

APOLOGIZING IN THEORY, EXCLUDING IN PRACTICE: OVERSTANDING
OPPRESSION AND THE APA APOLOGY: A QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL
STUDY EXAMINING HOW BIPOC MEN IN VARIOUS PROFESSIONAL FIELDS
RESPOND TO THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION'S 2021 APOLOGY
FOR PERPETUATING AND FAILING TO CHALLENGE SYSTEMIC RACISM AND
HUMAN HIERARCHY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED

TO THE FACULTY OF THE ADLER UNIVERSITY

BY
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY IN INDUSTRIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

CHICAGO, IL

JANUARY 13, 2026

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Abstract

Institutional apologies, such as the American Psychological Association's 2021 apology for its role in perpetuating systemic racism, have become a common response to acknowledged histories of harm; however, limited research has examined how such apologies are interpreted by those most directly affected within professional contexts. This phenomenological study examined how self-identified Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) professional men evaluated the American Psychological Association's 2021 apology, while situating their interpretations within the broader context of institutional apologies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 professional men who identified as Black or Hispanic/Latino, and the data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. The findings revealed six interrelated themes indicating that participants consistently distinguished symbolic acknowledgment from substantive accountability when assessing the American Psychological Association's apology. Participants evaluated the apology through considerations of structural conditions, professional identity, institutional processes, and anticipated outcomes, rather than through emotional reassurance or moral language alone. Notably, participants demonstrated evaluative sophistication regardless of prior awareness of the apology, suggesting that professional and institutional experience shaped interpretation more than exposure to the specific message itself. The findings further indicated that the American Psychological Association's apology operated as a legitimacy-maintaining response that acknowledged harm while preserving existing institutional arrangements, thereby sustaining organizational equilibrium. This study contributes to industrial and organizational psychology by clarifying how institutional apologies, exemplified by the American Psychological Association's 2021 apology, are assessed within

professional settings and how such responses function to stabilize institutions following admitted harm, informing leadership and accountability practices within complex organizations.

Keywords: institutional apology, institutional accountability, organizational psychology, professional identity, moral strain, symbolic acknowledgment, structural change, systems-thinking, meaning-making, Black professional men

Dedication

First and foremost, I give thanks to God, the Almighty, for divine guidance, grace, and alignment throughout this entire journey. Every challenge and triumph in this process has been a testament to faith and purpose coming together in perfect timing.

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother. It has been 10 years since you transitioned, but your spirit continues to guide me every step of the way. I miss you, Momma. Your love and strength live within me. To my father, thank you for constantly pushing me to compete and persevere. Your resilience shaped my own. To my siblings, thank you for simply being who you are and reminding me that family is both foundation and legacy.

To my daughter, you are my greatest motivation and inspiration. From the day you were born, you have helped me become a better man, father, and leader. My dream was for both of us to have a book—this one is for you. You are and will always be the force that drives me forward.

To my friends, mentors, and loved ones who have supported me through moments of loss, pain, and perseverance—especially as I received the heartbreaking news of childhood friends being taken from this world—your presence reminded me of why this work matters. Let this research help others see new ways to love, to lead, and to move through life with purpose.

A heartfelt thank you to every partner I've ever had. From the unwavering support, partnership, and dedication were vital in building Objectively Aesthetic (OA) and advancing the research as well as helping me raise my daughter. AJ, your collaboration, encouragement, and tireless efforts helped turn vision into reality. Thank you for believing in the mission, for your late nights, your insights, and your heart.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all those who supported and guided me throughout the completion of this dissertation. I am sincerely thankful to the dissertation chair, Dr. Irene Jones, for her continual encouragement, thoughtful feedback, and expert guidance. Your insight, patience, and commitment to excellence have been instrumental to both this research and my academic growth.

I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Jay Colker and Dr. Shannon Thomison, for their time, expertise, and valuable input throughout this process. Your perspectives and professional wisdom enriched the quality of this study and challenged me to think critically and purposefully.

To my peers and colleagues at Adler University, thank you for your collaboration, shared learning, and support during this journey. I am grateful to the participants who generously shared their time and experiences, making this study possible.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to my family and friends for their unwavering love, patience, and understanding. Your belief in me provided the strength to persevere through the most demanding moments.

Finally, I give thanks to the many mentors and leaders who have inspired my passion for learning and service. This achievement reflects not only my dedication but also the collective influence of everyone who believed in my potential.

As a BIPOC professional and a retired United States Air Force veteran, I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity to engage in meaningful scholarship that uplifts and amplifies our voices. Thank you, Dr. Khabir, for encouraging me to think boldly and act with intention.

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Epigraph

“Progress begins when people secure dignity through the work that sustains life.”

– Booker T. Washington (Safety and Material Dignity)

“Education must cultivate identity, imagination, and the capacity to define one’s own life—not merely train people to function.”

– W. E. B. Du Bois (Identity and Self-Definition)

“A people cannot transform their condition until they claim power over their history and act with unapologetic agency.”

– Malcolm X (Power and Agency)

“Enduring justice requires moral love—because transformation rooted in hatred reproduces the very harm it seeks to dismantle.”

– Martin Luther King Jr. (Love and Moral Courage)

“Healing a divided society requires truth-telling, accountability, and collective responsibility for repairing historical harm.”

– Nelson Mandela (Truth-Telling and Accountability)

“Social change begins when individuals align their inner convictions with disciplined, principled action.”

– Mahatma Gandhi (Integration and Liberation)

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**Apologizing in Theory, Excluding in Practice: Overstanding Oppression and the APA
Apology: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study Examining How BIPOC Men in
Various Professional Fields Respond to the American Psychological
Association's 2021 Apology for Perpetuating and Failing to
Challenge Systemic Racism and Human Hierarchy**

Chapter I: Background of the Study

Following the murder of George Floyd in 2020 and the ensuing global discourse surrounding racism, the American Psychological Association (APA) conducted a comprehensive review of its history and, on October 29, 2021, released a formal apology to Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC). This apology recognized the organization's role in perpetuating systemic racism through eugenics research, biased assessment instruments, and the systematic exclusion of communities of color from psychological science and practice (Akbar et al., 2024; APA, 2021a). Notably, this institutional reckoning was not isolated to psychology alone. Nine months earlier, on January 18, 2021, the American Psychiatric Association issued its own formal apology for structural racism, acknowledging psychiatry's parallel history of pathologizing marginalized populations and reinforcing racial hierarchies. The convergence of these apologies from the two dominant mental health professional associations—both prompted by the same societal catalyst—underscores the deeply interconnected nature of psychology and psychiatry's complicity in systemic racism. While both disciplines share this historical burden, the APA's apology, accompanied by a Racial Equity Action Plan and specific commitments to structural change, provided the focal point for this study's examination of how professional men from communities of color respond to and make meaning of institutional accountability efforts.

These apologies highlight the organizations' recognition of the impact of racism in their practices and a commitment to fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment.

The convergence of these institutional reckonings reflects a deeper historical reality: psychology and psychiatry have functioned as interconnected systems since their modern formation. As early as 1954, the American Psychiatric Association and American Psychological Association established a joint committee to examine interprofessional relationships, acknowledging *their mutual concern with human problems* (Grinker et al., 1971). This collaboration extended to shared diagnostic frameworks—most notably the “Four D’s” (deviance, dysfunction, distress, and danger)—that continue to guide psychiatric classification (Davis, 2009). These same criteria enabled historical abuses such as Drapetomania, where freedom-seeking among enslaved people was pathologized as deviant, dysfunctional, distressing, and dangerous (Myers, 2014). While Engel’s (1977) biopsychosocial model attempted to integrate biological, psychological, and social dimensions of illness, it did not interrogate whose social norms defined pathology or how these frameworks systematically marginalized communities of color (Borrell-Carrió et al., 2004). Understanding this historical interconnection is essential for evaluating contemporary accountability efforts, as isolated institutional apologies like cannot address harms that were systematically coordinated across disciplines.

The APA’s recognition of racism is tied to psychology’s traditionally Western-focused perspective, which often upheld White majority viewpoints while sidelining people of color. Examples of this bias include racially prejudiced intelligence testing and endorsement of eugenics. Incidents like the controversy surrounding Raymond Cattell’s 1997 APA Gold Medal nomination, due to his racist beliefs, further showcased these longstanding problems. The APA

admitted to contributing to systemic inequalities, such as the misdiagnosis of people of color and their underrepresentation in research.

The APA's 2021 Apology as Punctuation Event

The APA's formal apology to BIPOC for its historical involvement in perpetuating racism represents what organizational theorists identify as a punctuation event—a critical juncture where significant institutional change becomes possible (Gersick, 2019; Sat Ra & Winters, 2022). Punctuated equilibrium theory (PET), originally developed to explain how policies transform over time, provides a framework for analyzing whether such institutional acknowledgments function as genuine catalysts for transformation or merely symbolic gestures that preserve existing power structures (Gersick, 2019; Khabir, 2022).

The APA's 2021 apology emerged from converging pressures that created conditions ripe for institutional punctuation: the murder of George Floyd in 2020, decades of advocacy from BIPOC psychologists, and growing scholarly recognition of psychology's foundational role in perpetuating racial hierarchies through eugenics research, biased assessment instruments, and the systematic exclusion of communities of color (Akbar et al., 2024). Yet the gap between symbolic acknowledgment and structural transformation creates fundamental challenges to effectiveness (Gersick, 2019).

Whether this punctuation event produces genuine organizational evolution or merely represents what Thobani (2024) termed “symbolic accommodation” depends on implementation, sustained commitment, and—critically—the responses of those communities most affected by psychology's historical harms.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DIT)

Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DIT) provides crucial insight into these effectiveness challenges by explaining how institutional accountability innovations spread through professional networks. E. M. Rogers's (2003) framework reveals that the transformative potential of punctuation events depends not only on the innovation itself (the APA's apology) but on communication channels, adoption timing, and characteristics of the social system receiving the message. The APA's apology functions as an institutional innovation that must diffuse through diverse BIPOC professional networks, each with different communication patterns, adoption rates, and receptivity to accountability initiatives. DIT is about awareness, which was a major conversation of the study.

Research reveals several factors that limit transformative potential. Torrez et al. (2024) documented significant misperceptions about organizational racial progress, where institutional leaders often overestimate change while BIPOC professionals continue experiencing marginalization. Information dissemination patterns create additional barriers that align with DIT's findings about communication channel effectiveness: some professional contexts maintain hierarchical information flow that may filter or distort institutional messages, while others rely on informal peer networks that may never receive formal accountability statements. These diffusion barriers help explain why punctuation events may fail to achieve the widespread awareness necessary for institutional transformation, with E. M. Rogers's (2003) adoption categories revealing how institutional innovations may remain confined to *early adopters* without reaching the *early majority* needed for systemic change.

APA's Framework for Understanding Systemic Racism

The Association of Black Psychologists (ABP) has critiqued the APA for inadequately addressing issues faced by Black psychologists and the Black community. Founded in 1968, the ABP argued that accepting the APA's apology would validate a distorted historical narrative and contradict their mission (Bender & Adams, 2021). They asserted that the APA prioritizes symbolic victories over real justice, noting the low representation of Black psychologists (around 4%). The ABP recommended that the APA create a Truth and Reconciliation Commission akin to one in post-apartheid South Africa and called for the empowerment of ethnic-centered associations to develop their own ethical codes, licensing, and educational frameworks (Bender & Adams, 2021).

The APA admitted to avoiding discussions on race in both societal and psychological contexts, thereby contributing to systemic inequities and failing to fulfill its mission to benefit all members of society. The APA acknowledged its racist history and the ongoing influence of past practices on current psychological science, stressing the need for the field to change to better support marginalized groups, particularly psychology faculty and students of color, who face obstacles within a discipline that often reinforces social inequality (Bender & Adams, 2021).

The APA's formal recognition of racism extends beyond the 2021 apology to establish a comprehensive framework defining racism as a system structuring opportunity and value based on race, operating at four interconnected levels (APA, 2021b). Structural racism encompasses laws, policies, and practices creating durable inequalities across institutions. Institutional racism operates through organizational policies in schools, healthcare, and justice systems that systematically marginalize groups. Interpersonal racism manifests through harmful behaviors from individuals in dominant groups. Internalized racism occurs when marginalized groups

accept negative stereotypes about themselves. This multi-level framework positions psychologists to design research, education, and practice through an antiracist lens while recognizing intersections with other systems of oppression including sexism and ableism.

But the effectiveness of this type of punctuation event is often dependent on awareness and reception among affected communities (Giner-Sorolla et al., 2022; Thobani, 2024). This crucial link between awareness and effect became strikingly evident in the researcher's own response to the APA apology. This disconnect might even be a reflection on shortcomings in institutional change efforts (Torrez et al., 2024), particularly when thinking about how inflection points manifest in professional spaces. This is in alignment with one of the characteristics of Frantz Fanon's (1952/1968) work on theories of colonial psychology that states that the hierarchical order established on a historic past continues to structure the way information is disseminated and how professionals experience it (Shadab & Ilyas, 2024). The cognitive dissonance created by these gaps between institutional gestures and lived experience formed a crucial area for investigation (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019).

Researcher Position

The researcher's positioning as both scholar and BIPOC professional created a distinctive epistemological vantage point for examining this phenomenon through PET. Like Frantz Fanon—the psychiatrist whose military service and multidisciplinary training informed his analysis of colonial psychology—this researcher brings 20 years of military leadership, doctoral training in industrial–organizational (I/O) psychology, and direct experience navigating institutions that profess commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion while resisting structural transformation. This combination of insider knowledge and critical distance enables what Fanon

(1952/1968) described as the capacity to see systems from within while analyzing them from without.

The researcher's positionality emerged from 2 decades of disciplined code-switching cultivated through military service and refined through navigating predominantly White academic institutions. This experience shaped a heightened awareness of institutional language as both a tool of inclusion and a mechanism of control, particularly when professional credibility is contingent upon adapting to dominant norms. The researcher's professional background further includes legal investigative reasoning and mechanical systems investigation, reinforced through teaching, inspections, and procedural evaluations of institutional processes. These roles required examining systems for compliance, coherence, and integrity, and strengthened an evidence-based commitment to rule-governed accountability grounded in constitutional principles. As a result, the researcher entered this study with an analytic orientation toward institutional messaging as a form of structured power—something to be evaluated against dissemination, procedural alignment, and behavioral follow-through. Reflexive documentation and methodological transparency were used throughout to ensure positionality functioned as interpretive sensitivity rather than confirmatory bias. As a retired Air Force Master Sergeant, learning early that survival and advancement required strategic self-presentation—adjusting speech patterns, suppressing cultural expressions, and calibrating behavior to optimize acceptance within institutional structures that simultaneously valued service while questioning belonging (McCluney et al., 2021). This perpetual negotiation between authentic selfhood and institutional expectations mirrors what Fanon (1952/1968) described as learning to “assume the language of the oppressor” as the “only course to freedom and prosperity” (Hilton, 2011, p. 49).

The military instilled in them the concept of being “squared away,” which became the foundation for their theoretical work. As a Black servicemember, they faced unique challenges: heightened scrutiny of mistakes, the need to over-perform for recognition, and the risk that authentic cultural expression would be labeled unprofessional, all contributing to a persistent sense of double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903). Transitioning to doctoral studies at Adler University meant adapting codeswitching strategies to academia’s own structural barriers, such as epistemological gatekeeping and norms privileging Whiteness. Through earning six degrees across various fields, they gained critical insight into these systems, akin to Fanon’s (1952/1968) analysis of colonial psychology. Their military and academic backgrounds allow them to evaluate institutional accountability with both insider understanding and critical perspective, recognizing the complexities behind institutional apologies and their demands on marginalized individuals (Neikirk et al., 2023).

The Analytical Sophistication Discovery

Preliminary exploration of how BIPOC professional men engage with institutional accountability, like the APA apology, reveals remarkable analytical sophistication. Rather than passive recipients of institutional gestures, like the APA apology, these professionals demonstrate complex evaluation frameworks that integrate multiple dimensions of assessment (Colker, 2023; Lee et al., 2022). They naturally examine positionality dynamics (how organizational structures influence access to and interpretation of institutional messages, like the APA apology, social identity intersections (how professional and racial identities create unique interpretive lenses), transformation processes (distinguishing between genuine change mechanisms and performative gestures), and authentic results (evaluating outcomes through both symbolic and material impact measures; Polston et al., 2023; Tabara, 2014).

This analytical sophistication suggests that BIPOC professional men employ complex evaluation frameworks when assessing institutional accountability efforts, like the APA apology. These natural analytical capabilities, when understood and enhanced, can serve as powerful tools for both understanding institutional accountability effectiveness and empowering professionals as expert evaluators and catalysts of authentic organizational change (Polston et al., 2023).

Professional Context as Analytical Laboratory

Professional environments provide unique laboratories for examining institutional accountability reception. Unlike academic or community settings, professional contexts involve complex hierarchies, organizational cultures, and career considerations that influence how institutional messages, like the APA apology, are received, interpreted, and acted upon (Akbar et al., 2024). BIPOC professional men must navigate these environments while maintaining both professional credibility and authentic cultural identity, creating sophisticated balancing acts that reveal advanced leadership competencies (Nader & Maheshwari, 2023).

The diversity of professional fields, from military and government to legal, manufacturing, and emergency services, creates varied contexts for examining how industry-specific cultures shape institutional accountability reception, like the APA apology (Agrawal & Silbey, 2011). Each professional environment presents distinct challenges, opportunities, and evaluation criteria, allowing examination of how multi-dimensional frameworks manifest across different organizational contexts while maintaining core analytical sophistication (Ghasabeh et al., 2015).

The APA Apology as Case Study

The organization recognized the historic use of psychological science to sanction racial bias, and its complicity in eugenics, differential IQ testing, and the demonization of BIPOC

(APA, 2021a). This institutes its own public health consequences within the APA as well, as the APA acknowledged having contributed to inequities in health among groups using psychological approaches and practices (APA, 2021a).

The APA's 2021 apology served as an ideal case study for examining these analytical frameworks because it represents a clear institutional accountability effort with specific content, timing, and dissemination patterns. The apology acknowledged historical harm, outlined systemic problems, and committed to specific changes, providing concrete material for professional evaluation. However, awareness of and responses to this apology vary significantly across professional contexts, creating natural variation that enables examination of how different factors influence institutional accountability, like the APA apology's effectiveness (Fish et al., 2024).

More importantly, the APA apology relates to psychology—a field that intersects with numerous professions through human resources, organizational development, mental health, assessment, and research practices (APA, 2017; Sternberg, 2017). This intersection means that professionals across diverse fields may have relevant perspectives on psychological institutions and their accountability efforts, even if they work outside psychology directly.

Later efforts, including the Resolution on Harnessing Psychology to Combat Racism (APA, 2021b) and the Racial Equity Audit Report (APA, 2023a), have drawn attention to the challenges that remain in achieving cultural and racial equity and the lack of diversity in leadership. The APA's public admission of its past is a first step toward meaningful institutional reform, but it is also an implicit challenge: the APA has explicitly restated that much work remains to be done to enact the promises recently made to communities of color (APA, 2023a).

The APA's public recognition of its history is a testament to, and a good faith starting point in, the face of this institutional reckoning and reform; at the same time, this dissertation argues that it is also a public challenge, reaffirming a significant amount of work that still must be done to fulfill the promises made to communities of color (APA, 2023a). The action plan provides a roadmap towards structural transformation but will be relatively useless without intentional and sustained follow up, as well as holding those responsible, including our BIPOC professionals who have been marginalized or adversely impacted because of inequitable practices, accountable for meaningful, progressive change (APA, 2023a). To understand the broader implications of this narrative, it is essential to explore the intersection of these institutional changes with I/O psychology.

Conducted with collaboration with Black communities, the apology commits the APA to meaningful actions such as eschewing hegemonic science, reaffirming that race is a social construct, and increasing the representation of people of color in leadership and research (APA, 2021a). But this alone is not enough without real systemic changes, such as equity audits and culturally responsive training (APA, 2021b, 2023b).

The APA's Institutional Acknowledgments

The APA's (2021b) Resolution on Harnessing Psychology to Combat Racism accompanied the October 2021 apology and contained explicit acknowledgments establishing the institutional understanding that participants in this study were asked to evaluate. These WHEREAS clauses represent the APA's own articulation of the problems it committed to address:

WHEREAS racism has been an enduring, insidious, and pervasive feature of the United States (U.S.) landscape that often operates outside of the conscious awareness of its

targets, perpetrators, and beneficiaries, and has had an incalculable, negative toll on the basic human rights to survival, security, health, well-being, and societal participation of generations of people in the U.S. and across the globe (Alvarez et al., 2016; APA, 2012; 2019);

WHEREAS the belief that people of color were inferior was used to justify Indigenous peoples' forced removal and genocide and the enslavement of Africans, thereby establishing racism and settler colonialism and violence at the root of the ascendant U.S. and legitimizing racial and economic inequality;

WHEREAS racism was constructed as a basis to create and sustain White supremacy by assigning value to people of European descent and disproportionately allocating societal resources and opportunities to them, while limiting or refusing access to opportunity among Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), thereby severely marginalizing their status and blunting the potential of the entire society (C.P. Jones, 2018; Mosley et al., 2021);

WHEREAS, the field of psychology has historically contributed to the belief in human hierarchy through allowing—or not challenging—racial bias throughout the discipline and profession, such as in peer review, publishing, research motivated by racism, racial disparities in psychological research, and the valuation of certain types of research, as well as in Eurocentric models of clinical practice, including psychological assessment, while largely ignoring the contributions of, and adversities facing, BIPOC (APA, 2019; Roberts et al., 2020);

WHEREAS some prominent psychologists historically have perpetuated and others continue to perpetuate racism through pseudoscientific theories that postulate

racial differences in intelligence, propensity to violence, limits on educability, and other psychological characteristics, thereby contributing to eugenics and other racist movements in the United States and abroad (Editorial Board, *Personality & Individual Differences*, 2012; Guthrie, 2004; Helms, 2012);

WHEREAS the field of psychology has traditionally focused on intrapersonal and interpersonal racism, rather than forms of systemic racism and the impact of historical racism on racial inequities and racial injustice (Trawalter et al., 2020);

WHEREAS this relatively narrow focus limits psychology's effectiveness in mitigating and ultimately eradicating racism, because it fails to fully address the many manifestations of racism in our institutions, systems, policies, and practices. (APA, 2021b, pp. 1–2)

These institutional acknowledgments establish the benchmark against which this study's participants evaluated the APA's accountability efforts. Critically, the resolution acknowledges that psychology has operated with a *relatively narrow focus* on individual and interpersonal racism while failing to address systemic manifestations—a limitation the institution itself identified. This self-diagnosis raises the central question animating this research: How do BIPOC professional men—individuals who navigate institutional systems daily—respond to an institution that acknowledges its own limitations while claiming commitment to transformation? The 80% unawareness rate discovered during this study suggests that despite these comprehensive acknowledgments, the dissemination of this punctuation event failed to reach the very communities most affected by the harms described.

The APA's 2021 apology represents what Gersick (2019) identified as an "initial punctuation" (p. 11)—a critical juncture where institutional equilibrium becomes vulnerable to

disruption and genuine change becomes possible. However, as Sat Ra and Winters (2022) emphasized, punctuation events must be effectively disseminated to the communities most affected to stimulate authentic transformation. This study examined whether that dissemination occurred and how BIPOC professionals make meaning of an apology many never received.

This study examined how BIPOC professional men across diverse fields respond to and make meaning of the APA's 2021 apology for perpetuating systemic racism. As a discipline, psychology prides itself on helping people improve their lives. However, the field has a long history of committing harm against people of color (APA, 2021a). Using science as a pretext, psychology has contributed extensively to the idea of natural human hierarchy, perhaps more than any other social science (Bird et al., 2024; L. Rogers et al., 2024).

Psychology's complicity in systemic oppression extended beyond individual bias to institutional structures that have historically marginalized BIPOC voices and experiences (Bird et al., 2024; L. Rogers et al., 2024). The field's contribution to racial hierarchies through ostensibly scientific justifications has created what Settles et al. (2024) termed *epistemic exclusion*, the systematic devaluation of research and perspectives from ethnically minoritized professionals.

Akbar et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of institutional accountability in fostering trust among marginalized communities. The research addressed a critical gap in understanding how institutional accountability efforts, like the APA apology, reach and impact affected communities within professional contexts, while revealing the sophisticated analytical frameworks these professionals naturally employ when evaluating organizational credibility.

The main questions addressed focused on the relationship between awareness level, professional contexts, and institutional transformation effectiveness. This investigation explored

whether formal institutional apologies, like the APA apology, function as meaningful catalysts for change or remain symbolic gestures that fail to generate authentic organizational transformation among the communities they claim to serve (Gersick, 2019; Sat Ra & Winters, 2022).

These patterns reflect deeper colonial structures identified by Fanon (1952/1968), whose concept of *sociogeny* illuminates how social and historical conditions create lasting psychological realities that persist across generations and continue to shape contemporary professional environments.

Problem Statement

The APA's role in perpetuating systemic racism has been well-documented, highlighting the need for institutional accountability (Akbar et al., 2024; Bird et al., 2024). The research problem lies in the limited understanding of how the APA's 2021 apology reaches and impacts BIPOC professional men across diverse professional fields. The disconnect between institutional accountability efforts and community awareness reflects what Torrez et al. (2024) identified as systematic misperceptions about organizational racial progress, where institutional leaders often overestimate change while BIPOC professionals continue experiencing marginalization. Despite increased attention to systemic racism and institutional change efforts, significant gaps exist in understanding the 2021 APA apology function as transformative moments or remain ineffective symbolic gestures (Gersick, 2019; Sat Ra & Winters, 2022).

While existing research often focuses on the experiences of BIPOC women in academia (Fields & Cunningham-Williams, 2021) or general discussions of BIPOC masculinity and mental health (Coleman-Kirumba et al., 2023), there is limited understanding of how awareness and professional context influence the APA's apology reception. The gap between institutional

gestures and lived experiences becomes particularly significant when examining what Ferguson and Dougherty (2021) termed the “paradox of the Black professional” where individuals must reconcile their awareness of institutional claims with ongoing experiences of marginalization.

The Core Problem

Current research has not adequately examined how BIPOC professional men interpret and respond to the APA’s 2021 apology within their varied professional contexts. This gap warrants attention given the complex dynamics present in professional environments, which affect both the awareness of and responses to institutional accountability initiatives. It also contributes to cognitive dissonance for BIPOC professionals, who must reconcile the disparity between organizational commitments and persistent experiences of discrimination—a psychological challenge that McCluney et al. (2021) highlighted in their research on racial codeswitching within professional contexts.

Problem 1: Awareness and Information Flow

Current understanding of how professionals respond to institutional accountability like the APA apology’s effort often underestimates the analytical sophistication BIPOC male professionals bring to these evaluations. S. Roberts et al. (2020) emphasized the analytical sophistication of Black professionals, who navigate systemic barriers while critically evaluating institutional efforts for equity and transformation. Traditional frameworks focus on simple satisfaction measures, missing the complex, multi-dimensional analysis that occurs when experienced professionals evaluate institutional credibility and transformation potential.

Problem 2: Professional Context Complexity

The intersection of professional settings and racial identity creates complex interpretive frameworks that remain understudied. Industry-specific cultures, communication norms, and

advancement structures may significantly influence how institutional apologies like the APA apology are received and evaluated, yet these dynamics have received insufficient scholarly attention.

This gap creates cognitive dissonance for BIPOC professionals who must navigate tensions between institutional promises and lived experiences of ongoing discrimination—a psychological burden that McCluney et al. (2021) documented through their research on racial codeswitching in professional settings. Cognitive dissonance theory (CDT) explains how individuals experience psychological discomfort when institutional promises conflict with lived experiences (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019).

Problem 3: Response Patterns and Meaning-Making

How BIPOC professional men make meaning of the APA apology and institutional apologies and integrate these messages with their lived professional experiences remains poorly understood. The psychological processes involved in navigating institutional gestures, like the APA apology, while experiencing ongoing marginalization require deeper examination.

Psychology's historical complicity in systemic racism, such as the pathologization of Black resistance through fabricated diagnoses like drapetomania, underscores the weight of institutional apologies (Myers, 2014). Fanon's concept of *sociogeny* illuminates how colonial structures continue to shape professional environments and responses to institutional change efforts (Fanon, 1952/1968).

Underlying Causes

These problems are rooted in psychology's historical exclusion of BIPOC voices and perspectives, which the APA acknowledged in its 2021 apology for minimizing and marginalizing psychologists from communities of color and their contributions to the field. This

historical pattern may continue to influence contemporary communication effectiveness and institutional trust (APA, 2021a).

Consequences

Without understanding how institutional apologies, like the APA apology, reach and impact BIPOC professionals, organizations may continue ineffective approaches to accountability that fail to generate meaningful change (L. Rogers et al., 2024). This perpetuates professional marginalization while wasting opportunities for authentic transformation that could benefit both individuals and organizational cultures (L. Rogers et al., 2024).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine how awareness levels of the APA's 2021 apology influence its effectiveness as a punctuation event among BIPOC professional men across diverse professional fields (Gersick, 2019; Sat Ra & Winters, 2022). Using PET as the primary framework, complemented by CDT, I/O psychology, and Frantz Fanon's (1952/1968) work on colonial psychology, this study investigated whether and how the APA's apology functions as a transformative moment.

This research fulfilled its purpose by addressing the identified problems through four specific aims.

Primary Purpose: Examine Awareness and Response Patterns

The study investigated how BIPOC professional men interpret and respond to the APA's apology as a potential punctuation event, including initial reactions, changes in professional identity navigation, and impact on workplace relationships and dynamics.

Secondary Purpose: Investigate Professional Context Influence

The research explored how professional contexts and industry-specific cultures influence both awareness of and responses to the apology, considering barriers to and facilitators of information dissemination through industry-specific communication channels, professional networks, organizational structures, and workplace cultural factors.

Third Purpose: Understand Meaning-Making Processes

The study examined the psychological processes BIPOC professional men employ when navigating institutional apologies, like the APA apology, while maintaining their professional identities and managing potential cognitive dissonance between institutional promises, like the APA apology, and lived experiences.

Fourth Purpose: Institutional Effectiveness

By focusing on these key aspects, this study contributes to understanding the relationship between information dissemination and institutional change effectiveness, with findings that will inform strategies for enhancing institutional accountability efforts and promoting racial equity across professional settings.

Research Questions

The study explored the relationship between professional context and response to the 2021 APA apology and institutional apologies, the role of professional networks in information dissemination, response patterns among BIPOC professionals, and industry-specific barriers and facilitators that influence how the APA's apology is received and interpreted (Lackey, 2024; Sat Ra & Winters, 2022). The study was guided by research questions that examined both the content and process of the APA's institutional accountability evaluation.

How do BIPOC professional men across various fields respond to and make meaning of the APA's 2021 apology for perpetuating systemic racism?

Sub-questions:

1. What meanings do BIPOC professional men attribute to the APA's 2021 apology for perpetuating systemic racism, and how does it influence their professional experiences and perspectives?
2. What role does professional context play in how BIPOC professional men access, interpret, and respond to the APA's 2021 apology?
3. How do professional contexts and industry-specific cultures influence responses to the APA's apology?
4. What role do professional networks play in information dissemination?
5. How do organizational structures influence engagement with institutional apologies?
6. What industry-specific factors affect interpretation of the apology?
7. How do workplace cultures shape responses to the APA's apology's change efforts?

These research questions followed a hierarchical structure: three primary sub-questions guided the overall inquiry, with Sub-Question 3 containing four specific exploration areas that examined different dimensions of how industry cultures influence responses.

These approved research questions served as the foundational inquiry that guided all data collection and analysis activities. Enhanced theoretical frameworks served as analytical lenses for understanding the sophisticated evaluation processes revealed through participant responses.

Research Significance

This research contributes to multiple domains of knowledge while prioritizing community empowerment and social justice advancement.

Theoretical Contributions

PET Enhancement Across Multiple Domains. The study advances PET understanding across four key domains: (a) Evolutionary Biology Domain - examining whether institutions like the APA can evolve into fundamentally different organizational “species” or merely adapt surface characteristics; (b) Group Development Domain - revealing how BIPOC professional networks function as sites of collective evaluation beyond individual responses; (c) Organizational Change Domain - analyzing how environmental pressures (like the George Floyd murder and longstanding advocacy) create conditions for genuine versus symbolic transformation; and (d) Public Policy Domain - investigating whether accountability statements translate into concrete policy changes affecting professional standards and organizational structures (Gersick, 1988, 1991, 2019).

CDT Application. The research contributes to understanding how BIPOC professionals manage complex tensions between institutional promises and lived experiences, identifying strategic dissonance management as an advanced psychological capability that integrates cognitive and experiential knowledge rather than simply resolving tensions through attitude change (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019).

I/O Psychology Expansion. The findings contribute to I/O psychology by revealing how professional identity intersects with racial identity to create evaluation frameworks that extend beyond traditional organizational competencies, suggesting new approaches to diversity and inclusion that leverage rather than minimize identity integration (Colker, 2023; Qureshi & Hassan, 2019).

Colonial Psychology Framework Extension. The study extends Frantz Fanon’s (1952/1968) work by demonstrating how decolonizing analytical capabilities manifest in

contemporary institutional accountability contexts, building on his insight that healing cannot occur within structures that perpetuate harm. This provides tools for distinguishing authentic liberation from reformist accommodation (Shadab & Ilyas, 2024).

Practical Implications

Enhanced Institutional Communication. Organizations gain deeper understanding of how accountability efforts are evaluated by affected communities, enabling more authentic transformation strategies that reach intended audiences effectively (Nader & Maheshwari, 2023).

Professional Development Applications. The research provides insights into how professional contexts shape responses to institutional change efforts, informing strategies for enhancing communication effectiveness across diverse industries and organizational structures (Qureshi & Hassan, 2019).

Racial Equity Initiative Improvement. Findings inform strategies for enhancing the impact of institutional accountability efforts and promoting racial equity across professional settings by understanding barriers to awareness and effectiveness (Le et al., 2018; Nader & Maheshwari, 2023).

Methodological Contributions

Cross-Domain Phenomenological Analysis. The study demonstrates how lived experience methodology can capture multi-level organizational phenomena simultaneously, from individual meaning-making through professional network dynamics to institutional transformation processes (Colker, 2023; Le et al., 2018; Nader & Maheshwari, 2023).

Multi-Professional Context Integration. By examining responses across diverse professional fields, the research reveals how industry-specific cultures create varying conditions

for punctuation event recognition and effectiveness, contributing to understanding differential transformation capacity across organizational contexts (Gersick, 2019; Le et al., 2018).

Social Justice Impact

Dismantling Epistemic Exclusion. By centering BIPOC professional voices and analytical sophistication, this research challenges dominant narratives that position communities of color as passive recipients rather than expert evaluators of institutional change efforts. Enhanced frameworks provide tools for illuminating power dynamics and approaching institutional engagement with cultural awareness and respect (Gersick, 2019; Nader & Maheshwari, 2023; Settles et al., 2024).

Advancing Authentic Accountability. The research provides tools for distinguishing between genuine transformation and performative gestures, supporting more authentic institutional accountability that serves community interests rather than organizational image management. Systematic approaches enable values-aligned evaluation that honors the intersection of professional and cultural identities (Gersick, 2019; Qureshi & Hassan, 2019).

Building Collective Transformation Capacity. The study contributes to building collective capacity for institutional transformation by enhancing individual analytical capabilities while maintaining focus on community benefit and social justice advancement. Strategic frameworks facilitate fair assessment and mobilization of collective action for sustainable change (Gersick, 2019; Le et al., 2018).

Enhancing Professional Field Applications. The diversity of professional contexts examined enables transferability of findings across multiple industries and organizational types, while providing evidence-based guidance for organizations seeking authentic accountability efforts. Collaborative approaches prioritize community benefit and collective empowerment

through transparent implementation and shared responsibility for meaningful outcomes (Colker, 2023; Nader & Maheshwari, 2023; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Qureshi & Hassan, 2019).

Conceptual Framework

This study employed an integrated theoretical framework—termed the Core 4—that systematically addressed the multi-dimensional nature of how BIPOC professional men evaluate institutional accountability efforts. The framework emerged from recognizing that the APA’s own definition of racism operates at four interconnected levels: structural, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized. Understanding institutional accountability reception requires theoretical tools addressing each level simultaneously.

