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Everything and Nothing: Exploring the Connection Between Gender Microaggressions in the Family of Origin and Intimate Adult Relationships

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EVERYTHING AND NOTHING:

EXPLORING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN GENDER MICROAGGRESSIONS IN THE FAMILY OF ORIGIN AND INTIMATE ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

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We hereby approve the Dissertation

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Abstract

Experiences with gender microaggressions have been shown to negatively impact mental health and self-esteem in women. Cisgender women are faced with pervasive gender microaggressions throughout life, including within their homes and families. This study sought to explore cisgender women's experiences with gender microaggressions within two critical family systems, the family of origin and intimate adult relationships. Utilizing Postmodern Feminist Theory and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, three overarching themes were identified related to how cisgender women experience and make meaning of gender microaggressions: 1) Rigid Roles and Expectations for Women; 2) Impact of Power Dynamics; and 3) Identifying Pathways to Lasting Change. Within these overarching themes, five themes and 16 subthemes were identified and presented both descriptively and interpretively. These findings are also explored in conjunction with the existing literature. Strengths and limitations of the current study are addressed, and directions for future research are proposed.

Keywords: gender microaggressions, cisgender women, family of origin, intimate adult relationships

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Dedication

For the greatest gift of my entire life, the incredible Elliott Rose. May you always be bold, fantastic, and unapologetically yourself. You are my everything!

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> Gender roles are so deeply conditioned in us that we will often follow them even when they chafe against our true desires, our needs, our happiness.
>
> -Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions

Introduction

Within counseling and associated literature, there has been increasing attention to the construct of microaggressions (see Berk, 2017; Burdsey, 2011; Derthick, 2015; Gartner & Sterzing, 2016; Gomez, Khurshid, Freitag, & Luchak, 2011; Kirby, 2011; Nadal et al., 2015; Owen, Tao, & Rodolfa, 2010; Sue, 2010). According to Sue and Capodilupo (2008), microaggressions are pervasive, daily, and subtle negative messages toward a specific group of marginalized people. Microaggressions in all forms are embedded within our societal systems and practices (Smith, Chambers, & Bratini, 2009), with reported negative impacts on behavior (Burdsey, 2011; Sue, 2010), mental health (Berk, 2017; Gomez et al., 2011; Sue, 2010), and cognitive functioning (Moradi & Funderburk, 2006; Moradi & Subich, 2002). People of any marginalized identities, including cisgender women, can face microaggressions.

Gender microaggressions have been characterized as women being invalidated, devalued, put down, or otherwise excluded simply for being female or feminine (Nadal et al., 2015). The current social-political climate suggests the degree to which cisgender women experience

oppression. Namely, the devaluation of women's autonomy regarding reproductive rights (Rosenzweig et al., 2016); a wage gap which may not close until 2119 (American Association of University Women, 2018); reported incidents of pervasive harassment in the workplace (EEOC, 2015); and the negative impact of microaggressions (Berk, 2017; Burdsey, 2011; Gomez et al., 2011; Moradi & Funderburk, 2006; Moradi & Subich, 2002; Smith et al., 2009; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008), to name a few. In 2024, cisgender women continue to be systemically undervalued and invalidated in political discourse, such that derogatory comments about women are becoming a social norm (i.e., comments by the former president and current Republican presidential candidate "Grab 'em by the p*ssy"; Bracic et al., 2018; Yoonyhe, 2017) and the experiences of women (i.e., the recent US Supreme Court decision to overturn Roe v. Wade) are being disregarded. An example of the way women continue to be disregarded on a national stage are both Anita Hill's and Dr. Christine Blasey Ford's testimony for Supreme Court confirmation hearings, which occurred nearly three decades apart, but had similar outcomes (Edwards, 2018). In addition, women are leaving the workforce at a disproportionately high number compared to men as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been declared a national emergency (Silva & Miranda, 2021), highlighting how stereotypical roles are deeply ingrained within the fabric of our society.

Scholars have highlighted differences of experiences between cis- and transgender women. For example, cis- and transgender women were likely raised within their family of origin to assume different roles in adulthood, thus having different experiences with sexism and microaggressions (Barron & Capous-Desyllas, 2017; Field & Mattson, 2016; Gagne & Tewksbury, 1999; Grossman et al., 2006). Specifically, Barron and Capous-Desyllas (2017)

found that transgender youth are faced with mixed messages regarding the affirmation of their female identity, with transgender children as young as five years old living fluidly in different settings (i.e., school and home).

While both cis- and transgender youth develop and internalize ideas about gender through a combination of: 1) assigned sex; 2) current gender identity; 3) gender roles and expectations; 4) social gender presentation; and 5) gender evaluations (Tate et al., 2014), cisgender girls are less likely to receive mixed messages within these categories than their transgender counterparts. This conceptualization of gender development can indicate the different ways transgender and cisgender girls learn to navigate their identities and what it means to be a girl, through the combined influence of home, school, peers, and societal interactions. In addition, cisgender women may experience physical changes that their transgender counterparts may not (i.e. pregnancy and menstruation), which can be another avenue through which cisgender women uniquely experience gender microaggressions (Kirby, 2011). Finally, the way in which cisgender women, as a separate group from transgender women, experience microaggressions has had limited exploration within the existing literature, despite differences between these two groups. Nascent research has provided evidence that cisgender women experience higher levels of internalized misogyny as compared to transgender women (Gartler, 2015), potentially related to experiences with gender microaggressions. Such emerging research garners support to explore ways in which cis- and transgender women uniquely experience gender microaggressions. Further, researchers have pointed to the importance of family in gender role development (Atwood, 2001; Endendijk, Groeneveld, & Mesman, 2018; McHale, Crouter, & Whiteman,

2003; van der Pol et al., 2015) and development of later relationship ideals (Cavanaugh, 2007; Conger et al., 2001; Eryilmaz & Atak, 2011; Feldman et al. 1998).

In this proposed interpretive phenomenological qualitative study, I will explore how cisgender women describe their experiences with gender microaggressions within their family of origin, their intimate adult relationships, and the intersection of these experiences, using a postmodern feminist framework. This chapter includes a brief overview of microaggressions, as well as the impact of microaggressions on marginalized people. This chapter will also include an exploration of the issues cisgender women face related to sexism and microaggressions, as well as the influence of the family of origin during childhood and adolescence on the development of gender dynamics in intimate adult relationships. Throughout this study, the intersection of gender and other marginalized identities will be explored alongside postmodern feminist theory.

Statement of the Problem

Several authors have reported upon the impact of microaggressions in multiple facets of life for various marginalized groups. Microaggressions in any form are related to increased stress, anxiety, depression, hypervigilance (Berk, 2017; Sue, 2010), and disruptions to self-esteem and self-image (Moradi & Funderburk, 2006; Moradi & Subich, 2002). In addition, Sue (2010) discussed the occurrence of anger, guilt, and defensiveness as not only typical, but also expected responses to microaggressions. Gomez et al. (2011) also discussed feelings of uncertainty about expertise and knowledge in a given field, as well as decreased feelings of self-efficacy, related to the experience of racial microaggressions. In addition, people faced with microaggressions may minimize or accept their own experiences out of fear or hopelessness and may feel powerless related to creating social change (Burdsey, 2011).

Although this section provides a brief snap-shot of several ways in which people are impacted by microaggressions, the literature is consistent in reports of microaggressions having harmful effects on many facets of functioning throughout a person's lifetime (Nadal et al., 2015; Owen et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2009; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008). This proposed study aims to enhance our understanding of cisgender women's experiences with gender microaggressions within the family of origin, intimate adult relationships, and how cisgender women make meaning of the intersection of these experiences.

Cisgender Women and Microaggressions

The scope of sexism, harassment, and microaggressions in the work lives of cisgender women was detailed in the 2015 US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Special Task Force Report. This task force (EEOC, 2015) reported the pervasiveness of sexual harassment in the workplace, with 25% - 85% of women reporting unwanted sexual advances, discrimination based on gender, and exposure to inappropriate jokes or images. Interestingly, the task force (EEOC, 2015) discovered reports of sexual harassment *increased* when a definition of sexual harassment was included in the survey, tentatively lending support to the way in which sexism can be embedded in our work culture and thus go unnoticed.

In addition to the experience of microaggressions in the workplace, this phenomenon occurs in other settings. For example, girls experience microaggressions in the classroom, such as being called on less often than their male peers (Sue, 2010). Women and girls also face unrealistic expectations and judgments based on their appearance, which creates a dichotomy between the image of a "good" girl or woman versus a "whore" (Baraket et al., 2018, p. 519). In addition, women in sports receive less support and encouragement from media and fans than

their male counterparts (Kaskan & Ho, 2016). Finally, women and girls face microaggressions within their family relationships, including brothers having more freedom and opportunities compared to their sisters (Atwood, 2001) and higher expectations of nurturing and caregiving, while women also maintain full-time work outside of the home (Meisenbach, 2010).

Gender microaggressions have been generally defined as acts which dismiss women, treat women as sex objects, limit women, and devalue their contributions at work, in the home, and within society (Sue, 2010), often in systemic and pervasive ways (Nadal et al., 2015). Differentiating the experiences of cis- and transgender women would help to highlight and understand the nuances of subtle discrimination in the lives of all women along the gender spectrum.

Derthick (2015) noted that gender occurs along a spectrum and exploring one specific point along that spectrum can lend clarity to the study of microaggressions against women and subsequent conclusions. However, studies within counseling and related literature that explored women's experiences with gender microaggressions often do not explicitly state participants were cisgender women (i.e., Kaskan & Ho, 2016; Owen et al., 2010; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008, Turban et al., 2017) but rather that participants identified as women. Thus, I intend to explore how cisgender women experience the subtle devaluation and objectification characteristic of gender microaggressions, both within the family and within their intimate adult relationships, an area which remains unexplored in the literature.

Another point related to gender microaggressions is the concept of gender dynamics. According to the United States Agency of International Development (USAID, n.d.), gender dynamics are defined as

> the relationships and interactions between and among boys, girls, women, and men. Gender dynamics are informed by socio-cultural ideas about gender and the power relationships that define them. Depending upon how they are manifested, gender dynamics can reinforce or challenge existing norms (para. 4).

Gender dynamics can manifest within the family of origin between and among parents, siblings, and other important figures in the family unit (Carlson & Knoester, 2011; Endendijk et al., 2018; Epstein & Ward, 2011; Feldman et al., 1998). In addition, gender dynamics may manifest in intimate adult relationships, particularly in the division of household labor and emotional labor; gender role expectations; decision-making; and status (Curran et al., 2015; Galliher et al., 1999; Helms et al., 2006). The term gender dynamics seems to capture the complexity of gendered interactions, rooted in power, which cisgender women experience through their lives. Gender dynamics will be used to explore potential issues related to status based on gender, stereotypical roles and societal assertions about cisgender women, and the division of both emotional and physical labor within an intimate adult relationship.

Other quantitative studies have examined the impact of sexism and microaggressions on women (Derthick, 2015; Morardi & Funderburk, 2011; Swim et al., 2009), gendered messages within the family of origin (Atwood, 2001; Vu & Rook, 2013), and factors that influence intimate adult relationships (Conger et al., 2001; Cavanaugh, 2007; Eryilmaz & Atak, 2011; Feldman et al., 1998) separately. To date, there are no published qualitative studies that simultaneously explore the phenomena of gender microaggressions and gender dynamics within the family of origin and intimate adult relationships, as well as the way in which cisgender women make meaning of these experiences in the context of one another.

Importance of Family to Understanding Gender

Several authors have examined the importance of early family experiences related to gender development, including: 1) attitudes about gender; 2) expression of gender identity; 3) gender stereotyped behavior; and 4) beliefs and values about gender roles, family, and relationships (Carlson & Knoester, 2011). McHale et al. (2003) acknowledged how the family unit interacts with the larger society to create and enforce gender role expectations, highlighting the need for an ecological perspective into understanding gender development. More recently, Endendijk et al. (2018) discussed a gendered family process model, which includes biological, social, and cognitive factors as moderators of gender development in children and adolescents. This model is consistent with Bryant and Conger's (2002) Development of Early Romantic Relationships (DEARR) model, in which the authors proposed and tested the importance of family characteristics such as cognitions, behaviors, stability, and socioeconomic status on intimate relationship success in early adulthood. All of the aforementioned models of gender development share the critical role of socialization, both within the family and in society. These models and studies also highlight how gender roles and the performance of gender develop within a loop, which includes societal influences on parenting and how children perform gender in societal settings.

Some research was conducted in efforts to better understand how messages about gender are communicated within the family. Specifically, van der Pol et al. (2015) found that gendered messages begin as early as toddlerhood. In addition, the way in which mothers and fathers discuss emotion with their young children differ based on the sex of the child. For example, both mothers and fathers were more likely to ascribe emotions such as anger to their young boys, but

highlighted emotions such as sadness and happiness with young girls (van der Pol et al., 2015). Van der Pol et al. also reported that mothers used more emotional terms with both boys and girls when compared to fathers. Finally, the aforementioned findings highlight the opportunity to explore how microaggressions can play a role in the development of gender roles and its potential impact on gender dynamics in intimate adult relationships.

Eryilmaz and Atak (2011) highlighted the important role of socialization for the development of self-esteem, gender, and gender roles in childhood on intimate adult relationships. For example, Eryilmaz and Atak found that both male and female participants who identified with more masculine gender roles, as well as both male and female participants who exhibited higher levels of self-esteem, were more likely to initiate intimate relationships. Helms et al. (2006) concluded that heterosexual couples who closely align with gender stereotypes exhibited lower levels of marriage satisfaction. Alignment with gender stereotypes may include, but is not limited to, markedly submissive women or acceptance of only a male breadwinner (Helms et al., 2006). In addition, Galliher et al. (1999) found that unbalanced power in romantic relationships during late adolescence, particularly related to emotional care and decision making, was correlated with higher levels of depression in women. These studies describe how cisgender women might experience and present with restricted gender roles, which they have been socialized to fill.

A multifaceted influence on gender development, beginning in the family at a young age, begins to emerge from these models and studies, with girls being more susceptible to the influence of these factors and messages (i.e., interaction of expectations from family and society, observations of parental relationship, and gendered communication about emotions), as

compared to their brothers (Feldman et al., 1998). Messages received within the family of origin can impact roles assumed in intimate adult relationships and satisfaction in those relationships, specifically for young women (Feldman et al., 1998), as these messages of inferiority become internalized, which creates an inner directive about gender role expectations and could set the stage for the manifestation of gender dynamics within relationships.

Research Question

I conducted a study to explore the ways in which cisgender women describe their experiences of gender microaggressions within their family of origin and their current intimate adult relationships, in the context of one another. This study also included an exploration of the way in which cisgender women experience gender dynamics within their intimate adult relationships. Specifically, I sought to answer the following research question: "How do gender microaggressions experienced in the family of origin shape cisgender women's meaning making related to gender microaggressions within their intimate adult relationships?" I will sought to answer the following sub-questions, which include: a) "How do cisgender women experience gender microaggressions within their family of origin?" and b) "How do cisgender women experience gender microaggressions within their intimate adult relationships?".

Significance of the Study

My study further explored the experiences of cisgender women in relation to their experiences of gender microaggressions within their family of origin, as well as gender dynamics through middle adulthood. Cisgender women encounter sexism and microaggressions that can impede their optimal development (Szymanski et al., 2009). My study can bring increased awareness to the ways in which cisgender women experience and are impacted by gender

microaggressions by providing participants with a space to express and process their experiences with gender microaggressions. In addition, participants, counselors, counselors in training, and counselor educators may be empowered to recognize and challenge gender microaggressions in their own lives, have the opportunity to make recommendations for social change, and develop ideas about advocacy.

Counselors and counselor educators can use this information to better understand how cisgender women experience and make meaning of microaggressions and gender dynamics in their daily lives, thereby informing their own work with cisgender women throughout the lifespan. This goal is in alignment with the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014) Code of Ethics in that practitioners and educators may expand their own practices to better serve marginalized groups. The impact of microaggressions and the ways in which early experiences cultivate internalized distress can be further understood as a result of this study. This understanding may enhance the counseling process, particularly through the incorporation of distal and proximal stressors, resilience, and positive coping skills (Budge et al. 2017).

Ross-Sheriff (2012) called social workers to improve their own understanding of microaggressions in order to provide clients with services that recognize the different types of microaggressions clients face on a daily basis, the discrimination inherent in these messages, and how clients describe the impact of microaggressions. By understanding the impact of gender microaggressions for cisgender women in the context of their family of origin and adult relationship dynamics, counselors can be better equipped with additional culturally competent interventions. Specifically, counselors can help clients mitigate the impact of microaggressions and improve awareness of both the counselor's and client's own biases related to femininity and

gender. Counselors and counselor educators can view this information through the context of the impact of microaggressions on mental health, self-esteem, and internalized misogyny, as well as other negative consequences of microaggressions. In addition, counselors and counselor educators can act as agents of social change, armed with empirical information regarding the way cisgender women understand and make meaning of their experiences with gender microaggressions at different stages of life.

With the information and awareness garnered in this study, counselor educators may enhance multicultural counseling, lifespan development, theories, and family counseling courses in order to highlight sexism and the way in which cisgender women experience gender microaggressions. Further, this study can sensitize practitioners and counselors-in-training to the experience of gender microaggressions which can serve to promote and maintain growth fostering relationships with clients and hence, possibly mitigate early termination for women seeking counseling services (Owen et al., 2010).

This study can also prepare counselors to work with a myriad of family and relationship dynamics in a different way, including the deliberate exploration of gender microaggressions experienced in the context of familial and intimate relationships, and intentional inclusion of microaggressions in conceptualizing presenting problems in family and couple counseling. According to Kaestle (2016), the family unit is the first place to challenge and begin to change ideas about gender norms rooted in power. As such, the information garnered from this study will be useful for counselors and counselor educators to create positive change related to conceptualizations and understandings of cisgender women at both micro (i.e. the family unit) and macro (i.e. society) levels.

Theoretical Framework

Postmodern feminist theory will be used to examine the interplay of gender microaggressions within the family of origin and intimate adult relationships. The major tenets of general feminist theory, also germane to postmodern feminist theory, include: 1) the power differential between men and women; 2) viewing gender inequality as a social and cultural construct; 3) attending to the harmful nature of the inequality between men and women; and 4) promoting social change (Allen & Sierra-Jaramillo, 2015). Postmodern feminist theorists expanded upon general feminist viewpoints by including: 1) an intersectional view of gender, recognizing that gender one of many oppressed identities and may not be the most salient oppressed identity for diverse women; and 2) a recognition of the social construction of gender, particularly through discourse (Tong, 2009). Because this proposed study focuses on the experiences of cisgender women within their family of origin and intimate adult relationships, postmodern feminist theory is uniquely situated as a vehicle to explore multifaceted sources of gender microaggressions and the interplay of gender with different social and cultural identities, while allowing space for the celebration of power inherent in all women.

The strengths of postmodern feminist theory within qualitative research include the lack of acceptance of a single truth about the experiences of people, the goal to deconstruct the current power structure through language, and the fostering of individuality (Frost & Elichaoff, 2014). In this study, deconstruction will be particularly prominent during analysis, in which different interpretations of interview material will be explored (Tong, 2009). Within any feminist research, differences between men and women, as well as differences amongst women, cannot be ignored (Maracek, 2016). It is critical to attend to these gender differences from the inception of

this proposed study in order to better design the study, analyze data, and lend rigor and trustworthiness to the design and conclusions, through adherence to postmodern feminist theory.

Finally, feminist theory encourages the researcher to attend to women's voices and lived experiences, which has been neglected in traditional research (Hesse-Biber, 2014). This same prescription is salient within postmodern feminist theory. To honor the voices of participants, the researcher must listen deeply to participants and work to establish trust and rapport during interviews (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Adherence to the overarching tenets of feminist theory will be evident throughout the process as I work to respect, understand, and honor the stories of diverse women at all stages of research.

Although at first glance, the central focus on cisgender women may appear exclusionary, I will apply an intersectional lens to this study in order to honor the differences between all participants based on their various racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, sexual orientation, and other salient identities. Although only cisgender women will be eligible to participate in this study, the information gathered from this dissertation can serve as a starting point for a more precise differentiation of the experiences of cis- and transgender women, thereby providing all women a platform to discuss their experiences with microaggressions accurately and fully.

Rationale for Qualitative Method

In anticipation of the myriad ways that women might describe, understand, and make meaning of their experiences with gender microaggressions within their family of origin and in intimate adult relationships, coupled with the dearth of qualitative research in this area, a qualitative design is proposed to capture the unique experiences of participants. I aligned with a postmodern feminist framework within my proposed qualitative study to honor the individual

voices of participants. Specifically, I utilized an interpretive phenomenological approach, in order to explore critically each participant's experience with the phenomenon of gender microaggressions, both within her family of origin and her intimate adult relationships, and better understand how participants experience and describe gendered dynamics within their intimate adult relationships.

Chapter 1 Summary

As gender microaggressions can have a negative impact on cisgender women and familial relationships can have such an impact on the ideas formed about relationships, understanding how cisgender women process microaggressions within their family of origin and intimate adult relationships remains to be investigated. This study may impact the way burgeoning counselors are taught about gender microaggressions at two points across the life span and the way in which counselors understand, conceptualize, and work with families and couples.

Definition of Terms

Cisgender women refer to women who were biologically assigned female at birth and who identify as female.

Family of origin refers to the family in which a cisgender woman resided with during her formative years. This family structure may include biological parent(s); other relatives, such as aunts, uncles, or grandparents; foster families; adoptive families; or other adult caretakers.

Gender microaggressions refer to the subtle and systemic devaluation, invalidation, and objectification of women and femininity (Sue, 2010; Sue & Capidilupo, 2008).

Gender dynamics refer to the interactions between people, informed by gender and power. These dynamics may be apparent in decision-making, emotional work, and status in intimate adult relationships and may reinforce or challenge gender stereotypes (USAID, n.d.).

Intimate adult relationships include any cohabiting romantic or intimate relationship that has lasted for a minimum of one year, in which both parties were over the age of 18. Based on this definition of adult relationships, it is possible for participants to have engaged in more than one such relationship at the time of the study.

Modern sexism refers to covert and socially embedded sexist acts and ideas. Modern sexism can manifest in denying the existence of sexism and lack of support for policies specifically related to providing women with increased opportunities (Swim et al., 1995). Modern sexism can be conceptualized as resulting from an increased awareness of "politically correct" behavior.

Sexism refers to the belief that women are inferior to men. Sexism may be old-fashioned, or blatantly expressed; modern, or more subtly expressed; and may even be benevolently expressed (Swim at al., 1995).

Chapter 2

> I write for those women who do not speak, for those who do not have a voice because they were so terrified, because we are taught to respect fear more than ourselves. We've been taught that silence would save us, but it won't.
>
> -Audre Lorde, The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action

Introduction

This chapter will begin with a discussion of postmodern feminist theory and how this theoretical orientation informs the proposed study. In addition, this chapter will include in-depth discussions of the existing research related to sexism and gender microaggressions; the impact of family on understanding gender; and the way in which messages communicated about gender in the family of origin can impact intimate adult relationships. It is important to note the recent emergence of literature focusing on the intersection of gender microaggressions with other aspects of identity (e.g. race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status), however, there still remain gaps in the exploration of diverse cisgender women and their experiences. As such, limited research has explicitly engaged diverse women in discussions about gender microaggression, specifically in the family of origin and intimate adult relationships. These topics are the focus of an extensive review of the literature related to the research questions for this proposed dissertation, which include "How do gender microaggressions experienced in the family of origin shape cisgender women's meaning making related to gender microaggressions within their intimate adult relationships?" I will also seek to answer the following sub-questions, which include: a) "How do cisgender women experience gender microaggressions within their

family of origin?" and b) "How do cisgender women experience gender microaggressions within their intimate adult relationships?". I will conclude with a summary of the existing literature.

Theoretical Framework

The experiences of marginalized individuals have gained increased attention in research. One such group are cisgender women. The experiences of all women are unique and warrant individual attention; postmodern feminism allows space to understand events by those experiencing a given phenomenon, including gender microaggressions. People are situated within various systems that maintain discrimination and oppression (Frost & Elichaoff, 2014) and postmodern feminist research creates opportunities to explore the way people are impacted by these systems through active deconstruction of patriarchal practices in different environments. The goal of postmodern feminist theory is change at the personal and systemic level, rather than simply discussing oppressive experiences (Frost & Elichaoff, 2014). Personal and systemic change can be an outcome of this proposed study through discourse promoting an understanding of the experiences of cisgender women with gender microaggressions. As such, this section will also include a brief discussion about embodiment and how this concept can enhance the use of postmodern feminist theory in the context of this proposed study.

A key aspect of this proposed study is how cisgender women experience gender microaggressions within the family of origin and intimate adult relationships. The term gender microaggressions refers to women being invalidated and devalued in subtle manners (Sue, 2010). Gender microaggressions may be intentional or unintentional in nature and may include microinsults, microinvalidations, or microassaults (Nadal et al., 2015; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008). Encouraging cisgender women to conform to accepted social norms and stereotypes, a

phenomenon often experienced by women within the family unit across the lifespan, can be considered microaggressive in nature (e.g., Daminger, 2019; Morawska, 2020; McConnon et al., 2022). These messages received within the family can perpetuate social inequalities between men and women, as well as inequalities for others along the gender spectrum. Examples of gender microaggressions in the family of origin include guiding girls and boys toward gendered toys (Rittenour et al., 2004), subtle and overt disapproval of gender non-conforming behaviors (Blakemore & Hill, 2008; Gartner & Sterzing, 2018), gendered family roles and expectations (Blakemore & Hill, 2008; Marks et al., 2009), and parents' communication of stereotypical expectations for marriage and child-rearing responsibilities (Carlson & Knoester, 2011; Cichy et al., 2007; Starrels & Holm, 2000).

In order to understand the unique contributions of postmodern feminist theory to this proposed research study, the following section begins with a brief overview of the evolution and general tenets of feminist theories. In this section, I will also explore the central tenets of postmodern feminist theory, as well as criticisms of postmodern feminist theory and potential solutions in the context of this proposed study.

Origins of Feminist Theories

Although many common themes are present in all iterations of feminist theory (e.g., centering the experiences of women; deconstructing power dynamics), there is also substantial diversity (Worell & Remer, 2003), which contributes to the ambiguity often criticized by scholars across variations of feminist theories. While a detailed discussion of the origins of feminist theories is beyond the scope of this chapter, I will provide an overview of the origins of feminist theories and evolution to postmodern feminist theory.

The term feminism did not appear in general parlance until 1913 (Cott, 1987), after some of the earliest feminists began to discuss ideas of equality. Early feminist theorists included Mary Wollestonecraft, who focused on education for women; suffragists such as Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Sojourner Truth, who discussed education and political involvement for women; and more recent authors such as Simone de Beauvoir, bell hooks, and Judith Butler, who examined issues related to sex and gender through varied lenses (Black et el., 2019).

Feminist theory is often described in waves. First wave feminism was inspired by the abolition movement and was focused on educational and political equality for White, upper and middle class, heterosexual women (Burkett & Brunnell, 2021). Second wave feminism emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, inspired by the fight for civil rights, equality and justice, and the Vietnam war (Burkett & Brunnell, 2021). This wave centered issues of education, politics, and equal pay. Many different voices focused on various ways of implementing the aforementioned ideas, but second wave feminism was still dominated by White, middle class, educated women (Black et al., 2019). Despite social discourse and activism privileging the voices of White, middle class, educated women, Black feminist voices began to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s, addressing the role of gender and race in oppression (Black et al., 2019).

Simultaneously, feminist theories emerged in framing family research beginning in the 1960s-1970s (Allen, 2016). An important tenet of feminist family research is the conceptualization of the family as both a site of oppression and a source of strength (Allen, 2016). The family is also identified as a primary location of gender socialization, the family unit is an excellent setting to start deconstructing societal norms and challenging power structures (Baber, 2009). The use of feminist theories in family research has served the purpose of

deconstructing the roles of both men and women regarding status, power, and fairness. Specifically, family research grounded in feminist theories examines issues related to paid labor, caretaking responsibilities, socialization, and oppression, all of which are anticipated to arise in the study of gender microaggressions within the family of origin.

