



Why Are Black Women Executives Leaving Corporate America Before Reaching the C-Suite?

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Agenda

Motivation

Literature Review

Methodology

Study 1

Study 2

Research Contributions / Limitations

Q&A



Background

- Organizational Behavior and HRM research primarily focuses on the general population (men and women collectively) opting out
- Achieving and maintaining organizational diversity at executive levels are critical to the performance of the firm
- Black women are underrepresented in executive corporate roles
- Limited research on black women executives opting out

RQ: Why are Black Women Executives Leaving Corporate America Before Reaching the C-Suite?

Literature Review

- Why Women Leave Corporate Positions
- Unique Experiences of Black Women that Impact Retention
- Diversity Impact on Firm Performance





Literature Review - Summary

Why Women leave?

- Lack of access to informal network and role models
- experience frustration and disillusionment
- Work environments
- Lack of challenging work or opportunities for advancement
- Lack of sponsorship and advocacy

(Myerson & Fletcher, 2000)
(Horowitz, et al, 2003); (Earle, 2003); (Oladapo, 2014); (Giscombe & Mattis, 2002);
(Oladapo, 2014); (Messmer, 2006); (van Dam et al., 2009)

Black Women Experiences that Impact Retention

- Exclusion from informal networks
- 54% report being the only one; creating additional pressure to perform
- 49% report that race is a factor in not advancing
- Corporate environment not designed for Black women
- Sponsorship and advocacy are more difficult for Black women to obtain

(LeanIn.org, 2020); (Burns, 2021); (Beckwith, et al, 2016); (Lanier, 2005); (Linnabery, 2014)
(Anderson, 2011); (Crenshaw; 1989)

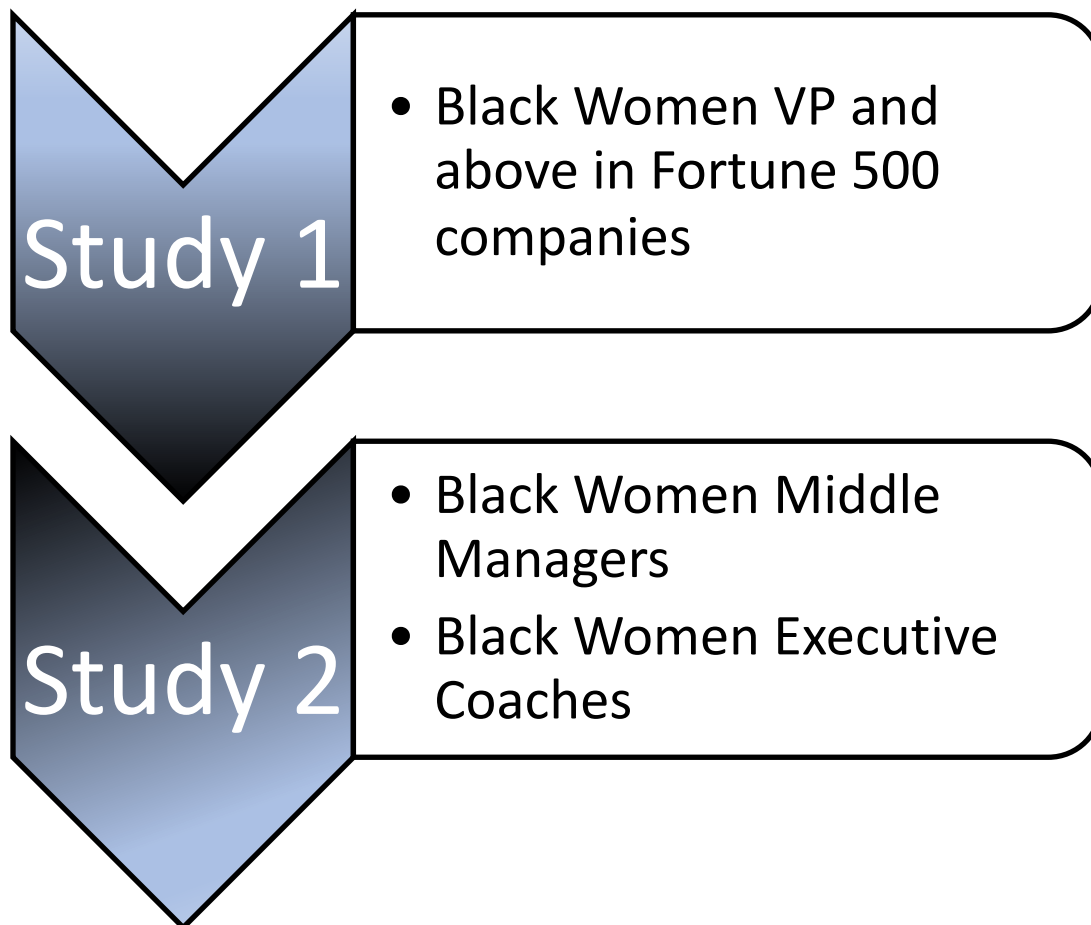
Diversity Impacts Performance

- Gender and race performance increase firm performance
- Female representation increase firm performance
- Race matters

(Murthi & Ismail, 2007); (Dezo & Ross, 2012);
(Richard et al., 2007)



Methodology



- Phenomenological research methodology
- Qualitative, inductive, exploratory studies
- Homogenous purposive sampling
- Snowball sampling
- Thematic analysis



Study 1



Volunteer
Research
Study



SEEKING PARTICIPANTS

DEAR VOLUNTEERS

I am currently a doctoral student at Temple University's Fox School of Business. I am conducting research regarding the experiences of black female executives in senior leadership positions in Fortune 500 companies of corporate America. I am seeking volunteers to participate in the study. Participation will include a semi structured, recorded interview on Zoom that will take approximately 60 minutes.

PLEASE NOTE:

1. The interview questions will be approved by the **Institutional Review Board** in advance of your participation.
2. The identities of all participants and associated **confidential information will be protected**. The names and data provided will be housed separately in password protected files.

PARTICIPANT CRITERIA

Self-identified Black female executives (VP and above) serving or who have served in Fortune 500 companies.

If you are interested in participating, contact Michelle Dutton at Michelle.Brown0004@temple.edu. Please feel free to share this information with anyone you feel would be interested in this research and fits the criteria. Thank you for your help!