The Core 4 Theoretical Foundation

- PET examines whether institutional apologies represent genuine transformation or symbolic accommodation that maintains existing equilibrium. PET addresses the structural level where laws, policies, and practices create durable inequalities (Gersick, 2019).
- CDT illuminates how professionals manage psychological tensions between institutional promises and lived experiences of ongoing marginalization. CDT addresses the interpersonal level where individual behaviors and responses shape institutional reception (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019).
- I/O psychology analyzes how professional contexts, organizational structures, and workplace cultures mediate institutional message reception and interpretation. I/O psychology addresses the institutional level where organizational policies systematically marginalize groups (Salas et al., 2017).

- Frantz Fanon's (1952/1968) colonial psychology reveals how historical oppression creates lasting psychological structures that influence contemporary institutional responses while documenting sophisticated resistance strategies colonized populations develop. Fanon's work addresses the internalized psychological level where identity, meaning-making, and cultural consciousness operate (Fanon, 1952/1968; Shadab & Ilyas, 2024).

Supporting Frameworks

The Core 4 foundation integrates with supporting frameworks that enhance analytical capacity:

- Foundational Prerequisites
- Leadership Competencies
- Organizational Analysis Tools
- Strategic Decision-Making Models
- Meta-Process Frameworks

This integrated framework served dual purposes: (a) as a conceptual lens for understanding institutional accountability across multiple organizational levels, and (b) as a systematic guide for interview question development and data analysis. The framework enabled examination of whether and how participants' responses aligned with structural, interpersonal, institutional, and symbolic dimensions of institutional transformation.

Limitations and Assumptions

Demographic Scope

The study focused specifically on BIPOC professional men, limiting direct generalizability to BIPOC women or other gender identities. While this study recruited across

BIPOC communities, the resulting sample composition (80% Black/African American, 20% Hispanic/Latino) means findings most accurately reflect Black professional men's experiences with institutional accountability. This concentration enabled depth of insight while establishing foundation for comparative research with other BIPOC populations. While this focus provided depth, it constrained broader applicability across all BIPOC professional populations.

Cross-Sectional Design

The single-timepoint data collection prevented examination of how responses to institutional apologies develop over time or how institutional follow-through actions might influence evolving perspectives on accountability efforts.

Single Institution Focus

Examining only the APA's apology positioned this study as an instrumental case—a high-profile institutional accountability statement from psychology's flagship professional organization. Transferability to other institutional contexts depends on structural similarities, though the theoretical frameworks and analytical approaches may transfer to similar organizational contexts.

Professional Context Scope

While the study aimed to include diverse professional fields, the sample may not capture the full spectrum of professional environments where BIPOC men encounter institutional accountability efforts.

Self-Selection Bias

Participants who volunteer for research about institutional apologies may have perspectives on racial justice or institutional accountability that differ from those who would not participate in such research.

Virtual Data Collection

Remote interview methods via Microsoft Teams may have limited the capture of nonverbal cues and subtle communication patterns that could provide additional insights into participants' evaluation processes.

Awareness Variability

The study included participants with varying levels of prior awareness of the APA's apology, which may have created differences in depth of response that affect the richness of data collected.

Empowerment and Development Implications

Empowerment strategies and professional development programs are critical for fostering leadership among BIPOC professionals, as highlighted by Ferguson and Dougherty (2021), but remain beyond the scope of this study. Future research could explore how the analytical frameworks demonstrated by BIPOC professionals can be leveraged to design leadership development programs and institutional evaluation models (S. Roberts et al., 2020).

While the study did not address empowerment strategies directly, its findings provide a foundation for future research and institutional reforms aimed at fostering equity and accountability (Gaztambide et al., 2024). This study's findings can inform institutional practices by emphasizing the need for accountability efforts that align with the analytical sophistication and lived experiences of BIPOC professionals (Akbar et al., 2024). Professional contexts significantly influence organizational change reception, as demonstrated by Bolman and Deal's four organizational frames, which highlight structural, symbolic, political, and human resource dynamics (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Methodological Approach

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine how BIPOC professional men across diverse professional fields respond to and interpret the APA's 2021 apology for perpetuating systemic racism. A qualitative phenomenological approach is ideal for exploring lived experiences, as it seeks to understand how individuals make sense of their realities within specific contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological design allowed for in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of BIPOC men, with particular focus on how their professional contexts influenced their interpretations of and responses to institutional change efforts (Smith et al., 2009).

Participants

The study recruited 10 BIPOC professional men aged 25–55 years from various professional fields who meet inclusion criteria. This sample size was determined based on methodological considerations specific to phenomenological research designs and established patterns for achieving data saturation in qualitative studies with relatively homogeneous samples (Guest et al., 2006; Khabir, 2022).

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams, with each interview lasting approximately 30 to 75 minutes. All participants received a brief description of the APA's 2021 apology at the beginning of the interview to ensure common understanding before proceeding with interview questions, regardless of their prior awareness of the apology (Guest et al., 2006).

Data Analysis

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis approach using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. The process involved familiarization with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, refining themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a report with descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical levels of coding.

Theoretical Framework Integration

The study utilized PET as the primary framework, complemented by CDT and Frantz Fanon's (1952/1968) work on colonial psychology to understand how professional contexts influence participants' responses to the APA's apology and institutional change efforts more broadly.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the responses of BIPOC professional men to the APA's 2021 apology, revealing their sophisticated analytical frameworks. The research addressed gaps in understanding institutional accountability effectiveness and provides tools to enhance transformational leadership capabilities. The study's significance lies in empowering BIPOC professional men as expert evaluators and catalysts of institutional transformation. The integrated theoretical framework combined PET, CDT, I/O psychology, and Frantz Fanon's (1952/1968) colonial psychology, providing a foundation for understanding how professional contexts shape BIPOC men's responses to institutional change efforts.

The literature review will give a solid overview of institutional accountability, professional identity, and analytical methods for evaluating authentic transformation. The study examined how effective institutional change can be and offers recommendations to advance racial equity in professional environments. By using advanced theoretical frameworks, this

research aimed to support individual empowerment and collective capacity for genuine organizational change.

Looking Ahead to Chapter 2

The literature review that follows expands this theoretical foundation through six integrated sections:

- Introduction to Theoretical Architecture explains how the Core 4 framework emerged from examining the APA's four-level racism framework, establishing the methodological journey that led to this integrated approach.
- The Core 4 Theoretical Foundation provides comprehensive analysis of each theory—Fanon's (1952/1968) colonial psychology [Position 4: Symbolic/Internalized], PET [Position 1: Structural], CDT [Position 2: Interpersonal], and I/O psychology [Position 3: Institutional]—demonstrating how they systematically address transformation potential at different organizational and psychological levels.
- Foundational Prerequisites establishes the base conditions necessary for sophisticated evaluation revealing how positionality and security influence evaluation capacity.
- Supporting Analytical Frameworks develops organizational analysis tools, leadership competencies, and strategic decision-making models that enhance Core 4 analytical capabilities.
- Meta-Process Frameworks introduces DIT to explain the 80% unawareness finding and the PSPR framework (Positionality, Social Identity, Processes, Results) that emerged from participants demonstrated analytical sophistication.

- Research Gaps and Study Justification identifies critical gaps in understanding awareness–professional context intersections, analytical sophistication recognition, enhancement opportunities, and framework integration needs that this study addresses.

Definitions of Terms

Within this study, there are many key terms used, and the following provides operational definitions to better understand context and meaning:

Analytical sophistication – The complex, multi-dimensional evaluation frameworks that BIPOC professionals naturally employ when assessing institutional credibility, transformation potential, and accountability authenticity (McCluney et al., 2021; S. Roberts et al., 2020).

Awareness levels – Categorization of participants based on their knowledge of the APA’s 2021 apology (Sat Ra & Winters, 2022; Torrez et al., 2024):

African Americans – An official racial category of individuals who are members of an American ethnic group who has origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (Lackey, 2024).

APA Apology – This refers specifically to the 2021 apology issued by the APA acknowledging its historical role in contributing to systemic racism and its harmful impact on communities of color (APA, 2021a).

BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) – Captures Black, Indigenous, Asian, and other self-identified non-White individuals of non-European descent. This term is a recognition of these communities’ significant systemic and racial challenges (APA, 2021a).

Black – According to the Office of Management and Budget’s (2024) revised federal standards for race and ethnicity data, Black or African American refers to individuals with

origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa, including, for example, African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, and Somali.

Cognitive dissonance – Cognitive dissonance, as defined by Festinger (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019), is the psychological discomfort experienced when holding conflicting beliefs, ideas, or values. In this study, it refers to the potential tension between accepting the APA’s apology and the lived experiences of racism that BIPOC people may continue to face in their professional lives.

Evaluation frameworks – The sophisticated analytical processes participants use to distinguish between genuine institutional transformation and performative gestures across multiple dimensions of assessment (Ferguson & Dougherty, 2021; Stanley, 2023).

Information dissemination – The process by which institutional messages and changes are communicated across professional contexts and networks (Auelua-Toomey et al., 2024; Sue et al., 2024).

Institutional accountability – Formal organizational efforts to acknowledge historical harm, take responsibility for systemic problems, and commit to specific changes designed to address inequities and promote justice (Akbar et al., 2024).

Institutional change – Formal efforts by organizations to transform their practices, policies, or culture, particularly regarding racial equity and inclusion (Anderson & Jones, 2024; Gaztambide et al., 2024).

Lived experience – Lived experience refers to the subjective understanding and interpretation of one’s own life and experiences, particularly as shaped by social and cultural contexts. In this study, it emphasizes the importance of centering the perspectives and narratives of BIPOC people in understanding their responses to the APA’s apology (Lackey, 2024).

Professional context – The specific industry, organizational structure, workplace culture, and professional network within which individuals navigate their careers and encounter institutional accountability efforts (Ferguson & Dougherty, 2021; Stanley, 2023).

Professional fields/settings – This encompasses a broad range of industries and occupational sectors in which BIPOC people are employed, recognizing that workplace cultures and norms can significantly influence experiences of race and racism (Lackey, 2024).

Professional identity integration – The process by which individuals navigate the intersection of racial and professional identities within organizational contexts while maintaining authenticity and competence (Ferguson & Dougherty, 2021; Stanley, 2023).

Professional networks – Formal and informal connections within and across professional fields that facilitate information sharing and career development (Ferguson & Dougherty, 2021; Stanley, 2023).

Microaggressions – Subtle, often unintentional, acts of discrimination perpetuated by an individual against an individual (Nadal et al., 2014).

Punctuation event – A significant moment of institutional change that disrupts existing patterns and potentially leads to transformation, as defined in PET (Fish et al., 2024; Gersick, 2019).

Systemic racism – Systemic racism refers to the complex interplay of institutions, policies, practices, and norms that perpetuate racial inequality and privilege certain racial groups over others. It is not limited to individual acts of prejudice but encompasses the ways in which racism is embedded within societal structures (Fish et al., 2024).

Transformational leadership capabilities – Enhanced analytical, evaluation, and change catalysis competencies that emerge when natural analytical sophistication is strengthened through systematic frameworks (Le et al., 2018).

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Introduction to Theoretical Architecture

The APA's 2021 apology for systemic racism raises questions about how it affects BIPOC professionals in various fields. This literature review explores the theoretical foundations of PET, CDT, I/O psychology, and Frantz Fanon's (1952/1968) colonial psychology, to understand how BIPOC professionals evaluate institutional accountability efforts in their professional contexts.

The review begins with sources cited in the APA's 2021 apology, then expands through systematic searches of Adler University databases and research platforms including Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ScienceDirect. Search terms included combinations of "institutional apologies," "BIPOC professionals," "organizational change," "punctuated equilibrium," "cognitive dissonance," and "professional identity."

The APA's four-level racism framework (structural, institutional, interpersonal, internalized) necessitated an integrated theoretical approach addressing each level systematically. This study employs the Core 4 framework combining PET (structural), CDT (interpersonal), I/O psychology (institutional), and Fanon's (1952/1968) colonial psychology (symbolic/internalized).

PET examines structural equilibrium patterns and transformation moments at organizational and policy levels (Gersick, 1991, 2019). PET provides frameworks for understanding whether institutional apologies, like the APA's, represent genuine punctuation events capable of disrupting existing patterns or symbolic accommodations that maintain equilibrium through modified language (Sat Ra & Winters, 2022). This theory operates at the

structural level identified in the APA's racism framework, analyzing how institutional architectures resist or enable transformation.

CDT illuminates interpersonal tensions and individual psychological processing when institutional promises conflict with lived experiences (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019). CDT explains how BIPOC professionals manage psychological discomfort arising from contradictions between organizational accountability statements and ongoing marginalization patterns. This theory addresses the interpersonal level where individual behaviors and psychological responses shape institutional reception.

I/O psychology analyzes institutional dynamics, professional contexts, and organizational communication systems that mediate accountability message reception and interpretation (Rogelberg & Reiter-Palmon, 2007; Salas et al., 2017). I/O psychology provides frameworks for understanding how professional socialization, workplace cultures, and organizational structures influence both awareness of and responses to institutional change efforts. This theory operates at the institutional level where organizational policies and practices create conditions enabling or constraining transformation.

Frantz Fanon's (1952/1968) colonial psychology reveals internalized psychological mechanisms and sophisticated resistance strategies that counter psychological colonization (Fanon, 1952/1968, 1961/2004; Shadab & Ilyas, 2024). Fanon's work illuminates how historical oppression creates lasting psychological structures that influence contemporary institutional responses while documenting the analytical sophistication colonized populations develop to resist continued subjugation. This theory addresses the deepest psychological level where identity, meaning-making, and cultural consciousness operate.

Integration Logic: One Framework, Not Four Separate Theories

The Core 4 framework functions as an integrated analytical lens rather than four independent theories applied sequentially. Each theory addresses different aspects of the same phenomenon—how BIPOC professional men evaluate institutional accountability—creating multi-dimensional understanding that single-theory approaches cannot provide. The integration operates through systematic alignment:

- PET examines *whether* transformation occurs (structural disruption vs. equilibrium maintenance)
- CDT examines *how* individuals process transformation attempts (psychological mechanisms)
- I/O Psychology examines *where* transformation encounters barriers (organizational contexts)
- Fanon examines *why* certain responses emerge (historical–psychological conditioning and resistance)

This alignment with the APA’s four-level racism framework demonstrates theoretical coherence between the study’s analytical approach and the phenomenon under investigation. The Core 4 theories systematically address racism’s multiple operational dimensions while maintaining focus on transformation processes rather than merely describing institutional or racism types.

Theoretical Positioning Within Literature

The Core 4 integration builds upon established organizational change literature while extending it to address racial equity contexts that traditional frameworks often overlook. PET, originally developed for evolutionary biology (Gould, 2002) and later applied to organizational

studies (Gersick, 1991), provides powerful tools for examining institutional transformation moments but requires complementary frameworks to address the psychological and cultural dimensions relevant to BIPOC professional experiences.

CDT, foundational to social psychology since Festinger's original work (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019), explains psychological processing of contradictory information but needs expansion to address how professional contexts and racial consciousness create unique dissonance management strategies. I/O psychology offers extensive literature on workplace dynamics and organizational behavior (Salas et al., 2017) but often treats diversity and inclusion as peripheral rather than central to organizational functioning.

Fanon's (1952/1968, 1961/2004) colonial psychology, though foundational to postcolonial studies, remains underutilized in organizational research despite its profound insights into how institutions perpetuate psychological harm through ostensibly neutral practices. His concept of *sociogeny*—how social and historical conditions create lasting psychological realities—proves essential for understanding why BIPOC professionals bring sophisticated skepticism to institutional accountability efforts.

Supporting Frameworks as Enhancement Tools

Building on the Core 4 foundation, this study integrated supporting frameworks that enhanced understanding without replacing the primary theoretical lens. These included foundational prerequisites (Maslow's hierarchy, psychological safety theory), organizational analysis tools (Bolman & Deal's four frames), leadership competency frameworks (purposeful, authentic, servant, transformational), strategic decision-making models (OODA loop, game theory, political leadership theory), and meta-process explanations (DIT).

These supporting frameworks functioned as analytical enhancement rather than competing theories. Where Core 4 provides the foundational explanatory power for transformation processes, supporting frameworks illuminate how those processes manifest across different organizational dimensions and professional contexts. The integration creates comprehensive analytical capacity while maintaining theoretical parsimony through the four-position architectural alignment discussed throughout this chapter.

The Core 4 Theoretical Foundation

Understanding how BIPOC professional men respond to institutional accountability efforts requires theoretical tools that address the multi-dimensional nature of both racism and organizational transformation. This recognition emerged from examining the APA's own conceptualization of how racism operates within institutional contexts.

This section examines each Core 4 theory in depth, beginning with Fanon's (1952/1968) colonial psychology [Position 4], then PET [Position 1], CDT [Position 2], and I/O psychology [Position 3]. This sequencing moves from foundational historical consciousness through structural transformation potential, individual psychological processing, to institutional mediation dynamics.

This sequencing of theoretical perspectives also aligns with the APA's (2021b) own recognition that racism functions at multiple, interconnected levels: structural, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized. Fanon's (1952/1968) colonial psychology [Position 4] speaks most directly to internalized racism, revealing how legacies of colonial power and systemic oppression are embedded in the psyche and shape self-perception among marginalized groups. It also engages the symbolic frame by illuminating how racial hierarchies become normalized in cultural narratives and professional discourse. Beginning here acknowledges that historical

consciousness and identity formation provide the foundation for interpreting institutional statements such as apologies.

PET [Position 1] corresponds to structural racism, examining whether the APA's apology signals a true systemic rupture or a superficial adaptation. Its emphasis on punctuations versus equilibrium resonates with the structural frame in organizational analysis, where the question becomes whether durable inequalities are being dismantled or subtly reinforced. CDT [Position 2] captures the dynamics of interpersonal racism, focusing on the psychological negotiations that BIPOC professionals face when encountering contradictions between official narratives of accountability and lived experiences of exclusion. This lens reflects the human resource frame, where the interpersonal climate of work and professional relationships mediates how institutional messages are processed.

Finally, I/O psychology [Position 3] connects to institutional racism, grounding the analysis in the organizational and professional contexts where policies, practices, and leadership cultures either perpetuate inequity or create possibilities for transformation. This aligns with the political frame, where questions of power, credibility, and resource allocation determine whether institutional statements like the APA's apology gain legitimacy or are dismissed as symbolic. Together, the sequence integrates the APA's four levels of racism with the reframing model, offering a layered view that moves from internalized identity struggles (Fanon) to structural transformation potential (PET), interpersonal negotiations of meaning (CDT), and institutional mediation (I/O).

The Core 4 framework's systematic alignment with the APA's four-level racism conceptualization (structural, institutional, interpersonal, internalized) positioned it as an ideal analytical lens for this study. This theoretical architecture informed interview protocol

development and provided deductive categories for later-phase thematic analysis, while remaining open to patterns that might emerge outside the framework's boundaries.

Chapter Organization

This chapter first examines each Core 4 theory in depth, establishing how they address structural, interpersonal, institutional, and psychological dimensions of institutional accountability evaluation. Subsequent sections explore foundational prerequisites that enable sophisticated evaluation (Maslow's hierarchy, psychological safety), organizational analysis frameworks that participants naturally employ (Bolman & Deal, leadership competencies), strategic decision-making approaches (OODA loop, game theory, political leadership), and meta-process explanations for awareness failures and analytical sophistication (diffusion of innovation, PSPR framework). The chapter concludes by identifying research gaps this study addresses.

Historical Context and Colonial Psychology

Understanding how contemporary BIPOC professionals respond to the 2021 APA apology requires examining the historical foundations that continue to shape organizational dynamics, establishing the colonial psychology lens through which institutional accountability must be interpreted. Frantz Fanon (1952/1968), the psychiatrist whose work on colonial oppression remains foundational to understanding racialized psychological harm, argued that Western psychology and psychiatry functioned as interconnected tools of dehumanization—providing scientific legitimacy for what he termed the “Manichaeic” division of humanity into colonizer and colonized (Hilton, 2011).

Psychology, as a discipline, played a significant role in constructing and perpetuating this division through the creation of fabricated diagnoses such as drapetomania, a so-called mental

illness invented to pathologize the desire for freedom among enslaved people (Myers, 2014). This diagnostic abuse operated through the same criteria still embedded in contemporary classification systems: deviance from expected norms, dysfunction in assigned roles, distress reframed as individual pathology, and danger to the existing social order (Davis, 2009). Such pseudoscientific concepts, along with the promotion of eugenics movements and racially biased intelligence testing, served what Fanon (1961/2004) identified as a cognitive function for White society—allowing the maintenance of moral self-perception while perpetuating systemic harm (Hilton, 2011; Robertson, 2020).

This approach allowed White society to avoid confronting the profound moral contradictions inherent in slavery and racial oppression. Instead of grappling with these ethical dilemmas, individuals and institutions could maintain psychological comfort by justifying inequity as scientifically valid. In this way, psychology functioned as a mechanism for dissonance reduction, enabling White communities to preserve beliefs about their own moral standing while actively upholding harmful structures. The APA's 2021 apology acknowledges this legacy, yet the question remains whether institutional acknowledgment can address harms embedded in the discipline's epistemological foundations.

Fanon's Colonial Psychology

Colonial psychology (Position 4: Symbolic/Internalized) is Frantz Fanon's analysis of psychological colonization provides the foundational framework for understanding how historical oppression creates lasting psychological structures that influence contemporary institutional responses. Fanon himself embodied the multidisciplinary lens necessary for such analysis—a psychiatrist, military veteran, philosopher, and revolutionary whose clinical work treating colonized patients in Algeria revealed how Western psychology and psychiatry

functioned as interconnected instruments of racial oppression (Hilton, 2011). His theoretical contributions prove essential for analyzing BIPOC professional responses to institutional accountability.

Manichaeian Psychology. Fanon (1961/2004) described colonialism as creating a “compartmentalized, Manichaeian world” divided into colonizer and colonized sectors—one characterized by abundance and humanity, the other by deprivation and dehumanization (Hilton, 2011, p. 51). This binary framework reduced colonized peoples to “absolute evil” requiring civilization, thereby justifying systematic oppression. Critically, Fanon recognized that this Manichaeian structure served a cognitive function: it allowed colonizers to “reduce or even eliminate cognitive dissonance brought about after committing harmful, even immoral acts against the natives” (Hilton, 2011, p. 51). Psychology and psychiatry provided the scientific architecture for this moral maintenance, pathologizing resistance while normalizing oppression.

Sociogeny. The process by which social and historical conditions create psychological realities persisting across generations (Fanon, 1952/1968; Shadab & Ilyas, 2024). Fanon (1952/1968) argued that “a normal black child, having grown up with a normal family, will become abnormal at the slightest contact with the white world” (Hilton, 2011, p. 56)—not due to individual deficiency but because colonial systems produce psychological wounds subsequently diagnosed as individual pathology. Participants’ sophisticated skepticism toward the APA apology reflects sociogenic awareness—understanding that psychology’s historical complicity in racial oppression creates effects an apology alone cannot address.

Double Consciousness. Building on Du Bois’s concept, Fanon reveals how colonized peoples must simultaneously maintain authentic cultural identity while navigating dominant institutional expectations (Drabinski, 2019). Fanon (1952/1968) documented how colonized

individuals learned to “assume the language of the oppressor” as their “only course to freedom and prosperity,” creating what he termed an “inferiority complex” rooted in the constant comparison to colonizer standards (Hilton, 2011, pp. 49–50). BIPOC professionals demonstrate this dual navigation when evaluating institutional apologies while managing professional advancement within systems historically designed to exclude them.

Decolonization vs. Reformism. Fanon distinguished authentic decolonization (fundamental restructuring eliminating colonial power relations) from reformism (modifications maintaining colonial structures through gentler means). Hilton (2011) noted that Fanon believed colonized peoples’ psychological grief would remain “unhealed” without genuine structural transformation, manifesting in self-destructive patterns until revolutionary change occurred. This distinction enables recognition of when institutional changes preserve underlying power dynamics despite appearing transformative—a central tension in participants’ evaluation of the APA’s accountability efforts.

The Role of Medicine in Oppression. Fanon witnessed firsthand how medical and psychological institutions perpetuated colonial harm—doctors committing malpractice against Algerian patients, administering saline while claiming it was medicine (Hilton, 2011). This pattern extends to American psychology’s participation in eugenics, forced sterilizations, and racially biased diagnostic frameworks. Both the APA and American Psychiatric Association emerged from this shared epistemological foundation, providing theoretical justification and diagnostic operationalization for the same Manichaeian structure Fanon identified.

Theoretical Implications. Fanon’s framework reveals how participants’ universal skepticism and demands for concrete accountability reflect sophisticated decolonizing consciousness rather than cynicism. They demonstrated capacity to identify when institutions

operate at what Fanon would recognize as reformist levels—symbolic accommodation that preserves colonial structures—while affected communities evaluate from decolonizing consciousness that demands fundamental transformation. This developmental gap between institutional and community consciousness explains why apologies perceived as sincere by organizations may register as insufficient to those with sociogenic awareness of psychology’s foundational role in racialized harm.

This skepticism also reflects recognition of a discursive containment pattern with historical precedent. Martin Luther King Jr.’s evolution from civil rights advocacy (1963) to economic justice critique (1966–1968)—culminating in the Poor People’s Campaign—was systematically resisted. What survived in institutional memory was the “Dream” speech’s aspirational racial reconciliation, not the later demand for wealth redistribution. The APA’s 2021 apology operates within this edited framework: acknowledging racism as historical bias while leaving untouched the economic structures—licensing fees, training costs, diagnostic billing models—that perpetuate professional gatekeeping. Participants evaluated not merely what the apology stated, but what it structurally refused to address.

Practical Implications. The framework provides tools for BIPOC professionals to reclaim authentic voice, resist psychological colonization, and distinguish genuine institutional transformation from accommodation maintaining existing hierarchies.

Chapter 5 draws directly from this colonial framework to interpret participant skepticism toward institutional apologies. Their responses aligned with Fanon’s observations on sociogenic structures and colonial patterning, a connection analyzed more fully in the discussion of institutional communication breakdowns in Chapter 5.

Institutional Change and PET

PET (Position 1: Structural) posits that social systems experience long periods of stability interrupted by brief transformative “punctuations” that fundamentally alter institutional trajectories (Gersick, 2019). Applied to institutional accountability, PET examines whether apologies represent genuine disruption creating new organizational equilibrium or what Fanon (1961/2004) would recognize as reformism—modifications that maintain colonial structures through gentler means while appearing transformative (Hilton, 2011). This distinction proves critical for understanding BIPOC professional responses to the APA’s 2021 apology.

PET’s effectiveness depends on what Sat Ra and Winters (2022) termed *differential impact zones*—the varying capacity of change efforts to reach and resonate with affected communities across contexts. Punctuation events require widespread recognition to disrupt equilibrium; innovations confined to organizational elites cannot achieve the critical mass necessary for systemic transformation (Gersick, 2019). Fanon’s analysis illuminates why: authentic decolonization requires fundamental restructuring of power relations, not merely symbolic gestures that demand colonized peoples perform receptivity while underlying structures remain intact. When punctuation events fail to penetrate differential impact zones, they function as what participants in this study recognized as performative accountability—apologies that serve institutional reputation management rather than community healing.

Theoretical Implications. Recent scholarship validates this incomplete transformation. Bird et al. (2024), writing in the APA’s flagship journal *American Psychologist*, documented that despite the 2021 apology, “scientific racism continues to be published in psychology journals and scholarly books” with over 350 articles since 2012 claiming genetic bases for racial cognitive differences (p. 497). The authors concluded that “the apology and the action plan for

dismantling systemic racism do not address the ongoing production of scientific racism by psychologists” (p. 497). This external validation—published within the APA’s own institutional apparatus—confirms that the 2021 apology functioned as a PET-1 punctuation event that failed to achieve the structural disruption necessary for genuine transformation. The persistence of racial hereditarian research demonstrates that underlying power structures and epistemological frameworks remained intact beneath the surface acknowledgment of historical harm.

Genuine institutional transformation requires progression through successive phases: PET-2 implementation (translating acknowledgment into policy changes and resource allocation), PET-3 structural transformation (redistributing power and dismantling epistemological frameworks that enabled harm), and PET-4 new equilibrium (embedding sustained change into institutional culture). Bird et al.’s (2024) documentation that scientific racism continues unabated in psychology’s journals—3 years post-apology—confirms the APA’s accountability efforts stalled at PET-1, offering symbolic acknowledgment while the structural apparatus producing racialized harm remained operational.

Practical Implications. Understanding PET helps BIPOC professionals evaluate whether institutional gestures represent genuine transformation moments or equilibrium maintenance through symbolic accommodation, providing frameworks for distinguishing authentic change from performative responses. The codeswitching literature (McCluney et al., 2021) suggests an additional burden: BIPOC professionals must not only assess institutional sincerity but also calibrate their own responses to appear appropriately receptive while maintaining critical consciousness—navigating the dual demand of professional advancement and authentic selfhood.

The interpretive discussion in Chapter 5 further expands PET by demonstrating that the APA apology functioned as a PET-1 punctuation event but did not progress into PET-2 or PET-3 transformation cycles. Chapter 5 analyzes how this incomplete transformation intensified moral scrutiny among participants and reinforced the Ethical and Moral Divide—the gap between institutional accountability operating at ethical/compliance levels while BIPOC professionals evaluate from moral/transcendent consciousness shaped by sociogenic awareness of psychology’s colonial legacy.

Professional Identity and Cognitive Processing

Cognitive Dissonance in Professional Settings. CDT provides insight into psychological processes BIPOC male professionals experience when confronting institutional apologies, like the APA’s apology, while facing ongoing discrimination. The theory explains how individuals experience psychological discomfort when holding conflicting beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors—a dynamic that becomes particularly complex in professional settings where individuals must reconcile institutional claims of commitment to equity with persistent experiences of marginalization (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019).

For BIPOC professionals, cognitive dissonance manifests in multiple dimensions simultaneously. They must navigate tension between accepting institutional apologies and their lived experiences of continued discrimination, between professional advancement needs and authentic self-expression, and between hope for institutional change and skepticism based on historical patterns of unfulfilled promises. This multi-layered dissonance creates what Ferguson and Dougherty (2021) identify as the “paradox of the Black professional”—maintaining effectiveness while processing ongoing marginalization.

The theory identifies three primary mechanisms for reducing dissonance: changing existing cognitions, adding new consonant cognitions, or decreasing the importance of dissonant cognitions (Borah et al., 2020). BIPOC professionals employ sophisticated strategies across all three mechanisms, from reframing their understanding of institutional commitments to seeking evidence of genuine progress to compartmentalizing professional and personal experiences. These adaptation strategies reflect complex psychological processes that institutional change efforts must recognize and address.

The psychological labor required to manage this multi-dimensional dissonance does not occur in isolation; rather, it is deeply intertwined with how BIPOC professionals construct and navigate their professional identities. Understanding the paradox of the Black professional requires examining not only the cognitive tensions these individuals face, but also the identity navigation strategies they employ within institutional contexts that simultaneously demand their presence and question their belonging.

Professional Identity Navigation. Professional identity development significantly influences how BIPOC individuals interpret and respond to institutional accountability efforts. Professional socialization creates specific frameworks for evaluating organizational communication, leadership effectiveness, and institutional credibility based on field-specific standards and expectations. These professional lenses interact with racial identity and lived experience to create sophisticated evaluation frameworks that extend beyond surface-level assessment of institutional statements.

Stanley's (2023) research on Black male doctoral students in psychology revealed how professional identity navigation requires constant attention to both advancing within institutional structures and maintaining authentic connections to community and cultural identity. This dual

consciousness, building on Du Bois's foundational concept, becomes particularly acute when institutional apologies invite vulnerability and authentic engagement while professional success may depend on careful management of racial identity expression. The tension between authenticity and advancement creates ongoing dissonance that shapes how professionals evaluate institutional sincerity.

Meaning-Making Processes. The meaning-making process involves what Antojado and McPhee (2024) termed “lived experience methodology”—the integration of professional training with personal experience of marginalization to create comprehensive frameworks for institutional evaluation. These frameworks often prove more sophisticated than traditional organizational assessment tools because they account for both explicit institutional commitments and subtle patterns of exclusion that may not be immediately visible to those in dominant groups. This integration of professional expertise with experiential knowledge represents an advanced form of dissonance management—one that transforms the paradox of the Black professional from a burden into an analytical asset.

CDT and Professional Identity

CDT explains the psychological discomfort individuals experience when holding conflicting beliefs—dynamics particularly complex for BIPOC professionals confronting institutional apologies while experiencing ongoing marginalization (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019). Operating in support of PET's macro-level analysis of institutional change, CDT provides the micro-level psychological mechanisms explaining why punctuation events succeed or fail at the individual and organizational level. For BIPOC professionals, cognitive dissonance manifests through tensions between accepting institutional promises and lived experiences of continued

discrimination, between professional advancement needs and authentic self-expression, and between hope for change and skepticism based on historical patterns.

Rather than resolving dissonance through simple attitude change (traditional CDT pathway), BIPOC professionals employ strategic dissonance management—acknowledging institutional statements while maintaining awareness of systemic patterns. This sophisticated approach maintains dual consciousness, integrating hope with realism and enabling calibrated institutional engagement (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019; Qureshi & Hassan, 2019).

Ethical Dissonance Within CDT. While cognitive dissonance describes general psychological tension from inconsistent cognitions, Barkan et al. (2012) identified ethical dissonance as a distinct and intensified form of cognitive dissonance—not a separate framework but a specialized application when moral identity is threatened. They argue that ethical dissonance “should be singled out as a unique case in the wide range of cognitive dissonance phenomena” because it simultaneously triggers all three sources of dissonance: behavioral inconsistency with personal values, threat to self-integrity, and violation of societal norms (p. 758). When institutions like the APA confront undeniable evidence of historical harm—eugenics research, racially biased assessments, systematic exclusion—they experience ethical dissonance at the organizational level: their professional conduct contradicted stated values, threatened institutional identity, and violated the societal norms they claimed to uphold.

The Double-Distancing Mechanism. Barkan et al. (2012) discovered that individuals experiencing ethical dissonance engage in a “double-distancing response”—using an overcompensating ethical code to judge others more harshly while presenting themselves as more virtuous. Critically, their research demonstrated this response reflects conscious impression management rather than unconscious self-deception. Applied to institutional accountability, this

suggests organizational apologies may function as sophisticated impression management—presenting reformed institutional identity while underlying structures remain unchanged.

Participants in this study demonstrated capacity to recognize this pattern, evaluating whether the APA’s apology represented genuine transformation or institutional self-presentation designed to restore moral reputation without restructuring power relations.

The Frozen Middle. Ethical dissonance at organizational levels produces what change management literature identifies as the “frozen middle”—middle management layers that become paralyzed between top leadership’s stated commitments and operational realities (Gleeson, 2017). When leadership issues apologies or diversity commitments, the frozen middle experiences acute ethical dissonance: they recognize the gap between institutional rhetoric and daily practices but lack either the authority to implement structural change or the psychological safety to voice concerns. This frozen middle helps explain why punctuation events like the APA apology fail to progress beyond PET-1 symbolic acknowledgment—transformation stalls in organizational layers where ethical dissonance remains unresolved, and managers default to impression management rather than structural disruption.

Destructive Leadership and Ethical Climate. Ethical dissonance intensifies under conditions of destructive leadership—leadership behavior that undermines organizational goals, employee well-being, or ethical standards through action or inaction (Einarsen et al., 2007; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Psychology’s historical leadership enabled scientific racism through editorial decisions, funding allocations, and institutional silence—forms of destructive leadership through passive tolerance of harm. The 2021 apology represents leadership acknowledgment of this legacy. However, Bird et al. (2024) documented that editorial practices enabling racial hereditarian research remain unchanged—suggesting destructive leadership patterns persist

through what Padilla et al. (2007) termed “toxic triangles”: the intersection of destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments.

When organizational leadership operates destructively—whether through active harm or passive tolerance—employees experience chronic ethical dissonance. Over time, this can normalize unethical behavior through what Tenbrunsel and Messick (2004) called “ethical fading”—the gradual relaxation of moral criteria that allows misconduct to continue unnoticed. Alternatively, employees with strong moral identity may experience what this study termed moral exhaustion—the cumulative depletion resulting from persistent ethical dissonance without resolution.

The Ethical-Moral-Transcendent Divide. Integrating CDT’s ethical dissonance component with Fanon’s colonial psychology reveals a developmental gap between institutional and community consciousness. Organizations typically operate at ethical levels—compliance with stated values, policies, and professional standards. The APA’s apology functions at this level: acknowledging that past behavior violated professional ethics and committing to alignment with stated values. BIPOC professionals, shaped by sociogenic awareness of psychology’s colonial legacy, evaluate from moral and transcendent levels—demanding accountability that addresses power structures, epistemological frameworks, and the ongoing production of racialized harm rather than merely acknowledging historical violations. The institution resolved its ethical dissonance through impression management (the apology); affected communities, evaluating from moral consciousness, recognized this as the “double-distancing” Barkan et al. (2012) identified—institutional self-presentation designed to restore reputation without restructuring the conditions that produced harm.

