model 3</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
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<tr>
<td>T2 Satisfaction: respect/concern</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rank</td>
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<td>.21</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of children</td>
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<td>.20</td>
<td>−.16</td>
<td>−.25</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>−.15</td>
<td>−.20</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T1 Satisfaction: respect/concern</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.49***</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.51***</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2 AFTB knowledge</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.23*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>T2 Fit: demands</td>
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<td></td>
<td>−.02</td>
<td>.15</td>
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<tr>
<td>T2 Fit: abilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>.08</td>
<td>.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>T2 Fit: needs/rewards</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.37**</td>
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<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.35***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.40***</td>
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<td>.50***</td>
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<tr>
<td>F for change in R²</td>
<td>10.40***</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4.90*</td>
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<td>3.65*</td>
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*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
tion with the Army. That is, the increased sense of fit, specifically in the enhancement of the perception of needs/rewards, fully mediated the relation between AFTB knowledge and satisfaction with perceptions of the Army’s respect and concern for families. This suggests that AFTB knowledge increases satisfaction by enhancing a person’s perception of fit, providing further support to Pittman’s (1994) finding that fit is a mediator between the workplace and family. In addition, the finding establishes for the first time that the AFTB program has a desirable effect on family member fit and satisfaction. The nature of the demands of the Army as a workplace and the wives’ perceptions of their families’ abilities to meet those demands did not predict satisfaction following the AFTB course. Perhaps the AFTB program is less effective in reducing perceived demands or increasing perceived abilities to meet demands than it is in increasing a sense of fit in the area of rewards meeting needs. Or it may be that the effect of AFTB on these other fit dimensions only occurs after participants have more time to apply their knowledge to real-life Army demands, and experience better success in managing these demands. Alternately, it may be that perceptions of fit pertaining to the needs/rewards balance is the most salient aspect of fit related to whether civilian wives feel satisfied with the respect and concern that the Army shows families.

Although results provide empirical support for the effects of improved knowledge about the workplace on levels of satisfaction through perception of fit, it is important to note the limitations of the study. Primary limitations are the self-selection to attend AFTB, the small sample size, and the composition of the sample (civilian wives only). However, we note that the vast majority (92.7%) of Army spouses are female civilians (Military Family Resource Center, 2001); thus, it was not surprising that the sample of participants recruited here was composed of civilian wives.

AFTB is an optional program offered by the Army for family members. There is no requirement that individual family members attend, and the course participants are most often the civilian spouses of soldiers. All participants were present at the AFTB class voluntarily and chose to participate in this study. Certainly, this implies some personal need or desire to learn more about the institution of the Army, which could have affected our results. In fact, the participants were asked why they chose to attend the course, and 41 of the 69 indicated (in response to an open-ended question) that it was because they wanted to learn more about the Army. This response implies the participants’ desire for personal development and to be supportive of their spouses’ careers. This leads to an inevitable conclusion: There is something different about the spouses who decided to attend the course. What that difference is remains unknown. In asking participants how they learned about AFTB, why they attended the course, and what they hoped to learn, similarities emerged that might support a bias toward personal development. Participants reported a range of responses, from hearing about the program from their husbands or from their husbands’ units (command) in some way, to being advised by their Family Readiness Group leader or another wife in the unit that the class was available. More revealing answers might come in a qualitative study of the program and through surveying individuals who chose not to attend the course in order to establish and then compare possible differences between those who attended and those who did not.

Suggestions for Future Research

Orthner (2002) noted that data collected during the Survey of Army Families IV did not allow for analysis of the impact of participation in specific AFTB program levels. This study begins to fill the gap between anecdotal support and empirical evidence that AFTB knowledge can have a positive and lasting effect on participants in terms of fit, and demonstrates the impact that increased fit has on satisfaction with the Army.

We provide empirical support that Army Family Team Building Level I may be a valuable tool for increasing the sense of fit for Army spouses,
which can lead to a greater sense of satisfaction with the Army. Replicating and expanding this modest study is recommended.

Bowen (1989) noted that past research has not explored the variations that may exist among subgroups, particularly among family types. This is certainly a future direction for this research and dovetails with the literature that suggests that younger families and less experienced families may be in greater need of community supports such as AFTB. A larger study of the AFTB program—one that seeks a larger sample, includes a control group of nonparticipants, and canvasses Army installations worldwide so installations with varying missions can be included and compared—would contribute to better understanding of the impact of workplace supports on Army families of various types—for example, variations by rank, type of job or position (platoon sergeant, company commander, command sergeant major, battalion commander), and work status of spouse.

