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## From Compliance To Commitment: The Individual And Organizational Implications Of Emotional Tax

Lauren Footman

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Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics, College of Liberal and Professional Studies in the School of Arts and Sciences in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics at the University of Pennsylvania  
Advisor: Amrita Subramanian

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# From Compliance To Commitment: The Individual And Organizational Implications Of Emotional Tax

## Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore emotional tax and how it negatively impacts Black women's experiences in corporate America and intimately learn more about the professional experiences of Black women millennials in corporate America. Specifically, the research focuses on the experiences of Black millennial women (born between 1981 to 1996) in entry-level and middle management positions (Dimock, 2019). This study includes 10 confidential qualitative interviews with Black millennial women in corporate organizations across the United States. Emotional Tax (Travis, 2016) is described "as the heightened experience of being different from peers at work because of your gender and/or race/ethnicity and the associated detrimental effects on health, well-being, and the ability to thrive at work" (Travis, 2016). Organizations with more culturally and ethnically diverse executive teams are 33% more likely to see better profits while employees effectively engaged and supported are more productive in the workplace, which drives profitability (Hunt, Prince, Dixon-Fyle, & Yee, 2018).

## Keywords

Black, women, millennial, diversity and inclusion, Emotional Tax, stereotype, social identity threat, inclusive

## Comments

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FROM COMPLIANCE TO COMMITMENT: THE INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL  
IMPLICATIONS OF EMOTIONAL TAX

by

Lauren J. Footman

Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics,  
College of Liberal and Professional Studies  
in the School of Arts and Sciences  
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Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics at the  
University of Pennsylvania

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

2020

FROM COMPLIANCE TO COMMITMENT: THE INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL  
IMPLICATIONS OF EMOTIONAL TAX

Approved by:

Advisor Amrita Subramanian, Ph.D., Advisor

Reader Kimberly Torres, Ph.D., Reader

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to explore emotional tax and how it negatively impacts Black women's experiences in corporate America and intimately learn more about the professional experiences of Black women millennials in corporate America. Specifically, the research focuses on the experiences of Black millennial women (born between 1981 to 1996) in entry-level and middle management positions (Dimock, 2019). This study includes 10 confidential qualitative interviews with Black millennial women in corporate organizations across the United States. Emotional Tax (Travis, 2016) is described “as the heightened experience of being different from peers at work because of your gender and/or race/ethnicity and the associated detrimental effects on health, well-being, and the ability to thrive at work” (Travis, 2016). Organizations with more culturally and ethnically diverse executive teams are 33% more likely to see better profits while employees effectively engaged and supported are more productive in the workplace, which drives profitability (Hunt, Prince, Dixon-Fyle, & Yee, 2018).

**Keywords:** *Black, women, millennial, diversity and inclusion, Emotional Tax, stereotype, social identity threat, inclusive workplace*

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Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank the countless Black women who paved the way for this research by continuing to defy the odds in all sectors of society. Most importantly, I would like to thank the 10 Black women who shared their personal stories with me. These women's experiences added such texture and necessary perspective to this research as they candidly shared insight into their childhoods, familial dynamics, life challenges, and personal and professional successes. These women and other unnamed pioneers have blazed trails for younger Black women like me to be able to show up in spaces, not created with me in mind, and still succeed due to their courage.

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## CHAPTER 1: THE BURDEN OF SUCCESS

The Capstone's objective is to examine the professional experiences of Black women millennials in corporate America. Specifically, my research focuses on the experiences of Black millennial women (born between 1981 to 1996) in entry-level and middle management positions (Dimock, 2019), as related to their wellbeing, and opportunities for advancement in corporate America. Moreover, the paper addresses the impact non-inclusive workplaces can have on an organization's profitability, and what organizations can do to ensure individual and organizational wellbeing. This capstone will attempt to explore and answer the following research questions:

- What is emotional tax and how does it negatively impact Black women's experiences in corporate America?
- What is the impact of the emotional tax or psychological toll that is levied on Black millennial women in corporate settings, due to their racial/ethnic and gender identities, which are often deemed inferior by homogenous corporate culture?
- What can organizations do to create organizations that are authentically inclusive to Black millennial women, including ensuring their recruitment, retention, and advancement?
- What are the implications for organizations that do not create authentically inclusive work environments for Black millennial women?

### *Emotional Tax : Old Concept, A New Perspective*

Annual diversity and inclusion benchmarking data released by organizations such as Diversity Inc. (2018) and Black Enterprise (2018) underscore that women and certain racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately underrepresented and compensated in comparison to their white male counterparts, especially Black women. Despite having the longest presence in the U.S. workplace, and the presence of 10.7 million Black women in the workforce, there is still a gap for Black women's earnings and career advancement relative to their white counterparts (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010, 2019). In the United States,

for every 100 entry-level men who are promoted to manager, 58 Black women are promoted; for every 100 men hired to manager, 64 Black women are hired (Huang, Krivkovich, Starikova, Yee, & Zanoschi, 2019). On average Black women are paid 39% less than white men and 21% less than white women in comparable positions (Hegewisch, 2017). Outside of their lack of advancement in comparison to their white peers and Black men, Black women also experience a range of detrimental emotional and physical effects, due to the lack of inclusion in the workforce, known as Emotional Tax. Emotional Tax is described “as the heightened experience of being different from peers at work because of your gender and/or race/ethnicity and the associated detrimental effects on health, well-being, and the ability to thrive at work” (Travis, 2016). Emotional Tax can negatively impact Black millennial women’s individual wellbeing, and career advancement which in turn can create ineffective organizations (Travis, 2016). In order for organizations to cultivate welcoming environments, organizations must cultivate psychological safety, or comfortability taking a risk without fear of embarrassment.

The phenomena of Emotional Tax, the importance of creating psychological safety, and its impact on Black employees were explored in 2016 by the non-profit Catalyst, in the report "Emotional Tax: How Black Women and Men Pay More at Work and How Leaders Can Take Action." The report includes a sample of 649 Black employees (322 women and 327 men) including 19.1% non-management/individual contributors, 23.3% first-level managers, 28.3% middle managers, 18.2% senior executives, and 11% CEOs/business owners. The study relies on survey data from Black women and Black men in corporate America. The study also includes qualitative interviews from participants to reveal the detrimental physical and psychological effects of Emotional Tax on Black employees. The

study revealed a consequence of Emotional Tax negatively can be a lack of career advancement for Black employees. Black millennial women are especially vulnerable to Emotional Tax because they live at the intersection of two under-represented identities as a racial minority and as a woman. Addressing Emotional tax will be important, as they will comprise 75% of the global workforce by 2025 according to a 2014 study entitled “The Deloitte Millennial Survey” (Deloitte, 2014).

Emotional Tax is not a new concept, but a contemporary term used in corporate spaces to discuss what social scientists recognize as social identity threat (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson 1995; Emerson & Murphy, 2014). Social identity threat is defined by social psychologists Claude Steele, Steven Spencer, and Joshua Aronson. These social psychologists share “racial and ethnic minorities must contend with a legacy in which they were either segregated within or barred from American workplaces because their groups were considered intellectually and morally inferior. Stemming from this history of cultural stereotyping and exclusion, minorities are particularly sensitive to indicators of respect and inclusion in mainstream workplaces” (Emerson & Murphy, 2014: 508). The research, that begins with Steele and Spencer assert that stereotype threat typically occurs in high-stress environments such as elite higher education institutions where there are few Black students. Due to this feeling of otherness, Black students are constantly trying to affirm their presence and prove themselves as deserving due to the legacy of affirmative action (Steele & Aronson, 1995). These situations can be extrapolated to predominantly white organizations, as there are the same conditions and factors for minorities to contend with in the workforce.

Those most vulnerable to social identity threat and Emotional Tax are individuals who continually find themselves in high-pressure situations and are invested in their success

in these racialized environments. (Emerson & Murphy, 2014). Similar to Blacks in higher education institutions, Blacks in predominantly white work environments are constantly navigating this subordinated space, always striving to prove their worthiness; essentially, stereotype threat causes Emotional Tax. Therefore, Emotional Tax is not a new concept but its application in the workforce could have long-term consequences for employees and organizations that strive to build a diverse and competitive workforce. PwC's 2011 report "Millennials at Work: Reshaping the workplace" highlights how millennials are seeking employers who have effective diversity and inclusion programs (PwC, 2011). In order to remain viable in the marketplace, organizations will have to begin to adequately address these prerequisites of their future potential employees, as millennials presence increases in the workforce (Deloitte, 2014).

### *A Path Forward*

In order to create a workforce that is truly inclusive that will improve individual and organizational outcomes, organizations must take a holistic approach. A holistic approach to diversity and inclusion means taking into account the historical context of diversity and inclusion. In addition, it means considering the existing sociological and psychological research on Black women's experiences at work. Lastly, it is essential to take into account emerging organizational development best practices including organizational research reports. Understanding that companies are often driven by profitability it is imperative to fully understand how diversity and inclusion impacts profitability, as this can motivate companies to be more intentional around their efforts. In their 2018 report, "Delivering through Diversity," McKinsey & Company reported that companies with cultural and ethnically diverse executive leadership teams are 33% more likely to experience higher than

average returns. Also, people who generally enjoy their organizations are more productive, which impacts profitability (McKinsey & Company, 2018). Oftentimes, when discussing diversity and inclusion, companies will focus on representation, which creates tokenized and ineffective programs. However, there is value in organizations viewing their employees as stakeholders, and ensuring their personal development including advancement. Some organizations have begun to see their responsibility to make their employer-employee relationships more reciprocal. For example, companies like JP Morgan, are shifting away from an investor-centric model as of 2019, to serve the wellbeing of their employees, which is the first step (Bloomberg, 2019).

***A Personal Connection: My Experience With Emotional Tax***

I am personally drawn to this research because of my experiences as a Black millennial woman, who has worked in corporate America as a human resource professional. My career experiences have provided me insight into the organizational and individual implications of un-inclusive workspaces. I experienced the physical and mental strain of stereotype threat and the lack of advancement opportunities extended to me in comparison to my white peers. My own experiences with Emotional Tax motivated me to study ways organizations can begin to address these implications strategically and institutionally through diversity initiatives. From my experience, I believe organizations must acknowledge their strengths and opportunities with their existing diversity and inclusion efforts, provide all staff ongoing training and personal development, and create on-ramps for communities of color to be promoted to manager and leadership roles.

Last year, I began researching the negative effects corporate environments can have on Black professionals' emotional and physical health and their professional advancement.

Through this research, I discovered the concept of Emotional Tax and saw an opportunity to link organizational development practices and social science research to inform diversity and inclusion initiatives. I discovered that Emotional Tax is a cumulative experience for Black professionals. Many Black women professionals in corporate America have been socialized from childhood to be high academic and professional achievers; they are well-versed in knowing how to navigate predominately white spaces from a young age. Black professionals from largely middle-class origins are typically most vulnerable to social identity threat because of the ‘fatigue’ of existing in predominantly white spaces all the time (Irizarry, 2013: 610). In addition, empirical research on Black students at selective colleges and universities, reveals a direct correlation between social class status, interracial contact, and vulnerability to social identity threat for upwardly mobile young Black adults (Torres and Massey, 2012; Charles, Mooney, & Massey, 2009; Massey, Charles, Fischer, & Lundy, 2003). Moreover, quantitative studies completed at selective higher education institutions by sociologists Douglas Massey and Camille Charles, reveal that Black college students' ability to thrive was influenced by their vulnerability to stereotype threat. Massey and his colleagues also identified the level of inferiority students felt was based on years of racialized interactions and socialization. They found oftentimes Black students felt so inferior because they were often the least academically prepared (Massey et al., 2003). This research is important to the experience of Black women in the workplace, as these are the same individuals who take positions in corporate America and continue to endure stereotype threat due to their token status.

