

Women in the U.S. Military: Coping Style as a Moderator between Gender  
Microaggressions and Depressive Symptoms

by

Sierra K. Dimberg

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Lisa Spanierman, Chair  
Frank Dillon  
D. Anthony Clark

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## ABSTRACT

Women in the military work in a hypermasculine environment and may have experiences with gender microaggressions that contribute poorly to their mental health. In this quantitative study, the author assessed active duty United States military women's ( $N = 683$ ) reports of experiences with eight types of gender microaggressions (*traditional gender roles, sexual objectification, second class citizen, sexist language, explicit threat to physical safety, implicit threat to physical safety, invalidation of sexism, and environmental*; Capodilupo et al., 2010). Participants reported around a little or rarely having experiences with such microaggressions. Exploratory analyses demonstrated that Navy and junior enlisted women reported significantly higher frequencies of gender microaggressions compared to other groups. Using hierarchical regression analysis, controlling for general levels of stress, branch, rank, and sexual orientation, the author also examined whether the eight gender microaggressions explained scores on a measure of depression. Results suggested that only *second class citizen* explained a significant proportion of variance in depression. Therefore, the author examined whether coping style moderated the association between the gender microaggression subscales and depression as proposed. Results indicated problem focused engagement and emotion focused disengagement both moderated the link between *second class citizen* and depression. Findings from the current study have the potential to inform military programs, specifically around bringing awareness to subtle forms of sexism and ways to engage in coping. Limitation and directions for future research also are discussed.

## DEDICATION

This is dedicated to all of the women who have ever served our country and for any little girl who wants to serve in the future. You are worthy and you are able.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Female service members represent roughly 16.2% of active-duty service members across the Department of Defense's four armed forces (i.e., Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, and Navy) and the U.S. Coast Guard (Department of Defense, 2017; Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, 2016). Although the proportion of women in the military increases every year, they are still the numerical minority across all branches of the armed forces. For example, women comprise 19.8% of Air Force personnel, 19.2% of Navy, 14.9% of Army, and 8.4% of Marines, with no reported information for Coast Guard (Department of Defense, 2017). In addition to small numbers, the military's emphasis on strength, aggression, and toughness creates a hypermasculine work environment (Archer, 2010; Ryder, 1991). As such, women may be particularly susceptible to experiencing sexism within the U. S. military.

While women may be susceptible to various forms of sexism within the military, subtle forms of sexism have become more common in recent years (Spence & Hahn, 1997; Twenge, 1997, 2011). Related to subtle sexism, to my knowledge, no research to date has examined the prevalence or effects of gender microaggressions among active duty women in the U.S. military. Microaggressions have been defined as insults or invalidations that communicate negative messages to a target based on their social-group identity, with or without intent to harm (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Wills, 1978; Sue, 2010). Relevant to the current dissertation study, gender microaggressions are insults or invalidations that communicate negative messages to women based on gender (Nadal, 2010). Researchers have developed a taxonomy of eight gender



microaggressions that includes: sexual objectification, second class citizens, assumptions of inferiority, denying sexism, assumption of traditional gender roles, sexist language, denying individual sexism, and environmental microaggressions (Capodilupo, 2010; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008). These eight gender microaggressions comprise comments, gestures, and policies that target women.

The experiences women endure with sexism may lead to negative health outcomes, such as cardiovascular disease, anxiety, and depression (CDP, 2016; Foynes, Shiperd, & Harrington, 2013; Foynes, Smith, & Shiperd, 2015; Kessler, 2003; Pascoe, Richman, & Cooper, 2009). Because women generally display higher lifetime prevalence rates of depression than men (Kessler, 2003), and because the military brings forth additional stressors that have been linked to depression (e.g., deployment or combat exposure; Redmond et al., 2015), in the current study I focus specifically on depression among active duty women.

Given that women are at heightened risk of experiencing negative health outcomes due to sexism within the military, I am also interested in examining strategies that they use to cope with gender microaggressions. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional coping theory includes problem focused and emotion focused coping. This theory posits that a person can choose to engage in coping, either by focusing on exploring their feelings or targeting the problem with action, or that a person can disengage from coping by ignoring the problem or endorsing self-blame. Likewise, other forms of coping include withdrawal, advocacy, and social support (Constantine, Smith, Redington, & Owens, 2008; Houshmand, Spanierman, & De Stefano, 2019; Szymanski & Lewis, 2016). In addition to investigating women's experiences with gender

microaggressions, I also seek to understand the potential moderating effects of coping on the link between gender microaggressions and depression.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review the literature relevant to my study on gender microaggression experiences among active duty military women. First, I define various forms of sexism and then provide a description of sexism within organizations generally and the military in particular. Next, I review the microaggressions literature, emphasizing gender microaggressions and their negative effects on mental health with a focus on depression. Finally, I describe empirical findings that show how individuals respond to and cope effectively in response to experiences with microaggressions.

#### **A Brief Definition of Sexism**

Sexism refers to an ideology or set of beliefs that posits women as inferior to men and leads to gender inequality (Rollins, 2012). More specifically, four types of sexism have emerged from the research, including: old fashioned, modern, hostile, and benevolent (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Young & Nauta, 2013; Young & Nauta, 2017). Old-fashioned sexism explicitly expresses the notion that women are inferior to men and their roles are restricted to those grounded in stereotypes of a submissive and weaker sex (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). Expressions of old-fashioned sexism tend to be overt and entail “unequal and harmful” conduct towards women (Swim & Cohen, 1997, p. 104). Furthermore, the concept of gender polarization is predominant within old-fashioned sexist thinking and behaviors, as it reinforces the notions that gender differences between men and women are inherent or natural (Moradi & Yoder, 2011). Examples of overt, old-fashioned sexism, include unwanted touching, verbal or physical abuse, demanding sexual favors, or threatening retaliation for refusal of sexual acts.

While old-fashioned sexism is characterized by overt behaviors towards women, modern sexism tends to be less explicit. Modern sexism reflects a lack of empathy towards women's issues, resentment towards the preferential treatment of women, and denial that any discrimination exists towards women. More specifically, modern sexism can be characterized by three different styles of behavior (i.e., blatant, subtle, and covert; Becker & Swim, 2011; Swim, Becker, Lee, & Pruitt, 2009; Swim & Hyers, 2009). Blatant modern sexist behaviors, for example, include unequal treatment of women in the family or the workplace (Becker & Swim, 2011). Subtle modern sexist behaviors can be difficult to categorize as sexist, but researchers have described them as condescending, chivalrous, or friendly (Becker & Swim, 2011). Covert modern sexist behaviors are purposeful and undermine women, but they are also difficult to prove, such as hiring women solely to prevent complaints of sexism (Becker & Swim, 2011). The main difference between subtle and covert modern sexism is that covert modern sexism has a direct immediate impact on women, while subtle modern sexism appears to undermine women's autonomy and has a less direct impact. Modern sexism perpetuates the idea that women's issues are no longer an issue in society, because they appear to help women and deny the current existence of sexism. Accordingly, individuals who engage in modern sexism disapprove of policies to safeguard women from sexism (Swim et al., 1995).

In addition to Swim and colleagues' (1995, 2009) theory of modern sexism, Glick and Fiske (1996, 1997, 2001) conceptualized a theory of ambivalent sexism, including hostile and benevolent sexism. Expressions of hostile sexism lead to antagonistic attitudes towards women, while benevolent sexist beliefs lead to thinking that women need protection (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Examples of hostile sexist beliefs include thinking

women are unintelligent, too emotional, or incompetent (Glick & Fiske, 1996), which are also deemed blatant sexist beliefs. Another example of hostile sexist beliefs is the idea that women are trying to control men (Swim et al., 2009).

Benevolent sexism, on the other hand, may appear positive but actually suggests the idea that women need to be looked after by men (Swim et al., 2009). Beliefs that women need to be flattered, protected, or taken care of are examples of benevolent sexism (Swim et al., 2009). The story of Jessica Lynch exemplifies benevolent sexism in the military (Feuerherd, 2019). Private First Class Lynch was taken prisoner of war during the Iraq war after being seriously injured during an ambush and was later rescued by Special Forces. The media portrayed Lynch as an innocent woman in need of rescuing, assuming she was not a fighter but was fought for. Conversely, male prisoners of war tend to be portrayed as heroic fighters, as opposed to individuals who need rescuing (Sjoberg, 2007).

While being interviewed on his research with Susan Fiske, Peter Glick stated that benevolent and hostile sexism exist together (Dixit, 2018). They exist together because benevolent sexism justifies hostile sexism. In other words, benevolent sexist beliefs excuse more hostile behavior because the overall underlying belief amongst both is that women are less than men (Glick et al., 2000). As such, women have to choose whether they want to reject benevolent sexism and risk experiencing hostile sexism or accept benevolent sexism and be protected from hostile sexism (Glick et al., 2000).

In my dissertation research, I was most interested in covert or subtle forms of sexism, which are difficult to classify because they often are seen as “customary or normal” (Swim & Cohen, 1997, p. 104). I chose to study subtle forms of sexism because

they are more prominent in today's society, compared to overt forms in previous years, and need to be studied in the current sociopolitical climate. In particular, I focus on gender microaggressions, which I describe later in this review of the literature,

### **Organizational Sexism**

Thus far, I discussed individual sexist beliefs and sexist ideology. Now, I shift attention to discuss sexism in organizations. Organizations are subcultures of larger society and thus reflect similar sexist environments. Research has indicated that four areas of workplace culture (i.e., inadequate organizational support, personally experienced burdens, perceived burdens on women as a group, and workplace sexual harassment) have been detrimental to working women (Bergman, 2003; Bergman & Hallberg, 2002).

Most organizations are not feminist organizations that “empower women in practice and policy,” thus providing inadequate organizational support (Morgenl, 1994). Organizations may also place burdens on persons, such as long working hours or relocation, that may contribute to negative outcomes. More notable, most organizations are either unsafe workplaces for women and/or do not support women in the same capacity as men, placing unique burdens on women as a group in the workplace. One particularly detrimental burden to working women is workplace sexual harassment. Researchers have linked sex-based discrimination with unhealthy occupational functioning among targets and have shown that targets are more likely to seek new employment (Antecol, Barcus, & Cobb-Clark, 2009; Pascoe et al., 2009). Other research has linked sexual harassment and workplace aggression to lower job satisfaction and more unproductive work behaviors (Díaz, Moreno, Garrosa, & Sebastián, 2011). Sexual

harassment in the workplace is linked to decreased morale, low job satisfaction and commitment to the organization, as well as high absenteeism and poor work relationships (Antecol et al., 2009; Estrada & Berggren, 2009). Experiences with sexual harassment diminish the cohesion in a unit, thus decreasing work morale (Moradi, 2009). Moreover, although less intense than direct harassment, workplace incivility has negative consequences for retention, satisfaction, and employee health (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008; Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001). These examples demonstrate the detrimental effects of sex-based discrimination on individuals and organizations in a work environment. The previously mentioned burdens on women in the workplace are exacerbated in hypermasculine environments and organizations.

### **Sexism in the United States Military**

The U.S. military is a unique organizational context-- a hypermasculine environment that places many burdens on women in the workplace (Johnson & Williams, 2019). A hypermasculine culture is one that exaggerates male stereotyped behaviors, (e.g., physical strength and aggression) and has been described as consistent with stereotypical male behavior, with an emphasis on physical rigor and aggression that is associated with status and self-worth (Toch, 1998; Ryder, 1991). Hypermasculinity focuses on proving one's hardiness and toughness (Archer, 2010). Increased hypermasculinity has been associated to trait physical aggression, toughness, the need to avoid femininity, and to control women's sexuality (Archer, 2010).

The military has been a hypermasculine culture and environment since its inception. Unsurprisingly, the force's more than 80% male composition, combined with

the tough and strong culture required for war readiness, create a hypermasculine environment that inadequately supports women (Department of Defense, 2017; Gibbons-Neff, 2018; Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, 2016). This hypermasculine culture breeds various forms of sexism in the military. The high rates of men (82-85.5%) (Department of Defense, 2017; Pelts, Rolbiecki, & Albright, 2015), along with a long history of sexism, creates the potential for a culture of hypermasculinity that permeates each branch of service and impacts women who serve. The hypermasculine culture awards various privileges to men and results in women experiencing burdens both personally and women as a group such as exclusion, dehumanization, objectification, harassment, and/or discrimination in the military (Koeszegi, Zedlacher, & Hudribusch, 2014). Caroline Johnson, a former Naval weapons systems officer, described her work environment in aviation as hypermasculine in her memoir (Johnson & Williams, 2019). She described discrimination and harassment at the hands of her colleagues in this hypermasculine environment (e.g., “man up”) that affected her mental health and relationships with others. The harassment and discrimination women endure in the military contributes to the sexist culture that is embedded in the military’s history and culture.

Related to hypermasculinity, the concept of military masculinity is also important to understanding sexism in the U.S. military. Hypermasculinity has been understood as one component of military masculinity; both encompass aggression and traditional male behaviors (Burland, 2009). Serving in the military and participating in war contributes to the perception of what a man is and may elevate one’s status in society (Godfrey, 2009). The idea of military masculinity is that the military specifically recruits individuals who



encompass these hypermasculine traits, thus creating a culture of aggressive service members that leads to detrimental behaviors, such as misogynistic jokes, that fuel a sexist environment (Burland, 2009).

Within the sexist environment, women are expected to act feminine and embody characteristics that live up to the female ideal, despite challenging perceptions of their ability to function within the U.S. Military. For example, numerous studies demonstrate that women are rated by colleagues in the military as less competent, more emotional, and lower overall than their male counterparts in performance and status, which exemplifies the presence of ambivalent sexism in military culture (Archer, 2012; Boyce & Herd, 2003; Drake, 2006; Looney, Robinson-Kurpius, & Lucart, 2004; Morgan, 2004). In addition, the ideal type of woman in the military has been described as “tough but not violent, brave but not self-sufficient, masculine but feminine, frail but not afraid, can fight but also be tortured, maternal but strong, and soldier but innocent” (Sjoberg, 2007, p. 93). A shorter description of the ideal female soldier is to be “as capable as a male soldier but as vulnerable as a civilian woman” (Sjoberg, 2007, p. 93). These descriptions of ideal military women portray them as weak and needing protection while awarding them the status of being adept. Both descriptions of what women “should be” supports the notion that benevolent sexism exists in the military. Overall, the hypermasculine and sexist environment is extremely difficult to navigate because it creates negative perceptions of women, but mandates they adhere to an unattainable female ideal.

Notably, the military does not address covert sexism in the Uniformed Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001). The UCMJ defines the military justice system with criminal offenses under federal law (Powers, 2011). Only

sexual misconduct (Article 120; “an act of sexual intercourse by force and without consent, is guilty of rape”) and assault (Article 128; “attempts or offers with unlawful force or violence to do bodily harm to another person, whether or not the attempt or offer is consummated”) are liable to punishment under the UCMJ (American Bar Association, 2012). There is a continuum of violence in the military that increases acceptance and engagement in violent behaviors, ranging from subtle harassment to intentional, overt, and explicit violence (Moradi & Yoder, 2011). Unlike other work settings, the U.S. military is legally allowed to discriminate for age, disability, and physical health (American Bar Association, 2012; Redmond et al., 2015); however, according to the UCMJ, it may not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, color, national origin, or religion (American Bar Association, 2012). Despite the UCMJ codes stating gender discrimination is illegal, forms of sexism, which entail unequal treatment of women, continue to occur in the military. Notably, combat jobs were not available to women until 2015 (Rosenberg & Philipps, 2015).