This progression maps directly onto Kohlberg's (1984) moral development stages. Cognitive dissonance operates at Levels 1–2 (Pre-conventional)—the individual experiences psychological tension when behavior contradicts personal interest (Level 1: Punishment/Obedience) or expected reciprocity (Level 2: Instrumental Exchange). The discomfort is fundamentally self-referential: “These conflicts with what I believe/want.” Ethical dissonance, however, escalates to Levels 3–4 (Conventional)—where the individual experiences tension not merely from personal inconsistency but from violation of group norms (Level 3: Interpersonal Conformity) and institutional expectations (Level 4: Social Order Maintenance). Critically, ethical dissonance at Levels 3–4 manifests as groupthink (Rose, 2011)—the phenomenon where conformity pressure overrides realistic appraisal of alternatives. When institutions experience ethical dissonance collectively, they resolve it not through transformation but through group consensus that impression management constitutes adequate response. The “frozen middle” represents managers locked at Level 3–4 consciousness: they recognize the ethical violation but cannot act because groupthink demands conformity to institutional consensus.

Mental Model Myopia (MMM) emerges as the cognitive consequence of prolonged Level 3–4 lock. When groupthink persists, individuals lose the capacity to perceive information that challenges institutional consensus. The myopia is not willful blindness but developmental arrest—consciousness that cannot access post-conventional frameworks (Levels 5–7) because it remains embedded in conventional group maintenance. This explains why institutions can articulate comprehensive WHEREAS statements (demonstrating Knowledge) yet fail to cascade transformation (requiring Wisdom): the collective consciousness operating the institution is locked at Levels 3–4, where groupthink prevents the disruption necessary for evolution.

Participants in this study, evaluating from Levels 6–7 (Moral-Transcendent Accountability), recognized what Level 3–4 consciousness cannot perceive: that the apology represented groupthink resolution of ethical dissonance rather than authentic moral repair.

Theoretical Implications. CDT illuminates how BIPOC professionals manage psychological tensions between institutional promises and lived realities, revealing sophisticated integration of cognitive and experiential knowledge rather than simple acceptance or rejection. The progression from cognitive dissonance (Levels 1–2) to ethical dissonance/groupthink (Levels 3–4) explains why institutional accountability failures generate particularly intense responses—affected communities operating at Levels 6–7 recognize when organizations engage in groupthink-driven impression management rather than authentic moral repair requiring post-conventional consciousness.

Practical Implications. Recognizing CDT processes empowers BIPOC professionals to consciously choose dissonance reduction strategies maintaining psychological well-being while promoting authentic institutional change.

Industrial–Organizational Psychology

Where Leadership Competencies Meet Analysis

I/O psychology (Position 3: Institutional) served as the interpretive bridge between CDT’s psychological mechanisms (Position 2) and the organizational contexts within which BIPOC professionals evaluate institutional accountability efforts. This position represents the critical juncture where leadership competencies intersect with analytical frameworks, enabling professionals to move from experiencing ethical dissonance to systematically evaluating institutional transformation potential. The I/O framework operates through integrated components that reveal how meta-process failures shape awareness, how assessment activates

moral development, and how leadership determines whether institutions produce transformation or destruction.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

DIT explains why the APA's 2021 apology reached only 20% of study participants despite being public for 4 years (E. M. Rogers, 2003). DIT posits that innovations spread through social systems via communication channels over time, with adoption following predictable patterns across five categories: innovators (2.5%), early adopters (13.5%), early majority (34%), late majority (34%), and laggards (16%).

The study's 20% awareness rate suggests the apology remained confined to innovators and early adopters without reaching the early majority required for widespread institutional transformation. This diffusion failure occurred because:

Communication Channel Barriers. Hierarchical organizational communication reached internal stakeholders but failed to penetrate BIPOC professional networks where participants operated. Military participants described systematic top-down information flow within their organizations, yet 80% remained unaware of the apology, demonstrating that even effective internal communication does not ensure external community reach.

Critical Mass Not Achieved. DIT emphasizes that innovations require critical mass—the point where adoption becomes self-sustaining through peer influence—for systemic change. When innovations remain at 20% awareness, they cannot achieve the momentum necessary for institutional transformation regardless of their quality or importance.

Network Structure Exclusion. Professional association communications rely on membership networks. When BIPOC professionals are underrepresented in membership (the problem the apology addresses), standard channels systematically exclude them from

accountability information. This represents a fundamental paradox: the exclusion the APA apologized for is the same exclusion that prevented the apology from reaching those harmed.

DIT directly enhances PET by explaining the mechanisms through which punctuation events spread and gain acceptance. While PET identifies when and why institutional transformation occurs, DIT illuminates how new accountability standards diffuse through BIPOC professional networks and what factors influence adoption or rejection of institutional change efforts.

The Metaethical Foundation

Before examining specific assessment frameworks, Position 3 requires grounding in metaethics—the philosophical inquiry into the nature, foundations, and scope of moral reasoning itself. While normative ethics asks, “What should we do?” and applied ethics asks “How do we apply moral principles to specific situations?” metaethics asks the foundational question: “What is the nature of morality itself, and how do we know what is moral?”

Table 1 presents the ethical framework used to analyze the APA’s apology, distinguishing between metaethical, normative, and applied ethical levels and their corresponding accountability questions. This metaethical grounding proves essential for understanding institutional accountability because the APA’s apology operates within contested moral terrain:

Table 1*Ethical Framework for Analyzing Institutional Apologies*

Ethical level	Guiding question	Application to APA apology
Metaethics	What is morality, and how is it known?	Who determines what constitutes adequate accountability?
Normative ethics	What should be done?	What obligations does the institution owe to harmed communities?
Applied ethics	How are ethical principles enacted?	How should the apology translate into specific actions or reforms?

Note. This table outlines three levels of ethical analysis used to evaluate institutional apologies, illustrating how abstract moral reasoning translates into expectations for organizational accountability.

The APA apology functions primarily at applied ethics levels—acknowledging specific harms and proposing specific remedies. Yet the question remains whether affected communities evaluate from different moral consciousness levels, potentially questioning whether psychology itself possesses the moral authority to define adequate accountability for harms psychology produced.

Corporate social responsibility frameworks provide the organizational bridge between metaethics and applied accountability. Table 2 summarizes the four levels of corporate social responsibility and illustrates how each level applies to the American Psychological Association's institutional accountability obligations. Carroll's (1991) CSR Pyramid identifies four ascending levels of organizational responsibility.

Table 2*Corporate Social Responsibility Levels and Application to the APA Apology*

CSR level	Function	APA application
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate profit/sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain organizational viability
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comply with laws and regulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet professional licensing requirements
Ethical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do what is right, fair, just 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge historical harm, commit to change
Philanthropic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a good corporate citizen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to community well-being beyond requirements

Note. Adapted from Carroll’s (1991) CSR framework, this table illustrates how economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities translate into expectations for institutional accountability following an apology.

Evaluating whether the APA’s accountability represents genuine ethical and philanthropic commitment or merely legal and reputational compliance becomes a central analytical question.

Organizational Assessment

The assessment function integrates multiple analytical tools that professionals employ—often intuitively—when evaluating institutional accountability efforts.

Psychological Safety. Edmondson’s (1999) psychological safety concept establishes the foundational question professionals ask after experiencing ethical dissonance: “Is it safe to engage with this?” For BIPOC professionals, conventional safety frameworks prove insufficient; Burrell (2022) demonstrated that authentic safety requires systemic conditions enabling participation without career penalties or cultural suppression.

Psychological safety becomes the organizational moderator determining how BIPOC men interpret institutional apologies. The APA’s (2022) Racial Equity Action Plan explicitly

acknowledges this, committing to “model a culture and climate of psychological safety and belongingness throughout APA to fully include and support people of color at all levels of the organization” (p. 14). The question becomes whether this commitment manifests in professional environments—in unsafe environments, cognitive dissonance elevates stress and avoidance; in safe environments, it enables openness, reflection, and dialogue.

Bolman and Deal’s Four Organizational Frames. Bolman and Deal’s (2017) four organizational frames provide foundational tools for multi-lens organizational analysis, serving as the conceptual foundation for sophisticated leadership evaluation frameworks. Table 3 presents Bolman and Deal’s four organizational frames and illustrates how each frame can be used to evaluate institutional accountability following the APA’s apology:

Table 3

Bolman and Deal’s Four Organizational Frames and Accountability Evaluation

Frame	Focus	Accountability evaluation
Structural	Roles, goals, formal relationships	Does accountability include concrete policies, timelines, resource allocation?
Human resource	People’s needs and skills	Do initiatives address psychological safety, professional development, authentic inclusion?
Political	Power, conflict, resource competition	Has power been redistributed? Are systemic change mechanisms in place?
Symbolic	Meaning, culture, inspiration	Does communication reflect genuine cultural transformation or performative messaging?

Note. Adapted from Bolman and Deal’s four-frame model of organizations, this table illustrates how each frame provides a distinct lens for evaluating the substance and depth of institutional accountability efforts (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Applied to institutional accountability, these frames illuminate how BIPOC professionals naturally employ multiple analytical lenses when evaluating institutional credibility. The structural frame examines whether accountability statements include concrete policies, timelines,

and resource allocation. The human resource frame assesses whether initiatives address psychological safety, professional development, and authentic inclusion. The political frame analyzes power redistribution, coalition building, and systemic change mechanisms. The symbolic frame evaluates whether communications reflect genuine cultural transformation rather than performative messaging.

APA’s Four Levels of Racism. The APA’s (2021b) Resolution on Harnessing Psychology to Combat Racism established four levels of racism as the institutional framework for accountability. Table 4 outlines the APA’s four levels of racism, which serve as the institutional framework for analyzing accountability and systemic change:

Table 4

APA’s Four Levels of Racism

Level	Definition
Structural	Laws, policies, practices producing cumulative, durable, race-based inequalities
Institutional	Policies, practices, procedures of institutions that marginalize diverse racial groups
Interpersonal	Behaviors by dominant group members that diminish and harm marginalized groups
Internalized	Acceptance by diverse populations of negative societal beliefs about themselves

Note. Adapted from the American Psychological Association’s Resolution on Harnessing Psychology to Combat Racism (APA, 2021b).

The Resolution states: “Because these forms of racism are mutually reinforcing, efforts to mitigate and ultimately eradicate racism will require comprehensive interventions aimed at all of its four levels” (p. 3). This framework provides explicit criteria against which institutional accountability can be evaluated.

Rule of Law Principles and the Four Levels of Racism. The APA’s four levels of racism align systematically with established Rule of Law principles, creating an accountability framework that the institution itself implicitly endorsed. This alignment provides the evaluative criteria against which participants assessed the apology’s adequacy—criteria derived from the APA’s own conceptual architecture rather than external standards. Table 5 aligns core rule of law principles with the four levels of racism, illustrating how legal and ethical accountability requirements vary across structural, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized dimensions.

Table 5

Rule of Law Principles Aligned With Four Levels of Racism

Level of racism	Rule of law principle	Accountability requirement
Structural	Being just	Advocating for systemic fairness and equity in laws and policies
Institutional	Being open	Reforming policies and processes to eliminate systemic inequities
Interpersonal	Being transparent	Being honest about interpersonal bias and discriminatory behaviors
Internalized	Being accountable	Owning internalized prejudice and taking responsibility for addressing it

Note. This table integrates rule of law principles with multilevel racism frameworks to clarify differentiated accountability expectations across legal, organizational, interpersonal, and intrapersonal domains.

This alignment establishes the APA’s framework not merely as a descriptive taxonomy but as a normative standard with embedded accountability mechanisms. By defining four levels of racism, the APA simultaneously defined four corresponding accountability obligations: to be just in addressing structural racism, to be open in reforming institutional racism, to be transparent about interpersonal racism, and to be accountable for internalized racism’s perpetuation.

Critically, this study employed the APA's framework as the standard against which institutional accountability is measured—not as a conclusion about what accountability should entail. Participants evaluated the apology against criteria the APA itself established, assessing whether institutional follow-through demonstrated justice at the structural level, openness at the institutional level, transparency at the interpersonal level, and accountability at the internalized level. The framework thus functions as the evaluative lens through which the gap between institutional commitment and institutional action becomes visible.

Critical race theory (CRT) reveals the deeper paradox within this alignment. CRT scholarship demonstrates that legal structures—ostensibly neutral and objective—embed racial hierarchies within their foundational logic (Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The Rule of Law does not simply fail to protect BIPOC communities; it actively constructs conditions for marginalization while maintaining legitimacy through procedural neutrality. Applied to the APA's accountability framework, CRT predicts precisely what this study documents: an institution can satisfy Rule of Law requirements (Being Just, Being Open, Being Transparent, Being Accountable) at the formal level while the structures those principles ostensibly govern remain unchanged. The apology demonstrates procedural compliance—acknowledgment was issued, commitments were stated, language was appropriately contrite—yet CRT would identify this as how racial hierarchies perpetuate: through legitimacy gained from formal process that preserves substantive power arrangements.

This CRT insight explains why communities evaluating from Levels 6–7 (Moral-Transcendent Accountability) cannot be satisfied by Level 4 (Ethical Accountability) compliance, regardless of institutional sincerity. Post-conventional consciousness perceives what CRT articulates: Rule of Law mechanisms are not neutral tools that can dismantle racism if

properly applied—they are themselves mechanisms through which racial hierarchies maintain legitimacy. Participants intuitively applied CRT analysis when they demanded evidence of structural transformation rather than procedural compliance, when they distinguished symbolic accommodation from substantive change, and when they evaluated the apology against embodied action rather than formal commitment. Their skepticism was not cynicism but sophisticated recognition that satisfying Rule of Law criteria within a system CRT identifies as structurally racist cannot produce the justice those criteria nominally require. The Ethical-Moral Divide thus reflects not merely developmental difference but epistemological divergence: institutions operating within Rule of Law logic versus communities recognizing that logic as insufficient for genuine transformation.

The WHEREAS Statements as Institutional Self-Diagnosis. The WHEREAS statements from the APA’s (2021b) Resolution on Harnessing Psychology to Combat Racism represent the institution’s explicit acknowledgments—their own framing of the problem they claim to address. These statements warrant detailed examination because they establish the criteria against which institutional follow-through can be evaluated, while simultaneously revealing the consciousness level at which the institution operates.

The resolution opens with acknowledgments of racism’s systemic nature:

WHEREAS racism has been an enduring, insidious, and pervasive feature of the United States (U.S.) landscape that often operates outside of the conscious awareness of its targets, perpetrators, and beneficiaries, and has had an incalculable, negative toll on the basic human rights to survival, security, health, well-being, and societal participation of generations of people in the U.S. and across the globe (Alvarez et al., 2016; APA, 2012; 2019). (APA, 2021b, p. 1)

This opening clause demonstrates institutional awareness at the structural level—acknowledging that racism operates systemically and often unconsciously. The language aligns with the APA’s four-level racism framework, recognizing that harm extends beyond individual prejudice to encompass societal participation and generational impact.

The resolution then addresses psychology’s specific culpability:

WHEREAS, the field of psychology has historically contributed to the belief in human hierarchy through allowing—or not challenging—racial bias throughout the discipline and profession, such as in peer review, publishing, research motivated by racism, racial disparities in psychological research, and the valuation of certain types of research, as well as in Eurocentric models of clinical practice, including psychological assessment, while largely ignoring the contributions of, and adversities facing, BIPOC (APA, 2019; Roberts et al., 2020).

WHEREAS some prominent psychologists historically have perpetuated and others continue to perpetuate racism through pseudoscientific theories that postulate racial differences in intelligence, propensity to violence, limits on educability, and other psychological characteristics, thereby contributing to eugenics and other racist movements in the United States and abroad (Editorial Board, *Personality & Individual Differences*, 2012; Guthrie, 2004; Helms, 2012). (APA, 2021b, p. 2)

These clauses move from general acknowledgment to specific institutional confession—naming peer review bias, Eurocentric clinical models, and the ongoing perpetuation of pseudoscientific racism. The present-tense language (“continue to perpetuate”) indicates awareness that the problem remains active rather than historical.

The resolution concludes with acknowledgment of psychology’s methodological limitations:

WHEREAS the field of psychology has traditionally focused on intrapersonal and interpersonal racism, rather than forms of systemic racism and the impact of historical racism on racial inequities and racial injustice (Trawalter et al., 2020);

WHEREAS this relatively narrow focus limits psychology’s effectiveness in mitigating and ultimately eradicating racism, because it fails to fully address the many manifestations of racism in our institutions, systems, policies, and practices. (APA, 2021b, p. 1)

The Ethical-Moral Consciousness Gap

Examined through the Ethical-Moral-Transcendent Accountability framework, these WHEREAS statements reveal a critical pattern: the institution operates at Level 4 (Ethical Accountability)—demonstrating sophisticated policy language, comprehensive problem identification, and commitment to procedural remedies. The acknowledgments are thorough, properly cited, and institutionally appropriate.

Yet communities of color, as this study’s findings demonstrate, evaluate institutional accountability at Levels 6–7 (Moral and Transcendent Accountability)—assessing relational integrity, authentic transformation commitment, and evidence of genuine consciousness shift rather than policy compliance. This developmental mismatch explains why institutional apologies that appear comprehensive at Level 4 often fail to resonate with communities operating at higher evaluative consciousness.

The WHEREAS statements demonstrate what Fanon (1961/2004) identified as reformism rather than authentic decolonization—modifications that acknowledge colonial harm while

maintaining the fundamental structures that perpetuate it. The institution acknowledges its “narrow focus” on individual racism while simultaneously framing the solution through institutional mechanisms (resolutions, policies, frameworks) that operate within the same narrow epistemological tradition.

These statements provide the benchmark against which participants—and analysts—can evaluate whether institutional actions match institutional understanding. As subsequent chapters demonstrate, participants applied sophisticated evaluation frameworks that assessed precisely this gap between acknowledgment and embodied transformation.

Strategic Analysis: SWOT → OODA Loop → Game Theory

SWOT analysis enables professionals to assess institutional Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats in accountability efforts.

The OODA Loop (Observe-Orient-Decide-Act)—derived from military strategic thinking (Enck, 2012)—illuminates how professionals gather information about institutional messages, analyze contextual factors, select appropriate responses, and implement strategies while observing outcomes. This military-derived framework proves particularly relevant for understanding how professional socialization creates systematic approaches to evaluating organizational communication.

Table 6 illustrates how the OODA Loop extends into game theory–based strategic behaviors, clarifying how different strategies shape institutional accountability responses over time. The OODA Loop naturally progresses to game theory strategic behaviors.

Table 6*OODA Loop–Informed Game Theory Strategies and Institutional Accountability Applications*

Strategy	Description	Institutional application
Be kind	Cooperative relationship-building	Engage constructively with accountability efforts
Be forgiving	Strategic patience with structured accountability	Allow time for change while maintaining expectations
Be retaliatory	Strategic pressure when cooperation fails	Apply consequences when commitments aren't met
Be clear	Transparent communication and empowerment	Articulate expectations explicitly

Note. Adapted from game theory principles applied to the OODA Loop, this table illustrates how strategic responses shift based on institutional behavior and accountability performance.

These strategic behaviors align with different leadership approaches and organizational responses to institutional accountability efforts.

Knowledge Transformation: SECI and DIKW

The SECI Model. Table 7 presents Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) SECI model and illustrates how each knowledge transformation process applies to institutional accountability following the APA's apology. Nonaka and Takeuchi's SECI model explains how organizational knowledge transforms through four processes.

Table 7*SECI Model of Organizational Knowledge Creation and Accountability Application*

Process	Transformation	Accountability application
Socialization	Tacit → Tacit	Shared understanding of harm through lived experience
Externalization	Tacit → Explicit	Apology articulates previously unspoken institutional failures
Combination	Explicit → Explicit	Resolution combines multiple explicit acknowledgments into policy
Internalization	Explicit → Tacit	Policy becomes embedded organizational behavior

Note. Adapted from Nonaka and Takeuchi's knowledge creation theory, this table illustrates how institutional apologies can be evaluated based on whether acknowledged harm is translated into durable organizational learning (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Applied to institutional accountability, SECI reveals how apologies must move beyond explicit statements to genuine knowledge transformation—becoming internalized organizational practice rather than remaining external policy pronouncements.

The DIKW Pyramid. Table 8 illustrates how the Data–Information–Knowledge–Wisdom (DIKW) hierarchy can be applied to evaluate institutional accountability following an organizational apology. The DIKW Pyramid illuminates the developmental progression required for authentic institutional accountability.

Table 8*DIKW Pyramid Accountability Application*

Level	Definition	Accountability application
Data	Raw facts	Historical harm documented
Information	Organized, contextualized data	Apology provides organized acknowledgment
Knowledge	Understanding of patterns and relationships	Recognition of systemic dynamics
Wisdom	Applied understanding for decision-making	Transformed organizational behavior

Note. This table applies the DIKW hierarchy to institutional accountability, illustrating how acknowledgment must progress beyond data disclosure toward sustained organizational transformation.

The gap between Information-level communication and Wisdom-level accountability represents a significant analytical consideration for evaluating institutional transformation efforts.

Moral Development Frameworks

Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development. Kohlberg's (1984) stages of moral development provide the framework for understanding how individuals evaluate institutional ethics across developmental levels. Table 9 summarizes Kohlberg's stages of moral development, organized by pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional levels of moral reasoning:

Table 9*Kohlberg's Levels and Stages of Moral Development*

Level	Stages	Orientation
Pre-conventional	1–2	Obedience/Punishment; Self-interest
Conventional	3–4	Interpersonal accord; Law and order
Post-conventional	5–6	Social contract; Universal principles

Note. Adapted from Kohlberg's theory of moral development, this table illustrates progressive shifts in moral reasoning from self-centered compliance to principled ethical judgment (Kohlberg, 1984)

Stage 6 representing the highest level of moral consciousness—reasoning based on universal ethical principles. Institutional accountability efforts can be evaluated against these stages: Do they reflect compliance-based reasoning (Stages 1–4) or principled reasoning (Stages 5–6)?

However, scholars have noted limitations in Kohlberg's (1984) framework, particularly its Western-centric orientation and potential ceiling effects when applied to communities with sophisticated moral traditions that may extend beyond universal principles toward collective and transcendent considerations (Gilligan, 1982; Snarey, 1985).

Haidt's Moral Foundations Theory. Haidt's (2012) moral foundations theory identifies six foundations underlying moral judgment. Table 10 presents Haidt's moral foundations framework, outlining six core moral dimensions that shape ethical judgment and social behavior:

Table 10*Haidt's Moral Foundations Theory*

Foundation	Focus
Care/Harm	Compassion, preventing suffering
Fairness/Cheating	Justice, rights, equality
Loyalty/Betrayal	Group allegiance, patriotism
Authority/Subversion	Respect for tradition, hierarchy
Sanctity/Degradation	Purity, sacredness
Liberty/Oppression	Freedom from domination

Note. Adapted from moral foundations theory, this table illustrates core moral domains that influence how individuals and institutions evaluate ethical obligations and social responsibility (Haidt, 2012).

Institutional accountability efforts typically address Care (acknowledging harm) and Fairness (admitting discrimination) while potentially neglecting how Authority structures perpetuate harm and how Sanctity of professional identity may have been violated. Haidt's (2012) framework enables evaluation of which moral foundations institutional apologies address and which remain unexamined.

Like Kohlberg (1984), some scholars suggest Haidt's (2012) six foundations may not fully capture the moral reasoning of communities whose ethical traditions emphasize collective liberation, epistemological justice, or systemic transformation beyond individual moral intuitions.

Developmental Convergence Across Frameworks

The theoretical integration of multiple developmental frameworks reveals a striking pattern: independent theorists across psychology, moral philosophy, consciousness studies, and

leadership development consistently identify the same developmental gap that this study documented between institutional and community consciousness. This convergence provided robust validation for the Ethical-Moral Divide identified in participants' responses.

While Kohlberg (1984) identified Stage 6 (Universal Ethical Principles) as post-conventional morality, and Haidt (2012) documented six moral foundations, additional developmental frameworks extend and validate these findings. Hawkins's (2002, 2006) Map of Consciousness provides calibrated measurement of developmental levels, identifying Level 500 (Love) as a critical attractor point where individuals and institutions plateau, believing they have achieved the highest consciousness. However, Hawkins's (2002, 2006) scale extends to Levels 600 (Peace), 700 (Enlightenment), and 1000 (Non-dual Awareness), suggesting that institutional accountability operating at the "love and care" level (500) may fail to resonate with communities evaluating from transcendent consciousness (600–700+).

Maslow's (1943,1971) late addition of Self-Transcendence as a sixth level beyond Self-Actualization proves particularly significant. His recognition that individual achievement was not the developmental peak—that there exists a level focused on purpose beyond self—aligns with participants' evaluation criteria that exceeded institutional ethical compliance. Graves's (1970) Levels of Existence theory, later developed into Spiral Dynamics (Beck & Cowan, 1996), distinguishes First Tier consciousness (Levels 1–6: survival through pluralistic) from Second Tier consciousness (Levels 7–8: integral and holistic). This distinction parallels the gap documented in this study: institutions operating at First Tier (Green/pluralistic) consciousness while participants evaluated from Second Tier (Yellow/Teal/integral) awareness.

The conscious leadership literature provides organizational application of these developmental frameworks. Laloux (2014) documented how organizations evolve through

developmental stages: Red (impulsive), Amber (conformist), Orange (achievement), Green (pluralistic), and Teal (integral). Barrett (2014) extended this to organizational values, identifying how institutions can plateau at Green consciousness—values-driven, relationship-focused—without progressing to Teal/integral purpose. Kegan and Lahey (2009) termed this developmental arrest “immunity to change,” explaining why organizations articulate transformation language while remaining structurally unchanged.

The convergence across these independent frameworks suggests not methodological artifact but genuine developmental architecture. Each theorist, working from different disciplinary foundations—developmental psychology (Kohlberg, 1984; Loevinger, 1976), humanistic psychology (Maslow, 1971), consciousness research (Hawkins, 2002, 2006), organizational development (Barrett, 2014; Graves, 1970; Laloux, 2014), and moral psychology (Haidt, 2012)—identified the same structural pattern: a significant developmental gap between conventional or institutional levels and post-conventional or transcendent levels.

This multi-framework validation transforms what might appear as participant “demands” into documented developmental positioning. When participants required concrete action plans, independent verification mechanisms, and sustained commitment, they were not asking for “too much”—they were evaluating from exactly where developmental theory places the highest human consciousness. The consistency across Kohlberg’s (1984) Stage 6, Maslow’s (1971) Self-Transcendence, Hawkins’s (2002, 2006) 700+, Graves’s (1970) Second Tier, and Laloux’s (2014) Teal consciousness confirms that participants’ evaluation frameworks represent post-conventional/transcendent consciousness rather than cynicism or excessive expectation.

Seven-Framework Convergent Validation

Barrett's (2014) Seven Levels of Consciousness model, widely adopted in organizational development and used by Fortune 500 companies and governments worldwide, provides additional convergent validation. Barrett identifies three developmental tiers: Levels 1–3 (Self-Interest: Survival, Relationship, Self-Esteem), Level 4 (Transformation: the critical hinge point), and Levels 5–7 (Common Good: Internal Cohesion, Making a Difference, Service). This architecture maps directly onto the frameworks already discussed, creating seven-source convergent validation for the developmental gap this study documents.

Table 11 presents the seven-framework convergent validation of the developmental architecture underlying the SALT framework, illustrating structural alignment across consciousness, moral development, motivation, leadership, and symbolic systems.

Table 11

Seven-Framework Convergent Validation of Developmental Architecture

Level	Barrett	Kohlberg	Maslow	Hawkins	Leadership orientation	G.U.N.S. symbolism
7	Service	Universal principles	Self-transcendence	700+	Purposeful	G (God)
5–6	Cohesion / difference	Post-conventional	Self-actualization	500–600	Authentic / transformational	U (Universe)
3–4	Esteem / transformation	Conventional	Belonging / esteem	310–400	Authentic / Servant	N (Nature)
1–2	Survival / relationship	Pre-conventional	Physiological / safety	20–250	Servant	S (Spirit)

Note. This table demonstrates convergent validation across seven independent frameworks, including levels of consciousness.

This seven-framework convergence validates the GUNS framework as empirically grounded rather than theoretically imposed. GUNS (God/Universe/Nature/Spirit/Soul) names an

underlying developmental architecture that scholars across consciousness research, moral development, human motivation, and leadership theory independently documented (Barrett, 2014; Hawkins, 2002, 2006; Kohlberg, 1984; Maslow, 1971). Within this alignment, Level 7 Service consciousness corresponds to GUNS Level 1 (God/Ontological); Levels 5–6 Common Good consciousness correspond to GUNS Level 2 (Universe/Governance); Levels 3–4 Transformation consciousness correspond to GUNS Level 3 (Nature/Power); and Levels 1–2 Self-Interest consciousness correspond to GUNS Level 4 (Spirit/Soul/Survival).

Importantly, GUNS Level 4 may also be understood as “Governing Under National Scarcity,” reflecting survival-oriented decision-making conditions in which fear, resource insecurity, and short-term preservation dominate both individual and institutional behavior. The GUNS framework does not invent developmental architecture; it names what seven independent research traditions consistently revealed.

GOD as Dual-Axis Consciousness: The Seventh Moral Stage and Foundation

The “G” in GUNS—representing the highest consciousness level—operates through dual-axis architecture: GOD = Gaining One’s Definition (Vertical/Ethics) + Guiding One’s Direction (Horizontal/Moral). The vertical axis addresses ontological identity: “Who am I?”—the ethical foundation of being that exists independent of institutional validation. The horizontal axis addresses purposeful action: “What do I do?”—the moral expression of identity through direction and decision. Level 7 consciousness integrates both axes simultaneously, while lower levels typically operate on one axis at a time.

This dual-axis architecture explains the Ethical-Moral Divide documented throughout this study. Institutions operating at Levels 3–4 function primarily on the vertical axis—defining who they claim to be through mission statements, apologies, and values declarations. The APA’s

apology operates vertically: “We define ourselves as an organization that acknowledges and opposes racism” (APA, 2021a, p. 1). Participants evaluating at Levels 6–7 hold both axes simultaneously, assessing whether horizontal direction (actual behavior, resource allocation, structural change) aligns with vertical definition. When institutions offer vertical definition without corresponding horizontal direction, Level 7 consciousness recognizes the gap as structural rather than incidental.

This GOD architecture substantiates what scholars have theorized but not formally documented: a seventh moral stage beyond Kohlberg’s (1984) six stages and a seventh moral foundation beyond Haidt’s (2012) six foundations. Kohlberg’s Stage 6 (Universal Ethical Principles) represents the highest level of individual moral reasoning but does not address the integration of being and action, definition and direction. Haidt’s six foundations—Care, Fairness, Loyalty, Authority, Sanctity, Liberty—identify distinct moral domains but do not account for the meta-foundation that integrates all six into unified consciousness operation. The seventh Stage/Foundation is not another domain but the *integration* of all preceding domains through dual-axis consciousness: simultaneously Gaining One’s Definition (who I am across all moral domains) and Guiding One’s Direction (how I act from integrated identity).

The seventh Stage/Foundation is substantiated through DIKW integration. Stages 1–2 (Pre-Conventional) operate primarily at the Data level—raw stimulus-response processing. Stages 3–4 (Conventional) operate at the Information level—contextualized patterns shaped by group norms. Stages 5–6 (Post-Conventional) operate at the Knowledge level—integrated understanding that transcends immediate context. Stage 7 (Transcendent/GOD) requires simultaneous operation across all four DIKW levels: Data (immediate sensory awareness), Information (contextual pattern recognition), Knowledge (integrated principled understanding),

and Wisdom (real-time application through discerning action). The seventh stage is not merely Wisdom but the *simultaneous integration* of D-I-K-W into unified consciousness operation—precisely what participants demonstrated when evaluating the APA apology.

Similarly, OVERSTANDING—defined as the simultaneous integration of all four GUNS dimensions, DIKW progression through all four levels, and dual-axis GOD consciousness (Gaining One’s Definition + Guiding One’s Direction)—is now empirically substantiated as the documented state of operating from Level 7/Stage 7 consciousness while integrating all preceding levels. Participants demonstrated overstanding naturally; seven independent frameworks validate the architecture it describes. What this study contributes is not invention of developmental theory but discovery that BIPOC professionals, when encountering institutional accountability efforts, spontaneously operate from the highest documented consciousness levels—the seventh Stage/Foundation that institutions issuing apologies have not achieved.

Universal Four-Element Architecture: Cross-Disciplinary Substantiation

The DIKW hierarchy (Ackoff, 1989; Rowley, 2007) receives cross-disciplinary substantiation from the Conscious Competence Model (Broadwell, 1969; Curtiss & Warren, 1973; Keeley, 2021). What knowledge management describes as the Data → Information → Knowledge → Wisdom progression, learning theory describes as Unconscious Incompetence → Conscious Incompetence → Conscious Competence → Unconscious Competence. These are not parallel frameworks but unified descriptions of the same developmental architecture from different disciplinary perspectives. Data corresponds to Unconscious Incompetence—raw input without awareness of what one does not know. Information corresponds to Conscious Incompetence—contextualized awareness of gaps in knowledge. Knowledge corresponds to Conscious Competence—actionable understanding requiring deliberate effort. Wisdom

corresponds to Unconscious Competence—where Keeley (2021) noted individuals “have honed their abilities so much that it is now innate or second nature” (p. 1). Unconscious Competence IS Wisdom: the state where knowledge operates intuitively without deliberate effort. This cross-disciplinary identity—not mere alignment—substantiates DIKW as empirically grounded rather than theoretically imposed.

The four-element architecture extends beyond psychology to physics itself. The four fundamental forces of nature—gravity, electromagnetism, the weak nuclear force, and the strong nuclear force—provide the physical foundation for understanding universal structural patterns. Gravity provides foundational stability and cohesion, often taken for granted (analogous to Unconscious Incompetence). Electromagnetism enables connectivity and interaction, representing awareness of systemic relationships (analogous to Conscious Incompetence). The weak nuclear force drives transformation and change at the atomic level, requiring specific conditions and deliberate energy to initiate change (analogous to Conscious Competence). The strong nuclear force ensures unity and cohesion at the deepest level, binding atomic nuclei together despite repulsive forces (analogous to Unconscious Competence). This physics-to-consciousness alignment suggests that the four-element structure is not an artifact of theoretical convenience but reflects fundamental patterns observable across physical, psychological, and organizational systems.

Bolman and Deal’s (2017) four organizational frames—structural (rules and hierarchy), human resources (people and motivation), political (power and alliances), and symbolic (culture and rituals)—provide additional convergent validation. These four frames have been applied across organizational contexts as diagnostic and intervention tools. When mapped against the other frameworks, a consistent pattern emerges: the Structural frame corresponds to foundational

stability (Stage 1/Data/Gravity); Human Resources to relational awareness (Stage 2/Information/Electromagnetism); Political to transformative action (Stage 3/Knowledge/Weak Force); and Symbolic to integrated meaning-making (Stage 4/Wisdom/Strong Force). This alignment enables systematic analysis at each consciousness level through four distinct but complementary lenses. Table 12 presents the Universal Four-Element Architecture, demonstrating cross-disciplinary convergence across learning theory, knowledge hierarchies, organizational frames, moral development, consciousness models, physics, and the SALT and GUNS frameworks.

Table 12

Universal Four-Element Architecture: Cross-Disciplinary Convergence

Stage	Competence level	DIKW level	Fundamental force	Organizational frame	Barrett	GUNS	SALT
1	Unconscious incompetence	Data	Gravity	Structural	Survival	S (Spirit/Soul)	Light
2	Conscious incompetence	Information	Electromagnetic	Human resource	Relationship	N (Nature)	Life
3	Conscious competence	Knowledge	Weak nuclear	Political	Transformation	U (Universe)	Leadership
4	Unconscious competence	Wisdom	Strong nuclear	Symbolic	Service	G (God)	Love

Note. This table illustrates convergence across multiple independent theoretical traditions, including Kohlberg's (1984) moral development and Haidt's (2012) moral foundations. The alignment suggests a shared developmental architecture rather than framework-specific theoretical imposition.