During this process, I have been able to make clear connections with my experience as a practitioner and a scholar with other Black women, with this knowledge. I have been

able to approach my professional career from a more strategic perspective. I have leveraged sociologist W.E.B Du Bois' theory of double consciousness that was found in his seminal *The Souls of Black Folks* (Du Bois, 1903). *Double consciousness* is being able to see myself through the lens of whiteness, to navigate spaces that were not established with minorities in mind. In summation, my objective here is to investigate how corporate organizations can develop the best practices to create authentic diversity and inclusion programs, which will improve employee wellbeing, productivity, and organizational profitability.

### ***Capstone Roadmap***

Historical events are the backdrop of this capstone, specifically I study the evolution of diversity and inclusion within corporate organizations, including how government-enforced policies have influenced organizational cultures. This analysis ranges from 1948 when President Truman desegregated the armed forces with Executive Order 9981 to the present. (Showers, 2016). Chapter two, includes a review of literature that links three genres of literature essential for organizations to have a holistic approach to diversity, and inclusion. The three genres highlighted are organizational development literature, sociological literature, and psychological literature, with a keen eye on the literature supplied by non-profit entities such as Catalyst and Black Enterprise, to augment understanding with real world statistical progress. The linkage between this literature is necessary because organizational development literature does not take into the individual and societal factors that impact how organizational frameworks are implemented and received.

. Including psychological literature is paramount as it implicates elements that impact the psychological wellbeing of individuals, including race and gender. Sociology literature supplements and provides a framework to understand the development, structure, and



functioning of human society, on the mental experiences of individuals as well as organizational dynamics.

Chapter three provides an overview of the research methodology which is qualitative interviewing. This method was selected as the best approach for this study because it enabled me to learn in-depth about the first-hand experiences of Black millennial women in corporate America. Qualitative interviewing provides an in-depth look into individuals' lives--their attitudes, feelings, and behaviors (Sutton, 2015).

Chapter four includes an empirical analysis of the interviews with the ten Black women in my sample. The study seeks to understand the participants' formative years, their college experiences, and their specific work experiences as it relates to their feelings about inclusion and advancement opportunities. I also present my empirical analysis and interpretation of the interview data, along with recommendations for organizations. The recommendation for organizations includes developing explicit diversity and inclusion programs, establishing a culture of accountability, implementing targeted recruitment and advancement programs, and ensuring ongoing professional development. Finally, I acknowledge the limitations of this research and consider future research opportunities. Chapter five, serves as an Executive Summary of this Capstone, which provides recommendations for organizations to foster inclusive environments and can be leveraged for future research into progressive workspace for black women.

## CHAPTER 2: AN OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The organizational endeavor to develop diversity and inclusion programs within its historical and social culture makes it an imperative to have a holistic set of resources to inform this strategy. As stated previously, it is necessary to include the lived experiences of underrepresented communities, but it is also essential to use the research, and literature that informs these topics. Social science, specifically sociology and psychology, provides invaluable information on lived experience and the societal factors that impact society including organizational culture. The organizational development literature provides the framework and best practices for organizations to apply as they work to innovate and improve their outcomes. In addition to organizational development literature, organizations should study recent research reports done by organizations like Catalyst, and Black Enterprise that annually track diversity and inclusion data. These corporate reports show strength and opportunities, best practices, and case studies, as templates for change. In addition, it is worth considering how government enforced anti-discrimination legislation, and policies impact how companies view inclusion efforts. The government's strategy has positioned diversity and inclusion as training to mitigate potential lawsuits and has historically put less emphasis on inclusion initiatives as a result. Having this holistic approach, provides the necessary nuance to develop effective programs, as it is not siloed but taking into account the employee, social factors, and organizational best practices and frameworks.

### *A Preface to Research*

The chapter draws deeply from the disciplines of the nation's history and from society's cultural evolution, deeply impacted by political events. The literature review interweaves the complexities from the lenses of time gone, decisions taken, and the long-term understanding of those decisions on Black Women. As a researcher, this is as much my history, as it is of those I study to honor.

Most of the literature on Black women's experiences in the workforce is located within sociology and not organizational development literature. Sociologists have studied ascending Black professionals mostly in collegiate settings. These qualitative and quantitative studies typically assess Black students' formative years, their racial attitudes, and how they academically navigate predominately white institutions (Torres, 2009; Torres and Massey 2012; Charles et al., 2016; Massey et. al., 2003). Studies like "Culture Shock?: Black Students Account for Their Distinctiveness at an Elite College" by sociologist Kimberly Torres (2009) studies the effects of social class on the experiences of working class, Black college students at a selective, liberal arts college. Torres (2009) finds that Black students who come from segregated, poor communities experience a type of "culture shock" when they arrive at college, because they lack the requisite cultural and social capital to navigate these environments. This lack of requisite capital takes a toll on their mental and academic wellbeing, as these differences are pervasive. Culture shock and its psychic toll are similar to that of Emotional Tax, as it is levied due to this feeling of otherness in relation to the majority population. Torres's (2009) work relates to the women in this study as

oftentimes individuals similarly enter corporate America with limited cultural and social capital to navigate these majority white spaces. Black women from homogenous communities and who have lower socioeconomic status, are likely to experience culture shock that can have lasting psychological implications. In order to address this corporate “culture shock,” organizations must increase demographic diversity at every level and create critical mass while simultaneously developing psychological safety so everyone can feel supported

While experiencing culture shock, Blacks can simultaneously be navigating social identity threats, given their positionality as subordinate due to race and class, which adds to the psychic toll. Social identity threat asserts that culturally diverse groups can have different perspectives when experiencing the same environment based on socio-cultural and historical legacies of their respective groups. (Emerson & Murphy, 2014; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). Black adolescents are often socialized by their families to navigate social identity threat which causes an Emotional Tax. Psychological research highlights that interracial contact between Black and whites may reduce Blacks' negative perceptions of whites' intentions (Irizarry, 2013). Also, it highlights the importance to investigate the socio-psychological burden existing in predominantly white settings may cause Emotional Tax (Irizarry, 2012; Massey et al. 2003, Steele et al., 2002). This reaffirms why companies need to not only understand the experiences of Black people but the importance of questioning at what cost do these exchanges take place for Blacks. It also serves as a reminder of the types

of responsibility organizations have to create equitable workplaces to ensure not only recruitment but advancement.

The idea of social identity threat gives insight to sociologist W.E.B Du Bois' famous question "How does it feel to be a problem?" in his seminal *The Souls of Black Folks* (Du Bois, 1903). This question, of "how does it feel to be a problem?" works in tandem with W.E.B. Du Bois' idea of *double consciousness*. Double consciousness articulates the conundrum Black Americans face as members of a historically subjugated group; they observe themselves through the lens of whiteness to survive. By viewing themselves through the gazer's perspective, they can deftly maneuver racial hierarchies as they have heightened awareness of how they are perceived; however, the price they pay to survive at work is exemplified by Emotional Tax. Blacks are always conscious of how their race will impact their interactions or success. Organizations must work to address the stereotypes and institutional structures that often perpetuate Black employees' feelings of inferiority and the burden of their social and numerical minority status.

To understand this idea of double consciousness, it is important to underscore Frantz Fanon's theory of being overdetermined from without. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), Fanon argues Blacks have little agency to determine individual realities; Blacks are first judged by their race which they cannot escape, which impacts all aspects of their lives. Without question, Blacks pay a high cost or emotional tax, including negative effects on their health and the lack of career advancement, when acculturating to workplaces that subscribe to whiteness. However, it is important to note that these environments can be transformed to

be more inclusive if organizations are intentional in their efforts when cultivating the culture, and performance management process. Like double consciousness, Blacks often face judgment not on their ability at first, but by their race. This idea of being overdetermined from without, is important for organizations to consider as it reinforces the need for bias training. The biases organizations have and perpetuate can have lasting impacts on policies, and individuals showing the need for anti-bias training (Fanon, 1967). Overall the social science literature provides insight into the structures of oppression, and the lived experiences of minorities, which is a starting place of identifying the problems, and the symptoms.

### ***Research Studies***

The mentioned lack of intersection between social science literature and the organizational development literature serves as an opportunity for practitioners to begin this linkage. To help organizations create more effective policies and programs, think tank reports can serve as an invaluable resource to organizations, as these reports provide case studies and best practices for companies across sectors. Some of the notable, recent organizational research on the experiences of Black women found in the Catalyst's Emotional Tax report (Travis, 2016). The report incorporates qualitative and quantitative insights from corporate organizations, striving to mitigate social identity threat through targeted D and I efforts. Other organizations such as Deloitte, Harvard Business Review, and McKinsey and Company, routinely publish in-depth research reports on corporate diversity and inclusion programs, and their effectiveness. These reports analyze diversity across the organization including employee advancement, employee satisfaction, and organizational culture (Huang

et al., 2019; Travis, 2016). Findings suggest that although organizations are making public commitments and devoting human resources to diversity, there is still not parity for certain groups specifically women of color. In addition, Black women are not advancing at the same rate as white women or Black men with comparable skills and education. These reports enable companies to see how their peers are tracking with their efforts; they can also serve as a catalyst to action because organizations want to stay viable in the marketplace. In addition, these reports often provide insight into the bottom-line impact of creating more inclusive environments, incentivizing leaders to inspire change.

Outside of best practices, these reports provide a vocabulary for corporate organizations, such as Emotional Tax. Another important term from recent McKinsey and LeanIn.Org's annual "Women in the Workplace" study is "broken rung" (McKinsey, 2019). McKinsey surveyed 68,500 employees from 77 companies across 329 companies across the United States and Canada. "Broken rung" refers specifically to Black women who do not make it into middle management roles due to bias and lack of support from their organization and immediate managers. As white women begin to break the metaphoric glass ceiling to professional advancement, Black women still trip over a broken rung, irrespective of social class and education. The broken rung perpetuates personal exclusion, and lack of representation in middle management and senior roles within organizations. The experiences of the Black women in my study, highlight how Black women can often struggle to advance from entry-level and middle management roles, due to lack of opportunities and intentional development.

Besides defining and applying the term ‘broken rung’, the McKinsey report (2019), provided tangible takeaways to address this gap for Black women, which reinforces the benefit and using these reports. The report encourages organizations to have senior leaders who model inclusive behavior, create a safe and respectful culture that includes accountability, and establish inclusive hiring and promotions processes. By implementing these actions, managers can create unbiased, normative practices, to ensure all employees to excel at work. These best practices are imperative, as companies historically equate gender diversity with promoting white women; more attention needs to be paid to women of color’s satisfaction and advancement. McKinsey’s yearly report provides a good survey of the landscape and tracks the progress that is being made specifically for Black women.

### ***Organizational Development Literature***

There is a plethora of organizational development literature that focuses on topics such as culture development, leadership development, managing team dynamics, talent management, and coaching. A staple in organizational development literature is “Reframing Organizations” (2017) by organizational consultants, Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal. Deal and Bolman (2017) use time-tested best practices to help executives develop organizational leadership. In order to meet the needs of the ever-evolving organizational dynamics, Bolman and Deal leverage years of multidisciplinary social science research. Their work includes organizational theory, organizational behavior, psychology, sociology, and political science to add the appropriate nuance to their theory that was created over 25 years ago. As practitioners, Bolman and Deal recognized their solutions needed to include



frameworks to support cross-sector collaboration, generational diversity, remote working, the economy, sustainability, and cultural intelligence (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Their text works to optimize organizational effectiveness, cultivate collaboration across generations and sectors, inform organizations on how to navigate conflict and understand power and conflict amid internal and external politics while establishing a consistent culture. Over time, they have begun to consider the lived experience and impact of structural inequities may have an organization's ability to foster effective organizations. There is still an opportunity to directly integrate race and ethnicity into their framework. The evolution of Bolman and Deal's theory emphasizes the necessity for organizations to understand how minorities adversely experience the workplace. By utilizing this time-proven framework and adding a racial equity lens, organizations can assess ways to establish an inclusive culture, cultivate collaboration and ensure their strategies do not perpetuate exclusion.