Third wave feminism arose in the mid 1990s and shifted the focus to economic and social issues impacted not only by gender, but also race and class (Burkett & Brunnell, 2021). As such, third wave feminism was inherently more inclusive than previous iterations. The inclusion of multiple voices from myriad racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups was criticized by some as a weakness (Tong, 2009), however, the emergence of non-White feminists during the third wave created improved understanding of the experiences of women through an intersectional lens. Finally, fourth wave feminism is considered to encapsulate the current understanding of feminist theories. Current iterations of feminism continue to focus on inclusion and social issues, particularly at a global level (Allen, 2016). Third and fourth wave feminists sought to question and reform systems of oppression and redefine the stereotypes of womanhood, laying the foundation for the emergence of postmodern feminist theory.

Central Tenets of Postmodern Feminist Theory

As gaps in representation persisted through the evolution of feminist theory, other voices emerged to create more inclusive versions of feminist theory. The development of postmodern feminist theory is largely credited to Helene Cixious, Luce Irigary, Julia Kristeva, and Judith Butler (Baber, 2009; Tong, 2009). In general, postmodern feminist theorists reject essentialism (e.g., the idea that characteristics are fixed and innate) and embrace diversity of perspectives, experiences, and individuals (Tong, 2009). Postmodern feminist theorists also strive to challenge

and change the patriarchal values dominating much of Western society. The central tenets of postmodern feminist theory include: 1) honoring and fostering individuality; 2) the lack of acceptance of a single truth about the experiences of people (i.e., constructivism); 3) deconstructing the current gendered power structure through language; and 4) attention to cultural factors which influence development and functioning (Baber, 2009; Frost & Elichaoff, 2014; Marecek, 2016).

The first tenet of postmodern feminist theory is honoring and fostering individuality. Postmodern feminist theory accounts for the influences of microsystems (e.g., school, family), exosystems (e.g., culture, ethnicity, policies), and macrosystems (e.g., world view, politics, distribution of resources) on an individual's thoughts, behaviors, and relationships (Porter, 2005). Thus, women may hold several oppressed identities; gender may or may not be their most salient identity (Barrett et al., 2005). Tong (2009) also discussed how gender oppression exists in a system with many other types of oppression. As such, these multiple oppressions act to influence and maintain one another (Tong, 2009). According to postmodern feminist theory, these unique and individual experiences should be honored and valued. This tenet can be exemplified by inviting discussion about how women have made meaning of various identities, rather than exploring issues related to gender within a vacuum.

Relatedly, the second tenet of postmodern feminist theory is the lack of acceptance of a single truth; rather, there are many subjective experiences shaped by events, culture, and society (Frost & Elichaoff, 2014). As such, there is not a single explanation for why women are oppressed (Baber, 2009; Tong, 2009). Tong (2009) asserted that truth is often informed by the people who hold power. Postmodern feminist theory represents the movement of women, with

one or more oppressed identities, taking back power through constructing and sharing their own truths. Postmodern feminist theory highlights a shift toward exploring context, intersectionality and multiple oppressions, and views gender on a spectrum rather than dichotomous categories (Baber, 2009; Porter, 2005; Tong, 2009). This shift impacts issues related to inclusion and representation of all women and is particularly important to understanding gender microaggressions.

Language is also considered to be another central tenet of postmodern feminist theory. Language and discourse construct reality (Tong, 2009), contribute to our understanding of the world (Barrett et al, 2005), and can reinforce oppression and discrimination (Frost & Elichaoff, 2014). The words we choose, the power of these words, and the way words can unconsciously suggest gender are all factors in how we make meaning of sex and gender. Utilizing postmodern feminist theory for this proposed study is warranted because analysis will include a focus on how gender microaggression are conveyed via discourse, and will be viewed as an avenue to deconstruct and understand oppression (Baber, 2009; Frost & Elichaoff, 2014).

Finally, culture also plays an important role in influencing beliefs about family and gender roles and is considered as a central tenet of postmodern feminist theory. Barrett et al. (2005) discussed how cultural differences can influence individualist and collectivist ideals, with direct implications for family dynamics. In addition, perceptions of what constitutes a family and the way gender roles are practiced within families can be influenced by culture (Barrett et al., 2005). Finally, culture can also play a role in how gender is performed in daily life. The way people of all genders dress, behave, and present in different settings is a layer of embodiment that can be influenced by social norms and cultural expectations (see Butler, 2015; Kaschak,

1992). Culture can also have implications for the expectations of how women present their bodies in different settings, leading to issues related to restricting and policing appearance (Piran, 2016). Overall, culture impacts the way women come to think about, describe, and embody gender throughout their lives.

Embodiment

Due to the aforementioned restriction and policing of women's bodies in social and private spaces (Piran, 2016), an understanding of embodiment is important for the exploration of gender microaggressions and can serve to enhance the tenets of postmodern feminist theory. In fact, self-concept for women is intimately tied to their embodied experiences (Kaschak, 1992). Embodiment can include: 1) body connection and comfort; 2) agency and functionality; 3) experience and expression of desire; 4) attuned self-care; 5) and resisting objectification (Piran, 2016). These characteristics of embodiment are relevant to the research questions of this proposed study and postmodern feminist theory in that the aforementioned characteristics lend themselves to the discussion of women's meaning making experiences with gender microaggressions in various domains and can provide another opportunity to deconstruct gender.

According to Merleau-Ponty (2005), the body is a medium for cultivating habits and impacts our interactions with the world, as well as the world's interactions with us. Shehan and Kaestle (2009) further identified the family as an "embodied institution" (p. 83), with individual behaviors and emotions relating to the physical body. In addition, the body adapts to the world around it; therefore, the way people make meaning of the world and interact with others is influenced by embodied experiences, such as pregnancy, pleasure, and physical power. Further, different experiences influence how an individual presents their body in the world (Moya, 2014).

The body and mind cannot be separated and are inextricably linked when making meaning of experiences (Merleau-Ponty, 2005), particularly when discussing issues related to gender and identity.

The way women and girls inhabit their bodies shifts over time and is responsive to different life events (Piran, 2016). Embodiment can transcend the physical to include mental processes, dichotomies (e.g., slut/prude, tomboy/girly girl), and social power (Piran, 2016). In fact, embodiment is evident in the ever-present dichotomies within the lived experiences of women (Gergen, 2001; Piran, 2016). For example, many girls (and women) embody the notion that no matter what she does, it is not right (e.g., too fat/thin, too chaste/slutty, too smart/dumb, breasts are too big/small; Gergen, 2001). There is only a small subset of women who fit stereotypically ideal standards, if any exist (Gergen, 2001). Being considered an ideal woman is further complicated by issues of race, sexuality, and socioeconomic status (Baber, 2009).

Including embodiment in feminist studies can add richness to data, such that attention is given to the influence of women's embodied lives and experiences on meaning making (Gergen, 2001; Kaschak, 1992; Piran, 2016). The concept of embodiment can translate to this proposed research by intentionally bringing discussion of lived experiences in the context of the participants' bodies, critically examining how women make meaning of their experiences, and co-constructing knowledge with participants.

Criticisms

Although postmodern feminist theory has many strengths, there are also criticisms when framing a study from this perspective. The primary critiques, particularly from family therapy researchers, are the academic nature of this theory and the emphasis on the lack of

shared experiences (Baber, 2009; Benhabib, 2020; Tong, 2009). Postmodern feminism can inherently lack clarity because of the emphasis on individuality in all experiences and perceptions (Tong, 2009). Finally, the lack of a singular voice may pose a challenge related to creating and maintaining community, but can be overcome by honoring the many and varied voices of women as indicative of their individual experiences (Frost & Elichaoff, 2014). Gender and diversity can be unintentionally subjugated in postmodern feminist theory if not addressed carefully, so patriarchal values should be challenged, rather than reinforced, within research (Cosgrove, 2002). The evolution of feminism to postmodern feminist theory is the result of criticisms that early iterations of feminism originated with a focus solely on gender, without a focus on diverse identities (Bruns, 2010). In addition, postmodern feminist thought has been influenced by a shift away from static and binary understandings of sex and gender (Baber, 2009; Kaschak, 1992). Therefore, intersectionality will continue to be asserted as a vital tenet of both postmodern feminist theory and this proposed research study, through attention to the way women make meaning of various identities at all stages of research.

Postmodern feminist theory moves beyond simply exploring gender (Benhabib, 2020; Porter, 2005; Tong, 2009) and can be used as a framework to highlight and deconstruct power differentials (Allen & Jaramillo-Sierra, 2015; Domingue, 2015; Frost & Elichaoff, 2014; Maracek, 2016), while simultaneously creating space for the experiences of diverse women (Baber, 2009). Within the context of this proposed study, postmodern feminist theory will be employed to deconstruct cisgender women's experiences with gender microaggressions and power dynamics in their family of origin and intimate adult relationships. In addition, embodiment can be used to explore the connection between experiences with gender

microaggressions through the lifespan and the physical experiences of cisgender women (Gergen, 2001, Chapter 3; Piran, 2016). Although criticisms exist for postmodern feminist theory, researchers can minimize issues related to these criticisms through deliberate and purposeful attention to potential biases and research methods.

The Evolution of Sexism, Microaggressions, and Gender Microaggressions

Through the years, overt acts of sexism towards women have evolved into more covert acts of sexism. These covert acts of sexism include behaviors such as asking women to complete tasks traditionally viewed as feminine (e.g., administrative tasks) or are discouraged from engaging in physically demanding activities (Matteson & Moradi, 2005; Nadal, 2018; Swim, Aiken, et al., 1995; Swim & Cohen, 1997; Swim et al., 2001). While overt and covert sexism remain prevalent, women can also experience gender microaggressions.

Microaggressions are pervasive within our society and are embedded within our systems and practices (Smith et al., 2009). Many scholars have reported the deleterious effects of microaggressive acts for specific marginalized groups, including women (Berk, 2017; Burdsey, 2011; Gomez et al., 2011; Moradi & Funderburk, 2006; Moradi & Subich, 2002; Smith et al., 2009; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008). Sue (2010) identified gender microaggressions as those that target women. Sue described this common form of microaggressions as slights that dismiss women, treat women as sex objects, limit women, and devalue their contributions. Similar to sexism, gender microaggressions may be overt or covert in nature (Sue, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008).

Cisgender women may encounter gender microaggressions, which includes behaviors such as sexual objectification and subtle slights related to sex (Derthick, 2015; Kaskan & Ho,

2016; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008). Women subjected to gender microaggressions may experience disruptions to self-image and self-esteem, as well as psychological distress (Moradi & Funderburk, 2006; Moradi & Subich, 2002). The following literature review will unpack the evolution of sexism into microaggressive acts based on gender and sex. For the purposes of this dissertation, the concepts of sexism and gender microaggressions are presented separately despite the overlap between these categories in women's lived experiences (Kaskan & Ho, 2016; Matteson & Moradi, 2008; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008; Swim et al., 2001; Szymanski et al., 2009).

Sexism

Sexism is defined as "discrimination or prejudice against an individual or group based on the idea that one sex or gender is better than the others" (Bell, 2013). Sexism is conceptualized in terms of overt, covert, and subtle manifestations (Swim & Cohen, 1997). According to Sue and Capodilupo (2008), overt and covert sexism can be verbal or behaviorally based and is generally conscious, whereas subtle sexism is largely unconscious.

Sexism can also be described in two forms: old-fashioned and modern manifestations (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005; Swim et al., 1995). An example of old-fashioned sexism includes obvious slights against women, whereas modern manifestations of sexism involve a lack of empathy toward the experiences of women (Garcia-Sanchez et al., 2019; Swim & Cohen, 1997; Swim et al., 1995; Swim et al., 2001). Since overt sexism is obvious and intentional discrimination, old-fashioned sexism reflects an overt manifestation of sexism (Sue & Capodilupo, 2008; Swim & Cohen, 1997). Matteson and Moradi (2005) provided examples of overt sexism within the *Schedule of Sexist Events* (SSE), an instrument that assesses sexist events

in a variety of settings. Specifically, items which endorsed the Sexist Degradation factor of the SSE included obvious, old-fashioned acts of sexism: being called derogatory names, hearing sexist or sexually demeaning jokes, being the target of unwanted sexual advances, or being threatened or physically harmed (Matteson & Moradi, 2005).

On the other hand, modern sexism has been characterized as a lack of empathy toward women's experiences; thus, this type of sexism is covert and subtle compared to the old-fashioned version (Sue & Capodilupo, 2008; Swim & Cohen, 1997; Swim et al., 1995; Swim et al., 2001). Matteson and Moradi's (2005) validation of the SSE also provided insight into the manifestation of modern sexism in the lived experiences of women. For example, items related to SSE's Unfair Treatment in Distant and Close Relationships factor included examples of modern sexism, such as being treated unfairly by a significant other, neighbor, or stranger (e.g., women not being shown respect based solely on gender).

According to Swim et al. (2001), sexism occurs by maintaining traditional (e.g., women as primarily caregivers) gender role prejudice and its stereotypes through discrimination, derogatory words or actions, and sexual objectification. The target of these behaviors can be directed to an individual woman, to bystanders observing sexist behaviors, or towards a group of women (Swim et al., 2001). In addition, women who participated in a study designed to explore the occurrence of sexist events in daily life reported being degraded or treated unfairly within intimate relationships, in public, or at work (Matteson & Moradi, 2005). Matteson and Moradi's (2005) findings suggest that women are the targets of sexism from acquaintances or those in close relationships, in various settings, and in a variety of ways. More recently, Oswald et al.

(2019) reinforced findings that women continue to face sexism in overt and nuanced ways and in different social contexts.

In addition to sexism being directed towards women or within their presence, it occurs in various settings: public places (Nielsen, 2002); the workplace (Basford et al., 2014); athletics (Kaskan & Ho, 2016); and graduate programs (Gomez et al., 2011). Matteson and Moradi (2005) found that factors from the Lifetime and Recent scales supported the widespread environments in which sexism occurs: intimate or personal situations, public domains, and work or school settings (Basford et al., 2014; Gomez et al., 2011; Kaskan & Ho, 2016).

In efforts to understand specific sexist events experienced by women and the impact of said events, Matteson and Moradi (2005) explored the reliability and validity of the factor structure of the *Schedule of Sexist Events* (SSE) subscales. A sample of 245 female undergraduate students and female university faculty and staff completed the Lifetime, Recent, and Appraisal scales of the SSE. Each scale assessed the occurrence of specific sexist events for either a specific timespan (lifetime or within the last year for the Lifetime scale and Recent scale, respectively) or the impact of sexist events on the participant (Appraisal scale). Two factors, experiences of sexism in intimate relationships and experience of sexism in public places, were retained on the Lifetime and Appraisal scales; sexist degradation, unfair treatment at work and school, and unfair treatment in distant and close relationships were retained on the Recent Scale.

Sexism experienced by women can occur interpersonally and intrapersonally. Hill and Fischer (2008) examined the incidence of self-objectification when compared to cultural sexual objectification. Self-objectification occurs when women internalize cultural messages of sexual objectification and view themselves as sexual objects, while cultural sexual objectification refers

to others treating women as sexual objects (Hill & Fischer, 2008). This description of cultural sexual objectification highlights how women may experience sexism and microaggressions from others (Swim et al., 2001) and how they can internalize these experiences (Hill & Fischer, 2008).

Participants for their study included 361 women, 73% self-identified as heterosexual and 27% self-identified as lesbian (Hill & Fischer, 2008). Participants represented a wide range of ages (18 to 79 years) and educational levels. The authors found that women who self-objectified were more likely to report cultural objectification. In addition, both lesbian and heterosexual women reported similar levels of sexualization and harassment by others, as well as exhibited similar patterns of self-objectification when compared to reports of cultural objectification or harassment. This finding indicates potential ways in which women may internalize sexist messages, resulting in negative outcomes, including self-objectification.

Regarding self-objectification and internalized misogyny, Calogero and Jost (2011) conducted a series of experiments to understand exposure to different types of sexism, including benevolent sexism, and the impact of self-subjugation in women and men. Calogero and Jost defined benevolent sexism as words, behaviors, and beliefs that simultaneously celebrate and diminish women through the viewpoint that women are fragile, and thus require assistance or protection. The researchers compared 100 college men and 100 college women on self-objectification, self-surveillance, and internalized body shame following a task designed to manipulate exposure to different sexist beliefs.

The authors found that exposure to benevolent sexism increased self-objectification, self-surveillance behaviors (i.e., maintaining appearance; planning appearance routines), and body shame in women across all experiments (Calogero & Jost, 2011). In contrast, there was no

reported correlation between men's scores on measures of self-objectification, self-surveillance, and body shame with exposure to sexist assertions. These findings highlight the different impact of sexism on men and women, with women impacted disproportionally by sexism, possibly related to a decreased sense of power and autonomy (Hill & Fischer, 2008; Szymanski et al., 2009). This assertion is in line with attention to power dynamics characteristic of postmodern feminist theory.

Negative outcomes of sexism have long been the focus of research. Szymanski et al. (2009) examined the impact of internalized misogyny as a potential moderator between the experience of sexist events and overall psychological distress. The authors found that women who experience sexist events exhibited higher levels of psychological distress and reported a positive correlation between internalized misogyny and psychological distress. Despite an overwhelmingly White sample of heterosexual college women, these findings further support the notion of women internalizing sexist messages with negative outcomes, while also highlighting the need to investigate the impact of sexism through an intersectional lens. Together, these studies highlight the negative impact of sexism on women at various levels: emotional, psychological, and behavioral (Calogero & Jost, 2011; Szymanski et al., 2009).

When faced with sexism, women reported feelings of anger, sadness, surprise, and discomfort (Swim et al., 2001). Other studies have highlighted potential negative psychological outcomes related to experiencing pervasive sexism: decreased self-esteem, increased anxiety and stress (Derthick, 2015; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008); increased depression (Matteson & Moradi, 2005); increased psychological distress (Moradi & Funderburk, 2006; Moradi & Subich, 2002); and feelings of self-doubt (Smith et al., 2009). With an increased understanding of the

negative impact of sexism on women, studies have also unpacked women's experiences with sexism.

With sexist experiences occurring in many facets of life (Matteson & Moradi, 2005) women are at risk of internalizing sexist messages and perpetuating those ideals through self-objectification (Hill & Fischer, 2008). In addition, research has supported the notion of benevolent sexism as a means of maintaining a system of oppression within our society, such that women experience self-objectification as a result of experiencing benevolent sexism and police their own behaviors and appearances (Calogero & Jost, 2011). The way in which sexism manifests in daily life have evolved into gender microaggressions.

Taxonomy of Microaggressions

The initial definition of microaggressions is often credited to Pierce (1970) to describe subtle and chronic racial prejudice and discrimination. The concept of microaggressions was further explored by Sue et al. (2007) to highlight the taxonomy of racial microaggressions. According to Sue et al., racial microaggressions occur within nine categories, including: 1) assumptions that a person of color was not born in the U.S.; 2) assumptions that people of color have inferior levels of intelligence; 3) denial of the importance of race in individual lived experiences; 4) assumptions that a person of color is dangerous or criminal; 5) denial that racism exists; 6) endorsing meritocracy; 7) pathologizing the culture and communication styles of people of color; 8) treating people of color as second-class citizens; and 9) devaluing or making people of color feel unwelcome at an environmental level. The concept of microaggressions has been applied to people with diverse identities detailing how different individuals experience oppression and invalidation in subtle ways while maintaining a similar taxonomy regarding

different groups, including experience with sexism and gender microaggressions (Capodilupo et al., 2010; Sue, 2010). Conceptualizations of microaggressions have also shifted to explore issues related to intersectionality (e.g., Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Lee et al, 2022), which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Gender Microaggressions

Many conceptualizations of gender microaggressions exist in the literature (see Basford et al., 2014; Nadal et al., 2015; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008). For the purposes of this proposed study, Sue's (2010) definition is used to understand and explore microaggressions in all forms. According to Sue, gender microaggressions are defined as pervasive acts which dismiss women, treat women as sex objects, limit women, and devalue their contributions. Due to the covert nature of these slights, it is difficult to readily identify gender microaggressions (Basford et al., 2014; Berk, 2017; Sue, 2010), but researchers attempt to do so. Researchers have agreed that gender microaggressions can be classified along the following factors: 1) sexual objectification; 2) second class citizenship; 3) assumptions of inferiority; 4) denial of the reality of sexism; 5) assumptions of traditional gender roles; 6) use of sexist language; 7) denial of individual sexism; and 8) environmental (e.g., systemic) microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2015; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2010; Sue et al., 2007).

Research has indicated that gender microaggressions can occur in many ways (Nadal et al., 2015; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2010; Sue et al., 2007. Specifically, Basford et al. (2014) confirmed that both men and women are able to detect gender microaggressions, particularly when discrimination is obvious. The researchers presented vignettes to 150 male and female college students that portrayed discriminatory behavior toward a female employee by a

male supervisor. The sexism presented in the vignettes ranged from explicit to subtle. Basford et al. described explicit microaggressions against women as purposeful exclusions from important work meetings, based on gender. Obvious microaggressions against women also may include comments about a woman's appearance, especially when appearance is a non-issue with male counterparts. Subtle microaggressions included dismissive comments toward a woman leading a meeting. Participants in this study completed measures to assess perception of microaggressions in the vignettes and projected negative work outcomes as a result of the microaggressions experienced.

Both men and women were able to recognize gender microaggressions and attributed a negative outcome in the workplace to experiences of gender microaggressions, particularly for explicit microaggressions (Basford et al., 2014). However, women appeared to have a higher level of sensitivity to gender microaggressions and were better able to identify subtle microaggressions compared to their male counterparts. This finding provides further support to the prevalence and impact of sexism and gender microaggressions in the lives of women (Calogero & Jost, 2011; Hill & Fischer, 2008; Matteson & Moradi, 2005; Szymanski et al., 2009), including women's heightened sensitivity to experiences with subtle gender microaggressions.

Gender microaggressions experienced by women in specific fields, such as athletics, STEM, or academia, have garnered particular research interest due to the observable treatment of men and women in these domains. In a review of the existing literature on microaggressions against female athletes, Kaskan and Ho (2016) sought to classify themes of microaggressions

against female athletes that occurred in the media. The authors explored how assumptions of inferiority, sexual objectification, and restrictive gender roles manifested in female athletics.

Regarding assumptions of inferiority, Kaskan and Ho (2016) found that media coverage of female athletes was limited compared to their male counterparts: victories of female athletes were attributed to the weaknesses of their female rivals; female athletes were infantilized (e.g., references to them as girls, baby, or honey); and male athletes were referred to in a derogatory manner, using female descriptions (e.g., girls, sissies). Kaskan and Ho argued that sexual objectification of female athletes is apparent when their physical attributes are displayed in ways unrelated to their athletic prowess. Sexual objectification may also degrade the accomplishments of female athletes, overshadowing their abilities. Finally, restrictive gender roles are perpetuated by having different rules for the conduct of male and female athletes, including encouraging women to behave in a more "feminine" or "delicate" manner (e.g., limiting grunting noises while playing tennis; pressure to maintain societal beauty standards), despite the demands of their sport (Kaskan & Ho, 2016, p. 279).

Differences in the perception and treatment of men and women also exist in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Using qualitative interviews, Kim and Meister (2022) identified microaggressions experienced by women in STEM and how these microaggressions impact workplace functioning. Gender microaggressions common to the participants included devaluation of technical competence, devaluation of physical presence, denial of one's reality, pathologizing woman's personal character, and pathologizing woman's gender (Kim & Meister, 2022). Consistent with previous literature (e.g., Derthick, 2015; Matteson & Moradi, 2005; Moradi & Funderburk, 2006; Moradi & Subich, 2002; Sue, 2010; Sue

& Capodilupo, 2008; Smith et al., 2009; Swim et al., 2001), women experienced several negative outcomes related to the experience of microaggressions, including negative emotions, cognitive disruptions, and identity threat (Kim & Meister, 2022). As stated earlier, these negative outcomes may be indicative of issues related to power and oppression when conceptualizing date through a postmodern feminist lens.

Gender microaggressions can also manifest in academic settings including academic conferences (Biggs et al., 2018) or on college campuses (Blithe & Elliott, 2020; Vacaro, 2010). For example, Blithe and Elliott (2020) examined the way female faculty members experienced microaggressions as stressors. Participants included 21 women of varying academic ranks (i.e., tenured, tenure-track, full-time instructor). Notably, this study included both White women and women of color, providing a more nuanced understanding of how gender microaggressions can intersect with racial microaggressions. According to Blithe and Elliott, all participants reported experiencing overt forms of sexism, such as hostility and sexual harassment, and/or covert forms of sexism, including structural inequalities and microaggressions, to some degree. Women of color additionally noted tasks to manage microaggressions at work, including simultaneously attempting to increase productivity while disengaging to avoid microaggressions related to tokenism or exclusion. This increased management of microaggressions can have implications for time spent in research or teaching tasks. Participants identified examples of sexism and microaggressions from both colleagues and students.

Biggs et al. (2018) focused on a different academic environment in their quantitative study to determine the relationship between perception of a sexist climate and participation in academia. Specifically, the researchers sought to understand if women's conference attendance

and decisions to present at academic conferences were influenced by perceptions of a sexist conference climate (e.g., lack of women presenters, lack of accommodations for mothers). In addition, Biggs et al. questioned whether perceptions of sexism at academic conferences impact the coping styles and intentions of study participants to remain in academia.

Biggs et al. (2018) sampled 329 conference presenters (63% women) from three conferences within the US that involve human behavior. This sampling procedure was limited by a low response rate and by researchers identifying participants' gender, rather than participants identifying their own gender. All participants completed several Likert scale questionnaires to assess: 1) climate and reputation of the conference; 2) perceptions of sexist attitudes and treatment during the conference; 3) active or passive coping with perceived sexism; 4) gendered performance at the conference (i.e., stereotypically masculine or feminine behaviors); and 5) intent to exit the specific conference and/or academia. The measurements were grounded in the existing literature, however, there was a potential bias with the gendered performance measurements. Specifically, the researchers identified what they considered to be masculine and feminine behaviors in their questions to participants, identifying competitive behavior or male comradery as masculine behaviors and being soft-spoken, acquiescent, or engaging in female comradery as feminine behaviors. Thus, participants' own perceptions of masculine and feminine behaviors were not measured. This limitation may have impacted findings related to classification of behavior that may not have aligned with participants' views of masculine and feminine behaviors.

As hypothesized, women perceived sexism and microaggressions to a greater extent than their male counterparts (Biggs et al., 2018). This finding supports the conclusions of Basford et

al.'s (2014) study regarding women's heightened sensitivity to microaggressions in the workplace. Biggs et al. (2018) also reported that women actively (e.g., challenged and spoke against) and passively (e.g., remained silent) coped with perceived microaggressions and sexism within the conference environment more often than men. Although Biggs et al. found no difference between men and women with regard to their intentions to leave a specific conference, women were more likely to express intentions to leave academia as compared to men. Overall, the difference between men and women regarding intentions to remain in academia when faced with gender microaggressions indicates the impact of such experiences on the decision-making process for some female academics.

Related to academia and conference environments, incidents of gender microaggressions on college campuses have been described. Based upon Sue (2010), the following issues occurring on college campuses exemplify gender microaggressions:

- Sexual objectification, as in women participating in date auctions (Vacaro, 2010);
- Second-class citizenship, as in lack of responsiveness to complaints by female students or fewer mentoring opportunities for women (Kim & Meister, 2022; Sue & Capodillupo, 2008; Vacaro, 2010);
- Assumptions of inferiority, such as viewing women as sensitive or excluding women from different athletic or academic pursuits (Blithe & Elliott, 2020; Kim & Meister, 2022; Sue & Capodillupo, 2008; Vacaro, 2010);
- Assumptions of traditional gender roles, such as when female students are recognized for decorating or cleaning up after a campus event (Vacaro, 2010);

- Use of sexist language, such as when women are referred to in derogatory terms (Blithe & Elliott, 2020; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capidilupo, 2008; Vacaro, 2010);
- Denial of the reality of sexism, including ignoring the aforementioned acts and the oppression of women (Blithe & Elliott, 2020; Kim & Meister, 2022; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008; Vacaro, 2010);
- Environmental microaggressions, including a lack of attention to the unique needs of women and few women in leadership roles (Blithe & Elliott, 2020; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capidilupo, 2008; Vacaro, 2010).