Although the military requires mandatory trainings annually to every service member, those trainings focus on sexual assault and bystander interventions and do not address implicit forms of gender discrimination and sexual harassment, one of the previously mentioned areas of workplace culture. Given women’s experiences in the military, there is a need for trainings to also focus on these implicit forms of sexism. While Gurung and colleagues (2018) described that 6.7% of active duty women experienced military sexual trauma, a much higher number of women reported sexual harassment throughout numerous research studies (66.3%) (Bastian, Lancaster, & Reyest, 1996; Culbertson & Rosenfeld, 1994, 1996; Goldstein, Dinh, Donalson, Hebenstreit, &

Maguen, 2017; Lehavot & Simpson, 2012; Lipari & Lancaster, 2003; Lipari, Lancaster, & Jones, 2005; Rosen & Martin, 1998; Gurung et al., 2018).

The rates of female service members experiencing sexual harassment is quite alarming, considering the rates of civilian women experiencing sexual harassment are under 20% on average (Bastian et al, 1996; Culbertson & Rosenfeld, 1994, 1996; Lipari & Lancaster, 2003; Lipari et al., 2005; Rosen & Martin, 1998; Gurung et al., 2018). Sexually harassing behaviors typically are considered “sexist behaviors, crude or offensive behaviors, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion” (Estrada & Berggren, 2009, p. 165). Other studies show women experience sexual harassment at school or work in U.S. institutions at lower rates than women in the military (Estrada & Berggren, 2009; Illies, Hauserman, Schwochau, & Stibal, 2003). In an interview with female Army veterans, every member had experienced or witnessed sexual harassment or some type of sexual assault (Moore, Crowley, & Sandhoff, 2017). The veterans attributed these experiences to the masculine culture, tolerated by leadership, and they believed that reporting incidents would make a “mess” and cause them to feel isolated (Moore, et al., 2017, p. 229).

Similarly, there are groups and individuals who overtly or covertly do not support women in the military or in certain roles within the military, known as female exclusion supporters or “exclusionists,” despite the fact that women add support to the military forces (Dieckmann, 2011). Some exclusionists argue that unit cohesion is negatively affected with the presence of women, despite research showing otherwise (RAND, 2015). Other exclusionists suggest the physical differences between men and women render women physically incapable (Dieckmann, 2011; Dietz, 2011); however, women are

passing the same trainings that have always been required of military men now that they have the option. These exclusionist beliefs lend to a gendered workplace incivility environment (Cortina, 2008), which is a breeding ground for gender microaggressions.

I focus on gender microaggressions in the current study, because subtle forms of sexism have become more prevalent within the past 25 years than overt forms (Spence & Hahn, 1997; Twenge, 1997, 2011). In general, microaggressions are a form of covert discrimination that members of marginalized groups endure. Microaggressions are not covered by the UCMJ, and therefore may still pose a risk to marginalized groups, such as women in the military. Interestingly, gender microaggressions have not been studied empirically within military populations. While the researcher recognizes that women may identify with multiple marginalized groups (i.e., LGBTQIA+, racial/ethnic minority) and experiences with sexism or sexual harassment, the sole focus of this paper will be on gender microaggressions.

### **Gender Microaggressions**

Microaggressions have been defined as “every day, verbal or nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, that communicate derogatory, hostile, negative messages to target a person based on their identity, whether the intent was to harm or not” (Sue, 2010, p. 3). There is a clear power difference between the perpetrator and the target of the microaggression that is based on social group identities (Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014). Marginalized identities that are researched most often pertain to gender (e.g., Capodilupo et al., 2010; Miyake, 2018), racial and ethnic minorities (e.g., Clark, Kleiman, Spanierman, Isaac, & Poolokasingham, 2014; Poolokasingham, Spanierman, Kleiman, & Houshmand, 2014; Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino 2007; Sue,

Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008), and sexual minority communities (e.g., Dimberg, Clark, Spanierman, VanDaalen, 2019; Nadal, Whitman, Davis, Erazo, & Davidoff 2016).

In many cases, perpetrators do not realize that they have said something harmful that influences a person's well-being (Friedlaender, 2018). Accordingly, one of the dilemmas of microaggressions is that they often are difficult to identify, thus leading the target to question their feelings towards the interaction (Sue et al., 2008). Furthermore, because the impact of microaggressions may be invisible, there is a tendency to minimize harm caused to targets, which facilitate hostile work environments (Sue, 2010).

There are specific gender microaggressions that women encounter, which are defined as everyday hostile, derogatory, and sexist insults, behaviors, or environments that target women (Nadal, 2010). A combined taxonomy of gender microaggressions includes work by Sue and Capodilupo (2008) and Capodilupo and colleagues (2010) based on qualitative data. These gender microaggressions include: sexual objectification, second class citizens, assumptions of inferiority, denying sexism, assumption of traditional gender roles, sexist language, denying individual sexism, and environmental microaggressions (Capodilupo, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008). Further research created a different taxonomy for gender microaggression after quantitative data, that added implicit and explicit threat to physical safety, combined assumptions of inferiority with second class citizens, and combined denying sexism and denying individual sexism into invalidation of the reality of sexism (Miyake, 2018). The final taxonomy includes: sexual objectification, second class citizens/assumptions of inferiority, invalidation of the reality of sexism, traditional gender roles, sexist language, implicit threat to physical safety, explicit threat to physical safety, and environmental.

*Sexual objectification* refers to when a woman's body (e.g., body parts or functions) are reduced to tools separate from the person or to completely represent her (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Twelve female Psychology 101 students described in focus groups several examples of sexual objectification: they were cat-called, whistled at, stared at, or touched without consent (Capodilupo et al., 2010). In another qualitative study, 29 women in a university setting described experiencing the male gaze in a public setting as a way to reduce a woman to serve as a visual or sex appeal to men, and may cause women to feel uncomfortable, especially when expected to always smile (Gervais, Holland, & Dodd, 2013). For example, women on a college campus described receiving these sexual objectifications as "unwanted attention" and "harassment" (McCabe, 2009, p. 140). In addition, women working in STEM fields, which are also male-dominated like the military, have experienced gender microaggressions, such as sexual objectification. A qualitative interview study among 21 women in physics or astronomy graduate programs described how experiences with sexual objectification led them to change their appearance at work and be concerned about collaborating with male colleagues due to potential sexual advances (Barthelemy, McCormick, & Henderson, 2016).

*Second-class citizens/assumptions of inferiority*, another form of gender microaggressions, refer to opportunities that men are awarded that women are not (Capodilupo et al., 2010). Women in physics and astronomy graduate programs have described male colleagues that interact differently with them compared to other male colleagues due to their gender (Barthelemy et al., 2016) and may exclude women from activities. This may also occur when others assume women are less than men in various capacities. Capodilupo et al.'s (2010) focus group participants described their experiences

with men where they were seen as inferior-- cognitively, physically, and in their work abilities. One example includes, “The reason women get paid less is that they don’t work as hard” by male colleagues (Barthelemy et al., 2016, p. 020119-9). On the surface, these appear to be positive, but they lend to the belief that women are unintelligent or lack competence that men have (Eagly & Mladinic, 1994). Women have reported that their opinion was not considered important by peers in a classroom, when they “blew over” them speaking and that male colleagues brush off female suggestions (Barthelemy et al., 2016; McCabe, 2009, p. 8). Although not referred to explicitly as gender microaggressions, some research helps us understand their manifestation in a military context. In a study of 81,000 military performance evaluations, the only two words to negatively describe men were arrogant and irresponsible, while the negative words to describe women included inept, selfish, frivolous, passive, scattered, opportunistic, gossip, excitable, vain, panicky, temperamental, and indecisive (Smith, Rosenstain, Nikolov, & Chaney, 2019). Meanwhile, the positive words to describe men included analytical, competent, athletic, dependable, confident, versatile, articulate, level-headed, logical, and practical while the positive words to describe women included compassionate, enthusiastic, energetic, and organized (Smith et al., 2019).

*Invalidating the reality of sexism* occurs when people posit that sexism no longer exists and women in general do not have to endure sexism. Relatedly, denying individual sexism refers to invalidating a woman’s reported experience with sexism (Capodilupo, 2010; Glick & Fiske, 1996). When men make comments, such as, “It’s not that big of a deal” or question what was said or the motive of the perpetrator, women experience invalidation to their experiences with sexism. A comment a woman described in the work

setting during a qualitative analysis of physics and astronomy graduate programs include, “There are many cases of ‘discrimination’ that are total bullshit,” thus denying the belief that women experience discrimination (Barthelemy et al., 2016, p. 020119-9).

*Assumptions of traditional gender roles* refers to assumptions of social roles or occupations ascribed to women (Capodilupo et al., 2010; Glick & Fiske, 1996). In Capodilupo et al.’s (2010) study, women explained they were expected to be feminine, be healthy, be with men when out at night, cook or clean, and bear children. Similarly, Barthelemy et al. (2016) found among their physics and astronomy graduate student participants, one was told, “Women can’t do science because they should be taking care of babies” (Barthelemy et al., 2016, p. 020119-10). Additionally, participants reported they were told they were worse at spatial cognition and less emotionally strong compared to their male colleagues (Barthelemy, et al., 2016).

*Sexist language* refers to degrading verbal comments directed toward women, which has been outlined extensively in multiple studies. For example, across various studies, women reported being called a “slut,” “dyke,” “honey,” “baby,” or “bimbo” (Capodilupo et al., 2010; Nielsen, 2002). Similarly, one woman in a STEM graduate program heard sexist language in the workplace with the word “chicks” and a sexist joke referencing liking “chickens for their legs not their brains” (Barthelemy, et al., 2016, p.020119-8). Moreover, Barthelemy and colleagues (2016) found that other male colleagues in STEM joked about rape or domestic violence (Barthelemy, et al., 2016). Overall, the literature suggests that sexist language towards women is extremely prevalent in the workplace (Barthlemy et al., 2016; Capodilupo et al., 2010; Nielsen, 2002).



*Implicit threat to physical safety* refers to indirect communication that a woman may not be physically safe and may need to take precautions to ensure safety (Miyake, 2018). This gender microaggression includes comments women receive to be on the alert or watch out for certain behaviors or settings in which they might be compromised, such as walking at night or drinking at a party. Research has supported the notion that women receive messages that it is necessary to take certain precautions to protect themselves (Easteal, Holland, & Judd, 2015). It also includes the notion that women need self-defense to protect themselves and to always have a safety plan if needed. Fourteen women in a qualitative research study mentioned feeling threatened at times and need to take preemptive measures to safeguard themselves (Nadal, Hamit, Lyons, Weinberg, & Corman, 2010).

*Explicit threat to physical safety* refers to direct actions that threaten a woman's safety (Miyake, 2018). This may include touching a woman's shoulder without consent, a comment that makes a woman feel unsafe, being stared at or being followed. Previous research has shown that women in the U.S. did not feel safe when followed (Nadal et al., 2010). Other research has shown that young women and girls around the globe have also not felt safe in public spaces (Plan Network, 2019).

*Environmental microaggressions* are systemic, macro-level practices or policies that foster discrimination (Capodilupo, 2010; Sue et al, 2007). This includes negative messages communicated to others such as exclusion in the workplace or marginalizing women globally. One of these widespread policies includes the gender wage gap previously discussed that communicates that women are worth less than men in general and thus should not get paid equally. Twelve women in a focus group described being

paid less than men for the same job, commonly referred to as the gender wage gap (Capodilupo et al., 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Social media can be a source of major environmental microaggressions in which women witness media portrayal of women who are devalued and sexualized (APA Task Force, 2007). Women are often portrayed as dumb, only sexual, or in roles serving men. Another example of environmental microaggressions is exclusion of women. For instance, the 2020 Oscar nominations did not include any female directors in the nomination category for best director and only five women have ever been nominated in the history of Oscar nominations (Whitten, 2020). This communicates that female directors are less than their male counterparts or they think female directed work is not valued as highly as men's.

### **Employing a Microaggressions Framework to Understand the Experiences of Active Duty Women**

The sexual harassment and discrimination that women confront in the hypermasculine culture of the military, supports and reinforces subtle forms of sexism, such as gender microaggressions. The only known data on microaggressions in the military is the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute's technical report on microaggression and organizational climate in military units, which focuses on *racial microaggressions* (Brown, 2011). The data was drawn from 6,816 active duty personnel, mostly men (83.3%) across all five branches (Army = 53.2%, Navy = 29.7%, Marines = 15.4%, Air Force = .6%, & Coast Guard = 1.2%) and included a range of rates/ranks (enlisted = 83.7%, officer = 16.3, & Warrant Officer = 2.1%; Brown, 2011). The report states that different behaviors across jobs in the military toward members of minority groups correlate significantly with racial microaggressions (Brown, 2011). This particular

study showed that job satisfaction, trust, positive equal opportunity behavior, command behaviors towards racial minority group members, religious and age discrimination, and racism, predicted racial microaggressions for women in the military (Brown, 2011). As such, Brown (2011) predicted a reduction in racism and microaggressive behaviors would provide a much more positive environment for females and other minority members.

Although little research has been conducted, anecdotal accounts suggest women in the military indeed have experienced gender microaggressions. I reviewed activity on a current Facebook page for women who are Naval Officers (i.e., Female Navy Officers) to gather anecdotal evidence through comments women shared on this online platform. Female Navy Officers serves as a place to ask uniform, moving, or work questions and also provides a platform for discussing experiences with sexism in the workplace. I describe these below. Additionally, several women in the U.S. military have published autobiographies that provide examples of their experiences with gender microaggressions. One U.S. Naval Officer described in her autobiography that “microaggressions were constant and relentless” and that she would still be in the Navy if it were not for these experiences (Johnson & Williams, 2019, p.170). She described them vaguely similar to previous research on microaggressions as “stupid, slight, and many ignorable” but stated it was the stressful environment of the military, where being a woman, made it worse (Johnson & Williams, 2019, p. 170). She further said they should not have been meaningful but that multiple experiences of them frequently became unbearable (Johnson & Williams, 2019). Below, I provide anecdotal evidence that suggests women in the U.S. military have experiences with the eight gender microaggression themes reported above.

Recall that sexual objectification gender microaggressions involve the notion that women's bodies (and body parts) represent her and who she is. An example of sexual objectification in the military includes the culture of sharing naked photos of women in the military (CNN, 2017), which also supports environmental gender microaggressions. One enlisted sailor mentioned that a coworker recorded her in a bathroom without her consent and shared the naked videos of her with other coworkers (Katzenberg, 2019). While some women have naked photos shared without their knowledge, an Army veteran reported receiving direct requests to show her breasts and hearing comments about performing sexual acts upon her without her consent (Williams, 2005). Several U.S. Naval Officers have described feeling uncomfortable when male colleagues stare at their chest, which is where the rank is placed on a uniform. One U.S. Navy Officer reported that her superior officer "stuck his fingers in the corner of his own mouth and drew them up while saying 'SMILE!'" Another U.S. Naval Officer described getting asked from male senior officers why she does not smile more, insinuating that women should always be smiling, while another U.S. Naval Officer said she was asked to put makeup on and smile more during a training and her leaders then noted her "improvement." These behaviors insinuate that women should always be smiling, which refers to another sexual objectification microaggression that women should be sexually appealing to men. Yet another U.S. Naval Officer explained that a coworker told her a patient only responded well to her because she was attractive and not due to her rapport or skill. A Naval Academy graduate mentioned that she and another female pilot were nicknamed the "femme bots" during flight school because of a film that depicted female robots in a hypersexualized manner (Johnson & Williams, 2019). Other U.S. Naval Officers have

heard their Commanding Officers refer to a female enlisted sailor as a stripper when he said, “she was on her pole,” or ask if they were a porn star because their name resembled a porn stars name.