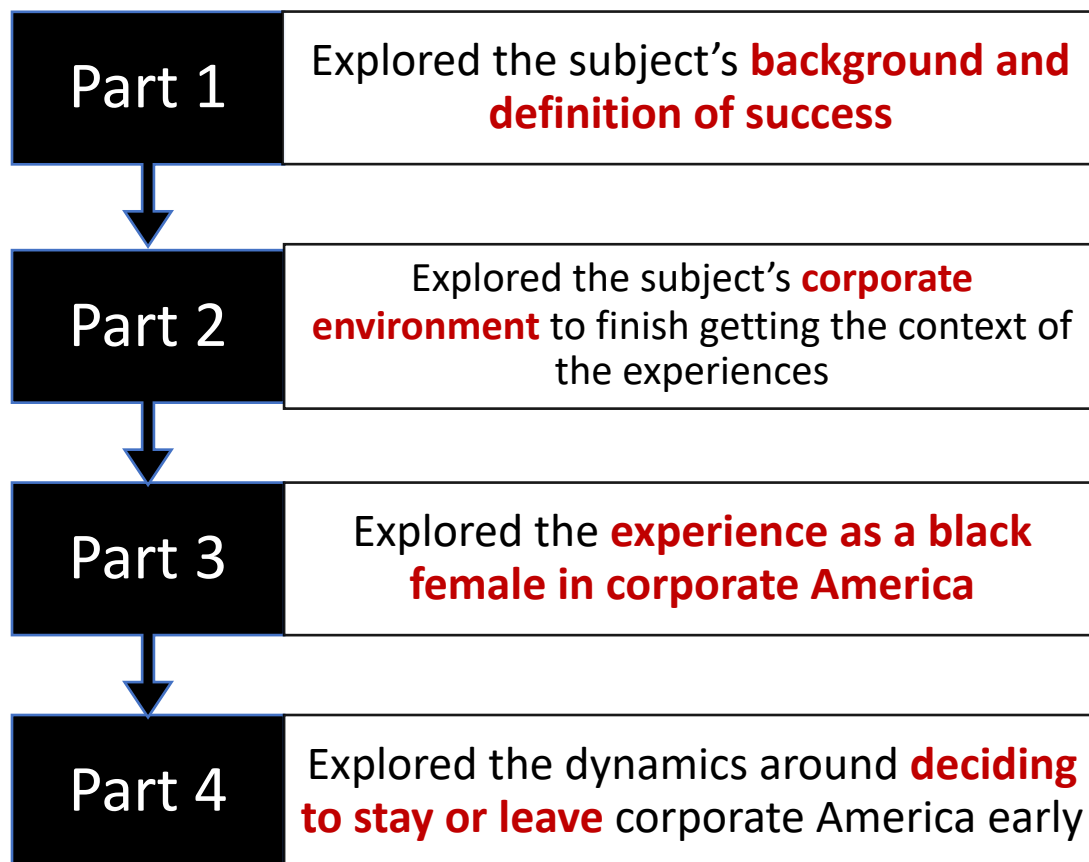
MICHELLE BROWN DUTTON

Recruitment of participants

Subject	Age	Education	Title	Marital Status	Children	Exit or Stay
P1	60+	M	VP	D	Y	E
P2	60+	M	VP	M	Y	E
P5	60+	M	VP	D	Y	E
P6	50+	M	SVP	M	Y	E
P3	40+	M	VP	M	Y	S
P4	50+	M	SVP	M	N	S
P7	50+	M	VP	D	Y	S