As illustrated above, gender microaggressions can occur in different settings and can manifest in a variety of ways, all of which can negatively impact women receiving these messages (Basford et al., 2019; Biggs et al., 2018; Blithe & Elliott, 2020; Kaskan & Ho, 2016; Kim & Meister, 2022; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008; Sue et al., 2007; Vacaro, 2010). The negative psychological, behavioral, and cognitive impacts of such experiences are detailed in the following section.

Impact of Gender Microaggressions. Previous research on sexism and gender microaggressions has indicated the pervasive nature of these phenomena and the negative effects for women. For example, Sue and Capodilupo (2008) discussed the occurrence of anger, guilt, and defensiveness as reactions to all types of microaggressions. Women subjected to microaggressions may experience disruptions to self-image and self-esteem, as well as psychological distress (Moradi & Funderburk, 2006; Moradi & Subich, 2002). Feelings of helplessness are thematic within the literature, as several authors (e.g., Biggs et al., 2018; Chou et al., 2012; Cundiff et al., 2014; Gomez et al., 2011; Kaskan & Ho, 2016; Nadal et al., 2015;

Nielsen, 2002; Owen at al., 2010; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008) attributed this reaction to the experience of microaggressions. Although these reactions typically relate to the experiencing various forms of microaggressions, similar reactions might occur for cisgender women experiencing gender microaggressions.

Experiencing microaggressions, including gender microaggressions, can also impact cognitive functioning and behaviors. Several of the studies discussed previously (i.e., Biggs et al., 2018; Blithe & Elliott, 2022; Calogero & Jost, 2011; Gomez et al., 2011; Kaskan & Ho, 2016) illustrated the negative cognitive and behavioral impact of microaggressions for women, including disruptions to self-esteem and increased attention to appearance maintenance behaviors. Due to the covert nature of gender microaggressions, women may experience impairments to decision-making skills in different aspects of their lives or may behave differently in the absence of gender microaggressions.

Nadal et al.'s (2014) study highlighted additional negative consequences of microaggressions against transgender and gender nonconforming individuals. Despite the absence of cisgender women in this study, these findings are applicable as they replicate the deleterious effects of gender microaggressions from other studies: 1) emotional reactions (e.g., anger, betrayal, distress, hopelessness, feelings of invalidation; Gomez et al., 2001; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008); 2) cognitive reactions (e.g., rationalization, vigilance, resiliency, need to balance identity and safety; Nielsen, 2002); and 3) behavioral reactions (e.g., direct or indirect confrontation, passive coping; Biggs et al., 2018; Nadal et al., 2014). In addition, these findings provide further insight into the ways people who do not conform with gender norms may experience microaggressions.

Research on microaggressions, including microaggressions against transgender men and women, serves as a catalyst to understand how gender microaggressions may impact psychological well-being, cognitive functioning, and behaviors for cisgender women. Women subjected to gender microaggressions may experience disruptions to self-image and self-esteem, as well as increased levels of psychological distress (Borrell et al., 2011; Moradi & Funderburk, 2006; Moradi & Subich, 2002). However, gender is just one facet of an individual's identity. The interaction of gender, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other salient cultural identities should be considered.

Intersectionality

A final note regarding microaggressions concerns intersectionality. As no identity exists in a vacuum, exploring how other cultural identities (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, race) interact to influence the experience of microaggressions warrants discussion. The term intersectionality gained prominence with Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) to describe the exclusion of Black women from both feminist and antiracist discourse. According to Shields (2008), intersectionality refers to the relationships among different social identities held by one person. Examples of identities that can compound with one another include race, class, gender, age, ableness, and sexual orientation (Shields, 2008). Navigating several marginalized identities can magnify the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional toll of sexism and gendered microaggressions while also providing an opportunity for integration of various aspects of identity (Lee et al., 2022). In addition, many factors can influence gender roles, including immigration status, social class, experiences with racism, and family dynamics. Together, these factors point to the importance of studying gender not only as a discrete concept, but through an intersectional lens.

As a result, it behooves researchers to attend to the unique salient identities from the individual's perspective to avoid assumptions about how such identities are experienced.

Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) presented a model of intersectional invisibility in order to highlight how individuals with multiple oppressed identities face higher levels of oppression through accumulation. Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach also posited that an individual with several minority identities may not be representative of any one group and thus will not receive the advantages of recognition in said group. That is, these individuals may face marginalization even within the marginalized groups with which they identify. However, members may also be privy to some advantages through their invisibility, such as avoidance of outright discrimination. Due to the complexity of intersectional identities, listening to the individual stories of women who hold multiple marginalized identities is crucial in order to align with postmodern feminist theory.

Similarly, Lee et al. (2022) examined how bicultural women make sense of varied expectations for gender, racial, and ethnic identities. Participants included 10 Asian American women over 18 who strongly identified with both their Asian and American identity and values. Lee et al. found that bicultural women can experience conflicts with regard to gender role expectations. This conflict may lead women to create a hybrid identity, integrating different aspects of each culture into their practiced gender roles, or engage in different gendered behavior based on setting. In addition, role expectations were largely communicated through messages within the family, which were sometimes in conflict with messages about gender received outside of the family, such as from friends or through the media (Lee et al., 2022). This finding

provides additional evidence for the important role in the family of origin in the development of gender role ideology.

Nadal et al. (2015) identified several themes and subthemes of microaggressions that occur against women from varying racial and ethnic groups. One theme was the labeling of women of color as exotic, including subthemes related to treating women of color as sexual objects. Additional themes from Nadal et al.'s study on microaggression towards women of color and of various ethnic groups included making biased compliments on appearance, viewing Asian women as distressed and submissive, and excluding multiracial women from one or more racial groups. These themes and subthemes can be extended to women of other minority and majority status identities (e.g., class, ableness).

Intersectional microaggressions have garnered research attention in different settings and for people of varying identities. Ross-Sheriff (2012) explored the intersection of gender and race for women of color in academia. Ross-Sheriff discussed the overrepresentation of Black women in community colleges and institutions considered to be less prestigious. In addition, only 3.4% of full professors in the US are Black women (Ross-Sheriff, 2012). The limited representation of Black women in academia sheds light on how the intersection of gender and race can compound experiences of discrimination and microaggressions.

Veldhuis et al. (2018) focused on the experiences of sexual minority women and gender minority individuals. Using a mixed methods study, Veldhuis et al. explored the impact of the 2016 presidential election on health and well-being for a sample of sexual minority women and gender minority individuals. A total of 741 participants completed an internet-based survey prior to the 2017 Presidential Inauguration. Participants also responded to a demographic

questionnaire that was used to categorize them by one of the following gender identities: female/woman, transgender, or non-binary, and into one of the following sexual identity categories: lesbian, bisexual, and queer or other. The participants completed a Likert-scale survey wherein participants identified concerns and feelings following the election, as well as reactions related to mental health. Additionally, 399 participants responded to open-ended questions regarding changes in personal relationships post-election along with specific political and social concerns.

This study emphasized the way in which multiple oppressed identities compound to increase stress in tangible ways (Veldhuis et al., 2018). Veldhuis et al. (2018) found that participants expressed fear for themselves. Participants also reported feelings of hopelessness, depression, anxiety, and hyper-vigilance. Another salient finding was related to safety. Specifically, participants with multiple minority identities reported concerns for safety should others be made aware of previously disclosed portions of their identity. Fears for other marginalized groups also emerged as an important theme, with participants acknowledging that those with multiple minority identities may be more likely to face higher levels of discrimination and oppression. In addition, participants expressed awareness of their individual areas of privilege, resulting from identification with only a single minority identity. Finally, participants expressed concerns that the rights of women and LGBTQ individuals would decrease, with past progress being undone. These findings are in direct alignment with the work of Lee et al. (2022), Nadal et al. (2015), Ross-Sheriff (2012), and Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) who also posited an accumulative effect of more than one minority identity on experiences of discrimination.

Several strengths were apparent in Veldhuis et al.'s (2018) methodology, including the use of an audit trail, continuous and critical discussion about the emerging data, triangulation of qualitative data with quantitative data, and a final check of findings by an outside reviewer. Veldhuis et al. also noted several limitations: 1) lack of representation for the full spectrum of LGBTQ individuals; 2) use of a convenience sample, which limited generalizability; 3) limited diversity within the sample, which included mainly White and well-educated individuals; 4) potential bias in the sample related to the study description; and 5) lack of validation for study measures. Another limitation of the study is its focus on anticipated issues related to the election, rather than actual events. Despite these limitations, this study provided evidence for the various fears individuals had related to the election for themselves and others. The way in which these fears intensify for women who also identify as sexual minorities added to the body of literature on the impact of intersectional identities on perceptions and impact of discrimination. In addition, Veldhuis et al. supported the compounding of sexism and microaggressions for women who also hold minority identities in other domains (Lee et al., 2022; Nadal et al., 2015; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Ross-Sheriff, 2012).

Using an online survey, Puckett et al. (2016) explored the intersection of gender and sexual orientation. The authors hypothesized that both men and women who do not conform to stereotypical gender expectations would be more likely to: 1) struggle with mental health; 2) expect and experience higher levels of prejudice, lower levels of internalized homophobia, and less identity concealment; and 3) experience the mediating effects of minority stressors between gender nonconformity and mental health.

Participants included 251 cisgender women and 132 cisgender men, between the ages of 18 to 80 years old; all participants identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or questioning (Puckett et al., 2016). Survey questions addressed gender expression, experiences with prejudice, expectations of prejudice, identity concealment, internalized homophobia, symptoms of anxiety or depression, and feelings of social anxiety. Although effect sizes were small, results indicated that those with higher levels of gender nonconformity expected and experienced more prejudice, concealed their identity less often, and exhibited higher levels of psychological distress and social anxiety. These findings were consistent with Veldhuis et al.'s (2018) results, such that individuals who identify on the lesbian, gay, and bisexual spectrum experienced higher levels of prejudice. In addition, individuals with higher levels of gender nonconformity may also have an awareness of areas in which they hold privilege, which in turn could moderate their experiences with microaggressions and the outcomes of such experiences (Veldhuis et al., 2018). Puckett et al.'s (2016) study, in conjunction with Veldhuis et al.'s findings, provides insight into the way in which gender nonconformity compounds with expectations and experiences of prejudice and harassment to negatively impact mental health.

Smith et al. (2018) surveyed gender conforming cisgender women who identified across the LGB spectrum (i.e., lesbian, bisexual, queer, other non-heterosexual) and across ethnic groups. The goal of this study was to examine the types and prevalence of sexual behavior among this sample of cisgender women, as well as explore discrimination faced by these women. In addition to diversity with regard to sexual orientation and ethnicity, the 150 participants varied with regard to educational level.

The survey included questions about experiences with heterosexism, particularly harassment, rejection, and discrimination; and sexual risk-taking behaviors (Smith et al., 2018). Although the authors did not identify specific microaggressions faced by participants, they correlated instances of harassment, rejection, and discrimination with sexual risk-taking (Smith et al., 2018). Specifically, Smith et al. (2018) found that cisgender women who self-identified on the LGB spectrum and reported more experiences of heterosexism by service professionals, strangers, or helping professionals also reported higher levels of impulsive sexual behaviors. This study indicated that these participants not only faced increased levels of heterosexism, but also engaged in risky sexual behaviors, potentially related to these experiences, further supporting how multiple intersecting minority identities compound to increase distress and negative outcomes (Lee et al., 2022; Nadal et al., 2015; Puckett et al., 2016; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Ross-Sheriff, 2012; Veldhuis et al., 2018). It is noteworthy that many of the researchers highlighted in this section hold multiple marginalized identities (e.g. diversity in race, ethnicity, LGBTQ identity, age); however, empirical research gaps remain on the topic of gender microaggressions in family contexts. In line with postmodern feminist theory, which is used to frame this proposed dissertation study, and in order to address gaps in intersectionality, the voices and experiences of cisgender women who hold various identities will be sought.

Summary

Overt expressions of sexism have evolved into subtle expressions of sexism (Swim & Cohen, 1997; Swim et al., 1995; Swim et al., 2001). In turn, subtle forms of sexism continued to shift and manifest as gender microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2015; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2010; Sue et al., 2007). Research has illustrated how women experience microaggressions and

how microaggressions against women are perpetuated in daily life (Basford et al., 2019; Biggs et al., 2018; Kaskan & Ho, 2016; Nadal et al., 2015; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2010; Sue et al., 2007; Vacaro, 2010). Further research has also highlighted the adverse impact of sexism and gender microaggressions on women (Biggs et al., 2018; Borrell et al., 2011; Calogero & Jost, 2011; Gomez et al., 2011; Kaskan and Ho, 2016, Moradi & Funderburk, 2006; Moradi & Subich, 2002). More recently, researchers have explored the impact of gender microaggressions for women with multiple minority identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status; Lee et al., 2022; Nadal et al., 2015; Puckett et al., 2016; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Ross-Sheriff, 2012; Veldhuis et al., 2018), although there are still many gaps in the literature regarding intersectionality. These experiences may shape women's conceptualizations of gender roles, as well as the development of gender role ideals and plans for the future. The aforementioned researchers have highlighted the variety of environments in which messages about sex and gender are conveyed (Basford et al., 2019; Biggs et al., 2018; Blithe & Elliott, 2022; Kaskan & Ho, 2016; Kim & Meister, 2022; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008; Sue et al., 2007; Vacaro, 2010). One environment, the family of origin, will be explored to understand possible messages about sex and gender.

Gendered Messages in the Family of Origin

Many researchers have focused on how messages about gender are communicated and shaped by the family of origin in early childhood (Blakemore & Hill, Endendijk et al., 2013; de Vries et al., 2022; Groeneveld et al., 2021; Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016; McKown & Weinstein, 2003; Morawska (2020); Rittenour et al., 2014; van der Pol et al., 2015). There is evidence that supports the notion that subtle and explicit messages about gender continued to be

communicated during adolescence (Gartner & Sterzing, 2018; Hitlin, 2006; Marks, Lam, & McHale, 2009; Montanes et al., 2012; Wenhold & Harrison, 2021) and adulthood (Carlson & Knoester, 2011; Cichy et al. 2007), often in the form of gender microaggressions. The research underpins the purpose of this proposed study, which is to examine cisgender women's experiences with gender microaggressions in their family of origin and within their intimate adult relationships. In addition, the research highlighted throughout this section is exemplary of postmodern feminist theorists' rejection of essentialism in that socialization and modeling often are cited as vehicles of how people come to understand and enact gender. However, included research often focuses on White families with traditional family structures; limited research explores marginalized groups regarding gender microaggressions in the family of origin. This lack of representation provides additional rationale for the purposeful inclusion of intersectionality throughout this study. The literature regarding how messages about gender are communicated in three time frames, beginning with early childhood, will be highlighted.

Early Childhood

In a systematic review of the literature, Morawska (2020) consolidated research regarding the impact of parental attitudes, behaviors, and modeling on young children's gender role development. Research highlighted that both mothers and fathers speak, socialize, and play differently with young sons and daughters, as well as encourage gendered toy choices (Morawska, 2020). Overall, this review provided support for differences in communication about gender for boys and girls within families, beginning when children are very young.

McHale et al. (2003) completed a literature review about the role of the family unit in gender development, which emphasized how family relationships and roles compound with

outside factors to influence gender development. McHale et al. also highlighted the relationship between caregivers and their children to underscore the importance of this relationship in the transmission of gender role ideals. Specifically, mothers were generally more involved with their children and often have more conflicts with their children when compared to the father (Carlson & Knoester, 2011; Endendijk, et al.; 2013; Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016; McHale et al., 2003). Sibling relationships and observations of the parental relationship were also highlighted as important to gender role development (McHale et al., 2003). Collectively, McHale et al.'s and Morowska's (2020) respective reviews suggested the pervasive nature of gendered messages from an early age.

In addition, developmental models have supported the capacity of young children to identify and perceive stereotypes (Brown & Bigler, 2005; Endendijk et al., 2018). For example, McKown and Weinstein (2003) presented 202 children between the ages of 6 and 10 with two vignettes that depicted stereotypes toward a fictional group. The vignettes depicted a fictional Green child choosing either a Blue or Green child to be on their team to complete an academic task. Children did not receive priming about the characteristics of the Greens and Blues prior to the first vignette; however, before the second vignette, participants were told that the Greens believed the Blues were not smart. McKown and Weinstein found that by the age of 10, nearly all participants were able to perceive and identify stereotypes about the imaginary groups.

Communication About Gender

Although indirectly related to gender, McKown and Weinstein (2003) provided empirical support for the ability of young African American and Latinx children to perceive stereotypes due to frequent exposure to stereotypes about their minority status. This finding has implications

for the way in which young girls can observe gendered behavior in the home and begin to assign meaning to gender roles, particularly as girls become aware of gender differences (Brown & Bigler, 2005; Endendijk et al., 2018). Awareness of gender differences may be cultivated, in part, through communication with their parents.

Endendijk et al.'s (2013) qualitative study explored how mothers and fathers communicate messages about gender to their children. These authors sampled families from the Netherlands as part of a larger study to examine gender-differential socialization on boys and girls under the age of four. The study included 172 families who participated in two home visits; the initial visit included the mother and children while the second visit consisted of the father and children. Both parents completed assessments measuring implicit and explicit stereotypes, while child participants completed an assessment measuring implicit stereotypes. Implicit stereotypes are typically unconscious, such as associating men with math. Explicit stereotypes are communicated directly, such as stating that women belong in the home while men are breadwinners. These conceptualizations of implicit and explicit stereotypes may be another expression of gender microaggressions.

Mothers in the study displayed a higher level of implicit stereotypes related to gender when compared to fathers, while fathers displayed higher levels of explicit stereotypes (Endendijk et al., 2013). According to the authors of the study, the reported differences may have persisted due to social desirability with women often performing better than men on tasks of social desirability, indicative of filtering communications. The reported rationale for differences related to social desirability suggest differences in socialization between men and women, providing tentative evidence that women both internalize and express gender microaggressions

differently than men. There were also differences between fathers with same gender and mixed gender children, such that fathers of the former (e.g., two sons or two daughters) had stronger implicit stereotypes than those with mixed gender children (e.g., one son and one daughter). This reported disparity in implicit stereotypes implies differences in socialization for boys and girls, as well as the influence of children's gender constellation on parents' beliefs about gender. In the same study, Endendijk et al. (2013) found no difference between boys and girls with regard to explicit stereotypes and proposed the lack of peer influences at this age range as a possible explanation for this finding. This finding supports a developmental perspective for understanding gender and experiences with gender microaggressions, wherein various factors within the family system interact with outside factors to produce ideas about gender (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Endendijk et al., 2018) and influence the ability for children to perceive stereotypes (Brown & Bigler, 2005).

van der Pol et al. (2015) explored ways in which caregivers explicitly discuss emotions with their young children. In a longitudinal study, 317 families with two young children (aged two years apart) completed the same home visit structure detailed above (Endendijk et al., 2013) with each family participating in two visits (van der Pol, 2015). Gender constellation of children participants included pairings of two sisters, an older sister and younger brother, two brothers, or an older brother and younger sister (van der Pol et al., 2015).

During the visits, each parent read and discussed the *Emotion Picture Book* with their children (van der Pol et al., 2015). This book contained eight pictures of gender-neutral children expressing four different emotions, without text. For example, one picture showed a face

expressing an emotion followed by a second picture providing the context for the same emotion. Researchers coded different aspects of the parents' spontaneous emotional talk.

As the researchers expected, mothers used more emotion talk with both boys and girls when compared to fathers (van der Pol et al., 2015). One consequence of this study is the increased understanding that gender and emotional expression may be shaped covertly, as parents were more likely to discuss emotions such as anger with boys and emotions such as sadness or happiness with girls, indicative of gender microaggressions. This type of communication has possible implications for the development of future relationship ideals, as girls may internalize submissive emotions and boys may internalize disharmonious emotions, based on subtle socialization cues from parents. According to van der Pol et al. (2015), this correlation may be especially true for second-born children, who receive more explicit discussion about emotion than their older sibling.

Groeneveld et al. (2021) furthered the exploration of family gender talk as an important route of gender socialization for young children. This study placed an explicit focus on triadic interactions between the mother, father, and child, adding depth to literature that typically focused on mother-child communications. Groeneveld et al. extended the findings of Endendijk et al. (2013) in order to explore implicit and explicit communication about gender within the family, not just differences in emotion talk between sons and daughters.

Participants included 134 two parent families with a preschool aged child (i.e., between 4-6 years old). Families read the *Gender Stereotype Picture Book* (Endendijk et al., 2013) together. Parents also completed *the Implicit Association Test* (IAT) to assess implicit gender

stereotypes and *Child Rearing Sex-Role Attitude Scale* to assess explicit stereotypes (Groeneveld et al., 2021).

Results indicated that children are active participants in discussions of gender, with no significant differences between boys and girls (Groeneveld et al., 2021). In addition, mothers had significantly stronger implicit stereotypes as measured by the IAT compared to fathers, while fathers had significantly stronger explicit stereotypes than mothers. Based on the aforementioned findings, it is unsurprising that mothers in this study used more implicit methods to discuss gender than fathers, though their communications were not found to be significantly more stereotypical than father's communication about gender. Differences in implicit and explicit gender communications when comparing mothers and fathers also mirror the findings of Endendijk et al. (2013). It is important to note that children receive mixed messages about gender stereotypes through implicit and explicit communications with mothers and fathers, often in the form of gender microaggressions and possibly leading to the persistence of stereotypical thinking in young children.

Groeneveld et al. (2021) also found that children would generally begin conversations with a stereotypical gender comment, which was then questioned, confirmed, or negated by parents. Even when parents challenged children's stereotypical perspectives, children often maintained their stereotypical gender ideology. This finding may be related to previous findings regarding development and recognition of stereotypes for children of this age (McKown & Weinstein, 2003), such that exposure to stereotypes may make it difficult for young children to adjust to different perspectives.

Gendered Behaviors

Halpern and Perry-Jenkins (2016) examined how parents' gendered behavior and ideologies impact gender role attitudes of their children. Halpern and Perry-Jenkins defined gendered behavior as the degree to which parents' behavior adheres to stereotypical behaviors. The researchers defined gendered ideologies as values and attitudes about biological sex and gender expression. Couples expecting their first child were recruited for this study, with a total of 109 cohabiting, dual-career couples. Data was collected five times during the child's first year of life, and also when the child entered first grade. Retention rates were high, with 79% of participants agreeing to complete the 6-year follow up interview. Throughout the study, parents completed questionnaires related to gender roles, division of household labor, work outside of the home, and gender typicality of careers. Upon entering first grade, child participants completed the *Sex Roles Learning Inventory* (Edelbrock & Sugawara, 1978) which assessed gender-role attitudes.

Halpern and Perry-Jenkins (2016) reported girls whose mothers engaged in more household tasks and childcare had more knowledge and awareness of gender stereotypes about women, compared to girls whose mothers spent less time in household management and childcare tasks. This finding directly contrasted for boys, who displayed less knowledge of masculine stereotypes when mothers engaged in traditional behaviors. These results suggest modeling may be a critical factor in the development of gender role ideals.

Bridging the connection between developmental theory (see Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Brown & Bigler, 2005; Endendijk et al., 2018; McHale et al., 2003) and research on ways in which children internalize parental behaviors (Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016), Blakemore and Hill (2008) developed a scale to measure how parents perceive their children's gendered

behavior. Participants included 507 men and women enrolled in an introductory psychology course; 78% of participants did not have children and hence were asked to imagine their reaction to different gendered behaviors in their theoretical children. Participants answered survey questions regarding their attitudes toward different gendered behaviors in preschool and elementary aged children. In a series of experiments, the original 84 questions were pared down to 28 items that differentiated between boys and girls, and were then validated with different participant groups.

Upon validation of their created scale, Blakemore and Hill (2008) identified five categories of gendered behavior: 1) Toys and Activities Stereotyped for Girls; 2) Toys and Activities Stereotyped for Boys; 3) Helping at Home; 4) Education for Marriage and Family; and 5) Disapproval of Other-Gender Characteristics. These categories provide support to the differential socialization of and expectations for boys and girls (McHale et al., 2003; van der Pol et al., 2013) and children's early understanding of gendered behavior (Brown & Bigler, 2005; Endendijk et al., 2018; Groeneveld et al., 2021). In addition, these categories provide insight into the domains in which parents may communicate gender microaggressions to their children in covert and overt ways. Consistent with other studies (e.g., Broussard & Warner, 2019; Endendijk et al., 2013; Gartner & Sterzing, 2018), Blakemore and Hill reported disapproval of gender nonconformity was positively correlated with traditional parental beliefs, whereas parents who self-identified as feminist were more likely to endorse items related to both boys and girls helping in the home.

Rittenour et al. (2014) also explored the role of feminist identity in the transmission of gender role ideals. In their study, mothers completed surveys related to the centrality of

mothering, feminism, and generativity to their own identities, as well as their reactions to their daughters' gendered behavior while growing up (e.g., playing with stereotypical male or female toys, helping around the house).

Rittenour et al. (2014) found that generativity was supported as a stronger factor than feminist identity in an egalitarian gender socialization of the daughters in the study. Specifically, mothers identified with higher levels of generativity encouraged daughters to engage with both male and female stereotypes, while also encouraging daughters to help around the house. Although these findings provide insight into mothers and daughters communications about gender, Rittenour et al. noted limitations to this study, including the reflective nature of questions, such that mothers were asked to recall early experiences with their now adult daughters. In addition, mothers were recruited through their daughters, who were enrolled in college or active in specific online communities that may have introduced bias into the sample.

While some studies (Endendijk et al., 2013; Groenveld et al., 2021; Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016; Rittenour et al., 2014; van der Pol et al., 2015) focused on the early development of gender roles and ideals in childhood, others have focused on different points of development. The next section will focus on the communication and understanding of gendered messages during adolescence, as well as other factors that influence gender development at this stage.

Adolescence

During adolescence, children continue to be subjected to messages about gender and gender microaggressions that shape their understanding of gender roles and ideals (e.g., Feigt et al., 2022; Gartner & Sterzing, 2018; Hitlin, 2006; Marks et al., 2009; Montanes et al., 2012; Sanchez Guerrero & Schroeber, 2020). While these ideals continue to be formed during the

critical period of adolescence, the implications for future roles and behaviors in intimate relationships can be far-reaching.

Marks et al. (2009) examined patterns of gender role attitudes for two-parent, two-adolescent households. During individual interviews, parents completed the *Attitudes Towards Women Scale*, and were asked questions about time spent on traditionally feminine household tasks, time spent with children, and conflict in the home. Adolescent participants were asked to discuss gender role attitudes, attitudes toward women, and conflict with their siblings.

Marks et al. (2009) identified three gender patterns within these participating families: 1) congruent egalitarianism of parents and children, 2) congruent traditional attitudes of parents and children, and 3) divergent beliefs in which parents were more traditional and children were more egalitarian. These patterns were correlated to the family's socioeconomic status (SES) and amount of time parents spent in gendered tasks. Families with more traditional attitudes had lower reported SES than egalitarian families. Interestingly, parents and children who both held egalitarian beliefs or traditional beliefs did not have less conflict with one another when compared to families in which parents held traditional beliefs and children held egalitarian beliefs. However, with Marks et al.'s cross-sectional study, conclusions cannot be drawn about how these dynamics may evolve over time.