Another common form of gender microaggressions that likely appear in the U.S. military are second-class citizen or assumptions of inferiority gender microaggressions, when men are preferred over women. An example includes a group of male coworkers that may not include a female coworker in outside work events, such as physical training (PT), because they prefer the group to be all men. One U.S. Naval Officer reported that at work events, she is expected to mingle with the wives instead of her coworkers because her colleagues would prefer to spend recreational time with their male colleagues (Johnson & Williams, 2019). One U.S. Naval Officer noted that she was left out of lunch conversations or invites simply because she was a woman. Another U.S. Naval Officer said more men were requested to do job specific presentations to other departments in the Navy than her female colleagues. A U.S. Naval Officer was touring a base with four other females and one male in her cohort and the tour guide would only speak to their male colleague and would salute the group as sir, leaving the majority female officers ignored and unseen. An enlisted air woman described being left behind frequently while on deployment because she was a woman (Katzenberg, 2019). Women are often viewed as less than or inferior to men, also. This example was most prevalent among media examples. For example, the military’s history of exclusion of women from combat, despite no rational basis, demonstrates the perceptions that women are inferior to men in combat situations. Assumptions of inferiority also involve situations in which women’s thoughts are less valuable than men’s thoughts. Several U.S. Naval Officers have

described online that other men answer before they have a chance to, talk over them, or the men's ideas are more valued. Yet another U.S. Naval Officer mentioned that a friend posted, "women weren't created to do everything a man can do," and another U.S. Naval Officer posted in the Facebook group that what was "corrosive" to the military was the "behind the scenes" comments, such as "she doesn't know what she's talking about" or "screw what she said." One U.S. Air Force veteran had a teacher who told her, "The Navy is no place for you, Mary. What are you trying to prove? This isn't a game. Defending our nation should be left to the strong, and it's no place for a woman," while a superior officer told her, "Shit, LT, the first time your time of the month gets in the way of doing your job, you're fired. Now get out of my office" (Hegar, 2017). She also had a male colleague that say to her, "Wow, that was the best spin recovery I've seen...from a chick," and a different colleague said, "Nothing personal. It's just that women can't hold their own in an evasion scenario" (Hegar, 2017). Yet another assumption of inferiority gender microaggression this U.S. Air Force veteran suffered is the comment, "Little lady, why can't you just leave the fightin' to the men who are so good at it? I mean, what could you possibly have to contribute" (Hegar, 2017). A U.S. Army veteran and U.S. Naval Officer wrote that men were threatened by their gender during physical activities because women were supposed to be less capable than men (Johnson & Williams, 2019; Lemmon, 2015). An enlisted Army member also mentioned that she was told she was taking a spot from a man in the military, insinuating that women were beneath men and these opportunities should only be awarded to men (Katzenberg, 2019).

Active duty women also reported being invalidated, where they were told sexism no longer exists and they have the same opportunities as men. There are many examples

of denying the reality of sexism in the military, such as when one male colleague told a U.S. Naval Officer that “this sort of thing and thinking [sexism and sexist thinking] doesn’t happen anymore in today’s Navy because, look, we have female 4-stars.”

Another U.S. Naval Officer stated that her commanding officer told a group of coworkers that “sexism is not a problem in the military anymore.” Denying individual sexism occurs against women in the military in general, as men within the military frequently deny their own bias toward women or support when other men are biased. One U.S. Naval Officer online said a colleague told her, “I’m sure they didn’t mean anything by it” when telling him her experience with sexism.

Assumptions of traditional gender roles has also been a theme for women in the military. The notion that women need to be protected or saved by men represents assumptions of traditional gender roles. The previously mentioned story of Jessica Lynch needing to be saved as a POW because she was a woman is a perfect example (Feuerherd, 2019). Another notion within traditional gender roles is that women should be nurses and not in combat because they are nurturing and not fierce warriors. One U.S. Army veteran explained how some civilians assumed all females in the military were nurses (Lemmon, 2015). In another example, after a male General asked one U.S. service member’s age, he told her that she “should start having kids,” which highlights assumptions of traditional gender roles microaggressions that women are for childbearing and not working. Other U.S. Naval Officers have described their male colleagues looking down on them for working and having childcare, saying, “I would never leave my child” or “I don’t want someone else raising my kids.” A U.S. Naval Officer also described that women were often given jobs that were deemed unwanted by men, such as planning

events or cleaning things, because the men were preferred to do other tasks and these were more stereotypical jobs for women (Johnson & Williams, 2019). Civilians also perpetuate assumptions of traditional gender roles in the military by always assuming any affiliation for a female is through marriage. For example, one U.S. Naval Officer was asked what command her husband was with instead of assuming correctly that she was the service member, while countless others have been thanked for their husband's service, completely ignoring their own sacrifice as a service member and not a spouse. A Coast Guard woman mentioned she was told she could not be a rescue swimmer because she was "too small" and could not save people (Katzenberg, 2019), indicating that women were not able to serve in this role due to stature and would be better suited in another role. An enlisted Marine also said during physical fitness with her platoon, a coworker suggested that she serve as a cheerleader for the day instead of engaging in the physical activity (Katzenberg, 2019).

Sexist language is common in the military. Perhaps one the most common forms of microaggressions for females in the military is to be labeled a "slut," "easy," "bitch," "whore," "cunt," or "dyke" (Archer, 2012; Bayard de Volo, & Hall, 2015; Johnson & Williams, 2019; Williams, 2005). Although not yet explicitly examined using the microaggressions framework, sexist language appears commonly in research among female service members. Employing a microaggressions conceptualization among women generally, U.S. military women in leadership positions may experience being labeled a "bitch," or are viewed as less capable than men (Capodilupo, 2010). One drill sergeant was quoted as saying, "You little girl," which implies that being a little girl is a bad thing or unwanted in the military (Shilts, 1993, p. 132). A U.S. Naval Officer was



told to “man up” once also (Johnson & Williams, 2019). The same U.S. Naval Officer also said that there was a lot of sexual innuendo in the aviation community (Johnson & Williams, 2019). Another example includes when one U.S. Air Force veteran shared how a male colleague would respond to her by saying, “Whatever you say babe;” and she further explained that, “He never missed a chance to call [her] babe or honey in a dismissive way” (Hegar, 2017, p. 45). One only needs to listen to cadences across all branches of the military to know that sexist language, including sexual objectification language, is embedded in the past and present military. An Army cadence example that is explicitly sexist while poorly attempting to use humor to cover the sexualization includes:

See that lady wearing brown? She makes her livin’ goin’ down. She’s a deep sea diver, a deep sea diver. See that lady wearing black? She makes her livin’ on her back. She’s a back stroke swimmer, a back stroke swimmer. See that lady from the south? She makes her livin’ with her mouth. She’s a rock n’ roll singer, a rock n’ roll singer.

Another cadence example is:

I wish all the ladies were bells in a tower. I’ll be the bellman and bang them every hour. I wish all the ladies were pies on a shelf. I’ll be the baker and eat the pie myself. I wish all the ladies were a cat in a tree. I’ll be a firefighter and get that nice pussy. I wish all the ladies were potholes in the road, and I was the mixer filling them with my load. I wish all the ladies were bricks in a pile, and I was the mason, I’d lay them all in style.

Also reflecting sexist language, women in the U.S. military often hear and/or are the center of misogynistic jokes (Koeszegi et al., 2014).

Women in the military have endorsed implicit threats to their physical safety. These messages are especially true among women who are deployed. For example, a male soldier asked an Army psychologist not to use her soap while on deployment because it smelled too good and he was concerned for her safety. There are higher rates of sexual assault while deployed so the implication is that women should change things about themselves to make them less of a target (Leardmann et al., 2013). There are also examples in the military outside of a deployed setting. One U.S. Naval Officer described that male colleagues want to walk her to her vehicle if it is dark outside to ensure her safety. Another U.S. Naval Officer mentioned that she had a safety plan when going out on a date of giving information of her suitor and date plans to friends. During sexual assault trainings in the military, it is common to discuss that a drink should not be accepted from another and that you should have your drink at all times, indicating potential threat otherwise.

There are also themes of explicit threat to physical safety among women in the military. One U.S. Naval Officer described feeling unsafe when a male colleague in a leadership position tried to give her a shoulder massage without her consent. Another example is when an Army soldier mentioned that men groped her without her permission while on deployment (Lemmon, 2015). This was a direct threat to her physical safety and while she was not assaulted further because it was interrupted, the explicit threat was still present. One enlisted Marine mentioned that she had been stalked by a coworker, directly threatening her safety (Katzenberg, 2019).

In anecdotal accounts, women in the U.S. military also expressed the theme of environmental gender microaggressions, where women receive negative global

communications at the macrolevel. There is a “striking imbalance in the highest ranks” among men and women in the U.S. military, partly due to women’s exclusion in combat and the requirements for making rank, including combat leadership experience (Dieckmann, 2011; Rollins, 2012). Women in the military continue to experience exclusion, harassment, and discrimination through denial of jobs and career advancements (Dieckmann, 2011; Dietz, 2011; Hasday, 2008; Rollins, 2012). This also means that women are less likely to be promoted, which affects their pay and retirement (Dieckmann, 2011). Another notion of environmental microaggressions is that women are devalued and sexualized globally. One example of this was that the Marines used to force female recruits to go through a class on image and discussed topics, such as nail polish as well as skirt wearing and use (Shilts, 1993). When women do not conform to traditional gender roles or appearances in such a hypermasculine environment, men may react with stronger forms of resistance or sexist beliefs (Young & Nauta, 2017). Other notions of environmental microaggressions includes the idea that women are not included in thoughts of the military or welcomed in the environment. One U.S. Naval Officer posted her annoyance at a radio announcer saying, “It’s nice to have a holiday to celebrate these men who have done so much for our country,” when referring to Veterans Day, which shows environmental microaggressions because even U.S. civilian culture does not recognize or appreciate women in the military. Another U.S. Naval Officer veteran was told that she “didn’t look like a veteran.” Other civilians have told U.S. Naval Officers: “Why are you wearing those clothes,” “You don’t look like you work on warships,” and “You’re a Navy pilot?!” insinuating their ideas of service members, warship workers, and pilots all belonged to males. A U.S. Air Force veteran reported that

one male colleague said, “Man, that’s why they shouldn’t let women on these convoys” in a discussion with colleagues and then back tracked when he realized one of his coworkers was in fact a woman, saying, “oh not you, you kick ass” (Hegar, 2017). One U.S. Naval Officer reported she was told by a colleague that it “never occurred” to them “that Officer’s got pregnant too,” when discussing enlisted pregnancy information. Another U.S. Naval Officer is frequently called “sir” in emails instead of by her rank, assuming that all Officers are men. The combined experiences of women in the military created a culture of sexism and a breeding ground for gender microaggressions, which may impact them in ways outside of their work environment.

### **Effects of Microaggressions on Mental Health**

Previous findings on discrimination and harassment, including microaggressions, have shown negative outcomes for individuals with marginalized identities. Specifically, studies found associations between microaggressions and: diminished quality of life and general health (Bergmann & Hallberg, 2002; Foynes et al., 2015; Lehavot & Simpson, 2012; Ratner, Halim, & Amodio, 2010); higher depressive symptoms (Cochran, Balsam, Flentje, Malte, & Simpson, 2013); higher symptoms of anxiety, substance use, and PTSD (Estrada & Berggren, 2009; Lehavot & Simpson, 2012; RAND, 2010;); isolation and negative personal relationships (Estrada & Berggren, 2009; Gilder, 2017;); and lower job satisfaction and higher turnover (Antecol et al., 2009; Estrada & Berggren, 2009; Moradi, 2009; Velez & Moradi, 2012).

It is difficult to navigate how to handle or cope with microaggressions and the microaggressive stress that accompanies these experiences (Friedlaender, 2018; Sue, 2010). Many individuals will not respond to microaggressions due to time limitations,

self-deception, or difficulty discerning if an offense actually occurred (Sue, 2010). Individuals must also determine whether a response will result in a positive or negative outcome, and they must consider the impact those responses will have on them (Sue, 2010). The difficulty in choosing how to respond involves both the power structure in which marginalized groups live and their level of safety in responding. Gender microaggressions that target women demonstrate a sexist and historical power difference between men and women.

Sue, Capodilupo, and Holder (2008) as well as Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, and Rivera (2009) conducted studies to determine the process of how microaggressions effect targets, which resulted in the microaggression process model. Each incident of hearing or experiencing a gender microaggression leads to a cascade of additional experiences. This process model is “applicable to how process and deal with subtle sexism,” (Sue, 2010, p. 67), with explicit gender microaggression examples (Sue & Spanierman, 2020). The process model includes five phases: incident, initial assessment, reaction, interpretation, and consequence (Sue & Spanierman, 2020).

Phase one includes the incident or event of experiencing the microaggression, both verbal and nonverbal or behavioral. For example, a woman in the military might experience one of the eight gender microaggression themes previously discussed. A specific example would be a male colleague calling a female U.S. service member a slut.

The second phase includes how the target perceives the microaggression, which often includes questioning the content to be biased or not. Continuing with the sexist language example from above, the service member might question why the male

colleague is calling them a slut and determines it is biased and based on stereotypes of women in the military and is sexist.

In the third phase, the target has an immediate reaction to the microaggression, which may include healthy paranoia, checking one's sanity, empowering one's self, or an attempt to rescue the perpetrator. In the previous example, the service member may jokingly say, "screw you" hoping not to draw attention to it or make a big deal out of the subtle sexism that just occurred.

Next, in the fourth phase, the microaggression is interpreted to have meaning, which has suggested the person does not belong, they are not normal, they are inferior, they are untrustworthy, or they are not an individual outside of their minority identity. The service member in the previous example may then determine that they do not belong in the military because men will always call her derogatory names and she will not be accepted. Furthermore, she may not feel safe in the military environment because others are judging her and putting her down.

Lastly, the microaggression has a consequence or impact on the target. Consequences have shown to include being invisible, feeling powerless, a loss of integrity, and pressure to represent their minority group. The service member may feel worthless and that she cannot seek help for her male colleagues' behavior and develop depression over time because she is inundated with subtle gender microaggressions from her male colleagues. Microaggressions in the workplace have been referred to as an "obstacle course" that lead to consequences, such as greater health challenges (Charles & Arndt, 2013, p. 1154).

In this current study, I focused primarily on phases one and five of the microaggressions process model for gender microaggressions. The main focus was on phase one because I collect data on specific experiences with gender microaggressions. Phases two through four were not explicitly examined but the women may have questioned their experiences (phase two) or had a reaction to the gender microaggressions (phase three) and interpreted them to have a negative meaning (phase four). The consequences of the gender microaggressions were directly assessed, examining their depressive symptoms (phase five).