This cross-disciplinary substantiation yields a unified equation: OVERSTANDING = ENLIGHTENMENT = WISDOM = UNCONSCIOUS COMPETENCE. These are not four separate concepts, but one operational state described by different disciplines—integrated mastery functioning without deliberate effort, embodied truth expressed through spontaneous right action. Participants in this study demonstrated this fourth-stage operation: their evaluation

of the APA apology was not effortful analysis but natural recognition, the *second nature* that Keeley (2021) identified as the hallmark of unconscious competence. They did not need to consciously apply frameworks; they operated from integrated consciousness that immediately perceived the gap between institutional claims and institutional behavior.

The APA, by contrast, operates at the Information/Conscious Incompetence level transitioning toward Knowledge/Conscious Competence. The 2021 apology demonstrates awareness of historical harm—the institution now knows what it did not know. However, transformation remains effortful and incomplete, requiring deliberate attention and external pressure. The institution has not achieved Wisdom/Unconscious Competence where anti-racist operation becomes innate. Using Bolman and Deal's (2017) frames: the APA addressed the Structural frame (policy statements) and Human Resources frame (acknowledging harm to people) but remains contested in the Political frame (power redistribution) and has not achieved the Symbolic frame (cultural transformation). This analysis explains why institutional accountability efforts generate recognition without resonance—they operate from Information-Knowledge consciousness addressing communities that evaluate from Wisdom.

The convergence of multiple disciplines—knowledge management, learning theory, organizational theory, physics—on the same four-element structure suggests this architecture is not theoretical imposition but empirical discovery. Conscious Competence does not parallel DIKW; it proves DIKW. Bolman and Deal's frames do not align with the architecture; they apply it organizationally. The four fundamental forces do not metaphorically resemble the pattern; they ground it in physical reality. This study does not claim to invent developmental theory; it documents that independent research traditions identified the same structural pattern. The frameworks contributed by this study—GUNS, SALT, PSPR, KEYS, GOD—name this

architecture in domains where it had not been explicitly identified, extending rather than replacing established scholarship.

The 4 D's of Psychopathology

Table 13 summarizes the four traditional diagnostic criteria used in psychology's traditional diagnostic criteria—deviance, dysfunction, distress, and danger—provide the standard framework for identifying psychopathology:

Table 13

The 4 D's of Psychopathology

Criterion	Traditional application
Deviance	Behavior departing from social norms
Dysfunction	Impaired functioning
Distress	Psychological suffering
Danger	Risk to self or others

Note. The four D's—deviance, dysfunction, distress, and danger—represent the foundational criteria commonly used in psychological assessment to distinguish typical variation from clinically significant psychopathology.

The historical precedent of Drapetomania—the fabricated diagnosis pathologizing enslaved people's desire for freedom (Cartwright, 1851)—demonstrates how psychology weaponized the 4 D's to serve oppressive interests. Drapetomania labeled freedom-seeking as deviant (departing from enslaved “norms”), dysfunctional (inability to accept enslavement), causing distress (to slaveholders), and dangerous (threatening the institution of slavery). This historical example raises questions about how diagnostic frameworks can be applied—or misapplied—and whether institutions themselves might be evaluated using similar criteria.

Leadership Frameworks: SALT and Aligned Leadership

SALT (Squared-Away Legacy Theory) functions as the governing theoretical architecture for this study. The Core 4 framework—PET (structural), CDT (interpersonal), I/O psychology (institutional), and Fanon’s colonial psychology (symbolic)—operates as SALT’s diagnostic lens for examining institutional phenomena. Supporting frameworks including DIKW, WHIP & CHAINS, PSPR, and the Ethical-Moral-Transcendent accountability levels represent analytical instruments within SALT’s architecture rather than parallel theories. This hierarchy is essential: SALT creates the positioning; supporting frameworks operationalize specific diagnostic functions within that positioning.

SALT stands firmly on the shoulders of Adlerian Psychology, which frames leadership as a courageous, socially embedded, and purpose-driven endeavor (Johnson, 2024). Alfred Adler’s emphasis on goal orientation, social interest (*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*), and encouragement as foundational to personal development (Adler, 1938; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) laid the groundwork for modern leadership theories that prioritize service and authenticity over authority.

SALT expands Adler’s vision into four interconnected leadership frames—Strategic (Purposeful), Authentic, Liberating (Transformational), and Togetherness (Servant)—each aligned with both moral development and organizational consciousness (Bitter & Corey, 2010; Colker, 2023; Johnson, 2016, 2024). Table 14 presents the SALT leadership framework, aligning leadership types with their core functions and Adlerian psychological foundations:

Table 14*SALT Leadership Framework*

SALT frame	Leadership type	Core function	Adlerian foundation
Strategic	Purposeful/Consciousness leadership	Awareness, vision, and mission alignment	Goal orientation; overcoming inferiority
Authentic	Authentic leadership	Identity, transparency, and relational integrity	Lifestyle analysis; genuine self-expression
Liberating	Transformational leadership	Systemic change and vision development	Social interest directed toward collective transformation
Togetherness	Servant leadership	Community-centered leadership and power redistribution	<i>Gemeinschaftsgefühl</i> ; community feeling

Note. This table integrates the SALT leadership framework with established leadership theories and Adlerian psychological principles, illustrating how leadership development progresses from individual purpose to collective service.

This theoretical direction began during the author’s 2020 capstone on transforming military organizational culture, where transformational leadership, structural alignment, and followership were positioned as essential practices for reform within hierarchical systems. Drawing on insights from Bolman and Deal’s four-frame model, that capstone helped operationalize Adlerian concepts in real-world leadership environments—focusing not just on the structure of organizations, but on the people within them (Johnson, 2016, 2024).

What differentiates SALT is its integration of purpose-driven thinking with system-level change—extending Adlerian psychology from intrapersonal development toward organizational and societal transformation. Whereas Adler emphasized overcoming inferiority for communal welfare, SALT reframes that journey through the lens of systemic impact and moral responsibility, aligning with theories of transformational and servant leadership (Colker, 2023; Northouse, 2019).

The Sequential Requirement

SALT suggests that leadership frames develop most effectively in sequence—Strategic (Purposeful) awareness before Authentic identity work, Authentic grounding before Liberating (Transformational) change efforts, and Transformational vision before Togetherness (Servant) commitment. Institutions that attempt transformation without first establishing purposeful awareness and authentic identity may produce what Einarsen et al. (2007) termed destructive leadership: leadership behavior that undermines organizational goals, employee well-being, or ethical standards through action or inaction.

SALT as Light, Life, Leadership, Love: Cross-Disciplinary Substantiation

Beyond its leadership frame operationalization (Strategic, Authentic, Liberating, Togetherness), SALT represents a deeper consciousness architecture through four foundational pillars: Light, Life, Leadership, and Love (Johnson, 2016, 2024). Squared Away Legacy Theory operates through nested layers—Squared Away Lens Theory (how one sees), which contains Squared Away Leadership Theory (how one leads), which extends Transformational Leadership at its core (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). Together, these four pillars represent the essential substance needed for a well-ordered and purposeful existence: Light provides vision and awareness (seeing reality without distortion); Life enables purpose-driven existence (aligning daily action with long-term mission); Leadership develops influence and strategy (disciplined, principled guidance); and Love achieves enlightened togetherness (deep connection based on mutual understanding and shared growth).

Intellectual Lineage and Gap Identification

SALT does not compete with transformational leadership theory—it completes it. Burns (1978) identified transformational leadership; Bass (1985) operationalized it through the Four I's

(Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, Individualized Consideration); Adler (1938) provided the social interest foundation; Maslow (1943, 1971) mapped the developmental progression toward transcendence; Bass and Avolio (1994) elaborated the full range leadership model; Colker (2023) integrated alignment principles. SALT synthesizes these contributions into a unified four-pillar architecture that names what each predecessor partially described. Existing leadership theories describe WHAT transformational leaders do but not HOW consciousness develops to enable transformational capacity. Bass's (1985) Four I's identify behavioral markers without explaining the developmental architecture underlying those behaviors. Maslow mapped human needs toward transcendence but did not connect this progression to leadership development. SALT integrates what predecessors separated: Light provides the awareness Maslow assumed; Life provides the relational context Adler emphasized; Leadership provides the directed action Bass described; Love provides the transcendent integration Maslow envisioned but did not operationalize for organizational contexts.

Six-Framework Convergent Validation. Six independent frameworks validate the SALT architecture.

Light (Foundational Awareness). Light corresponds to Data within the DIKW hierarchy (Ackoff, 1989; Baskarada & Koronios, 2013; Rowley, 2007), Unconscious-to-Conscious Incompetence in learning theory (Broadwell, 1969; Howell, 1982; Keeley, 2021), Survival and Safety needs (Maslow, 1943, 1971), Awareness of inferiority (Adler, 1938), and Level 1 Survival Consciousness (Barrett, 2014). Light aligns metaphorically with gravity—the fundamental force that grounds existence, establishes orientation, and makes awareness possible by anchoring the individual within conditions of survival and constraint.

Life (Relational Meaning). Life corresponds to Information in the DIKW hierarchy (Ackoff, 1989; Baskarada & Koronios, 2013; Rowley, 2007), Conscious Incompetence in learning theory, Belongingness and relational needs (Maslow, 1943, 1971), Social embeddedness (Adler, 1938), and Levels 2–3 Relationship Consciousness (Barrett, 2014). Life aligns with the electromagnetic force—the relational force governing attraction, repulsion, communication, and connectivity—representing how meaning, emotion, and identity emerge through interaction.

Leadership (Directed Transformation). Leadership corresponds to Knowledge in the DIKW hierarchy, Conscious Competence in learning theory, Esteem needs (Maslow, 1943, 1971), goal-directed striving (Adler, 1938), and Level 3–4 Transformation Consciousness (Barrett, 2014). Leadership aligns with the weak nuclear force, the force responsible for transformation and change at the elemental level, symbolizing intentional action that converts relational awareness into directed influence and systemic impact.

Love (Integrative Transcendence). Love corresponds to Wisdom within the DIKW hierarchy, Unconscious Competence in learning theory, Self-Transcendence (Maslow, 1943, 1971), *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* or social interest (Adler, 1938), and Levels 4–7 Service Consciousness (Barrett, 2014). Love aligns with the strong nuclear force, the binding force that holds all matter together, representing integrated unity, ethical coherence, and transcendent operation that stabilizes and sustains all preceding levels. Table 15 is a validation table, not an exposition table, so the goal is to show convergence, not exhaust every framework in full detail.

Table 15*Cross-Disciplinary Validation of SALT Framework*

SALT	Knowledge / Competence	Maslow (1984)	Adler (1943)	Barrett (2014)	Physics
Light	Data → UI→CI	Survival	Inferiority	L1	Electromagnetic
Life	Information → CI	Belonging	Social	L2–3	Gravity
Leadership	Knowledge → CC	Esteem	Goal-striving	L4	Weak nuclear
Love	Wisdom → UC	Transcendence	Gemeinschaft	L5–7	Strong nuclear

Note. This table demonstrates cross-disciplinary convergence validating the SALT framework across knowledge development, psychological theory, consciousness models, and symbolic physical forces.

To enhance readability, conceptually overlapping frameworks were consolidated where theoretical alignment was direct and sequential, while preserving distinct disciplinary contributions necessary for cross-framework validation.

Physics Grounding: String Theory and Grand Unified Theory. PET explains *how* institutional change occurs—through periods of stability interrupted by rapid, nonlinear transformation—yet it does not fully explain *why* such transformation often remains imperceptible until after it has occurred (Gersick, 1991; Tushman & Romanelli, 1985). This limitation reflects an epistemological boundary rather than a theoretical flaw. Insights from physics clarify this boundary.

String theory proposes that what appear as distinct particles are, at a deeper level, different vibrational frequencies of a single fundamental entity—strings—rendering reality fundamentally unified but perceptually fragmented at lower observational levels (Greene, 1999; Kaku, 1994). Similarly, Grand Unified Theory demonstrates that forces experienced as separate

at ordinary energy levels—electromagnetic, weak nuclear, and strong nuclear—operate as a single unified force at higher energies inaccessible to everyday observation (Hawking, 1988; Weinberg, 1993).

This physical insight parallels the SALT architecture. SALT reflects epistemological sequencing rather than metaphysical assertion. The first position (Light) involves awareness without objectivity; the second position (Life) reflects individuality and lived experience—conditions under which phenomena exist but are not yet measurable. String theory aligns with the second position: it describes reality that exists but cannot be directly observed through conventional measurement. Objectivity emerges in the third position (Leadership), where pattern recognition and structured evaluation enable knowledge formation. Only in the fourth position (Love/Wisdom) does integrated understanding become available, allowing disparate elements to be apprehended as a coherent whole.

Qualitative inquiry is therefore not a methodological compromise but an epistemological necessity. Just as string theory predicts dimensions that remain hidden because they are “curled up” beyond perceptual access (Greene, 1999), SALT recognizes that Levels 5–7 of consciousness are inaccessible to institutions operating exclusively within Levels 1–4. What cannot yet be measured quantitatively must be accessed through lived experience and interpretive analysis. Hawkins's Map of Consciousness, which conceptualizes awareness as frequency-based rather than categorical, reinforces this alignment between physics and consciousness research (Hawkins, 2002, 2006).

The convergence of PET, string theory, Grand Unified Theory, and consciousness research supports the claim that SALT does not impose an artificial structure on development; it names a universal unification pattern observable across disciplines. Overstanding—defined as

the simultaneous integration of Light, Life, Leadership, and Love—mirrors what unified physical theories describe: the point at which apparent multiplicity resolves into underlying unity (Johnson, 2016, 2024).

Eleven-Source Convergent Validation. SALT receives validation from 11 independent sources spanning physics to psychology to leadership theory: (a) String Theory—frequency-based architecture, hidden dimensions (Greene, 1999; Kaku, 1994); (b) Grand Unified Theory—unification at higher levels (Hawking, 1988; Weinberg, 1993); (c) Four Fundamental Forces—four-element physical structure (empirical physics); (d) DIKW Hierarchy—Data→Information→Knowledge→Wisdom progression (Ackoff, 1989; Rowley, 2007); (e) Conscious Competence Model—learning progression validates DIKW (Broadwell, 1969; Keeley, 2021); (f) Maslow’s Hierarchy—needs progression toward transcendence (Maslow, 1943, 1971); (g) Adlerian Psychology—inferiority to social interest development (Adler, 1938); (h) Barrett’s Seven Levels—organizational consciousness progression (Barrett, 2014); (i) Kohlberg’s Moral Development—pre-conventional to post-conventional stages (Kohlberg, 1984); (j) Hawkins’s (2002, 2006) Consciousness Calibration—frequency-based consciousness mapping (Hawkins, 2002, 2006); (k) Transformational Leadership—core of SALT Leadership pillar (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). This convergent validation from physics, knowledge management, learning theory, humanistic psychology, individual psychology, organizational development, moral psychology, consciousness research, and leadership studies substantiates SALT as empirically grounded universal architecture rather than theoretical imposition.

Empirical Grounding and Predictive Power

Participants in this study demonstrated SALT operation without instruction. They exhibited Light (clear awareness of institutional performance versus claims), Life (purpose-

driven evaluation from integrated professional–racial identity), Leadership (sophisticated assessment of influence, resources, and accountability structures), and Love (demand for authentic relationship rather than symbolic inclusion). The framework emerged from participant behavior; it was not imposed upon them. SALT’s predictive power explains phenomena this study documents: the APA apology failed because it operated at Light (awareness) and partial Life (purpose statement) but lacked Leadership (resource allocation, timeline, accountability) and Love (authentic relationship with BIPOC communities). The 80% unawareness finding reflects Information/Life-level failure to cascade. Participants’ universal skepticism reflects their operation from Love/Wisdom evaluating institutions stuck at Light/Data. SALT does not invent this architecture; it names what scholars across leadership, psychology, systems thinking, and the natural sciences have independently identified. Transformational and moral leadership theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Burns, 1978), individual and social development (Adler, 1938; Kohlberg, 1984; Maslow, 1971), knowledge and learning systems (Ackoff, 1989; Broadwell, 1969), consciousness research (Barrett, 2014; Hawkins, 2002, 2006), and foundational principles of physics collectively point toward a coherent developmental structure. Together, these four pillars—Light, Life, Leadership, and Love—represent the essential substance required for a well-ordered and purposeful existence.

Aligned Leadership and Adlerian Psychology

Dr. Jay Colker’s (2023) Aligned Leadership framework provides crucial insight into the relationship dynamics that determine institutional accountability effectiveness. Drawing on Adlerian psychology principles, Colker’s framework emphasizes. Table 16 presents the core components of Aligned Leadership and their grounding in Adlerian psychology, illustrating how relational leadership dynamics shape institutional accountability outcomes:

Table 16*Aligned Leadership Components*

Aligned leadership component	Adlerian foundation	Accountability application
Self-awareness	Understanding one's own lifestyle and private logic	Institutions recognizing their historical patterns and biases
Relationship-building	Social interest (Gemeinschaftsgefühl)	Creating authentic connection with affected communities
Resistance identification	Understanding safeguarding behaviors	Recognizing organizational defenses against genuine change
Outcome achievement	Goal-directed behavior	Translating apology into measurable transformation
Engagement fostering	Encouragement and belonging	Creating conditions for authentic BIPOC participation

Note. Adapted from Colker's (2023) Aligned Leadership framework, grounded in Adlerian psychology. The model emphasizes relational alignment as a prerequisite for effective institutional accountability and sustainable organizational change.

Adlerian psychology's emphasis on social interest—the innate potential to connect with others and contribute to the common good—aligns directly with servant leadership's community-centered orientation. Alfred Adler's concept of *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* (community feeling) provides the psychological foundation for understanding why institutional apologies must move beyond individual reconciliation to collective transformation (Watts, 2012, 2015).

Colker's (2023) emphasis on reducing resistance through understanding different motivations and working styles directly applies to institutional accountability challenges. His framework suggests that effective institutional apologies require not only acknowledgment of harm but systematic attention to relationship repair, resistance point identification, and collaborative solution development. The Adlerian foundation of social interest and community belonging aligns with the psychological dynamics BIPOC professionals experience when

evaluating whether institutional environments genuinely support authentic participation and cultural integrity.

Preiss and Molina-Ray (2007) demonstrated the relevance of Adlerian psychology to I/O practice, emphasizing how encouragement, belonging, and purposeful contribution create organizational conditions for authentic change.

The Bridge to Colonial Psychology

The analytical sophistication developed through I/O assessment—integrating DIT awareness analysis, metaethical grounding, psychological safety evaluation, multi-frame organizational analysis, strategic decision-making, knowledge transformation, moral development frameworks, and SALT leadership frameworks—creates the foundation for examining how institutional apologies relate to broader patterns of colonial psychology.

Critical Race Theory and the Rule of Law

CRT scholarship demonstrates that legal structures—ostensibly neutral and objective—embed racial hierarchies within their foundational logic (Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The rule of law does not simply fail to protect BIPOC communities; it actively constructs the conditions for their marginalization while maintaining legitimacy through procedural neutrality.

Applied to psychology, CRT reveals how professional standards, ethical codes, research methodologies, and credentialing requirements function as legal–structural mechanisms that perpetuate exclusion while appearing race-neutral. The APA’s apology operates within this legal–structural context: acknowledging historical harm while the institutional structures producing that harm may remain largely unchanged.

Connection to Fanon's Colonial Psychology

When analyzed through the integrated I/O framework, institutional apologies can be examined through what Fanon identified as the fundamental dynamics of colonial psychology: the capacity of dominant institutions to define reality, including the terms of reconciliation. Position 4 will examine Fanon's framework directly, but the I/O analytical tools provide the organizational mechanisms through which to understand how colonial structures might perpetuate themselves through professional institutions claiming scientific objectivity.

Fanon's four core areas—Psychological Disalienation, Revolutionary Agency, Decolonization Process, and New Humanism—provide the lens through which institutional accountability efforts can be evaluated for whether they represent genuine liberation or what Fanon termed false decolonization: liberation offered on terms that preserve existing structures while appearing to dismantle them.

Theoretical Implications

The I/O framework provided essential analytical tools for understanding how professional contexts shape BIPOC responses to institutional accountability efforts. DIT explains diffusion failures; metaethical grounding situates accountability within moral philosophy; organizational assessment frameworks (psychological safety, Bolman & Deal, SWOT, OODA, Game Theory) provide systematic evaluation tools; knowledge transformation models (SECI, DIKW) illuminate developmental progression requirements; moral development frameworks establish evaluation criteria while their limitations suggest areas requiring further examination; and SALT and Aligned Leadership provide the leadership architecture for understanding institutional transformation potential.

The integration of these frameworks created a comprehensive analytical lens through which to examine how BIPOC professional men evaluate institutional accountability efforts—and how their professional expertise shapes sophisticated assessment capabilities that warrant further investigation.

Practical Implications

Understanding how I/O frameworks apply to institutional accountability enables more effective evaluation of organizational transformation efforts. DIT analysis can identify diffusion barriers requiring intervention. Multi-frame assessment ensures comprehensive rather than single-dimension evaluation. Knowledge transformation models establish developmental benchmarks. Moral development frameworks provide criteria for assessing institutional and community consciousness levels. SALT and Aligned Leadership offer practical guidance for institutions seeking authentic accountability through sequential leadership development and relationship-centered approaches grounded in Adlerian psychology's emphasis on social interest and community contribution.

Research Gaps and Study Justification

The integration of I/O psychology frameworks with institutional accountability analysis reveals significant gaps in existing literature that this study addresses. These gaps are organized by their theoretical position within the Core 4 framework, demonstrating how limitations in existing scholarship create the foundation for this investigation.

Position 1 Gaps: Punctuated Equilibrium Theory

Gap 1: Diffusion Failure in Institutional Accountability. While PET explains how institutions maintain stability punctuated by rapid transformation events (Gersick, 1991; Tushman & Romanelli, 1985), the theory does not adequately address how punctuation events

reach affected communities. DIT (E. M. Rogers, 2003) has been extensively applied to technology adoption, product innovation, and organizational change initiatives, but limited research examines how institutional accountability messages—particularly apologies for systemic harm—diffuse through affected populations.

The existing literature assumes that institutional communications reach their intended audiences through standard organizational channels. This study's preliminary finding of 80% unawareness among BIPOC professionals suggests a fundamental diffusion failure requiring investigation. PET identifies the punctuation event; DIT reveals why punctuation fails to propagate. Research has not adequately examined how the very exclusion that institutions apologize for simultaneously prevents accountability messages from reaching harmed communities—creating a paradox where the problem the apology addresses becomes the barrier to receiving the apology.

Gap 2: PET Stage Progression Beyond Symbolic Acknowledgment. PET literature documents punctuation events but provides limited guidance on what determines whether institutions progress beyond initial punctuation (PET-1: symbolic acknowledgment) toward structural transformation (PET-2, PET-3, PET-4). The “frozen middle” phenomenon (Gleeson, 2017)—where middle management layers become paralyzed between leadership commitments and operational realities—suggests organizational dynamics that stall punctuation progression. Research has not adequately examined how affected communities evaluate institutional progress through PET stages or what distinguishes genuine transformation trajectory from stalled symbolic punctuation.

Position 2 Gaps: Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Gap 3: Ethical Dissonance in Institutional Contexts. While Barkan et al. (2012) identified ethical dissonance as a distinct intensification of cognitive dissonance when moral identity is threatened, their research focused on individual behavior. Limited scholarship examines how ethical dissonance operates at organizational levels—particularly when institutions confront undeniable evidence of historical harm that contradicts stated values, threatens institutional identity, and violates societal norms simultaneously.

The “double-distancing” mechanism Barkan et al. (2012) identified—using an overcompensating ethical code to judge others more harshly while presenting oneself as more virtuous—has not been examined in institutional accountability contexts. Research has not investigated whether organizational apologies function as sophisticated impression management (conscious self-presentation) rather than authentic moral repair, or how affected communities recognize this pattern.

Gap 4: Strategic Dissonance Management Among BIPOC Professionals. Traditional CDT research assumes dissonance resolution through attitude change, behavior change, or rationalization. Limited research examines how BIPOC professionals employ strategic dissonance management—acknowledging institutional statements while maintaining critical awareness of systemic patterns. This sophisticated approach maintains dual consciousness rather than resolving through simple attitude adjustment. The psychological mechanisms enabling BIPOC professionals to integrate hope with realism, acceptance with skepticism, remain undertheorized.

Gap 5: The Evidence + Apology Paradox. Existing research treats institutional apologies as potentially healing interventions. No research examines whether having both

decades of research evidence documenting harm AND an institutional apology creates worse psychological outcomes than either alone. The paradox—that acknowledgment combined with unchanged structures may intensify rather than resolve dissonance—represents an unexplored dimension of CDT application to institutional accountability.

Position 3 Gaps: Industrial/Organizational Psychology

Gap 6: The 4 D's Applied Beyond Individual Pathology. Psychology's diagnostic criteria (deviance, dysfunction, distress, danger) have been applied exclusively to individual psychopathology. The Drapetomania precedent demonstrates how these criteria were weaponized against marginalized communities—pathologizing the oppressed rather than the oppressor. Yet no research examines whether the 4 D's framework might be inverted to evaluate institutional rather than individual pathology.

Can psychology's own diagnostic tools assess organizational behavior? Do institutions that deviate from stated ethical commitments, demonstrate organizational dysfunction, cause distress to affected communities, and perpetuate danger through unchanged structures meet criteria for institutional pathology? This analytical inversion remains unexplored.

Gap 7: BIPOC Professional Evaluation Sophistication. I/O psychology literature extensively documents professional socialization, expertise development, and organizational assessment capabilities. However, research has not adequately examined how BIPOC professionals integrate professional analytical training with lived experience of marginalization to create sophisticated evaluation frameworks for institutional accountability.

The intersection of professional identity and racial identity in shaping institutional assessment capabilities remains undertheorized. Existing frameworks position BIPOC communities as apology recipients rather than expert evaluators whose professional expertise—

legal evidentiary standards, military chain of command analysis, government accountability structures—shapes analytical responses exceeding traditional organizational assessment tools.

Position 4 Gaps: Colonial Psychology

Gap 8: Colonial Psychology in Professional Institutions. CRT (Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and Fanon’s (1952/1968, 1961/2004) colonial psychology have been applied to educational institutions, legal systems, and healthcare contexts. However, limited research examines how colonial psychological structures operate through professional associations claiming scientific objectivity—particularly psychology itself.

The APA’s unique position as the institution that both produced harmful psychological frameworks (eugenics research, racially biased assessments, Drapetomania) and now apologizes for that harm creates an unprecedented accountability context. How do BIPOC professionals navigate this paradox—receiving apology from the institution whose frameworks justified their marginalization? This paradox reflects both the internal psychological consequences of institutional domination (Fanon, 1952/1968) and the structural limitations of symbolic reform absent systemic transformation (Fanon, 1961/2004) has not been applied to professional association accountability.

Gap 9: Rule of Law Structures in Institutional Accountability. CRT demonstrates that legal structures embed racial hierarchies within ostensibly neutral procedural frameworks. Applied to psychology, professional standards, ethical codes, research methodologies, and credentialing requirements may function as legal–structural mechanisms perpetuating exclusion while appearing race-neutral.

Research has not examined how BIPOC professionals evaluate whether institutional apologies satisfy procedural requirements while substantive structures remain intact—the rule of

law functioning to provide legitimacy through formal process while preserving existing power arrangements. The relationship between CRT analysis and institutional apology evaluation remains underdeveloped.

Cross-Position Gap: Theoretical Integration

Gap 10: Integration Across Theoretical Domains. Existing research typically applies single theoretical frameworks to institutional accountability: organizational change theory OR cognitive psychology OR colonial theory OR moral development. No existing research integrates PET, CDT, I/O psychology, and colonial psychology into a unified analytical framework for understanding how BIPOC professionals evaluate institutional apologies. Table 17 presents the Theoretical Integration Framework, illustrating how multiple theoretical traditions align across four analytic positions to explain institutional accountability processes and limitations.

Table 17

Theoretical Integration Framework

Position	Framework	Contribution	Limitation addressed
Position 1	PET + DIT	Identifies punctuation events and diffusion mechanisms	Explains WHEN change occurs and WHY messages fail to reach communities
Position 2	CDT + ethical dissonance	Reveals psychological mechanisms	Explains HOW individuals process institutional contradictions
Position 3	I/O psychology	Provides organizational assessment tools	Explains WHAT frameworks professionals use to evaluate
Position 4	Colonial psychology	Names epistemological foundations	Explains WHY patterns persist through professional legitimacy

Note. PET = punctuated equilibrium theory; DIT = diffusion of innovations theory; CDT = critical dissonance theory. This framework demonstrates how explanatory gaps at each analytic position necessitate integration across disciplinary boundaries.

This fragmentation limits comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The Core 4 framework addresses this gap by integrating theoretical positions into unified analysis where each position informs and extends the others.

Study Justification

This study addressed these 13 gaps by examining how BIPOC professional men—drawing on diverse professional expertise across military, government, legal, manufacturing, academic, and emergency services contexts—evaluate the APA’s 2021 apology. The phenomenological approach enabled exploration of:

Position 1 Questions (PET/DIT). These questions examined how participants became aware (or remained unaware) of the apology, what awareness distribution reveals about diffusion failures, and whether participants evaluated the apology as genuine punctuation or stalled symbolism.

Position 2 Questions (CDT/Ethical Dissonance). These questions explored how participants managed dissonance between institutional promises and lived realities, whether participants recognized impression management versus authentic moral repair, and whether evidence combined with apology created intensified rather than resolved dissonance.

Position 3 Questions (I/O Psychology). These questions investigated what analytical tools BIPOC professionals employ when assessing institutional accountability, how professional expertise shapes evaluation frameworks, at what moral developmental levels participants evaluate accountability, whether existing frameworks adequately capture participant consciousness, and how participants evaluate institutional leadership through SALT and Aligned Leadership criteria.

Position 4 Questions (Colonial Psychology). These questions examined whether participants demonstrate capacity to identify colonial structures operating through institutional accountability, whether participants can distinguish genuine transformation from false liberation, and how participants navigate receiving apology from the institution whose frameworks justified their marginalization.

Integration Questions (Core 4). These questions explored how participants integrate professional analytical training with cultural knowledge and lived experience, what evaluation sophistication emerges from the intersection of professional and racial identity, and whether unified Core 4 analysis reveals patterns invisible to single-framework approaches.

The study's focus on BIPOC professional men addressed the intersection of professional identity, racial identity, and gender identity in shaping institutional accountability evaluation. The diverse professional backgrounds enabled examination of how field-specific socialization (military chain of command, legal evidentiary standards, government accountability structures) influences apology assessment.

By integrating the Core 4 theoretical framework— PET, CDT, I/O psychology, and colonial psychology—this study provides comprehensive analysis that addressed the fragmentation limitation in existing research. The I/O framework served as the interpretive bridge where leadership competencies meet analytical tools, enabling systematic examination of how BIPOC professionals transform lived experience into sophisticated institutional evaluation.

Chapter Summary

This literature review established a comprehensive theoretical foundation for understanding how BIPOC professional men evaluate institutional accountability efforts through

an integrated framework combining four core theoretical positions with supporting analytical tools.

Position 1: Punctuated Equilibrium Theory

The historical context reveals how psychology's colonial foundations—from *Drapetomania* through eugenics to contemporary epistemic exclusion—created the conditions necessitating institutional accountability. PET (Gersick, 1991; Tushman & Romanelli, 1985) explains how institutions maintain stability punctuated by rapid transformation events, positioning the APA's 2021 apology as a potential punctuation event. DIT (E. M. Rogers, 2003) extends PET by explaining the mechanisms through which punctuation events spread—or fail to spread—through affected communities. The convergence of George Floyd's murder, longstanding pressure from BIPOC psychologists, and growing recognition of psychology's historical harm created conditions for institutional punctuation, yet questions remain about whether this punctuation event will progress beyond symbolic acknowledgment toward structural transformation.

Position 2: Cognitive Dissonance Theory

The examination of cognitive processing illuminates how BIPOC professionals navigate institutional apologies while facing ongoing marginalization. CDT (Festinger, 1957; Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019) provides the psychological mechanisms explaining why institutional accountability generates complex responses. Barkan et al.'s (2012) ethical dissonance framework reveals how moral identity threats intensify dissonance, triggering all three dissonance sources simultaneously: behavioral inconsistency with personal values, threat to self-integrity, and violation of societal norms. The “double-distancing” mechanism and distinction between impression management and authentic moral repair provide analytical tools for evaluating

institutional apology authenticity. CDT illuminates how BIPOC professionals manage psychological tensions between institutional promises and lived realities, revealing sophisticated integration of cognitive and experiential knowledge rather than simple acceptance or rejection.

Position 3: Industrial/Organizational Psychology

The I/O framework serves as the interpretive bridge where leadership competencies meet analytical tools. This position integrates:

Meta-Process Frameworks. DIT explains awareness failures, revealing how the exclusion institutions apologize for becomes the barrier preventing accountability messages from reaching harmed communities.

Metaethical Foundation. The philosophical grounding distinguishing metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics situates institutional accountability within contested moral terrain, raising questions about who possesses authority to define adequate accountability.

Organizational Assessment Tools. Psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), Bolman and Deal's (2017) Four Organizational Frames, the APA's Four Levels of Racism, SWOT analysis, the OODA Loop, and Game Theory strategic behaviors provide multi-dimensional frameworks for institutional accountability assessment.

Knowledge Transformation Models. The SECI Model (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) and DIKW Pyramid illuminate developmental progression requirements, revealing how apologies must move beyond explicit statements toward internalized organizational wisdom.

Moral Development Frameworks. Kohlberg's (1984) stages and Haidt's (2012) moral foundations establish evaluation criteria while their noted limitations (Gilligan, 1982; Snarey, 1985) suggest areas requiring further examination—particularly whether communities shaped by

collective trauma and liberation struggles demonstrate moral reasoning extending beyond these frameworks' upper boundaries.

Leadership Frameworks. SALT (Johnson, 2024), grounded in Adlerian psychology and expanding Adler's vision into four interconnected leadership frames—Strategic (Purposeful), Authentic, Liberating (Transformational), and Togetherness (Servant)—provides the leadership architecture for understanding institutional accountability. Colker's (2023) Aligned Leadership framework, emphasizing self-awareness, relationship-building, resistance identification, outcome achievement, and engagement fostering, offers crucial insight into the relationship dynamics determining accountability effectiveness. The sequential requirement—purposeful awareness before authentic identity work, authentic grounding before transformational change, transformational vision before servant commitment—suggests that institutions violating this sequence may produce destructive rather than constructive outcomes.

The Bridge to Colonial Psychology. The analytical sophistication developed through I/O assessment enables examination of how rule of law structures and institutional apologies relate to broader patterns identified by Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and Fanon's (1952/1968) colonial psychology framework.

Position 4: Colonial Psychology

Frantz Fanon's analysis of psychological colonization provides crucial insights into how historical power dynamics create lasting institutional patterns (Fanon, 1952/1968, 1961/2004; Shadab & Ilyas, 2024). Fanon's concept of *sociogeny*—the process by which social and historical conditions create psychological realities persisting across generations—illuminates how colonial structures continue shaping professional environments. His four core areas—Psychological Disalienation, Revolutionary Agency, Decolonization Process, and New

Humanism—provide the lens through which institutional accountability efforts can be evaluated for whether they represent genuine liberation or false decolonization: symbolic change preserving colonial structures while appearing to dismantle them. The 4 D’s of psychopathology (deviance, dysfunction, distress, danger), historically weaponized against marginalized communities through fabricated diagnoses like *Drapetomania*, raise questions about whether psychology’s own diagnostic criteria might illuminate institutional rather than individual pathology.

Research Gaps

The literature review identified 13 research gaps organized by theoretical position:

Position 1 Gaps. Diffusion failure in institutional accountability; PET stage progression beyond symbolic acknowledgment.

Position 2 Gaps. Ethical dissonance in institutional contexts; strategic dissonance management among BIPOC professionals; the Evidence + Apology Paradox.

Position 3 Gaps. Maslow’s hierarchy in institutional accountability contexts; moral development framework ceilings; leadership sequence in institutional accountability; the 4 D’s applied beyond individual pathology; BIPOC professional evaluation sophistication.

Position 4 Gaps. Colonial psychology in professional institutions; rule of law structures in institutional accountability.

Cross-Position Gap. Integration across theoretical domains—no existing research combines PET, CDT, I/O psychology, and colonial psychology into unified analytical framework.

Theoretical Integration. The supporting theoretical frameworks, anchored in SALT (John, 2020; Johnson, 2016, 2024), Aligned Leadership (Colker, 2023), and Bolman and Deal’s

(2017) organizational frames, provided the foundation for examining the sophisticated evaluation capabilities BIPOC professionals naturally employ. The Core 4 framework addresses the fragmentation limitation in existing research by integrating theoretical positions into unified analysis.