Hitlin (2006) explored how SES and socialization during adolescence interact to influence career aspirations. A total of 314 adolescents completed surveys to assess values and family support. Hitlin found that career aspirations were related to gender and the socioeconomic environment in which adolescents were socialized, which supports Marks et al.'s (2009) findings regarding the impact of SES on gendered behaviors within families. The father's career variables

(e.g., wages, job prestige) as predictors of children's career aspirations were particularly strong for male children (Hitlin, 2006).

It should be noted that Hiltin's (2006) sample consisted of predominantly White individuals and had nearly twice as many female as male participants. There was also a low response rate and participants were not randomly selected. Despite these limitations, Hitlin's reported correlation between fathers and their male children with regard to gender socialization complements other studies that highlight the important role of mothers in gender socialization for daughters (Carlson & Knoester, 2011; Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016; Rittenour et al., 2014; van der Pol et al., 2015). Based on these findings, children may better identify with the parent of the same sex, thus perpetuating a same-sex parent's ideals more than a different-sex parent's ideals.

Sanchez Guerrero and Schroeber (2020) extended previous findings related to the importance of parents in transmitting gender role ideology to include adolescents and their parents in different countries. Specifically, Sanchez Guerrero and Schroeber surveyed a sample of 1,636 immigrant adolescents (defined as first or second generation) and their parents and 4,281 native adolescent/parent dyads, located in Sweden, Germany, Netherlands, and England. The survey assessed who should perform gendered tasks in the home. Both parents and adolescents answered these questions. In addition, adolescent surveys were compared to better understand how peer gender role ideology may play a role in shaping ideas about gender.

Sanchez Guerrero and Schroeber (2020) found that native parents and adolescents generally displayed more egalitarian values compared to immigrant parents and adolescents in all countries included in the study. Consistent with previous findings (Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016; Hitlin, 2006; Rittenour et al, 2014), parents were found to have a statistically significant

impact on adolescents' gender role ideologies, regardless of immigration status (Sanchez Guerrero & Schroeber, 2020). Overall, the authors found that parents and peers influence the development of gender ideologies, regardless of immigration status or country of origin.

Notable limitations of this study included that parent respondents may have offered more egalitarian beliefs to present as more socially desirable (Sanchez Guerrero & Schroeber, 2020). Similar to many studies discussed in this chapter, data was only collected from mothers and not fathers, limiting our understanding of how gender role ideology may be communicated in different family structures and by fathers specifically.

How mothers communicate gender ideals to their daughters also has received research attention. As discussed in previous sections, behaviors that idealize or reward girls and women who behave in ways aligned with traditional gender roles are characteristics of benevolent sexism (Montanes et al., 2012; Swim et al., 1995; Swim et al., 2001). Montanes et al. (2012) explored how mothers communicate benevolent sexism to their daughters and how participating mothers' beliefs impacted their daughters' academic goals and performance.

Montanes et al.'s (2012) study included 164 pairs of mothers and adolescent daughters residing in Spain from various nationalities (e.g., Spaniard, British, Bolivian, Morrocan, Uruguayan) and socioeconomic environments (e.g., job status, level of education). All participants completed surveys regarding daily experiences of benevolent and hostile sexism, and participating daughters also completed surveys related to future academic and family goals. One notable finding was that internalized benevolent sexism reported by mothers was negatively correlated with their level of education. Montanes et al. also reported a positive correlation between mother's communication of benevolent sexism and their daughters' internalized

benevolent sexism, as well as a negative correlation between daughters' internalized benevolent sexism and future academic goals. These findings point to the influence of the mothers' education level and beliefs onto their daughters' beliefs and goals related to academics, career, and family formation. Thus, covert messages that girls receive from their family about women's roles and academic expectations, possibly in the form of gender microaggressions, can manifest in their internalized and practiced gender inequality in adulthood.

Feigt et al. (2022) further explored how mothers conveyed messages about gender to their daughters. In addition, Feigt et al. examined the connection between gender microaggressions in the home and mental health outcomes. A sample of 102 mother-daughter pairs completed the *Gender Microaggressions Scale*, *Ambivalent Sexism Inventory*, as well as assessments of anxiety and depression. Adolescent daughters were between the ages of 14 and 18, while mothers were between the ages of 34 and 68 years old. Similar to critiques of previous studies, Feigt et al. utilized a predominantly White sample.

Feigt et al. (2022) noted a significant positive correlation between mother's and daughter's experiences of microaggressions over the previous month, as well as levels of depression and anxiety. In addition, increased experience of gender microaggressions was indicative of increased symptoms of depression and anxiety. Thus, Feigt et al. provided additional evidence for the convergence of mother's and daughter's experiences not only with gender microaggressions, but also related to mental health outcomes.

Gartner and Sterzing (2018) also explored the impact of communication about gender and microaggressions experienced by LGBT teens aged 14-19, within their family of origin. Two forms of microaggressions were measured via survey: interpersonal (e.g., being called

derogatory names) and environmental (e.g., overhearing derogatory comments not directed at the individual. Participants also answered survey questions related to family dynamics and LGBT status.

Gartner and Sterzing (2018) found that participants who did not conform to gendered expectations were more likely to face microaggressions at home and in the community. Families with higher levels of religiosity also displayed greater microaggressions toward gender nonconforming youth. Although directed to LGBT youth, these findings may also reflect the experience of cisgender girls who do not conform to gender role expectations. These girls may also be at increased risk of experienced microaggressions within their family of origin (Endendijk et al., 2018; Leaper & Brown, 2008; Rittenour et al., 2014).

Microaggressions that cisgender girls experience within their family of origin may also be reflective of gender policing, a concept involving acts that reinforce traditional gender expectations or stereotypes (Derthick, 2015; Gartner & Sterzing, 2018). Questioning a woman's femininity that is not in alignment with stereotypical images of women is one example of gender policing (Derthick, 2015) that can contribute to a woman's future understanding about and enactment of gender. Gender policing can occur in the family of origin overtly (e.g., violence) or covertly (e.g., encouraging gender typical dress or interests; Gartner & Sterzing, 2018) and occurs throughout the lifespan. Gender microaggressions, in the form of gender policing, may be a contributing factor to gender ideology development into adulthood.

Adulthood

Researchers have explored how messages about gender and microaggressions experienced in the family of origin can impact gender role ideals and values into adulthood,

specifically focusing on cisgender, heterosexual parents. While this limited focus provides some insight into the impact of family origin on adult children, these findings also highlight a distinct limitation in the understanding of how messages about gender can be conveyed to adult children in different family structures.

Using surveys, Carlson and Knoester (2011) examined the impact of family structure (e.g., single parent, stepparent, two biological parents) on the transmission of gender ideology, which includes values, ideals, and identity. The researchers also measured the quality of the parent-child relationship using three survey questions to assess affection, admiration, and involvement. Participants included parents and their children aged 18-23.

Mothers' gender ideology was found to be a significant positive predictor of their adult children's gender ideology, regardless of family structure (Carlson & Knoester, 2011). This finding supports other studies that highlighted the primary role of mothers in gender socialization (Carlson & Knoester, 2011; Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016; Montanes et al., 2012; Rittenour et al., 2014; van der Pol et al., 2015) and extends the mothers' influence into adulthood. Children were also more likely to adopt a different-sex parent's values if the relationship quality between children and their same-sex parent was low (Carlson & Knoester, 2011).

Cichy et al. (2007) examined gender attitude differences between African American (AA) and European American (EA) adult children between the ages of 22 and 49 and their parents in the US. Each offspring-mother-father triad completed surveys regarding attitudes about child-rearing and marital roles. The authors found that mothers and fathers held congruent beliefs about marital roles (i.e., different roles of husbands and wives in the home), but mothers tended to have more egalitarian beliefs about child-rearing roles compared to fathers, regardless of race.

However, there were differences between AA and EA families as Cichy et al. found fathers' gender attitudes to be more predictive of AA children's gender attitudes, when compared to mothers of AA children. For EA children, mothers' gender attitudes were found to be more predictive of children's gender attitudes. This finding regarding this heightened role of fathers for AA children contradicts other studies that reported the mother as the primary transmitter of gender ideology (Carlson & Knoester, 2011; Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016; Montanes et al., 2012; Rittenour et al., 2014). Potential explanations for the differences in findings related to transmission of gender ideology may be related to the age of children at the time of the aforementioned studies, race or ethnicity of children and families, relationship quality between parents and children, and aspects of gender ideology assessed (Carlson & Knoester, 2011; Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016; Montanes et al., 2012; Rittenour et al., 2014).

Overall, research findings support the notion that gender constellation in the home of origin impacts the development of gender roles and ideals (Endendijk et al., 2013; Marks et al., 2003; McHale et al., 2003). While studies also indicated that mothers play significant roles in gender socialization for children (Carlson & Knoester, 2011; Endendijk et al., 2013; Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016; Montanes et al., 2012; Rittenour et al., 2014), there is at least one study that reported fathers as the primary transmitter of gender ideology for AA children (Cichy et al., 2007). In addition, communication about gender occurs in myriad ways within the family of origin (Endendijk et al., 2013; Groeneveld et al., 2021; Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016; Rittenour et al., 2014; van der Pol et al., 2013), including explicit communication about gender ideology, as well as covert communication through microaggressions and gender policing. Parents' expectations of their children can influence later gendered behavior, the development of gender

ideals, and future expectations throughout the lifespan (e.g., Endendijk et al., 2013; Marks et al., 2003; Montanes et al., 2012; van der Pol et al., 2013). As the understanding of gender socialization within the family of origin grows, we can begin to more closely explore how communications about gender in the family of origin can also extend to expectations for intimate adult relationships.

Impact of Family of Origin on Intimate Adult Relationships

Just as the family of origin can shape gender ideology, gender attitudes, and gender role expectations, the family of origin also can impact future intimate adult relationships. For the purpose of this proposed study, intimate adult relationships are defined as cohabiting romantic or intimate relationships that have lasted for at least one year, in which both parties are 18 years of age or older. Experiences within the family of origin, particularly with gender microaggressions, can highlight ways in which women and men may internalize messages about gender role expectations differently when engaging in intimate adult relationships (Feldman et al, 1998). Several researchers have reported the importance of experiences within the family of origin in shaping adult behaviors and expectations (e.g., Conger et al., 2011; Fulcher et al., 2015; Ruitenberg & de Beer, 2014; Sells & Ganong, 2017; Starrels & Holm, 2000), including marriage and parenthood, relationship roles, and relationship satisfaction. Again, gaps exist in applying these findings to diverse populations due to limited representation of diverse voices and experiences.

Expectations for Marriage and Parenthood

Previous researchers have studied the impact of mothers on their children's development of gender attitudes and gender role expectations (Carlson & Knoester, 2011; Halpern & Perry-

Jenkins, 2016; Montanes et al., 2012; Rittenour et al., 2014). With an intentional focus on mothers, these researchers reported mothers to have an influential role in transmitting gender role ideology to their children. This finding does not imply the lack of importance of fathers, due to the scant research focusing on the role of fathers in the development of family formation plans and expectations. A limited number of studies (Cichy et al., 2007; Conger et al, 2001; de Vries et al., 2022; Fulcher et al., 2015; Groeneveld et al., 2021) have included both mothers and fathers as participants when exploring how modeling influences their children's gender role ideology; only Cichy et al. (2007) reported the primary influence of fathers on children's family formation plans and expectations for intimate adult relationships. Given the majority of researchers have prioritized mothers as the focus for gender role ideology, the next section will examine the role of mothers in shaping their children's plans for marriage and parenthood, followed by a review of the influence of both mothers and fathers on children's future expectations for marriage and family.

The Role of Mothers in Shaping Expectations for Marriage and Parenthood

The focus in research on mothers transmitting gender role ideologies to their children is likely due to the assumption that mothers stereotypically act as the primary caregiver in their family, thus having a greater influence on socializing their children. As such, several studies have focused on the role of mothers in transmitting gender role ideology to their children. However, an extensive literature review revealed only two studies that highlighted ways in which gender role ideology is passed from mothers to their children, with specific implications for intimate adult relationships (Cunningham, 2001; Starrels & Holm, 2000), underscoring the need for further research in this domain. These two studies have shown that while both sons and

daughters are influenced by their mothers' gender role ideals and marriage behaviors, daughters are more likely to align with their mothers' roles and ideology compared to their brothers (Starrels & Holm, 2000), with particular impacts when girls are young (Cunningham, 2001).

Starrels and Holm (2000) conducted a study to understand the role of mothers in the development of their adolescent children's family formation plans. Starrels and Holm defined the term family formation plans as future plans for marriage and parenthood, including role expectations. Specifically, the adolescent participants were asked about their intentions to marry and have children of their own by the age of 24. Biological parents also were asked about their expectations for their adolescent children to be married and have children by the age of 24.

Starrels and Holm (2000) reported a statistically significant difference between sons' and daughters' own marriage plans, such that more daughters reported their expectations to be married by the age of 24 compared to sons. Both sons' and daughters' family formation plans were positively correlated with their mothers' family plans, with the relationship being stronger for daughters. Specifically, daughters' family formation plans were most similar to their mothers' marriage and parenthood roles. Starrels and Holm's results supported the work of Carlson and Knoester (2011), who reported children's tendency to adopt the beliefs of their same-sex parent.

Although Starrels and Holm (2000) focused on the impact of mothers on both sons and daughters, Cunningham (2001) focused on the role of mothers in their daughters' development of future gender role expectations and preferences. For Cunningham's study, mothers completed surveys in 1962 and 1977, while their 18 year old daughters completed the same survey in 1980.

Survey questions addressed gender role attitudes, division of household labor, parental employment and education, and enjoyment of household tasks (Cunningham, 2001).

Cunningham (2001) found that mothers' gender role attitudes impacted their daughters' gender role development in early childhood, providing additional support for research findings related to the convergence of mothers' and daughters' beliefs (Carlson & Knoester, 2011; Montanes et al, 2012; Starrels & Holm, 2000). According to Cunningham, daughters were especially impacted by their observations of parental divisions of household labor, even into adulthood. For example, mothers who were primarily responsible for childcare had daughters who expressed a preference to be the primary caregiver in their own family (Cunningham, 2001). Cunningham posited that children come to view tasks and roles as gendered based on observations within the home, which supports Starrels and Holms (2000) assertion that children's family formation plans align with their mother's roles in the home.

The Combined Role of Parents in Shaping Expectations for Marriage and Parenthood

Minimal research has explicitly investigated the role of fathers in transmitting gender role ideology related to their children's future intimate relationships. Upon completing an extensive review of the literature, four studies were identified that explored the role of both mothers and fathers in transmitting gender role ideology to their children, with implications for intimate adult relationships (Cichy et al., 2007; Conger et al, 2001; Fulcher et al., 2015; Midgette & D'Andrea, 2021). One such study was the work of Cichy et al. (2007), who found that African American children were more likely to align with the gender role beliefs of their fathers, compared to European American children. Although Cichy et al.'s study was described in the previous section on gendered messages in the family, their work is also relevant to the fathers' role in shaping

children's expectations for marriage and parenthood. Three additional studies provide evidence that mothers and fathers impact the gender role ideology of their children through modeling (Conger et al., 2001; Fulcher et al., 2015; Midgette & D'Andrea, 2021). Children can come to understand gender and formulate ideas about future intimate adult relationships through direct observations of their mother's and father's individual gendered behaviors, as well as how their parents relate to each other.

Fulcher et al. (2015) explored the role of both mothers and fathers in the development of future family preferences. College student participants were asked about the division of caregiving and labor observed between their biological parents, as well as their own future family plans for the aforementioned tasks. Overall, Fulcher et al. found that men were more likely than women to express plans to work when their children are young. Male participants also reported a significantly higher subscription to traditional divisions of paid and unpaid labor, but also expected to be involved in childcare responsibilities. Conversely, female participants expected to be more involved in childcare compared to their male partners. Fulcher et al. also found that women who had observed a traditional division of labor in their family of origin also reported plans to work less outside of the home. This finding was not statistically significant for men. One interpretation of these findings relates to how women may view motherhood and career as conflicting roles, whereas men may not have the same perception for themselves as fathers. Other researchers have suggested differences between men and women regarding career and family roles due to disparities in gender role socialization, with men identifying work outside of the home as a primary role and women undertaking the bulk of household responsibilities (Blakemore & Hill, 2008; Cichy et al., 2007; Gartner & Sterzing, 2018; Halpern

& Perry-Jenkins, 2016; Hitlin, 2006). Hence, gender role socialization may explain the more impactful experiences in the family of origin on future plans for girls when compared to boys (Feldman et al., 1998; Nomaguchi et al., 2011), particularly regarding stereotypical divisions of labor and child care (Fulcher et al., 2015).

Midgette and D'Andrea (2021) conducted a study to further understand expectations for future intimate relationships through exploration of heterosexual emerging adults' evaluations of fairness in divisions of household labor in their parents' relationship, their own future expectations, and in a vignette. Midgette and D'Andrea included 161 unmarried, heterosexual, childless, emerging adult (18-23 years old) participants. In addition, participants lived with two different-sex parents during most of their childhood and adolescence. About half of participants identified as cisgender women, and half of participants identified as cisgender men; the majority of participants identified as European American. Participants completed surveys to assess gender role ideology; ambivalent sexist attitudes; observed parents' division of household labor; expected future labor division; and fairness evaluation, including participant justification of a hypothetical division of labor.

Midgette and D'Andrea (2021) noted that the majority of participants grew up observing a traditional division of labor between their parents; however, fewer than half of participants reported observing a traditional division of childcare responsibilities. The majority of participants classified traditional labor divisions as fair in their family of origin, but classified traditional divisions of childcare as unfair; however, participants indicated an expectation for egalitarian divisions in their future relationships, which they identified as fair. Interestingly, some participants identified observed divisions of labor as neither fair or unfair, supporting

previous research pointing to the way individuals use circumstances (e.g., time engaged in paid work; flexibility of labor outside of the home) to justify different divisions of labor (Daminger, 2020; Dernberger & Pepin, 2020). Finally, women were more likely than men to identify observed labor divisions as unfair, as well as to expect an unfair division of labor in their own future relationship (Midgette & D'Andrea, 2021). These findings support the notion that fairness evaluations for division of household labor can have possible implications for marital satisfaction, marital commitment, and psychological distress.

While Fulcher et al. (2015) and Midgette and D'Andrea (2021) explored family influence on divisions of labor and child-rearing responsibilities, Conger et al. (2001) provided a broader view by examining the influence of family of origin relationships and dynamics on perceived quality of and competence in adult relationships. Participants included 193 European American young adults (85 men and 108 women) with a mean age of 20 at the conclusion of the study. Participants' families resided in a rural Midwest area of the U.S. with reported experiences of economic stress (Conger et al., 2001). Participant criteria for the start of the study included: current enrollment as a 7th grade student; having a sibling within four years of age; and residing with married biological parents. Participants and their families met with an interviewer annually over four years to complete several tasks of conflict resolution and emotional expression with the entire family, between parents, and between siblings. Parenting behaviors towards the participant, marital interactions between their parents, and interactions between the participant and their sibling were assessed based on the aforementioned tasks.

Similar to Feldman et al.'s (1998) and Fulcher et al.'s (2015) assertions that socialization, modeling, and messages received within the family origin impact future intimate

adult relationships, Conger et al. (2001) reported that adolescents recapitulated their interactions within their family of origin in their intimate adult relationships. For example, Conger et al. found that having more nurturing parents corresponded with choosing a partner who was perceived to be more warm and supportive, for both male and female participants, while volatile experiences within the family of origin may account for more dysfunctional dynamics in intimate adult relationships. Behaviors and dynamics which occurred within the family of origin were often present in future intimate adult relationships (Conger et al., 2001).

Relationship Role Expectations

Research has highlighted the impact of the family of origin on the development of gender roles and ideals starting from childhood into adulthood (Blakemore & Hill, 2008; Carlson & Knoester, 2011; Endendijk et al., 2013; Halpern & Perry Jenkins, 2016; Hitlin, 2006; Montanes et al., 2012; Rittenour et al., 2014). These studies can be extrapolated to draw conclusions about future relationships, including expectations of relationship roles in intimate adult relationships. For example, Ruitenberg and de Beer (2014) examined the formation of gender roles and egalitarian ideals related to paid labor and caregiving in a sample of 935 Dutch women with at least one child under the age of 12.

Ruitenberg and de Beer (2014) found that family interactions and dynamics impacted future relationship preferences. Specifically, women who perceived their mothers as oriented to more traditional gender roles were likely to idealize traditional gender roles in their intimate relationships, while women who reported receiving messages about independence and self-sufficiency within their family of origin identified a preference for egalitarian family ideals in adulthood. The women participants manifested relationship ideals through the combined result of

modeling and messages about gender roles in their family of origin, as well as their adult intimate partner's preference for egalitarian or traditional gender roles. Overall, Ruitenberg and de Beer's findings support Conger et al.'s (2001) conclusion that family of origin dynamics impact functioning in intimate adult relationships. Further, Ruitenberg and de Beer's findings revealed information about the impact of intimate partner relationship ideals on gender role expectations later in life, providing further evidence for the way ideals shaped in the family of origin (Blakemore & Hill, 2008; Carlson & Knoester, 2011; Endendijk et al., 2013; Halpern & Perry Jenkins, 2016; Hitlin, 2006; Montanes et al., 2012; Rittenour et al., 2014) can continue to evolve.

Unlike the aforementioned studies (e.g., Conger et al., 2011; Fulcher et al., 2015; Ruitenberg & de Beer, 2014; Starrels & Holm, 2000), Sells and Ganong (2017) did not observe dynamics in the participants' family of origin. Rather, these researchers explored young adults' expectations and preferences for gender roles in intimate adult relationships. The 451 participants responded to vignettes portraying different relationship dynamic categorizations and structures, including cohabitation or being married with or without children. Participants also discussed relationship satisfaction in the context of the vignettes and completed a survey related to their own anticipated satisfaction in different relationship types.

Sells and Ganong (2017) found that young adults had a significant preference for egalitarian relationships. In addition, Sells and Ganong found that participants perceived cohabiting, dual-earner relationships as more satisfying than married, traditional male earner relationships. Interestingly, participants did not display significant differences in perceived satisfaction in relationships where children were present, as compared to couples who did not

have children. Despite the omission of investigating the family of origin, these findings still suggest the impact of experiences within participants' own family of origin as they are reflective of participants' own desires and perceived socialization.

McConnon et al. (2022) also explored heterosexual college students' perceptions of anticipated work-life balance for men and women. This study included 176 participants between 18 and 23 years old, about half of whom identified as heterosexual cisgender women while the other half identified as heterosexual cisgender men. As with other studies discussed, the majority of participants identified as European American (88%). Participants completed surveys related to gender roles and division of responsibilities within their future families, using both a Likert scale and justification for their response.

Results indicated that most participants (73%) felt that women can work outside of the home when they have preschool aged children; 52% of those respondents were women, emphasizing that many women do not believe they are able to work outside of the home when they have young children (McConnon et al., 2022). Thematic analysis revealed themes of: 1) work as a personal choice; 2) mothers should work as fathers do; 3) childcare is mother's responsibility; 4) mothers can't choose to stay home if financial need dictates dual-earners; and 5) mothers should stay home, reinforcing the prevailing ideal of both men and women that women should be able to have it all (wonder-woman). This concept can be damaging because of the high expectations it sets for women to manage all aspects of work and home life, while not placing this same expectation on male partners. All participants, whether they agreed or did not agree with traditional gender roles, identified mothers as the primary caregiver of young children. These findings serve to highlight the problematic language around division of labor and

gender role expectations, such that men and husbands "help" rather than engage in active partnership. These findings also highlighted class and race differences regarding choice to work compared to necessity to earn income. Again, divisions of labor that are unbalanced and place the burden of invisible labor on female partners can have implications for relationship satisfaction.

Finally, Thoman and Zelin (2020) explored relationship satisfaction through the lens of work satisfaction in a study that explored if women enact different gender roles at work and at home, and if these behaviors have implications for psychological functioning. Participants included 182 cisgender women between 21-30, who identified as heterosexual and were currently in a monogamous relationship. Participants completed a survey that addressed work experiences, perception of self at work and at home, as well as work and relationship satisfaction. A notable limitation was that ethnicity data was not collected for participants.

Participants were classified into three clusters: 1) low agentic (e.g., traditionally masculine) behaviors at work and at home; 2) moderate agentic and communal (e.g., traditionally feminine) behaviors at work and at home, and 3) high levels of communal and agentic behaviors at work and at home. Thoman and Zelin (2020) found that women in cluster one had significantly lower job and relationship satisfaction than women in either cluster two or three, but women in cluster two and three did not differ significantly in terms of relationship or job satisfaction. This finding speaks to the way in which socialized gender roles can become innate, but also provides evidence of flexibility across settings.

Results indicated that communal (i.e., more feminine roles) at work and at home were positively correlated with both job and relationship satisfaction, but there was no relationship

between agentic (i.e., more masculine roles) and satisfaction in either setting (Thoman & Zelin, 2020). Thoman and Zelin (2020) also noted a positive relationship between job and relationship satisfaction, supporting previous studies that highlighted the connection between life and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Sells & Ganong, 2017).

Research has collectively suggested the importance of family of origin in developing expectations for marriage and parenthood in intimate adult relationships (Conger et al., 2011; Fulcher et al., 2015; Ruitenberg & de Beer, 2014; Sells & Ganong, 2017; Starrels & Holm, 2000). In addition, gendered divisions of labor have implications for depression, marital conflict, and labor disparities between men and women (McConnon et al., 2022). These findings regarding expectations for marriage, parenthood, and division of labor may also impact future relationship satisfaction (Thoman & Zelin, 2020).

Chapter 2 Summary

I began this chapter with an examination of postmodern feminist theory, the theoretical framework for this proposed study. Postmodern feminist theory evolved from previous iterations of feminist theory due to criticisms that feminist theory did not include diverse voices (Black et al., 2019; Burkett & Brunnell, 2021; Tong, 2009). Postmodern feminist theory focuses beyond gender to explore how one individual can experience oppression at many levels (Porter, 2005; Tong, 2009). The concept of embodiment was also included to connect experiences with gender microaggressions to the physical experiences of cisgender women (Gergen, 2001; Piran, 2016). Despite many strengths, postmodern feminist theory has faced criticism for being inherently academic and convoluted in nature, due to the inclusion of many diverse voices and experiences (Frost & Elichaoff, 2014; Tong, 2009). The aforementioned issues can be minimized in this

proposed study through deliberate and purposeful attention to potential biases and research methods.

In this chapter I also provided an in-depth exploration of existing research related to the following areas: 1) sexism and gender microaggressions; 2) the impact of family on understanding gender; and 3) how messages communicated about gender in the family of origin can impact intimate adult relationships. Specifically, research has indicated that expressions of sexism have evolved over time, beginning as overt and transitioning to subtle (Swim & Cohen, 1997; Swim et al., 1995; Swim et al., 2001), then moving from subtle forms of sexism to more insidious gender microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2015; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2010; Sue et al., 2007). Sexism and gender microaggressions against women in daily life can adversely impact mental health, decision making, and functioning (e.g., Blithe & Elliott, 2020; Biggs et al., 2018; Borrell et al., 2011; Calogero & Jost, 2011; Gomez et al., 2011; Kaskan & Ho, 2016, Moradi & Funderburk, 2006; Moradi & Subich, 2002). Although beyond the scope of this literature review, it is important to note that researchers also have explored socialization differences between cis- and transgender women (Barron & Capous-Desyllas, 2017; Field & Mattson, 2016; Gagne & Tewksbury, 1999; Grossman et al., 2006). Taken in the context of studies focused on the development of cisgender women's gender role ideals, family formation plans, and intimate relationship satisfaction may be shaped, particularly in the family of origin (e.g., Allen & Webster, 2001; Bareket et al., 2018; Brown, 2003; Brown, 2013; Conger et al., 2001; Cunningham, 2001; Deummler & Kobak, 2001; Eryilmaz & Atak, 2011; Feldman et al., 1998; Fulcher et al., 2015; Kalmijn, 2005; McConnon et al., 2022; Nomaguchi et al., 2011; Perrin et al., 2011; Ruitenberg & de Beer, 2014; Starrels & Holm, 2000) and postmodern

feminist theory, there is support for intentionally exploring the experiences of cisgender women in this proposed study. As discussed throughout this chapter, there is limited research that focuses on cisgender women with diverse backgrounds, leaving many questions about how women, particularly women who identify with multiple marginalized identities, experience gender microaggressions within their family of origin and how they make meaning of these experiences in their intimate adult relationships.