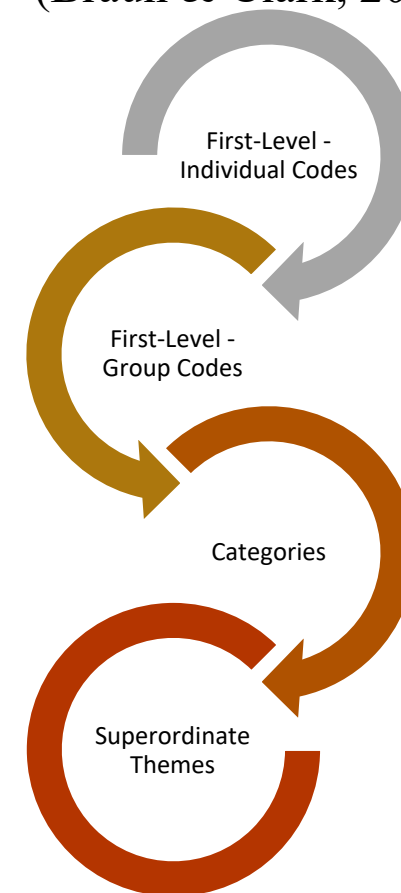
Study 1 – Data Collection and Analysis

Interview Protocol



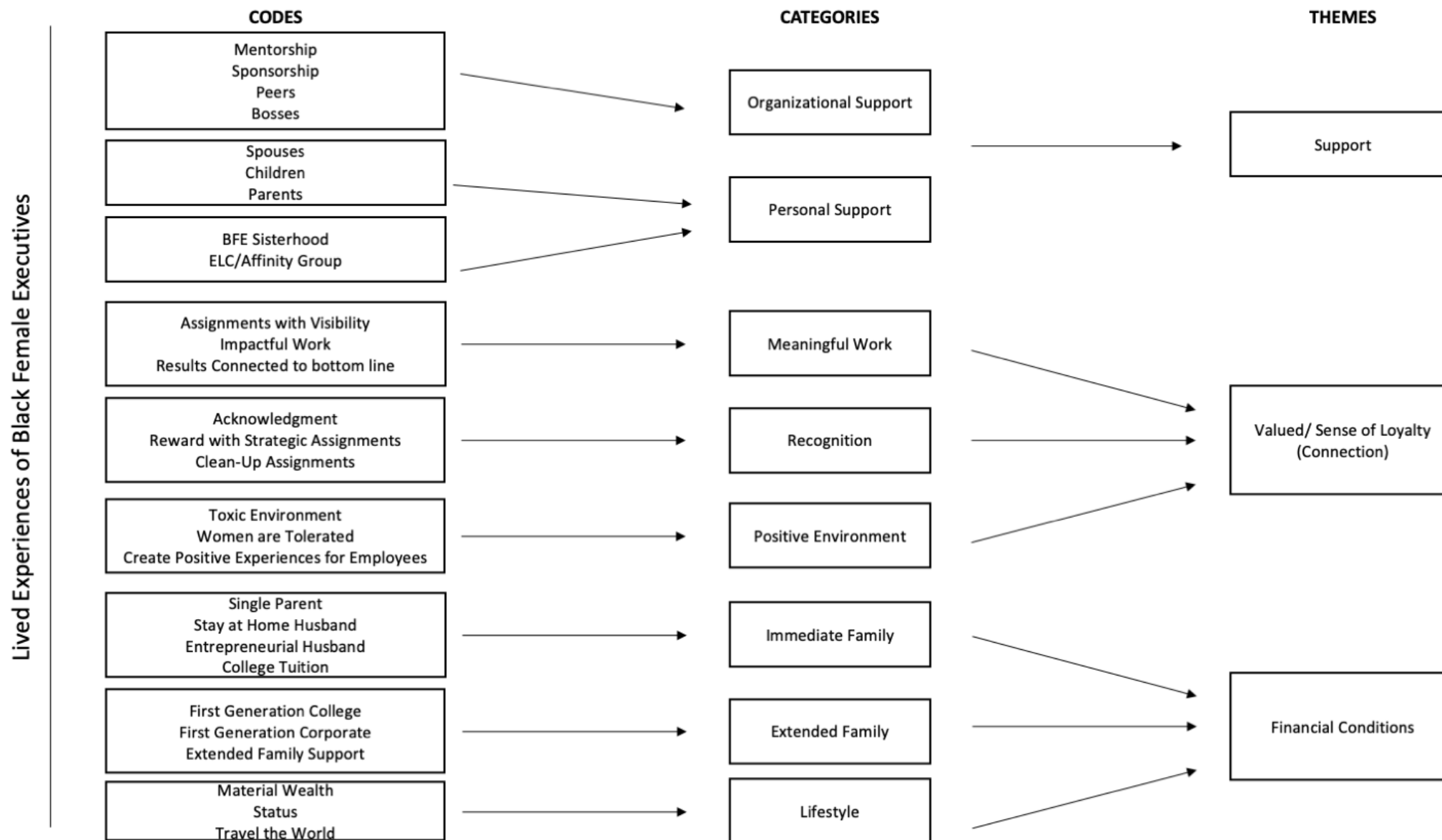
Thematic Analysis

(Braun & Clark, 2022)



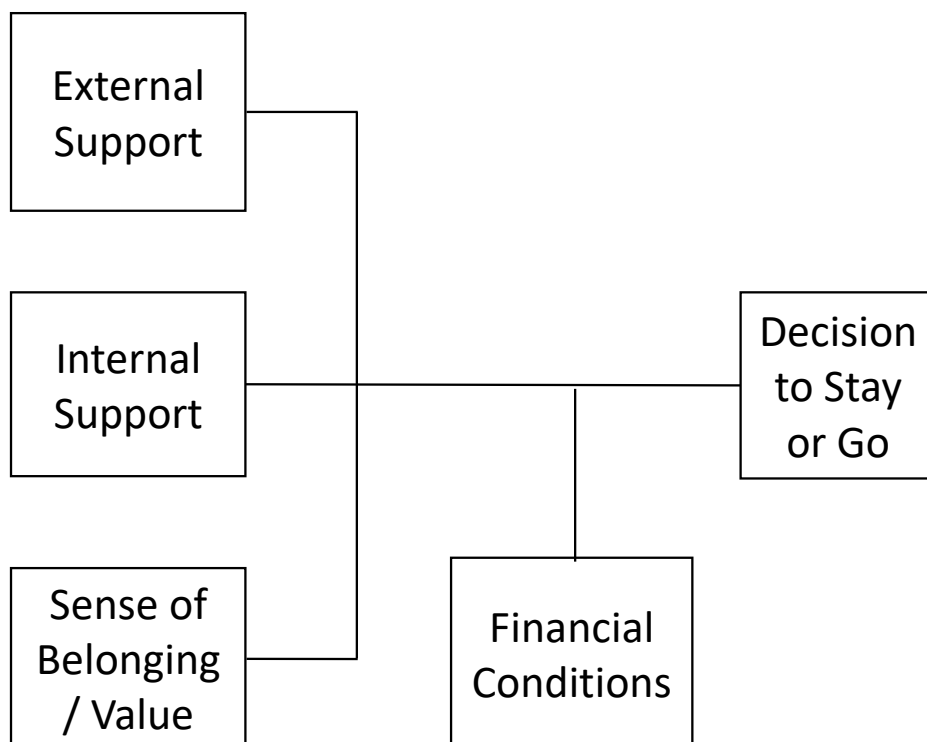


Study 1 – Codes and Themes





Study 1 – Emerging Conceptual Framework



Black female executives leave when they are:

- not supported through mentorship, sponsorship, and external networks
- not valued or experiencing a sense of community within the organization
- financially set, especially when the above conditions are met.

- Job Demand Control Theory, (Linnabery et al, 2014)
- Intersectionality Theory, (Alexander-Floyd, 2018), (Crenshaw, 1989)



Study 2 – Data Collection

Recruitment of participants



Volunteer Research Study

SEEKING PARTICIPANTS

DEAR VOLUNTEERS

I am currently a doctoral student at Temple University's Fox School of Business. I am conducting research regarding the experiences of black female Managers or Directors at Fortune 500 companies; and ICF certified Executive Coaches. I am seeking volunteers to participate in the study. Participation will include a semi structured, recorded interview on Zoom that will take approximately 60 minutes.

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Self-identified Black female Managers or Directors serving or who have served in Fortune 500 companies

ICF certified Black Female Executive Coaches that have the PCC credential and have experience coaching Black Female Executives

If you are interested in participating, contact Michelle Brown Dutton at Michelle.Brown0004@temple.edu. Please feel free to share this information with anyone you feel would be interested in this research and fits the criteria. Thank you for your help!