**Implications for Practice**

Research (Peterson, 2002) has shown that young spouses were less likely to adapt well to service life, and suggested that a greater effort is required to facilitate families’ coping skills. As an institution, the Army may want to consider capitalizing on AFTB as a vehicle for fostering adaptation to the Army lifestyle for young families. We show that the resources supplied by the workplace improve knowledge about the workplace and increase both fit and satisfaction with the workplace for spouses. We also show that age is an important predictor of fit. Other research has demonstrated that when the unit—as a “social address” for soldier and family—and its leadership are perceived as supportive of and responsive to families, there is an increased sense of quality of life and work commitment from the family (Pittman et al., 2004; Russo, 1999). Increased cooperation between the AFTB program and unit-level leadership for the delivery of programming specifically at the unit level may be the most efficient means of service delivery and might serve to enhance not only those outcomes indicated here, but also the relationship between family and unit leadership.

Experience with the Army (Wood & Scarville, 1995) and personal resources (Rohall et al., 1999) are associated with higher family adjustment in the military; however, experience and personal resources also apply to families outside the military. As a training and education program, AFTB increases levels of knowledge (a personal resource) about the Army, which may diminish the need to find existing information on one’s own and the problems encountered when knowledge is lacking. Programs that (a) draw from lessons learned by others in similar situations, (b) draw together catalogs of resources available to families in a community, and (c) scrupulously assess the changes that participants feel in fit after participation would be valuable to family practitioners both within and outside the military.

Our study capitalizes on the suggestion by Teng (1999) that the work-family fit scale may be a useful tool for assessing the impact of workplace supports designed to enhance work-family balance, and demonstrates its effectiveness as just such a tool for one support that the Army uses in an effort to enhance readiness of families and retention of soldiers. Family professionals outside the Army specifically, and the military in general, may find good use of this measure to assess changes across time in levels of work-family fit in the context of workplace supports such as parenting programs, marriage enhancement programs, on-site child care, or flexible work hours.

**Conclusion**

Fit is the balance that is perceived to exist between the needs and abilities of the family as a unit and the rewards from and demands of the workplace on the family (Teng & Pittman, 1996). It is apparent that the perception of fit for these Army spouses mediates their satisfaction with the Army above and beyond demographic variables that might influence satisfaction.
The Army acknowledges the need to support families in the face of the demands that it imposes, but may not maximize the visibility of all of its rewards—particularly those found in social support and family services—to very young or inexperienced Army families especially. Research has noted that younger Army families are less aware of the formal and informal services (Wood & Scarville, 1995) that may be perceived as rewards from the workplace.

The Army is a hierarchical institution, and rank does have its privileges. Among these privileges are higher pay and a certain degree of prestige. Regardless of privilege, perceptions that the Army provides rewards to meet family needs is important. There are other rewards beyond income, such as opportunities for promotion, financial programs, family programs, and health care available to Army families. Some of the less visible rewards include community services that support Army families and seek to educate them and enrich their experiences while part of the Army.

It is unlikely that the Army’s demands will diminish, especially in light of recent world events, and it is reasonable to think that changes in the more apparent reward structure, particularly in pay, will not soon undergo significant change. Although it is fair to presume that the abilities of its families will develop over time and with various experiences, families who cannot adapt may leave the Army or experience such misery in trying to cope with the rigors of the lifestyle that they create a vacuum of demand on leadership and services (Segal & Harris, 1993). Workplace supports such as the Army Family Team Building program may increase knowledge about the military context and increase both satisfaction and adaptability for family members through increasing their sense of fit.

Within the greedy institution, the demands are numerous, but so can be the resources the institution supplies to assist a family with meeting those demands. Rather than focus on an evaluation of AFTB’s curriculum with a focus on specific program components to determine their value and offer information for program improvement (Shadish, Newman, Scheirer, & Wye, 1995), we addressed the basic research question of whether an increase in knowledge about the military (gained in the context of an educational program) can increase a sense of fit, and subsequently, satisfaction with the work-family interface. Our findings provide information that can be generalized to similar nonmilitary work contexts. Investments in providing workplace-sponsored educational programs that raise awareness of workplace supports and build individual and family skills to meet workplace demands may well improve the workers’ and their spouses’ sense of fit with the company and increase satisfaction and commitment, positively affecting individual functioning in both domains.

References