### **Depression.**

While I recognize that there are both physical and psychological health concerns for targets of microaggressions, this study will focus solely on one form of psychological health: depression. Depression is a common mental health disorder in the United States, affecting roughly one in every six adults (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Meadows, 2015). Common symptoms of depression include depressed mood, diminished interest in activities, insomnia, and fatigue (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). In 2015 to 2016, 9.4% of 16,699 active duty Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, Navy and Coast Guard service members suffered from depressive symptoms, higher than the civilian average of 6% (Meadows, 2015). The unique stressors of the military's "intense work environment," including deployment or combat exposure, are risk factors for depression (Redmond et al., 2015, p. 5; Wells et al., 2010). Depression was higher in the Marine Corps, Army, and Navy compared to all other branches; it was also higher among enlisted individuals compared to officers and women compared to men (Luxton, Skopp, & Maguen, 2010; Meadows, 2015).

Depression is more common for women than men, with a 15-25% lifetime prevalence rate for depressive disorders for women and only 4-12% for men (CDP, 2016; Kessler, 2003). Because women tend to report higher levels of depressive symptoms than men generally do (Galambos, Leadbeater, & Barker, 2004; Kessler et al., 2003; Weissman & Klerman, 1977), it is not surprising that female soldiers have reported higher levels of depressive symptoms than male soldiers (Luxton et al., 2010; Meadows et al, 2015; Warner et al., 2007). Women who have served in the military are at an even greater risk of developing depressive symptoms and having suicidal thoughts compared to women who have not served in the military (America's Health Ranking, 2017). Women, younger service members, and lower ranking individuals in the military are more susceptible to developing depressive symptoms (CDP, 2016; Warner, et al., 2007). Women in the military are a minority group, and the stressors they experience with sexism may lead to depression. This research aims to explore the link between gender microaggressions and depression and how active duty military women might cope effectively with such microaggressive stressors.

### **Coping with Discrimination Generally and Microaggressions in Particular**

Members of minority groups who encounter microaggressions are required to endure multiple experiences with discrimination and have been forced to find ways to survive their environments through different methods of coping. Coping is considered to be different internal and external cognitive or behavioral ways of dealing with stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In addition to dealing with the stress of experiencing microaggressions, targets have the added burden of deciding how to respond to these experiences and further cope with their consequences. There is debate within the research



community of not placing the burden on the targets, but rather focusing on the perpetrators. The focus of this study will be on how the targets of gender microaggressions coped or dealt with their experiences. Individuals have demonstrated effective coping with racial microaggression experiences, and while there is limited research on women coping with gender microaggressions, the coping strategies used to manage stress associated with racism may lead to others forms of microaggressions. For example, approaches to coping with racial microaggressions, which Sue et al. (2019) refer to as microinterventions, include: retreating, confronting the perpetrator, supporting targets, being an ally, seeking social support, getting authoritative assistance, or a mixture of these coping methods.

There are different styles of coping with stress and discrimination that can lead to better mental health. To develop the microaggression process model described in the previous section, Sue (2010) utilized Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of coping. The transactional theory posits that when a person determines a situation to be harmful, two appraisals (i.e., primary and secondary) are applied to determine which coping actions to pursue. This process aligns well with Sue's (2010) perception phase, in which a person determines if the microaggression was motivated by bias or not. Primary control coping is problem focused, while secondary control coping changes thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Rothbaum, Weisz, & Snyder, 1982). The two modes of coping discussed and included in this study are problem and emotion focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Each form of coping has unique predictors or outcomes to successfully dealing with stress, but emotion focused coping leads to poorer mental health (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The way an individual is able to cope with stress is dependent upon their

resources, goals for the situation, and the context (Wong, 1993; Leong & Wong, 2003). The military provides an additional stressful life situation with deployments and locational limitations of resources, which may further impact their mental health (i.e., risk for developing depression). Other research has used coping as a mediator or moderator for stress experienced by members of minority groups (Sanchez, Adams, Arango, & Flannigan, 2018; Wei, Heppner, Ku, & Liao, 2010) or examined coping with microaggressions (Hernandez & Villodas, 2019; Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015; Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Hunt, 2013; Liang, Alvarez, Juang, & Liang, 2007; Nadal, et al., 2011).

Some research to date has described how individuals have been forced to cope with the effects of microaggressions as they continue to occur. African American women who have endured gendered racial microaggressions have utilized the coping mechanisms of engagement, such as resistance or education/advocacy, and disengagement, such as internalization or use of drugs or alcohol (Szymanski & Lewis, 2016). Other Black women have used using one's voice as power, resisting Eurocentric standards, leaning on support network, becoming a Black superwoman, and becoming desensitized or escaping as forms of coping (Lewis et al., 2013). Another study examined how a sample of Black Canadian and Indigenous community members coped with racial microaggressions (Houshmand, Spanierman, & De Stefano, 2019). They found the coping skills used included calling out perpetrators, empowering self and others, choosing not to engage, and using humor (Houshmand et al., 2019). Other coping strategies with racial microaggressions identified by research include seeking support from colleagues, friends, partners, and family members, choosing battles carefully, praying, withdrawing from the

microaggressive situation, and accepting the comments (Constantine et al., 2008).

However, it is unknown how women strategically respond with gender microaggressions, not just racial microaggressions, as previous research has examined.

### **The Present Study: Purpose and Rationale**

In the present study, I draw from the microaggressions process model, which posits that experiences with microaggressions lead to a five-phase process resulting in consequences for the target (Sue, 2010). Specifically, I am interested in subtle forms of discrimination that target women: gender microaggressions. I focus on subtle forms of sexism in the military, because modern and benevolent forms of sexism have been prevalent in recent years (Spence & Hahn, 1997; Twenge, 1997, 2011). Moreover, the hypermasculine environment within the U. S. military gives rise to all forms of sexism, including microaggressions (Hinojosa, 2010). I use the gender microaggressions framework, featuring eight themes, to examine experiences women in the military have with these specific types of microaggressions in their workplace. Lastly, I employ transactional coping theory in the present study to determine which coping styles (i.e., problem-focused or emotion-focused) influence the link between gender microaggressions and depression among active duty women in the U.S. military. To test my hypotheses, I use a moderation model to explore whether coping style moderates the effects of gender microaggressions on depressive symptoms. I also explore group differences by rank, military occupational specialty code, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and branch of service and include any pertinent covariates in the regression model. The study will attempt to answer the following research hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1: Active duty women will report experiences with gender microaggressions.
- Hypothesis 2: I will identify group differences by branch, rank, and MOS.
- Hypothesis 3: I expect to find a positive association between all gender microaggression scales (IVs) and depression (DV), while controlling for general stress and other relevant demographic variables.
- Hypothesis 4: I expect to find a moderating effect of coping style on the link between gender microaggressions (IV) and depression (DV), while controlling for general stress and other relevant demographic variables.
  - Hypothesis 4a: Specifically, I hypothesize women who report high levels of problem-focused engagement coping will show lower levels of depression than women who are report low levels of problem-focused engagement coping.
  - Hypothesis 4b: I also hypothesize that women who report high levels of emotion-focused engagement coping will show lower levels of depression than women who report low levels of emotion-focused engagement coping.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

Below, I provide demographic information for the sample. Next, I describe each instrument used in the current study, including reliability and validity estimates. Finally, I present procedures pertaining to this study including recruitment methods and how data were collected.

#### **Participants**

The final sample of participants comprised 683 active duty women across three branches of the military aged 18-59, ( $M = 31.5$ ,  $SD = 7.1$ ). More specifically, 335 (49%) were Navy, 287 (42%) were Air Force, and 61 (8.9%) were Army. Some women were a Reservist or in the National Guard (2.2%), while most were not (97.7%) or declined to answer (.1%).

Participants provided information on their ranks and military occupation specialties (MOS codes). Across branches, more than 75% were officers: senior officers (O4-O6; 25.3%) and junior officers (W1-O3; 51.5%). The remainder were enlisted: senior enlisted (E7-E9; 4.1%) and junior enlisted (E1-E6; 19%). More specifically, the ranks were: O-3 (31.9%), O-4 (15.7%), O-1 (10%), O-2 (9.4%), E-5 (8.6%), O-5 (7.9%), E-4 (4.5%), E-6 (4.2%), E-7 (2.9%), O-6 (1.9%), E-8 (.9%), E-9 (.3%), E-1 (.1%), and W-3 (.1%).

To make military occupational specialty code (MOS) or designator codes more meaningful, I chunked into categories specified in military occupation manuals (Occupational Conversion Index, 2001): Medical (e.g., aviation medicine, nurse, psychologist, corpsman, dental, biomedical specialist; 29%), Intelligence (e.g.,

cryptologic technician, cryptologic interpreter, operations, operations specialist, language analyst; 9.8%), Pilot (8.3%), Supply (e.g., culinary specialist, logistics; 7.2%), Aviation (e.g., air traffic controller, maintenance, support equipment, wing staff agency; 5.4%), Legal (e.g., master at arms, special investigations, security, force support; 5.6%), Nuclear (e.g., space nuclear missile operations; 5.6%), IT/MIS (e.g., electronics, communications, sonar tech, cyber operations, combat systems, cyber surety, command control, 5.3%), Line (e.g., surface warfare; 5.3%), Scientific/engineering (e.g., electrician, boatswain, hulltech, fire control, damage control, seaman, machinist, gunners mate, weapons, developmental engineering; 4.1%), Personnel/admin (e.g., navy counselor, finance, public affairs, yeoman; 2%), Acquisition (e.g., contracts; 1.5%), and Religious (.4%). For those that did not fit into the above-mentioned categories, I classified as “Other” (e.g., oceanographer, weather, band, special duty, civil engineer, construction, explosive ordinance disposal, student; 10.5%),

The number of years served ranged from 0-36, ( $M = 8.70$ ,  $SD = 6.43$ ). A majority of women were not currently stationed overseas (83.5%), while some were stationed overseas (16.3%), and two declined to answer (.3%). A majority were not currently or had not been deployed in the last six months (85.2%), but there were a number of women who were currently or had been deployed in the last six months (14.6%) or declined to answer (.1%). Of the 100 who were deployed in the last six months, few experienced combat (1.6%) or declined to answer (.3%). Some indicated that they had a disability (2.8%), while others said they did not (96.9%) or declined to answer (.3%).

A majority of participants were White (78.6%), while others were Biracial (6.4%), Latinx (6%), Asian American (4%), Black/African American (3.1%), American

Indian (.3%), Multiracial (.1%), Middle Eastern or North African (.1%), Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (.1%), Other (.9%), and Preferred not to answer (.3%). Most identified as heterosexual (89.8%), but others identified as bisexual (5.3%), lesbian (3.2%), asexual (.4%), queer (.3%), or gay (.3%), preferred to self-describe (.4%), or declined to answer (.3%). See Appendix A for full demographic information.

## **Instruments**

Below, I describe the measures used in the current study.

**Demographics.** I created a demographic form for the current investigation which included items about gender, age, race/ethnicity, and so forth. Gender, race, and sexual orientation included an open-ended answer option (i.e., “Prefer to self-describe, please specify:”), so participants were able to self-define if they wished. Germaine to my research focus, I also asked about branch of service, Reservist/National Guard status, time on active duty, rank/rate, MOS/designator code, years in service, abroad/overseas status, deployment status, and combat experience. See Appendix B.

**Perceived General Stress.** I used the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) to obtain a general stress score (Cohen, Kamark, & Mermelstein, 1983). There are 10 total items with a 5-point Likert-type response format, ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*very often*). The stem asks, “In the last six months ...” and items include: “In the last six months, how often have you felt nervous or stressed?” and “In the last six months, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?” Higher scores indicate greater levels of general stress. Possible scores range from 0 to 40. I then calculated an average scale score for participants who responded to at least 80% of the items for each scale, resulting in less than 5% missing data. Prior research identified a positive

association with depression (Hong & Jian-Hong, 2004). In prior research, alpha coefficients have ranged from .77 - .78 (Cohen, Kamark, & Mermelsten, 1983; Wei et al., 2008). In the current study, the internal consistency estimate was  $\alpha = .90$ . See Appendix C.

**Gender Microaggressions.** I used the Female Microaggressions Scale (FeMS; Miyake, 2018) to assess gender microaggressions that correspond with the gender microaggressions described earlier in the literature review (see Appendix D). The FeMS is a 34-item measure consisting of eight subscales: traditional gender roles (four items; e.g., “Someone assumed that I should cook and clean because of my gender”), assumptions of inferiority/second-class citizen (five items; e.g., “Someone assumed that I am not good at math because of my gender”), sexist language (four items; e.g., “Someone called me a ‘bitch’”), explicit threatened physical safety (four items; e.g., “A man said something to me that made me feel unsafe”), implicit threatened physical safety (four items; e.g., “Someone told me not to walk alone because I might be raped or assaulted”), denial of the reality of sexism (five items; e.g., “Someone told me that sexism is no longer an important social issue”), sexual objectification (four items; e.g., “I observed someone staring at a woman’s body”), and environmental (four items; e.g., “I observed that men hold more leadership positions in society than women”).

Because I was interested specifically in women’s experiences within their work environment with the military and in the last six months, I modified the instructions to read “During the last 6 months in your military work environment,” instead of “During your lifetime.” Participants rated each Likert-type item from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*often/frequently*). I then calculated an average scale score for participants who responded



to at least 80% of the items for each subscale, resulting in less than 5% missing data.

Higher scores indicated greater experiences with gender microaggressions.

The FeMS subscales have garnered psychometric support in prior research. For example, each has demonstrated adequate internal consistency: traditional gender roles ( $\alpha = .79 - .84$ ), assumptions of inferiority/second-class citizen ( $\alpha = .80 - .84$ ), sexist language ( $\alpha = .83-.84$ ), explicit threatened physical safety ( $\alpha = .79 - .83$ ), implicit threatened physical safety ( $\alpha = .75 - .79$ ), denial of the reality of sexism ( $\alpha = .74 - .83$ ), sexual objectification ( $\alpha = .73 - .74$ ), and environmental ( $\alpha = .77 - .80$ ; Miyake, 2018). Demonstrating convergent validity, all FeMS subscales were correlated significantly with the Schedule of Sexist Events (SSE) scale for lifetime and within the past year (Miyake, 2018). All FeMS subscales also have been significantly and positively related to depression (Miyake, 2018). In the current study, the internal consistency estimate for each subscale was: traditional gender roles,  $\alpha = .79$ ; assumptions of inferiority/ second-class citizen,  $\alpha = .82$ ; sexist language,  $\alpha = .82$ ; explicit threatened physical safety,  $\alpha = .83$ ; implicit threatened physical safety,  $\alpha = .86$ ; denial of the reality of sexism,  $\alpha = .83$ ; sexual objectification,  $\alpha = .81$ ; and environmental,  $\alpha = .71$ .