Two other important practitioners in organizational development literature are executive coaches Leni Wildflower, and Diane Brennan. In, *The Handbook of Knowledge-Based Coaching: From Theory to Practice* (2011), the authors help clients navigate their careers, through merging theory and practical application. They define culture for practitioners and their clients to provide a baseline for professionals. According to Leni Wildflower and Diane Brennan, culture consists of "shared mental programs that condition individuals' response to their environment" (Wildflower & Brennan, 2011, p. 231). To that end, they acknowledge how lived experience influences people's perspectives. However, this definition of organizational culture is static and one-dimensional; it does not contextualize

how these differences impact workplace culture with respect to racial stereotypes and stereotype threat (Steele et al., 2002). These shared mental maps can translate to bias based on existing stereotypes for individuals or organizations. Having a shared definition of culture for practitioners is helpful when leading organizations because it provides them a template to work within. However, when these frameworks do not consider the lived experiences of people of color, it can make the program less effective because there is no nuance.

Building upon this idea of culture, organizational literature does include Elisabeth Plum's definition of cultural intelligence. Plum defines this as the "ability to make oneself understood and the ability to create a fruitful collaboration in situations where cultural differences play a role" (Wildflower & Brennan, 2011, p. 231). Cultural intelligence directly acknowledges cultural competency is a skill set needed to differentiate yourself in the workplace. It also reinforces how coaches should be prepared to coach someone on the importance of developing this skill. This coaching is necessary as it can impact an individual's advancement as well as the organization's culture and effectiveness.

Similar to the idea of culture, cultural intelligence does not take into account the lived experience of individuals, and how social factors impact how someone is able to develop cultural intelligence and receive it. Making links to individuals' lived experiences and social factors are imperative to make these ideas proven concepts and framework effective for organizations. Understanding cultural intelligence should be a part of professional development and is critical to fostering an inclusive environment for organizations. However, the opportunity exists to see how societal factors and personal experience impact one's

ability to have cultural intelligence which are essential to support staff in their journeys with this topic.

In order to have a holistic approach to diversity and inclusion, organizational development literature must incorporate sociological and psychological literature. Linking this literature will illuminate best practices with the experiences of minorities and social factors. Diversity and inclusion strategist and coach La'Wana Harris (2019) and organizational development consultant and executive coach Minda Harts (2019) have begun to bridge this conceptual gap.

In *Diversity Beyond Lip Service: A Coaching Guide For Challenging Bias* (2019), Harris provides a detailed process on the preparation, implementation and individual work needed to assist organizations create inclusive workplaces. Specifically, her "Inclusion Coaching" method equips individuals with the tools to see that leaders are not losing power by sharing it. This is necessary to help diverse people advance and feel supported by the organization. Harris emphasizes the importance of developing workplaces that are not only demographically diverse but have honest engagement and access for all. In addition, Harris provides coaching resources that directly address cultural differences and encourages everyone to become allies in advocating for diversity and inclusion. Like the name of the book, Harris requests that companies move beyond "lip service," by encouraging people to be comfortable being uncomfortable. She encourages leaders to remain open, and to commit to being honest even if it's difficult. By taking these steps, Harris contends, organizations will be able to take concrete steps to make inclusion an embedded reality. This racialized

organizational development book provides lived experiences, frameworks, and tangible steps practitioners can begin to shift their approach to foster inclusion. Harris' work equips those in positions of power with best practices, and opportunity to adjust them to fit their individual needs.

In *The Memo: What Women of Color Need to Know to Secure a Seat at the Table* (2019), Minda Harts builds upon Harris' work with a holistic overview that is even more direct with her call to action. Harts' work is meant to be an "insider's" perspective of the experience of women of color in predominantly white workspaces. In the preface, Harts reveals that she was motivated, in part, to write *The Memo* as popular books like *Lean In* (2013) by Sheryl Sandberg do not sufficiently address the nuances women of color experience in the workplace.

In her response to my personal inquiry, on April 9, 2020 Minda Harts shared:

I talk about the emotional toll being a Black woman in the workplace took on my health--it declined until I was able to find a new environment. With that said, we also have to discuss the lasting effects of racial trauma in the workplace and the post-traumatic stress disorders women of color experience in future jobs. (M. Harts, personal communication, April 9, 2020).

Books like *The Memo* are so important to be leveraged by organizations because most times the experiences of women of color, specifically Black women are absent in professional development literature. Harts also provides specific directives and "how tos" for women of color to professionally excel and ascend. Some of Minda's suggestions include women of color leveraging in order to build strong professional networks, continuing professional development, specific ways to negotiate a competitive salary and knowing your worth.

Moreover, Harts provides a call to action for white allies and how they can do their part in ensuring inclusion for their colleagues of color. Hart's book is so insightful as she provides space for lived experience and societal factors while understanding organizational dynamics. *The Memo* is unique as it provides realistic action steps individuals can take which are typically provided in organizational development literature, with a racial equity lens.

### **A Timeline of Diversity & Inclusion in the U.S 1960s to 2020**

While it is critical to conduct a literary analysis to study Black women's experiences in the workplace, it is of equal significance to consider the concurrent and historical socio-political events. Societal events often impact organizations' policies and culture along with how employees experience the workplace (Anand & Winters, 2008). The United States' enactment of laws and companies' stance that diversity and inclusion training could prevent litigation created a compliance mindset. And, as time went on anti-discrimination policies became more reflective of the political views of the U.S. President at the time. The politicization of anti-discrimination laws is partially why programs lack continuity and effectiveness (Anand & Winters, 2008). Companies often do what the government mandates without a commitment to the cause (Anand & Winters, 2008). Because of lack of regulation, diversity efforts have afforded white women and Black men more advancement opportunities than Black women even contemporarily (Huang et al., 2019). Due to diversity and inclusion serving as litigation mitigation strategy and the inconsistency of government, organizations have not made consistent efforts around diversity and inclusion. As a result of government-imposed affirmative action requirements, organizations have become more consumed with

meeting quotas, as opposed to fostering inclusive environments for racial minority groups (Anand & Winters, 2008).

The “idea” of diversity in the workplace can be traced back to 1941, when President Theodore Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802, banning workforce discrimination. As time went on more provisions were set in place to prevent discrimination, specifically in the Armed Services with Executive Order 9981 in 1948. Following this, President John F. Kennedy's Executive Order (E.O.) 10925 used affirmative action for the first time by instructing federal contractors to take "affirmative action to ensure that applicants are treated equally without regard to race, color, religion, sex, or national origin" (Ourdocuments.gov, 1961). President Kennedy also created the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity (Ourdocuments.gov, 1961). The advocacy of President John F. Kennedy, and social unrest caused the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to be signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The Civil Rights Act was a huge milestone for integration and workplace inclusion. This Act prohibited racial discrimination in public settings and in the workplace and required integration of schools and other public facilities (EEOC 1965). The ways these policies were developed and enforced have since created a culture where companies only do what is inspected and not expected, such as ensuring equity and access for racial and gender minorities.

Another notable aspect of this the Civil Rights Act, was it established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, to oversee anti-discrimination policies. Following the Civil Rights Act, other laws passed in the next decade, and diversity became compliance driven. Most diversity trainings were a review of EEOC laws and became a lawsuit

prevention tool. Diversity training thus increased in the 1970s; as people were educated about anti-discrimination, they began to file in large numbers with the newly formed EEOC. Outside of training being a preventative tool, it was also a punishment for companies found guilty of discrimination, reinforcing the compliance element D and I (Anand & Winters, 2008). We still see the implication of this training, as many new hire programs typically include basic diversity and inclusion training, with no intentional follow up. By crafting these types of training and having them persist so long, it has created a culture of compliance, organizations are simply ensuring they meet the mandates of training without investing in culture change.

The legal impetus of training no doubt influenced the increase of diverse staff in the workplace through the 1970s (Anand & Winters, 2008). This increase in representation stalled for racially and ethnically individuals but continued for women in the 1980s as President Reagan advocated for deregulation (Anand & Winters, 2008). In 1982, President Regan appointed Clarence Thomas to lead the EEOC. During his tenure, Thomas disapproved conciliation agreements which included timelines for companies to increase their minority representation. This lack of oversight caused companies to redirect their priorities away from D & I. Also, during Reagan's term, Secretary of Labor, William Brock commenced a study by Hudson institute titled "Workforce 2000: Work and Workers in the Twenty-First Century" (McCormick, 2007). Brock's study highlighted five demographic factors that would impact the U.S. labor market, which led to the creation of diversity and inclusion initiatives based on the key factors determined:

- The population and the workforce will grow more slowly than at any time since the 1930s.
- The average age of the population and the workforce will rise, and the pool of young workers entering the labor market will shrink.
- More women will enter the workforce.
- Minorities will be a larger share of the new entrants into the labor force.
- Legal and illegal immigrants will represent the largest share of the increase in the population and the workforce since World War 1 (McCormick, 2007).

This report is a milestone in the timeline of diversity and inclusion as it created a paradigm shift and caused the phrase workforce diversity to be introduced (Anand & Winters, 2008). It also served as the direct impetus for the diversity industry as organizations became aware of the changing demographic of the workforce. Moreover, it initiated the shift from a compliance mindset of ensuring certain policies were followed, and lawsuits were avoided. It caused companies to consider how they could assimilate diverse people into the culture of their organization's homogeneous cultures (Anand & Winters, 2008). During this time, organizations were unable to fulfill their affirmative action plans and were not successful in recruiting and retaining diverse talent. Little consideration was given to how dominant groups would interact with diverse coworkers and vice versa, which posed a problem for organizations. To address this, organizations took the approach focused on helping racial and gender minorities assimilate into the extant professional culture. This focus on workforce assimilation is still prevalent today. More often than not diversity programs, still, position



minority groups to assimilate into homogenous corporate cultures but do not encourage the majority to make any adjustments. By not having this education be reciprocal, the feelings of inferiority are perpetuated even now, as there is a high-stress situation where the minorities are always striving to fit in.

Following the Workforce 2000 report, R. Roosevelt Thomas, known as the “Father of Diversity” and founder of the American Institute for Managing Diversity Inc., encouraged organizations to go beyond recruitment in 1990 (Anand & Winters, 2008). Thomas argued that more needed to be done to ensure employees would be retained and advanced. He specifically encouraged organizations to design workplaces “where we are everyone,” and contended that more than affirmative action was needed to manage diversity (Anand & Winters, 2008). To this end, diversity began to include all staff, not just racial minorities; the added focus on cultural sensitivity signaled a shift from compliance. In this stage, white men were often vilified and there was no consensus of definitions or effective frameworks.

Although there is now a more nuanced idea that diversity was not a compliance exercise, organizations still couple diversity and compliance together. Topics for the trainings ranged from legality to sensitivity to social justice (Anand & Winters, 2008). In addition, there were those like Thomas believed diversity needed to be discussed from a bottom-line perspective. Due to the wide array of opinions corporate diversity training and programs were all unique. Even to this day, some training is subtle while some are blatant

and place blame on white men. To that end, some white men have even filed reverse racial discrimination cases (Anand & Winters, 2008).

During the 1990s the diversity industry still did not have a clear framework that guided the dialogue. In order to provide some structure, academics David Thomas and Robin Ely created a diversity model in 1996. They presented three paradigms of diversity: 1) discrimination and fairness, 2) access and legitimacy, and 3) learning and effectiveness. Thomas and Ely shared most companies were comfortable with the first two paradigms and recognized programs were not effective because the training was often not reinforced. In the 1990s training increased, but the training was ineffective as organizations were not often equipped with internal subject matter experts and trainings were short in duration without adequate resourcing. In addition, minorities left the training feeling further traumatized by the training, as the curriculum positioned them as the voice of all people of color. When assessing these factors, they are still relevant in 2020. The commitment to diversity and inclusion is still very diverse based on the company, and training can still be problematic.