Chapter 3

Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women.

-Maya Angelou

Introduction

In order to explore and better understand cisgender women and their lived experiences related to gender microaggressions in their family of origin and intimate adult relationships, I conducted an interpretive phenomenological qualitative study. In this chapter, I will provide an overview of interpretive phenomenological analysis and how this particular methodology served to answer my research question. I also detail my own positionality regarding personal experiences with gender microaggressions, along with sharing my assumptions regarding this phenomenon. A discussion of my methodology will follow, including selection criteria for participation, data collection procedures, and data analysis. Finally, I discuss how I maintained rigor throughout the research process, including credibility and trustworthiness, as well as how ethical and methodological concerns were addressed.

Phenomenology

According to Heppner et al. (2016), phenomenology is rooted in discovering the experiences of participants through multiple methods, including interviews. Phenomenological research may also incorporate journals, drawings, observations, and other artifacts (Heppner et al., 2016). Creswell et al. (2007) further discussed the purpose of phenomenological research, particularly concerning the lived experiences of participants in relation to a specific phenomenon. Experiences that participants have in common and have faced in their daily lives

can be considered a phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007; Heppner et al., 2016). In the context of this study, gender microaggressions were the phenomenon of research focus. Creswell et al. also noted that a goal of phenomenological research is to not only gain individual perspectives on a given phenomenon, but to make connections between these different perspectives to identify themes and commonalities. Young (2017) supported this purpose, stating that the researcher should focus on the interaction between the participant and the world around them. Finlay (2012) further argued that phenomenological research is dynamic and includes "(a) embracing the phenomenological attitude, (b) entering the lifeworld (through descriptions of experiences), (c) dwelling with horizons of implicit meanings, (d) explicating the phenomenon holistically and dialectically, and (e) integrating frames of reference" (p.174). Interpretive phenomenological analysis, detailed in the following section, is rooted in phenomenology (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) and was utilized in this study.

Overview of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

According to Smith et al. (2009), interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a "qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences" (p. 1). The focus of IPA research is on the significance of particular experiences to the individual participant (Smith et al., 2009). Throughout the process of IPA, the researcher works to interpret and understand the way the participant has interpreted and understood her individual experience (Brocki & Wearden; 2006; Smith, 2004). IPA is informed by three core philosophical positions: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Alase, 2017; Oxley, 2016; Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009).

The first tenet of IPA, phenomenology, refers to understanding the lived experiences of participants (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). Through the use of phenomenology, the researcher aims to better understand the lived experiences of a specific group, related to a specific phenomenon (Oxley, 2016). In the context of this study, I sought to understand the lived experiences of cisgender women with regard to gender microaggressions. Specifically, I explored the way participants experience this phenomenon within their family of origin and intimate adult relationships.

The second tenet of IPA, hermeneutics, refers to the levels of interpretation in a study (i.e. the participants' interpretation of their experiences, the researcher's interpretation of what the participant shares; Alase, 2017). The concept of the hermeneutic circle involves two aspects: 1) how personal interpretations of experiences are impacted by participants, and 2) how personal interpretations of experiences further impact the context surrounding participants (Smith et al., 2009). The saliency of the hermeneutic circle for this study is clear due to my focus on the lived experiences of cisgender women; however, the experiences of these women have also been influenced by and have influenced the larger whole, including partners, the family unit, and society.

Sartre (1943) discussed the importance of our meaning making experiences in regards to what is present and what is absent from our perceptions and experiences. Hence, interpretation of both past (e.g., meaning making of gender microaggressions) and present (e.g., gender dynamics in intimate adult relationships) experiences are vital. Regarding IPA, Smith et al. (2009) posited "the aim should not be to relive the past but rather to learn anew from it, in the light of the present" (p. 27).

The last tenet of IPA, idiography, encompasses the way in which individual participants will have unique perspectives on and relationships to a phenomenon in question (Smith et al., 2009). Idiography refers to the detailed exploration and analysis of particular experiences (Smith et al., 2009). In my study, idiography provided a means to better understand and analyze the individual context of experiences related to gender microaggressions within the family of origin and in intimate adult relationships. This perspective was helpful in recognizing patterns of convergence and divergence among the stories shared by participants. Idiography helped to honor the individual contexts in which my participants have experienced gender microaggressions. Grounded within these three aforementioned core tenets, researchers engage in the following actions: 1) utilize IPA to explore the phenomenon in question from the perspective of the individual; 2) compare the way individuals make meaning of the phenomenon with other participants; and 3) interpret what they think the meaning making experiences of participants may indicate about the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009).

Another important consideration in IPA is the assumption that we are inextricably linked to our world, context, and societal expectations, also known as intersubjectivity (Smith et al., 2009). For this reason, IPA is an iterative process. During the interview process, the researcher speaks to participants to elicit rich and detailed information about their experiences (Matua & van der Wal, 2015; Smith et al., 2009). Through the use of IPA, the researcher targets the stories, thoughts, and feelings of each participant (Smith et al., 2009).

Smith et al. (2009) described the use of interpretive phenomenology in social science research, including in-depth discussions of theoretical foundations, data collection, and data analysis. This discussion included Merleau-Ponty's description of being a "body-in-the world"

(p. 19, as cited in Smith et al., 2009). According to Merleau-Ponty (1962) our physical being in the world shapes the way we know and understand our experiences. This understanding is not the same as the way other people make sense of their experiences and can never be fully shared with another person, as each person uniquely perceives and understands the world based on their own bodily experience. Hence, the body is intimately connected to experiences (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). For my study, cisgender women inhabit a particular and specific body, to which society has ascribed meaning. Hence, the *body* of cisgender women lends itself to the experience of certain microaggressions, but these experiences can vary based on other salient identities (i.e., race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation; Crenshaw, 1989).

My Positionality

As a qualitative researcher, articulating and examining my perspective is important (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By sharing my views, I can more accurately reflect on how my own assumptions can affect my data collection process and analysis. My interest in women's issues began at a young age. In high school, I remember being referred to as a "feminist" by peers, which was used as an insult. It was not until I became a mother that I started to understand how pervasive stereotypes about cisgender women permeate many aspects of my daily life. I began to rethink some of my own past experiences, which I will discuss further in this section, that served as the catalyst for this study.

I consider myself to be both an insider and an outsider to my anticipated participants. With regard to being a cisgender woman, I am an insider. However, being cisgender may be the end of my similarities with participants. I hold privilege in several areas, which my participants may or may not share. Although I am part of a marginalized group as a cisgender woman, I am

also a White, educated cisgender woman who has moved beyond my working class upbringing to reside within middle class status. I am a heterosexual woman, married to a cisgender, educated, middle class man. I have come to understand and make meaning of experiences with gender microaggressions in my own family of origin and within my current intimate relationship, but the way in which prospective participants have thought about their experiences may greatly diverge from my own.

Specifically, I was raised in a "traditional" Italian family, which included my mother and father, along with three younger brothers and one younger sister. My early experiences bolstered my identity as a strong woman, with my parents constantly reminding me that I could do anything, be anything, and achieve anything. My siblings, regardless of gender, were told the same. However, in hindsight, I began to notice subtle differences in rules and limitations. For example, my younger brothers were granted more freedom than me: having later curfews, getting permission to date, and being able to socialize more freely. Although I had demonstrated that I was responsible and intelligent, my brothers could do more.

The dynamics I witnessed within my parents' relationship were also a noteworthy aspect of my childhood, which later shaped my own interactions in my intimate relationships. Throughout my childhood and adolescence, I believed that my parents had the egalitarian relationship I wanted in my own future intimate relationships. Counter to mainstream cultural and media stereotypes regarding how a "man" and "father" should act, my father cooked, cleaned, and attended all extracurricular events for myself and my siblings. For my father, work was always a means to an end, rather than how he defined himself. While my mother stayed at

home and took on the majority of the home responsibilities during the day, she also worked in the evening. I saw my parents acting as equal partners in marriage and parenthood.

However, in my adult years, I have noticed ways in which my mother defers to my father as an authority figure. Although stereotypical gender dynamics did not obviously manifest in their relationship, I now see how these stereotypes were always present. As a result, my own egalitarian ideals have shifted since becoming a mother. Although household chores are often split, I notice that I manage the bulk of the emotional labor and child-rearing in my home.

I consider sexism and gender microaggressions to be pervasive in the daily lives of all cisgender women; however, I also acknowledge that all women may not react to or recognize these experiences in the same way. I believe that different identities influence the way in which cisgender women make meaning of gender microaggressions. I am also entering this study with the assumption that participants will be able to make connections between their family of origin experiences, gender dynamics, and gender microaggressions experienced in their intimate adult relationships. Finally, I am undertaking this study with the bias that cisgender women who have experienced gender microaggressions within their family of origin will likely consciously and unconsciously internalize these messages and engage in stereotypical gender dynamics in intimate adult relationships. I believe that these women will also be more susceptible to experiencing gender microaggressions within their intimate adult relationship. Due to my identified assumptions, I intend to listen carefully to the stories and experiences of the participants, noting both where our experiences are similar, but also where our meaning making experiences differ.

Research Question

Using interpretive phenomenology as a methodological base, I answered the following question: “How do gender microaggressions experienced in the family of origin shape cisgender women’s meaning making related to gender microaggressions within their intimate adult relationships?” I also answered the following sub-questions: a) “How do cisgender women experience gender microaggressions within their family of origin?” and b) “How do cisgender women experience gender microaggressions within their intimate adult relationships?”.

Research Methodology

In order to investigate my research question, I employed IPA. This approach provided a rich understanding of the stories and lived experiences of my participants, as well as the ability to connect the stories of both individual participants and participants as a group in a meaningful way (Smith, 2005; Smith et al., 2009).

Participants and Setting

All participants self-identified as cisgender women. I chose to focus on women in middle adulthood, born between 1965 and 1980, in order to avoid potential cohort effects (Keyes, Utz, Robinson, & Li, 2010). The Pew Research Center (2015) describes adults born between the years 1965 and 1980 as Generation X, a generation characterized by lower marriage rates than previous generations. Women in Generation X were also part of the first generation to have many dual income households, thereby having a first generation view of shifting gender roles (Bruns, 2010). Women between the ages of 42 and 57 have also witnessed several key historical events, including 9/11, and have lived in a time of increasing technology (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Previous studies that examined the impact of social factors (e.g. peer groups, media) on romantic relationships often focused on both male and female adolescents (Cavanaugh, 2007) and emerging adults (19-25 years old; i.e.; Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2001; Eryilmaz & Atak, 2011; Feldman, Gowen, & Fisher, 1998). Limiting this study to women in middle adulthood gives voice to an often unheard group of cisgender women. In addition, by including cisgender women who are in established and stable relationships, I was able to explore the patterns of their relationship, limiting the confounding variables of the honeymoon stage characteristic of early relationships (Bryant & Conger, 2014; Duemmler & Kobak, 2001; Garcia, 1998).

Participants were in a cohabiting relationship of at least one consecutive year at the time of the study. According to Garcia (1998), reported intimacy and commitment reach higher levels than romantic passion and erotic passion about one year into an intimate adult relationship. This information provided the rationale for including cisgender women who have been in cohabiting intimate adult relationships for at least one year, in that intimacy and commitment are more likely to be established. According to Duemmler and Kobak (2001), both commitment and attachment increase for both partners in intimate relationships, as a function of the length of the relationship.

In addition, this study only included cisgender women who do not reside with children. Kalmijn (2005) indicated that children can influence partner values, such that men may have less egalitarian values when children are in the home. Other research has indicated that egalitarian values can improve relationship satisfaction (Brown, 2013). Thus, including couples who do not have children in the home reduces variables which may impact intimate relationships. By

including cisgender women who are in established and stable relationships and do not have children in their home, the patterns of their relationships over time can be explored more effectively as the sample is more homogenous. Participants were recruited from personal Facebook page, as well as the Women Empowering Women Facebook group, using purposive sampling methods. Purposive sampling methods are in alignment with IPA conventions as participants will need to represent their experiences with gender microaggressions in specific contexts, rather than represent the entire population of cisgender women (Oxley, 2016; Smith et al., 2009).

Participants were engaged via recruitment posts on Facebook, leveraging contacts to identify appropriate participants. Participants were also recruited from Women Empowering Women Facebook group, which includes about 3,400 women. According to their mission, Women Empowering Women Facebook group provides a safe space for women to support, empower, and uplift one another. Participants will not be excluded based on race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Permission for recruitment was obtained from group administrators. Participants responded directly to me, via email, in order to express their interest in the study. A brief telephone screening was arranged with each potential participant in order to explain the nature of the study, verbally review informed consent, answer questions, and ensure that the potential participants meet criteria. I compiled a list of potential participants who met the criteria set and were interested in participating in the study. I maintained transparency with participants regarding the small-scale nature of this study (e.g., only 5-8 participants), along with the intention of balancing diverse voices with the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this study. Balancing diverse voices is also consistent with IPA in that purposive sampling is

preferred in IPA studies (Alase, 2017; Cresswell, 2013; Smith et al. 2009). I contacted selected participants by a predetermined date and the initial interview was arranged via Webex.

In order to minimize potential re-traumatization for cisgender women who may have various experiences with rejection or discrimination, I engaged in transparency throughout the selection process, openly answering participant questions about myself and my own experiences with intersectionality, being clear about the time and participant limitations for this study, and informing all participants of their selection status by a predetermined date. In addition, I gave potential participants who were not selected for this study the option to be contacted for future research studies.

Following IPA protocol, each participant was analyzed individually prior to collective analysis (Smith et al., 2009). Through the iterative nature of analysis, saturation was determined when similarities in patterns of experiences discussed by participants were identified and when new themes no longer emerged during the analytic process. Based on selection criteria and interest in continued participation, Table 1, below, details the demographic information for participants who were included in final analysis for this study:

Table 1: Participant Demographics (*n*=6)

Pseudonym	**Year Born**	**Race/Ethnicity**	**Highest Level of Education**	**Years Residing with Current Partner**	**Family of Origin Structure (Caregivers)**	**Family of Origin Structure (Siblings)**
Ann Johnson	1965	White/European American	PhD	18	Mother and father divorced	Three older stepsisters, two older stepbrothers, two older biological brothers

Gabbi	1970	White	Phd	15	Mother and father married	Two older brothers and one younger sister
Liz	1978	White/French Canadian	EdD	20	Mother and father married	Two older brothers
MLM	1971	White/European American	ABD, two Masters degrees	19	Mother and father married	Three younger brothers
P03	1974	White	MFA	19	Mother and father divorced	One older sister
Sky	1976	White	Masters	18	Mother and father married	One younger brother

Refer to Appendix E for additional information related to participant demographics and privilege.

Data Collection

Smith et al. (2009) supported the use of small sample sizes for IPA and asserted that a maximum of 10 participants should be utilized in order to best understand both the "particular" (p. 29) detailed experiences and the phenomenon in question. Tang (2017) also supported a homogeneous sample of fewer than 10 participants. While Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) encouraged flexibility regarding the number of participants, family and educational researchers often utilize 5 to 10 participants. Some examples include five participants to understand barriers to using humor in childhood education (Noon, 2018), six participants to explore family secrets (Oliver, 2015) and 10 participants to examine family interventions for psychosis (Rapsey, Burbach, & Reibstein, 2015). For this interpretive phenomenological study, I recruited six

participants in order to explore, with depth, the experiences of gender microaggressions, with an intentional focus on intersectionality.

Following the initial telephone screening call, I utilized two individual semi-structured interviews per participant, in order to understand family and intimate relationship experiences. In-depth interviews can be a helpful way to facilitate a meaningful conversation about the participants' experiences and include open ended questions (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Smith et al., 2009). In addition, an interview schedule was used as this method is ideal for facilitating a conversation about gender microaggressions and gaining a deep understanding of the participants' individual stories (Smith et al., 2009), particularly related to potentially sensitive discussions about family, gender microaggressions, and intimate adult relationships. Noon (2018) encourages funneling when constructing a semi-structured interview, moving from broad to specific questions, in order to increase recall related to specific events.

Participants were invited to discuss their understanding of being a woman and the emergence of this understanding. For example, in asking participants how they came to understand their role as women, who communicated these messages to them, and how these messages were communicated, I was able to directly highlight relationships between family members. In addition, questions about the dynamics between participants and their partner also revealed patterns of interaction.

The semi-structured interview included questions such as "Please tell me what being a woman means to you," "When did you first understand what it means to be a 'girl' or 'woman'?," and "Please tell me about a typical day for you and your partner." In addition, probe questions included how participants felt and reacted to such experiences. A full protocol can be

found in the appendix. These questions were designed to assist participants in discussing their experience with gender microaggressions in their family of origin and intimate adult relationships, as well as to articulate the way they have made meaning of these experiences. Initial individual interviews ranged from approximately 60 to 90 minutes and were conducted online, via Webex.

A second interview was conducted in order to debrief participants and allow me to gain further insight from the participants regarding their perspectives on the research experience, including experiences they may not have thought of during the initial interview. Finally, the use of a second interview allowed for member checking. Second interviews lasted about 30 minutes and occurred online, via Webex, in order to accommodate each participant. Although there was not an individual incentive for participation in this study, participants were able to share experiences and insights to contribute to societal change.

All sessions were recorded and stored in compliance with HIPAA and IRB regulations. All research data was stored on a password protected computer and as documents in a shared password protected Dropbox folder, to which only the dissertation team have access. Consent forms are filed in a locked cabinet in my home office. Any handwritten notes taken during the interviews include only participants' pseudonym and are stored in a locked cabinet in my home office. Materials will be kept for three years after study completion, and then may be destroyed.

Data Analysis

The focus of analysis in IPA is how participants make sense of their experiences (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011; Smith et al., 2009): how individual participants describe their experience, what parts of the experience are most salient to them, and how they make meaning of

the experience. IPA is a user-friendly methodology for beginning researchers in that there are suggested steps to follow throughout the research process, including data analysis (Smith et al., 2009). However, these suggestions should not be considered exhaustive or prescriptive, but rather as a base of ideas for looking at data deeply and critically. Overall, analysis moves from description to interpretation (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). IPA includes the following steps: 1) an initial analysis phase, 2) exploratory notation, 3) identification of emergent themes, 4) determination of connections between emergent themes, and 5) looking for patterns across all cases (Smith, 2005; Smith et al., 2009).

Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) provide insight into the practical use of the aforementioned steps, including multiple readings and taking notes on transcripts to identify insights into the lived experience of the participant and any reflections on the researcher's own process in relation to the data. Next, researchers can utilize their notes to identify emergent themes, with particular focus on the participant's perspective (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Finally, researchers are tasked with creating relationships between emergent themes and clustering to create a list of themes and subthemes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). According to Pietkiewicz and Smith, IPA utilizes both description and interpretation, which is reflected in the general steps proposed by Smith (2005) and Smith et al. (2009). Further, researchers employing IPA shift between the etic and emic perspectives when analyzing data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Data obtained in individual interviews was transcribed verbatim from audio recordings. During the initial analysis phase, I listened to each recording while reading through the transcript, in order to maintain focus on the participants' stories and experiences. At this stage,

in-depth reading and re-reading of the transcripts enables the researcher to enter the world of the participant (Smith et al., 2009).

The purpose of the second stage, exploratory notation, is to deeply engage with the data, rather than remaining at a superficial level when reading transcripts (Smith et al., 2009). By continually examining my own biases and recording my own thoughts throughout the interview process, I was better able to recognize how my own perspective is shaping the way I was interpreting data. Some modes of commenting which may be of focus at this exploratory notation stage are descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual (Smith et al., 2009).

During the third step of analysis, emergent themes are identified, particularly through the use of the exploratory comments (Smith et al., 2009). Noon (2018) also described drawing emergent themes from the detailed notes from the deep reading and re-reading of the transcript, rather than directly from the transcript. During this step, comments focused on the content of the interview, the participants' language use, and the concepts discussed in the interview; however, this list is not exhaustive as exploratory comments may take other forms (Smith et al., 2009).

The fourth step of analysis is to determine connections between and across emergent themes, focusing on the way themes converge and diverge (Smith et al., 2009). This step involved my own interpretations of the way emergent themes come together, in conjunction with my understanding of the way in which participants have made meaning of their own experiences. During this stage, I drew together all of the information I had obtained from participants, coupled with my own interpretations of their experiences. I created a chart of themes, subthemes, and supporting quotes at this stage, in order to further organize and connect the identified themes for each participant (Noon, 2018).

The table below can be used to visualize the analytic process for the theme "Expectations to be Everything and Nothing", which will be described in detail in the next chapter.

Table 2: Exemplar Data Analysis

Participant	Examples of Exploratory Notations	Individual Emergent Theme and Definition	Final Theme
Ann Johnson	Not meeting expectations and feeling uncomfortable; Expectation that she continues to contribute to household chores, even when she is ill; Household manager, expectation that she will do it all	Everything and Nothing: Expectation that women will take care of everything, without being asked and without any gratitude (women just know what needs to be done and they take care of it)	Expectations to be Everything and Nothing
Gabbi	Value placed on ability to be helpful; Expectations to manage household plans; Get the work done but don't show the effort	Everything and Nothing: Endless barrage of expectations for women, often in conflict with one another. Everything and Nothing reflects the learned behavior to do everything and to do it quietly	
Liz	Women have to stay in their place; Speaks to the role of women ruling the home, but diminished in other areas; Women can't win	Everything and Nothing: Women are expected to manage all tasks, without expectation for recognition	
MLM	Observations the women should be available to their family first; Women can never get it right; Father expressed frustration at family responsibilities that were viewed as mother's responsibility	Responsibility for Others: Women must manage the emotional reactions of those around them	
P03	Memories of mom fulfilling expected roles; Everything and nothing through observation – military wives had a specific place	Separation between Men and Women: Clear delineation between men and women in social spaces and in terms of roles	

Sky	Observation that mom is responsible for home and caring tasks; Division of labor in the home; Women make decisions in the family, but are kept quiet in public spheres	Everything and Nothing: Women are expected to take on many roles and responsibilities, doing so quietly and without attending to any discomfort they may experience	

Throughout the data analysis process, I tracked my own interpretations and assumptions about the data by simultaneously recording my own thoughts and feelings related to the data. This ongoing interpretation is a critical and continuous process in IPA research, occurring at all stages of analysis (Alase, 2017; Oxley, 2016; Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). Pool (2018) also proposes self-reflection as critical throughout the use of IPA as a means to confront personal bias, facilitate openness to the data, and improve shared-meaning making. It is important to note that the analysis steps may not occur in a linear fashion, but will be iterative in nature.

Utilizing critical friends also served as a way to lend rigor to the research design, an important consideration in qualitative research (Creswell et al., 2007). I reviewed the transcriptions multiple times and elicited review by two critical friends in order to identify multiple perspectives and reach consensus regarding salient themes. Specifically, critical friends provided support and consultation, challenging my own assumptions about gender microaggressions and family dynamics so that findings were grounded in the experiences of participants and not reflective of my own biases. For this study, my critical friends included a cisgender woman who met criteria for this study, as well as a cisgender male colleague, who identifies as a millennial and is married to a man. By engaging critical friends with multiple perspectives, I was also able to broaden my own interpretation of the data and notice new

patterns that I may have missed on initial analysis. Finally, critical friends served to identify gaps that I was unaware of during analysis, allowing me to view data in a more critical and nuanced way. For example, the interconnection between power and internalized misogyny was not immediately apparent, however, after discussion with critical friends, I became aware of how this important connection contributed to understanding the experiences of my participants. Members of my dissertation committee were also consulted to confirm themes. Through the use of critical friends and personal reflection, as well as a flexible approach to analysis, I took steps to conduct a rigorous study while considering credibility and trustworthiness from the outset.

Rigor

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research can be understood as the dependability of research design and findings, while credibility can be equated to validity and is useful in maintaining trustworthiness (Sousa, 2014). Trustworthiness can be improved through transparency related to the research method and includes clearly describing all steps related to gathering and analyzing data (Sousa, 2014). In addition, Sousa (2014) proposed several criteria to improve the trustworthiness of qualitative studies, which include intentionality, synthesis, and phenomenon versus individual throughout data analysis. These criteria can be applied to any iteration of qualitative research, with adjustments made to account for different epistemological views (Sousa, 2014). Because IPA focuses primarily on individual experiences, the aforementioned criteria are most useful to maintaining trustworthiness and credibility, in an effort to separate the perceptions of the researcher from the stories of each individual participant (Sousa, 2014).

Intentionality is important to validation when examining the phenomenon of gender microaggressions from a subjective and objective lens (Smith et al., 2009). For example, the stories shared by participants involved concrete recapitulations of events they have experienced. Yet the way in which they shared these stories and how I interpreted their stories can be influenced by our own experiences over time. I maintained focus on the subjective and objective nature of these stories throughout the data collection and analysis process, by documenting my own assumptions and utilizing peer debriefers.

The second criteria to improve trustworthiness is synthesis. According to Sousa (2014), utilizing synthesis to improve credibility ensures that the researcher is not just focusing on the quantity of a specific phenomenon, but on the congruence of meaning. In this study, participants discussed their experiences with gender microaggressions in different contexts. Although the specific stories of participants varied, I maintained a focus on the way in which *meaning* emerged through the telling of these stories, by listening for similarities and differences between and within interviews. In this way, the expression and meaning making experiences of participants came to the forefront during analysis, ensuring that I accurately described and interpreted the way participants shared and made meaning of their experiences with gender microaggressions.

The last criteria I used to maintain trustworthiness is known as phenomenon versus individual, which focuses on how each participant experiences the same phenomenon (Sousa, 2014). Hence, I also sought to synthesize the experiences of participants, while honoring the experiences of the individual (Smith et al., 2009). This criterion was evident during the second interview and member-checking process, in which I sought clarification and expansion from

individual participants, while also discussing observations across all participants and giving the opportunity to provide further insight into discussion in the first interview (Doyle, 2007). Phenomenon versus individual also assisted in improving any assumptions related to generalizability and transferability (Sousa, 2014), such that data regarding the individual and commonalities between participants was explored. Refer to Appendix F for additional information about divergent experiences within intimate relationships.

I also used bracketing as a tool to put aside my own assumptions and understanding of gender microaggressions, in order to more deeply examine the meaning of these experiences and better understand their essence. Bracketing can be effectively used in conjunction with reflexive practices, including journaling. According to Smith et al. (2009), "the underlying qualities required of the IPA researcher are open-mindedness, flexibility, patience, empathy, and the willingness to enter into, and respond to, the participant's world" (p. 55); all qualities I intentionally brought into the research process.

Ethical and Methodological Concerns

Although efforts were made to minimize and address ethical and methodological concerns, no study can be completely free of issues of this kind (Sousa, 2014). From the outset of the IPA research process, Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) cautioned researchers against conflating IPA with strictly descriptive approaches and encourage researchers to understand the importance of interpretation within IPA. For example, information obtained in interviews may not wholly reflect the context and viewpoints of participants. Hence, the focus of IPA is to understand the perspective, thoughts, and feelings of participants through interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). Understanding and discussing context (i.e. when and where events occurred; the

nature of relationships in which experiences occurred; cultural factors) helped to alleviate concerns related to finding the truth in a participant's story and enabled me to remain focused on the lived experiences of each participant.

Rich interview data is essential for understanding the unique experiences of the individual, hence an interview schedule acted as a guide in obtaining information consistent with the research question (Alase, 2017; Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). The interview schedule was used as a planning tool throughout the research process, rather than a script.