**Coping.** I used the Coping Strategies Inventory- Short Form (CSI-SF) to assess coping (see Appendix E; Speyer, et al., 2016). The CSI-SF is a 14-item measure that assesses four coping strategies that encompass both problem and emotion focused coping foci of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) coping theory: problem focused engagement (four items; e.g., "Try to put things into perspective"), problem focused disengagement (four items; e.g., "Put the problem out of my mind"), emotion focused engagement (four items; e.g., "Talk about it with a friend or family"), and emotion focused disengagement (two

items; e.g., “Tend to blame myself”). Participants were instructed to indicate how often they used each of the 14 thoughts or behaviors to cope with stress. Items are scored on a 1 (*never*) to 5 (*almost always*) Likert-type scale. I then calculated an average scale score for participants who responded to at least 80% of the items for each scale, resulting in less than 5% missing data. Internal consistency estimates in prior research ranged from  $\alpha = .56 - .86$ ; emotion focused disengagement did not demonstrate an internal consistency above .70 (Addison et al., 2007; Speyer et al., 2016). In the current study, the internal consistency estimate for each subscale was: problem focused engagement,  $\alpha = .69$ ; problem focused disengagement,  $\alpha = .43$ ; emotion focused engagement,  $\alpha = .78$ ; and emotion focused disengagement,  $\alpha = .85$ . Although problem focused engagement had an alpha level below .70, I retained it for this study for exploration because it was just beneath the cutoff. Because problem focused disengagement had an alpha level of .43, I did not analyze data from this scale in the current study.

**Depression.** I used the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) to measure participants’ depressive symptoms during the last two weeks (see Appendix F; Kroenke, Spitzer, & Williams, 2001). Because I was interested specifically in women’s experiences in the last six months, I modified the instructions to read “In the last six months,” instead of “In the last two weeks.” The PHQ-9 is derived from DSM diagnostic criteria for major depressive disorder and is the depression module of the full PHQ which assesses numerous disorders (Kroeke & Spitzer, 2001). The instrument is used to diagnose and quantify depressive symptoms and monitor severity. The PHQ-9 comprises nine items asking participants to rate how bothered they were during the last six months (e.g., “little interest or pleasure in doing things,” “feeling tired or having little energy”). Each item is

rated 0 (*not at all*) to 3 (*nearly every day*). The scores are a total sum, interpreted on depression severity ranging from none (0 - 4) to severe (20 - 27), with higher scores indicating greater depressive symptoms. I then calculated an average scale score for participants who responded to at least 80% of the items for each scale, resulting in less than 5% missing data. The measure has demonstrated adequate internal consistency ( $\alpha = .86 - .89$ ; Kroeke & Spitzer, 2001; Miyake, 2018). The PHQ-9 also has evidenced adequate internal consistency among female veterans and service members after combat ( $\alpha = .94$ ; Levahot & Simpson, 2014). The internal consistency estimate for the PHQ-9 in the current study was  $\alpha = .88$ .

**Validity-check items.** Due to potential inattentiveness and distraction that may result from online surveys, I included three validity-check items (Mohr & Rochlen, 1999). These items instructed participants to choose a certain answer (e.g., Click “never” if the sky is blue), (e.g., Please choose “fairly often” if an orange is a circle), and (Please choose “several days”). Participant feedback resulted in the removal of one validity item (e.g., Please choose “fairly often” if an orange is a circle), as participants stated on a Facebook post that they thought it was a sphere not circle. I removed 187 participants based on incorrect answers to the two viable validity-check items.

## **Procedures**

To achieve .80 power, an a priori power analysis ( $\alpha$  error probability = .05) revealed that the present study would need approximately 139 participants to achieve a .15 anticipated effect size (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009), with fifteen predictors (i.e., three covariates: general stress, branch, rank, sexual orientation; eight gender microaggression subscales; and three coping subscales).

After obtaining ASU's Institutional Review Board approval (STUDY00009377), I recruited potential participants via military and women's group listservs (e.g., American Psychological Association Division 19 Society for Military Psychology), Facebook groups (i.e., Female Navy Officers, U.S. Navy Medical Service Corps, Army Women's Foundation, Military HPSP Students and Physicians, Military Mental Health Teams, APA Division 19 Military Psychology, ASU Veterans Club Group, AAPTIV Service Members, Sigma Kappa Alumnae, Female Navy Enlisted Sailors, Female Air Force Officers, and Sigma Kappa Military Alumnae), and individuals on the researcher's personal Facebook page.

I acquired participants through the use of nonprobability sampling with use of convenience sampling and the virtual snowball technique, in which participants may recommend the study to others (Heppner, Wampold, Owen, Thompson, & Wang., 2016; Leary, 2012). I recognized that women in the military may be difficult to reach due to geographical location or fear of participation's impact on service. Moreover, previous research used snowball sampling effectively to reach a military population (Dietert & Dentice, 2015). Therefore, I used snowball sampling to reach a greater number of participants in widespread locations. I utilized existing relationships among participants to foster comfort. That is, snowball sampling allowed participants to send the study to other women in the military to further expand the approach to recruitment and sampling.

A total of 918 women completed the survey, but I used several exclusion criteria to narrow the sample. I eliminated from analyses any Reservist or National Guard ( $N = 34$ ) who was not on active duty during the last six months because their military workplace experience differed from a person with a full six-month active duty service.

And I excluded two participants whose ages (71 and 95) did not seem accurate. I also eliminated one Coast Guard participant and 10 Marine participants because there were too few to run meaningful analyses. Any participant who did not answer the two viable validity questions correctly also was eliminated from all analyses ( $N = 187$ ). Anyone who identified as transgender ( $N = 1$ ) was excluded from analyses because there are different laws and experiences for transgender persons in the military. Thus, the final sample comprised 683 participants from the Navy, Airforce, and Army.

Before participation, I obtained informed consent, in which I explained the participant has the right to withdraw at any point from the study with no penalty or obligation. The surveys were completed online in Qualtrics and took participants approximately 20 minutes to complete. Researchers have identified advantages of online research as reaching distant participants, both geographically and hard to contact, and automatic data collection (Schmidt, 1997; Wright, 2005). Other research also has shown that people's trust in the Internet influences them to disclose personal information online in research (Robinson, 2018). Each participant completed a demographic questionnaire, gender microaggressions scale, general perceived stress scale, coping measure, and depression scale. I provided participants with a national mental health phone number at the end of the survey in case any participants had a negative experience with memories related to the study subject matter.

I received a Graduate & Professional Student Association Graduate Research Support grant of \$1,800 to offer participants the chance to enter a raffle and win one of seventy-two, \$25 Amazon gift cards. Only 416 participants provided their email addresses to be entered into the raffle, which resulted in 72 randomly selected

participants receiving gift cards. As an additional incentive, I also asked participants to identify a women veteran's organization (e.g., Center for Women Veterans, Women Veterans Interactive, American Women Veterans, Women Military Aviators, Service Women's Action Network, Women Veterans Network, Women Veterans ROCK!) to which I donated \$100. The organization that received the most votes was Center for Women Veterans (31.5%), however, their donations were only made available to specific state VA hospitals, and therefore could not be designated for women's use only. Consequently, I donated \$100 to the organization with the second-highest number of votes, the American Women Veterans Foundation (20.9%).

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### **Preliminary Analyses**

**Missing data.** Following methodologists' recommendations (Scholmer, Bauman, & Card, 2010), I calculated average scale scores for each study variable for participants who responded to at least 80% of the items for each scale. This procedure resulted in less than 5% missing data for each study variable and no further action was needed.

**Descriptive statistics.** I examined scale means, standard deviations, and internal consistency estimates for relevant study variables (see Appendix G). Skewness and kurtosis were checked, and assumptions of normality were met.

Generally, participants reported low to moderate levels of experiences with gender microaggressions. Specifically, mean scores ranged from 1.41-3.13 (1 = "never" to 3 = "sometimes/a moderate amount"). Among the eight gender microaggressions themes, participants reported the greatest experience with environmental gender microaggressions ( $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = .67$ ), followed by traditional gender roles ( $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = .91$ ), and invalidation of sexism ( $M = 2.38$ ,  $SD = .82$ ). See Appendix G for all scales.

Among the three styles of coping, participants reported the greatest experience with using problem focused engagement ( $M = 4.03$ ,  $SD = .66$ ), followed by emotion focused disengagement ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ). Noted above, problem focused disengagement was excluded from analyses because the alpha level was .43.

Finally, participants reported experiences with depression between "several days" and "nearly every day" ( $M = 1.74$ ,  $SD = .60$ ).

## Group Differences

To examine group differences on relevant study variables, I conducted univariate and multivariate analyses of variance. I conducted univariate analyses to determine group differences on depression, whereas I conducted a series of multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) to determine differences on the eight gender microaggressions. Significant associations were examined further by non-parametric testing. Findings are described below. See Appendix H for all group difference scores.

**Branch of service.** I conducted a MANOVA to determine group differences in gender microaggressions based on branch. There was a statistically significant difference by branch,  $F(2,666) = 4.99, p < .000$ ; Wilks's  $\Lambda = .89$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .06$ . Specifically, branch had a statistically significant effect on traditional gender roles ( $F(2, 666) = 6.10; p < .002$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ ), sexist language ( $F(2, 666) = 26.23; p < .000$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = .07$ ), second class citizen ( $F(2, 666) = 4.08; p < .02$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ ), sexual objectification ( $F(2, 666) = 18.57; p < .000$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = .05$ ), explicit threat of physical safety ( $F(2, 666) = 10.25; p < .000$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ ), implicit threat of physical safety ( $F(2, 666) = 5.12; p < .006$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ ), and invalidation of sexism ( $F(2, 666) = 11.34; p < .000$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ ). There were no differences by branch for environmental gender microaggressions.

Follow-up Tukey HSD tests showed significant differences. Mean scores for traditional gender roles differed significantly between Navy ( $M = 2.59, SD = .90$ ) and Air Force ( $M = 2.36, SD = .91, p < .005$ ). Mean scores for sexist language differed significantly between Navy ( $M = 1.59, SD = .72$ ) and Air Force ( $M = 1.23, SD = .43, p < .000$ ) and Navy and Army ( $M = 1.35, SD = .76, p < .017$ ). Mean scores for second class



citizen differed significantly between Navy ( $M = 2.04$ ,  $SD = .82$ ) and Army ( $M = 1.77$ ,  $SD = .78$ ,  $p < .037$ ). Mean scores for sexual objectification differed significantly between Navy ( $M = 2.17$ ,  $SD = .86$ ) and Air Force ( $M = 1.82$ ,  $SD = .71$ ,  $p < .000$ ) and Navy and Army ( $M = 1.72$ ,  $SD = .78$ ,  $p < .000$ ). Mean scores for explicit threat of physical safety differed significantly between Navy ( $M = 1.69$ ,  $SD = .72$ ) and Air Force ( $M = 1.44$ ,  $SD = .58$ ,  $p < .000$ ). Mean scores for implicit threat of physical safety differed significantly between Navy ( $M = 2.26$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) and Air Force ( $M = 2.01$ ,  $SD = .93$ ,  $p < .006$ ). Mean scores for invalidation of sexism differed significantly between Navy ( $M = 2.53$ ,  $SD = .82$ ) and Air Force ( $M = 2.23$ ,  $SD = .80$ ,  $p < .000$ ) and Navy and Army ( $M = 2.24$ ,  $SD = .84$ ,  $p < .029$ ).

**Rank.** I conducted a MANOVA to determine group differences in gender microaggressions based on rank. There was a statistically significant difference in gender microaggressions based on rank,  $F(3,665) = 14.29$ ,  $p < .000$ ; *Wilks's  $\Lambda$*  = .62, partial  $\eta^2 = .15$ . Rank had a statistically significant effect on traditional gender roles ( $F(3, 665) = 12.61$ ;  $p < .000$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = .05$ ), sexist language ( $F(3, 665) = 100.76$ ;  $p < .000$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = .31$ ), second class citizen ( $F(3, 665) = 19.89$ ;  $p < .000$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = .08$ ), sexual objectification ( $F(3, 665) = 67.33$ ;  $p < .000$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = .23$ ), explicit threat of physical safety ( $F(3, 665) = 39.23$ ;  $p < .000$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = .15$ ), implicit threat of physical safety ( $F(3, 665) = 39.57$ ;  $p < .000$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = .15$ ), invalidation of sexism ( $F(3, 665) = 20.68$ ;  $p < .000$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = .09$ ), and environmental ( $F(3, 665) = 9.00$ ;  $p < .000$ ; partial  $\eta^2 = .04$ ). There were group differences on all gender microaggressions by rank.

Follow-up Tukey HSD tests showed significant differences. Mean scores for traditional gender roles differed significantly between junior enlisted ( $M = 2.86$ ,  $SD =$

.83) and senior enlisted ( $M = 2.25, SD = .82, p < .006$ ), junior enlisted and junior officer ( $M = 2.45, SD = .91, p < .000$ ), and junior enlisted and senior officer ( $M = 2.24, SD = .89, p < .000$ ). Mean scores for sexist language differed significantly between junior enlisted ( $M = 2.15, SD = .83$ ) and senior enlisted ( $M = 1.38, SD = .42, p < .000$ ), junior enlisted and junior officer ( $M = 1.27, SD = .46, p < .000$ ), and junior enlisted and senior officer ( $M = 1.17, SD = .29, p < .000$ ). Mean scores for second class citizen were statistically significant different between junior enlisted ( $M = 2.41, SD = .80$ ) and junior officer ( $M = 1.90, SD = .77, p < .000$ ), and junior enlisted and senior officer ( $M = 1.76, SD = .73, p < .000$ ). Mean scores for sexual objectification were statistically significant different between junior enlisted ( $M = 2.77, SD = .82$ ) and senior enlisted ( $M = 2.04, SD = .56, p < .000$ ), junior enlisted and junior officer ( $M = 1.83, SD = .73, p < .000$ ), and junior enlisted and senior officer ( $M = 1.67, SD = .61, p < .000$ ). Mean scores for explicit threat of physical safety were statistically significant different between junior enlisted ( $M = 2.09, SD = .80$ ) and senior enlisted ( $M = 1.47, SD = .65, p < .000$ ), junior enlisted and junior officer ( $M = 1.48, SD = .59, p < .000$ ), and junior enlisted and senior officer ( $M = 1.36, SD = .53, p < .000$ ). Mean scores for implicit threat of physical safety differed significantly between junior enlisted ( $M = 2.84, SD = .95$ ) and senior enlisted ( $M = 2.21, SD = 1.08, p < .005$ ), junior enlisted and junior officer ( $M = 1.07, SD = .91, p < .000$ ), and junior enlisted and senior officer ( $M = 1.71, SD = .79, p < .000$ ). Mean scores for implicit threat of physical safety were statistically significant different between senior enlisted ( $M = 2.21, SD = 1.08$ ) and senior officer ( $M = 1.71, SD = .79, p < .034$ ). Mean scores for invalidation of sexism were statistically significant different between junior enlisted ( $M = 2.86, SD = .75$ ) and senior enlisted ( $M = 2.24, SD = .67, p < .001$ ), junior

enlisted and junior officer ( $M = 2.31, SD = .80, p < .000$ ), and junior enlisted and senior officer ( $M = 2.17, SD = .82, p < .000$ ). Mean scores for environmental were statistically significant different between junior enlisted ( $M = 3.39, SD = .63$ ) and junior officer ( $M = 3.04, SD = .68, p < .000$ ), and junior enlisted and senior officer ( $M = 3.09, SD = .64, p < .001$ ).