In the new millennium, the diversity and inclusion movement in corporate America has continued to expand and improve in some areas, due to shifts in employees and customer demographics, as well as globalization and technical skills gaps (Anand & Winters, 2008). Practitioners have come to recognize that diversity should not be compliance-led programs but integrated authentically with ongoing commitment. With the business case of diversity clear, companies have begun using the term inclusion as an extension of diversity. A number

of leaders were focused on creating workplaces that felt welcoming and no longer solely focused on assimilation. During the late 1990s, due to this shift, the idea of cultural competency has become a part of the American workplace. As a result, training has become more in-depth, and now ranges across a variety of topics outside of the race, including sexual orientation, age, and ability. However, even with this change, it is not universal, and due to lack of regulation, companies are left to do what they see appropriate for their companies.

Although it has been 56 years since the Civil Rights Act of 1964, many firms still grapple with how to design inclusive workplaces. Diversity and inclusion programs have not been effective for a myriad of reasons. Government mandates still require diversity training as punishment for organizations found guilty of discrimination, along with the deregulation of the EEOC by President Reagan (Anand & Winters, 2008). Since affirmative action has historically benefited white women, it has made organizations comfortable when looking at their diversity progress (Huang et al. 2019). And while there is more representation of Black Americans in organizations than ever before, they remain few and far between in managerial or leadership positions, reinforcing a disconnect especially when Blacks were the focus of many of the Civil Rights policies.

In *Opting Out: Losing the Potential of America's Young Black Elite*, sociologist Maya Beasley (2012) provides a historical account of diversity and inclusion efforts in business. Beasley's work emphasizes why the lived experiences of underrepresented groups should also be considered when creating employee-serving programs. Although the Civil

Rights Act created safeguards for Blacks and enabled them to obtain better jobs, they have still not reached parity for a variety of factors, according to Beasley. Beasley asserts that Blacks lack parity because of the way legislation was drafted, along with judicial interference, and lack of enforcement. Beasley reveals why American Blacks are overwhelmingly represented in social service fields, and not the lucrative fields as whites. She explains how career choices are informed by the socialization from previous generations. Essentially, Blacks lack adequate social capital to be exposed to other opportunities impacts their ability to know all that is possible and how to obtain it. Beasley also shares Black Americans' desire to work in social responsibility careers to aid the betterment of their communities. Lastly, the newness of the Black middle class and neighborhood segregation impacts the lack of mobility for this group. Not only do these factors impact access to new opportunities but reinforce the income gap between Blacks and whites. (Beasley, 2011, p. 22-27).

In order for organizations to create inclusive environments for Black millennial women and other minorities to thrive, they must be innovative in their approaches. Organizations must use a diverse set of resources to ensure their approach is holistic, taking into account lived experiences from existing social science research, organizational development literature. In addition, they must use the organizational literature that specifically amplifies the lived experience of people of color. By linking this literature, organizations can understand the situation, how individuals and groups like Black women experience the workplace, and how social structures impact the workplace. In addition,

organizations have access to shared definitions and frameworks they can leverage to begin to enact change within the organization. It also is necessary to leverage emerging research from think tanks. Think tanks examine diversity and inclusion by detailing emerging trends, contemporary definitions, and best practices, case studies; they also utilize a variety of analytical methods to measure progress, essential for companies to compare themselves to peers. Think tank reports are often written in a way that correlates with desired business outcomes, especially profitability. Lastly, while taking into account literature, inclusive of reports, the historic analysis of diversity and inclusion is an essential part of this conversation. Having this understanding of how compliance driven this topic was is crucial to understanding how to not foster inclusion. By acknowledging the need to focus on inclusion, organizations are better equipped to stop focusing on checking the box activities, without enough resources or follow up.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

I reflected on my experience and recognized a need to start to further research on our experiences as Black Women as we were often not considered in organizational development literature, practices and policies. It prompted me, as a researcher, scholar and practitioner, to move towards the impact generational differences would have on how people experience the workplace. Moreover, millennials will comprise such a large percentage of the workforce in the near future. In addition, I kept considering that Black women are excelling academically, which meant focusing on this group is not only morally correct but simply good business sense.

#### *A word on conceptual framework*

The third and fourth chapters tightly weave-in the overall methodology, participants' responses on their experiences around Emotional Tax and its many hidden and known facets, experience of interviewee and interviewer (me), the thematic highlights, the juxtaposition of literature and contrasts of insights. The study is a small study and thus there is no attempt to generalize the findings, though they heartily support the research questions around the lived experience of Emotional Tax on Black women.

The individuals, for my subject group for study, had to be Black millennial (born between 1981 to 1996) women who work in corporate America, in entry-level, and middle management positions. Such a key element of this research was determining the subject group's inclusion criteria, as this idea of Emotional Tax has been identified to differentially impact diverse minority groups including Black women and men and all women of color. Interview participants were recruited through social media outreach on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. This research took place via in-person meetings in individual's homes,

workplaces, and Zoom between January 2020 and February 2020. At the time of data collection, all participants were between the ages of 22 and 36 and full-time employees in U.S. organizations.

The formal interview guide was designed to acquire an understanding of the participants' specific work experiences as it relates to their feeling of inclusion and opportunities for advancement. Specifically, the guide inquired about their 1) familial background; 2) their formative years ranging from adolescents to college years; 3) how they determined their career path; 4) their perception of the racial climate at their organization; 5) their feelings toward their career development and/or progression; 6) and their engagement in workforce initiatives and relationships with colleagues inside and outside of work in the workplace. The data gathered from these questions is presented in tables to emphasize the similarities, themes, and best practices that inductively emerged within the interviews. An early portion of the interview focused on people's familial background including their parents' ethnicity, country of origin, marital status, and the socioeconomic background of their families. This was essential to highlight as part of this process, as this research is not only analyzing how participants experience and navigate life as a professional but how their pre-work origins contribute to how they navigate their career (please see Table 1 and Table 2 on pages 42 and 43). I present demographic information on the participants' familial background and formative years, and their academic and career attainment. Specifically, Table 1 shows a correlation to participants' exposure to predominantly white spaces before entering the workforce. These experiences correlate with how participants navigate their respective work environments and racial attitudes. Previous sociological research shows on

Black students in elite higher education institutions have difficulty navigating homogeneous whites spaces without the requisite social and cultural capital (Torres, 2009).

### **Self as the Instrument in my Qualitative Study**

Outside of my formal interview guide, I was also an instrument in my study. Reflexivity is defined as the “analytic attention to the researcher's role in qualitative research” (Gouldner, 1971, p. 16). In this case, I was a vessel to gain insight as I had points of commonality with my interview participants, as a Black millennial female, that has experienced Emotional Tax in corporate settings. My intimate awareness of this topic as a Black woman was something that I could leverage but also had to be conscious of. I had to set clear boundaries between myself and the participants; this methodology requires vigilance to minimize bias and separate my personal experiences from those of the women in my study. In addition, I had to be clear to establish myself as a researcher, not as a clinician who could support the unpacking of the psychological toll that we may discuss (Bright, 1992).

I had to be conscious of my own bias, as a former employee of two the organization's my participants worked at. My ability to know the historical context of some of these environments did provide an authentic connection with some participants. However, I could not let my previous experiences cloud my ability to hear their experiences, especially if it contradicted what I felt to be true. I had to balance establishing rapport and trust while staying within the confines of the intended research objectives and formatted interview guide. Outside of building this rapport, I wanted to build trust, and emphasize the confidentiality of the process. This was even more prevalent with the participants from organizations, I used to work at (Rew, Bechtel, & Sapp, 1993: 300). I intentionally bracketed personal experiences or perspectives I knew of the workplace if they did not



mention it. During each interview, I used my intuitiveness to synthesize participants' perspectives and thus connect with them on a personal level. The interviewing process, although structured, was conversational in approach so that participants could share topic-related insights, attitudes, and beliefs at will. This intuitiveness gave way for my receptivity. I was able to learn from my participants at the moment, to challenge my own thoughts of Emotional Tax, and how I viewed diversity and inclusion efforts in organizations.

Throughout the interview, I had to develop sensitivity or the ability to see and hear accurately what is being shared by the participants. (Rew et al., 1993, p. 301). I was thus able to maintain reciprocity as we were peers learning from each other, with these shared experiences.

### ***The Setting***

I chose to focus on Corporate America's commitment to diversity and inclusion because of the financial and human capital resources being spent annually. Diversity and Inclusion is big business with a reported \$8 billion spent annually (Hansen, 2003; Mehta, 2019). Since the 1960's, the U.S. has instituted a series of Civil Rights Acts in the 1960s to protect minorities in the workplace, schools, and other public settings. Due to the nature of the policies created, including affirmative action, organizations initially viewed diversity as a compliance activity and lawsuit mitigation through mandatory training (Anand & Winters, 2008). Extreme federal enforcement measures have prioritized corporate commitment to diversity. Government-influenced prioritization was shown when President Reagan began to deregulate the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in the 1980s and, consequently, organizations' efforts declined (McCormick, 2017). The Workforce 2000 report made it apparent that the marketplace would have to diversify demographically to

include people of color and women; organizations then became compelled to focus on D & I as part of their professional mission (Anand & Winters, 2008). As time went on, “inclusion” rather than simply “diversity for its own sake,” shifted the focus along with corporate training. Despite the fact that progression of D & I programs vary across different organizations and there is no “one size fits all” remedy. Some organizations have allocated sizable resources and have moved beyond computer-based compliance training; but some organizations still do not have formal programs (Lindsey, 2017). The unique experiences of Black women in corporate spaces have not been thoroughly addressed as of late and they remain significantly underrepresented in manager and leadership positions in comparison to white women and Black men.

The empirical findings suggest that regardless of Black millennial women’s background they all have experienced racialized interactions that reinforce inferiority. These insights also reinforce how Black women are socialized from a young age by their families and society to be aware of how they are perceived in relation to whiteness; they are often taught to be on guard, often amplifying the psychological toll. Minority groups that are excluded like Black women, must have their nuanced sentiments heard, as they will have an increased presence in the marketplace. In addition, higher education statistics reveal that Black women are one of the leading groups in obtaining advanced degrees (Reeves & Guyot, 2017). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, “between 2009 and 2010, Black women earned 68% of associate's degrees, 66% of bachelor's degrees, 71% of master's degrees and 65 % of all doctorate degrees awarded to Black students (NCES, 2019). This meant Black women received a higher percentage of degrees within their race/ethnic group than did women in any other major group. With the rate of Black women increasing in the

workforce, and their advanced education, their skill set will be essential in the marketplace, which is why organizations should take the time to foster inclusive environments.

I follow the primary tenets of qualitative interviewing methodology and the grounded theory approach for data analysis. (See the appendix for full interview guide). This process included the transcription of interviews, writing field notes, and coding transcripts. The interview analysis included open and axial coding techniques devised by grounded theorists (Glaser, & Strauss, 1967; Corbin & Strauss 1990). I also created a textual database to house my interview transcripts and coding schema. By creating this database, I was able to uniformly aggregate and analyze various individual and organizational attributes related to how my respondents experienced Emotional Tax at work. This approach allowed for the identification of common themes, outliers and best practices to consider when developing recommendations for organizations to develop more inclusive environments.