Alase (2017) and Smith et al. (2009) also stressed the importance of intentional, careful, and critical listening in addition to the use of probing throughout the interview process. Through careful and critical listening, I encouraged participants to focus on their own experiences throughout the interview, rather than other people in their lives. Finally, I utilized attentive listening to maintain focus on the participant, in order to help mitigate premature analysis during the interview.

From an ethical perspective, I openly discussed the interview process and potential time requirements with participants, beginning during the recruitment process, so that potential participants were able to make informed decisions regarding participation. This open dialogue is also in alignment with postmodern feminist theory, which was employed throughout this study. Particularly, the lived experiences of participants were treated with the utmost respect and transparency (Hesse-Biber, 2014). To that end, I monitored participants' reactions to discussions and asked participants for their input regarding comfort level, as well as their desire to continue to discuss certain incidents (Noon, 2018). I also worked to be mindful of my role as a researcher, balancing this role with my training as a counselor. I maintained this distinction through open

discussion with participants about the limitations of processing events discussed during interviews and sharing appropriate resources should they wish to continue these discussions with a mental health professional. I also reflected on my own reactions throughout the interview process and while engaging in data analysis, journaling immediately after each interview and throughout all stages of data analysis.

Finally, because the discussion of family relationships and experiences may be difficult for some participants, I was prepared to share appropriate counseling referrals. Participants had the opportunity to end the interview or end their participation in the study at any point, should the discussion of family relationships and gender microaggressions prove to be problematic for their individual mental health.

Chapter 3 Summary

In this study focusing on cisgender women's experience with gender microaggressions within their family of origin and intimate adult relationships, I utilized IPA methodology. This methodology allowed me to explore critically, to listen, and deeply understand the experiences of my participants in efforts to draw sound and rigorous conclusions. Throughout the study, I remained open, flexible, and creative in order to better understand each participant’s lived experiences and the way in which they have made meaning of these experiences. I identified issues that arose throughout the course of this study, as well as solutions for addressing these concerns. In the following chapter, I will detail my findings related to the way cisgender women describe and make meaning of their experiences with gender microaggressions, both within their family of origin and in the context of their intimate adult relationships.

Chapter 4: Findings

Utilizing the research question: "How do gender microaggressions experienced in the family of origin shape cisgender women's meaning making related to gender microaggressions within their intimate adult relationships?", five main themes were identified: *1) Expectations to Be Everything and Nothing; 2) Making Meaning of Rigid Gendered Expectations; 3) Developing Internalized Misogyny; 4) Recognizing Unequal Power Dynamics; and 5) Finding Pathways to Meaningful Change*. Subthemes were identified for the aforementioned themes and were included if at least four participants discussed related situations. Quotes from participants will be used to give voice to each theme and subtheme. In addition, divergent experiences in intimate adult relationships are further detailed in Appendix F.

A critical aspect of IPA is the inclusion of an interpretive narrative (Eatough & Smith, 2017). The interpretative narrative is based on my own experiences and understanding of the participants' words and will be included for each theme and subtheme. Interpretations will be made utilizing the concept of the hermeneutic circle, looking at the whole and individual parts in an iterative way (Smith & Osborn, 2003), as well as Smith's (2011) concept of "gems" (shining, suggestive, and secretive; p. 6), which provides additional insight into the participants' experience. According to Smith, shining gems are accounts in which the meaning of participants' words are clear, the researcher does not need to deeply search for meaning, and the participant is aware of the meaning. Suggestive gems are words that are a suggestion of a deeper meaning, in which the researcher needs to look more deeply to find the true meaning and the participant has some awareness of the meaning of their words. Finally, secretive gems are those words and stories that do not have an immediately clear meaning, which the researcher needs to examine

deeply and of which the participant is not aware. Interpretive analyses will be presented in italics for ease of reference.

Theme 1: Expectations to Be Everything and Nothing

Expectations to Be Everything and Nothing is a layered theme which emerged for all participants. This theme was apparent when participants reported expectations to fulfill several roles and manage many responsibilities without expecting recognition. For example, participants detailed organizing all aspects of home life, engaging in stereotypically feminine tasks as children and adults, juggling competing obligations in work and family domains, and anticipating the needs of their partner. Participants discussed expectations to do everything without complaint as communicated through observation of family members, specifically mothers, in various situations, as well as through direct discussions with parents, siblings, and partners about expectations for women. Participants highlighted the concept of being everything and nothing in their family of origin and with their current partner, with all subthemes classified as shining gems (Smith, 2011). Subthemes identified include: a) *Women as household managers*; b) *Women as caregivers and protectors*; and c) *Expectations for marriage and motherhood.* All subthemes emerged related to both family of origin and intimate adult relationships.

Women as Household Managers

This subtheme is indicative of the often silent expectation that women will manage all aspects of life in the home, as reported by participants. Participants highlighted learning about their role as household manager in their family of origin through observation of and direct communication with adult family members and siblings. Participants spoke of these roles directly and with awareness, thus leading to this subtheme being classified as a shining gem.

According to participants, acting as the household manager included anticipating the needs of their family, reminding others about important events and appointments, as well as keeping track of and responding to household needs. Within the family of origin, participants reflected on expectations during childhood and early adolescence to prepare meals and engage in stereotypically feminine or "traditional" tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for younger siblings, when their mothers were not available. For example, Sky spoke to implicit expectations to manage household responsibilities when her parents were unavailable:

> …that [my mother was not home] meant that my mother was relying on me to take care of my brother, and she would typically get home about 6. Um, and my, my father would get home about 6:30, and so, I think got a little bit older, just like, maybe around 12 or 13, I'd be starting dinner and stuff like that.

MLM also shared a similar experience:

> Um, and so when she [mother] went back to work I kind of, for whatever reason, I took on her role, making sure that, um, you know, I, I you know, cleaned the house and did laundry and made dinners and things like that.

Participants discussed observations of their own mother and other women in their lives managing all aspects of family life, such as planning meals, gatherings, and family schedules. Gabbi spoke to many layers of being a household manager when she observed her own mother engaging in the same role:

> I mean, I, I really observed. When I was younger and my mom was a full time homemaker, she very much did all all of the house cleaning, um, laundry, um, bathrooms,

> dishes, always always cooked. I mean, she made all the meals and there were four of us. So, I mean, it was, it was a lot, um. You know, and so she, she was busy with the house.

Expectations to act as the household manager, beginning from a young age, as well as observations of mothers in the household manager role, manifested as participants managing all aspects of social life with their current partner. Gabbi also discussed expectations to manage household responsibilities within her own intimate relationship, while also balancing expectations to work outside of the home:

> So it goes into his [my husband's] little magical land, and he expects it [food] to show up and be in the fridge, like, some fairy brought this food and so. You know, I have been really struggling with that because I'm not going to do full time family manager at home, and b- try to be a breadwinner and so, umm, I have been kind of trying to prepare myself for that tough conversation because. Because I'm the family manager, he golfs every waking moment of every day when he's not at work…You know, it always falls on me…I think I talked about the expectation of, like, the social calendar, the expectation of things just magically happening.

Liz echoed the sentiment of feeling responsible for her partner and added an additional layer to the concept of being a household manager in her own relationship when she stated:

> Because he knows that I will remember, because he knows that I will remind him. He doesn't make the effort to remember it, uh, because he can absolutely. But I think he's just taking the easy way out because I'm enabling him. And that's on me.

Liz spoke to her perception that her husband is capable of remembering household needs, but chooses not to as Liz manages all household needs for both of them. In addition, Liz shed light

on the internalization of expectations to manage the home, as well as how women may struggle with their own responsibility in fostering dependent behaviors with their partner.

Participants spoke about the struggles of managing physical responsibilities at home, as well as the mental and emotional labor implicitly expected of them. It seems as if participants experienced mental exhaustion of carrying household burdens from a young age. Participants expressed a sense of powerlessness in changing these roles and a feeling of resignation to these roles. Participants also discussed the way in which household manager duties are implicitly and explicitly foisted onto them, indicating how deeply ingrained the roles and expectations for women can become.

Women as Caregivers and Protectors

A vital role identified by all participants was that of caregiver. An extension of the caregiver role that became apparent during data analysis was the importance of being protectors to loved ones. All participants explicitly discussed their roles as caregivers, whether to their siblings in their family of origin, adult family members, or partners. Participants also gave voice to their sense that the expectation to act as a caregiver and protector to others often resulted in personal sacrifice. Sky discussed this expectation directly, saying “women are relied on for accepting care of extended family members. That’s it. Et cetera it comes falls down to the woman”.

Participants also described feeling protective of loved ones, enacting this care by diffusing conflict. Liz clearly described:

> …Um, trying to smooth things over. I do that. I do that. And and I think it's about it connects again to this idea of protecting, carrying. I feel like I'm a very, a very *protective*,

> um. In a way a mama would be. You know, like, um, I don't protect myself that well. But I will take a bullet for my people.

Although Liz spoke about going to extreme lengths to care for those around her, she also acknowledged the dichotomy of how women are valued as caregivers:

> I'm the first call, usually. Uh, my husband is the same. So, um, so, yeah, that's more that, I think this this idea of, you know, woman gets shit done. Definitely. Um, you know, and it's funny the irony and the paradox between women talk all the time and nananana, chit chat. Yet, if you want something done.

Participants attempted to make sense of how they came to engage in caregiving roles in their families. MLM struggled to articulate the origin of her perception of women as caregivers, but shared her observations of her mother caring for her paternal grandmother:

> Um, and and I think part of it is me wanting to take care of everybody else. Um. And then I, you know (right), I don't know where that came from (laughing)… Um, you know, and I, I remember my mom taking care of her, like she was taking care of the rest of us. And it was almost like having another child, in a way. Um. And I think my dad just kind of put that responsibility on her.

This statement acts as a suggestive gem, with MLM only partially recognizing the ways that observations have shaped her own caregiving roles and tendencies. Women can struggle to make sense of how they have come to engage in particular roles.

Imagery and affect can lend additional layers to understanding participants' words. The use of imagery related to "take a bullet" is indicative of not only the level of protectiveness Liz feels for the people she cares for, but also the sacrifice inherent in the role of women as

caregivers and protectors. MLM laughed as she spoke about her own desire to care for others and the observation of her mother caring for her paternal grandmother. This can be interpreted as potential discomfort with the heavy expectation for women to care for others, but can also be indicative of attempting to brush these expectations off. Overall, expectations to act as caregivers and protectors may be so ingrained in women that these roles are not questioned.

Expectations for Marriage and Motherhood

Related to their role as caregivers, participants discussed expectations for marriage and motherhood. All participants shared messages that they would find worth and fulfillment through marriage and motherhood. These messages were often received directly from their family of origin, but also were received in external settings, such as religious gatherings and work settings. Participants were not always fully aware of the meaning of their words and this researcher was intentional in discovering the meaning conveyed by participants, hence, this subtheme was classified as a suggestive gem. It is important to note that the criteria for this study was that participants did not have children in their home, however, one participant was a mother to adult children she had not raised with her current partner and two participants were stepmothers to adult children who did not reside with them. Despite no longer or never having children in their homes, many participants spoke to expectations to be mothers and the perception that they would be "motherly" in work settings. MLM spoke to pressures to marry and have children, directly communicated from her parents, when she said:

> My mom went to school to be a nurse. Um, but I, I saw him [dad], or at least, I heard them talk about how this is the, the typical, um. The typical way you get through life. I

> mean, you you, it's okay to go to college, but you need to get married. You need to get married to somebody who's successful and you need to have kids and blah, blah, blah.

MLM also directly discussed the sources of messages related to motherhood when she provided additional insight into how the role of motherhood is synonymous with being a woman, as well as the struggle to find validation in other roles:

> Um, so they [women at mother's church], you know, they would talk about how having kids and being a mother would bring you closer to God and I don't care about that. Um. But what I did care about was the message that I was getting, and that was that whatever I do in my lifetime. That is the only thing that will validate me…These people act like, you know, this is the only thing of value that I will ever do. When I feel like, I do a lot of other things that are valued, um… And so, so that but that, that was one of those messages that was really loud and clear, so, I mean, I've, I've kind of gotten these messages from, you know, my mom and from that church, from my dad, and, you know, my other grandparents and. Sorry, that was, that was the story, because that was that was one of the things that just offended me to no end.

In this excerpt, MLM clearly articulated not only the messages she received about expectations to become a mother and the way motherhood would provide a source of fulfillment, but also the internal struggles related to these messages and resultant feeling of being "offended".

Gabbi shared the messages received about marriage and motherhood when she said, "you'll only be worthy if you get married, you'll only be worthy if you become a mother". Gabbi highlighted the association between marriage, motherhood, and worth for women. In addition to issues related to worth, Sky discussed the pressures to marry and have children, subtly

communicated in her family of origin, “Um, I mean, I always had pressure of like, you know, you should have children, you should get married, you should do this, you should do that, but”.

Finally, Liz provided insight into the perception that women will be motherly in work settings. In this particular excerpt, she not only highlighted how students view her as “like a mom”, but also how she internalized her own treatment of students as being motherly:

> Um, also, like, I've noticed, I don't have kids, but I often treat my students almost like my children. What I mean by that is the parental authority of, I want you to succeed and I'm and I love you and I'm proud of you, *but* don't you disappoint mama and don't you piss off mama. And there's really that feeling. And my students, some of them from previous years told me you are like a mom. And, uh, when when you're not happy with us, when you're disappointed in us, it hurts. And I think that's very interesting. And I think it's because I'm a woman.

Women are socialized, beginning in the family of origin, to plan for marriage and motherhood. Participants in this study do not have children in the home; nonetheless, the concept of pressure for motherhood, as well as the perception of being motherly, emerged. Mothering and caregiving can often be synonymous for women; as such, women are expected to enact the caregiving role by engaging in motherhood. Because the roles of motherhood and wife can be salient for women from a young age, there are also challenges and potential consequences for going against these expectations. Ultimately, women may actively choose not to become mothers, but may also struggle with barriers such as medical challenges that prevent them from becoming mothers. Thus, some women may choose not to become mothers, while others would like to become mothers and are not able to have children.

Theme 2: Making Meaning of Rigid Gendered Expectations

Theme 1, Expectations to Be Everything and Nothing, highlighted external expectations that women must do it all, as well as centered perceptions of how women should be in the world. Participants also discussed internal reactions to pressures to engage in specific roles, including feeling easily dismissed in many different situations. Making Meaning of Rigid Gendered Expectations emerged as a salient theme for all participants, who discussed ways that they have learned about rigid traditional roles for women and men. Participants also highlighted how rigid gendered expectations have impacted their perceptions of themselves as women and how they engage in the world. Additionally, dismissal and invisibility were pervasive and impacted how women presented themselves in various settings. The first subtheme, *Generational transmission of traditional gender roles*, captured participants' understanding of how they have come to understand and embody their expected roles as women. *Feeling invisible*, the second subtheme, centered participants' awareness of being ignored in various settings. Participants described feeling "lost in the shuffle" in their family of origin and detailed feeling insignificant and unseen with their partners. Participants articulated the final subtheme, *Never enough*, when they shared internalized sense of failure related to their inability to meet competing expectations.

Generational Transmission of Traditional Gender Roles

This shining gem subtheme relates to how gender role expectations were transmitted to participants. Participants expressed awareness of developing an understanding of their family roles through observation and communication in the family of origin. Women discussed their perception of traditional roles that women are expected to maintain, as well as the pressure to live up to traditional gender role expectations. Specifically, participants spoke to the pervasive

nature of gendered messages in all areas of life, most often communicated through observation within the family of origin. Liz explicitly discussed the generational transmission of traditional roles through observations of adult women at “family meals, family parties. Uh, the, the other women will clean up, the women will do the dishes. That's one thing that gets understood. It's assumed”. Liz experienced an implicit communication of expectations, based on the roles she witnessed the women in her family engaged in during many family gatherings.

Participants also highlighted their perception that the adults in their life during childhood were enacting roles and expectations they learned in their own family of origin. This perception was directly shared when MLM said “So, um, you know, a lot of the messages, I think I got were based on what he [dad] saw in his relationship, growing up with his parents”. MLM was able to connect the gendered messages and role expectations she received from her father to his own upbringing, speaking to the way that messages about gender can become crystalized through generations.

Gabbi highlighted the direct way family placed value on girls engaging in traditional tasks, as well as her reaction being valued for engaging in these tasks:

> That was the value. That was placed. Oh, you girls just did such a good job cleaning and. I remember they called us, like, oh, you're just the little white tornadoes you just, you know, come in here and clean and all that. And I just remember like, ugh, I mean, even as a kid, that kind of felt icky.

Gabbi’s words clarified how engagement in particular tasks can be reinforced during childhood, becoming inherent to a woman’s identity in adulthood. An additional layer of this quotation is the “icky” feeling this valuation left, even at a young age.

The concept of learning about behaviors through modeling and observation is well-established. Hearing how participants were impacted by these observations and how value was directly placed on traditional roles add personalized stories to support knowledge about the generational transmission of gender roles. The participants' words provide context to perceptions that girls and women are taught that they will be validated and have worth for engaging in traditional tasks. This mirrors the way their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and even fathers might have been taught about and continue to perpetuate roles and expectations with each generation.

Feeling Invisible

Participants discussed the emergence of feelings of invisibility, related to rigid gender role expectations for women. Participants articulated feeling invisible themselves, but also observing other women being silenced or ignored. This invisibility manifested in different ways, from partners having a lack of awareness about the tasks women manage, to watching their mothers' interests be diminished. Despite differences in experiences, the common thread of feeling invisible was present for all participants. Thus, this subtheme was classified as a shining gem.

Gabbi spoke about her husband's lack of awareness related to daily tasks she must complete when she said, "Right and that's, you know, that's the thing is that there's a lot of stuff that I just take care of that he doesn't even know about". Gabbi articulated how many of the tasks she manages in the home are invisible to her husband, creating a perception for Gabbi that she is invisible, as well.

MLM shared her observations of her father dismissing her mother's interests when she said, "Um, she wanted to show him what she had seen, and he basically said, I don't want to see any of it. I don't care". Although MLM was not directly involved in this situation between her parents, the impact of watching her father clearly tell her mother that he did not care about her interests left an impression. In fact, MLM frequently came back to the feelings of being dismissed and invisible rendered through observation of her parents' interactions, which may serve to provide evidence for the lasting impact of secondhand gender microaggressions.

Women often feel invisible in various ways and in many different settings. The feeling of invisibility associated with women being dismissed can occur directly, when a woman experiences herself as unimportant in a given situation or is directly told that her input does not matter. Feelings of invisibility can also occur indirectly, when observing other women being ignored. The feeling of being invisible can have implications for how much space women feel they can take up in the world.

Never Enough

When discussing innumerable and often conflicting gender roles and societal directives for women, participants overwhelmingly shared a sense that they will never be good enough when faced with these seemingly endless expectations. All participants discussed a sense of failure related to competing expectations, often feeling that the standards communicated to women in all settings are contradictory and impossible. Participants clearly expressed the belief that, no matter what choices women make, they cannot win. Ann Johnson spoke about expectations within her family of origin related to physical appearance:

> …then I have these two step-sisters who are tall and thin. Right? And so they were the standard and I was the deviation. And, uh, when, you know, all of us had her own stuff, you know right. And I remember I was talking about that, that, you know. It would be like, making fun of different aspects.

Ann Johnson shared that she was viewed as "the deviation" because she did not fit into the "tall and thin" aesthetic. Also apparent in this quotation was Ann's perception that women will never meet all expectations, when she discussed how her step-sisters also faced ridicule for other aspects of themselves.

Liz further articulated the reality of being in a lose-lose situation when she reflected on the impossible dichotomy faced by women:

> Okay, so I can't win here. Uh, there's really this feeling of you cannot win. If you don't speak up, they walk all over you. If you speak up, then you're, you're the bitch, the squeaky wheel and the problem maker and the trouble. So it really feels like a lose-lose… Maybe that's a that's a female thing, you know, like, how? It's always our fault.

Liz distinctly captured the myriad ways women can be perceived negatively in nearly any situation and highlighted the perception that "it's always our fault" when it comes to not meeting expectations and not being enough.

Gabbi also shared her perspective on trying to fulfill competing expectations, as well as the sense of failure related to trying to "catch all these balls":

> It really society has some just really crappy messages out there for women and also, um, I think the expectations change. And I think the expectations cancel each other out. We want you to be this, but we also want you to be this but we want you to be that. And can

> you just do that? And so here we are as women. And we're trying to catch all these balls of expectations. And…we can't win, right? We can't win because we're supposed to take care of the kids and the house and earn money. And, and, and.

Gabbi spoke to the seemingly endless trail of expectations and discussed how expectations of women can shift over time. For Gabbi, this shifting appeared to make it particularly challenging to know where the bar is set and what expectations to fulfill, resulting in a sense of not meeting any expectations well, and therefore not being good enough.

Women can be faced with impossible standards to be and do many things. These expectations can often be contradictory, forcing women into a position in which they must choose one expectation or another. In doing so, women inherently understand that they are failing at the expectation they have not chosen to meet. Additionally, participants expressed feelings of resentment related to being asked implicitly and explicitly, to constantly make decisions about which roles and directives to fulfill. Women are constantly expected to show up and manage many tasks that significant people in their life may not notice, but are critical for daily functioning.

Theme 3: Developing Internalized Misogyny

After considering the roles and expectations for women, as well as how participants have come to understand these roles and the impact of expectations, the next idea that emerged was how participants have internalized these expectations for themselves and other women. Participants implicitly shared internalized gender microaggressions and the need to police other women, which began to emerge through participants' words and phrases. In addition, this theme and the next (*Recognizing Unequal Power Dynamics*) connect to the way power differentials can

manifest internally and externally for women faced with pervasive gender microaggressions. *Developing Internalized Misogyny* was not an immediately obvious theme, however, upon close analysis of participants' tones and assumptions about women, this theme and the role of power in maintaining internalized misogyny, became clear. Hence, *Developing Internalized Misogyny* was categorized as a hidden gem. For example, Gabbi spoke about her perceptions of feminine and masculine traits:

> You know, people talk about like, more feminine traits, more masculine or things like that. And so thinking in terms of that…his [husband's] inaction…forces me to be a lot more masculine. Um, in the sense of. A go-getter doing things, um.

Gabbi's musing captured her internalized perception of women as inherently different than men, sharing a sense that, because she does not perceive her husband as masculine, he "forces me" to engage in more masculine tasks. Gabbi also highlighted the way that power differentials can internally manifest as unwillingly engaging in roles she considers non-traditional. Underlying this quotation is a sense of distaste for having to be "more masculine" because her husband does not meet her expectations.

Internalized misogyny can also appear in how women perceive and describe other women in negative ways. For example Ann Johnson shared her perspective on her brother's wife, "…his first wife was just, oh God, she was a hardcore, uh, meddling just not nice. Right? And, uh, l-, like high pitched loud voice that you just would cut your…yeah". Ann Johnson discussed her distaste for her brother's former wife, focusing less on her personality traits and more on her "high pitched loud voice" when critiquing their relationship. Statements such as these may be indicative of an internalized sense that women who talk back or are viewed as too assertive can

be criticized by other women who wish to distance themselves from traits and actions they may view as negative. This can also be an indicator of power dynamics at home and within society, as pervasive messages about how women should be influence how women engage with one another.

Similarly, Liz sought to set herself apart from women who "control" their partners when she said:

> Yeah, and also, he, he knows that it's not the dynamic in our couple. It's never been like that, you know? The ball breaking wife who says no, and who controls how much did you spend? And how much did you drink? And I'm not like that.

Again, words such as Liz's may be overlooked at first glance, simply categorized as observations about other women. However, closer examination of context and tone can reveal a more nuanced interpretation related to how women perceive other women and themselves. Gender microaggressions and internalized struggles with power, may covertly rob participants of the autonomy to make their own decisions about how women present themselves in the world and may have implications for how they police other women.

Internalized misogyny was communicated in subtle ways and was only made apparent through close examination of words, tone, and context when speaking about other women and internalized expectations for women. Women can internalize gender microaggressions experienced throughout life, and may police other women as a result. Internalized misogyny can be indicative of the cost that gender microaggressions and patriarchal values have for women. In addition, power differentials between men and women can be one pathway by which internalized misogyny is developed and maintained for women.

Prioritizing Others

All participants clearly spoke about prioritizing others, whether in their family of origin, through their own actions with their partner, or in career settings. Prioritizing others occurred when putting the comfort of those around them first; prioritizing their partner's needs; and hiding familial discord from the outside world. Inherent in discussions of prioritizing others was the idea of sacrificing their own needs, as participants acknowledged someone must always "take the passenger seat". Participants learned about prioritizing others through observations of mothers and other women. P03 detailed how she prioritized and protected the image of her family of origin:

> What I remember from my childhood was a lot of arguing, like, to the point… Um, to the point to, you know, we'd run around the house and close the windows 'cause we didn't want the neighbors to hear.

P03 shared an awareness of how others would perceive her family, even when she was young, as well as her efforts to hide family discord from the outside world. In this way, P03 prioritized the needs of her family unit, working to preserve their image during times of conflict.

MLM spoke about prioritizing others in many settings, even when it was uncomfortable for her:

> I end up taking on, I think a lot from from others and part of this, um, caretaker mentality, I think, comes from wanting everything to be okay. And not wanting anybody to be mad when, you know, kind of wanting, needing everybody to be on an even keel. Um. You know, and I noticed that I I step into that, um, and and, you know, I'll volunteer to do

> things that I really don't have time for because I know it will make somebody else, you know, make things easier for them.

MLM acknowledged taking on responsibilities she may not have the capacity for in an effort to help those around her. Prioritizing others and acting as a caretaker were salient roles for all participants, but explicitly discussed by MLM. Liz provided further insight into the source of her inclination to prioritize others when she discussed observations of her mother prioritizing her father in daily life, “you know, and then she took the passenger seat, you know, and it was always about, all about him”.

Women can prioritize others in many ways throughout their lives, beginning in their family of origin and continuing into their intimate relationship. When learning about how to prioritize others, observation played an important role in how expectations and hierarchies are communicated in the family. These expectations highlight the broader context in which women are taught to prioritize the perception of the family unit and the needs of everyone around them, even from a young age. Taken together, we might deduce that women could internalize an understanding that they must put others first in order to be loved and accepted. In addition, this subtheme may speak to the way women perceive their own value in relation to others, possibly based on their perception of power dynamics.

Silence is Safety

In the previous subtheme, participants shared their need to prioritize the needs of others before their own. Relatedly, participants gave voice to the idea that silence keeps women emotionally safe and protects relationships. Three participants spoke directly to the idea of maintaining safety through their own silence, while the remaining three participants discussed

finding safety in silence in covert ways, resulting in this subtheme being identified as a suggestive gem. Regardless of the personal motivation participants articulated for staying silent, the end result was the same, that is, participants kept quiet and did not feel comfortable giving voice to their internal experiences in the home or at work, across their lifespan. Participants shared that the idea of being silent developed over time, through observations in their family of origin, and became more overt in later life. These observations might also be indicative of yet another way women internally manifest their understanding of worth and power in the world. For example, Ann Johnson succinctly shared, “I think they feel like you can just be silenced. I think that's it”. Ann spoke to the perception that society works to silence women and normalizes the practice of silencing women, specifically sharing her experiences in academia.

Liz spoke clearly to one way that women may find safety in silence when she articulated her internal connection between women who speak out against men as troublemakers:

> Because *she* talked back, because *she* was mouthy, because *she* didn't respect him. So, I think somehow I internalized this idea that a woman who speaks up, is a troublemaker. Is a bitch. Is is somebody who is going to break relationships.

Women can also learn the importance of staying silent through observation. MLM specifically emphasized the role of observation when learning to stay quiet in her own interactions with her partner:

> You know, and I don't ever remember my mom or my grandmothers yelling or fighting, you know, like, if if. If their spouse said something that was, um, hurtful. They never said anything, it was, like, turn the other cheek. Um. You know, and and that's something that I I definitely have done.