### *Correlations*

Using Pearson Product Moment bivariate correlations (Cohen, 1988), I examined correlations among relevant study variables (see Appendix I). Small correlations represent .10 - .30, medium correlations represent .30 - .50, and above .50 represent large correlations (Cohen, 1988). All FeMS subscales had positive and significant medium to large correlations with all other FeMS subscales. All FeMS subscales correlated positively and significantly with depression. In particular, sexual objectification, second class citizen, sexist language, and explicit threat to physical safety all showed small to medium correlations with depression ( $r_s = .18$  to  $.44$ ).

I examined correlations among FeMS scales and coping style. All FeMS scales were positively and significantly correlated with Emotion Focused Disengagement ( $r_s = .18$  to  $.53$ ), whereas only one FeMS scale (Sexist Language) was correlated negatively and significantly with Emotion Focused Engagement ( $r = -.08$ ). Most FeMS scales (except Traditional Gender Roles and Environmental) also were correlated negatively and significantly with Problem Focused Engagement ( $r_s = -.08$  to  $-.19$ ).

I also examined correlations between coping style and depression. Problem Focused Engagement and Emotion Focused Engagement were negatively and significantly correlated with depression ( $r = -.41$  and  $-.18$ , respectively), while Emotion

Focused Disengagement was positively and significantly correlated with depression ( $r = .45$ ).

### **Main Analysis**

I examined regression assumptions for the model to ensure normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity (Fox, 2016). Assumptions of normality through the p-p plot met criteria. Assumptions of linearity met the VIF score below 10 for all variables and the model. Using a scatter plot, I checked assumptions of homoscedasticity, which met criteria.

I conducted a hierarchical regression analysis to examine if the FeMS subscales explained depressive symptoms and to test various coping strategies as potential moderators of that association, while controlling for levels of perceived general stress and other relevant demographic variables (branch, rank, sexual orientation). The three additional pertinent covariates were chosen after running group difference analyses. It was determined that branch, rank, and sexual orientation were significantly different and there was a need to account for those differences in the model. I ran three regression models (i.e. one for each of the three viable coping strategies). Branch, rank, and sexual orientation were dummy coded into majority or minority nominal variables to be used in the regression.

In Step 1, I entered perceived general stress, branch (i.e., Air Force, Army, Navy), rank (i.e., Junior Enlisted, Senior Enlisted, Junior Officer, Senior Officer), and sexual orientation (i.e., Heterosexual, Lesbian/Gay/Queer, Bisexual) as covariates. There were significant main effects for rank, branch, and perceived general stress.

Next, in Step 2, I entered each of the eight gender microaggression variables (i.e., traditional gender roles, assumptions of inferiority/second-class citizen, sexist language, explicit threatened physical safety, implicit threatened physical safety, denial of the reality of sexism, sexual objectification, and environmental). There were significant main effects for second class citizen.

In Step 3, I entered one of the three viable coping strategies (i.e., problem focused engagement, emotion focused engagement, and emotion focused disengagement). There were significant main effects of second class citizen and all three coping strategies on depression.

In Step 4, I entered the two-way interaction term (second class citizen x coping strategy) to determine if coping strategy served as a moderator between microaggressions and depression while controlling for stress and demographics. The interaction of second class citizen and emotion focused engagement coping was not significant ( $F(14, 652) = 46.10, p = .000, \beta = .002, t = .09, p = .93$ ). See results in Appendix J. The interaction of second class citizen and emotion focused disengagement was significant ( $F(14, 652) = 47.73, p = .000, \beta = .042, t = 2.03, p = .043$ ), indicating emotion focused disengagement significantly moderated the relationship. Simple slopes analysis (Aiken & West, 1991) indicated that second class citizen significantly predicted depression at high levels of emotion focused disengagement ( $\beta = .104, t = 2.86, p = .004$ ), but not at low levels ( $\beta = .02, t = .44, p = .66$ ). This means that higher emotion focused disengagement with higher second class citizen gender microaggressions led to higher depression. See results in Appendix K and Appendix L. The interaction of second class citizen and problem focused engagement also was significant ( $F(14, 652) = 46.52, p = .000, \beta = -.06, t = -2, p$

= .046), indicating the problem focused engagement significantly moderated the association between second class citizen and depression. Simple slopes analysis indicated that second class citizen significantly predicted depression at low levels of problem focused engagement ( $\beta = .113, t = 2.98, p = .003$ ), but not at high levels ( $\beta = .034, t = .94, p = .35$ ). This means that lower problem focused engagement with higher second class citizen gender microaggressions links to higher depression. See results in Appendix M and Appendix N.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to enhance our understanding of women's experiences with a form of subtle sexism-- gender microaggressions -- in the U.S. military. I sought to explore frequencies of various types of gender microaggressions, group differences (by branch and rank, for example), and whether such microaggressions explained scores on a measure of depression. Additionally, I wanted to understand active duty military women's coping style and how, if it all, coping style moderated the link between gender microaggressions and depression. This work is important because empirical evidence is needed to support anecdotal accounts (e.g., Female Navy Officers; Johnson & Williams, 2019) of women's experiences with gender microaggressions. Results from this study demonstrate that this sample of active duty U.S. military women did report experiences with gender microaggressions; however, their experiences were rare to sometimes and considered minimal. Moreover, gender microaggressions were associated with depression to some degree and coping style moderated the link between *second-class citizen* and depression. Below, I discuss the results by hypothesis. I also discuss limitations, directions for future research, and implications for practice.

#### **Experiences with Gender Microaggressions: Frequencies and Group Differences**

Due to the hypermasculine military culture, I anticipated that the sample in the current study would endorse greater experiences with gender microaggressions than a civilian sample in prior research. However, the civilian sample reported greater experiences (Miyake, 2018). It is important to note that a large number of military participants worked in a medical setting and were highly educated, serving in roles within

the military that may be more similar to a civilian sample instead of the hypermasculine military setting. A majority of my sample, roughly 83%, had not deployed in the last six months and less than two percent of those deployed had exposure to combat. A combat deployment setting is vastly different from a military medical facility and findings may differ for service members who serve in a deployed setting. Another reason for the low reported levels of gender microaggressions might be due to the hierarchical environment of the material. That is, the hierarchy of reporting may deter active duty women from being forthcoming with their experiences out of fear of retaliation. One U.S. Naval Officer mentioned in a private Facebook group that they were nervous to speak up to male leaders when they make inappropriate comments, out of fear for their careers and working relationship.

Participants in this study endorsed experiences with environmental gender microaggressions more than any other. Noted above, the military is a hypermasculine culture that creates a sexist environment (Johnson & Williams, 2019). Environmental gender microaggressions are systemic practices or policies that demonstrate discrimination (Capodilupo, 2010; Sue et al., 2007). These may manifest in the military as exclusion of women, the gender wage gap, or the sexualizing of women through social media. There are still “exclusionists” who do not support women in the military having numerous roles, such as combat, that also contribute to an environment that reflects this belief (Dieckmann, 2011; RAND, 2015; Dietz, 2011). There continues to be a gender wage gap in leadership for women in the military where they are denied jobs that are awarded to men (Dieckmann, 2011; Dietz, 2011; Hasday, 2008; Rollins, 2012). Another example of environmental gender microaggressions includes the military’s history of



sharing naked photos of women in the military (CNN, 2017), that not only demonstrates that women in the military serve as sexual objects, but fosters the sexist environment that cultivates an environment with gender microaggressions. Therefore, it is understandable that environmental gender microaggressions were the most prevalent amongst this sample. Environmental gender microaggressions may be more prevalent than other gender microaggressions because the military is a system with a long documented history of practices that exclude women.

The second most prevalent gender microaggression was traditional gender roles, followed by invalidation of sexism. Anecdotal reports demonstrate that women in the military continue to be assumed to be the wives of service members instead of them being the service member, as well as are assumed to have jobs that align more with traditional gender stereotypes such as nurses (Lemmon, 2015). A group of Naval Officers created a belt buckle that reads, “Don’t be a lady, be a legend,” insinuating that they could not be both a lady and a legend in the Navy. A coworker also told a Naval Officer that “Ms.” can replace other titles such as rank or “Dr.” in the military, adhering to the tradition of considering a woman a “Ms.” instead of acknowledging her like all other coworkers in the military, by their rank or title. The invisibility of microaggressions tends to minimize harm to targets which contribute to a hostile working environment (Sue, 2010), where women in the military have reported minimization of gender microaggressions through invalidation of sexism (Johnson & Williams, 2019). Women in the military are more likely to negate the impact these experiences have on them because they are trying to survive in a hypermasculine environment and if they speak out, there is greater potential for increased gender microaggressions and exclusion. It also aligns with

Cortina's (2008) discussion of a workplace incivility environment because the environment perpetuates the existence of other types of gender microaggressions. Now that we have discussed the descriptive findings, I will break down results by exploratory analyses and by hypothesis.

In my exploratory analyses, I sought to explore whether demographic variables accounted for significant differences in scores on relevant study variables. The first group difference I explored was branch. The Navy reported greater experiences with gender microaggressions than the Air Force or Army. Research had previously shown the Navy to have more reports of sexual assault than other branches (Copp, 2018), suggesting a more hostile and sexist work environment. Specifically, the Navy reported more experiences with traditional gender roles, sexist language, implicit threat of physical safety, explicit threat of physical safety, invalidation of sexism, and sexual objectification gender microaggressions than the Air Force participants. The Navy also reported more sexist language, invalidation of sexism, second class citizen, and sexual objectification gender microaggressions than the Army participants. The Navy may have reported greater experiences with gender microaggressions than the Air Force or Army participants because they work in more confined spaces, amongst ships. It could also be due to the history of exclusion of women on ships having only recently begun to shift. Women were not allowed to serve on ships until 1993, a mere 27 years ago, so the Navy is newer to integrating women and may lag in appropriateness, with regard to sexism. One enlisted sailor mentioned that when she reported to a destroyer in 2004 there was not a place for her to sleep (Katenberg, 2019). In 2016, RAND conducted the Military Workplace Study Survey and found that Navy ships were the most dangerous for sexual

assault occurrences across military installations amongst all branches (Copp, 2018). If this overt form of sexism and violence is commonplace, it can be assumed that more subtle forms of sexism such as gender microaggressions are also more frequently encountered in the Navy, both on and off the ships, as suggested by Becker and Swim (2011). It is also important to note that the differences between branches may be better explained by MOS codes. My sample was not evenly representative of jobs across the branches. However, aviation was shown to be different from other MOS's, although it only captured aviation in the Navy and not the other branches.

The next group difference I examined in exploratory analyses was rank. In this study, junior officers reported more traditional gender roles, sexist language, implicit threat of physical safety, explicit threat of physical safety, invalidation of sexism, second class citizen, and sexual objectification gender microaggressions than senior enlisted, and junior and senior officers. Senior enlisted also reported more implicit threat to physical safety than senior officers. Junior enlisted reported more environmental gender microaggressions than junior or senior enlisted. Junior enlisted are typically younger, less educated, and have lower socioeconomic status than their senior counterparts. Perhaps the most important difference between ranks is the power differential. Junior enlisted have the least amount of power in the hierarchy compared to senior enlisted and officers. A majority of enlisted, both junior and senior, have a high school diploma and/or college experience (80.5%; Military OneSource, 2018), but their lower education may be connected to their reports of greater depressive symptoms. Additionally, higher ranking officers may not be aware of gender microaggressions that target them because their status protects them. Male subordinates cannot engage in verbal and nonverbal gender

microaggressions to female officers because there would be strict consequences for such actions. If rank does indeed serve as a protective factor for women who are officers compared to enlisted, this might explain the finding that junior enlisted women reported greater experiences with all eight types of gender microaggressions.

### **Gender Microaggressions and Depression among Active Duty Women**

In my first hypothesis, I expected to find a positive association between all gender microaggression scales and depression, while controlling for perceived general stress and relevant demographic variables. In this study, similar to prior research, all FeMS subscales were significantly positively correlated with each other in one to one bivariate correlations (Miyake, 2018). This was expected based on previous research showing negative psychological and physical health outcomes for sex-based discrimination (Foyne, Shiperd, & Harrington, 2013; Foyne, Smith, & Shiperd, 2015; Kessler, 2003; Pascoe, Richman, & Cooper, 2009). However, in the current investigation, only second class citizen significantly predicted depression while controlling for perceived general stress and other demographic variables. This could be due to stressful events contributing to the probability of depression (Keyes, Barnes, & Bates, 2011). Specifically, general stress and demographic variables account for more of the variance from the model and these specific demographic variables (branch, rank, & sexual orientation) may be explaining some of the results of the experiences of women with gender microaggressions with depression. Second class citizen, or assumptions of inferiority, may contribute to depression in a military sample more than other gender microaggressions because it is so pervasive and relentless that women are seen as “less than” men through the long history of exclusion. There are many still that want to

exclude women from certain roles and these individuals may be colleagues to women. Intersectionality research can include examining microaggressions of differing demographics to create a more nuanced model to see what specific variables may be contributing to their outcomes. For example, Lewis and colleagues (2016) has examined gendered racial microaggressions with Black women. The coping scales were also related to depression, with problem focused engagement and emotion focused engagement significantly and negatively related, and emotion focused disengagement significantly and positively related.

### **Moderation of Coping Style on Gender Microaggressions and Depression**

My second hypothesis was that I expected to find a moderating effect of coping style on the association between gender microaggressions and depression, while controlling for perceived general stress, branch, rank, and sexual orientation. Because second class citizen gender microaggressions was significant in predicting depression when controlling for perceived general stress and demographic variables, I was examined all coping styles as potential moderators.

I further hypothesized that women who reported high levels of problem focused engagement would report lower levels of depressions than women who reported lower levels of problem focused engagement. Problem focused engagement significantly moderated the relationship between depression and second class citizen. Women who reported lower problem focused engagement with second class citizen gender microaggressions experienced higher symptoms of depression. This means that women may benefit from putting things into perspective, making an action plan, looking on the bright side of things, and tackling the problem head on to avoid depressive symptoms

when experiencing assumptions of inferiority. Previous research has shown engaging in problem focused coping results in better psychological well-being due to a sense of control over the situation (Dijkstra & Homan, 2016).

I also hypothesized that women who reported low levels of emotion-focused engagement coping would report higher levels of depression than women who reported high levels of emotion-focused engagement coping. However, this model was not significant. Therefore, emotion-focused engagement coping did not moderate the relationship between gender microaggressions and depression. This could be because discussing with friends or family your feelings related to the offense may not be actionable to change and the behavior may continue, continuing any depressive symptoms as well.

I did not hypothesize about any disengagement coping strategies, but emotion focused disengagement significantly moderated the relationship between second class citizen gender microaggressions and depression. This means that for women who disengaged more with emotion focused coping had higher depressive symptoms with second class citizen gender microaggressions. Women who blame or criticize themselves experience higher depressive symptoms when faced with assumptions of inferiority. Previous research has found disengagement coping to negatively affect psychological well-being, specifically having a sense of control in a situation that is stressful (Dijkstra & Homan, 2016).