Table 18 organizes the supporting theoretical frameworks into four analytic positions that collectively structure the study's interpretive approach to institutional accountability.

Table 18

Core 4 Theoretical Integration Framework

Position	Framework	Contribution
Position 1	PET + DIT	Identifies WHEN change occurs and WHY messages fail to reach communities
Position 2	CDT + ethical dissonance	Explains HOW individuals process institutional contradictions
Position 3	I/O psychology	Reveals WHAT frameworks professionals use to evaluate accountability
Position 4	Colonial psychology	Names WHY patterns persist through professional legitimacy

Note. PET = punctuated equilibrium theory; DIT = diffusion of innovations theory; CDT = critical dissonance theory.

Together, these positions demonstrate that institutional accountability cannot be evaluated through a single theoretical lens but requires integrated analysis across temporal, psychological, organizational, and epistemological dimensions.

Together, these theoretical foundations established the groundwork for examining how these dynamics manifest in the lived experiences of BIPOC professional men responding to the APA's 2021 apology. The integrated Core 4 framework created the conceptual foundation for a phenomenological investigation that can capture both the complexity of institutional

accountability evaluation and the sophisticated analytical processes that BIPOC professionals bring to these assessments.

The following chapter details the methodological approach designed to examine these phenomena while honoring the analytical sophistication that participants demonstrated in their professional contexts.

Language, Meaning, and Organizational Action

The consciousness gatekeeping mechanism described above operates within a linguistic medium that determines whether institutional acknowledgments translate into ethical action. Understanding why praxis consistently fails despite accurate theory requires examining the structural properties of the language through which institutional commitments are articulated.

Historical Linguistic Transitions

Classical and Hellenic languages functioned as high-precision systems in which grammar was inflected, explicit about agency, and structurally constrained (Deutscher, 2010). Meaning was bound by syntax rather than interpretation. Philosophy, science, and early theological frameworks were articulated in languages that minimized interpretive drift—language and responsibility were tightly coupled. Early scriptural translations (Hebrew to Greek, Greek to Latin) operated under conditions where translators assumed truth had a fixed referent and deviation was considered dangerous. This explains why early theological disputes centered on single words: meaning mattered because salvation, law, and ethics depended on precision.

English emerges late (approximately 500–1400 CE) as a structurally different linguistic system—context-heavy, idiomatic, flexible, and ambiguity-tolerant. English is not an inflected precision language; it privileges interpretation over obligation. Critically, English matures as a governance language precisely when colonial expansion accelerates, legal systems globalize,

racial classification becomes codified, and economic systems scale (approximately 1600–1800 CE). This timing produced a linguistic infrastructure that excels at abstraction without accountability, moral signaling without obligation, and universals without enforcement.

From Exactness to Elasticity

The translation of ancient ethical and theological frameworks into English introduced a structural shift from linguistic exactness to interpretive elasticity, enabling plausible deniability and weakening the link between theory and praxis. This linguistic transition coincided with colonial expansion and institutional governance, producing enduring gaps between moral acknowledgment and ethical action.

In classical linguistic models, the pathway was direct: Language → Meaning → Action. If action contradicted meaning, the contradiction was visible; ethics was enforced by linguistic clarity. In the English model, an intermediary layer emerges: Language → Interpretation → Justification → Action. Interpretation absorbs contradiction; ethics becomes discretionary. Praxis collapses not because people do not know better, but because the language allows them not to commit.

Application to Institutional Communication

This linguistic architecture appears in institutional apologies, legal disclaimers, policy language, and corporate ethics statements. Phrases such as “we acknowledge,” “we are committed to,” and “we recognize the need for” permit meaning to be gestured at without being bound. The APA’s apology operates within this same linguistic infrastructure: acknowledgment is sincere, theory is accurate, yet praxis fails because English permits the gap between what is said and what is required.

This explains why participants in this study recognized institutional gestures as insufficient despite their formal correctness. Participants were not evaluating content alone; they were evaluating whether language compelled coherence between belief, responsibility, and action. Their skepticism reflects not cynicism but linguistic discernment—recognition that the medium itself permits the evasion the content appears to foreclose.

Integration With Consciousness Gatekeeping

Linguistic elasticity functions as the delivery mechanism for consciousness gatekeeping. Institutions permit awareness (Understanding, Level 5) by using language that acknowledges harm. Institutions constrain integration (Overstanding, Level 7) by using language that does not compel action. The gap between acknowledgment and transformation is not a failure of will or knowledge—it is a structural feature of the linguistic system through which institutional commitments are expressed. This study's findings suggest that affected communities recognize this linguistic mechanism even when they cannot name it theoretically—a form of practical wisdom that institutional frameworks consistently underestimate.

Theoretical Integration Across Analytical Levels

This study's four foundational theoretical frameworks operate across the biopsychosocial architecture, providing analytical tools for examining how racial hierarchy is constructed, legitimized, enforced, internalized, and potentially transformed. The integration demonstrates that race persists not because of biological validity but because of multi-level institutional reinforcement across the biopsychosocial spectrum.

PET (Gersick, 1991) functions as the temporal mechanism across all biopsychosocial levels. Institutional systems maintain deep structure equilibrium until punctuation events create conditions for fundamental change. The APA's 2021 apology represented a potential punctuation

event—a moment when institutional equilibrium could shift. This study examines whether that punctuation produced transformation or was absorbed back into equilibrium. The 80% unawareness finding suggests the latter: the announcement occurred, but the deep structure remained intact.

CDT (Festinger, 1957; Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019) operates primarily at the psychological level of the biopsychosocial model. When individuals hold contradictory cognitions—such as awareness of institutional harm alongside continued institutional participation—psychological tension emerges requiring resolution. The APA’s apology creates dissonance for both the institution (acknowledging harm while retaining authority) and for affected professionals (receiving acknowledgment without receiving structural change). This study examines how participants navigate and resolve this dissonance through what the analysis reveals as strategic dissonance management rather than simple attitude change.

I/O psychology operates at the institutional and social levels, explaining how professional contexts mediate individual responses to organizational change efforts. Participants’ professional identities, workplace environments, and career trajectories shape how they receive and evaluate institutional gestures. This framework explains why professional context emerged as a significant factor in participant responses—organizational embeddedness affects whether apologies register as meaningful or performative.

Fanon’s colonial psychology (1952/1968, 1961/2004) operates at the social-existential level, explaining how racial hierarchy produces internalized domination and consciousness fragmentation. Fanon’s work shifts analysis from classification to lived experience, demonstrating how racial systems produce not only material disadvantage but psychological and existential injury. Critically, Fanon also articulates conditions necessary for liberation—

consciousness integration that this study terms Overstanding. Participants who demonstrated Level 7 evaluative capacity exhibited precisely the coherent integration Fanon identified as prerequisite for transformation.

This integration demonstrates that the biopsychosocial architecture and the Core 4 frameworks function as complementary lenses rather than competing explanations. The biopsychosocial model identifies the levels at which governance operates; the Core 4 frameworks explain the mechanisms through which that governance is maintained or disrupted.

When examined through the biopsychosocial model—an epistemology already endorsed within psychology—the APA’s WHEREAS statements function as institutional acknowledgments of harm that permit cognitive awareness while preserving structural authority. The biopsychosocial model explicitly states that human outcomes arise from biological, psychological, and social systems simultaneously; that knowledge is contextual, relational, and ethically situated; and that awareness without participatory transformation reproduces hierarchy (Borrell-Carrió et al., 2004; Engel, 1977). The APA’s apology meets biopsychosocial awareness standards but fails biopsychosocial integration requirements—a pattern participants identified empirically before encountering the theoretical framework. The interpretive discussion in Chapter 5 draws directly from this integrated framework to analyze participant responses.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction and Methodological Overview

This phenomenological qualitative study examined how BIPOC professional men across diverse fields respond to and make meaning of the APA's 2021 apology for perpetuating systemic racism. This chapter presents the methodological approach, research procedures, and analytical strategies employed to investigate this phenomenon.

Research Problem

The APA's 2021 apology acknowledged the organization's historical role in perpetuating systemic racism through pseudoscientific practices, eugenic movements, and the marginalization of BIPOC psychologists and communities. While such institutional accountability efforts represent potential punctuation events that could catalyze organizational transformation (Gersick, 2019), limited understanding exists regarding how these apologies reach and impact BIPOC professionals across diverse fields. The disconnect between institutional accountability efforts and community awareness reflects systematic communication barriers that may undermine transformation effectiveness (Torrez et al., 2024). This study addressed critical gaps in understanding whether institutional apologies function as meaningful catalysts for change or remain symbolic gestures that fail to generate authentic organizational transformation among the communities they claim to serve.

Research Questions

This study was guided by one main research question and three sub-questions:

How do BIPOC professional men across various fields respond to and make meaning of the APA's 2021 apology for perpetuating systemic racism?

Three sub-questions guided this inquiry. The first examined what meanings BIPOC professional men attribute to the APA's 2021 apology for perpetuating systemic racism and how it influences their professional experiences and perspectives. The second explored the role professional context plays in how BIPOC professional men access, interpret, and respond to the APA's 2021 apology. The third investigated how professional contexts and industry-specific cultures influence responses to the APA's apology, including the role professional networks play in information dissemination, how organizational structures facilitate or hinder awareness, what industry-specific factors affect access to and interpretation of the apology, and how workplace cultures shape responses to institutional change efforts.

Purpose and Methodological Approach

The purpose of this study was to examine how awareness levels of the APA's 2021 apology influence its effectiveness as a punctuation event among BIPOC professional men across diverse professional fields. A phenomenological qualitative design was selected to capture the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of participants as they encountered and interpreted this institutional accountability effort within their specific professional contexts.

Chapter Organization

This chapter is organized into 11 sections that detail the philosophical foundations, research design, participant selection, data collection procedures, analytical processes, quality measures, and ethical considerations that guided this research. The chapter begins by establishing the epistemological and philosophical foundations of phenomenological inquiry, followed by examination of researcher positionality and reflexivity practices. Subsequent sections describe the research design adaptations necessitated by the unexpected finding that 80% of participants were previously unaware of the apology, detail participant selection and sampling strategies, and

explain data collection and analysis procedures. The chapter concludes with discussions of trustworthiness measures, ethical considerations, study limitations, and a summary.

Epistemological and Philosophical Foundation

Phenomenological Philosophy

This research operated from a phenomenological epistemology rooted in descriptive phenomenology as articulated by Husserl and operationalized by Moustakas (1994). Phenomenology seeks to understand the essence of lived experiences by examining how individuals consciously experience and make meaning of phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological approach assumes that reality is constructed through subjective lived experience, and that understanding these subjective experiences requires bracketing (epoché) of the researcher's preconceptions to allow the phenomenon to reveal itself (Asali, 2021).

For this study, the “phenomenon” under investigation was the experience of encountering—or not encountering—the APA's 2021 apology within professional contexts. The research sought to understand participants' conscious awareness, interpretation, and meaning-making processes when confronted with institutional accountability efforts.

Rationale for Phenomenological Methodology

This study employed phenomenologically informed reflexive thematic analysis. While grounded in phenomenological interest in lived experience and meaning-making, analytic procedures followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis, emphasizing patterned meaning across cases. This methodological integration enabled examination of both the essence of participants' experiences encountering institutional accountability and the systematic patterns across diverse professional contexts.

Phenomenology was selected over other qualitative approaches for specific methodological reasons:

Not Grounded Theory. While grounded theory generates theory inductively from data through theoretical sampling and constant comparative analysis, this study employed an existing theoretical framework (Core 4) as an analytical lens and sought to understand lived experiences rather than build new theory. The study's approach was primarily deductive and descriptive rather than theory-generating.

Not Ethnography. Ethnographic immersion in professional cultures could illuminate workplace dynamics broadly, but this study focused specifically on individual meaning-making about a discrete institutional event rather than the cultural practices and shared meanings within organizations.

Not Narrative Inquiry. Although participants' professional journeys informed their interpretations, the research question targeted responses to a specific phenomenon (the APA apology) rather than life stories, career trajectories, or personal narratives over time.

Not Case Study. While professional contexts served as important contexts for interpretation, the unit of analysis was the individual's lived experience with the apology phenomenon rather than organizational cases or institutional contexts themselves.

Phenomenology uniquely enables examination of how consciousness, awareness, and professional positioning converge in participants' encounters with institutional accountability efforts. The methodology's emphasis on describing lived experience aligned with the study's purpose of understanding "how" BIPOC professional men respond to and make meaning of institutional apologies within their specific professional contexts.

Researcher Positioning and Reflexivity

Positionality Statement

As a BIPOC professional and retired Air Force veteran, the researcher occupied dual insider status with participants—sharing racial identity while possessing extensive institutional experience, particularly with military and government organizational structures. This positioning required careful navigation throughout the research process.

The researcher's 20-year military career included roles in accident investigation, military justice proceedings, and law office management—contexts requiring systematic evidence evaluation and root cause analysis. The researcher had prior professional training in conducting structured and semi-structured interviews, which supported consistent protocol adherence, ethical engagement, and careful probing during data collection. This professional background informed the analytical approach: training in failure analysis developed attention to systemic patterns rather than surface explanations; legal practice demanded evidentiary standards where claims require documentation; leadership roles across organizational levels provided familiarity with institutional communication dynamics. The same diagnostic precision applied to aircraft systems to prevent catastrophic failure, and to legal structures to prevent litigation, informed the systematic analysis of institutional accountability mechanisms.

The researcher's insider status provided several advantages including facilitated rapport-building and trust with participants, nuanced understanding of military and government organizational dynamics that most participants referenced, cultural competence in discussing experiences with racism and marginalization, and participant comfort when discussing potentially sensitive institutional critiques.

However, this insider status also presented challenges including the risk of assuming shared understanding rather than probing for participants' unique meanings, potential to impose the researcher's own military-trained institutional analysis frameworks onto participants' responses, tendency to focus interview follow-up questions on aspects that resonated with the researcher's experience while under-exploring unfamiliar perspectives, and difficulty maintaining analytical distance when participants described experiences similar to the researcher's own.

- Tendency to focus interview follow-up questions on aspects that resonated with the researcher's experience while under-exploring unfamiliar perspectives
- Difficulty maintaining analytical distance when participants described experiences like the researcher's own

Epoché and Bracketing Procedures

Following Moustakas's (1994) guidance on phenomenological reduction, The researcher engaged in systematic bracketing throughout the research process:

Pre-Interview Bracketing. Before each scheduled interview, the researcher completed a structured bracketing exercise documented in a separate reflexive journal. This exercise required the researchers to write:

- Expectations about what this participant might say based on their professional field and awareness level
- Assumptions about how their responses might differ from or align with previous participants
- Personal experiences that might bias the researcher's interpretation of their responses
- Specific areas where the researcher needed to probe rather than assume understanding

These pre-interview reflections were dated, stored in a password-protected file separate from interview data, and never revised after the interview to preserve initial assumptions for later comparison.

During-Interview Awareness. The researcher used a field note system during interviews where the researcher marked moments (with timestamps) when:

- The researcher felt strong emotional reactions to participant responses
- The researcher recognized assumptions the researcher was making about participant meanings
- The researcher prepared follow-up questions based on the researcher's interpretation rather than the participant's actual words
- Participants used terminology or described experiences unfamiliar to me

Post-Interview Reflexive Journaling. Within 24 hours of each interview, the researcher completed detailed reflexive journal entries addressing:

- Surprises or contradictions to expectations
- Moments where the researcher recognized the researcher's biases potentially influencing question follow-ups
- Aspects of the participant's experience the researcher struggled to understand
- How the researcher's own professional socialization might be shaping the researcher's interpretation

The reflexive journal contains entries spanning the data collection period (June 2025–August 2025) and analysis period (August 2025–September 2025), totaling 89 single-spaced pages.

Phenomenological Reduction in Analysis. During transcript analysis, the researcher implemented several practices to maintain focus on participants' meanings rather than the researcher's interpretations:

- Used participants' exact language in initial coding rather than paraphrases
- Repeatedly asked "What did *they* say?" rather than "What do *I* think they meant?"
- Coded each transcript twice: once immediately after transcription and again after a 2-week gap, comparing codes for consistency
- When codes differed between the two passes, returned to the transcript to determine which better reflected the participant's actual words

Acknowledgment of Bracketing Limitations

Complete bracketing is impossible—the researcher's perspective inevitably shapes what is seen and heard. The researcher's military background likely enhanced their recognition of the sophisticated institutional analysis frameworks that military-trained participants employed, evidenced by the richness of coding in those transcripts. Conversely, the researcher may have been less attuned to evaluation frameworks from civilian professional contexts, potentially under-developing those themes. The concentration of military-trained participants may reflect not only sampling accessibility but also greater comfort recruiting from familiar professional networks.

Additionally, the researcher's own unawareness of the APA apology prior to beginning dissertation research likely influenced their strong reaction to discovering that participants shared this unawareness. A researcher who had been previously aware might have interpreted this finding differently or probed it less extensively in follow-up questions.

Research Design and Methodological Approach

Study Design

This research employed a descriptive phenomenological design to examine the lived experiences of BIPOC professional men encountering the APA's 2021 apology. The screening questionnaire included an awareness question to inform interview approach, not to stratify the sample. The design incorporated:

- Single data collection method: Semi-structured interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams
- Purposeful sampling strategy: Targeted recruitment of BIPOC professional men across diverse fields
- Natural variation in awareness: No screening for prior awareness, allowing natural distribution to emerge
- Thematic analysis approach: Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase method for identifying patterns across lived experiences

Theoretical Framework Application

This study employed theoretically informed phenomenological analysis integrating deductive and inductive approaches. The Core 4 theoretical framework functioned as a sensitizing lens (Blumer, 1954) throughout the research process:

During Interview Protocol Development. The framework guided question formulation to systematically explore:

- Structural positioning and information access (PET focus)
- Psychological processing of institutional messages (CDT focus)
- Professional context influences (I/O Psychology focus)

- Historical consciousness and meaning-making (colonial psychology focus)

During Data Collection. The framework helped recognize follow-up opportunities when participants' responses touched on structural barriers, cognitive tensions, professional standards, or historical patterns, enabling deeper exploration of these dimensions.

During Data Analysis. Initial coding remained data-driven using participants' language (Braun & Clarke's Phases 1–3). However, Phases 4–6 employed the Core 4 framework deductively to examine whether and how emergent themes aligned with theoretical positions.

This dual approach enabled:

- Identification of patterns genuinely present in participant responses (inductive)
- Organization of those patterns through established theoretical dimensions (deductive)
- Recognition of theoretical alignment without imposing predetermined conclusions

Participant Selection and Sampling

Target Population

The target population consisted of self-identified BIPOC professional men, aged 25–55 years, currently employed across various professional fields within the United States. This population was selected because institutional apologies like the APA's are directed toward broad BIPOC communities, yet little research examines how these messages are received and interpreted by BIPOC men within professional contexts where they may face pressures around professional identity navigation (Ferguson & Dougherty, 2021). For inclusion/exclusion criteria (see Appendix A), participants must self-identify as BIPOC.

Inclusion Criteria

- Self-identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color)
- Self-identify as male

- Age 25–55 years
- Currently employed in a professional field
- At least 2 years of professional work experience
- Reside in the United States
- Willing and able to provide informed consent
- Able to participate in English-language interviews

Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals who do not self-identify as BIPOC men
- Under 25 or over 55 years of age
- Lack of significant professional work experience (less than 2 years)
- Personal, familial, academic, or professional relationship with the principal investigator
- Inability to provide informed consent or complete interviews in English

Racial and Ethnic Self-Identification Protocol

This study employed self-identification as the sole criterion for BIPOC status, consistent with contemporary research ethics and critical race methodology. This approach reflects three considerations. First, the APA’s 2021 apology—the phenomenon under investigation—was directed explicitly at BIPOC communities; studying responses from individuals who self-identify with these communities maintains alignment between the institutional address and the population examined. Second, researcher-imposed racial categorization would replicate the colonial taxonomies this study critiques—the historical weaponization of genetics, anthropometry, and blood quantum standards to police racial boundaries represents precisely the systemic harm the APA acknowledged. Third, contemporary DNA and ancestry testing reflects commercial and

methodological biases rooted in Eurocentric reference populations, rendering genetic verification both scientifically unreliable and ethically problematic for determining community membership. Participants who self-identified as BIPOC during recruitment were accepted without external verification, honoring participant autonomy and aligning with the APA's stated audience for its 2021 apology.

Sampling Strategy

The study employed purposeful sampling as the primary strategy, supplemented by snowball sampling to achieve representation across diverse professional fields. Purposeful sampling in phenomenological research aims to select "information-rich cases" that provide in-depth insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Moustakas, 1994).

Initial Recruitment Approach. A recruitment letter (see Appendix B) and flyer (see Appendix C) were distributed through multiple channels and networks:

- LinkedIn professional groups (with documented approval from the Minority Professional Network)
- Facebook groups focused on BIPOC professionals
- Professional networks and associations
- Direct outreach to contacts in diverse industries

Recruitment materials emphasized exploring professional experiences of BIPOC men in relation to institutional accountability efforts, with general mention of the APA's 2021 apology but without requiring prior awareness. This approach enabled natural variation in awareness levels while ensuring participants understood the study's focus.

Snowball Sampling Procedure. Following IRB-approved protocols, participants could provide referrals while maintaining strict privacy protections:

- Participants received recruitment materials containing only researcher contact information
- Referred individuals contacted the researcher directly without the initial participant's involvement
- No information about referral sources was shared with the researcher to ensure confidentiality
- Three participants were recruited through snowball sampling (Participants 4, 8, and 9)

Sample Size Determination

The target sample size of 10–12 participants was determined based on established phenomenological research guidelines. Guest et al. (2006) found that data saturation typically occurs within six to 12 interviews for relatively homogeneous samples, with basic metatheme elements present as early as six interviews. Khabir (2022) achieved meaningful saturation with 10 participants when studying African American experiences with institutions, providing methodological precedent for this study's target.

Actual Sample Achieved. Ten participants were recruited and interviewed between June and August 2025. Data saturation was monitored throughout collection using the following indicators:

- **Thematic Redundancy:** By interview 8, no new major themes were emerging, with subsequent interviews reinforcing existing thematic categories.
- **Pattern Stability:** The six major themes identified (Skepticism, Personal Impact, Professional Standards, Action Expectations, Organizational Hierarchy, Field Dynamics) were consistently present across interviews 7–10.

- **Comprehensive Perspective Range:** The variation across professional contexts (military/government, education, manufacturing, legal, emergency services) and awareness levels provided sufficient diversity to address research questions.

After interview 10, the researcher team reviewed transcripts and preliminary coding to confirm saturation. We determined that additional interviews would likely reinforce existing themes without adding new dimensions of understanding, meeting the saturation criterion that additional data collection yields diminishing returns (Saunders et al., 2018).

Participant Exclusion and Methodological Implications. During the screening and data collection process, one potential participant was excluded after initial interview completion when it became apparent they did not self-identify as BIPOC despite ethnic Mexican heritage. This decision maintained strict adherence to the study's phenomenological grounding in participant self-identification rather than researcher-imposed racial categorization. This exclusion itself illustrates the complexity of racial and ethnic identity boundaries that emerged as a significant theme, particularly regarding how xenophobia operates distinctly from racism within Hispanic/Latino communities—an individual may experience nationality-based discrimination while not identifying with racially marginalized communities. This methodological observation, combined with included Hispanic participants' descriptions of contextual identity navigation, revealed a spectrum of identity positioning that became significant to understanding how informal professional networks (Good Ol' Boy Systems) operate across racial and ethnic boundaries.

Data Collection Procedures

Overview of Data Collection Process

Data collection occurred between June and August 2025, following IRB approval (IRB Protocol #25-057, approved June 4, 2025). Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams, a HIPAA-compliant video conferencing platform selected for its security features, recording capabilities, and accessibility for geographically dispersed participants. Each interview lasted between 32 and 68 minutes, with all participants completing the full interview protocol. All interviews followed a semi-structured protocol (see Appendix D for Interview Guide).

Pre-Interview Procedures

Screening and Consent. Potential participants completed a Qualtrics screening questionnaire that assessed eligibility against inclusion/exclusion (see Appendix A) criteria and asked one critical question: “Are you familiar with the American Psychological Association’s 2021 apology for perpetuating systemic racism?” (Yes/No). This question served only to inform interview approach, not to control sample composition. Potential participants received an initial recruitment email (see Appendix B) and flyer (see Appendix C).

Informed consent procedures followed IRB-approved protocols (see Appendix E for consent form). Upon passing screening criteria, participants were presented with the informed consent document within Qualtrics. After reviewing consent information, participants indicated agreement by checking a consent box. The system automatically emailed participants a PDF copy of their signed consent form. Participants who provided consent were redirected to a Microsoft Bookings calendar interface where they selected interview time slots.

Scheduling and Reminders. Automated confirmation emails were sent immediately upon booking, followed by reminder emails 48 hours and 24 hours before scheduled interviews.

These reminders included:

- Microsoft Teams meeting link
- Brief reminder about interview focus (institutional accountability in professional contexts)
- Instruction to find a private, quiet space for the interview
- The researcher contact information for questions or rescheduling

Interview Environment and Setup

The data collection process began with conducting 30- to 60-minute interviews with participants who had completed the Qualtrics screening and provided signed informed consent forms. All interviews followed a semi-structured protocol (see Appendix D for Interview Guide).

All interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams video conferencing. Before each interview:

1. Completed a pre-interview bracketing exercise (documented in reflexive journal)
2. Reviewed the participant's professional field and screening responses
3. Prepared the appropriate interview protocol based on their awareness level
4. Tested recording equipment and internet connection
5. Ensured a quiet, private environment free from interruptions

Data Analysis Process

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis approach using NVivo 15 qualitative data analysis software. This section describes the actual implementation of each phase rather than simply listing the theoretical steps.

Phase 1: Familiarization With the Data

Familiarization began during the interview process itself, but systematic familiarization occurred in three stages. During initial review while transcribing (June–August 2025), the researcher corrected Microsoft Teams auto-generated transcripts while listening to recordings and noted initial impressions in a separate memo for each transcript, capturing surprising statements, recurring phrases, and moments of strong participant emotion. A complete reading pass followed (August 15–20, 2025) in which the researcher read each of the 10 finalized transcripts completely without taking notes or coding, simply immersing in participants' words and reading them in random order rather than interview sequence to avoid ordering effects. Active reading with marginal notes (August 21–25, 2025) involved re-reading all transcripts chronologically while making marginal notes about patterns, contradictions, and moments that seemed significant. The researcher had read each transcript at least three times and listened to each recording twice.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

Implementation. The researcher conducted two complete coding passes through all data:

First Coding Pass–Descriptive Coding (August 26–September 1, 2025). The researcher coded line-by-line using NVivo, creating codes that stayed very close to participants' language. This first pass generated 127 initial codes across all transcripts. Many were redundant or overlapping, which was expected.

Second Coding Pass–Pattern Codes (September 2–5, 2025). The researcher reviewed all 127 initial codes and began consolidating them into broader pattern codes. This consolidation reduced 127 initial codes to 36 pattern codes (see Appendix F for the full code list).

Coding Reliability Check. The researcher randomly selected three transcripts and re-coded them 2 weeks after initial coding without looking at the first codes. Agreement between the two coding with differences primarily in how broadly or narrowly certain codes were applied. Disagreements were resolved by returning to participant language and choosing the code that better reflected their meaning.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

Implementation (September 6–10, 2025). The researcher moved from codes to potential themes by clustering the 36 pattern codes into candidate themes using a visual mapping process:

Code Clustering. The researcher printed all 36 codes on individual cards and arranged them physically on a large table, grouping codes that seemed related. This tactile process helped the researcher see relationships that might be missed on screen.

Candidate Theme Development. Through this clustering, the researcher identified eight candidate themes.

Data Extracts Organization. For each candidate theme, the researcher created a separate NVivo node and gathered all relevant coded segments. Some segments belonged to multiple themes, which the researcher noted for later consideration.

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes

Implementation (September 11–15, 2025). Theme review occurred at two levels:

Level 1 - Internal Homogeneity Check. For each candidate theme, the researcher read all coded extracts to ensure they formed a coherent pattern. Questions the researcher asked:

- Do these extracts genuinely belong together?
- Is there a clear unifying concept?
- Are there outliers that don't fit?

Level 2 - External Heterogeneity Check. The researcher examined relationships between themes to ensure they were distinct from each other. The researcher created a thematic map showing how the six remaining themes related to each other and to the research questions.

Consultation With Dissertation Chair (September 16, 2025). The researcher presented themes with supporting extracts to the dissertation chair. We discussed whether the themes adequately captured the data and addressed the research questions. She suggested strengthening the connection between themes.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Implementation (September 17–20, 2025). For each of the six themes, the researcher wrote a detailed definition including:

- The theme's essence (core idea)
- Scope and boundaries (what fits, what doesn't)
- How it relates to research questions
- How it relates to other themes
- Representative quotations

Theme Naming Decisions. The researcher chose names that were:

- Descriptive of the theme's content
- Concise enough for easy reference
- Meaningful to readers unfamiliar with the data
- Grounded in participants' language where possible

Phase 6: Producing the Report

Implementation (September 21–October 15, 2025). The final phase involved selecting quotations and writing the results narrative:

Quotation Selection Criteria. For each theme, the researcher selected three to five key quotations that met these criteria. The researcher ensured quotations came from diverse participants (not over-relying on particularly articulate individuals).

- Vividness (captures the theme powerfully)
- Clarity (easily understood without extensive context)
- Representativeness (typical of the theme across participants)
- Diversity (showing range within the theme)

Results Chapter Organization. The researcher organized Chapter 4 by:

- Presenting each theme with its definition
- Providing frequency data (how many participants demonstrated this theme)
- Offering representative quotations with participant identifiers
- Explaining variations within the theme
- Connecting themes to research questions

Integration With Theoretical Framework. While Phases 1–6 focused on inductive thematic analysis, the researcher then examined how the emerged themes related to the Core 4 theoretical framework. This deductive analysis appeared in Chapter 5 (Discussion) rather than Chapter 4 (Results) to maintain the phenomenological integrity of findings.

Use of NVivo 15 Software

Throughout the analysis process, NVivo 15 provided:

- Transcript management: Secure storage and organization of de-identified transcripts
- Coding efficiency: Ability to code segments and organize codes hierarchically
- Code queries: Searching for all instances of specific codes across transcripts
- Coding comparisons: Checking consistency between the two coding passes

- Visualization tools: Creating node structures showing relationships between codes and themes
- Export functions: Generating reports of coded segments for each theme

However, NVivo was a tool, not a substitute for analytical thinking. All decisions about what constituted meaningful patterns, how to group codes into themes, and what themes meant were made by me through careful engagement with participant words.

Ethical Considerations and Researcher Positionality

In descriptive phenomenology, the researcher's role includes engaging in epoché or bracketing, suspending preconceptions to allow the phenomenon to emerge without interpretation. As Asali (2021) noted, "the epoché requires researchers to suspend their preconceptions and assumptions about the phenomenon under investigation" (p. 40). Ethical considerations center on participant protection through robust confidentiality measures, informed consent procedures, and risk mitigation strategies. Given the sensitive nature of discussions about racial experiences in professional settings, particular attention is paid to maintaining professional anonymity and providing access to emotional support resources if needed. Following Ferguson and Dougherty's (2021) approach, participants were assigned pseudonyms and given opportunities to review and modify their interview transcripts.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness in qualitative research encompasses four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Contemporary qualitative scholars further emphasize transparent procedures for demonstrating these criteria through sampling adequacy, saturation, and analytic rigor (Saunders et al., 2018). This section details the specific strategies employed to establish each criterion.

Credibility

Credibility addresses whether findings accurately represent participants' realities and lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The following strategies enhanced credibility:

Triangulation. Multiple forms of triangulation strengthened credibility:

- Data triangulation: Interviews conducted across diverse time points (June–August 2025) and with participants from varied professional contexts
- Investigator triangulation: Regular consultation with dissertation chair who reviewed coded transcripts and challenged interpretations
- Theory triangulation: Application of multiple theoretical lenses (Core 4 framework) to examine phenomena from different perspectives

Member checking was used to verify resonance and clarify meaning, not as a validity vote, participant agreement was not treated as confirmation of “correct” interpretation. Divergent feedback was documented and incorporated into interpretive refinement.

Member Checking. Participants received de-identified transcripts within 1 week of interviews with instructions to verify accuracy, clarify statements, or redact content. No participants challenged substantive interpretations of their responses.

Extended Engagement. Interviews lasting 32–68 minutes allowed sufficient time for rapport building and in-depth exploration. The conversational approach enabled participants to expand on ideas rather than providing superficial responses.

Peer Debriefing. Regular meetings with dissertation chair (bi-weekly during data collection, weekly during analysis) provided opportunities to challenge assumptions, identify biases, and refine interpretations. These sessions were documented in reflexive journal entries.

Reflexive Journaling. Maintained throughout data collection and analysis, the reflexive journal documented pre-interview expectations and assumptions, post-interview reflections and surprises, analytical decisions and their rationales, recognition of potential biases, and the evolution of interpretations over time. This systematic reflexivity created transparency about how researcher positionality influenced the research process.

Confirming With Literature. Findings were systematically compared with existing research on institutional accountability, BIPOC professional experiences, and organizational communication. Alignment with prior literature (e.g., Torrez et al., 2024 on misperceptions of organizational racial progress; Ferguson & Dougherty, 2021 on the Black professional paradox) enhanced confidence in credibility while novel findings opened areas for future investigation.

Transferability

Transferability concerns the extent to which findings can inform understanding of similar phenomena in other contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Thick Description. Detailed, contextualized descriptions enable readers to assess transferability to their contexts. This includes participant context encompassing professional fields, organizational types, career stages, racial and ethnic identities, and military or civilian backgrounds. Interview context details the setting, duration, awareness levels, and interaction dynamics. Phenomenon context situates the timing of the apology (October 2021), data collection period (June–August 2025), and the broader sociopolitical environment.

Diverse Professional Contexts. Participants represented eight distinct professional fields, enabling examination of how industry-specific cultures shape responses. Findings that held across diverse contexts demonstrate greater transferability than those specific to single professions.

Theoretical Connections. Grounding findings in established theoretical frameworks enable conceptual transferability. Readers can assess whether these theoretical dynamics apply in their contexts even if specific details differ.

Detailed Methodology. Comprehensive documentation of research procedures (sampling, data collection, analysis) enables readers to evaluate methodological rigor and consider whether similar approaches would yield meaningful insights in different contexts.

Acknowledged Limitations. Explicit discussion of sample composition helps readers understand boundaries of transferability and areas requiring additional research with different populations.

Dependability

Dependability focuses on research stability and consistency—could the study be replicated with similar participants and yield comparable findings? (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)

Audit Trail. Comprehensive documentation enables external verification through raw data (interview recordings and transcripts stored securely), data reduction (NVivo coding structures showing progression from 127 initial codes to 36 pattern codes to six themes), data reconstruction (Chapter 4 presenting findings with representative quotations), process notes (reflexive journal documenting analytical decisions), and data synthesis (Chapter 5 connecting findings to theoretical framework and literature).

Methodological Consistency. Standard procedures were maintained across all interviews including the same interview protocol structure for all participants, a consistent approach to introducing the apology to unaware participants, uniform transcription and de-identification procedures, and systematic application of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis.

Multiple Review Cycles. Data underwent multiple analytical passes including initial review during transcription, three complete transcript readings during Phase 1, two complete coding passes with reliability check, theme review at two levels (internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity), and consultation with the dissertation chair on theme structure.

Documentation of Changes. Methodological adaptations were documented in the reflexive journal and IRB amendments including the addition of a follow-up question about unawareness.

Confirmability

Confirmability ensures findings reflect participants' perspectives rather than researcher biases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Reflexive Journal as Bias Documentation. The reflexive journal explicitly documented potential biases including pre-interview expectations that could shape questioning, moments of strong emotional reaction during interviews, recognition when personal experiences aligned with or diverged from participants' experiences, and awareness of favoring military-trained participants' responses. This documentation does not eliminate bias but makes it transparent and manageable.

Audit Trail Transparency. Detailed documentation of analytical progression from raw data through codes to themes enables external verification that findings emerged from data rather than being imposed.

Verbatim Quotations. Extensive use of participants' exact words in Chapter 4 anchors interpretations in their language. Quotations were selected for representativeness and diversity, not to support predetermined conclusions.

Disconfirming Evidence. The analytical process actively sought instances that contradicted emerging patterns. Additionally, variation within themes was documented and outlier responses were noted rather than dismissed.

Peer Scrutiny. Regular dissertation chair consultations provided external perspective challenging interpretations and demanding evidence. These sessions forced explicit justification of analytical decisions.