Notably, during our interview, MLM expressed discomfort speaking about her relationship dynamics if her husband was within hearing and took steps to maintain privacy during that portion of our conversation. The aforementioned behaviors, coupled with the above quotation, can be interpreted as evidence of the internalization that silence is necessary for emotional safety.

While all of the highlighted quotations were not directly related to home or family functioning, these statements are important in understanding the way in which messages that begin in the home can be internalized and have an impact on the way women function in the world. In addition, the way women might internalize how they "should be", becoming quiet and acquiescent in order to protect the relationships important to them, rather than feeling empowered to share their own perceptions and experiences in various settings. The concept of staying silent in order to maintain safety can also be related to how women understand power dynamics between themselves and others, unconsciously placing themselves and their opinions beneath others. Participants added insight into how observing family members has influenced ways they react in various situations and their prerogative to be quiet. Although participants were not always direct in connecting silence with safety, the message was clear. If women stay quiet, they can protect themselves and those around them.

Justifying Gender Microaggressions

Another way participants may enact internalized power dynamics was to justify their experiences with gender microaggressions with loved ones. Justifications ranged from downplaying how hurtful certain actions or comments may be, to discussing gender microaggressions as out of character, or outright excusing gender microaggressions as related to

age. Undergirding all justifications was a sense of protection, whether for themselves or the person displaying gender microaggressions. Participants did not articulate awareness regarding justification of gender microaggressions and the underlying contribution of implicit power dynamics to justification of gender microaggressions; as such, this subtheme was classified as a secretive gem.

Many participants identified examples of gender microaggressions they experienced, but also offered justifications for these microaggressions, thereby highlighting the dual role of caring for others and also defending the actions and words of the subjects of their caregiving. Again, the underlying force for justifying gender microaggressions may be related to power. Ann Johnson compared experiences with her husband to experiences in a past abusive relationship by speaking about her perceptions of the power "imbalance" between herself and her husband, highlighting her lack of complete satisfaction in her relationship. She also compared "difficulties" to those experienced by people in other relationships, thereby diminishing incidents in her own relationship because "a lot of people" also struggle with satisfaction in their relationships:

> So, it's it's just kind of this imbalance in that way, but it's like. It's not horrible. I'm not being denied… so it's, it's it's a lot of people have those difficulties, but (yeah), um. So, it's it's just a, I don't know, it's not great, but it's not the end of the world, I guess.

Liz reflected how her husband began using more derogatory language in recent years, saying:

> Uh, I want to say in the last 2, 3 years that my husband will make comments like that, which is not a natural thing for him, he's not. He's never been like that, but I've noticed, I think it's a shift. It's just my, my perception, I think it's a shift in, in the normal discourse around us.

Rather than focusing on other causes for husband's use of crude language and gender microaggressions in different settings, Liz focused on how their changing environment has contributed to alterations in their typical discourse. Liz also notably uses "my perception" as another way to excuse her husband's behavior, in an effort to shift blame away from her husband.

Sky also provided justification for gender microaggressions from her husband, citing his age and experience as reasons he speaks down to her in arguments when she says, "I would say, uh, because he's *older,* so much more experienced. Um. And, yeah, he's got his, he's got his, he's got his ways, you know, as a man or even just as a businessman". In this quotation, Sky was able to assign ownership for gender microaggressions to her husband; however, looks for reasons, including his age and "his ways", to justify these actions. These justifications also provide concrete evidence of power differentials, with Sky implicitly sharing that age and gender can create power differentials. In doing so, Sky also diminishes how her husband may fundamentally view her and other women in a negative light.

Liz spoke about justifying gender microaggressions from her father, who "doesn't listen anyway":

> Um, with my dad, it's a little bit more complicated. Um, I think it's probably because, you know, he's in his 70s and he won't change and it's just everything is complicated with him. So I often just suck it up. And let it pass. Because he doesn't, he doesn't understand and he doesn't listen anyway.

Liz highlighted the resignation of noticing gender microaggressions, but feeling that the aggressor is not capable of change. Liz also discussed her own reactions to gender microaggressions from her father as doing her best to ignore his behaviors.

Women can express the power dynamics experienced in various settings through justifying their own mistreatment. When faced with gender microaggressions, women may deny their own reality, justifying what their partner or family member is saying for myriad reasons. Excusing behaviors because of little hope for change can be a common experience for women who recognize gender microaggressions, but do not feel their words will make a difference. Justification of gender microaggressions is also multifaceted in that rationalizations can serve as a way to prioritize others, thereby reinforcing and maintaining imbalanced power dynamics.

Theme 4: Recognizing Unequal Power Dynamics

All participants explicitly discussed the ways in which they have witnessed or experienced unequal power dynamics between men and women in their family of origin and with their partner. Similar to the themes previously discussed, unequal power dynamics were evident to participants in both direct and indirect ways, with some inequities occurring between themselves and their significant other and other inequities being observed between parents. Participants' words also suggested that unequal power dynamics can also be related to dissatisfaction within intimate relationships. In addition, pathways to power are explored, with participants alluding to their perceived hierarchy between men and women when discussing money. Subthemes identified include: *a) Women can be dismissed; b) Lack of autonomy in decision-making; c) My body is not my own; and d) Money allows for power and freedom.*

Women Can Be Dismissed as Inferior to Men

All participants articulated the perception that women, as well as opinions women express, can be easily overlooked and undervalued by others. Additionally, all participants alluded to the perception that men are superior to women, beginning with feeling that boys had more value than girls within the family of origin. This subtheme was also evident related to hierarchy in the home and ownership of material items, such as property. Overall, participants expressed a sense of being "less than" the men in their lives, as well as external intimations that they are inferior to the men around them. These sentiments were not always within the awareness of participants, hence this subtheme was classified as a suggestive gem.

Liz captured the essence of being dismissed when she shared a story about how her father has demeaned gatherings of women:

> He calls that in French le dejeuner de sac couche, which literally means the *purse brunch*. Like, the handbag brunch, which I think he's trying to be funny, again, eh? But there is, I find that so gross. And, you know, like, oh, yeah, we're, we're there with our purses and how we're chit chat. And again, another thing I've heard a lot in my childhood is that women are chatty. Don't they chat so much and nininini. Again, it's one of those things I heard a lot. Uh, that we're almost like some kind of of birds, you know, that make noise in the tree, that almost that feeling. That, there's the feeling of silliness. Of aren't they so silly? Aren't they so haha, you know, with their TV shows that they like to watch and with their little chats and.

Liz shared imagery in which her father compared women to birds, creating a sense that her father perceived women as small, meek, insignificant, and silly. This quotation also captured the sentiment of women not having anything of importance to say.

This quotation highlighted the ways in which women can be dismissed due to "silliness". There was also an underlying sense that the way women are dismissed, particularly when women are in well-functioning groups, can be related to fear of women supporting one another. As discussed in a later subtheme (empowerment in collective voice), when women gather together, they can experience a sense of empowerment to speak out for change.

Related to perceived importance in the family of origin, MLM shared, "And once my brother was born, it seemed like he kind of transferred to my brother, so al- I took that as, Dad wanted a son. He didn't want a daughter". MLM stated that, following the birth of her brother, she felt less important to her father, suggesting that having a daughter may have been a second choice for her father. MLM also addressed her perception that men hold a higher position in the home as compared to women when she simply stated, "Like the man runs the house".

P03 echoed MLM's statements about hierarchy in the home with observations of decision-making and ownership in her family of origin. P03 questioned, "Who's the disciplinarian? Who's, you know, who makes the familial decisions? Um, who has ownership of things. So, like, it, you know, both people being on the deed of the house is not a thing". P03 discussed her observation of inequities between men and women, making sense of situations she observed as a child. Access to "ownership of things" and property were articulated as one way society allows men to assert superiority over women.

Perceptions of being inferior to men can influence women in many domains. There was a common thread through discussions with participants that external issues related to autonomy, power, and value within society can be internalized by women. As such, women may often change their own behaviors to fit a mold that is constantly shifting. The struggle to maintain

autonomy and find freedom within our society may be related to the way women are valued in society and also value themselves.

Lack of Autonomy in Decision-Making

Lack of autonomy emerged as a consideration for participants in various ways, particularly related to decision-making. All participants discussed feeling that others "forced" them to make important decisions at various times in their life and about many different topics, from interests to college and career decisions. Participants also shared the meaning they ascribed to lack of autonomy in decision-making, with some participants feeling grateful for the course their lives have taken due to the direction of parents, while others reported feeling resentful to work actively in order to assert autonomy. Participants used powerful and direct language when discussing lack of autonomy, therefore, this subtheme was classified as a shining gem.

Although the majority of discussions about lack of autonomy in decision-making centered experiences as children in the family of origin and with their partner in adulthood, participants also discussed how family of origin can play a role in a woman's decision making into adulthood. Gabbi highlighted this sentiment when she spoke of her divorce from her first husband, including the role of her mother's shame in "forcing" Gabbi to hide her decision to divorce from the public:

> And so I filed for divorce and my mom had so much shame over this. She forced me, at that time, the newspaper printed or published every divorce filing. So, my mom had so much shame over this that she forced me and, I mean. I lived out in the country, so driving in town, I was not super adept at driving in town.

Gabbi's words highlight her perception of the complicated layers that influenced her own actions, including her mother's ideals related to marriage and divorce, her proximity to be able to address her mother's concerns, and how personal matters were published in the local paper by default.

MLM discussed her experiences with a lack of autonomy with her partner. MLM detailed her sense of having to "ask permission" from her husband to attend functions outside of her typical routine when she said, "…there have been like. Times where I need to travel for work, and it's not often. Um, but I need to, to travel for work and um, you know, ask permission". Although MLM is an adult in her relationship, she expressed the feeling that she must gain her husband's approval prior to traveling for work. This statement can serve to highlight the way MLM views herself in relation to her husband, with her husband taking a primary role in decision-making and therefore having influence over MLM's own decisions.

Participants also shared the resultant emotions related to their lack of autonomy in different situations. Sky spoke about the consequences of asserting her autonomy in her family of origin regarding caretaking tasks for her younger brother when she said, "I kind of, *I* stood my ground, I regretted it later". Sky's statement brought to light the way that she was momentarily empowered to stand "my ground", but ultimately experienced a sense of regret at doing so.

Although participants acknowledged a sense of regret and powerlessness related to a lack of autonomy in their families of origin and with their partners, there were situations in which participants expressed feelings of gratitude for being guided to make certain decisions. For example, when speaking about her career decision-making process, Liz shared, "Uh, it was not my intent. That's not what I studied originally. I became a teacher a little bit by accident and I'm

so glad I did and that now makes perfect sense". Although Liz did not actively choose her career, she voices happiness at finding a career that is fulfilling, "a little bit by accident".

Women are faced with many decisions through the course of their lives, however, such decisions may be influenced by others when making both large and small decisions. Maintaining autonomy was discussed as challenging for all participants. This might be reflective of the fear of experiencing consequences associated with asserting autonomy. Negative reactions related to asserting autonomy can range from disapproval and disappointment to feelings of resentment. However, it is possible that having support and guidance in decision-making may not be directly experienced as a lack of autonomy, but rather a situation that can breed feelings of gratitude and fulfillment. It may be important to distinguish between these situations in order to identify more effective ways to support women in their decision-making, rather than stifling them.

My Body is Not My Own

Decision-making was not the only challenging arena for participants related to autonomy and external displays of external power dynamics. All participants discussed ways expectations for their appearance and body size were communicated within their family of origin. Further, participants also detailed feeling as if they did not have ownership over their own bodies, both in their family of origin and with intimate partners. An interesting layer that emerged in this subtheme was the idea of women as protectors, previously discussed. Although there is a connection between these subthemes, the concept of women acting as protectors is simply a layer of bodily autonomy, not the whole picture. This subtheme encompasses the external way women's bodies are treated, highlighting how power dynamics can manifest related to ownership of one's body. Although participants discussed ways in which their bodies and appearances were

policed by others with awareness, the layer of power inherent in this treatment of their bodies required deeper explanation of context. Therefore, *My body is not my own* was classified as a suggestive gem.

An interesting aspect that emerged related to communication about expectations for appearance was that mothers often served as the perpetrators of gender microaggressions related to body and appearance against their young daughters. For example, P03 discussed the subtle ways her mother monitored and commented on her body:

> So, yeah, like, when I think about microaggressions and my mother and growing up. Um, kind of that idea of always like the idea that she thought something was a compliment that was, really not, like - you have the most beautiful, muscular calves. You're so lucky that your legs are so cut. Then imagine how much better they would look if you would just lose 10 pounds.

P03 expressed her interpretation of the intent of her mother's "compliment" about her body, which she internalized as striving for a smaller body for many years. P03 also grew up in the dance community and received messages about the value of a smaller body at home and in her dance studio, a place she identified as a second home. The pervasive nature of this particular type of microaggression for P03 may have served to compound messages she received from her mother.

Although expectations for body and appearance were sometimes expressed directly, participants also discussed how expectations were communicated through comparisons with others. This comparison may occur when one body size is held as preferential to another. Ann

Johnson highlighted how her body was policed within her family of origin when she was compared to her step-sisters:

> …and so when I was young, like a teenager, um, you know, it would be things about my weight. It would be, uh, you know what men like. As opposed to what's healthy, right. Um, and that's, you know, I have two step-sisters who are tall and thin and I never was either of those. And so, in my family, there's that preference, you know, it was just clear, there's a preference and that's the better thing to be…it was really subtle right?

Although Ann Johnson struggled to identify how the "preference" for a "tall and thin" body was communicated in her family, the belief that she was not either of those left a lasting impression. In sharing this particular experience, Ann Johnson also provided additional support for the subtle ways in which gender microaggressions can be communicated.

In addition to having body size policed, participants also spoke to the way their clothing and presentation were regulated. Sky spoke specifically to her mother's reaction to her desire to wear jackets:

> Some of them were like, like men's, but very small and some of them more women's, and I was, I loved it and my mother was not happy. Um, and my father was a bit shocked. He didn't understand. And I later wonder if, if she, like, had inklings of like me wondering, you know about my sexuality, et cetera and she just, she thought she would be protecting me and, like, you really, you really shouldn't have these jackets.

Finally, participants spoke of ways they felt their bodies were disrespected and violated by others, providing an explicit illustration of how others utilize power in a malicious and purposeful way. Ann Johnson provided an example of the causal way her body was not respected

by a former boyfriend when she shared, "…he was, he had no, um, no sense of propri-, I don't know, he just would if he felt like grabbing at my crotch or something like that, he did it". MLM echoed this sense of having her body disrespected and feeling as if her body did not belong to her when she simply stated, "My my first, sexual experience was a date rape." Despite some differences in these experiences, the impact of having others use their bodies without permission can influence perceptions of self throughout life.

Women can struggle with unequal power dynamics in many aspects of life, one of which is body and appearance. The pressure to maintain a certain appearance can be a hindrance for women throughout life in that they are unable to express their true selves without the threat of judgment. A layer of bodily autonomy and appearance emerged related to participants' awareness of how others were impacted by their presentation in the world. Ideas related to being protected from ridicule when policed by mothers, to not embarrassing themselves and loved ones with their appearance, were apparent in some stories about expectations for appearance. In fact, this awareness can also speak to women as protectors, using insight into how others may be impacted by their body and appearance to adjust themselves in an effort to be more pleasing and compliant to expectations. This adjustment may be motivated by a desire not to reflect poorly on those closest to them. The layered and complicated ways that women can experience and internalize gender microaggressions and imbalanced power dynamics is evident.

Money Equates to Power and Freedom

All participants discussed perceptions of money and power being closely intertwined. In addition, participants articulated the role of money in establishing freedom. Because all participants articulated this subtheme with awareness and clarity, it was classified as a shining

gem. Ann Johnson shared how differences in income between herself and her husband are “a source of contention” between them:

> So, it's fraught, let me just say that. He makes way more money. Obviously. He makes probably more than three times more than I make. And. In his view, he funds our whole life, even though I do bring in a chunk of money. Um, and instead of viewing it as a we thing, you know, at times he does, uh, but it's been it's been a source of contention. Like, uh, he feels like he's carrying the weight and it's like, he hasn't had to do anything existential for that, like, he's had his job.

Ann Johnson not only discussed that her husband “obviously” makes more money, but also shared her perception of her husband’s sense of entitlement at “carrying the weight” of being the primary breadwinner in their home. Relatedly, Gabbi shared that men can be threatened by a woman who is able to earn a viable income:

> That's a threat, right? That's a threat to their…manhood of having this woman…who *could* leave, who *could* earn enough money, who is smart enough who, excuse me, could get the confidence enough to get a job. And then if if this woman can get the job, then she can leave. And so she has this power.

Gabbi concretely connected money with power when discussing how opportunities for women to be seen and make decisions become available when women have access to money.

During the semi-structured interviews, all participants were asked to identify changes they feel would most benefit women at a personal and a societal level. Sky discussed how financial freedom can positively influence women:

> Um, there's a, you know, a lot of talk about the equal pay, et cetera. Um. It's a, it's a big issue. I think for freedom, you know, giving financial freedom…to make sure that they can have that sound peace of mind.

Sky articulated the ways that money and power connect with one another, highlighting how women can "have that sound peace of mind" when they have access to financial stability.

Within this subtheme, participants' words conveyed a sense of grappling with a path to increased freedom, not just individually, but for all women. Women struggle to balance traditional roles and expectations, which can make seeking financial security and independence even more challenging. However, in order to increase a sense of autonomy and independence, women must also seek a way to have stable and sufficient income.

Theme 5: Finding Pathways to Meaningful Change

This final theme was characterized by participants' search for ways to find fulfillment outside of traditional expectations, as well as exact change for the future. All participants shared insights about educating and empowering younger generations, particularly young girls, in order to facilitate social change. Participants also highlighted the importance of being able to both speak out for themselves and others, while creating space for diverse voices. Subthemes identified included: *a) Empowering future generations; b) Speaking out collectively; and c) Honoring diversity to promote social change.*

Empowering Future Generations

Four participants spoke to empowering younger generations as a pathway to social change. This subtheme was viewed as a hidden gem as it was most directly discussed by only one participant; however, was present in covert ways for other participants when discussing ideas

for creating social change. Participants shared perceptions about changes that would most benefit women, such as pay equity and separating beauty from worth. Inherent within these ideas was a sense that future generations can benefit from change, especially when they are empowered to create that change. Gabbi articulated this sentiment specifically related to young girls when she discussed increased representation of girls in different types of roles:

> …but I think that's the number one thing, it's like to help change that messaging when girls are younger, um, so that they can start to see, um, you know, that they, they can be empowered to do all these other things, too.

According to P03, choice can be an important layer in empowering future generations to create change: "So, I think, uh, when you say, like, what things need to change, I think maybe an easy answer is choice". Although not directly discussed in this quotation, P03 gave a sense that women and men can empower future generations to make choices outside of stereotypical societal mandates.

Present within this subtheme was the simultaneous illustration of hope for the future, while also signaling resignation about change in the current generation. While Gabbi's quotation focused on how women can help young girls learn about different roles, she did not speak to improving the current status of women. Women may feel resigned to the current societal structure while also looking for ways to create equity for future generations. Overall, young women would benefit from being empowered through representation and increased choice, in order to create and sustain meaningful change.

Speaking Out Collectively

This subtheme is also related to seeking change for current and future generations. All participants discussed the strength of multiple voices speaking out for one another and acknowledged the power in raising our voices together. In addition, participants provided insight into how they became empowered to share their own experiences when feeling uplifted by the voices of others. Participants spoke to this subtheme with awareness, leading to classification as a shining gem. MLM captured the essence of this subtheme:

> You know, so, when we think about the things now where women need to have strong and loud voices. And speak up about things that are happening to other women...We've got to have a voice, so, you know, and. And I think our voice will continue to get louder as we start to use it.

Liz offered an alternative perspective on the power of speaking out collectively, when she shared the importance of also listening to others:

> I think we need to listen to. We need to listen a little bit more. What I mean, by that is, if we're too busy, constantly shouting. And, and like asking for stuff and demanding change. We also need to listen to what's happening. In order for the change to happen. Because I know that if I'm shouting all the time, I cannot hear even people who are agreeing with me.

Liz's tone in this quotation and at other points in her interviews can be interpreted as indicative of her personal perceptions of being too loud or taking up too much space, however, the sentiment that we must listen to all voices in order to create change is aligned with this subtheme.

Sky offered a moderate perspective on speaking out and listening to others when she highlighted the importance of conversation in creating change:

> People – *me* – I feel more open to talking about these things and I think that conversation needs to be had to make sure that more individuals feel comfortable to talk about their roles and their views on gender.

Similar to Liz, Sky offered a personal perspective on changes she would like to make in herself, before speaking to changes for all women. Taken collectively, participants shared their perception that collaboration can serve to empower more voices to share their experiences, while also listening to others.

Speaking out together can be a pathway to empowerment and change for many women; however, women must listen to other voices in order to create change that could be deemed as far-reaching. Women may be most empowered to use their voices when many women work together for a common goal. Open conversation provides a way to both actively hear and share thoughts about creating change, allowing space for meaningful collaboration.

Honoring Diversity to Promote Social Change

Finally, all participants highlighted the importance of listening to diverse voices when seeking change. Although all participants identified as White women, all expressed an awareness of their privilege as white, heterosexual, cisgender women and a commitment to uplifting the voices of women who hold additional marginalized identities. Thus, this subtheme was categorized as a shining gem. Participants acknowledged that their experiences are not the only experiences that matter and also expressed insight related to seeking change that can be beneficial for as many women as possible.

Ann Johnson clearly articulated the importance of being "teachable" and open to the experiences of others:

> Yeah. And white people and white women need to be teachable. I mean, if we would listen, I think, really a theme in my teaching lately has been deep listening is, you know, really hear what people are saying, you know, about any topic before you make a decision…so I think, you know, I think women have to connect and understand and educate and each other. Mm, hmm. And then men, uh, if they really want. What's equal they have to be willing to, you know, set aside. What they think they know about how things are and how things should be.

Honoring diversity can be a pathway to meaningful change. There can be many layers to identity that impact women in various ways with gender not being the most salient at all times. However, there can be challenges regarding the discussion of intersectionality, as collaboration and communication with diverse (e.g., race, culture, religion, age, ability status, sexual orientation) women who have many different life experiences is more important than simply stating an awareness of intersectionality and diversity. By inviting all voices, change can be more sustainable for all women and the value of seeking change for diverse groups can be honored.

Interpretive Summary

Based on interviews with six participants, themes and subthemes related to the experiences of women with gender microaggressions in their family of origin and intimate relationships were identified. Themes and subthemes were presented in both descriptive and interpretive ways, consistent with IPA. The aforementioned themes and subthemes captured the

roles and expectations women are demanded to embody, the impact of power dynamics in shaping internal and external reactions, and hope for creating social change. Many perspectives related to the experiences of these participants and implications for women as a larger population were explored. In general, the ways in which particular roles and expectations impact women was an important point for interpretive analysis. Relatedly, the salience of gender microaggressions in participants' lives was also discussed. Finally, interpretations were made regarding courses for meaningful change, as discussed by participants.

Participants discussed how expectations shaped their decision-making and satisfaction. For many participants, there was a feeling of being burdened with managing expectations to fulfill conflicting roles and expectations. The idea of being "aswirl" in gender microaggressions created a sense of not being able to escape these expectations. In addition, women struggled with a sense of not feeling good enough, which may impact perception of self and relationship satisfaction. This sense of not being enough may be a direct consequence of imbalanced power dynamics between men and women. Participants also attempted to make sense of their own value in traditional and nontraditional roles, as well as their value in relation to others. Finally, participants provided insights regarding change for themselves and future generations, creating a sense of hope that change is possible, while acknowledging that there is still much work to be done.

Chapter 4 Summary

Participants in this study articulated their experiences with gender microaggressions within their family of origin and in their intimate adult relationship. The accounts of participants shed light on the nuanced way that these expectations are internalized and manifested in their

lived experiences. Participants spoke to the negative ways they have been impacted by gender microaggressions, how generational messages about gender roles have impacted their relationships, and also provided hope for change in future generations.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In the previous chapter, I presented the findings of my dissertation study. In this chapter, I will situate my findings within the existing literature, as well as in relation to Postmodern Feminist Theory (see Baber, 2009; Frost & Elichaoff, 2014; Marecek, 2016; Tong, 2009), the theoretical framework for this study. I will also discuss the strengths and limitations of this study. I will offer implications for cisgender women, licensed professional counselors, and counselor educators. Finally, I will propose directions for future research.

Discussion of Findings

Based on the experiences shared by participants, three overarching themes were identified: 1) *Rigid Roles and Expectations for Women*; 2) *Impact of Power Dynamics*; and 3) *Identifying Pathways to Lasting Change*. *Rigid Roles and Expectations for Women* describes the myriad expectations women face in their family of origin and in their intimate adult relationships. In addition, this overarching theme captures the challenges in subverting these roles and expectations. *Impact of Power Dynamics* explores the way that women manage internal and external power issues, including how women make sense of their perception of power differentials between themselves and others. Finally, *Identifying Pathways to Lasting Change* focuses on the way women can use their experiences with gender microaggressions to feel empowered to create change collectively and for future generations. Connections will also be made between the theoretical framework of this study, Postmodern Feminist Theory, and the overarching themes.

Rigid Roles and Expectations for Women

Participants in this study overwhelmingly discussed the expectations they are faced with across the lifespan, both in their family of origin and intimate adult relationships. Participants described the roles they have been taught to fill (i.e., household managers, caregivers, wives, mothers), the way they have come to understand these roles through generational transmission, and the belief of never being enough, as the expectations for women are often in competition with one another. Participants' experiences related to rigid roles and expectations are classified in two domains: 1) *Within the Family of Origin*, and 2) *Within Intimate Adult Relationships*.

Within the Family of Origin

All participants discussed the rigid roles observed and enacted by themselves within their family of origin. Participants also discussed how expectations about being a woman were communicated to them by parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and siblings.

Participants shared situations in which they had been placed into traditional roles from a young age. Some participants highlighted experiences of setting up for family parties or cleaning up when a gathering was complete. Other participants discussed times they had to step into their mother's role when she was not available for tasks such as cooking and cleaning, beginning at a young age. This study serves to reinforce previous findings related to the impact of modeling on the development of gender roles in childhood (Cunningham, 2001; Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016; Rittenour et al., 2014) and adolescence (Gartner & Sterzing, 2018). The current study extends the aforementioned previous research by simultaneously exploring observations about gender roles, enacted roles, and gendered expectations in childhood and adulthood, thereby allowing tentative connections to be made between experiences in the family of origin and in intimate adult relationships. Overall, participants were acutely aware of expectations to act as

caregivers for others while growing up, as well as assumptions that they would maintain caregiving roles as wives and mothers, into adulthood.

All participants spoke about roles they observed their mothers and other important women in their life engaged in at various times and in different settings. Existing research points to how girls can begin to assign gendered meaning to the roles and dynamics they observe in their family (Brown & Bigler, 2005; Cunningham, 2001; Endendijk et al., 2018; Fulcher et al., 2015; McHale et al., 2003). In addition, many participants focused on the role of their mother in shaping their expectations about being a woman, a finding that coincides with the existing literature. Interestingly, participants provided additional insight into how their fathers shaped gender role expectations directly and indirectly. One way this occurred was through comments about what is appropriate for girls. These expectations were sometimes in conflict, as fathers upheld traditional expectations for maintaining the home and family, but also encouraged daughters to challenge expectations for appearance on some occasions. Participants discussed the way their mothers encouraged traditional roles, in addition to maintaining expectations for appearance. Additionally, there is some overlap with existing research that identified the importance of fathers' beliefs and expectations in shaping their children's gender role expectations (Cichy et al., 2007). However, this study revealed some differences related to how fathers may propagate conflicting expectations for their daughters, leading to lasting effects on how participants understand their roles as women. This finding, in particular, contributes an additional layer to previous understandings of how parents can influence gender roles and expectations in a consistent manner, such as when they communicate solely traditional or solely subversive ideology.