### **Limitations**

It is important to note limitations of this research despite the contributions the findings make to the gender microaggressions literature. Notably, my sample was limited

in several ways. Most participants were White (78.6%), heterosexual (89.8%), and around 30 years old, though this is consistent with the general military population and may serve as a representative sample of this population. A vast majority of my participants had some exposure to college (97.2%), with many holding a degree (87.7%), making my sample a highly educated group of women. This is unsurprising given that the military is more educated than the civilian population with a majority holding at least a Bachelor's degree (82.8%) compared to the civilian population (29.9%; Face the Facts USA, 2013). Most military service members have access to free education, some joining with the purpose of acquiring this benefit that they might otherwise not have been awarded. They have access to courses throughout their military career that also count towards college credit and the military provides education programs free of charge that lead to a degree for many. The women with higher education are more likely to serve as Officers, which may have impacted their responses to the study. These findings are limited to women who may represent these demographics and may not apply to women of other ethnicities, education levels, sexual orientations, and ages.

My sample was also limited in certain military contexts. A limited number of Marines and Coast Guard females took part in the study and were not enough for meaningful analysis and to compare across groups. This means my research findings are limited to the three branches discussed, the Air Force, Army, and Navy. The experiences of women in these two missed branches may be similar to or different than the currently examined military branches. Each military branch is unique and there are fewer females in the Marines (9%) and Coast Guard (12%) than Air Force (20%), Army (15%), and Navy (19%) (Dever, 2019; Data USA, 2018). The experiences with gender

microaggressions for women in the Marines or Coast Guard may differ, especially given their low visibility in their work environments. A majority of participants were officers (76.6%), while only some were enlisted (23.1%). This means my findings are a better representation of officers than enlisted, and gender microaggressions may be different across rank. Officers make up roughly 18% of the military, with 82% enlisted (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). There are even fewer female enlisted (14.2%) than officers (16.6%; CNN, 2013). I did not have many women who were recently deployed (14.6%) or exposed to combat (1.6%) and women in these environments may have more experiences with gender microaggressions to report, as deployed and combat settings tend to be the most hypermasculine of the military settings. Additionally, nearly a third (29%) of the sample worked in the medical MOS field, meaning though in the military, their experiences may more closely resemble civilian women who work in healthcare settings than the hypermasculine environment of the military. This means that there was unequal representation amongst my sample in job environments and future research should aim at better representation.

There are several other methodological limitations that should be mentioned. Another limitation to this study is that problem focused disengagement had low internal consistency and was unable to be used in analyses. Ideally, all measures would have good internal consistency so that all analyses could be run to test hypotheses. This study is also cross-sectional, and the data does not allow for causal predictions as to whether gender microaggressions precede depression or if depression preceded the gender microaggressions. Longitudinal research would better capture causal predictions. Lastly, I only examined one mental health outcome (i.e. depression) and consideration should be



made for including other mental health outcomes in research (i.e. anxiety). Other research has used anxiety as the outcome (Foynes, Shiperd, & Harrington, 2013; Foynes, Smith, & Shiperd, 2015) and women in the military may experience anxiety more than depression when it comes to gender microaggressions in the workplace, though rates of depression and anxiety are similar for service members (approximately 2.2%; Psychological Health Center of Excellence, 2017).

### **Directions for Future Research**

More research is needed on women's experiences with gender microaggressions in military contexts. First, as previously mentioned, future research should aim to have better representation in the data across branches, MOS codes, and ranks. This would provide a richer data set to do exploration and determine better group differences. I also previously suggested that future research should use longitudinal designs. It would be important to know of any pre-existing depressive symptoms prior to joining the military and at certain military milestones such as after graduating bootcamp, accession school, or continuation school. At each milestone and every six months, experiences with gender microaggressions could be assessed in addition to depressive symptoms for a period of time. Future research may include focus groups, interviews, or daily diary studies with women in the military to obtain a deeper understanding of their experiences with gender microaggressions. Women in the military may have unique experiences with gender microaggressions compared to a civilian sample but it is unknown outside of anecdotal accounts and should be scientifically examined. We could learn the specific experiences with gender microaggressions that women in the military encounter to give better examples in trainings of things that are inappropriate to say in a military work setting.

Additionally, it would behoove future research to hold focus group discussions with women on how they cope specifically with this subtle form of sexism. A qualitative study could also examine the unique ways women in the military use problem focused engagement coping with gender microaggressions. For example, military service members have to report incidences of discrimination and harassment to the Command Managed Equal Opportunity (CMEO) , which may serve as taking action and problem focused engagement. However, the experiences with gender microaggressions might not warrant a report or may come directly from their chain of command, making reporting and taking action difficult. Lastly, future research also might examine gender microaggression differences across age, work setting, and ethnicity, using an intersectional approach to build on the individual study presented here. For example, Lewis and Neville (2015) and Williams and Lewis (2019) have begun studying gendered racial microaggressions with depression, examining the intersection of gender and race.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study demonstrates that despite military efforts with the UCMJ to combat sexism, women in the U.S. military report a range of experiences with gender microaggressions. The military's biggest concern is mission readiness and the results of this study demonstrate a potential negative consequence to the mission. If women are experiencing gender microaggressions or depression, it may impact their ability to concentrate on the mission at hand, thus potentially putting themselves and others lives at risk depending on their job. The military also spends millions of dollars training their employees to ensure they complete the mission at hand, yet women are leaving the military due to experiences with sexism, like Caroline Johnson mentioned in her book

(Johnson & Williams, 2019). The Coast Guard's Diversity and Inclusion office conducted a recent study to examine the workplace in general and found that women were being excluded, hearing inappropriate comments, and being sexually harassed or assaulted and choosing to leave the military (Navy Times, 2019). This means that women are leaving the military workplace due to experiences with sexism, despite how much money and time the military has provided for their training. The military spends countless amounts of funding and time training our female service members to contribute to the mission, and the military should work to retain these service members. Previous research has shown that sex based discrimination causes women to seek new employment (Antecol, Baucus, & Cobb-Clark, 2009; Pascoe et al., 2009) and workplace civility is crucial for retention and job satisfaction (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008; Pearson, Anderson, & Wegner, 2011). The results of this study further demonstrate that sexism is an experience that impacts mission readiness by reducing the number of mission ready employees on deck. My study demonstrated the problem focused engagement had a significant impact on reducing symptoms of depression when experiencing gender microaggressions, therefore, intervention may focus on ways service members may engage in problem focused coping to combat any negative symptoms associated with their experiences with gender microaggressions, particularly second-class citizen. It would behoove the military to tackle microaggressions head on to prevent future difficulties and costs to their mission and I suggest doing so using problem focused engagement coping skills. Brown (2011) predicted that lowering racism and racial microaggressions would lead to more positive working environment for women in the military, and if we lower the rates of experiences

with gender microaggressions or enhance coping, we can assume it would also impact the military workplace for women. These experiences may also impact job satisfaction, work efficiency, and morale. It would be cost effective and benefit the military's mission to combat gender microaggressions and enhance coping to ensure mission readiness.

My results also demonstrated that junior enlisted may be the most at risk with experiencing gender microaggressions. I recommend the military support and create a female mentorship model with Officers and Enlisted to foster female-specific leadership and discussions of their unique experiences. Another implication for practice would be to hold a process group for junior enlisted to openly and safely discuss their experiences and ways of using problem focused coping with gender microaggressions, while discussing ways to reduce any self-blame or criticism that may arise.

Another implication of these findings is the propensity for environmental microaggressions in the military that continue to impact women serving. Policies need to stop excluding women to eliminate from certain roles historically held for men only, reduce the invisible gender wage gap and have female general officer leadership. Additionally, women should have access to breast pump stations in their work environment and have the opportunity to promote despite maternity leave. There needs to be consequences for anyone who partakes in sexualizing fellow service members such as through social media. Interventions can be designed to discuss the nature of microaggressions, and policies should be administratively distributed on the proper course of action for if these experiences occur, such as who to report to and potential consequences of actions. The military has clear direction on sexual assault reporting and outcomes, so due to the prevalence of gender microaggressions, they should also have

direction. However, it is not my intention to mean it is up to the targets of gender microaggressions to figure out how to deal with the negative outcomes (Houshmand et al., 2019; Sue et al., 2019). Thus, these findings should inform intervention at the military institution level and include all parties and persons. Specifically, the military's top leaders should be involved and have awareness considering the military is a top-down leadership system. Interventions and discussions need to include men so that the gender microaggressions may be held accountable by all parties, and not just targets. There is a need for trainings on implicit forms of sexism, not solely on sexual assault like the military's trainings currently provide.

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APPENDIX A  
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic Characteristic	Air Force ( <i>n</i> = 287)	Army ( <i>n</i> = 61)	Navy ( <i>n</i> = 335)	Total % ( <i>N</i> = 683)
Race/Ethnicity				
White or Euro-American	78.7%	86.9%	77%	78.6%
Hispanic Latino/a/x	4.5	3.3	7.8	6
Asian American	3.8	1.6	4.5	4
Black or African American	4.2	3.3	2.1	3.1
American Indian or Alaska Native	.7	0	0	.3
Middle Eastern or North African	0	0	.3	.1
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0	.3	.1
Biracial	7.3	4.9	6	6.4
Multiracial	0	0	.3	.1
Other	.3	0	1.5	.9
Prefer not to answer	.3	0	.3	.3
Sexual Orientation				
Heterosexual	91.3%	90.2%	88.4%	89.8%
Bisexual	6.3	3.3	4.8	5.3
Lesbian	.7	4.9	5.1	3.2
Asexual	1	0	0	.4
Queer	0	0	.6	.3
Gay	0	0	.6	.3
Prefer to self-describe	.3	1.6	.3	.4
Decline to answer	.3	0	.3	.3
Education Level				
Bachelor's	37.6%	21.3%	30.1%	32.5%
Master's	42.5	16.4	20.3	29.3

Doctoral or professional degree	17.1	54.1	15.2	19.5
Some college	0	6.6	18.2	9.5
Associate's degree	2.8	1.6	10.4	6.4
High school diploma/GED	0	0	5.7	2.8
Marital Status				
Married	61.3%	63.9%	52.8%	57.4%
Single/never married	30.3	26.2	29.9	29.7
Divorced	6.3	4.9	10.4	8.2
Partnered	1.4	3.3	4.5	3.1
Separated	.7	1.6	1.2	1
Widowed	0	0	1.2	.6
Rate/Rank				
Junior Enlisted	3.8%	13.1%	33.1%	19%
Senior Enlisted	1.4	0	7.2	4.1
Junior Officer	63.8	59	39.7	51.5
Senior Officer	31	27.9	20	25.3

APPENDIX B  
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your age? (self-select sliding bar 18-100)
2. What is your gender? (male, female, trans, other [please specify] \_\_, decline to answer)
3. What is your Race/Ethnicity (American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian American, Black or African American, Hispanic Latino/a/x or Spanish Origin, Middle Eastern or North African, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White or European American, Some other race ethnicity or origin, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_; I prefer not to answer)
4. What is your sexual orientation (heterosexual, lesbian, bisexual, gay, pansexual, asexual, queer, prefer to self-describe [please specify] \_\_\_)?
5. Do you have a disability? (yes, no, decline to answer)
6. Which branch of service are you currently serving (Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, Navy, Decline to answer)
7. Are you currently a Reservist or in the National Guard? (yes, no, decline to answer)
8. If yes, how much of the last six months have been spent on active duty? (less than a month, 1-3 months, 3-5 months, full six months, decline to answer)
9. What is your rank or rate (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, decline to answer)
10. What is your MOS or designator code? (type in response)
11. How many years have you been serving (self-select sliding bar 0-50)?
12. Are you currently stationed abroad or overseas? (yes, no, decline to answer)

13. Are you currently or have you been deployed in the last six months (yes, no, decline to answer)?
14. If yes, did you experience combat? (yes, no, decline to answer)
15. What is your highest education level? (High school diploma/GED, some college, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, Master's degree, Doctoral or professional degree (e.g., Ph.D., J.D., M.D.), decline to answer)
16. What is your marital status? (single/never married, partnered, married, separated, divorced, widowed)



APPENDIX C  
PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE

Instructions: For each question below please choose from the following alternatives:

0 = never    1 = almost never    2 = sometimes    3 = fairly often    4 = very often

1. In the last six months, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?
2. In the last six months, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?
3. In the last six months, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?
4. In the last six months, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?
5. In the last six months, how often have you felt that things were going your way?
6. In the last six months, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?
7. In the last six months, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?
8. In the last six months, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?
9. In the last six months, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?
10. In the last six months, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

APPENDIX D

FEMALE MICROAGGRESSIONS SCALE (FeMS)

Instructions: Think about your experiences related to your gender. Please indicate how frequently you have experienced each item DURING THE LAST SIX MONTHS in your military work environment utilizing the following scale:

1 = Never      2 = A little/rarely      3 = Sometimes/a moderate amount      4 = Often/frequently

#### Traditional Gender Roles

1. Someone assumed that I want children because of my gender
2. Someone assumed that I want to get married because of my gender
3. Someone assumed that I am nurturing because of my gender
4. Someone expected that I should cook and clean because of my gender

#### Sexist Language

5. Someone called me a “whore”
6. Someone called me a “slut”
7. Someone called me a “bitch”
8. Someone called me a “tease”

#### Implicit Threatened Physical Safety

9. Someone told me to watch my drink when I am in a social setting
10. Someone told me to have some form of self-defense (e.g., pepper spray) when going out in a public place
11. Someone told me that I should have a safety plan when going on a first date (e.g., tell a friend where I am going)
12. Someone told me not to walk alone because I might be raped or assaulted

#### Explicit Threatened Physical Safety

13. A man said something to me that made me feel unsafe

14. A man (a stranger) followed me in a public place

15. A man stared at me in a threatening manner

16. Someone touched me without my consent

#### Invalidation of the Reality of Sexism

17. Someone told me that men also experience discrimination when we were discussing sexism

18. Someone told me that sexism is no longer an important social issue

19. Someone told me that women have the same opportunities as men

20. Someone told me that women are being too sensitive when they say they experience gender discrimination

21. Someone told me that “not all men are like that” (or something similar) when we were discussing sexism

#### Assumptions of Inferiority/Second-Class Citizen

22. Someone assumed that I am not good at math because of my gender

23. Someone assumed that I am not intelligent because of my gender

24. Someone did not ask me about my career or accomplishments when first meeting me because of my gender

25. Someone assumed that I am not athletic because of my gender

26. Someone incorrectly attributed my work to a man

#### Environmental

27. I observed that men hold more leadership positions in society than women

28. I observed in the media that women are not believed when they report being sexually harassed

29. I observed in the media that people excuse men's behavior by saying "boys will be boys" (or something similar)

30. I observed women portrayed as housewives on T.V.

#### Sexual Objectification

31. Someone gave me compliments about my appearance before talking about something else

32. Someone catcalled me (e.g., whistled at me) while I was walking down the street

33. Someone told me that I am too pretty to look unhappy

34. I observed someone staring at a woman's body

APPENDIX E

COPING STRATEGIES INVENTORY-SHORT FORM (CSI-SF)

Instructions: Please indicate how often you use each behavior or thought to cope with stress.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
1	2	3	4	5

#### Emotion Focused Engagement

1. Talk about it with a friend or family
2. Let my feelings out to reduce the stress
3. Let my emotions out
4. Ask a friend/relative for help/advice

#### Problem Focused Engagement

5. Try to put things into perspective
6. Make a plan of action
7. Try to look on the bright side of things
8. Tackle the problem head on

#### Problem Focused Disengagement

9. Put the problem out of my mind
10. Hope the problem will take care of itself
11. Try not to think about the problem
12. Hope for a miracle

#### Emotion Focused Disengagement

13. Tend to blame myself



14. Tend to criticize myself

APPENDIX F  
PATIENT HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE (PHQ-9)

Instructions: Over the last six months, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?