**Table. 1 Participant Familial Background and Formative Years**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Mother Degree</b>	<b>Father Degree</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>City/Suburb</b>	<b>Neighborhood Racial Demographics</b>	<b>Friend Demographics</b>
NH	Masters	GED	Middle class	Suburb	Predominately white	Mixed
CC	Associates	Bachelors	Middle class	City	Predominately Black	Mixed
MJ	Associates	Bachelors	Poor	City	Predominately Black/Hispanic	Black
AW	High School	High School	Middle class	Suburb	Predominately Black	Black
AJ	Associates	Bachelors	Middle class	Suburb	Predominately white	Black
SB	High School	College*	Middle class	City/Suburb	Predominately Black	Mixed
TF	High School	High School	Middle class	City	Predominately Black	Black
DJ	Bachelors	Masters	Middle class	City	Predominately Black	Black
CH	High School	High School	Middle class	Suburb	Predominately white	Mixed
CS	College*	High School*	Middle class	City	Predominately Black	Black

\*Did not finish

The interview sample includes 10 Black millennial women who work in corporate organizations that ranged in age from 22 and 36. The participants' parents had various educational attainments; nine identified as middle class and just one reported that they had grown up poor. There was a mix of individuals who lived in the city, and suburbs, and some even relocated from the city to the suburbs as children. In addition, it is worth noting the racial composition of their neighborhood; three participants lived in predominantly white communities while the rest lived in predominantly Black neighborhoods. Lastly, two out of three participants who lived in predominantly white neighborhoods had racial mixed friend groups except one whose immediate social circle was exclusively Black.

**Table. 2 Participant Academic and Professional Attainment**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>Career Level</b>	<b>PWI/HBCU</b>	<b>Highest Degree</b>
NH	22	Utility	Entry Level	PWI	Bachelors
CC	25	Food Service	Entry Level	PWI	Bachelors
MJ	25	Financial Service	Entry Level	HBCU/PWI	Masters
AW	26	Financial Service	Entry Level	PWI	Bachelors
AJ	27	Financial Service	Entry Level	PWI	Bachelors*
SB	31	Retail	Manager	PWI	Bachelors*
TF	32	Financial Service	Manager	PWI	Bachelors
DJ	34	Healthcare	Manager	HBCU/PWI	Masters
CH	36	Aerospace	Manager	PWI	<i>Ph.D. Candidate</i>
CS	36	Financial Service	Manager	PWI	<i>Masters</i>

*Italics* currently enrolled

\*Did not complete

The interview sample included 10 Black millennial women who worked in corporate organizations that ranged in age from 22 and 36. The participants represent various industries including financial services, food service, aerospace, healthcare, utility and retail. Half of the participants were in management positions and the other half were in entry-level roles. All the participants attended predominantly while colleges and universities for either undergraduate and/or graduate school.

### **Limitations of the Research**

This research is a step in furthering the connection between lived experience, social science, and organizational development research. Given that this research focuses on Black millennial women in corporate spaces, there will be opportunities to continue to do extensive research on Emotional Tax for members of demographic groups who are still underserved and under-researched. Future research could consider the impact of Emotional Tax, on Black women in other age groups, and compare findings, as there may be differences based on age

and generation. There is also an opportunity to consider this phenomena's impact on other racial and ethnic minorities, and gender such as Black men, Latino men and women, and people who are transgender or gender non-binary. Furthermore, it would be worth researching the impact of Emotional Tax on racial/ethnic and gender minorities, in non-profit organizations and government institutions. Identifying if there are differences across sectors provides insight if diversity and inclusion best practices and findings can transcend sectors. Recognizing the nature of differences across and within sectors can be helpful for practitioners as they develop their strategies.

## CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Despite explicit diversity programs such as those targeted for the advancement of Black professionals, and their academic pedigree overall Black women are still not advancing (Roberts 2019). Without question, Blacks pay a high cost or Emotional Tax, including negative effects on their health and the lack of career advancement, when acculturating to workplaces that subscribed to whiteness. However, that these environments can be transformed to be more inclusive if organizations are intentional in their efforts when cultivating the culture, and performance management process.

As discussed in the third chapter, this chapter takes a granular look at participants' responses on their experiences around Emotional Tax, the thematic highlights, the juxtaposition of literature and contrasts of insights. These statements were reinforced by the two emerging themes from my interviews which are: oftentimes Black women are using double consciousness to navigate their workplaces, and in order to cultivate inclusive environments, organizations must create psychological safety for them to thrive.

### **“Because I was Black”**

Throughout my research, it was apparent that regardless of personal attributes all participants had some type of negative experience due to their race at some point in their life. One example is when being asked if they felt as if they had to work harder than their coworkers. When specifically asked if they felt they had been treated differently, and the women in my study most commonly reported yes “Because I was Black” “Because of race.” This stood out to me as this response reminds me of the question of “how does it feel to be a problem?” posed by W.E.B. Du Bois' in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). The question emphasizes no matter how accomplished these women are they are treated differently simply

because of their race. The concept of stereotype threat (Steele, 1997) works in tandem with W.E.B. Du Bois' idea of double consciousness. By viewing themselves through the gazer's perspective, subjugated individuals are better equipped to maneuver racial hierarchies, which Blacks have to do in order to survive even at work as exemplified by my participants.

In their commentaries, the women in my sample were always conscious of how their race impacts their interactions or success. Although they didn't know each other, these Black millennial women \ had a plethora of similarities. Recent empirical work reinforces the need for practitioners to understand dimensions of intersectionality within minority groups; the confluence of race, gender, and other factors impact an organization's ability to perform (Rosette, de Leon, Koval, Harrison, 2019, p. 17). It was also important to analyze if age or industry impacted the participants' views. Early within the process, it was clear that age or industry did not make any difference, and that Black women in the workplace, were expected to always overachieve.

**“I Did Feel like I Needed to Be as Close to Perfect as Possible.”**

“I did feel like I needed to be as close to perfect as possible,” remarked one of my participants. She was a Diversity Manager, at a global financial service firm TF. This was a common sentiment from all participants except one. This perception of being perfect reinforced the feeling that psychological safety or the comfortableness to take a risk does not exist (Delizonna, 2017). Participants felt the pressure to not just be on par with colleagues, but to always exceed expectations. Laura Delizonna in her article “High-Performing Teams Need Psychological Safety. Here's How to Create It” (2017) contends that “psychological safety allows for moderate risk-taking, speaking your mind, creativity, and sticking your neck out without fear of having it cut off — just the types of behavior that lead to market



breakthroughs (Delizonna, 2017). Psychological safety is necessary, in the work environment because it allows employees to take a risk and develop with the security they will not be chastised or fired. However, if an employee is on guard they are “consciously preparing to deal with potential discrimination by bracing for insults, avoiding social situations and places, or taking care with appearance to avoid bias” (Catalyst 2016). In fact, the Catalyst report reports 54% of those who felt different based on gender and race/ethnicity felt that they had to be “on guard” compared to 34% of those who did not feel different either (Travis, 2016). This data underscores how common it is for Black people to feel on guard. Without psychological safety workspaces remain exclusive and affect how parents must prepare their children for their predetermined reality.

#### **“I Will Always Have to do Twice as Much”**

There was a variety of familial structures outlined; out of 10 participants two participants reported that their biological parents were still married, and the others either had experienced the death of a parent, or their parents had separated or divorced. There was no correlation to any of the marital status of participants in regard to their academic and professional accomplishments. It was apparent regardless of their home structure these women approached school and careers with a certain level of excellence. Healthcare professional DJ reflected that her family reinforced “I will always have to do twice as much to get a third of [what] I had, to do twice as much to get to be able to see and do what I want.” This remark had a lasting impact, because so many of the other women have shared these lived experiences, even if by reflecting on lessons shared by their families.

Outside of family structure, all the Black women I interviewed reported that they had grown up in middle class households, except one, who defined her upbringing as poor. The

one participant MJ, who is an experienced associate at an accounting firm shared “honestly now that I know it was poor.” MJ’s childhood experiences are akin to the sociology literature that underscores the correlation between social identity threat and culture shock (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Torres, 2009). These two theories assert that minorities who are most invested in integrating into mainstream corporate America often lack the requisite cultural and social capital to do so. They assert these individuals are consequently more likely to experience social identity threat at work. When thinking of social capital, one must recognize the role that not having social capital or lack of access to social networks has on an individual’s ability to navigate the corporate culture.

When studying my data holistically, two of the women I interviewed shared they were lower middle class and poor. Both chose careers in the financial service industries and had committed to jobs with their respective organizations before graduation. In their commentaries, they explained that while in college they participated in internships at their respective organizations in the financial service industry. It is also worth noting that one went to a PWI and the other attended an HBCU, but they had similar career trajectories and motivations for choosing the industry. For instance, TF shared “I was already from my hourly standpoint, making more than my parents. So financial stability was very important for me and currently is still important to me.” MJ reflected: “And my mom did that instill that in us when we were younger, and I don't think she knew she was doing I think she was just doing that on like, I want my kids to know what money is and how to use it.” They both elaborated that their upbringing encouraged them to choose a career path that they know would provide financial security.

When looking at the neighborhoods, schools, and immediate friend groups of the participants there were interesting themes and nuances. All of the participants lived in predominantly urban Black areas at one point in their lives, while three of them eventually moved to predominantly white suburban neighborhoods. The three women who moved, all recounted how they experienced their race in relation to the white neighbors while still maintaining social ties to Black peers. There was a lot more diversity with their schooling paths for primary schooling, as some people went to public and private, and the diversity varied. Regardless of where they grew up, they would at all at some point have negative experiences based on their race. This data reinforced that it does not matter where you come from. The first thing people always have to navigate is their race and ethnicity as a Black person, there is no chance to be seen as an individual at first.

### **“I Love Being African American”**

There was one participant, NH, a Leadership Development Associate, who stood out regarding her primary and collegiate education. NH attended a predominately white private high school and predominantly white college and played sports at both. She often felt people did not assume she was intellectually gifted and that she was at her selective high school because of her basketball ability until she proved them otherwise. She also shared that by the time she got to college she expected certain behavior from white people. In a poignant quote participant NH, shared:

I mean, obviously, in any school, there's probably going to be racial issues and racial tension Especially me being in a PWI is the prime time when Trump was being elected and stuff like that. But I felt that a lot of the people that I knew and that were in my circle, regardless of their race, were very supportive.

NH reinforces the expectation that Black people expect to always have to navigate racialized situations. NH is the only participant who felt that she does not have any barriers with being accepted in her career, thus far. She did understand her social capital provides her a rare experience of inclusion as a Black woman. NH explained:

I honestly think that the background that I have kind of alleviates a few of those issues that a typical Black person would have in the workplace because...in my company... I've talked to working adults, so they all have known of [Lafayette College]...and even my high school people know of it. So, it's kind of an, especially with like, majoring in engineering. It's kind [like] people don't really think that I don't deserve to be there.

Although she does not experience Emotional Tax at work, NH recognizes how her stellar resume is a prerequisite to not be deemed inferior. She also knows she is more talented than some of her white male peers and that nepotism, not skills, promoted them to her leadership program.

Eight of the ten women in my sample attended a predominately white institution for at least part of their college tenure. Two participants who graduated from historically Black colleges and universities, earned advanced degrees at predominately white institutions. Some participants who went to PWIs experienced racially charged instances or feelings of exclusion. In contrast, the women who went to HBCUs described their college experiences as affirming and nurturing academically and otherwise. MJ reflected that attending an HBCU

“...definitely prepared me for corporate America. They kind of they told us like, what to look out for what we're up against. and even though it's not going to be easy, you can persevere by doing you know, like, they'll give you steps. They definitely make you love being who you are like I love being African American..they definitely brought that out of me like I don't think I loved my race as much as I did at the college.

Intentional preparation in a Black academic environment provided her the tools to navigate within the corporate mainstream. The HBCU culture undoubtedly affirmed her identity as a Black woman and gave her the necessary confidence to succeed professionally.

AJ expressed how she wanted to attend a HBCU, but her mother prevented her from doing so. In her commentary, she shared that she believes that attending an HBCU would have been beneficial for her development; she struggled in college, due to having to navigate racialized environments. Eight of the women I interviewed were motivated to attend their respective colleges and universities because of financial aid options and institutional name recognition and selectivity. The two that did not make an explicit connection to these determinants were those who attended HBCUs. There was a tradeoff for attending an environment that was created with you in mind versus having to make decisions strictly based on financial support. This situation often makes one think about what cost do people have to navigate environments that will perpetuate Emotional Tax.