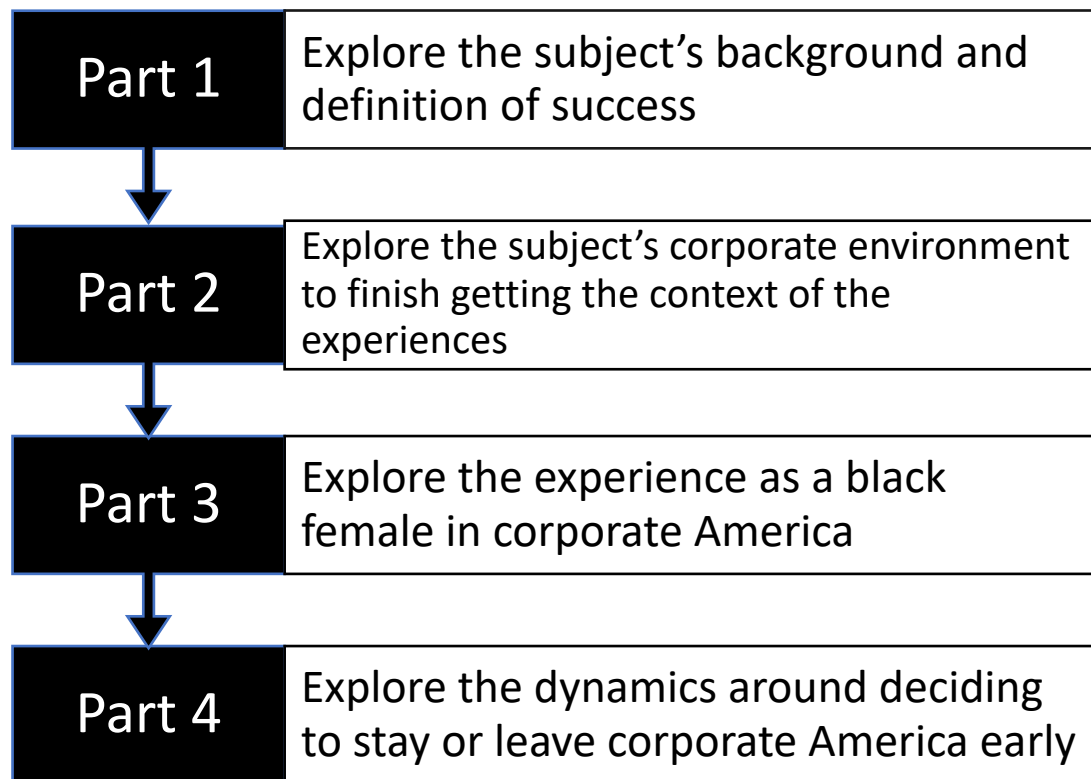
MICHELLE BROWN DUTTON

Subject	Age	Education	Title	Marital Status	Children	Exit or Stay
S2 BF1	60+	BA	Sr Mgr	M	Y	E
S2 BF2	40+	MS	Exec Dir	S	N	E
S2 BF3	50+	MS	Sr Dir	S	N	S
S2 BF4	50+	Ed D	Dir	M	Y	E
S2 BF5	40+	MBA/ MS	Sr Dir	M	Y	S
S2 EC1	50+	DBA	EC	M	Y	N/A
S2 EC2	50+	MD	EC	D	Y	N/A
S2 EC3	70+	MS	EC	W	Y	N/A