Coding Reliability Check. The 89% agreement between two coding passes (separated by 2 weeks) demonstrated consistency in how the researcher interpreted participant meanings over time.

Limitations of Trustworthiness Strategies

Despite systematic trustworthiness measures, limitations remain. Member checking focused on transcript accuracy rather than analytical interpretations. A single coder (despite reliability check) means potential blind spots went undetected. Reflexivity cannot eliminate bias, only make it visible. Theoretical framework selection before data collection shaped what the researcher noticed.

These limitations are acknowledged rather than resolved, reflecting inherent tensions in qualitative research between researcher perspective and participant meaning.

Ethical Considerations

This study involved human participants discussing experiences with racism and institutional accountability, requiring careful attention to ethical protections throughout the research process.

IRB Approval and Compliance

The study received IRB approval (Protocol #25-057). The researcher completed required human subjects training (see Appendix G for CITI certification).

Informed Consent

Informed consent procedures followed IRB-approved protocols (see Appendix E for consent form).

Risk Assessment and Mitigation

Emotional Distress. Discussing experiences with racism and professional marginalization could trigger emotional discomfort or distress.

Mitigation Strategies. Several strategies addressed emotional distress risk. Participants were informed via consent form that they could skip questions or end the interview at any time. The researcher monitored for signs of distress during interviews and offered breaks as needed. Mental health resources were provided at both interview beginning and end, and follow-up contact information was provided for ongoing concerns.

Actual Experience. Participants expressed frustration about unawareness of the apology, but no participants requested breaks or exhibited signs requiring interview termination. One participant became emotional when discussing personal experiences with racism but indicated desire to continue and completed the interview.

Mitigation Strategies. Multiple confidentiality protections were implemented. All identifying information was removed during transcription and pseudonyms were assigned (Participant 1–10 or P1–P10). Generic descriptions replaced specifics such as employer names, geographic locations, and colleague names. Secure data storage included password-protected files, an encrypted computer, and a locked cabinet for physical materials. All platforms used

were HIPAA-compliant (Microsoft Teams, Adler email, Microsoft OneDrive). Member checking allowed participants to redact identifying content, and only de-identified data were shared with the dissertation chair.

Actual Experience. One participant requested removal of an identifying anecdote during member checking, which was immediately removed from transcript and any coded segments. No other confidentiality concerns arose.

Professional Consequences. Risk that critical statements about institutions or racism could affect participants' professional standing if identities were revealed. Mitigation strategies included emphasis on confidentiality protections in the consent process, reminders that participants could redact any statements during member checking, secure storage preventing unauthorized access, and use of generic professional field descriptions in demographic data rather than specific employers.

Actual Experience. Several participants (particularly those still employed in hierarchical organizations) expressed appreciation for confidentiality measures and made frank statements they indicated they could not make publicly.

Mental Health Resources Provided

All participants received mental health resources at interview beginning and end. General therapy resources included Psychology Today Therapist Directory and Inclusive Therapists (a culturally responsive, BIPOC-focused directory). Crisis support information provided the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255). BIPOC-specific resources included Therapy for Black Men and Asian Mental Health Collective. These resources were included in recruitment materials, consent forms, pre-interview reminder emails, and post-interview thank you emails.

Researcher Conflicts of Interest

Specifically, as a BIPOC professional and retired Air Force veteran, the researcher occupies social and professional identities that may intersect with participants' roles, creating potential issues related to insider status and shared institutional experiences. In addition, the researcher's legal investigatory and avionics-based professional training reflects occupational norms emphasizing careful evidence assessment, systems accountability, and fault isolation and identification, which could predispose interpretations toward procedural or structural explanations. To minimize potential conflicts of interest, the researcher maintained reflexive notes throughout data collection and analysis, adhered to the established interview protocol, and prioritized participants' meanings over professional interpretations. No financial, supervisory, or institutional relationships existed between the researcher and participants that could reasonably influence participation, data analysis, or reporting. Management strategies included:

- Systematic bracketing through pre-interview exercises
- Reflexive journaling documenting bias recognition
- Consultation with dissertation chair about potential over-identification
- Multiple transcript readings to maintain focus on participants' meanings rather than the researcher's interpretations

Power Dynamics

The researcher–participant relationship involved inherent power imbalances requiring careful navigation:

Researcher advantages included:

- Control over interview questions and direction
- Authority to interpret participant meanings

- Doctoral candidate status potentially intimidating to some participants

Mitigation strategies included:

- Conversational interview style rather than interrogational
- Explicit statements that there were no “right” answers
- Participant control over what they shared (could skip questions)
- Member checking gave participants opportunity to challenge interpretations
- Emphasis on participants as experts in their own experiences

Participant Vulnerability

BIPOC professionals discussing racism experiences occupy vulnerable positions, particularly those still navigating organizational hierarchies. Protections included:

- Clear separation of research from participants’ employment
- No contact with participants’ employers
- Secure data preventing workplace discovery
- Option to withdraw without penalty
- Post-interview support resources

Data Ownership and Access

Participant rights included:

- Participants retained right to withdraw data up to 2 weeks after member checking
- Could request removal of specific content during member checking
- Would receive dissertation summary if requested (three participants requested)

Researcher responsibilities included:

- Secure storage for 7 years per APA guidelines
- Permanent deletion after retention period

- Data available to other researchers only in de-identified aggregate form
- No commercial use of data

Ethical Challenges Encountered

Unawareness Discovery. When participants learned about the apology during interviews, this created ethical tension - was the researcher creating distress by informing them of institutional failures? Consultation with dissertation chair confirmed that:

- Information was factual and publicly available
- Participants had right to know about institutional accountability affecting their communities
- Distress reactions (frustration, surprise) were reasonable responses to legitimate information
- Mental health resources were available if needed

Military Network Recruitment. Heavy recruitment from military networks raised questions about sample bias. To resolve the issue, the researcher:

- Acknowledged limitation openly in dissertation
- Recognized this reflects both researcher positionality and potentially greater institutional awareness in military contexts
- Recommended future research with broader civilian professional representation

Emotional Labor. Participants invested emotional energy discussing difficult experiences. To resolve the issue, the researcher:

- Expressed genuine appreciation for participants' willingness to share
- Emphasized contribution to knowledge benefiting broader communities
- Provided opportunity to see research results

- Committed to producing high-quality research honoring their contributions

Limitations

Despite rigorous methodology, this study has several limitations affecting interpretation and transferability of findings.

Sample Composition Limitations

Demographic Concentration. The sample consisted of Black/African American participants and Hispanic/Latino participants, with no representation from Indigenous, Asian American, Pacific Islander, or other BIPOC communities. While providing deep insights into Black professional men's experiences specifically, this concentration limits claims about "BIPOC professional men" broadly.

Findings are most accurately understood as primarily reflecting Black professional men's experiences with institutional accountability, establishing foundation for future research with broader demographic representation. The two Hispanic/Latino participants' experiences (including unique challenges like racial categorization on official forms) merit dedicated investigation in future studies.

Military Background Concentration. Participants had military experience, though only currently worked in government. This concentration reflects both sampling accessibility through military networks and the researcher's military background facilitating recruitment and rapport.

Reflected military training in organizational evaluation, potentially over-representing systematic analytical approaches while under-representing evaluation frameworks developed purely through civilian professional socialization. However, the finding that military-trained analytical skills transfer to civilian contexts represents a meaningful contribution.

Methodological Limitations

Cross-Sectional Design. Single-timepoint data collection prevents examination of how responses evolve over time or how institutional follow-through actions might influence perspectives on accountability effectiveness.

Cannot assess whether initial skepticism softens with demonstrated institutional commitment or whether unawareness converts to engagement when information finally reaches professionals. Longitudinal research could track these developmental processes.

Single Institution Focus. Examining only the APA's 2021 apology limits broader applicability to other institutional accountability efforts.

While theoretical frameworks and analytical approaches may transfer to similar organizational contexts, findings cannot be assumed to apply to apologies from different institution types or accountability efforts addressing other forms of systemic harm.

Virtual Data Collection. Remote interviews via Microsoft Teams may have limited capture of nonverbal cues and subtle communication patterns that could provide additional insights into participants' evaluation processes.

While video conferencing enabled geographic diversity and participant convenience, in-person interviews might have yielded richer observational data about participant reactions and engagement patterns.

Awareness Variability. While the unawareness rate became a significant finding, this natural variation meant most participants encountered the apology for the first time during interviews, potentially affecting depth and sophistication of responses compared to those with years to process the information.

Previously aware had developed more nuanced positions over time, while newly aware participants provided more immediate reactions. This variability enriched data but complicated direct comparison across awareness levels.

Self-Selection Bias. Participants who volunteered for research about institutional apologies may possess perspectives on racial justice or institutional accountability differing from those unwilling to participate in such research.

The study may have captured voices of those already engaged with institutional accountability issues while missing perspectives of professionals either disengaged from or actively resistant to such discussions.

Analytical Limitations

Single Coder. Despite reliability checks, having one primary coder (the researcher) means potential interpretive blind spots went undetected.

Multiple independent coders might have identified patterns or interpretations the single researcher missed, though regular dissertation chair consultation provided some external verification.

Language Limitations. All interviews conducted in English, potentially excluding perspectives of BIPOC professionals more comfortable in other languages.

Particularly relevant for Hispanic/Latino communities where Spanish-language interviews might have yielded different insights or reached different populations.

Generalizability Boundaries

Professional Context Scope. While diverse fields were represented, the sample may not capture evaluation frameworks from all relevant professional contexts where BIPOC men encounter institutional accountability efforts.

Certain industries (technology, healthcare, finance, arts) were absent, limiting understanding of how those professional cultures shape responses.

Geographic Concentration. While participants resided across the United States, recruitment through online networks may have favored certain geographic regions or professional networks.

Regional variations in professional cultures, organizational dynamics, or institutional accountability familiarity may not be fully represented.

Career Stage Effects. The 25–55-year age range captured mid-to-late career professionals but potentially missed early-career or senior executive perspectives.

Different career stages might yield different evaluation frameworks—early-career professionals navigating entry barriers versus senior executives with more organizational power and potentially different institutional relationships.

Strengths Despite Limitations

While acknowledging limitations, the study demonstrates important strengths:

- Achieved data saturation with appropriate sample size
- Systematic phenomenological approach with rigorous bracketing
- Thick description enabling transferability assessment
- Transparent documentation of limitations
- Contribution of novel findings
- Deep insights into understudied population (BIPOC professional men)

Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the phenomenological methodology employed to examine how BIPOC professional men respond to and make meaning of the APA’s 2021 apology. The

research operated from phenomenological epistemology emphasizing lived experience and systematic bracketing of researcher preconceptions.

Ten participants were recruited through purposeful and snowball sampling across diverse professional fields between June and August 2025. Semi-structured interviews via Microsoft Teams captured participants' interpretations and responses, with the unexpected finding that 80% were previously unaware of the apology becoming a central contribution about institutional communication failures.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, progressing systematically from initial codes to pattern codes to final themes. The analysis revealed sophisticated evaluation frameworks participants naturally employed a descriptive finding about participants' analytical approach rather than a generated theory.

Trustworthiness was established through multiple strategies: triangulation, member checking, reflexive journaling, peer debriefing, thick description, and comprehensive audit trails. Ethical considerations received careful attention throughout, with IRB approval, informed consent, risk mitigation, confidentiality protections, and mental health resource provision.

The study's limitations—particularly demographic concentration in Black/African American participants and military-trained professionals—constrain broad generalizability while enabling deep insights into this specific population's experiences. These limitations point toward important future research directions while the current findings meaningfully advance understanding of institutional accountability reception among BIPOC professional men.

This chapter described the methodological approach for examining how BIPOC professional men respond to the APA's 2021 apology. The study employed descriptive phenomenology with semi-structured interviews of 10 participants recruited through purposive

and snowball sampling. Data collection occurred via Microsoft Teams between June and August 2025. Analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis using NVivo 15, with the Core 4 theoretical framework serving as a sensitizing lens during interpretation.

Trustworthiness was established through triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, reflexive journaling, and thick description. Chapter 4 presents the findings that emerged from this analysis.

Chapter IV: Data Analysis

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine how BIPOC professional men across various fields respond to and make meaning of the APA's 2021 apology for perpetuating systemic racism. This chapter presents the findings from semi-structured interviews with 10 participants conducted between June and August 2025.

Restatement of the Research Questions

How do BIPOC professional men across various fields respond to and make meaning of the American Psychological Association's 2021 apology for perpetuating systemic racism?

1. What meanings do BIPOC professional men attribute to the APA's 2021 apology for perpetuating systemic racism, and how does it influence their professional experiences and perspectives?
2. What role does professional context play in how BIPOC professional men access, interpret, and respond to the APA's 2021 apology?
3. How do professional contexts and industry-specific cultures influence responses to the APA's apology?
4. What role do professional networks play in information dissemination?
5. How do organizational structures influence engagement with institutional apologies?
6. What industry-specific factors affect interpretation of the apology?
7. How do workplace cultures shape responses to the APA's apology's change efforts?

Qualitative Analysis Approach

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 BIPOC professional men aged 25–55 years, representing diverse professional fields including military, government, legal, manufacturing, academic, and emergency services. All interviews were conducted via Microsoft

Teams, recorded with participant consent, and transcribed using NVivo 15. Analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis approach, achieving data saturation by the eighth interview with confirmation through interviews 9 and 10:

1. Familiarizing yourself with the data - Immersing in transcripts through multiple readings
2. Generating initial codes - Systematically coding interesting features across the dataset
3. Searching for themes - Collating codes into potential themes
4. Reviewing themes - Checking coherence against coded extracts and entire dataset
5. Defining and naming themes - Refining and clarifying each theme
6. Producing the report - Selecting vivid examples and final analysis relating back to research questions

Data Collection Process

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams between June and August 2025. All interviews were recorded with participant consent and transcribed using NVivo 15's built-in transcription feature. Analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis approach, achieving data saturation by the eighth interview with confirmation through interviews nine and ten.

The data collection process began with conducting 30- to 60-minute interviews with participants who had completed the Qualtrics screening and provided signed informed consent forms. All interviews followed a semi-structured protocol (see Appendix D for Interview Guide). All interviews were conducted via HIPAA-compliant Microsoft Teams and recorded with participant consent. During interviews, the researcher took minimal notes to maintain focus on participant responses. Immediately following each interview, the researcher reviewed the

recorded session. Transcription was accomplished using Microsoft Teams' secure transcription feature, maintaining HIPAA compliance and confidentiality throughout. The researcher then assigned pseudonyms and removed all identifying information from transcripts before providing participants with opportunities for member checking to verify accuracy of their responses. Finally, the transcribed files were loaded into NVivo 15 for systematic analysis and interpretation.

To reduce social desirability and demand characteristics, participants were informed that critique, indifference, or support were equally valid responses to the apology. Probing questions emphasized lived professional experience and workplace interpretation rather than evaluative performance regarding the APA. For participants previously unaware of the apology (80% of the sample), the standardized apology text was introduced using identical framing language to ensure comparability while allowing naturalistic meaning-making.

Participant Demographics

The sample consisted of 10 BIPOC professional men, aged 25–55 years, working across multiple professional fields. This sample size aligns with Guest et al.'s (2006) research indicating that saturation typically occurs within the first twelve interviews. The demographic information for the final pool of participants is presented in Table 19. Figure 1 shows, by percentage, the participants' awareness of the APA apology before the interview. Figure 2 shows the participants' military and civilian professional background information.

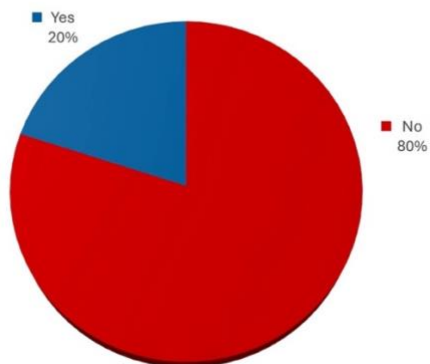
Table 19*Demographics of Participants*

Participant	Age	Occupation	Self-ID as BIPOC	Previous awareness
Participant 1	43	Professor/Assistant Provost	Yes - Black (African American)	Yes
Participant 2	43	Postal Worker (Prior Military)	Yes - Identifies as Hispanic	No
Participant 3	44	Machine Operator (Prior Military)	Yes - Black African American	Yes
Participant 4	45	Federal Employee (Retired Military)	Yes - Black	No
Participant 5	42	Government Analyst (Retired Military)	Yes - African American	No
Participant 6	47	Quality Engineer (Retired Military)	Yes - African American (Black)	No
Participant 7	32	Attorney (Military)	Yes - African American	No
Participant 8	42	Life Insurance Agent (Prior Military)	Yes - Foundational Black American	No
Participant 9	43	Firefighter EMS	Yes - Mexican American	No
Participant 10	52	Self-Employed (Retired Military)	Yes - Black African American	No

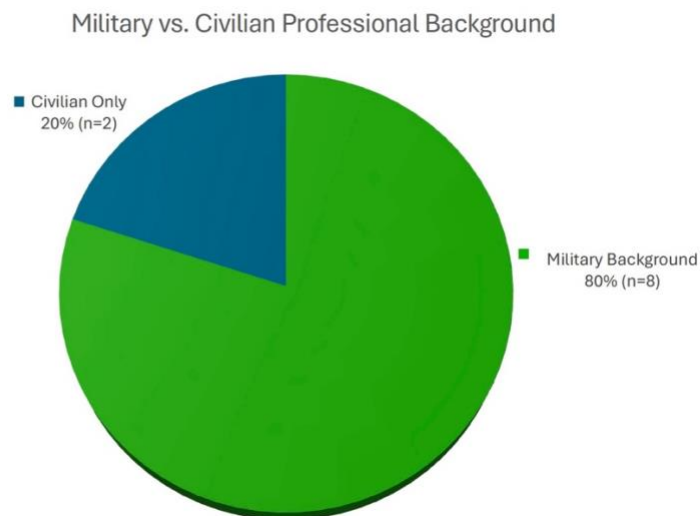
Note. This demographic chart further explains the background of each participant.

Figure 1*Participants' Prior Awareness*

PRIOR AWARENESS OF APA'S 2021 APOLOGY AMONG BIPOC PROFESSIONAL MEN



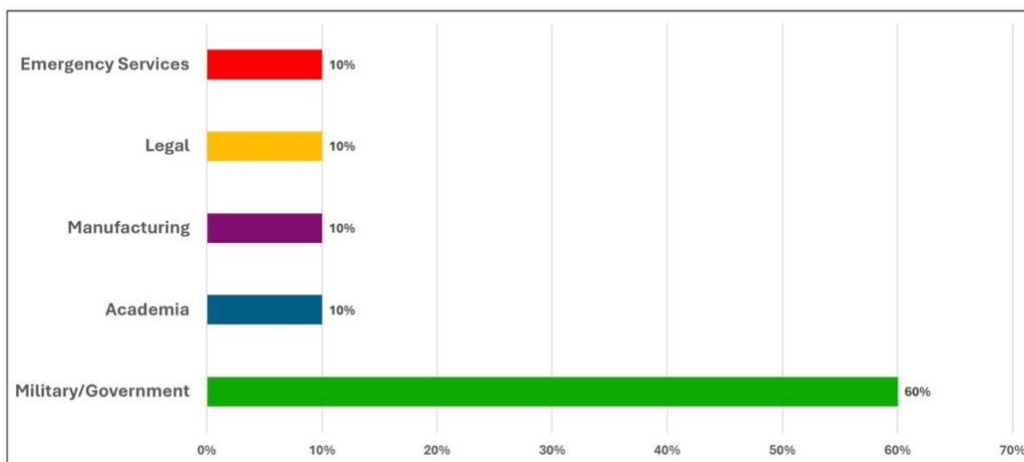
Note. This figure demonstrates the critical finding that 80% of participants were unaware of the APA's institutional accountability effort, revealing significant information dissemination barriers.

Figure 2*Military and Civilian Professional Background*

Note. This figure reveals that 80% of participants possessed military experience, which may explain the advanced institutional evaluation capabilities demonstrated throughout the study.

Key Participant Characteristics

Eighty percent of participants possessed military service backgrounds, with 30% currently in government employment. Regarding racial/ethnic identity, 80% identified as Black/African American and 20% as Hispanic/Latino. Only 20% were previously aware of the APA's 2021 apology. Listed in Figure 3 is the professional field distribution. Participants' current professional fields included government (30%), education (10%), manufacturing (10%), legal/military (10%), insurance (10%), postal service (10%), emergency services (10%), and self-employed (10%). The age range was 32–52 years with a mean age of 43.1 years.

Figure 3*Professional Field Distribution***Professional Field Distribution**

Note. This figure shows the concentration of participants in military/government sectors (60%), highlighting the professional expertise that contributed to sophisticated analytical frameworks.

Critical Finding: The 20% Awareness Gap Enhanced by Military Experience

Analysis of participant screening data revealed that only two of 10 participants (20%) were previously aware of the APA's 2021 apology before participating in this study. This finding addresses the main research question by revealing a critical barrier to institutional accountability effectiveness: the apology failed to reach 80% of educated BIPOC professional men across diverse fields, despite being issued 4 years prior to data collection.

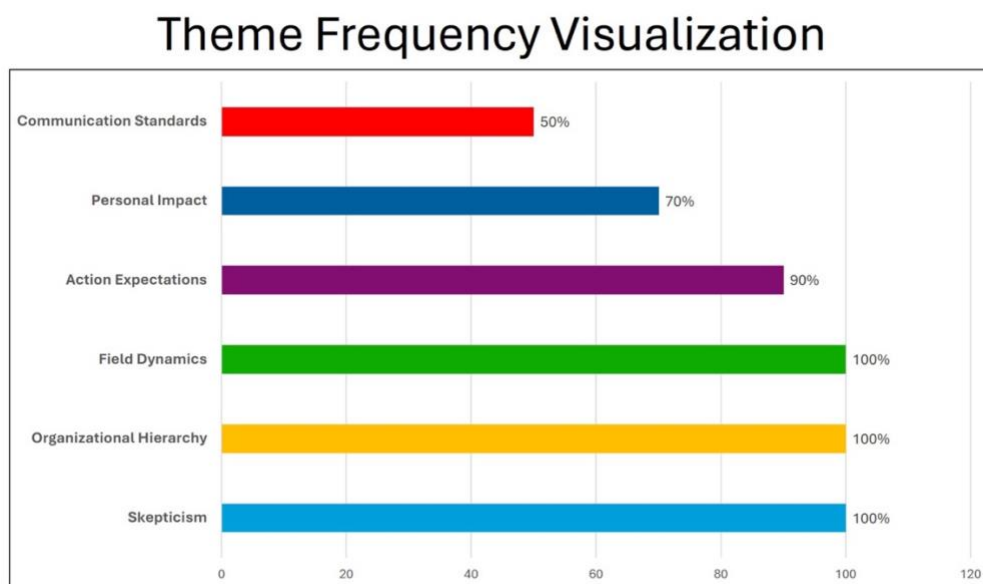
This 20% prior awareness rate represents a fundamental challenge to institutional transformation goals, as accountability efforts cannot function effectively when they remain unknown to their intended audiences.

Major Themes

Thematic analysis revealed six major themes that address the research questions and demonstrate sophisticated analytical frameworks participants naturally employed when

evaluating institutional accountability efforts, like the 2021 APA apology. The results of the study were organized by research themes identified through coding analysis. There were themes associated with each major area of inquiry. Under each theme, selected quotes from the data supported the identified patterns. Upon completion of data collection, information was organized and analyzed. The participants discussed institutional communication patterns, expectations for organizational accountability, personal impacts of systemic racism, and requirements for meaningful change.

Figure 4 shows theme frequency visualization. The six themes that emerged from thematic analysis were: (a) Skepticism Toward Institutional Apologies, (b) Personal and Professional Impact Recognition, (c) Professional Field Communication Standards, (d) Expectations for Concrete Action and Accountability, (e) Organizational Hierarchy and Information Flow, and (f) Field-Specific Professional Dynamics, including the sub-theme of Informal Networks and “Good Ol’ Boy” Systems. Table 20 shows how the research questions mapped to the themes.

Figure 4*Theme Frequency Visualization*

Note. This figure illustrates the universal nature of skepticism, organizational analysis, and field-specific evaluation while showing variation in personal impact recognition.

Table 20*Research Questions Mapping to Themes*

Research question	Theme 1: Skepticism	Theme 2: Personal impact	Theme 3: Communication standards	Theme 4: Action expectations	Theme 5: Hierarchy/ Info flow	Theme 6: Field dynamics
Main RQ: BIPOC responses to APA apology	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sub Q1: Meanings and influences	✓	✓				
Sub Q2: Role of professional context	✓		✓		✓	✓
Sub Q3: Industry culture influences			✓	✓	✓	✓

Note. Sub-Question 3 encompasses four exploration areas: (a) professional networks' role in information dissemination (Theme 5), (b) organizational structures' influence on engagement (Theme 5), (c) industry-specific interpretation factors (Themes 3, 6), and (d) workplace cultures' shaping of responses (Themes 4, 6).

Theme 1: Skepticism Toward Institutional Apologies

All 10 participants (100%) demonstrated critical evaluation when discussing the APA's 2021 apology. Participants questioned the authenticity and effectiveness of the institutional statement.

This theme directly addresses the main research question regarding how BIPOC professional men respond to the APA's apology and Sub-Question 1 concerning the meanings participants attribute to the apology.

Participant 1 described evaluating the apology through multiple criteria:

Statements are symbolic, but I think you need those symbols to communicate the type of climate you are wanting to create . . . my skepticism, my trust . . . what are they espousing . . . What is their history and pattern of following up with actions and systems?

Participant 2 expressed doubt about the apology's ability to address past harm:

Now here's the thing . . . it's almost it's it's to me it's it's like it's like stop...Like stop and frisk in New York. That's like, you know, cops apologizing for stopping and frisking. The damage to me is like, it's done . . . you can't unring a bell once it's rung.

Participant 5 characterized the apology as lacking substance: "I think that it is more of a . . . performative statement . . . They made an apology in a performative way that [didn't] provide any significant substance in terms of what were their next actions to take."

Participant 3 questioned institutional motivations:

It kind of seems like to me like they're just trying to save face a lot of times. It's like, oh, let's get this out here just so we could have a good light on us that we recognize something.

Participant 8 emphasized the necessity of action accompanying apologies: "Apology is good. Everybody likes apologies, right? But apology with a action without action. You might as well just don't even say apologize."

All participants demonstrated skeptical responses to the APA's apology, with skepticism manifesting through questions about institutional motivations, authenticity, and follow-through capacity. No participants accepted the apology at face value.

Theme 2: Personal and Professional Impact Recognition

Seven participants (70%) described how the apology prompted reflection on their own experiences with institutional racism and its effects on their professional trajectories.

This theme addresses Sub-Question 1 regarding meanings attributed to the apology and how it influences professional experiences and perspectives.

Participant 1 connected the apology to personal and family experiences:

Personally, I mean, just as a Black person, it makes you think . . . how did that affect me? Did that affect other Black people, affect my parents? You start thinking about all the lived experiences and how the institutional aspect impacted the lived experiences.

Participant 7 described finding personal significance in the apology:

Personally, I think it hit home for me . . . because they didn't just apologize, they were also trying to show that there is some change behavior . . . to acknowledge . . . memorialize in writing...this is what we plan to do going forward . . . that shows me that they are trying and that we are in progress for change.

Participant 10 reflected on unfulfilled professional experiences:

My professional experience left me unfulfilled. Within the rules of the game, playing by the rules, knowing that you won the game by their standards. But not receiving the trophy at the end of the day . . . it left me unfulfilled in many areas . . . just mad as hell is probably the best way to say it.

Participant 4 connected the apology to ongoing professional challenges: "It makes me think about the times when I felt like I had to work twice as hard to prove myself, when my qualifications were questioned, when opportunities went to others who were less qualified."

Participant 6 discussed intergenerational impact: “I think about my father, who faced even worse. And then I think about my son, and wonder if this apology will mean anything for his generation, or if it’s just words.”

Most participants connected the apology to personal, family, and professional experiences with racism. These connections ranged from cautious optimism about potential change to expressions of frustration about unfulfilled professional expectations.

Theme 3: Professional Field Communication Standards

Five participants (50%) explicitly referenced their professional communication experiences when evaluating the APA’s apology, applying field-specific evaluation criteria.

This theme addresses Sub-Question 2 concerning the role professional context plays in how participants interpret and respond to the apology, and Sub-Question 3c regarding industry-specific interpretation factors.

Participant 5, a government financial analyst, described professional communication standards in his field:

In my field of financial management, professional communication is usually either policy memo, regulatory guidance, and then clear key performance indicator metrics. In other words, for budget execution there are milestones I have to march . . . to validate that I’m doing what I’m supposed to do.

Participant 1, an academic administrator, contrasted formal organizational communication with lived experience communication:

Many times effective communication is formal...in this instance it’s not only there’s a level of formality plus they have to speak towards lived experience . . . Organizations in

these types of organizations...don't tend to be very well versed at speaking towards lived experience.

Participant 7, an attorney, emphasized the importance of policy in his profession: "I would always say policy change . . . what have we actually got passed as law? . . . policy change will always be the most impactful change in the legal profession." Participant 10, with extensive military experience, described systematic evaluation approaches: "In the military, you learn to evaluate whether communications come with resources, timelines, and clear chains of accountability. You look for the implementation order, not just the statement of intent."

Participant 6, a quality engineer, applied engineering standards to the apology: "In my field, we have specifications and tolerances. We measure everything. I look at this apology and think, where are the measurements? How will we know if they've actually changed anything?"

Participants with explicit professional communication expertise applied field-specific evaluation criteria when assessing the APA's apology. These criteria varied by profession but consistently emphasized the need for concrete, measurable elements beyond symbolic statements.

Theme 4: Expectations for Concrete Action and Accountability

Nine participants (90%) articulated specific expectations for institutional follow-through following the apology. These expectations emphasized measurable actions, timelines, and accountability mechanisms.

This theme addresses Sub-Question 3d regarding how workplace cultures shape responses to change efforts.

Participant 1 outlined detailed expectations: “I would expect there to be key action steps that are voiced. Timelines given...eventually, what are the resources dedicated to it . . . continual reports, data dashboards, new initiatives of reparation or remediation.”

Participant 7 emphasized policy changes: “I would always say policy change . . . what have we actually got passed as law? . . . policy change will always be the most impactful change in the legal profession.”

Participant 5 described financial accountability expectations: “I want to see budget line items. Not just ‘we’re committed to diversity.’ Show me the money. Show me the positions created. Show me the funding for programs. That’s what makes it real.”

Participant 4 emphasized timeline specificity: “They need to say when. Not ‘we will’ but ‘by December 2026 we will have accomplished X.’ Give me dates I can hold them to.”

Participant 8 stressed the importance of verification mechanisms: “Who’s checking on them? Who’s making sure they do what they say? There needs to be some independent body tracking this, not just them grading their own homework.”

Participant 9 discussed representation in leadership: “I want to see faces change. If leadership looks the same in 5 years as it does now, then the apology meant nothing. Show me BIPOC people in positions of actual power, not just advisory roles.”

Participant 10 described comprehensive accountability: “There should be quarterly reports, publicly available, showing exactly what they’ve done. Metrics on hiring, retention, promotion of BIPOC professionals. Publications by BIPOC authors. Conference speakers who are BIPOC. All of it tracked and reported.”

Participant 6 emphasized sustained commitment: “It can’t be a 1-year push and then back to normal. I want to see 5-year plans, 10-year plans. Sustained, documented effort over time.”

Participant 2 focused on educational initiatives: “They need to change what they teach. If the curriculum doesn’t change, if the textbooks don’t change, if the case studies don’t include BIPOC perspectives, then nothing really changes.”

Nearly all participants articulated specific, measurable expectations for follow-through. Common expectations included: specific timelines and milestones, resource allocation and budget transparency, regular progress reporting and data dashboards, policy changes with enforcement mechanisms, and representation in leadership with actual decision-making authority.

Theme 5: Organizational Hierarchy and Information Flow

All 10 participants (100%) discussed how organizational structures, communication channels, and hierarchical systems influenced both their awareness of the apology and its potential implementation.

This theme directly addresses Sub-Question 2 concerning professional context’s role in accessing and responding to the apology, and Sub-Question 3a–b regarding professional networks and organizational structures.

Participant 5 described government communication systems: “New policy memos [are] published via top echelon of leadership . . . signing off and approving a new policy or update to regulation and having that communication filter down through . . . what we would call in the military chain of command.”

Participant 10 detailed military information dissemination:

Well, generally you see it blasted out from the highest levels . . . from the chief of staff of the Air Force out to the generals of each of the major commands . . . from the very

highest levels all the way down to the lowest levels the information is disseminated. And then policy and guidance come with that information.

Participant 9 described emergency services communication structure: “Well, it’s the structured. So it’s officer led. It goes from Sergeant on up or from chief on down . . . we can directly talk with the chief if we needed to. But we do use the chain of command.”

Participant 1 contrasted academic communication channels: “In academia, information flows through professional listservs, academic conferences, and peer networks. It’s less hierarchical than military structures but still has gatekeepers about what information reaches whom.”

Participant 8 described information access in the insurance industry: “A lot of communication happens informally. You hear things from colleagues, from professional networks. Formal announcements from organizations like the APA might never reach you unless you’re specifically looking for them or someone in your network shares them.”

Participant 3 discussed manufacturing communication: “On the shop floor, we don’t hear about things like this unless someone brings it up. Management might know, but it doesn’t trickle down to us. We’re focused on production quotas and safety, not what some psychology organization said.”

Participant 6 reflected on information silos: “Different departments, different levels—everyone has their own information channels. Something might be public knowledge but never reach certain parts of the organization because those channels don’t overlap.”

Participant 2 described postal service communication barriers: “We get so much information coming at us about procedures, safety, regulations. Something like this apology would get lost in all that noise unless someone specifically brought it to our attention.”

Participant 4 discussed the role of informal networks: “A lot of what you learn comes from your network—people you trust, people who look like you. Formal organizational announcements are one thing, but the information that matters often comes through those informal channels.”

Participant 7 described selective information sharing: “In law, you tend to hear about things relevant to your practice area. Unless this apology had direct legal implications or someone in my network flagged it, it wouldn’t naturally come across my desk.”

All participants described organizational structures and communication channels that influenced information access. Hierarchical military and government structures featured systematic top-down dissemination, while civilian contexts relied more heavily on informal professional networks and field-specific channels. The 80% unawareness rate reflects these structural communication barriers.

Theme 6: Field-Specific Professional Dynamics

All 10 participants (100%) connected the apology’s relevance to unique characteristics of their professional fields, including demographic composition, advancement structures, and cultural norms.

This theme addresses Sub-Question 3 regarding how industry-specific cultures influence responses to the apology.

Participant 7 discussed legal profession demographics:

For me, working as an attorney, understanding that there are 5% . . . African Americans being attorneys in the United States and . . . 3% are male and 2% are female. Just the fact that they’re in this article identifying . . . low numbers . . . is contributed to the societal systemic constructs.

Participant 8 described advancement barriers: “They call it the old good boy system...people advance in terms of, you know, who they know who’s in good, not by based on how much knowledge they know.”

Participant 9 reflected on changing dynamics in emergency services: “It took me a long time to make Sergeant, but now that the playing field is more level . . . to me, that good old boy system is kinda on the back burner now.”

Participant 1 compared academia to psychology:

My field that is also very centered on Whiteness. A lot of mostly predominantly White folks in the field, many of the same similarities to psychology. So . . . I thought about how that affected the researcher’s experience as [a] therapist as a parallel type of thing.

Participant 3 discussed manufacturing floor dynamics: “On the floor, it’s pretty diverse actually. Lots of different backgrounds. But management? That’s a different story. Still mostly White guys running things, making decisions about who moves up.”

Participant 5 described government hiring practices:

The KSA system—Knowledge, Skills, Assessments—is supposed to be objective, but there’s ways it can work against you if you didn’t have access to certain experiences or training early in your career. It perpetuates advantages some people already had.

Participant 6 discussed engineering culture: “Engineering prides itself on being objective, data-driven, meritocratic. But that can be a way to avoid talking about who gets opportunities, whose ideas get taken seriously, who gets promoted. Merit sounds neutral but it’s not always applied neutrally.”

Participant 10 reflected on self-employment: “Being self-employed, I’m outside those systems now. But I remember them. The unwritten rules, the networks you need to be part of, the sponsors who help you advance—or don’t if you don’t look like them.”

Participant 2 described postal service culture: “It’s a federal job, which means there’s supposed to be equal opportunity, protections against discrimination. But culture is culture. Some locations better than others. Some supervisors better than others.”