***“It's Like a Water Hose and You're Taking Everything In.”***

Not only did the participants' formative years impact the way they selected colleges, but also their career paths. Not all of the participants knew exactly what they wanted to do professionally at the time they entered college. Some had an idea based on their academic interests, but it took time for them to crystalize their career goals. Some women did participate in internships or had full-time jobs that provided them insight into career paths. All of the individuals in the financial services field had received exposure early in their careers. Moreover, brand recognition is what drew participants to their organizations and allowed growth opportunities. Many of them shared how they wanted to work in an organization where they could grow their career and get exposure to diverse opportunities. It is important for these Black women to find their place in these predominantly white spaces in order to find success. Most of them had only worked in corporate environments and felt that the industry is where they could have their career advancement opportunities. Nine out of 10

participants felt their race had in some way impacted their career in corporate spaces. It did not matter what school, family structure, or previous experience they had, they all experienced having to work hard to prove themselves based on race and/or their age.

When inquiring about job preparedness, just two participants felt completely prepared for their roles. Most shared they had to learn on the job and that there was a lot of self-teaching necessary to ensure their success. These women felt most prepared because they had completed internships at their respective organizations prior to joining full time. The internship programs they did were pipeline programs to increase the presence of Black and Latinx in their organizations. This is important to underscore because part of this experience was to help socialize the participants to the company culture, develop some technical aptitude, and to network with existing employees and other interns of colors. Through these programs, they were educated on the necessary certification exams that they would need to advance in their careers; they both took their certification exams early on in their careers intentionally. They shared with me that they knew that most Black employees did not take their exams early and/or pass at the rate as their white peers.

Although this program was beneficial in the sense it provided a learning and job opportunity, it did not provide a holistic picture of what the experience would be like for them at the company as Black women. In general, the 10 participants felt they were lacking the specific technical experiences for their roles but had transferable skills that made them a good fit, nevertheless. AJ, a financial advisor recalled, “the training could be a lot better.” She shared that her leadership was not always accessible to teach her new things and that “it was like a water hose.” Not only was it evident that these women took the initiative to do self-learning to fill in the gaps, but they all also took the time to cultivate meaningful professional

relationships. These experiences reinforce how Black women are often expected to assimilate and have to train themselves to ensure they are outperforming their similarly stationed white counterparts.

***“It's Mixed...Depending on Who I'm talking to”***

Although other aspects of the interviews provided insight into the participants' experiences and perspective of race, a section of the interview directly focused on their perceptions of race at their current organizations. All of the participants' organizations had positions in diversity, equity, and inclusion. They also all shared their organizations expressed their desire to attract diverse talent and create a more inclusive culture. The organizations with global ties all had established diversity and inclusion programs with dedicated staff as well explicit diversity and inclusion programs and strategies. According to participants who worked at firms without global connections, diversity and inclusion strategies and programs had just gotten off the ground. Regardless, participants noted that any and all diversity and inclusion efforts seemed to be benefitting men of color and white women, and not specifically Black women.

Like so many Black women, the women I interviewed were taught to work hard, and still expect not to gain parity. For those women who worked at organizations with affinity groups, they all reported participating in these groups. They perceived these spaces as a place of safety to not only connect with other people of color, but also to find people who were invested in helping them succeed. They enjoyed being in these spaces instead of their current roles. CC, a Change Management Senior Specialist at a food service company explicitly shared:

“...it's the best part of me coming to work. Like, that's where I feel like I make a difference. And that's what kind of fuels me.”

CC's quote reinforces that diversity and inclusion programs can play a major role in retaining diverse staff; they may even serve as a recruitment tool, as some of the women became proud recruitment ambassadors at their companies. Affinity groups may also strategically help Black women advance into leadership roles, as these spaces are so integral to how people navigate their workspaces. Furthermore, it became evident some of the mentors that served the participants were connected through these affinity programs. Having a sense of community can make all of the difference.

At the time of hire, participants all felt welcomed by their organizations but understood the culture was not consistent across the organization. A Senior Organizational Effectiveness Consultant CH, shared her organization's "culture is inconsistent." This is why when organizations are brainstorming how to create an inclusive culture, we need to understand that so much of this is dependent on the actions of those in middle management positions. Middle management has such a large role in creating culture, as they have the largest day-to-day involvement with hiring, onboarding, how employees are developed, and made to feel like part of the team.

Without demographic diversity in middle management there is limited diversity in thought, talent, lived experience, and approach. It is not uncommon for Black women to spend more time in entry-level roles than their white peers; this often means there are diverse low-level staff, but all white managers and these environments are less inclusive for minorities in general. As the broken rung theory evidences, Black women are still severely underrepresented because of there is a broken step on the ladder to advancement. The 2019 "Women in the Workplace" study published by LeanIn.org and McKinsey & Company found "Based on five years of data from 590 companies employing more than 22 million people,



two things are clear: Despite progress at senior levels, Black women remain significantly underrepresented. A “broken rung” at the step up to manager is the biggest obstacle that women face on the path to leadership” (Huang et al. 2019). Data shows that Black women and Latinas are more likely to be held back by the broken rung. For every 100 entry-level men who are promoted to manager, just 68 Latinas and 58 Black women are promoted. Likewise, for every 100 men hired to manage, 57 Latinas and 64 Black women are hired.” As this data shows Black women are not advancing at the same rate as their white female counterparts, even if equally as qualified, which reinforces the Emotional Tax.

DJ, a manager within the healthcare industry, shared “I feel like actually, as my director, she's actually a pretty good mentor...[she is a] African American female.” Having a Black woman as a mentor, who understood her experiences was a game-changer for DJ’s career. Until this role, she did not feel this supported by her direct supervisors. On average the teams with diverse managers had more diverse teams and focused on professional development. The participants who were managers ensured their team was diverse when possible and receiving professional development of their staff. Many of them told me that they didn’t want to perpetuate these negative traits with their team members, and they have experience and even still experience in some cases.

As the organizational culture and diversity and inclusion strategy became apparent, it also became clear that all participants had explicitly been aware of people having diversity and inclusion concerns. For the Black women in my study, the most common issue was lack of racial diversity in management and leadership, which led to a conversation of access and opportunity. It was clear that these companies had advancement opportunities, but they had not yet implemented effective strategies to ensure that more women of color have access to

these opportunities. Even the organizations that had intentional diversity pipeline programs did not have any real demonstrated successes. CC candidly shared how her experience was impacted by the way people viewed younger colleagues in the workplace. She argued that their level of skepticism was based on their age, and the race could have been a secondary factor.

Although there was a lack of representation in their respective organizations, everyone in my sample had at least one mentor that was helping them navigate their respective careers. The diversity of their mentors was wide-ranging, including white men and women. They all found the value of having a mentor; it was not simply enough to do good work, but they needed to have people with experience to help them navigate the workplace. Only two out of the 10 women I interviewed participated in formal mentoring programs. Sponsorship is an essential part of career progression, specifically for women of color. One of the two respondents, who had a mentor did not find value in the relationship she had.

CS, a 36-year-old financial manager explained that her mentor is white and Senior Vice President who had “ been with the company for 42 years, [but] has no education besides high school. So it's just one of those things where kind of like our outlook is a little bit different.” This is not to say that as a white woman she could provide helpful mentorship, but there was no point of intersection for these two women professionally or personally. CS’ case stands out as her white mentor was advanced with a high school degree, while she felt she needed a master’s to differentiate herself in the marketplace. This dynamic shows why Black women do experience Emotional Tax, they have to work hard and differentiate themselves for white women to be promoted with the job experience.

*“It Depends on the Day”*

When asking what a typical day is like for work like for participants, there was always a slight pause as each day was filled with their own set of adventures and tasks. A common theme overall was that the jobs were all demanding in their own right. As the conversation went on, even the women who spoke highly of their organization’s diversity and inclusion efforts, individuals reflected on if they were really in a position that they wanted to be in. The participants' commentaries were filled with long pauses, quietness, and emphatic “no’s,” as the question really encouraged deep reflection. Specifically, it was evident that these women had an overarching career goal even if they did not have each milestone identified. They were all career-oriented and focused on continuing their achievement.

Not only did the overarching goal setting align the participants, but it was also clear eight out of 10 participants did not feel that they were getting the necessary coaching to advance to the next level. They attributed this lack of development to their direct supervisor not making this a consistent priority, as the focus was more on completing their daily tasks. This finding was similar across participants in manager and entry-level roles; Black women often do not make it to leadership in these organizations because there is not a consistent investment in them being promoted. It was also telling that some of the participants had not shared their future goals with their supervisors, which left one to wonder how they envision getting the support at work to navigate to those roles. CH noted that her mentors were a part of the leadership, but they could not advocate on her behalf and she was left to deal with a manager who was not committed to developing her. DJ also felt she was getting necessary coaching because her manager was a woman of color and knew how to specifically help her. DJ also shared that she planned to “continue to develop a good knowledge base to be able to

be like a director or ultimately like a VP” in 5 years. DJ has a clear path, but she felt her current role would get her to that big picture goal and that she felt supported by her leadership team. Success is two-fold; there is the individual doing their part, but also the role of the organization and the leadership to provide people the resources to succeed. DJ recognized her experience in stark contrast to what she has experienced with other roles in terms of having diverse leaders and feel included and supported.

Feedback is such a critical part of career development and when unpacking the participant’s experience with feedback, it was telling. All organizations had formal yearly reviews where each employee was appraised, however, the more routine feedback varied across participants. AJ, however, was an exception. She works in the financial services industry and she had regular access to the Managing Partner for routine feedback. This feedback is based on how well she did with her performance each week. AJ reflected that the insurance industry would not “even allow Black people to get life insurance, let alone work for a life insurance company. I think that was in the 80s.” Voluntary and involuntary turnover is really high AJ’s workplace, making it difficult to learn. Stories, such as AJ’s reinforce why organizations should reflect on how they are positioning people for success as new hires. Overall, no one was surprised with their feedback and they were all doing well. They took time to prepare for their reviews so as to ensure their reviewer had an accurate understanding of their previous year. All my participants felt they needed to be prepared to be advocate for themselves.

However, the women explained that there was no concerted effort from their supervisors to help them get to the next level. This reinforced this idea of the broken rung and why Black women do not continue to advance as it is not consistent across the board and

development of accountability for not having diverse teams. By not having strategic plans to increase diversity and inclusion, there will never be any movement in large numbers, as this has to be intentional. Receiving feedback and access to leadership should not be a prize but part of the employee experience.

When I asked participants if they had work-life balance, there were a variety of answers. A majority of the participants said absolutely yes, while others said it depended on the time of the year, while others said absolutely not. What was very telling about all of them is that they all worked really hard, and when being asked if they felt like they had to work harder than their peers, on average, most of them said yes. TF's response stood out:

"I don't I think we talked a lot about workflow balance, but within the value of stuff that was going on, nobody actually planned for me to have work-life balance. And then I will also say like, it was pressure that I put on myself because I was trying to get promoted, that I didn't necessarily feel comfortable disappearing for two weeks and then depending on when I took my vacation, I didn't always feel comfortable disconnecting completely."

Even if the organization provided a work-life balance, there was always a self-imposed, underlying pressure to maintain being twice as good as their peers. This relates to Emotional Tax as Black women expected to show up with more credentials and work harder without recognition or advancement opportunities. Even when TF would take on these large opportunities she never was selected for internal promotions. The women who felt like they had to work harder did not often see the fruits of their labor, whether it was this individual not being promoted, or their compensation did not relate. It's not just being able to disconnect from work, but it's how hard Black women work in relation to their peers and if the extra work is yielding the desired results.