In addition to the ways that parents can impact their children's gender roles and expectations throughout the lifespan, previous literature has highlighted how sibling dynamics can directly impact understanding about gender role expectations (McHale et al., 2003). Participants in the current study discussed learning about gender roles and expectations through observations of how adults in their life engaged with siblings of both same and different sex. This ranged from the way brothers were spoken to when engaging in feminine behaviors (e.g., being called a "sissy" for crying), to observing older sisters struggling to assert their autonomy and consequences they faced when they did not meet traditional expectations, to noting differences between the expectations for boys and girls in their home. As such, the findings of this study provide additional context about how observations of siblings indirectly shape gender roles and expectations, beginning in the family of origin and into adulthood.

In the context of postmodern feminist theory, the findings of the current study provide insight into the way that women are diminished, undervalued, and expected to only behave in a specific way through life. Indeed, the idea that family of origin is the first sight of oppression and can also be a source of strength (Allen, 2016; Baber, 2009) has been strengthened by the words of participants in the current study. Women can internalize and continue to enact rigid gender roles and expectations, as well as conflicting messages about expectations, throughout their lifespan.

Within Intimate Adult Relationships

Roles and expectations learned within the family of origin were perpetuated within participants' intimate adult relationships, echoing previous literature that highlighted the recapitulation of family of origin roles within future relationships (Conger et al., 2001).

Similarly, participants reported set roles within their current intimate relationship, often manifesting as a traditional division of labor, providing concrete examples of how roles within the family of origin can emerge in future intimate relationships. Participants explicitly connected the way they had come to understand roles and expectations about being a woman while growing up with the roles they enacted in their intimate relationships.

Women continued to engage in caregiving, maintaining the foundation that had been laid through observation and socialization from a young age. One particular role participants highlighted was acting as household managers with their partner, explicitly emphasizing the toll of mental labor related to gender microaggressions and socialization in a way that has not been explored in prior research. Participants were silently tasked with responsibilities such as managing schedules, keeping track of household needs, and making appointments. Along with these silent expectations, women discussed resultant feelings of being overwhelmed and feelings invisible.

The sense of never being enough lingered from childhood and carried into intimate adult relationships. Participants detailed the ways they sought to overcome this feeling, some reporting resignation that they never will meet all expectations, some sharing a fierce need to subvert feelings of inferiority, and others acknowledging the way that never feeling good enough impacted career decisions. Findings regarding never being enough are aligned with the existing literature on the impact of gender microaggressions on self-esteem (Biggs et al., 2018; Blithe & Elliott, 2022; Calogero & Jost, 2011; Gomez et al., 2011; Kaskan and Ho, 2016; Moradi & Funderburk, 2006; Moradi & Subich, 2002), with some participants explicitly identifying

decreased self-esteem as a consequence of pervasive gender microaggressions. One way that decreased self-esteem manifested for participants was feeling as if they were never enough.

Through the lens of postmodern feminist theory, findings regarding rigid roles and expectations for women can be viewed as perpetuating a patriarchal power dynamic (Baber, 2009; Frost & Elichaoff, 2014; Marecek, 2016). Women are expected to manage many tasks which go unnoticed by their partner, but which are essential for daily comfort. Women are expected to act with grace and service, while staying quiet and small. Patriarchal values dictate that women do not speak up and do not ask questions.

Impact of Power Dynamics

Power dynamics can influence the way women engage with themselves and others. Again, these power dynamics can be a direct reflection of our patriarchal society. Participants provided insight into how they were impacted by power dynamics both internally, as with internalized misogyny, and externally, related to a sense of decreased autonomy. The impact of power dynamics is described in terms of: 1) *Internal Power Struggles*, and 2) *External Displays of Power*.

Internal Power Struggles

Internal power struggles were most evident in participants' descriptions of prioritizing others. Within this domain, women placed the needs of important people in their lives above their own. In addition, participants described situations in which they had made themselves smaller in order to avoid conflict, keeping their needs and opinions to themselves. Another way internal power struggles manifested for participants was through justification of the gender microaggressions they experienced within their family of origin and with their intimate partner.

Underlying the internal power struggles described by participants was a sense of internalized misogyny.

Participants shared their own attempts to manage internal power struggles, as well as the consequences, real or perceived, of attempting to engage in opposite behaviors. For example, some participants cited the importance of staying silent in preserving relationships. Feelings of helplessness may be a consequence of gender microaggressions (Biggs et al., 2018; Chou et al., 2012; Cundiff et al., 2014; Gomez et al., 2011; Kaskan & Ho, 2016; Nadal et al., 2015; Nielsen, 2002; Owen at al., 2010; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008) that is connected to remaining silent (Puckett et al.; 2016). This thinking can also be extended to justification of gender microaggressions in that women may prioritize their relationships with others above their own comfort and well-being. Participants discussed times they had observed women in their lives prioritizing others, as well as situations when they prioritized the men in their life, both in their family of origin and with their intimate partner. These internal power struggles can be indicative of the socialized perception that men are superior to women and occur across the lifespan.

The negative impact of internalized misogyny on women discussed by participants in this study is also reflective of previous findings that internalized misogyny can moderate experiences of sexism and gender microaggressions with psychological distress (Calogero & Jost, 2011; Szymanski et al., 2009). Collectively, these findings highlight the differential impact of sexism on men and women, with women impacted disproportionally by sexism and gender microaggressions, possibly related to a decreased sense of power and autonomy.

Finally, previous studies highlighted occurrences of women policing one another and monitoring themselves (Derthick, 2015; Gartner & Sterzing, 2018; Piran, 2016). Findings from

the current study serve to extend the aforementioned literature by emphasizing how internalized misogyny may be one factor that contributes to policing and monitoring behaviors that serve to maintain patriarchal power differentials. Despite recognition that they would "never win", participants detailed their attempts to set themselves apart from other women, such as calling attention to unfavorably perceived traits in other women (e.g., "nagging", "controlling") and deliberately situating themselves at the opposite end of the behavioral spectrum (e.g., "I'm not a nag", "I'm not like those controlling wives"). Participants also discussed the ways they have been policed by important women in their life, reflective of internalized misogyny that may be a result of pervasive exposure to gender microaggressions.

External Displays of Power

When exploring power dynamics related to gender microaggressions in the family of origin and with intimate partners, participants shared examples of times they did not feel they had ownership over their decisions or their bodies. Participants also discussed the role of money in creating power and freedom. While external power dynamics were never explicitly cited by participants, their experiences of feeling "forced" and "controlled" in many situations highlight the way other people can view women as inferior, thus not honoring the autonomy of women. In addition, postmodern feminist theorists highlighted the importance of language in making sense of experiences (Baber, 2009; Frost & Elichaoff, 2014; Marecek, 2016; Tong, 2009), further supporting how participants' descriptions could be indicative of external power concerns.

Lack of autonomy emerged as a significant consideration for participants, who shared the roles of others in shaping important life decisions. For example, participants spoke about decisions for college and career as times when they had felt "pushed" to meet certain

expectations. It is important to note that not all participants expressed negative feelings about how others shaped their decision making.

Participants also discussed lack of autonomy over their bodies, detailing times their bodies had been used without their permission, commented upon, and disrespected. Sexual objectification is reflective of one way gender microaggressions can be expressed (Nadal et al., 2015; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2010; Sue et al., 2007). Lack of autonomy over their own bodies can contribute to negative self-concept, identity threat, and cognitive disruptions (Kim & Meister, 2022), as well self-objectification (Hill and Fischer, 2008). Overall, the findings from previous studies and the current study complement one another in terms of how women might experience gender microaggressions at different points in their life, particularly related to how their bodies are allowed to exist in the world, and the way women make meaning of these occurrences.

Finally, participants in this study explored pathways to power, focusing on access to money. This particular finding has not previously been reflected in the literature related to gender microaggressions, however, it adds an important layer of understanding related to how women may conceptualize their own ability to have power in their family and the world at large. According to participants, access to money served as a vehicle to increased autonomy. By allowing women to have more choice, participants expressed the belief that women would also have increased power in different domains.

Identifying Pathways to Lasting Change

Finally, this study yielded findings that led to tentative exploration of resilience for women. Participants in this study highlighted hope for social change in future generations, as

well as ways to create this change. Participants shared perspectives on empowering future generations to challenge traditional roles that do not serve them, speak out collectively to strengthen their voices, and listen to the needs of diverse (e.g., racially, culturally, socioeconomically) groups of women.

Participants discussed the importance of empowering future generations in order to create meaningful social change. This empowerment may come in the form of changing traditional gender narratives in stories young children hear, exposing children to different types of toys, or encouraging engagement in nontraditional roles. These suggestions are reflective of previous studies that highlighted how young children are primarily exposed to stereotypical toys, stories, and roles in their family of origin (Blakemore and Hill, 2008; Morawska, 2020; van der Pol et al., 2015). While participants expressed hope for change through empowerment of future generations, these suggestions may also be related to a sense of resignation for older generations.

Participants expressed more hope and resilience for older generations when they shared how speaking out collectively can strengthen our voices. Related to postmodern feminist conceptualizations of power (Tong, 2009), this finding reflects how women may derive power from confronting social issues and injustices as a unit, rather than individually. Speaking out collectively can serve as a way to deconstruct patriarchal power hierarchies and advance our society.

Finally, participants acknowledged the importance of listening to diverse voices and experiences. Diverse women may identify with several oppressed identities and gender may not be the most salient oppressed identity for all women (Barrett et al., 2005), so participants' assertions to attend to diversity is reflective of previous literature. Participants' understanding of

honoring diversity and intersectionality is also aligned with postmodern feminist theorists aims to center the voices of women who have historically been oppressed (Baber, 2009; Frost & Elichaoff, 2014; Marecek, 2016). Taken as a whole, women may be aware of power differentials and seek ways to create meaningful change for themselves and future generations. Social change can occur through commitment to one another and purposeful focus deconstructing systems that reinforce unbalanced power dynamics.

Study Strengths

There are several notable strengths of this study. Primarily, this is the first known study to explore how cisgender women experience and make meaning of gender microaggressions in their family of origin and in their intimate adult relationships, rather than focusing on only one of these family systems. While previous studies have given voice to the experiences of women in these family systems, there has been a lack of intentionality in potential differences between the experiences of cis- and transgender women. For example, many previous studies have explored the experiences of "women" when solely focusing on the experiences of cisgender women (e.g., Basford et al., 2014; Kim & Meister, 2022). In this study, I have directly targeted the experiences of cisgender women in an effort to avoid conflating the experiences of cis- and transgender women.

Another strength of this study is related to the women who agreed to participate. Although not intentional, all participants were women with a high level of education (i.e., Master's or Doctoral degree). While some studies have intentionally explored the experiences of women in academia with gender microaggressions (Biggs et al., 2018; Blithe & Elliott, 2020; Kim & Meister, 2022; Vacaro, 2010), many have engaged participants who do not hold terminal

degrees (e.g., Carlson & Knoester, 2011; Groeneveld et al., 2021; Kaskan & Ho, 2016; Sanchez Guerrero & Schroeber, 2020). There are no known studies related to gender microaggressions in family of origin and intimate adult relationships with a similarly educated sample. The participants' level of education served to strengthen this study as participants were able to articulately and insightfully discuss their experiences, thereby presenting rich awareness of their own gendered experiences in the family of origin, in their intimate relationships, and beyond. In addition, participants' layered perceptions also allowed for tenuous interpretations about resilience.

Finally, another strength of this study included the diversity in geographic location and experiences with gender in different places (e.g., American woman in Dubai, married to British man; French-Canadian woman in South Korea, married to American man). As such, some participants were able to discuss their experiences living in cultures outside of their culture of origin. In addition, participants engaged in cross-cultural relationships were able to provide additional layers of insight regarding navigating gender roles when their expectations may differ from their partner's expectations.

Study Limitations

Despite careful preparation and execution of a study, limitations are not wholly unavoidable. Firstly, a large limitation in this study was lack of diversity in terms of race and sexual orientations. All participants identified as white, heterosexual women. Refer to Appendix E for additional information about the demographics and privilege of participants. Although participants reported varying degrees of ability status, the intersection of gender with race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status was not able to be explored. This

limitation is particularly poignant in light of the use of postmodern feminist theory, as honoring diversity is a central tenet of this theory (Tong, 2009; Worell & Remer, 2003). However, although participants were not diverse from one another, they were able to acknowledge their privilege, thereby providing a different avenue to honor diversity. In addition, postmodern feminist theory calls for a focus on diversity of perspectives (Tong, 2009), so while participants were not diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and other demographic factors, they were able to share their unique perspectives on gender microaggressions in their family of origin and with their partner.

A second limitation in this study was related to the methodology. IPA calls for in-depth and iterative analysis of transcripts, while also urging researchers to analyze all participants separately before moving forward with analysis of the sample (Smith et al., 2012). As such, there is a risk that experiences of participants analyzed earlier in the process may have influenced analysis of interviews analyzed at a later time. In order to manage the potential impact of biases on data analysis and interpretation, I utilized journaling, critical friends, and member-checking strategies to limit bias in my analysis. These limitations can also be used as a catalyst to strengthen future research.

Implications

Based on the findings of this study, several implications for various groups are discussed. Implications for cisgender women, licensed professional counselors (LPCs), and counselor educators are presented.

Cisgender Women

All women who participated in this study identified as cisgender. As such, implications for this specific group of women are discussed. It is important to note that future research is imperative in order to understand where the experiences of cis-and transgender women with gender microaggressions may converge and diverge.

Based on the findings of this study, women may find pathways to empowerment. This might include gaining confidence to engage in open conversations within family and with significant others in their lives. As participants reflected, open conversation about experiences with gender microaggressions and the expectations placed on women, beginning with their own family units and extending to friends, acquaintances, and the larger community, can act as a spark for social change. These conversations may also lead to decisions to engage in advocacy work at the governmental level, as women navigate a post-Roe v. Wade society. Another positive implication may be an increased understanding that many of the roles and expectations women manage in daily life are more universal than they had realized. Women may learn that they are not alone and can collectively work together to enlighten future generations.

Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs)

Licensed professional counselors (LPCs) can use this research to enhance their practice with cisgender women and to increase their understanding of gender microaggressions across the lifespan. Using the themes identified in this study regarding how cisgender women experience gender microaggressions in the family of origin and in intimate relationships, LPCs can approach these experiences through the lens of pervasive expectations communicated through all stages of life, creating a more supportive and validating environment for clients. For example, LPCs can assist clients to intentionally explore family dynamics, relationship roles, and the connection of

their experiences to mental health symptoms (e.g., anxiety, depression). When working with families and couples, counselors can actively attend to experiences that may be considered gender microaggressions, in an effort to explore ways clients can challenge their own perpetuation of gender microaggressions at the micro level. Prompts might include: 1) "Who made the rules and decisions when you were a kid (and who makes the rules and decisions now that you're an adult)?; 2) "How did you know who was/is in charge?"; and 3) "How did/does it feel when other people exert power over you?".

LPCs can also utilize the information garnered from this study to understand the way ongoing experiences with pervasive gender microaggressions can shape women's perceptions of themselves. As such, LPCs may be in a better position to address issues related to self-esteem, depression, and anxiety by helping client's gain awareness into the way past and current experiences shape the way women present themselves in the world, as well as the implicit and explicit expectations they place on themselves and others. In the counseling space, this may look like counselors explicitly asking questions about family dynamics and providing clients with the opportunity to explore how they felt when experiencing these dynamics, as well as how their current relationship dynamics may be similar to or different from their earlier experiences. In addition, counselors may move away from pathologizing clients' symptoms in order to highlight how experiences with gender microaggressions can contribute to presenting concerns. This might look like adjusting case conceptualizations and treatment goals to focus on how experiences with gender microaggressions can impact anxiety, depression, or issues related to self-esteem.

Finally, LPCs can help clients effectively explore the way power has manifested in their lives and experiences, including how clients have made meaning of power dynamics. For

example, counselors may ask clients to describe the hierarchy in their home and relationship, asking questions about decision-making, emotional labor, and satisfaction. It is important to note that this may have implications for clients of any gender, as all people are subjected to the patriarchal system we live in and may experience various effects of this system.

Counselor Educators

Counselor educators can also use this study to inform teaching and research. Specifically, counselor educators can engage counseling students in meaningful discussion about how female clients may present with identity conflicts related to expectations. These discussions may be most appropriate in counseling skills and theories courses, as well as elective courses related to counseling children and families. Using the themes identified in this study, counselor educators can help counseling students to normalize discussions about gender in the counseling space, with clients of all ages, in developmentally appropriate ways. Counselor educators can assist students in developing knowledge about the pervasive nature of gender microaggressions across the lifespan, the relationship between family of origin experiences with gender microaggressions and roles later in life, as well as how experiences with gender microaggressions can influence mental health.

With regard to research, counselor educators may also become more aware of the increased importance of understanding power dynamics in family settings. This might include development of a model for how unequal power dynamics are maintained through gender microaggressions and patriarchal views, which can be extended to the family of origin and to intimate adult relationships. This potential model may best enhance students' learning in

counseling theories courses, particularly when discussing feminist theories, in order to help students meaningfully integrate often underutilized theories into clinical practice.

Future Research

Future studies would be well-served by an intentional focus on how gender intersects with other identities. As noted, one of the main limitations of this study was a lack of diversity among participants. As such, there remains a dearth of knowledge related to how various groups of women may make meaning of gender microaggressions experienced in their family of origin and intimate adult relationships. In order to better align with postmodern feminist theory utilized as the framework for this study, diversity should be actively centered in future studies. This might include focusing on the experiences of transgender women; women who are immigrants or are the first generation in their family to grow up in the US; women who are not in heterosexual or monogamous relationships; women and families who follow various religions; and women who have children in their home.

Future studies can further explore resilience and protective factors for women who do not recapitulate family of origin dynamics in their intimate relationships. Although the current study revealed tentative conclusions related to resilience, the factors that impact the development of resilience were not apparent within this study. Understanding how to cultivate resilience among women who are subjected to gender microaggressions early in life may have implications for mental health outcomes and relationship satisfaction later in life.

Finally, future research can enhance the findings of the current study by utilizing a larger scale quantitative approach. As the current study was qualitative in nature, correlations between gender microaggressions experienced in the family of origin and intimate adult relationships

could not be made. In addition, the methodology of this study engages a small sample, thereby providing the researcher with the ability to deeply explore the experiences of a particular group. By utilizing a methodology that includes a larger sample, findings may lend themselves to increased generalizability.

Chapter 5 Summary

In this chapter, I have reflected on the findings of the current study, highlighting themes related to rigid roles and expectations for women, the impact of power dynamics, and pathways to social change. These findings have been situated within the existing literature on gender microaggressions, socialization, and family relationships. In addition, findings were considered related to postmodern feminist theory.

In addition to exploration of the current findings, I also reflected on the strengths and limitations of the current study, including attempts to rectify limitations. Implications were offered for women, licensed professional counselors, and counselor educators, based on the overarching themes identified in this study. Finally, future directions for research were proposed, with a focus on improving upon limitations of this study and garnering additional insight into the experiences of diverse women.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Are you a cisgender woman who has received messages about how women should think, feel, or behave?

Were you born between 1965-1980?

Have you lived with your partner for more than one year?

Research Participants Wanted!

- I am looking at how women experience subtle messages about what it means to be a woman in their family of origin and intimate adult relationships.
- This study will take approximately 2 hours, over two interviews conducted online (about 60-90 minutes for the first; about 30 minutes for the second).
- You will be asked questions about your experiences as a woman, both while growing up and in your romantic relationship.

Stephanie DiZenzo-Priestley, a Doctoral Candidate in the Counseling Department, is conducting this dissertation study.

If you are interested in participating or have questions, please **contact Stephanie at dizenzopris1@mail.montclair.edu**

This study has been approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board,

MSU IRB # FY-22-23-2881

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Appendix B: Facebook Post

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS WANTED!!!

Are you a cisgender woman who has received messages about how women should think, feel, or behave?

Were you born between 1965-1980?

Have you lived with your partner for more than one year?

*This study is not sponsored by or affiliated with Pantsuit Nation x Supermajority.

My name is Stephanie DiZenzo-Priestley, a doctoral candidate in the Counseling Program at Montclair State University. I would like to invite you to participate in my dissertation research study to explore *gender microaggressions*. I am looking for cisgender women who are willing to discuss gender microaggressions they have experienced, both growing up in their family and with their romantic partner.

Participants in this study will be asked to complete two individual virtual interviews, the first lasting 60 to 90 minutes and the second lasting approximately 30-45 minutes.

If you were born between 1965-1980 and identify as a cisgender woman, you may be eligible to participate. In addition, you must have been living with your current partner for a minimum of one year and must not have children in your home. Please see the consent to participate form in the comments for more details.

If you have questions or are interested in participating in this study, please contact me, Stephanie, at dizenzopris1@montclair.edu.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. This study has been approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board (IRB # FY-22-23-2881).

Stephanie DiZenzo-Priestley, MA, LPC, Doctoral Candidate

Appendix C: Gender Microaggressions Telephone Script

Hi, I'm Stephanie DiZenzo-Priestley. I appreciate you agreeing to speak with me so I can tell you about my research study. Before we get going, I wanted to tell you a bit about myself. I am a mom, wife, sister, daughter, and aunt. I love reading, working out, and watching basically anything on Netflix. I am a doctoral candidate in the Counseling Program at Montclair State University. Feel free to tell me a little bit about yourself.

In this study, I want to hear about your experiences as a woman, particularly any messages you received about your role as a woman and how these messages have impacted you. For example, can you think of a time you felt excluded or dismissed because you are a woman? Has anyone made assumptions about you based on gender stereotypes? When I think of experiences with gender microaggressions in my own family, I think about differences in rules for myself and my younger brothers. In the initial post you might have noticed that I referred to these experiences as gender microaggressions. Is this a term you have heard before?

Gender microaggressions are often described on a range from obvious to subtle. Obvious gender microaggressions are intentional discrimination, for example, being called names based on gender. There are also gender microaggressions that involve demeaning messages that can be stereotypical, rude, or insensitive. For example, someone making a sexist joke or commenting on your appearance when that is irrelevant. Less obvious gender microaggressions can often come in the forms of invalidation or exclusion. For instance, when a man talks over a woman in a meeting or "mansplains".

My study will focus on your experiences with gender microaggressions in your family and with your partner. I'm also interested in hearing how different parts of your identity, such as race, culture, or socioeconomic status, may have influenced these messages about being a woman. Is there anything further I can tell you about the study and its purpose? Are you still interested in learning more?

If potential participant is no longer interested:

Thank you so much for taking the time to learn more about my study. I really appreciate it and I hope you have an excellent rest of your day.

If potential participant expresses continued interest:

Let's talk about research - I do not anticipate that there will be any risks to you in completing this study however as part of our conversations, although we may discuss things that bring up painful memories or that may feel uncomfortable. At any time, if you want to end the interview or your participation in this study, you can do so freely and without consequence. Your participation is always voluntary. How do you feel about having such discussions?

I also want to give a quick overview of the structure of this study. I am asking for the opportunity to speak with you twice over the period of about two months. The first individual interview will last 60-90 minutes and the second will last about 30 minutes. These interviews will be conducted virtually, using a secure conferencing app called Webex.

Your identity will be kept confidential, however, I will be sharing themes and direct quotes from interviews in my final discussion. I will not share your name or personal information with any one and will keep the recordings of our conversations in a locked place that no one has access to.

Would you like to participate in this study?

Do you have any questions before we proceed?

I have a few additional demographic questions for you today that relate to the eligibility requirements for my study:

What is your first name?

What year were you born?

What is the best way to contact you?

How do you identify in terms of gender?

How do you identify your race/ethnicity?

What other self-identified cultural identities do you find most important to you?

What is your highest level of education?

How long have you been residing with your current partner? How many years?

Do any children reside in your home?

As this is a small study, I will compile a list of everyone who expresses interest in participating and will select 5-8 women from that list to participate in this study. Women will be selected in order to promote the most diverse experiences within the confines of my research study. I will notify you to schedule our initial interview if you are selected by 3/31. If you are not selected for this particular study, would you like me to contact you for future research opportunities?

Thank you once again for your time.

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Research Question	Interview Question
RQ 1: How do gender microaggressions experienced in the family of origin shape cisgender women's meaning making related to gender microaggressions within their intimate adult relationships?	1) Let's talk about gender microaggressions – thinking about your family and your partner, tell me about any intentional or unintentional negative, hostile, or derogatory messages you remember receiving about being a woman. 2) Genogram creation probes a) Tell me about your relationships with the family you grew up with and their expectations of you. Probe: Do you consider any of these ways of communicating to be gender microaggressions? In what ways? Probe: Can you talk about how you felt? Probe: Tell me about different parts of your identity (for example, race, ability status) and how these may have influenced expectations of you. b) Tell me about the relationships you observed (between parents, parents and siblings) and expectations that were communicated to you about being a woman (that you would consider to be gender microaggressions). 3) Talk about a time you have felt pressured to act a certain way because you are a girl/woman. Probe: In your family of origin? Probe: In your intimate adult relationship? Probe: How was this communicated to you? Probe: How did you react? Probe: How did you feel?
Sub RQ a: How do cisgender women experience gender microaggressions within their family of origin?	1) When did you first understand what it means to be a "girl" or a "woman"? 2) What does being a woman mean to you in your current relationship with your partner? 2) How did your family send (communicate) messages about being a woman?

	3) Describe how you and your siblings communicated (about gender). (Facilitates genogram)
Sub RQ b: How do cisgender women experience gender microaggressions within their intimate adult relationships?	1) Please tell me about gender microaggressions you have experienced from your partner. Probe: What do you notice about power and making decisions with your partner? Probe: What about the division of labor? Probe: Talk a bit about satisfaction in the relationship with your partner. 2) How did you and your partner negotiate your roles? Probe: Do these roles match your expectations for intimate relationships? 3) What changes (in roles, division of labor, or anything else) do you feel would benefit women, at an individual and a social level?

Appendix E: Participant Privilege

An important note regarding the participants in this study concerns privilege. Consistent with postmodern feminist theory, gender may not be the most salient identity for women who hold several marginalized identities (Tong, 2009). For this particular subset of participants, gender was reported to be the most salient identity. Participants noted privilege in several areas, related to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, and socioeconomic status. As such, the findings from this study cannot be considered as representative of the experiences of all Gen-X cisgender women, but instead include the experiences of a very specific subset of women who also hold many layers of privilege, including race (i.e., White), education (i.e., Master's degree or higher), marital status (i.e., all married to cisgender men), and socioeconomic status (i.e., freedom and flexibility related to work and locale).

Appendix F: Divergent Analysis

Although themes identified pertaining to the family of origin were consistent, one participant, P03, shared divergent experiences regarding gender microaggressions, partnership, and satisfaction in her current relationship. While the majority of participants discussed pervasive power differentials between themselves and their partners, P03 articulately described a sense of egalitarianism and partnership within her relationship when she shared, “We were also like collaborators in art before we were collaborators in life”. In this description, P03 describes the origins of partnership with her husband as preceding their romantic relationship.

P03 was also insightful regarding the confusion others feel at the partnership she and her husband enact:

> And I remember everybody being, like, careful what you wish for you've been ships passing in the night and I can tel- like, especially my older teacher friends, like, we thought it would be great when we retired. And then we deci- discovered that we needed different projects, because we would drive each other crazy and I was like. No, not us and they were like, ha, ha, ha, you'll see and, you know, 10 years later, I'm like ha, ha, ha, no.

This quotation provides a concrete description of how P03 has had different experiences in her relationship compared to other women and the other participants. In fact, P03 expresses satisfaction in her awareness that her relationship is different from the relationships she has observed with friends and family when she says “I’m like ha, ha, ha, no”.

The factors that contribute to the divergence between P03’s intimate relationship experiences and the experiences of others warrant further exploration and understanding. Possible mediators may include the way P03’s husband has internalized egalitarian gender role

expectations and ideals, P03's resilience related to overcoming negative experiences in formative years, and her strong support network outside of her family of origin. However, further research is needed to determine how these and other factors may contribute to satisfaction and partnership in relationships.