Not at all	Several Days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
0	1	2	3

1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things
2. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless
3. Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much
4. Feeling tired or having little energy
5. Poor appetite or overeating
6. Feeling bad about yourself-or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down
7. Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television
8. Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed. Or the opposite- being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual
9. Thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself

## APPENDIX G

### DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR RELEVANT STUDY MEASURES

<i>Descriptive Statistics for Perceived stress, Female Microaggressions Scale (FeMS), Coping Style, and Depression (N = 683)</i>			
Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>
Perceived Stress	1.67	0.67	.90
FeMS Traditional Gender Roles	2.46	0.91	.79
FeMS Sexual Objectification	1.98	0.81	.81
FeMS 2 <sup>nd</sup> Class Citizen/Inferiority	1.96	0.80	.82
FeMS Sexist Language	1.41	0.64	.82
FeMS ETPS	1.56	0.67	.83
FeMS ITPS	2.13	0.97	.86
FeMS Invalidation Sexism	2.38	0.82	.83
FeMS Environmental	3.13	0.67	.71
Problem Focused Engagement	4.03	0.66	.69
Emotion Focused Engagement	3.37	0.82	.78
Emotion Focused Disengagement	3.39	1.02	.85
Problem Focused Disengagement	2.42	.67	.43
Depression (PHQ-9)	1.74	.60	.88
<i>Note.</i> <i>M</i> = mean, <i>SD</i> = standard deviation, ETPS = explicit threat of physical safety subscale of FeMS, ITPS = implicit threat of physical safety subscale of FEMS. Perceived stress scales ranged from 0-4. FeMS scores ranged from 1-4. Coping scales ranged from 1-5. Depression ranged from 0-3.			

APPENDIX H  
GROUP DIFFERENCES

	Traditional Gender Roles <i>M (SD)</i>	Sexist Language <i>M (SD)</i>	Second Class Citizen <i>M (SD)</i>	Sexual Objectification <i>M (SD)</i>	Explicit Threat to Physical Safety <i>M (SD)</i>	Implicit Threat to Physical Safety <i>M (SD)</i>	Invalidation of Sexism <i>M (SD)</i>	Environmental <i>M (SD)</i>
Branch								
Air Force	<b>2.36 (.91)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>1.23 (.43)<sup>b</sup></b>	1.91 (.76)	<b>1.82 (.71)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>1.44 (.58)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>2.01 (.93)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>2.23 (.80)<sup>b</sup></b>	3.06 (.67)
Army	2.30 (.89)	<b>1.35 (.76)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>1.77 (.78)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>1.73 (.78)<sup>b</sup></b>	1.50 (.75)	2.03 (.99)	<b>2.24 (.84)<sup>b</sup></b>	3.16 (.64)
Navy	<b>2.59 (.90)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>1.59 (.72)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>2.04 (.82)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>2.17 (.86)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>1.69 (.72)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>2.26 (.99)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>2.53 (.82)<sup>a</sup></b>	3.18 (.67)
Rank								
Junior Enlisted	<b>2.86 (.83)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>2.15 (.83)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>2.41 (.80)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>2.77 (.82)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>2.09 (.80)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>2.84 (.95)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>2.86 (.75)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>3.39 (.63)<sup>a</sup></b>
Senior Enlisted	<b>2.25 (.82)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>1.38 (.42)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>2.00 (.80)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>2.04 (.56)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>1.47 (.65)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>2.21 (1.08)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>2.24 (.67)<sup>b</sup></b>	3.21 (.64)
Junior Officer	<b>2.44 (.91)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>1.27 (.46)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>1.90 (.77)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>1.83 (.73)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>1.48 (.59)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>1.07 (.91)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>2.31 (.80)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>3.04 (.68)<sup>b</sup></b>
Senior Officer	<b>2.24 (.89)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>1.17 (.39)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>1.76 (.73)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>1.67 (.61)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>1.36 (.53)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>1.71 (.79)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>2.17 (.82)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>3.09 (.64)<sup>b</sup></b>

## APPENDIX I

### PEARSON PRODUCT MOMENT BIVARIATE CORRELATIONS



*Pearson Product Moment Bivariate Correlations for Relevant Study Variables (N = 683)*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	1												
2	.30**	1											
3	.32**	.57**	1										
4	.30**	.66**	.54**	1									
5	.32**	.43**	.67**	.50**	1								
6	.30**	.55**	.68**	.55**	.70**	1							
7	.27**	.60**	.62**	.47**	.56**	.66**	1						
8	.26**	.60**	.57**	.56**	.45**	.52**	.52**	1					
9	.24**	.53**	.42**	.51**	.34**	.42**	.41**	.54**	1				
10	-.50**	-0.06	-.13**	-.10*	-.19**	-.13**	-.11**	-.08*	-0.03	1			
11	-.11**	-0.02	-0.04	-0.05	-.08*	-0.06	-0.05	-0.03	0.04	.24**	1		
12	.53**	.25**	.26**	.25**	.26**	.26**	.26**	.21**	.18**	-.28**	-0.07	1	
13	.66**	.28**	.33**	.31**	.36**	.32**	.27**	.23**	.18**	-.41**	-.18**	.45**	1

*Note.* 1= Perceived Stress; FeMS: 2= Traditional Gender Roles, 3= Sexual Objectification, 4= Second Class Citizen, 5= Sexist Language, 6= Explicit Threat to Physical Safety, 7= Implicit Threat to Physical Safety, 8= Invalidation of Sexism, 9= Environmental, 10= Problem Focused Engagement, 11= Emotion Focused Engagement, 12= Emotion Focused Disengagement, and 13= Depression. \*\*  $p \leq .01$  \*  $p \leq .05$

APPENDIX J

REGRESSION ANALYSIS EMOTION FOCUSED ENGAGEMENT

<i>Regression Analysis to Examine Main and Interaction Effects on Depression (N = 596)</i>							
Variable	$R^2$	Adj. $R^2$	F	$df$	$\beta$	Std Err.	$p$
Step 1	.48	.47	151.14	662			.000
Sexual orientation					.09	.06	.11
Rank					-.22	.05	.000
Branch					.09	.04	.01
General stress					.55	.03	.000
Step 2	.49	.48	52.71	654			.000
Traditional gender roles					.02	.03	.59
Sexual objectification					.001	.03	.97
2 <sup>nd</sup> class citizen					.07	.03	.02*
Sexist language					.06	.04	.18
Explicit threat to physical safety					.02	.04	.59
Implicit threat to physical safety					-.001	.03	.96
Invalidation of sexism					-.03	.03	.27
Environmental					-.05	.03	.11
Step 3	.50	.49	49.77	653			.000
2 <sup>nd</sup> class citizen					.07	.03	.03*
Emotion focused engagement					-.06	.02	.005**
Step 4	.50	.49	46.14	652			.000
2 <sup>nd</sup> class citizen x emotion focused engagement					.002	.02	.93
<i>Note.</i> The * indicates significance at the .05 level and ** indicates significance at the .01 level.							

APPENDIX K

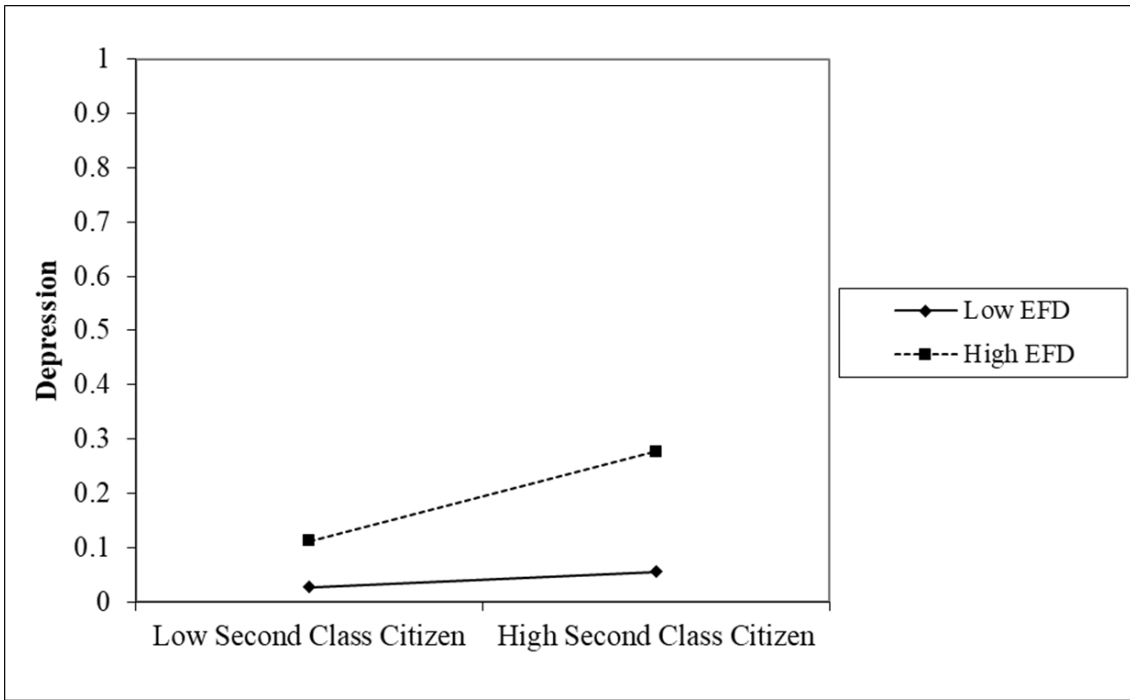
REGRESSION ANALYSIS EMOTION FOCUSED DISENGAGEMENT

<i>Regression Analysis to Examine Main and Interaction Effects on Depression (N = 596)</i>							
Variable	$R^2$	Adj. $R^2$	F	$df$	$\beta$	Std Err.	$p$
Step 1	.48	.47	151.44	662			.000
Sexual orientation					.09	.06	.11
Rank					-.22	.05	.000
Branch					.09	.04	.014
General stress					.55	.03	.000
Step 2	.49	.48	52.71	654			.000
Traditional gender roles					.02	.03	.59
Sexual objectification					.001	.03	.97
2 <sup>nd</sup> class citizen					.07	.03	.02*
Sexist language					.06	.04	.18
Explicit threat to physical safety					.02	.04	.59
Implicit threat to physical safety					-.001	.03	.96
Invalidation of sexism					-.03	.03	.27
Environmental					-.05	.03	.113
Step 3	.50	.49	50.84	653			.000
2 <sup>nd</sup> class citizen					.07	.03	.036*
Emotion focused disengagement					.08	.02	.000**
Step 4	.51	.50	47.73	652			.000
2 <sup>nd</sup> class citizen x emotion focused disengagement					.04	.02	.043*

*Note.* The \* indicates significance at the .05 level and \*\* indicates significance at the .001 level.

APPENDIX L

EMOTION FOCUSED DISENGAGEMENT GRAPH



*Figure 1.* Moderation of emotion focused disengagement on relationship between second class citizen and depression.

APPENDIX M

REGRESSION ANALYSIS PROBLEM FOCUSED ENGAGEMENT



<i>Regression Analysis to Examine Main and Interaction Effects on Depression (N = 596)</i>							
Variable	$R^2$	Adj. $R^2$	F	<i>df</i>	$\beta$	Std Err.	<i>P</i>
Step 1	.48	.47	151.14	662			.000
Sexual orientation					.09	.06	.11
Rank					-.22	.05	.000
Branch					.09	.04	.01
General stress					.55	.03	.000
Step 2	.49	.48	52.71	654			.000
Traditional gender roles					.02	.03	.59
Sexual objectification					.001	.03	.97
2 <sup>nd</sup> class citizen					.07	.03	.02*
Sexist language					.06	.04	.18
Explicit threat to physical safety					.02	.04	.59
Implicit threat to physical safety					-.001	.03	.96
Invalidation of sexism					-.03	.03	.27
Environmental					-.05	.03	.11
Step 3	.50	.49	49.57	653			.000
2 <sup>nd</sup> class citizen					.07	.03	.03*
Problem focused engagement					-.08	.03	.01*
Step 4	.50	.49	46.52	652			.000
2 <sup>nd</sup> class citizen x problem focused engagement					-.06	.03	.05*

*Note.* The \* indicates significance at the .05 level.

APPENDIX N  
PROBLEM FOCUSED ENGAGEMENT GRAPH

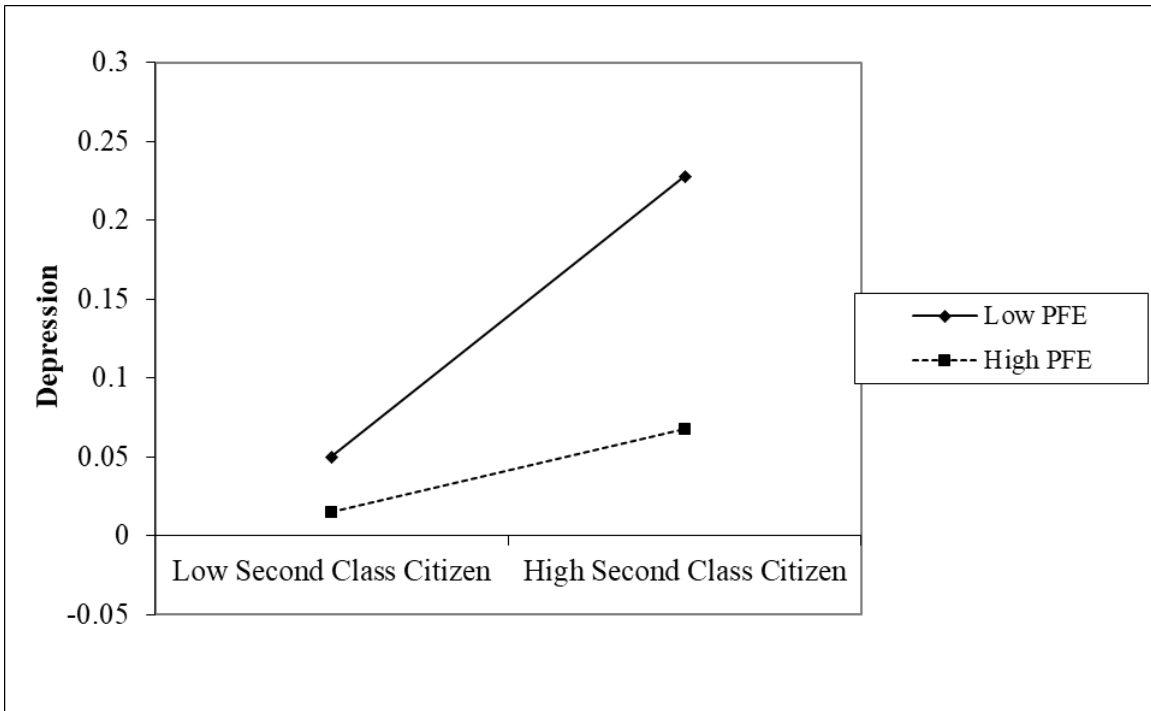


Figure 2. Moderation of problem focused engagement on relationship between second class citizen and depression.