***“The Best Part of My Day is Definitely Working with Diversity & Inclusion”***

All of the women shared that their organization has a direct commitment and desire for employee engagement. However, it was interesting to see how much of their engagement in workplace activities centered around affinity programming. This commonality shows that these women were engaging in the workplace for opportunities to connect with other colleagues and to engage with minorities in leadership positions. There was a definite interest in programming that focused on cultural diversity and professional development. CC reflected that “the best part of my day is definitely working with the diversity and inclusion” team. Another point for analysis is the immediate team's position on engagement, it definitely was not consistent. Some organizations had engagement programs, but the immediate teams that did not encourage employee engagement. The participants who were in management roles shared that they as managers took the time to encourage team engagement to boost morale. They thought it was beneficial to know their colleagues to make sure that they were creating an inclusive environment.

Outside of formal activities, many of the women-built networks within their organization, where they had people they could socialize with during the day; this was important to them. Everyone except one woman shared that they would get coffee and grab lunch with colleagues on a regular basis. They said that this was a way to not only engage them personally but also figure out how they could best support each other in the workplace. What drew participants to their colleagues, were common interests, them working on the same team having shared identity. NH even hung out with at work were not people that she would have likely met anywhere else. She revealed: “I mean, there's fun, good people to be around. We have like some things in common, but I mean, not too much.” On average, no one felt that

they had to socialize with their colleagues to get up ahead. There was a clear understanding that there was value in building a strategic network to help propel people forward and there was value in creating a community in the workplace. It is also apparent that the women developed friendships with people that extended to their personal lives. In *The Memo*, Minda Harts speaks a lot of the importance of building a tribe to support you inside and out of the workplace, understanding everything may not be easy, but having people to encourage you and affirm you are necessary, as it decreases the Emotional Tax.

### ***“I Give it a 7”***

When I asked the women how they would rate their experience in corporate America on a scale of one to 10, nine of the ten rated their experience as a “seven.” Their reasoning for this score included lack of advancement opportunities and there not being any extreme moments of negativity, as they expected some of the challenges they faced as Black women. CC stated: “I know what my experience can be, and I know what a 10 looks and feels like. I know what one could feel like too. So, I think, you know, I'm kind of at a place where it's like in the middle, but I'm more leaning toward you know, the more positive right now.” When I delved deeper about why they chose those ratings, it was apparent some of the challenges were around organizational culture or norms. It also became apparent that there was something more to be desired, but this reinforces why diverse leadership is needed. So often these spaces are not being led by people with various lived experiences and backgrounds to help share inclusiveness. Overall most were comfortable but recognize there was more they could be receiving from corporate America.

### ***A Running Conclusion***

There is evidence that there is an Emotional Tax levied due to isolation, lack of psychological safety, and having to 'work twice as hard' (Travis, 2016). As organizational development research reveals, leaders must ensure employees are building meaningful relationships while implementing policies that drive a culture of inclusion. Think tank organizations such as Catalyst, Deloitte, Harvard Business Review, and McKinsey and Company, continue to study and suggest best practices. Companies will need to prioritize how Black women specifically are impacted by corporate environments. Being a double minority has its own sets of obstacles which is why organizations need to begin to create more inclusion focused programming.



## CHAPTER 5: GETTING A RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The journey through the initiation of the study and having travelled the whole arc, I am humbled and liberated by the experience and the conversations with the participants. Taking a view of the enterprise, we acknowledge that although organizations are spending up to \$8 billion annually on diversity and inclusion efforts, Black women have not gained parity with respect to advancement and compensation (Hansen, 2003; Mehta, 2019). Not only do these ineffective efforts impact an organization's culture and efficiency, but also individuals' wellbeing (Travis, 2016). Due to the changing demographics of the workforce, corporate America must design an environment for Black women to be retained and advanced. Specifically, Black millennial women's experiences will identify opportunities for growth for companies, as millennials will make up 75% of the global workforce by 2025 (Deloitte, 2014). There are some organizations that have begun to address the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities and women. Organizations that are successful in this endeavor have explicit diversity and inclusion programs and specific goals, establish a culture of accountability, implement targeted recruitment and advancement programs for racially diverse staff that include mentorship and sponsorship, along with ongoing professional development.

### ***Prioritizing Inclusion***

To create truly inclusive environments, organizations must take a holistic approach to their diversity, equity, and inclusion. The method to foster these inclusive environments is to take into account the lived experiences of communities of color, as it is important to ensure

programs are not perpetuating oppressive systems and are meeting the needs of minorities. Moreover, it is vital to analyze the evolution of diversity and inclusion, including how government-enforced policies and historic events have influenced organizations' diversity and inclusion efforts and their transformation from compliance to commitment. Fusing all relevant literature, practitioners must be able to recognize the limitations to the existing literature they use to inform their work. To be effective organizations need to consider the individual and structural implications that impact how best practices and frameworks are implemented or received. And, social science literature by itself, does not provide the frameworks and best practices for an application that practitioners can leverage.

Some organizations are implementing new strategies to not only recruit but cultivate inclusive organizations where Black employees can thrive. They are starting to understand that an inclusive culture is the best way to attract and, most importantly, retain Black talent. For example, Intel has made very public commitments to increase their diversity and inclusion. Barbara Whye, Intel's Vice President of Human Resources and Chief Diversity and Inclusion argues that organizations like Intel must provide Black workers with better support systems. To begin providing better support systems, Intel started ensuring they were creating a critical mass of minorities. Intel announced "In January 2015, Intel set a goal to reach full representation of women and underrepresented minorities in the U.S. workforce by 2020. Intel has in fact achieved full representation in its U.S. workforce two years ahead of its 2020 goal. The company's workforce now reflects the percent of women and underrepresented minorities available in the U.S. skilled labor market" (Intel, 2018).

Following the release of this milestone for Intel, Whye shared “diversity and inclusion cannot be treated as an add-on. It has to be integrated into everything we do, and this is just the beginning. We need to make sure inclusion remains at the center. Every voice matters, and we need to listen and act to make change happen” (Intel, 2018.)

Intel understands the opportunities to increase their diversity and decided to take action to address culture, by providing additional resources and creating more inclusive policies. Intel decided to “invest in programs that expand access to STEM education and opportunities in underserved populations, including pathway programs, grants, and mentorship (Intel, 2018). It has also “invested heavily in internal programs so employees can bring their full experiences and authentic selves to work, such as the Warmline.” The Warmline is “a confidential employee hotline designed to help employees with career advancement and improve the overall employee experience. It has increasingly gained traction as a resource for employees, and as a result, has also become a source of insight into creating a more inclusive environment. Since its inception, the Warmline has received more than 20,000 cases with a retention rate of 82 percent. It’s an example of Intel’s data-driven principles underpinning correlations between a more diverse and inclusive organization and improved morale” (Intel, 2018)/ Currently, the organization is now working to address “the unique challenges women of color face” by “joining industry partners as a founding member of the Reboot Representation Tech Coalition, which will align existing philanthropic donations and increase funding to double the number of women of color graduating with computing degrees in the U.S. by 2025” (Elias, 2018).

Organizations like Intel provide hope that organizations can be effective with their diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. To be positioned for success, organizations should be leveraging: lived experiences of minorities, research reports with best practices from think tanks, and a broad variety of existing literature. It is essential to address recruitment and to obtain critical mass, but it is also important to foster an inclusive environment, to aid in the retention and advancements of minorities. By being strategic in this way, organizations are then best suited to decrease Emotional Tax and thereby improve individual and organizational outcomes. More importantly, organizations like Intel prove that with the appropriate commitment, including clear objectives and resources organizations can actually begin to change the landscape. To ensure effective diversity and inclusion programs organizations must: have explicit diversity and inclusion programs and specific goals, establish a culture of accountability, implement targeted recruitment and advancement programs for racially diverse staff that include mentorship and sponsorship, along with ongoing professional development.

Overall, this Capstone was a personal journey for me, as my research so often overlapped with my experience. I was able to not only self-reflect, but also able to identify ways I can help Black women, and other women of color navigate exclusive environments. I am also happy to have arrived at some tangible solutions to assist organizations see a return on their investment, as they continue to allocate resources for diversity and inclusion efforts. I hope readers of this Capstone are enlightened and also encouraged, that they too have a role

in fostering inclusion in the workplace, regardless of their identity. Lastly, I hope we all remember, diversity and inclusion, is not a sprint but a marathon.

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## APPENDIX

### Consent Form Interview Study

**LAUREN FOOTMAN** STUDENT  
 INVESTIGATOR GRADUATE  
 STUDENT MASTER OF  
 SCIENCE IN  
 ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS  
 PHONE #: 484-432-3369 EMAIL:  
 LFOOTMAN@SAS.UPENN.EDU

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/FACULTY  
 SPONSOR: DR. KIMBERLY TORRES  
 UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA  
 DEPARTMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL  
 DYNAMICS PHONE #: 908-477-7787  
 EMAIL: KTORRES@SAS.UPENN.EDU

### University of Pennsylvania

#### Consent Form Interview Study: From Compliance to Commitment:

#### The Individual and Organizational Impact of Emotional Tax

**Principal Investigator/Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Kimberly Torres, Department of  
 Organizational Dynamics Student Researcher: Lauren Footman, Master's Candidate,  
 Department of Organizational Dynamics**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to learn more about the experiences of Black female Millennials at corporate organizations. I am specifically interested in learning more about 1) your family background; 2) your pre-college origins; 3) how you determined your career path; 4) your perception of the racial climate at your organization; 5) your feelings toward your career development; and 6) and your engagement in workforce initiatives and relationships with colleagues inside and outside of work. This research is connected with requirements for the completion of the Master's in Organizational Dynamics. Dr. Kimberly Torres is the faculty sponsor for this project.

**Procedures:** By consenting to be part of this research, you agree to participate in a formal audio-taped interview, lasting no more than 1 hour. This interview will take place in a mutually agreed location in a public setting, outside of your workplace. I have a list of questions that will serve as a guide for our conversation. Having the interview audio-recorded is not required and I can take notes instead. Your participation is completely voluntary.

**Benefits/Risks:** This is a research study; therefore, there will be no direct benefits to you from participation in the study. It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide some

understanding of the experiences of Black Millennial women in corporate America, to aid in their career advancement. There are minimal risks to you from taking part in this interview. The risk is accidental disclosure of private information. However, efforts will be made, within the limits of the law, to safeguard the confidentiality of the information you provide. Only your pseudonym will appear on the interview transcript and no one other than myself, Lauren Footman will know your true identity. No company names or identifying information related to your place of employment will be referenced at any point in time throughout the course of this research and will not be included in any written documents related to this work. Should, I plan to continue this study at a later date, the data from this research will be de-identified, and could be stored and distributed for future research.

**Withdrawal:** You may choose not to answer any question that you do not want to answer and are free to terminate the interview at any time. Should you decide to terminate your interview and/or involvement in this study, I will destroy all related information, including written notes, audio transcripts, and consent forms. You will not be linked to my research in any way thereafter.

**Confidentiality:** No one, except the Principal Researcher, Lauren Footman, will know your true identity. You understand that all information collected in this study will be kept strictly confidential, except as may be required by law. If any publication results from this research, you will only be identified by the pseudonym that you choose prior to the interview. All transcriptions, recordings and notes from our conversation will be securely located on my password-protected computer. Your pseudonym is the only identifying information to be included on the transcript and notes. Consent forms will be kept in a secure location; I am the only person who will have access to this information. Because of the confidential nature of the research, there will be no witness to consent procedures; only the subject and principal researcher will sign this consent form.