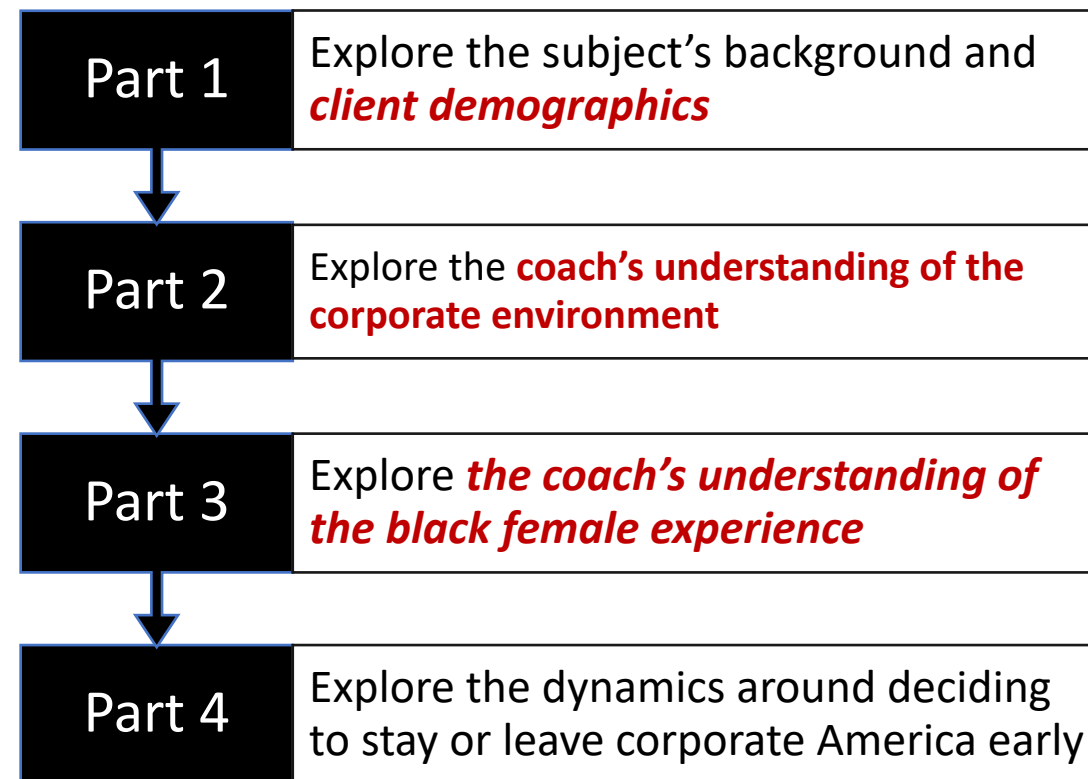


Study 2 – Interview Protocols

Middle Managers



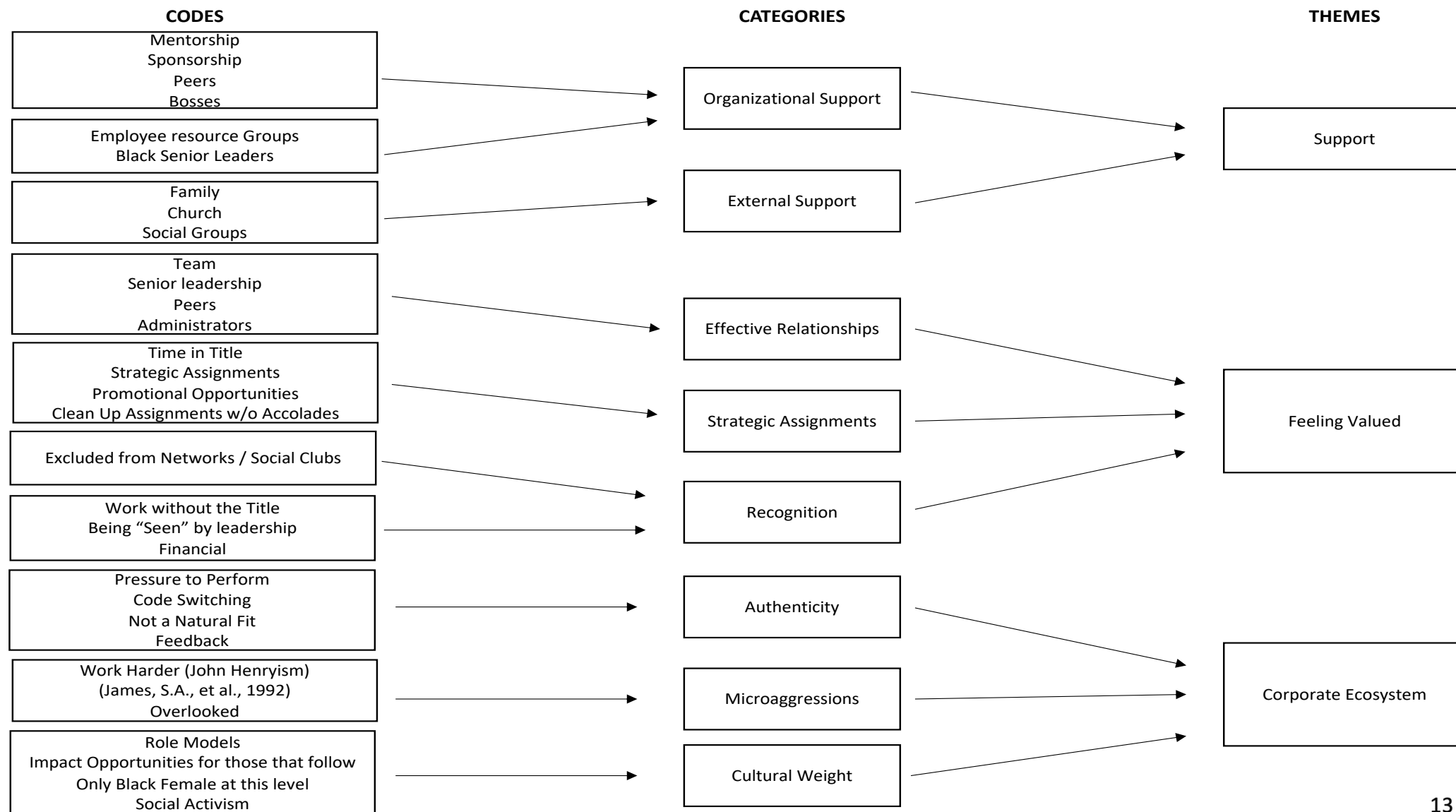
Executive Coaches





Study 2 – Data Analysis – Superordinate Themes

Lived Experiences of Black Female Middle Managers





Study 3 – Corporate EcoSystem Quotes

“You feel like you had *to prove yourself over and over again* with each new administration, but your *peers were given the benefit of the doubt*.” (S2 BFL1)

The *way we have to work takes a toll on you*. So, again, we're not talking about, just normal work and vacations *you're just working 10 times as hard*, after job cuts. (S2 BFL4)

“You had to *learn to be comfortable with being the only black women* in the room and work hard at building bridges.” (S2 BFL4)

“Being a Black women executive has been *rewarding and stressful*. Sometimes I feel like *I have the weight of Black America* on my shoulders.” (S2 BFL3)

“It's *feeling valued. Not just telling* someone, that what they're doing is making a difference, but *showing them* and sometimes, you know, and giving them *opportunities to stretch*. One of the biggest times that *I didn't feel value, is what allowed me to be open to leaving*. (S2 BFL2)

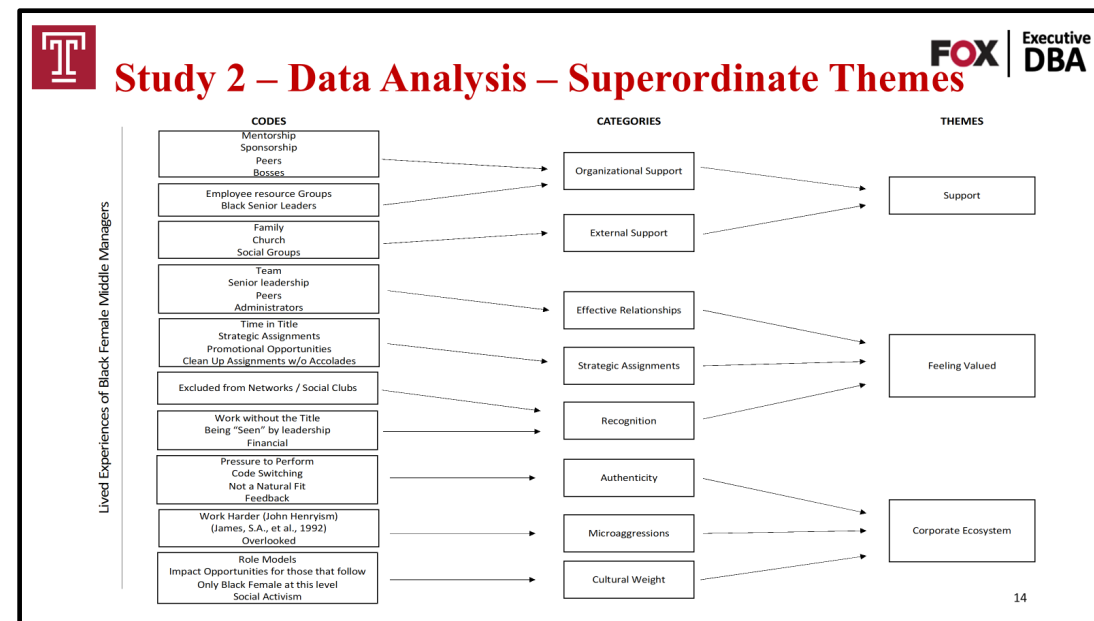
“I was actually told by a supervisor that *if I wanted to be promoted that I need to wear my hair straight*, and try to grow it longer, past my shoulders.” (S2 BFL2)

“The *microaggressions just weigh on you*. I mean, you've dealt with so much over the years. And I just felt like towards the end, *when I was able to, I was ready to go..*” (S2 BFL1)