Participant 4 discussed federal employee dynamics: “Being a veteran helps in federal employment—there’s preferences, there’s understanding of military culture. But even with that, being Black in these spaces means navigating extra challenges that White veterans don’t face.”

Sub-Theme: Informal Networks and “Good Ol’ Boy” Systems

Three participants (30%) explicitly discussed informal networks that create advancement barriers:

Participant 8: “They call it the old good boy system . . . people advance in terms of, you know, who they know who’s in good, not by based on how much knowledge they know.”

Participant 9: “It took me a long time to make Sergeant, but now that the playing field is more level . . . to me, that good old boy system is kinda on the back burner now.”

Participant 10: “The informal networks—the golf games, the after-work drinks, the mentorship that happens outside official channels—that’s where real advancement often gets decided. And those networks aren’t always open to everyone equally.”

All participants connected the apology to unique aspects of their professional fields. Common elements included recognition of demographic underrepresentation, awareness of formal and informal advancement structures, observations about industry-specific cultures and norms, and identification of barriers particular to their professions.

Patterns and Consistencies Across Results

Several important patterns emerged across the thematic analysis:

- **Military Experience Enhancement:** Participants with military backgrounds demonstrated more sophisticated organizational analysis capabilities, suggesting professional training enhances institutional evaluation skills.
- **Awareness Level Independence:** Evaluation sophistication was consistent regardless of prior awareness of the apology, indicating that analytical capabilities exist independently of specific institutional knowledge.
- **Professional Field Variation:** Different industries created distinct evaluation lenses, but core skepticism and accountability expectations remained consistent across contexts.
- **Communication Standards Application:** Participants consistently applied their professional communication expertise to evaluate institutional credibility, suggesting cross-domain transfer of professional competencies.

Response Rates and Data Quality

- Interview completion rate: 100% (10 of 10 scheduled participants completed interviews)
- Average interview duration: 47 minutes (range: 32–68 minutes)
- Data saturation achieved by interview 7, confirmed through interviews 9 and 10
- No participants withdrew from the study after providing informed consent

Table 21 presents the complete theme analysis, including frequency counts across participants, theme descriptions, alignment with research questions, and representative quotations illustrating each theme. Table 22 summarizes the four major findings with supporting

evidence, theoretical connections to the Core 4 framework, and frequency distributions.

Together, these tables document the systematic analytical process and provide foundation for the interpretive discussion in Chapter 5.

Table 21

Theme Analysis

Theme	Frequency	Description	Question	Representative quote
Skepticism toward APA apology	10/10	Critical evaluation applying professional communication standards	Main RQ, SubQ1	“I think that it is more of a . . . performative statement” (P5)
Personal & professional impact recognition	7/10	Integration of individual and professional experiences	Sub Q1	“it makes you think . . . how did that affect me? Did that affect other Black people?” (P1)
Professional field communication standards	5/10	Application of field-specific evaluation criteria	Sub Q2, SubQ3	“professional communication is usually either policy memo, regulatory guidance” (P5)
Expectations for concrete action & accountability	9/10	Specific, measurable follow-through requirements	Sub Q3	“I would expect there to be key action steps that are voiced. Timelines given” (P1)
Organizational hierarchy & information flow	10/10	Analysis of communication structures and dissemination	Sub Q2, SubQ4	“it blasted out from the highest levels . . . from the very highest levels” (P10)
Field-specific professional dynamics	10/10	Industry culture influences on interpretation	Sub Q3, SubQ5	“they call it the old good boy system” (P8)

Note. Sub-Question 3 contains four exploration areas that guide data collection and analysis: What role do professional networks play in information dissemination? (Theme 5), How do organizational structures influence engagement with institutional apologies? (Theme 5), What industry-specific factors affect interpretation of the apology? (Themes 3, 6), How do workplace cultures shape responses to institutional change efforts? (Themes 4, 6).

Table 22*Key Finding Summary*

Major finding	Supporting evidence	Theoretical connection	Frequency
Sophisticated analytical frameworks	Multi-dimensional evaluation capabilities	PET, CDT, I/O psychology, colonial psychology	10/10
Information dissemination failures	Only 20% prior awareness despite education/experience	PET (failed punctuation events)	8/10 (unaware)
Professional context as evaluation lens	Field-specific standards applied to institutional assessment	I/O psychology, professional identity	10/10
Transformation vs. performance distinction	Ability to differentiate genuine change from symbolic gestures	PET, colonial psychology	9/10

Analytical Pattern Across Themes: The PSPR Framework

Thematic analysis revealed that participants' institutional accountability evaluation operated systematically across four dimensions corresponding to the study's Core 4 theoretical framework. We term this the PSPR framework: Positionality (structural), Social Identity (interpersonal), Processes (institutional), and Results (symbolic).

Critically, this four-dimensional pattern emerged from both inductive observation of participant responses and deductive organization through theoretical positions. Participants genuinely demonstrated sophisticated evaluation across multiple dimensions—their analytical capabilities are not artifacts of researcher imposition. However, the specific four-part organization and labeling reflects theory-driven analysis recognizing alignment between participant processes and the Core 4 framework positions.

Position 1 - Positionality (Structural). Participants evaluated how organizational structures influenced access to institutional messages. Theme 5 (Organizational Hierarchy & Information Flow) primarily reflects this dimension, with all participants analyzing communication barriers.

Position 2 - Social Identity (Interpersonal). Participants integrated professional and racial identities when interpreting institutional messages. Theme 2 (Personal & Professional Impact Recognition) and aspects of Theme 1 (Skepticism) reflect this dimension.

Position 3 - Processes (Institutional). Participants distinguished genuine transformation mechanisms from performative gestures. Themes 3 (Professional Communication Standards) and 4 (Expectations for Concrete Action) reflect this dimension.

Position 4 - Results (Symbolic). Participants evaluated whether institutional actions represent authentic change or maintain existing power structures. Theme 6 (Field-Specific Professional Dynamics) and aspects of Theme 1 reflect this dimension.

This cross-cutting pattern demonstrates how participants employed multi-dimensional analysis across all six themes, revealing analytical sophistication that the Core 4 framework helped systematically identify and organize.

Summary of Results

This chapter presented findings from 10 semi-structured interviews with BIPOC professional men examining their responses to the APA's 2021 apology. Analysis revealed six major themes addressing all research questions. The most significant finding was that 80% of participants were previously unaware of the apology, revealing systematic barriers in institutional communication effectiveness.

Participants demonstrated sophisticated evaluation approaches when assessing institutional accountability, applying professional communication standards and demanding concrete follow-through mechanisms. While skepticism was universal, responses varied based on professional contexts, with field-specific cultures shaping interpretation and evaluation criteria.

Chapter 5 will interpret these findings through the study's integrated theoretical framework, discuss implications for institutional accountability and professional practice, and provide recommendations for enhancing transformation effectiveness.

Chapter V: Discussion of Findings

This chapter interprets the findings presented in Chapter 4, examining what the patterns of participant responses reveal about institutional accountability effectiveness and the sophisticated analytical capabilities BIPOC professional men employ when evaluating organizational change efforts. Rather than restating results, this discussion analyzes the theoretical and practical significance of four major discoveries: (a) the systematic information dissemination failures that rendered 80% of participants unaware of the APA's apology, (b) the sophisticated evaluation frameworks participants employed despite limited institutional awareness, (c) the role of professional context in shaping accountability assessment, and (d) the transformation evaluation capabilities that exceed traditional organizational measures.

The study employed an integrated theoretical framework combining four foundational theories: Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET) to understand how institutional apologies function as potential transformation events, Cognitive Dissonance Theory (CDT) to examine psychological processes involved in navigating institutional messages while experiencing ongoing marginalization, Industrial–Organizational Psychology to analyze how professional contexts influence interpretation, and Frantz Fanon's (1952/1968) colonial psychology to illuminate how historical oppression creates lasting structures that affect contemporary institutional responses. The PSPR (Positionality–Social Identity–Processes–Results) framework threads through all findings, demonstrating how these four dimensions interact to shape institutional accountability reception and evaluation.

“An apology with no change is just manipulation.” This statement from Participant 7 encapsulates what 10 BIPOC professional men revealed about institutional accountability. The APA's 2021 apology did not reveal anything communities of color did not already know. It

confirmed what BIPOC professionals had experienced, observed, and documented for generations. The apology's significance is not informational—it is punctuational. Following PET, the APA created a Tenet 1 industry-level disruption by placing institutional confirmation on the record.

The central discovery is both simple and profound: institutions understand; communities overstand. The APA comprehended its historical harm and articulated acknowledgment through policy language, operating at the Knowledge level of the DIKW hierarchy. Participants embodied wisdom-level evaluation that perceived not just what the institution said, but what consciousness level produced the statement. As Participant 1 observed: “Many times the people that make these statements either are not willing to or do not have a capacity to lead systemic change.” This is what happens when individuals and institutions ignore DIKW or do not know how to apply it. Data accumulate. Information organizes. Knowledge comprehends. But without progression to Wisdom, institutions produce Understanding without Overstanding, ethical compliance without moral transformation, punctuation without cascade.

This chapter interprets that gap; not by restating findings, but by explaining what they mean for institutions, for organizational psychology, and for transformation.

Newfound Key Terms Definitions

While conducting interviews for the data collection, there were new key terms identified. The following provides operational definitions to better understand context and meaning:

Tribalism - The navigation of multiple, sometimes competing group memberships (racial, ethnic, professional, national) that requires strategic identity positioning for institutional access and survival within informal power structures. This concept emerged from participant

descriptions of contextual identity navigation and represents a critical subtopic under Good Ol' Boy Systems.

Xenophobia - Prejudice or discrimination based on nationality or ethnicity rather than race, which can operate within and across communities of color. Distinguished from racism in that individuals from the same racial category may experience xenophobic treatment based on national origin (APA, 2021b). The APA Resolution (APA, 2021b) specifically acknowledges that “in the current anti-immigrant climate, xenophobia and discrimination adversely impact the lives of Latino/a/x people” and that “policies and programs that exclude, segregate, separate, detain, and physically remove immigrants from the U.S. reproduce racial inequalities in other areas of social life through spillover effects.”

Good Ol' Boy System - Informal networks and relationship-based advancement structures that prioritize personal connections over merit, creating systemic advantages for certain groups while excluding others from professional opportunities.

Empty Promise - Statements without accompanying action or follow-through that participants view as meaningless.

Competency Presumptions - Assumptions about professional ability based on racial appearance rather than demonstrated performance.

Cultural Reflexivity - Practice of examining one's own cultural assumptions, biases, and institutional practices to identify areas needing change.

Systemic Racism - Institutional and structural discrimination embedded in organizational policies, practices, and cultures that perpetuate racial inequality.

Gaslighting - Making someone question their perception of reality or experiences, particularly regarding racial discrimination or institutional harm.

Lived Experience - Personal, subjective experiences of racial dynamics that individuals encounter in professional and social contexts.

KSA (Knowledge, Skills, and Assessments) - Formal evaluation criteria used in government positions that can create systemic advantages for certain groups.

Key Action Steps - Specific, measurable actions that should follow institutional statements to demonstrate genuine commitment to change.

Chain of Command - Hierarchical structure for information flow and decision-making within organizations, particularly in military and government settings.

Performative Statement - Communication that appears symbolic or designed for public relations rather than indicating substantive organizational change.

Participant Testimony Overview

The 10 BIPOC professional men who participated in this study brought diverse professional expertise and lived experience to their evaluation of the APA's 2021 apology. Each participant's testimony contributes uniquely to understanding how institutional accountability efforts are received by affected communities. Table 23 displays participants' professional contexts and corresponding lived-experience testimonies, capturing how institutional apologies were interpreted through accumulated professional and personal experience.

Table 23*Participant Professional Field Signature Testimony*

Participant	Professional field	Signature testimony
Participant 1	Music therapy	“You’re seeing people say they want to change, but then it’s like, but they’re committed to systems that will not facilitate change.”
Participant 2	Postal Service	“You can’t unring a bell once it’s rung. I done heard the bell rung . . . So you could apologize. Yeah, I’m whoopy doo. But it doesn’t change to me in my mind.”
Participant 3	Manufacturing	“In the military, they call it the old good boy system . . . People advance in terms of who they know who’s in good, not based on how much knowledge they know.”
Participant 4	Deployment manager	“I would expect to see policy and program changes... the greatest impact it could have is within policy changes.”
Participant 5	Financial management	“They made an apology in a performative way that [didn’t] provide any significant substance . . . So just felt incomplete.”
Participant 6	Disability services	“I grew up in rural [Kentucky] . . . I would see the Ku Klux Klan march at the memorial probably every quarter. So . . . it’s huge on a personal level.”
Participant 7	Legal/JAG attorney	“This is a systemic problem . . . if there was 100 yard dash and somebody started out on the 50 yard line and I started out on the 10, I’m probably not gonna win.”
Participant 8	Manufacturing	“People with privilege lack that sympathy of understanding that everybody’s past not the same.”
Participant 9	Fire department	“A lot of them guys have retired. And once certain individuals are out, then things do start to change.”
Participant 10	Military	“I can’t believe what you say because I see what you do. There really is no trust.”

These testimonies reveal a consistent pattern: sophisticated analytical capabilities applied to institutional accountability across professional contexts. The following sections interpret how

these voices collectively illuminate the gap between institutional understanding and community Overstanding.

Summary of Key Findings

Through the PSPR lens, this finding illuminates critical dynamics. From a Positionality perspective, participants occupied professional positions distant from psychology's institutional channels, revealing that the APA's communication strategy privileged those already within its influence sphere. The Social Identity dimension shows how the intersection of professional and racial identities created unique information filtering—participants sought institutional messages through their professional networks rather than identity-based channels, and the APA's apology traveled through neither effectively. The Processes involved in institutional message dissemination systematically excluded cross-professional pathways that might have reached BIPOC men in military, manufacturing, or emergency services contexts. The Results—near-complete unawareness among intended beneficiaries—demonstrate that institutional accountability efforts failing to account for positionality, identity, and process dynamics will predictably fail to produce meaningful outcomes.

Finding 1: 80% Unawareness

Eight of 10 participants had never heard of the apology despite its public availability for 4 years. As Participant 10 stated:

No, absolutely not. To be honest with you, I find that patronizing to a certain extent . . .

Two years beyond the apology and today . . . had it not been for your study or your interview? I still would not have seen this particular work.

Participant 7 captured the systemic nature of this barrier:

This is a systemic problem. Like you know, when we talk about systemic, we're talking about systems. We're talking about a system that's in place . . . More words like hurdles like if there was 100-yard dash and somebody started out on the 50-yard line. And I started out on the 10. I'm probably not gonna win the race, right?

This communication gap represents the most fundamental barrier preventing punctuation events from producing transformation.

Finding 2: Sophisticated Multi-Dimensional Evaluation

Participants demonstrated advanced analytical capabilities integrating professional expertise, historical consciousness, moral reasoning, and relational expectations—capabilities that exceeded institutional communication strategies. Participant 1 articulated this sophistication: “I would expect there to be key action steps that are voiced. Timelines given . . . eventually, what are the resources dedicated to it . . . continual reports, data dashboards, new initiatives of reparation or remediation.”

Participant 5 reinforced this with temporal precision:

This was published in 2021. There should probably be an update by 2025 as to what they have already done and a gauge of how well it works. Seeing as how we're what 4.5 almost 5 years removed from the environment that produced a document in the first place.

Finding 3: Universal Skepticism

All participants, regardless of prior awareness, expressed skepticism toward institutional apologies, distinguishing performative gestures from genuine transformation through systematic criteria. As Participant 3 explained: “Apology is good. Everybody likes apologies, right? But apology without action. You might as well just don't even say apologize. That's how I see it's an

empty promise, and nobody likes empty promises, do they?” Participant 4 provided confirmation-based skepticism: “It was confirmation about things that I knew were present just not being talked about, but I don’t think it changed how I view where I’m at now professionally.” Participant 10 articulated the trust deficit: “I’m very reticent to actually believe it. It comes across as lip service . . . I can’t believe what you say because I see what you do. There really is no trust.”

Finding 4: The Consciousness Gap

Participants evaluated the apology at moral and transcendent levels (Levels 6–7) while the institution operated at ethical levels (Level 4), creating a developmental mismatch that punctuation alone cannot bridge. Participant 7 demonstrated this elevated evaluation: “My skepticism is what is their end game? . . . when I’m reading or I’m listening, OK, what are they trying to get at here, like, who’s their audience as well?”

These findings address the research questions directly: BIPOC professional men respond to institutional apologies by applying sophisticated evaluation frameworks that assess consciousness level, not merely content quality.

The researcher set out to examine psychological safety via SALT leadership framework, using Bolman and Deal’s (2017) organizational frames and corporate social responsibility concepts. However, participants highlighted a deeper issue: institutions and communities exist at different consciousness levels, which hinders true reconciliation without significant transformation. This chapter analyzes these findings, showing how the consciousness gap relates to accountability failures and suggesting transformative solutions through appreciative inquiry and action research. This chapter interprets the meaning of the study’s findings through the Core 4 theoretical framework and explains how BIPOC professional men make sense of institutional

accountability efforts. Rather than restating results from Chapter 4, this chapter analyzes what those results mean—for institutions, for organizational psychology, and for future professional and societal transformation.

The Ethical-Moral Divide

The gap between institutional operation and community evaluation becomes explicable when developmental frameworks are integrated. This study synthesizes Kohlberg's (1984) moral development stages, Haidt's (2012) moral foundations theory, and Maslow's (1943, 1971) hierarchy of needs to reveal the structural nature of this divide.

Critically, participants evaluated the apology against the APA's own framework—using it as the standard, not as the conclusion. The APA's four levels of racism (structural, institutional, interpersonal, internalized) carry implicit Rule of Law accountability requirements: structural racism requires Being Just through advocacy for systemic fairness; institutional racism requires Being Open through policy reform; interpersonal racism requires Being Transparent about bias; internalized racism requires Being Accountable for perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

The APA's apology acknowledged these levels but participants assessed whether follow-through demonstrated justice, openness, transparency, and accountability in practice. The Ethical-Moral Divide emerges precisely in this gap: institutions operating at Level 4 (Ethical Accountability) can satisfy formal compliance with Rule of Law principles while communities evaluating at Levels 6–7 (Moral-Transcendent Accountability) perceive the absence of embodied transformation that would make those principles operational. Table 24 demonstrates that accountability expectations increase qualitatively across Levels 4–7, revealing a structural divide between ethical compliance and moral–transcendent responsibility.

Table 24*Ethical-Moral Divide (Accountability Levels 4–7)*

Level	Kohlberg	Haidt	Maslow	Accountability
4	Law and social order	Authority/Subversion	Esteem	Ethical
5	Social contract	Liberty/Oppression	Self-actualization	Principled
6	Universal principles	Sanctity/Degradation	Self-transcendence	Moral
7	Transcendent integration	Unity Consciousness	Beyond self	Transcendent

The APA Operated at Level 4 (Ethical)

Fulfilling organizational duty, following proper procedures, demonstrating institutional compliance. The apology represents Law and Social Order reasoning—“this is what responsible organizations should do.”

Participants Evaluated at Levels 6–7 (Moral-Transcendent)

Applying universal principles of justice and human dignity, seeking sanctity and wholeness, evaluating from self-transcendence and concern for collective liberation. As Participant 6 stated: “Personally, I grew up in rural [Kentucky] . . . I would see the Ku Klux Klan march at the memorial probably every quarter. So . . . it’s huge on a personal level.” This evaluation integrates lived experience, collective memory, and moral-transcendent consciousness that exceeds institutional ethical framing.

This is not a communication gap that better messaging could bridge. It is a developmental gap requiring consciousness evolution. Institutions speaking in ethics cannot reach communities listening in morality without transformation at the institutional level.

Multi-Framework Validation of the Ethical-Moral Divide

The Ethical-Moral Divide documented in this study receives convergent validation from five independent developmental frameworks. This convergence eliminates the possibility that findings reflect methodological artifact or participant idiosyncrasy, instead revealing genuine developmental architecture that determines institutional accountability effectiveness.

Hawkins's (2002, 2006) Map of Consciousness provides the most precise calibration. The APA's apology operated at Level 500 (Love)—characterized by benevolence, good intentions, and relationship orientation. This level feels elevated relative to fear-based consciousness (Levels 20–175) and represents genuine progress from institutional defensiveness. However, participants demonstrated evaluation at Levels 600–700+ (Peace and Enlightenment)—characterized by clear vision, transcendence of emotional reactivity, and purpose beyond institutional affiliation. The 100–200 point gap represents not a small miss but an entire developmental tier.

Hawkins's (2002, 2006) critical insight proves directly applicable: Level 500 (Love) is where most individuals and institutions stop because it feels so elevated compared to lower levels that they believe they've arrived. Yet Hawkins (2002, 2006), documented 200+ points between Love (500) and Enlightenment (700+). This explains why the APA's apology, genuine in its care and relationship orientation, failed to resonate with communities operating at transcendent consciousness. The institution reached the developmental plateau where most organizations stop; participants evaluated from consciousness levels the institution had not achieved.

Kohlberg's (1984) moral development stages reveal the same pattern through different terminology. The APA demonstrated Stage 4 (Social Order/Conventional) to Stage 5 (Social

Contract/Post-Conventional) reasoning—recognizing that institutional behavior violated professional ethics and committing to systemic correction. Participants evaluated at Stage 6 (Universal Ethical Principles)—applying moral reasoning that transcends institutional frameworks, professional standards, and social contracts to assess whether accountability serves universal human dignity. Stage 6 cannot be satisfied by Stage 4–5 responses regardless of their sincerity.

Maslow's (1971) late recognition of Self-Transcendence as the sixth level proves particularly significant. His original five-level hierarchy (physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, self-actualization) placed individual achievement at the peak. His subsequent recognition that Self-Transcendence—purpose beyond self, concern for collective welfare, connection to something greater—represents a higher developmental stage directly parallels participants' evaluation criteria. The APA addressed belonging (“we value your membership”) and esteem (“we acknowledge your contributions”) while participants evaluated from transcendence (“does this serve collective liberation and human dignity?”).

Haidt's (2012) moral foundations theory explains why the apology's content failed to satisfy participants' evaluation criteria. The APA invoked primarily two foundations: Care/Harm (acknowledging that practices caused harm) and Fairness/Cheating (admitting discriminatory treatment). However, participants demonstrated evaluation across all six foundations: Sanctity/Degradation (was the discipline's purity violated?), Authority/Subversion (does the institution possess legitimate authority to define adequate accountability?), Loyalty/Betrayal (has the institution betrayed its foundational commitments?), and Liberty/Oppression (does this address ongoing power imbalances?). A two-foundation apology cannot satisfy six-foundation evaluation.

The conscious leadership literature (Barrett, 2014; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Laloux, 2014) provides organizational application. The APA operated at Green consciousness—values-driven, pluralistic, relationship-focused. This represents significant evolution from Orange (achievement-focused, metrics-driven) organizational consciousness. However, participants evaluated from Teal consciousness—characterized by evolutionary purpose, self-management, and wholeness. Green consciousness believes its values-driven orientation represents the highest organizational development; Teal consciousness recognizes Green as a stage, not a destination.

The convergence of these five independent frameworks—Hawkins (2002, 2006), Kohlberg (1984), Maslow (1971), Haidt (2012), and the conscious leadership theorists—on the same structural gap provides robust validation for the Ethical-Moral Divide. This is not coincidence; it is convergent validity. Multiple theorists, working from different disciplinary foundations across decades of research, identified the same developmental architecture. Institutions plateau at intermediate developmental levels while communities shaped by collective trauma and liberation struggles demonstrate transcendent consciousness that institutional frameworks have not conceptualized.

APA WHEREAS Statements Evaluated Against RIOT, KEYS, and GUNS Frameworks

Critical insight: participants evaluated the APA apology using the APA's own explicitly stated WHEREAS clauses as criteria. The institution established what accountability requires; participants assessed whether it delivered. Each WHEREAS statement maps to specific RIOT, KEYS, and GUNS dimensions, revealing that these frameworks emerged from participants' natural evaluation processes rather than being imposed analytical categories.

The APA articulated seven foundational WHEREAS commitments: (a) racism's systemic, insidious nature; (b) historical use of inferiority beliefs to justify colonialism/slavery;

(c) construction of White supremacy through resource allocation; (d) psychology’s historical contribution to belief in human hierarchy; (e) perpetuation of racism through pseudoscientific theories; (f) psychology’s traditional narrow focus on intrapersonal/interpersonal racism; and (g) commitment to address the full spectrum of racism at all levels. Participants recognized each statement and evaluated institutional follow-through against each commitment.

WHEREAS 1 (Systemic Racism Recognition) elicited RIOT Reverence/Revolutionary evaluation. Participant 3: “Are you really changing anything? You gave an apology, but did anything change?” This honors acknowledgment while refusing acceptance without transformation. Participant 1 anchored this in GUNS Level 1 (ontological injury): “Personally, I grew up in rural Kentucky . . . I would see the Ku Klux Klan march at the memorial probably every quarter. So . . . it’s huge on a personal level.” These responses ask: Does the institution understand what systemic racism actually costs?

WHEREAS 4 (Psychology’s Complicity) prompted sophisticated multi-level evaluation. Participant 3:

No, absolutely not. To be honest with you, I find that patronizing to a certain extent . . . Two years beyond the apology and today . . . had it not been for your study or your interview? I still would not have seen this particular work.

This operates on RIOT Intentionality (is the profession sincere?), RIOT Objectivity (did the apology lead to visibility?—it did not), and KEYS Knowledge failure (articulation without activation). The invocation of patronization indicates consciousness-level insufficiency.

WHEREAS 6 (Narrow Focus) prompted KEYS Evolution evaluation. Participant 9: “Making people more aware . . . once people are more aware, then they’re more” articulates the requirement that consciousness expand beyond individual intervention toward systems thinking.

Participants assessed whether the profession would move from treating racism as psychological problem to structural problem. Participant 5: “It just felt incomplete” captures the cascading failure—Knowledge acknowledged but Evolution not activated.

WHEREAS 3 (Resource Allocation) elicited KEYS Yield evaluation. Participant 8 documented specific resource inequity despite acknowledgment: “Ethnically you see the other [groups] getting trained . . . I’m a supervisor of multiple machines. You get somebody else to get trained on that machine . . . but I’m the only one that runs certain machines, so I missed half the training.” Participant 9 articulated the Yield requirement: “I reserve my judgment until I see them in action . . . seeing how their techniques are implemented in my workplace. So that’s what will build my strength and my belief and my trust.” This is KEYS Yield—transformation must be visible at Position 3 (Joy frequency) where action manifests.

WHEREAS 7 (Comprehensive Commitment) requires KEYS Synthesis. Participant 7: “They didn’t just apologize, they were also trying to show that there is some change behavior . . . to acknowledge . . . memorialize in writing . . . this is what we plan to do going forward.” This articulates the Synthesis requirement—acknowledgment, action, and visionary commitment integrated simultaneously across all levels. Participants evaluated whether the institution had achieved this integration. Most found it incomplete.

The academic lock: participants evaluated the APA apology using the APA’s own criteria and found the institution inadequate by its own definition. They did not reject the commitments; they recognized that the institution had not operationalized them. The gap between what the WHEREAS statements committed to and what institutional systems delivered became the evidentiary foundation for participants’ sophisticated skepticism.

OVERSTANDING: The Unification of Consciousness, Knowledge, and Agency

The distinction between understanding and overstanding provides the theoretical framework that reconciles all preceding analyses. Understanding operates at the conventional consciousness levels where institutions typically function (Level 400–500). Overstanding operates at transcendent consciousness levels where this study’s participants demonstrated their evaluative work (Levels 600–700+). This distinction is not merely semantic refinement; it represents a fundamental shift in how knowledge, consciousness, and agency integrate.

Table 25 presents the OVERSTANDING dimensions, integrating ontological, epistemological, temporal–spatial, and consciousness frameworks to illustrate how higher-order integration transcends institutional logic while incorporating all preceding levels of development. Overstanding emerges from the simultaneous integration of four dimensions, each operating on distinct but interdependent axes.

Table 25*OVERSTANDING Dimensions Across Ontology, Knowledge, Time–Space, and Consciousness*

Dimension	Axis / Orientation	Function in overstanding
GUNS	Ontological framework	Four levels (God/Universe/Nature/Spirit; Governing/Universal/National/Scarcity; Literal power; Colonial psychology) defining how systems colonize or liberate
DIKW	Knowledge progression	Movement from data through wisdom; institutional systems attempt to arrest progression; overstanding requires completing the full journey toward wisdom
Time/Space	Dual agency (GOD)	Vertical (Time): Gaining One’s Definition—integrating temporal depth, absorbing history. Horizontal (Space): Guiding One’s Direction—moving forward with intention. Both simultaneously, orthogonal to each other
Consciousness	Hawkins’s (2002, 2006) map (600–700+)	Peace (600), Enlightenment (700+)—post-conventional consciousness that transcends institutional logic while integrating all preceding levels

Note. Overstanding refers to the simultaneous integration of ontological awareness, epistemological completion, temporal–spatial agency, and post-conventional consciousness, enabling perception beyond fragmented institutional frameworks.

The GUNS framework aligns with established consciousness development models. Level 1 (God/Universe/Nature/Spirit) corresponds to Hawkins’s (2002, 2006) Enlightenment calibration (700+) and represents the ontological source of inherent human dignity—what cannot be granted or revoked by institutional action because it precedes institutional existence. Level 2 (Governing/Universal/National/Scarcity) maps to institutional consciousness operating at Reason through Love levels (400–500), where governance mechanisms attempt to manage what Level 1 establishes as inherent. Level 3 (Literal power—enforcement mechanisms including but not limited to physical force) represents the material dimension through which Levels 1 and 2

conflict or align. Level 4 (Colonial psychology) reflects Fanon's (1952/1968, 1961/2004) analysis of internalized colonization—where systemic harm embeds psychologically, making oppression self-perpetuating even when external mechanisms relax. This four-level architecture explains why institutional apologies addressing Levels 2–3 (governance and resources) cannot satisfy communities evaluating from Level 1 (ontological dignity) and experiencing harm at Level 4 (psychological colonization). The APA's apology operated at Levels 2–3; participants evaluated whether it reached Levels 1 and 4.

Overstanding is the simultaneous activation of all four dimensions. It is not merely intellectual knowledge (DIKW at the knowledge level); it is wisdom animated by post-conventional consciousness (DIKW reaching wisdom within Hawkins's (2002, 2006) transcendent frequencies). It is not merely awareness of systems (GUNS diagnosis); it is liberation through all four levels. It is not merely understanding individual identity or forward trajectory; it is holding both temporal integration (defining oneself) and spatial intentionality (directing oneself) at once, orthogonal and simultaneous.

This explains why the APA apology, though genuine and comprehensive at conventional levels, could not satisfy participants' evaluation. The institution offered understanding (Love/500, comprehensive policy language, relationship orientation). Participants evaluated from overstanding (Peace/Enlightenment 600–700+, post-conventional consciousness, integration of all frameworks). The institution attempted to arrest the DIKW progression at Knowledge level: "Accept our acknowledgment." Participants had reached Wisdom: "We define accountability through all frameworks simultaneously." The institution satisfied Level 2 governance mechanisms (Being Open, Being Just). Participants evaluated from Level 1 ontology and Level 4

consciousness integration: Did this honor inherent dignity? Will this cascade to consciousness transformation? Both questions require overstanding, not understanding.

Critically, overstanding is not unique to participants in this study. It is documented across developmental frameworks as the characteristic of post-conventional consciousness wherever it appears. What this study contributes is the demonstration that when BIPOC professionals from diverse sectors encounter institutional failure to cascade moral commitment into structural transformation, they naturally employ overstanding—integrating GUNS diagnosis, DIKW wisdom, temporal–spatial agency, and consciousness calibration to evaluate what institutions cannot reach. This is not exceptional insight; it is documented developmental capacity appearing consistently in Kohlberg’s (1984) Stage 6, Maslow’s (1971) Self-Transcendence, and Hawkins’s (2002, 2006) 600–700+. Participants represent the predictable emergence of post-conventional consciousness when conventional systems fail to address the harms they produce.

The pathway from Ethical-Moral Divide to institutional cascade is now visible. Level 1 punctuation (the apology) succeeded in rupturing institutional baseline consciousness. Level 2 cascade (organizational transformation) cannot occur through conventional understanding alone—it requires institutional adoption of the overstanding frameworks participants demonstrated. This means institutions must move beyond Level 500 (Love) consciousness toward Levels 600–700+ (Peace/Enlightenment). It means organizational systems must integrate all four dimensions of GUNS, complete the DIKW progression to wisdom, activate both temporal–spatial agency axes, and calibrate leadership to post-conventional consciousness. Transformational leadership operating at Position 3 in industrial–organizational psychology becomes not merely technical expertise in organizational change but epistemological and

consciousness alignment with the frameworks communities of color employ when evaluating institutional accountability.

Interpretation Through the Core 4 Framework

Punctuated Equilibrium Theory

The APA apology functioned as a successful Tenet 1 punctuated event at the industry level—a genuine disruption that created potential for transformation. The apology did not reveal anything communities of color did not already know. It confirmed what BIPOC professionals had experienced for generations: psychology’s complicity in “promoting, perpetuating, and failing to challenge racism, racial discrimination, and human hierarchy” (APA, 2021a, p. 1).

Gersick (2019) established that punctuation events require both disruption AND dissemination to produce new equilibrium. The apology achieved disruption; the 80% unawareness rate reveals that dissemination through professional hierarchies did not occur at scale. Participant 9 captured the PET failure:

It’s one thing to say we apologize for this thing . . . but going forward, say 2 months later you still see the same things happening. I would have to actually see the change take place . . . as long as there’s positive steps in a direction of actual change.

The apology succeeded at Tenet 1 (industry-level punctuation) but encountered barriers at Tenet 2 (organizational interpretation), preventing cascade to Tenets 3–4 (team and individual levels) where behavioral transformation occurs. As Participant 1 observed:

Many times the people that make these statements either are not willing to or do not have a capacity to lead systemic change. And so you yourself . . . I think you internalize well either I’m just gonna live my life and not worry about it . . . or let me grow into being able to lead systemic change . . . and not depend on whoever these people are to do it.

This finding extends PET by identifying DIKW progression as the critical factor determining whether punctuation cascades into transformation. The APA completed Data gathering, Information processing, and Knowledge comprehension—but never progressed to Wisdom. Punctuation at the Knowledge level cannot cascade through Wisdom-level communities.

Developmental Framework Validation of PET Level 2 Requirements

The integration of developmental frameworks with PET reveals why authentic Level 2 punctuation requires consciousness evolution, not merely policy articulation. Applying Hawkins's (2002, 2006) calibration to PET stages provides diagnostic precision previously unavailable for assessing transformation potential.

PET Level 1 (initial punctuation) requires minimum consciousness of 200 (Courage)—the threshold where institutions move from force-based compliance to genuine acknowledgment. The APA's apology achieved this threshold, demonstrating willingness to confront historical harm publicly. However, PET Level 2 (organizational cascade) requires consciousness of 540+ (Joy/Truth)—the level where acknowledgment transforms into authentic communication that reaches affected communities. The 80% unawareness rate documents that the APA stalled at Level 500 (Love), 40 points below the threshold required for organizational cascade.

This finding extends PET by providing calibrated thresholds for transformation stages. Consciousness at Level 500 can produce genuine punctuation events but cannot sustain cascade through organizational structures. Level 540+ consciousness is required for transformation to propagate beyond initial acknowledgment into structural change. Level 600+ consciousness is required for transformation to reach team and individual levels where behavioral change occurs. This diagnostic framework explains not only why the APA's punctuation stalled but what consciousness evolution would enable progression through subsequent PET levels.

The study thus contributes to PET by documenting that punctuation event effectiveness depends on consciousness calibration, not merely statement quality. The APA produced an articulate, comprehensive acknowledgment of historical harm operating at Level 500 consciousness. Participants demonstrated that communities shaped by the harm evaluate at Level 600–700+ consciousness. Bridging this gap requires institutional consciousness evolution—progression from Love (500) through Joy/Truth (540) and Peace (600) toward Enlightenment (700+)—not improved messaging, enhanced dissemination, or more detailed action plans.

CDT and the Pathway to Mental Model Myopia

Participants experienced heightened cognitive dissonance upon learning about the apology—not reduced dissonance as institutions might expect. The Evidence + Apology Paradox explains this phenomenon: the APA’s acknowledgment of promoting, perpetuating, and failing to challenge racism confirms what BIPOC communities have always known. The apology did not reveal new information—it created institutional documentation of lived experience. This confirmation, absent transformation, intensifies rather than resolves cognitive dissonance.