**Subject Rights:** If you wish to have further information regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Director of Regulatory Affairs at the University of Pennsylvania by telephoning 215-898-2614. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to your satisfaction. You have read and understand the consent form. You agree to participate in this research study. Upon signing below, you will receive a copy of this consent form. Thank you for your participation.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Subject	Signature of Subject	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Investigator	Signature of Investigator	Date

## **Interview Guide From Compliance to Commitment The Individual and Organizational Impact of Emotional Tax**

*Lead in:*

My name is Lauren Footman and I am a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania in the Department of Organizational Dynamics. To fulfill my program requirements, I am completing my Capstone research project. My research focuses on the experiences of Black millennial women (born between 1981 to 1996) in entry level and middle management positions in corporate spaces. I am personally drawn to this research because of my experiences as a Black a millennial woman, who has worked in corporate America as a human resource professional. My career experiences have provided me insight into the organizational and individual implications of un-inclusive workspaces, and the ways organizations can begin to address these implications strategically and institutionally through diversity initiatives. Last semester, I conducted research on the effects corporate environments can have on Black professionals' emotional and physical health and their professional advancement, based on how they perceive work environment, including their goals and opportunities for advancement. For my Capstone, my goal is to acquire deeper insights into this topic by using a multimethod approach. I plan to conduct a historical analysis of the evolution of diversity and inclusion within corporate organizations, including how government-enforced policies and historic events have influenced organizations' diversity and inclusion efforts and their effects on Black women's trajectories. For this part of my study, I am conducting interviews with Black millennial women to better understand their personal experiences at work and how they perceive diversity and inclusion practices first-hand at their companies. Having an in-depth understanding of Black millennial women's professional experiences will identify opportunities of growth and profitability for companies.

To gain a better understanding of your specific experience I would like to ask you about 1) your family background; 2) your formative years ranging from adolescents to college years; 3) how you determined your career path; 4) your perception of the racial climate at your organization; 5) your feelings toward your career development, and 6) your engagement in workforce initiatives and relationships with colleagues inside and outside of work in the workplace. This interview study is being conducted under the guidance of Dr. Kimberly Torres, at the University of Pennsylvania. Your pseudonym will appear on the interview transcript and no only other than myself, Lauren Footman will know your true identity. Your organization's name will not be named or referred to any way that would identifying during the course of the research. Thank you for your willingness to participate.

### **Section I: Introduction**

For Everyone:

To begin, would you mind telling me a little bit about yourself?

Age:

Position Title:

Position Level: (Entry Level, Management) (Length of time at job)

Industry:

Ethnic/racial self-identification:

Family and national origins: (i.e. Were both your parents born in the U.S? What are their racial/national origins?)

## **Section II: Family Background**

Now if you could tell me a little bit about your family (i.e. family structure, parents' professions and education)

Growing up did you live with both of your parents? (If not, who did you grow up ?) Probe: Were your parents/guardians married?

What do your parents do for a living? (i.e. present and past jobs/careers. How long have they been at their respective jobs?)

What is your mom's highest level of education? What is your dad's highest level of education? (i.e. type of degree, training, experience where did they attend)

Do you have siblings? If so, how many? What are they currently doing professionally?

How would you classify your family's social class background when you were growing up? (Probe for details here about financial situation, neighborhood quality, homeownership)

### **Formative Years**

What type of schools did you attend as a child? (private, charter, public, probe for racial/ethnic composition of classes & school)

What kinds of activities did you participate in outside of school? If so which ones? If not, was there a reason why? Probe: Did you participate in any extracurriculars? If so, which ones? If not, was there a reason why? Probe: What made you choose to participate [names of activities]?

Where did you grow up? How would you describe your neighborhood up in terms of racial/ethnic diversity?

Probe: What college did you go to? Is this a PWI or HBCU?

How did you select this school?

How would you describe your friend group growing up in terms of racial/ethnic diversity? (ask about closest friends)

Are there instances or lessons, from childhood or college that inform how you navigate work? If so, what are they?

Overall, how did you feel about your college experience? Probe: Did you have an idea of what you wanted to do career-wise? If so, what informed this career choice?

### **Career Path Decisions**

When did you start working at your company? Have you always worked in corporate America? If not, what other industry did you work in and why did you transition to corporate? Probe: What drew you to your current organization and your role? Did you always want to be in the professional position you are currently in?

How did you prepare for this role? Did you feel prepared professionally? If yes, what prepared you and if not, what did you feel you were lacking?

### **Perceptions of Racial Climate**

How would you describe the culture/values of your organization? Probe: Does it feel inclusive, welcoming and accepting for new employees? Probe: How does it feel to you after working here for [time specification]? Is that different than when you started? What do you think accounts for that change?

Would you describe it as diverse? If yes, what types of diversity do you see? If no, why not?

Are there any senior leaders who are racially diverse that you are aware of? Probe: Do you have mentor/role models that encourage you professionally? (Probe: for race/ethnicity/gender of mentors/role models).

How racially and ethnically diverse is your immediate team?

Is there a diversity and inclusion program within your organization? What are your thoughts about D&I efforts at your company? If yes, why, if not why? Do you participate in any of these programs? If so, what is this experience like?

How does your company talk about D&I? Do you know what the organization's diversity and inclusion commitment is?

Have you been aware of others having concerns of diversity and inclusion in this organization? If so, what?

### **Professional Development**

What is a typical day like for you at work? Do you find it enjoyable? What are the best and worst parts of your day?

Are you in the position you currently wish to be in?

Have you devised a plan for your professional trajectory? Probe: If so, how far out have you planned? If so, have you discussed this with your supervisor? Do you feel you can reach your goals here? Probe: Where do you see yourself in 5 years, and do you see yourself able to advance here?

Do you feel you receive adequate coaching and development that you need? If not, what is missing and why do you feel it is? If yes, what do you find most valuable?

How often do you receive formal feedback? Is it mandated or voluntary? How do you feel about this feedback and your performance overall? Do you ever feel like you have to work extra hard to prove yourself?

How do you prepare for your yearly performance review? What is the experience like for you?

Are always prepared for the feedback in your yearly performance review? If not, why are you surprised?

Do you think you have work/life balance? If no, why not? Probes: Do you take a routine vacation? If so, do you feel you can completely disconnect? If no, why not? Do you feel you ever have to work harder than your peers? If so, why is that?

Have you ever felt as if any aspect of your career trajectory was impacted by any part of your identity? What makes you say that?

### **Workplace Engagement**

Do you participate in any social organizations or functions at work? If so which ones? If not, why not? What is that experience like for you?

Is employee engagement encouraged by the organization? What about your immediate team?

Do you ever go to lunch or grab coffee with your colleagues? If so, what draws you to these individuals? If not is there a specific reason why you don't?



Do you ever socialize with any of your colleagues outside of work? If so, what draws you to these individuals? If not is there a specific reason why you don't? Probe: Do you feel you have to do this to get ahead?

### **Conclusion**

Lastly, how would you rate your experience in corporate America overall? (On a scale of 1-10-1 being the worst experience and 10 being the best experience) Professionally? Socially? What makes you give those ratings?

Thank you for your participation, it is greatly appreciated. Is there anything else you would like to add?

If there's anything else you would like to talk about, please feel free to contact me via email or phone. Email: [lfootman@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:lfootman@sas.upenn.edu) Cell: 484-432-3369.

**Minda Harts Interview Correspondence**  
**April 10, 2020**

**Do you encourage Black women to acculturate or assimilate to their organizational culture? Is your advice the same for other women of color? If not, what are the key differences?**

My position is for Black women to consider giving themselves permission to decide who they want to be in the workplace. We haven't always made career decisions based on our needs but on the needs of our counterparts due to workplace and respectability politics. It's not a question of to assimilate or not--yet, are you comfortable with assimilation or not? I can't answer those questions for another Black woman. The basis for my research and perspective for writing *The Memo: What Women of Color Need To Know To Secure A Seat At The Table*, is to remind Black women that at any time in our careers, we get to define our own career success. And if you look at the history of "assimilation" it hasn't gotten us any additional seats at the table.

**Moreover, do you partner with organizations to help them develop a culture that supports Black/women of color taking their seat at the table? What types of companies have you been able to support successfully, and what type of support do you specifically provide? Have any industries have been less willing to work with you and if so do you have any insight as to why this is?**

I started the Women of Color Equity Initiative in the Winter of 2018, but I have been working with companies and organizations since 2016. The impetus for the WOC Equity Initiative is to provide a diverse, pipeline of Black women and women of color into management and C-Suite roles. Often, we aren't even part of the interview process, so I am actively partnering with companies and organizations to add more Black women to their pipeline. The other part of the initiative--that's most important is working with those companies and organizations to make sure Black women can thrive in their workplace culture. Because I don't want to help recruit a Black woman who will be micro and macro-aggressed from one environment to another. Equity is what makes this initiative successful over the number of placements. The larger concern is will they stay. We are tracking the data and hope to have more statistics in 2021.

**Are you familiar with the concept of "emotional tax" (Travis, 2016) as it relates to Black women's experiences in corporate America? Do you discuss the impact of racially charged experiences on employees' emotional and physical health with your individual and organization clients? If so, how do you approach this conversation and what is the reception to this? Who is most/least receptive to these conversations & why? Do you think you have been able to make any inroads with helping organizations recognize and or alleviate any of these stressors?**

Absolutely. There is an emotion tax being a woman of color in the workplace, especially when you are the "only" one or one of a few minorities. In my research over 90 percent of women of color said they deal with racism on a daily basis at work. For example, I spent 15 years in corporate and nonprofit roles; if I am experiencing microaggression on a daily basis, that is a form of workplace

harassment and its just as insidious as any other form of harassment. So why would racially motivated harassment, be it intentional or not intentional not play a role in the overall health of women of color in the workplace. In my research and in the book, *The Memo*, I talk about the emotional toll being a Black woman in the workplace took on my health--it declined until I was able to find a new environment. With that said, we also have to discuss the lasting effects of racial trauma in the workplace and the post-traumatic stress disorders women of color experience in future jobs.

**What, if anything, do you think career development professionals and organizations can do to better prepare Black women/women of color to navigate the microaggressions and macro aggressions they will face at work ahead of time?**

We have to talk about race in the workplace. We can no longer sweep these racial inequalities under the rug. How do we solve problems if we never talk about them out loud? Additionally, inclusive leaders must create an environment where all employees can thrive and not just survive. Dismissing discrimination is not going to lead to a successful future of work. Companies and organizations will continue to see a mass exodus of Black women leaving the traditional workplace structure in exchange for entrepreneurial endeavors--because of these broken systems. And if Black women and women of color continue to leave the traditional workplace structure it could have a severe effect on the wealth gap. We need "us" on both sides of the table. Leaders can no longer talk about diversity, inclusion, and equity and their About Us pages don't reflect it.

**Do you see generational differences with how Boomers, GenXers, and Millennials who Black or women of color navigate racially uncomfortable situations in the workplace? If so, what are those differences?**

Before COVID-19, I was on the road for almost eight months for my book tour. I met women of color that identified as Boomers to Millennials. At one particular event in New York City, I had a Black woman (Baby Boomer) apologize for not writing *The Memo* for my generation and thanked me for making it available now. A lot of the racially uncomfortable conversations that Black women had in the workplace in the 50's is not much different than the experiences young women of color face in 2020. I believe that many women of color from previous generations had to navigate the workplace from more of a survival standpoint, so they could make space for future generations to have an office or corporate job. I am sensitive to the fact that during the Jim Crow era a Black woman could only take a racial conversation so far--without the risk of losing her job. Whereas generations today, we can speak a lot more radically about race in our offices. But at the same time, many of us in today's culture are still fearful of "rocking the boat." And if we don't create a culture of having critical conversations--then we are not making the workplace better for those future generations. In order to shift the dynamics for the next generation of women of color, it will take courageous conversations and critical listening from our counterparts. As James Baldwin once said, "Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced."

**Where do you think you can affect the most change?**

I think vulnerability has a lot to do with it. I can't be the only Black woman talking about the inequalities in the workplace. It will require all of us to make our voices audible. Dr. King wrote in his letter from the Birmingham Jail, "we must live in the monologue and not the dialogue." Again, critical conversations change the way the table is configured when we lean into our courage.