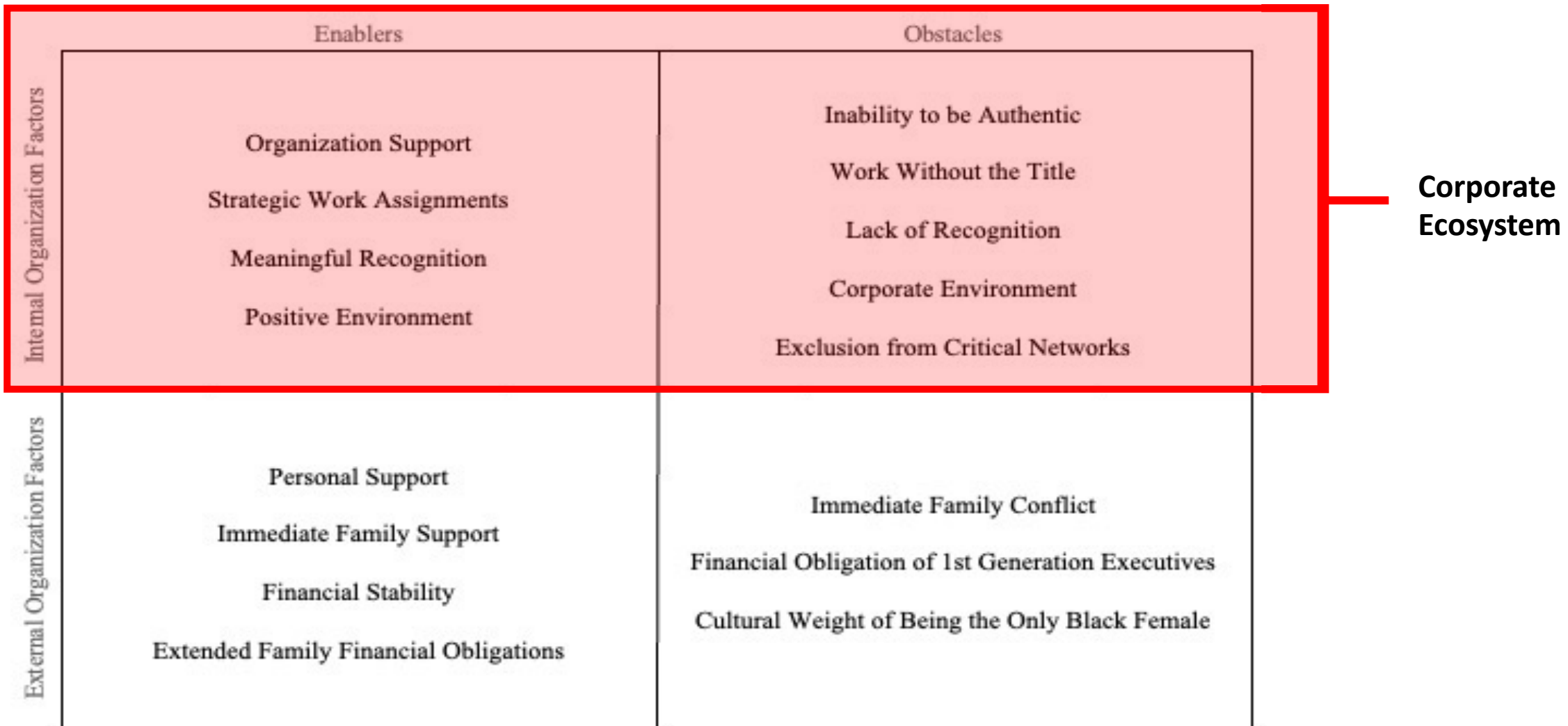
Additional Insights – Executive Coaches

- Difficulty of obtaining sponsorship
- Not able to show up authentically
- Additional pressure to perform
- Very unforgiving culture when mistakes are made
- Intensity of feeling the need to outperform peers, work harder and know more
- Self care is critical



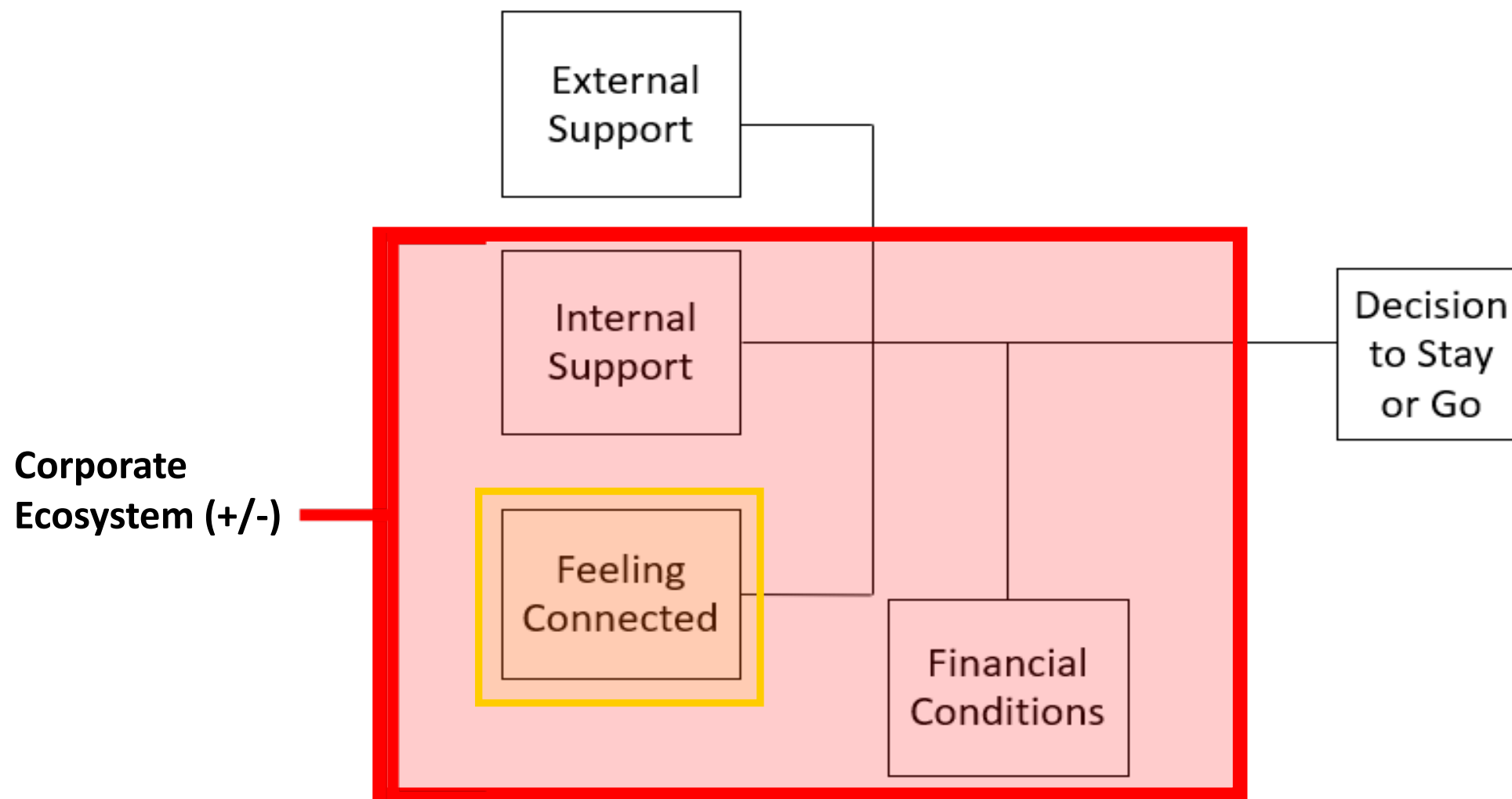


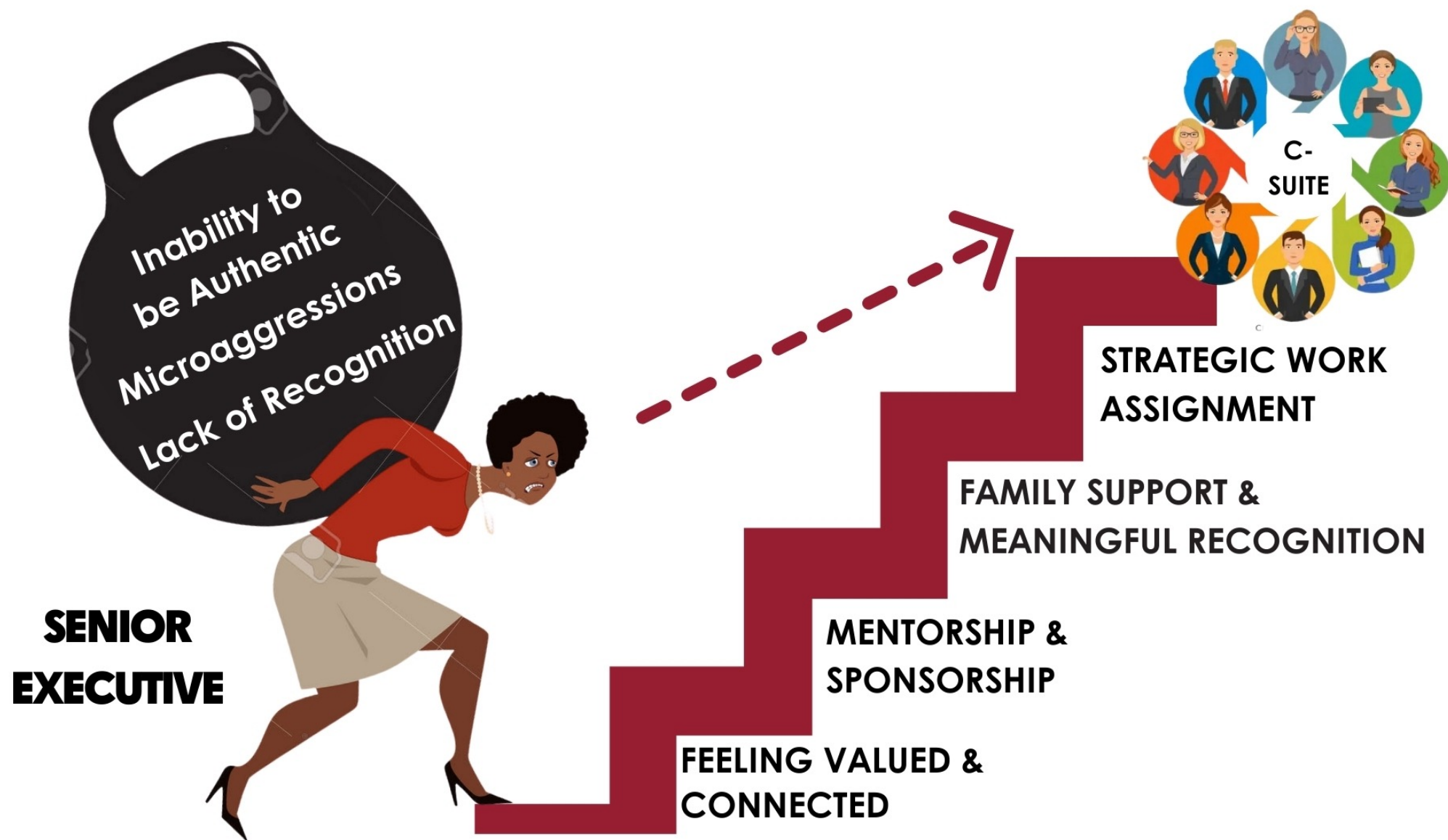
Findings



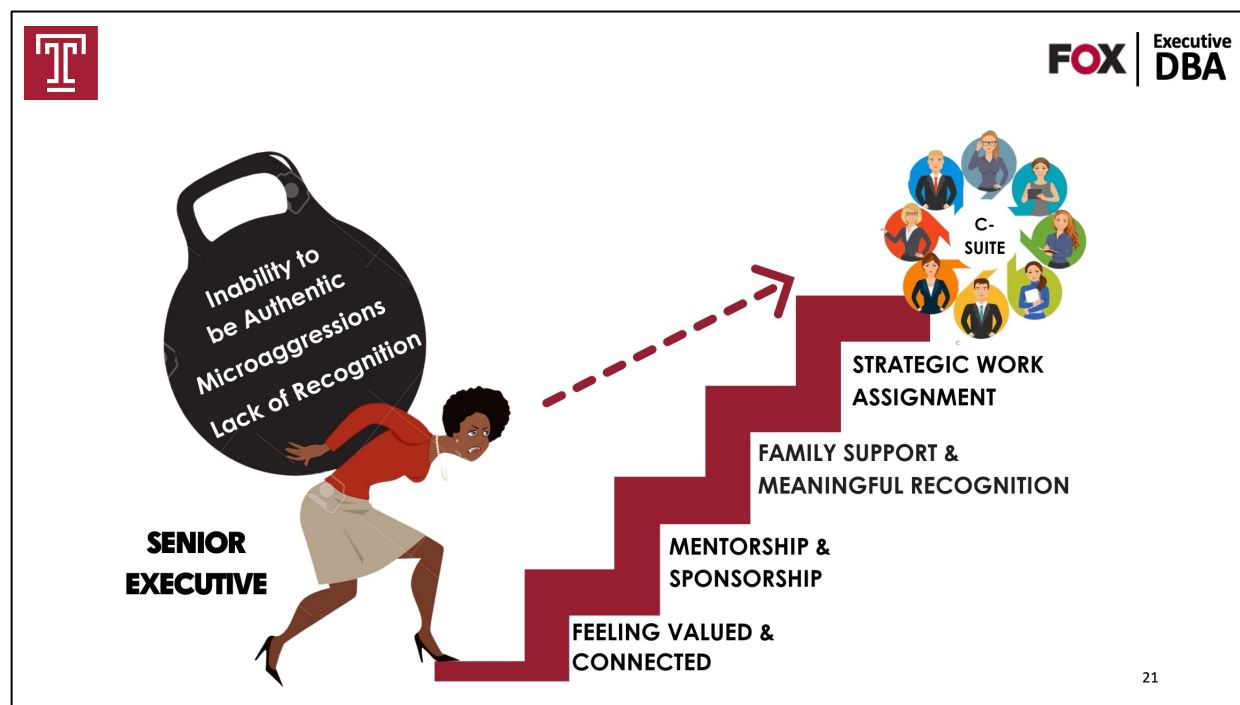


Study 2 – Conceptual Framework





Expected Contributions and Practical Applications



- Additional data on an understudied demographic to better understand the challenges that could result in them leaving leadership positions
- Foundation for a corporate retention tool
- Foundation for a tool for mentoring and coaching black women around the impact of “John Henryism”
- Inform HR policy where appropriate to account for the dual biases of race and gender for this underrepresented demographic in the organization.
- Information for black women in corporate America who are the only one in a position to help to better digest and validate their experiences.



Limitations & Future Research Opportunities

- **Limitations**

- Purposively small sample size precludes the findings from being generalized
- Researcher's biases cannot be totally eliminated
- Historical recollection from the subjects' point of view cannot be without bias due to their experiences.

- **Future Research Opportunities**

- Expand the study population to include other minority groups i.e., women of color or all women
- Explore the support phenomenon to understand better why it's more difficult for black women to obtain sponsorship in the corporate culture
- Explore the topic from the perspective of the organization to allow the voices of the organization and the power brokers to be heard

Questions and Discussion





Completed Research (Definitions)

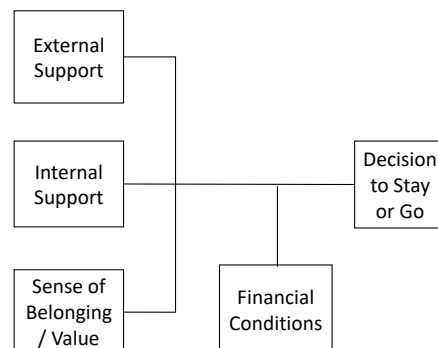
- C-Suite – a company’s top management position where the “C” stands for chief officers (e.g., CEO, CFO, CIO, CMO). This position doesn’t normally oversee day to day functions of the business.
- Senior leadership (officers of the company e.g., Vice President, Senior Vice President, Executive President, etc.)
- Middle Managers (e.g., Senior Managers, Directors)
- Fortune 500 Companies (A list of the 500 largest US based companies based on total revenue by fiscal year ranked and published by Fortune Magazine)



Study 2



Study 1 – Emerging Conceptual Framework



Black female executives leave when they are:

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- The extant literature shows that while women hold 49% of entry-level positions, it decreases to 38% at the managerial level. (LeanIn.Org, 2020)
- 49% of black female women feel that their race will make it harder to get promoted or get a raise compared to 3% of white women (LeanIn.org, 2020)
- Need to examine the experiences of the black female middle manager that aspires to senior executive positions to understand what's happening to the pipeline.
- Need to understand the perspective of the black female executive coach that works with black female executives.



Study 2 – Support Theme Quotes

“Mentoring and sponsorships are really important but hard to find. Within the company I had a few informal mentors for support.” My husband and ***family were always super supportive too.”*** (S2 BFL1)

“Sister friends/ mentors, who were the folks that really kind of talked you through things ***are really critical*** and ***I certainly had a lot of them within and outside of the Company at all levels.”*** (S2 BLF4)

“I had a sponsor that I didn’t know was a sponsor until after I left the business. I didn’t know but he was an advocate.” (S2 BFL4)

After 25 years, I am participating in a leadership program with a mentoring component. ***I have a white male, senior leader mentor, who has been extremely helpful*** and I’m very thankful for it. S2 BFL3

“There were ***formal mentoring programs, but I don’t know that they were accessible to everybody.*** There were employee resource groups that offered mentoring and then some of the Black executives formed ***mentoring circles for support which is especially critical for people of color, who may not have access.”*** (S2 BLF2)

I’ve had both sponsors and mentors, and as they left the business, ***I realized that I had to build*** a whole new board of directors to strengthen my network. S2BFL5)

“We are stronger because of our sisterhood. We cheer for one another instead of competing. We dream together. We push each other toward greatness. And when one of us succeeds, we all succeed. Together we are #unstoppable” -(Thasunda Duckett, 2023)



Study 2 – Feeling Connected Theme Quotes

“You have to do so much just to be **really seen**, that it’s **just exhausting**... and then finally they say now let’s see what you can do.” (S2 BFL3)

“When I first came into the technology culture, I was usually **the only Black in the room**. I was very **intentional** about getting to know the people. (S2 BFL5)

“There were times when you looked up and **you are doing your job, and your bosses job**, and they still aren’t trying to promote you. **Just exhausting!**” (S2 BFL1)

There is this **“club”** that you know will move up in the business, but **I didn’t fit the mold**. My boss told me that I was a **succession planning candidate**, but I didn’t get selected yet. (S2 BFL3)

“I was always **enough to train the leader, but not be the leader**, until I left my corporate position and **became the CCO** of a national non-profit organization.” (S2 BFL2)

“I’ve seen people with **much less qualifications** in terms of years of experience, and even formal education kind of get pushed along...” (S2 BFL4)

“I’m in the CEO club but I will never be a part of it...Learn how to maneuver without losing your authenticity and the technical and individual capabilities that we hired you for...” - Ursula Burns, 2021