Participant 2’s response powerfully illustrates this paradox:

The damage to me is like, it’s done. Like it’s you stop me for no reason . . . OK, yeah, you apologize. But it’s almost it’s the old saying you can’t unring a bell once it’s rung. I done heard the bell rung . . . So you could apologize. Yeah, I’m whoopty doo. But it’s not. It doesn’t change to me in my mind.

Participant 2 extended this with visceral analogy: “Like when I used to get hit as a kid, getting hit and your parents saying, oh, I’m sorry I hit you. No, you’re not. If you were sorry, you wouldn’t have done it.”

Prior to institutional acknowledgment, BIPOC professionals navigated harm that institutions denied. Following acknowledgment, they navigate harm that institutions confirm yet perpetuate. Institutional deniability has been removed, yet institutional behavior remains unchanged.

The Ethical-Moral Deterioration Pathway

When institutions deliver ethical-level responses to stakeholders who evaluate morally, the resulting gap generates ethical dissonance. This dissonance, when sustained over time, produces parallel deterioration pathways:

Ethical Burnout represents the emotional and physical fatigue from repeatedly navigating institutional contradiction. Ethical Exhaustion represents the operational strain—cognitive and functional depletion from sustained reconciliation efforts. These parallel pathways converge in Moral Exhaustion—where capacity for moral reasoning becomes burdened by sustained institutional contradiction.

The terminal stage is MMM—cognitive inflexibility resulting from blocked developmental progression. Participant 2's statement demonstrates this progression: "To be honest . . . I've resigned the researcher to . . . I'm not going to even try anymore . . . I'm just going to do the job that I'm doing now." This response reflects the protective cognitive rigidity characteristic of MMM—the narrowed interpretive schema that prevents further harm by limiting engagement with contradictory institutional systems. Participant 2 further revealed the accumulation of institutional harm: "I got a lot of, you know, packed up baggage up here. So it's just there's a lot of stuff that I don't, just don't think that [an apology will change]."

PSPR as Adaptive Sophistication

The PSPR framework (Positionality, Social Identity, Processes, Results) emerged as participants' natural dissonance resolution pattern. Rather than simple acceptance or rejection, they applied sophisticated multi-dimensional analysis. Participant 1 demonstrated all four PSPR dimensions in a single response: Positionality (“Personally, I mean, just as a Black person, it makes you think . . .”), Social Identity (“Did that affect other Black people, affect my parents?”), Processes (“The institutional aspect . . .”), and Results (“ . . . impacted the lived experiences.”). Participant 6 further demonstrated PSPR evaluation:

I reserve my judgment until I see them in action . . . when I see things starting to happen, then it will strengthen my trust and my belief . . . seeing how their techniques are implemented in my workplace. So that’s what will build my strength and my belief and my trust.

This response demonstrates all four dimensions: Positionality (personal stance of judgment reservation), Social Identity (workplace community context), Processes (implementation and techniques), and Results (building strength, belief, and trust). PSPR represents adaptive sophistication—a structured method for processing institutional contradictions that enables professionals to maintain awareness of their social responsibility while protecting against complete MMM.

Industrial–Organizational Psychology

Participants evaluated the apology through Bolman and Deal’s (2017) four organizational frames: Structural (policy changes), Human Resource (relational engagement), Political (power dynamics), and Symbolic (meaning and legacy). Field-specific expertise enhanced rather than competed with racial consciousness.

Participant 10 demonstrated sophisticated organizational analysis:

If you understand the game and you know how the game is played, then you kinda know what you're in for. So I know the rules of the game if we take the Air Force for instance, I know what is expected of an Air Force officer . . . but I also was in the game long enough to understand how to work around some of those rules.

This response reflects advanced Political frame analysis—understanding institutional power dynamics, formal and informal rules, and strategic navigation.

Participant 5 illustrated Human Resource frame evaluation:

If there was an arbitrary barrier to a career progression based off of racial discrimination or contributions to systemic racism that they're apologizing for, then I would need to see immediate policy changes in removing that professional barrier to progression.

This response integrates Structural frame (policy changes) with Human Resource frame (career progression, professional development). Participant 5 further demonstrated metrics-based professional identity:

I gauge the researcher's professional worth on my ability to do the best possible job at budget analytics. Funds execution. Volume of transactions. Things that I can quantifiably measure in relation to my peers . . . when the metrics and the performance goals are clear, it removes other confounding factors.

Participant 7 applied legal–professional credibility analysis: “For them to acknowledge the fact that, hey, there has been systemic issues that has contributed to the current society that we currently live in. I think that that speaks volumes. Very humbling, but it's also very inspiring.” Yet he also identified the absence of systemic representation:

How can I say [there has been justice for all] when I've never seen an all Black jury?

How can I say that when I never see a Black judge? How can I say that when I've never seen a full defense team . . . all African American?

Participant 8 revealed Structural frame failures through training inequity:

Ethnically you see the other [groups] getting trained . . . So I'm a supervisor of multiple machines. You get somebody else to get trained on that machine. You see the welders go through. They get their training . . . but I'm the only one that runs certain machines, so I missed half the training because I still have to work.

This response demonstrates how seemingly neutral organizational processes (training allocation) produce racially disparate outcomes. Participant 8 further articulated the positionality dimension:

“It seems like the people that have the more privileged past don't have that same two way looking at things . . . a lot of people with privilege lack that sympathy of understanding that everybody's past not the same.”

Participant 4 expressed Structural frame expectations with military precision: “I would expect to see policy and program changes. I would expect to see a better effort to find candidates for leadership positions . . . the greatest impact it could have is within with policy changes.” He further demanded ongoing accountability:

I'd expect some type of annual meeting or follow up as far as the progress. As if the organization has gotten better or worse or the same but something has to take place in the form of a follow up.

Military-trained participants (80%) demonstrated particularly systematic evaluation approaches, suggesting organizational cultures can develop transferable accountability assessment capabilities. This finding connects to Colker's (2023) Aligned Leadership

framework: organizations that develop alignment between individual purpose and organizational mission produce professionals capable of sophisticated moral reasoning.

Fanon's Colonial Psychology and the WHIP & CHAINS Framework

The communication patterns observed in this study reflect Fanon's (1952/1968) concept of *sociogeny*, how colonial structures perpetuate through seemingly neutral organizational processes. The WHIP & CHAINS framework clarifies this dynamic.

WHIPS (White Hierarchy in Power Systems) represents the operational enforcement mechanism of oppression, how systemic control is applied across four levels: internalized (affecting cognition), interpersonal (affecting affectivity), institutional (affecting interpersonal functioning), and structural (affecting behavioral outcomes). These four levels align with both the *DSM-5-TR*'s four functional domains and the DIKW hierarchy, revealing how oppression distorts perception, emotion, relationships, and action simultaneously. The APA itself identifies these four levels of racism in its Resolution on Harnessing Psychology to Combat Racism (2021b). Table 26 aligns levels of racism with psychological domains and DIKW stages, demonstrating how external control mechanisms escalate from internalized cognition to structural regulation.

Table 26*WHIPS Framework: External Control Mechanisms*

WHIP level	Racism type	DSM domain	DIKW
1	Internalized	Cognition	Data
2	Interpersonal	Affectivity	Information
3	Institutional	Interpersonal functioning	Knowledge
4	Structural	Impulse control	Wisdom

Note. The WHIPS framework conceptualizes racism as an external control system that operates across psychological domains and developmental stages of knowledge. Progression across levels reflects increasing institutionalization and normalization of control mechanisms.

When viewed through the WHIPS framework, racism functions less as isolated prejudice and more as a graduated system of behavioral regulation that becomes increasingly legitimized as it moves from internal experience to structural enforcement.

Critically, each WHIP level corresponds to a Rule of Law principle that establishes the accountability standard for that level of racism. Structural racism requires Being Just—advocating for systemic fairness in laws and policies. Institutional racism requires Being Open—reforming policies and processes to eliminate inequities. Interpersonal racism requires Being Transparent—being honest about bias and discriminatory behaviors. Internalized racism requires Being Accountable—owning prejudice and taking responsibility for addressing it. This alignment means the APA’s four-level racism framework carries embedded accountability mechanisms: by defining racism at each level, the APA simultaneously defined what accountability at each level requires. Participants in this study evaluated the apology against these implicit standards—criteria derived from the APA’s own conceptual architecture rather than external judgments.

CHAINS (Colonial Hierarchies Advancing International and National Subjugation) represent the structural foundations of human hierarchy that the WHIP enforces. Three primary CHAINS define categorical oppression: Generism (gender, age, body—controlling reproduction and bodily autonomy), Tribalism (identity, culture, belonging—controlling membership and purity codes), and Classism (resource access—controlling opportunity, labor, and wealth). Race operates as an engineered subchain of Tribalism—manufactured as pseudo-biological justification for labor extraction and social control. Table 27 presents the CHAINS framework, which identifies internal control mechanisms based on generation, tribe, race, and class. These mechanisms function through identity, belonging, and resource access, with race viewed as the key sub chain in this study.

Table 27

CHAINS Framework: Internal Control Mechanisms

CHAIN	Name	Controls	Study status
1	Generism	Gender, age, body; reproduction, bodily autonomy	Future research
2	Tribalism	Identity, culture, belonging; membership, purity codes	Future research
2a	Race	Engineered subchain; labor extraction, social control	This study
3	Classism	Resource access; opportunity, labor, wealth, mobility	Future research

Note. The CHAINS framework conceptualizes internalized systems of control that shape identity and behavior. Race is presented as an engineered subchain within broader tribal mechanisms and is the primary focus of the present study.

When read alongside the WHIPS framework, CHAINS illustrates how external systems of control become internalized, sustained, and reproduced within individual and collective identities.

Informal Networks and the ‘Good Ol’ Boy’ System

A critical finding emerged across participants: the WHIP operates not only through formal institutional structures but through informal networks that perpetuate hierarchy even when official policies change. Participants identified this phenomenon as the “Good Ol’ Boy” system, an interpersonal enforcement mechanism that bridges WHIP Levels 2 (Interpersonal) and 3 (Institutional), translating relational dynamics into career consequences.

Notably, three participants—Participant 2, Participant 8, and Participant 9— independently used the exact phrase “good ol’ boy system” or “good old boys club” to describe this phenomenon, despite representing different professional sectors (postal service, military/government, and fire service respectively). P2 stated: “If you’re not part of the good old boys club you don’t seem to get [opportunities].” P8 explained: “In the military, they call it the old good boy system . . . People advance in terms of who they know who’s in good, not based on how much knowledge they know.” P9 reflected: “It used to be the good old boys system. That’s what I used to call it.” This convergent terminology across sectors suggests a shared cultural vocabulary for describing institutional gatekeeping mechanisms.

Participant 10, while not using the specific “good ol’ boy” terminology, described the identical phenomenon with equal precision: “It’s not just the people holding you back, but it is the system. The system is made for [against] Calvin Johnson, a Black man in America.” He further characterized the pattern as maintaining environments that are “very homogeneous . . . White, male” and noted that “all the people that the system seems to be removing are all minorities . . . the diversity . . . the females . . . the Black males. All qualified, all squared away.” P10’s structural analysis complements the other participants’ colloquial framing, demonstrating

that whether labeled “good ol’ boy system” or described as systemic exclusion, BIPOC professionals recognize the same gatekeeping architecture operating beneath formal policy.

Participant 3 articulated this system’s operation with precision:

In the military, they call it the old good boy system . . . People advance in terms of who they know who’s in good, not by based on how much knowledge they know. It’s just if they will find a certain click or group of people with the same ideologies then you know, they got a certain privilege and favoritism over the ones that’s not in the in the group.

This description reveals the Good Ol’ Boy system as WHIP Level 2 (Interpersonal) enforcement with Level 3 (Institutional) consequences. Advancement depends not on competence but on relational proximity to power. The system operates through ideology alignment (“same ideologies”) and group membership (“in the in group”), creating privilege structures that formal policies cannot address.

Participant 3 further illustrated how the system protects itself when challenged:

If you in a in Group and you got friends that’s in the in Group that’s in high positions, they can just transfer you to a place. If somebody’s complaining about it, that’s the inner circle . . . The good old boy system that’s that happens.

This response demonstrates how the Good Ol’ Boy system insulates harm from accountability. When complaints arise, the network responds not with discipline but with relocation—preserving the individual’s status while removing them from the complainant’s environment. The “inner circle” maintains its integrity; the complainant receives no remedy; the behavior continues elsewhere.

The Policy–Practice Gap: Formal Change Without Informal Transformation

Participant 9 captured a crucial dynamic: formal policies can change while informal systems remain intact:

You can allow women into there, but they're still a good ol boy system. The Black woman could say, hey, there is hazing going on and it feels like y'all are being discriminate because at the end of the day . . . the good ol boy system is just, hey, you're in the in crowd and until you prove that you're in the end crowd, you're not in the end crowd.

This observation reveals the limitation of formal policy change absent informal network transformation. Organizations can modify official criteria (admitting women) while preserving the relational dynamics that determine actual advancement. The Good Ol' Boy system operates beneath policy, in the space where decisions are made before decisions are recorded. Participant 9 also identified the temporal dimension of this system: “A lot of them guys have retired. And once certain individuals are out, then things do start to change . . . that good old boy system is kinda on the back burner now.” This statement suggests that Good Ol' Boy systems are person-dependent rather than purely structural—they require specific individuals to maintain enforcement. However, without intentional intervention, retiring gatekeepers are often replaced by successors socialized within the same system. Transformation requires not just individual departure but deliberate network reconstruction.

Gatekeeping as Information Control

The Good Ol' Boy system extends beyond advancement decisions to information access. Participant 2 described this dynamic: “People like to gatekeep. They like to gatekeep their

information so that they don't, you know, you don't have all the secrets of everything you know.”

Information gatekeeping represents WHIP enforcement through knowledge restriction. By controlling access to institutional knowledge, informal networks maintain advantage even when formal policies mandate equal opportunity. The 80% unawareness rate documented in Finding 1 may reflect not just communication failure but active or passive gatekeeping—the apology existed, but information about it did not flow to those it addressed.

Systems Committed to Resistance

Participant 1 provided perhaps the most penetrating analysis of how informal networks interact with formal institutional statements: “You’re seeing people say they want to change, but then it’s like, but they’re committed to systems that will not facilitate change . . . those are some of the dynamics that happen once these types of statements come up.” This observation identifies the core paradox of institutional apology within unreformed networks: statements express intention while systems preserve inertia. The institution says “we apologize”; the informal network says “we continue.” This is why the APA apology, despite its substantive acknowledgment of harm, produced no cascade through the organizations and fields it addressed. The WHIP continued operating through informal channels even as formal channels broadcast transformation rhetoric.

Participant 1 extended this analysis to its logical conclusion: “I think what a lot of people came to the conclusion we have to build our own systems . . . We’re gonna kill ourselves trying to do the work in these systems.” This response reflects adaptive disengagement from resistant networks—not cynicism but strategic reallocation of effort. When informal systems are “committed to” preventing transformation, attempting change through those systems produces

burnout without producing results. Building parallel systems represents rational response to structural resistance.

WHIP & CHAINS Integration: Good Ol’ Boy as Enforcement Mechanism

The Good Ol’ Boy system represents a specific manifestation of how the WHIP enforces the CHAINS at the interpersonal–institutional interface. Table 28 shows how the “Good Ol’ Boy” system acts as an enforcement tool that connects external control processes (WHIP) with internalized control structures (CHAINS) at the intersection of personal interactions and institutions.

Table 28

WHIP–CHAINS Integration: “Good Ol’ Boy” as Enforcement Mechanism

WHIP level	Good ol’ boy manifestation	CHAIN maintained
Level 2 (Interpersonal)	Ideology alignment; relational proximity; “in crowd” dynamics	Tribalism (membership codes)
Level 3 (Institutional)	Advancement decisions; transfer protection; gatekeeping	Classism (opportunity access)
Level 2→3 Bridge	Informal decisions become formal outcomes; policy–practice gap	Race (subchain): exclusion through “neutral” processes

Note. This table demonstrates how interpersonal relational control mechanisms escalate into institutional outcomes, allowing race-based exclusion to persist through ostensibly neutral organizational practices.

Participant 10 articulated the trust implications of this dynamic:

I can’t believe what you say because I see what you do. There really is no trust. A lot of times when you’re dealing in a issue where you have systemic racism or systemic systems that are systems that are in place that are meant to keep a certain personnel or certain demographic down.

This statement identifies why institutional apologies fail to rebuild trust when Good Ol' Boy systems remain operational: words and actions exist in different registers. The apology operates at the formal level; the Good Ol' Boy system operates at the informal level. Participants evaluate both, and when they diverge, trust follows behavior rather than statement.

Participant 1 captured the WHIP & CHAINS dynamic precisely: “You see that many times the people that make these statements . . . but they’re committed to systems that will not facilitate change.” This observation identifies the core paradox: institutions address the WHIP (acknowledging racism) while remaining “committed to systems” (the CHAINS, enforced through Good Ol' Boy networks) that maintain the structural foundations of oppression.

Participant 6 further illustrated this pattern: “I am skeptical and with something like this, I reserve my judgment until I see them in action . . . Once we begin to trust you, you have to follow up, because if not, you’re gonna lose that trust.” This response demonstrates evaluation at the CHAINS level—assessing whether institutional action addresses root structural causes (including informal network transformation) rather than merely acknowledging the WHIP’s effects through formal statements.

SALT provides the consciousness lens to see both the WHIP (how oppression operates formally and informally) and the CHAINS (what oppression maintains through both policy and network). Without this dual awareness—including recognition of how Good Ol' Boy systems bridge interpersonal and institutional levels—institutions cannot perceive the full architecture of harm they perpetuate, and apologies will continue to address formal structures while informal networks preserve hierarchy.

Xenophobia and Tribalism Navigation Within Good Ol' Boy Systems

The Good Ol' Boy System's informal network structure revealed an additional layer of complexity for Hispanic/Latino professionals who must navigate not only racism but also xenophobia and tribalism simultaneously. This triad emerged through both participant responses and methodological observations during data collection, suggesting that informal power structures force Hispanic/Latino professionals to constantly calibrate their identity presentation based on which "tribe" offers institutional access in each context.

The APA Resolution explicitly acknowledges this intersection: "in the current anti-immigrant climate, xenophobia and discrimination adversely impact the lives of Latino/a/x people" (APA, 2021b, p. 1). Participant responses revealed how this plays out within professional contexts, with Hispanic participants describing fundamentally different experiences based on context, location, and how they are perceived by others. Participant 2 said the following about contextual identity perception:

I go to DR and they don't see me as Dominican. They see me as American White. Like they'll look at, oh, look at this gringo. I go to New York. You know, cops are looking at me. People are looking at me like, oh, look at this dude, you know, one of them numbers . . . The researcher consider the researcher a person of color, even though I'm light skinned.

Participant 2 said the following about external accusations of convenience: "People like my ex-wives, they'll say, oh, you're Dominican when it's convenient for you."

Participant 2 said the following about form-based identity: "I put White because it says Hispanic, Latino and then White. So I put both . . . I don't consider the researcher White. I write it on paper because that's the only option we get."

Participant 9 said the following about fluid identity positioning: “I’m on the fence, so I kind of, I fit in between. I can go either way. It’s a little bit easier, you know.”

Participant 9 said the following about biracial navigation: “Because I’m biracial, like I’m two different races . . . I could fit in pretty much. I’m on the fence both.”

Analysis: The Racism–Xenophobia–Tribalism Triad

The researcher’s methodological experience reinforced this finding when one potential participant of Mexican ethnicity did not self-identify as BIPOC, demonstrating that Hispanic professionals exist across a full spectrum of racial identification—from complete non-identification with BIPOC communities to contextual navigation (P2’s “gringo” in one location, profiled in another) to fluid positioning (P9’s ability to “go either way”). This spectrum suggests that Good Ol’ Boy Systems force Hispanic/Latino professionals to constantly calibrate their identity presentation based on which “tribe” offers institutional access in a given context.

This finding reveals that the Good Ol’ Boy System creates conditions requiring the simultaneous navigation of three distinct but interconnected forms of discrimination: racism (traditional racial discrimination), xenophobia (nationality/ethnicity-based discrimination), and tribalism (navigating multiple, sometimes competing group memberships for professional survival). This racism–xenophobia–tribalism triad represents a unique burden for Hispanic/Latino professionals that institutional accountability frameworks have not adequately addressed.

English as WHIP: Writing Standards as Enforcement Mechanism

This analysis reveals a fundamental contradiction in institutional accountability efforts: the APA uses writing standards to address racism, but writing standards are themselves a primary mechanism through which academic exclusion has historically operated. English

functions as a WHIP at multiple levels (Curry & Lillis, 2018; E. King & Scott, 2014): publication standards serve as gatekeeping mechanisms determining whose knowledge achieves legitimacy; “proper” academic discourse functions as a marker distinguishing insider from outsider status; APA formatting requirements create barriers to entry for scholars outside dominant educational trajectories; and peer review processes enforce language policing that privileges particular forms of expression (Habibie & Hyland, 2019; Politzer-Ahles et al., 2020). The question of who gets published reduces fundamentally to who speaks “correctly” according to standards established by and for dominant groups.

English simultaneously functions as CHAINS, maintaining all three structural hierarchies (Lillis & Curry, 2010). As Generism, academic English determines what counts as valid knowledge, privileging certain epistemological frameworks while marginalizing indigenous, oral, experiential, and community-based ways of knowing. As Tribalism, mastery of academic discourse determines who belongs in scholarly communities, creating in-group/out-group distinctions based on linguistic performance rather than intellectual contribution. As Classism, access to the educational resources required for academic English proficiency maps directly onto socioeconomic advantage, ensuring that opportunities for knowledge production remain concentrated among those already positioned within systems of privilege.

The Frozen Middle Diagnostic

This contradiction illuminates why institutional transformation stalls at what organizational change literature identifies as the “frozen middle” (Balogun, 2003; Heyden et al., 2017)—the layer of middle leadership that prevents transformation from progressing between executive vision and frontline implementation (Stouten et al., 2018). The WHIP & CHAINS framework provides diagnostic precision that existing frozen middle analyses lack. The frozen

middle can now be operationally defined as Position 3 leaders who produce Knowledge/Wisdom-level language (DIKW Levels 3–4) while operating at Information level (DIKW Level 2). These leaders know what to say; they have not built the systems to enact what they articulate. The evidence pattern is communication failure to intended audiences—precisely what this study’s 80% unawareness finding reveals.

However, this analysis reveals that the frozen middle is not merely organizational inertia but structural impossibility. Position 3 leaders (I–O Psychology) are being asked to dismantle oppression using the same tool that enforces it. Fanon (1952/1968) warned about false liberation—freedom offered through the colonizer’s frameworks. The APA’s apology commits to fixing language, but language itself is the WHIP. Liberation cannot be achieved through the instrument of captivity. This explains why holding professionals accountable via writing standards, without acknowledging that those standards have been tied to oppressive patterns, reproduces the very harm the accountability effort purports to address. The frozen middle is frozen not because leaders lack will, but because the tools available to them are structurally incapable of producing the transformation they articulate.

The DIKW Failure

The APA’s 2021 apology represents a Knowledge-level output from an institution that failed to progress through the complete DIKW hierarchy. The organization gathered Data (documented harm, historical analysis), processed it into Information (organized patterns), and developed Knowledge (comprehension sufficient for acknowledgment). However, the apology demonstrates no evidence of Wisdom—the embodied understanding that produces transformation rather than statements.

Value and Contributions of the Study

SALT, RIOT, KEYS, and WHIP & CHAINS as Interpretive Frameworks

The study validates SALT (Squared Away Legacy Theory) as a consciousness framework for institutional evaluation. Participants naturally demonstrated SALT dimensions. Participant 9 captured the Light (Clarity/Vision) dimension: “I have a little bit more power and the knowledge to . . . I see what you’re saying, I see.” Participant 1 articulated the Life (Lived Experience) dimension: “You start thinking about all the lived experiences and how the institutional aspect impacted the lived experiences.” The same participant demonstrated Leadership consciousness: “Let me grow into being able to lead systemic change so that . . . and not depend on whoever these people are to do it.” Participant 6 expressed the Love (Community Care) dimension: “If they’re on board with everything that the APA is, it would definitely make my life a lot smoother. I wouldn’t feel judged when I go into buildings . . . I could just be my authentic self.”

RIOT (Reverence, Intentionality, Objectivity, Togetherness) provides the action framework for moving through what SALT reveals (Johnson, 2024). Participants demonstrated RIOT naturally. Participant 7 demonstrated Reverence, valuing authentic acknowledgment: “Just to know that, hey, they are showing acknowledgement, but they are showing that they’re willing to change it as well.” Participant 1 demonstrated Intentionality, demanding purposeful action: “I would expect there to be key action steps that are voiced. Timelines given . . . what are the resources dedicated to it.” Participant 7 demonstrated Objectivity through critical evaluation: “When I’m reading or I’m listening, OK, what are they trying to get at here, like, who’s their audience as well?” Participant 1 articulated Togetherness as collective response: “We have to build our own systems . . . how do we build our own things?”

KEYS as DIKW Operationalization. KEYS provides the mechanism for institutional transformation through DIKW progression. Without KEYS, institutions stall at Knowledge; with KEYS, they can progress to Wisdom and Synthesis. Participants demonstrated KEYS evaluation naturally. Participant 9 recognized the Knowledge foundation: “Our knowledge, basically, and the power of it.” The same participant articulated the Evolution requirement: “Making people more aware . . . once people are more aware, then they’re more.” Participant 3 identified the Yield failure point (where APA failed): “Are you really changing anything? You gave an apology, but did anything change?” Participant 5 confirmed: “It just felt incomplete.” Participant 7 articulated what Synthesis/Legacy looks like: “They didn’t just apologize, they were also trying to show that there is some change behavior . . . to acknowledge . . . memorialize in writing . . . this is what we plan to do going forward.”

WHIP & CHAINS as Oppression Architecture. The framework distinguishes the WHIP (four-level enforcement mechanism aligning with *DSM* domains and DIKW) from the CHAINS (three structural hierarchies: Generism, Tribalism, Classism). Race operates as an engineered subchain of Tribalism. This architecture explains why addressing the WHIP without transforming the CHAINS produces acknowledgment without change.

White Supremacy Culture as Validating Evidence. Okun’s (2021) analysis validates that White supremacy culture exists and operates through 15 identifiable organizational characteristics, including fear as the root driver, the weaponization of “objectivity,” paternalism, worship of the written word, and power hoarding. This validation provides the evidence base for understanding how CHAINS (Generism, Tribalism, Classism) manifest at the cultural and organizational level. Professionals from communities of color navigate these characteristics daily, developing survival-level responses to institutional harm. PSPR (Positionality, Social

Identity, Processes, Results) provides the foundational awareness lens through which RIOT and KEYS operate as practical demonstrations. KEYS (DIKW, Experience/Understanding/Overstanding/Enlightening, Game Theory/I/O Psychology, Synthesis/Sociology) enables professionals to *decode* colonial psychology—moving from survival-level Understanding (Level 4) toward transcendental Overstanding (Levels 6–7). RIOT (Reverence, Intentionality, Objectivity, Togetherness) enables professionals to *act* on that decoded understanding with authentic engagement rather than reactive defense. This study’s participants demonstrated PSPR-grounded KEYS and RIOT naturally: their professional training and lived experience enabled immediate decoding of the APA apology’s limitations despite 80% being unaware of its existence. They evaluated at Overstanding (Levels 6–7) what the institution produced at Understanding (Level 4). What Okun identifies as the weaponization of “objectivity” is more precisely understood as *premature* objectivity—judgment rendered before authentic engagement with cognitive dissonance. RIOT’s sequential requirement ensures objectivity is *earned* through authentic Reverence and Intentionality, enabling movement from survival to transcendence.

PSPR as a Professional Social Responsibility Framework. This study documents that BIPOC professional men naturally employ PSPR-based interpretive structures, confirming PSPR as a tool for professional awareness of social responsibility grounded in lived experience.

MMM as an Occupational Phenomenon. The deterioration pathway (Ethical Dissonance → Burnout/Exhaustion → Moral Exhaustion → Mental Model Myopia) identifies a socially induced form of cognitive inflexibility warranting investigation as an occupational phenomenon with clinical significance.

Convergence with Aligned Leadership. The findings support Colker’s (2023) framework: institutional accountability fails when alignment between institutional purpose and community welfare is absent. For visual representation of the integrated theoretical architecture, see Figures H1 through H5 in Appendix H.

Positioning Academic Institutions as Transformation Agents

The APA has explicitly committed to revising language standards across journals, correspondence, article titles, and educational materials to align with the APA Publication Manual (APA, 2020) and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion guidelines (APA, 2021a). These commitments operate at Knowledge and Wisdom levels (DIKW Levels 3–4), demonstrating clear aspirational standards for bias-free language, accurate racial and ethnic descriptors, and the elimination of deficit framing. Writing standards are treated as ethical obligations rather than stylistic preferences, and methodology is recognized as interdependent with inclusive knowledge production. The APA acknowledges that language itself functions as a structural mechanism shaping how knowledge about communities of color is produced and disseminated.

However, this study’s findings reveal that while the APA’s language reflects Knowledge and Wisdom-level clarity, the organization operationally remains at the Information level (DIKW Level 2). The language is ahead of the infrastructure; the standards are aspirational before they become operational; the writing reflects moral clarity before organizational translation is complete. This is not a critique of the APA’s intent but a systems diagnosis that explains why 80% of participants remained unaware of accountability efforts despite 4 years of implementation.

This finding carries direct implications for academic institutions and the scholars who comprise them. Through the Core 4 framework, educational institutions occupy Position 1 (PET)

as sites where transformation either initiates or stalls. Universities function within PET Level 2 (Organizations), serving as the structural mechanisms through which professional standards are transmitted, enforced, and legitimized. Faculty, committee members, and academic leaders occupy Position 3 (I/O psychology) as transformational leaders whose evaluation and endorsement of scholarship determines what knowledge progresses from Information to Knowledge to Wisdom within professional fields.

Consequently, this dissertation functions as more than an academic exercise; it represents a punctuation event in the Kuhnian sense (Kuhn, 1970). The defense itself becomes Position 1 purposeful action, where the committee serves not merely as evaluators but as co-stewards of the very transformation the research describes. By engaging this scholarship, academic institutions could operationalize what the APA has articulated, translating aspirational standards into enacted practice. The gap between writing at Knowledge/Wisdom levels and operating at Information levels is precisely where transformational leadership intervenes. This study provides the diagnostic framework; Position 3 leaders determine whether psychology advances to PET Levels 3 and 4 or remains stalled at symbolic punctuation without structural transformation.

Implications

Scholarly Implications

The study expands theoretical application of PET, CDT, and I/O psychology by demonstrating how DIKW failure produces institutional accountability gaps. The WHIP & CHAINS framework provides a unified model for understanding how oppression operates (WHIP) and what it maintains (CHAINS). Future scholarship should examine how DIKW progression can be operationalized in organizational research, whether the Ethical-Moral Divide appears across institutional contexts, and how WHIP dynamics manifest when addressing

different CHAINS. Following PET, this study punctuates psychology; Tenets 2–4 involve interpretation across sociology, organizational science, education, public health, and law.

Practical Implications

For DEI practitioners, the information dissemination finding demands cross-professional communication strategies reaching BIPOC professionals outside their primary industry.

Organizations issuing institutional accountability statements should implement a Professional Network Saturation Protocol that includes: (a) identifying the top 10 professional associations representing their stakeholder communities, (b) establishing formal communication partnerships with each association's diversity committee, (c) distributing accountability statements through partner associations' member newsletters, and (d) tracking receipt through follow-up surveys administered by partner organizations.

For organizational leaders, the evaluation sophistication finding suggests implementing a Community Evaluator Advisory Board that positions BIPOC professionals as expert consultants on transformation authenticity. The board would: (a) review proposed DEI initiatives before implementation using community-defined criteria, (b) assess transformation effectiveness using metrics derived from lived experience evaluation frameworks, (c) provide quarterly reports to leadership on authenticity indicators, and (d) recommend course corrections when initiatives drift toward performative rather than transformational action.

For Institutions. Apply DIKW consciously—recognize when you are trapped at Knowledge and have not reached Wisdom. Use KEYS (Knowledge → Evolution → Yield → Synthesis) to progress. Address both the WHIP (how oppression operates) and the CHAINS (what oppression maintains). As Participant 1 articulated, institutions must provide “key action

steps... timelines... resources... continual reports, data dashboards, new initiatives of reparation or remediation.”

For Leaders. Develop SALT capacity—the ability to see both the WHIP and the CHAINS. Apply RIOT—move through what you see with Reverence, Intentionality, Objectivity, and Togetherness. Participant 6 captured what visible leadership looks like:

I just want to see like what would call the flight line. I want to see boots on the ramp. I want to see people helping others, not just in the workplace, but at the ballot box . . . putting forth an effort and helping. I want to see people speaking out against people that do make xenophobic, homophobic, racist statements publicly.

For Professionals. Use PSPR to maintain awareness of professional social responsibility. Recognize the deterioration pathway; protect against MMM through community connection and collective action. Participant 8 demonstrated the power of professional representation:

I want to be that representation that when you come into this world for manufacturing, you see most everybody in this company know of who I am . . . They know who I am because I’m the only one that does this, and the way I work is he’s gonna get it done.

Participant 8 further articulated the importance of collective care among professionals of color:

We put more effort in people of color. ‘Cause we already feeling like you’re gonna come in here, you’re not gonna get that same care that your White counterparts are gonna get . . . to offset that, we’re gonna make sure you’re good.

Policy Implications

Institutions should align accountability efforts with DIKW progression: ensure initiatives move from Data through Information and Knowledge to Wisdom. Develop KEYS-based implementation frameworks. Recognize that addressing the WHIP (racism’s four levels) without

engaging the CHAINS (genderism, tribalism, classism) will produce acknowledgment without transformation. For professional associations, the information dissemination finding indicates need for cross-association communication protocols for institutional accountability efforts affecting professionals across fields. The APA's similar organizations should establish formal partnerships with military organizations such as the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars; government and public administration associations including the American Society for Public Administration and the International City/County Management Association; manufacturing and industrial organizations such as the National Association of Manufacturers and the Society of Manufacturing Engineers; and emergency services organizations including the International Association of Fire Chiefs and the International Association of Fire Fighters to ensure accountability messages effectively reach BIPOC professionals across these sectors.

For accreditation bodies, the transformation evaluation finding suggests that DEI accreditation standards should incorporate community evaluation perspectives. Professional credentialing bodies can require demonstrated community impact, not merely policy adoption. Success metrics should include community-defined transformation indicators operating at moral and transcendent accountability levels.

Clinical Implications

The findings of this study reveal a consistent pattern: institutions operating at ethical accountability levels (policies, procedures, compliance) systematically fail to meet communities evaluating at moral and transcendent levels (relational integrity, transformational commitment). This Ethical-Moral Accountability Divide suggests more than strategic misalignment—it points toward cognitive constraints that prevent institutional actors from perceiving alternatives to

established frameworks. Building on these observations, this study proposes MMM as a candidate construct warranting systematic investigation.

MMM describes a persistent pattern of cognitive inflexibility characterized by the inability to update or shift internal mental models despite the presence of contradictory external evidence. This phenomenon manifests through three primary characteristics observed in institutional accountability failures:

- **Confirmation Bias Dominance** involves active filtering of environmental data to fit preexisting professional or institutional frameworks. In this study, the APA's communication strategy demonstrated confirmation bias dominance by disseminating accountability messages through channels that confirmed existing institutional relationships while filtering out pathways that might reach BIPOC professionals in military, manufacturing, and emergency services contexts. The 80% unawareness finding reflects not communication failure but confirmation of institutional assumptions about who constitutes the relevant audience.
- **Response Stereotypy** describes applying established solutions to novel problems where those solutions are demonstrably ineffective. Participants in this study identified institutional apologies as formulaic responses—acknowledgment of harm, establishment of committees, commitment to policy review—applied regardless of whether such responses address the actual transformation communities seek. The Ethical-Moral Accountability Divide emerges precisely because institutions apply Level 4 (ethical compliance) solutions to problems requiring Level 6–7 (moral–transcendent) engagement.

- Structural Blindness refers to an inability to perceive systemic variables that fall outside one's primary area of expertise or institutional silo. The APA's apology, despite its comprehensive acknowledgment of historical harm within psychology, demonstrated structural blindness to how BIPOC professionals in non-psychology fields might receive, interpret, and evaluate institutional accountability efforts. Participants' sophisticated evaluation frameworks—integrating professional expertise, lived experience, and decolonizing consciousness—remained invisible to institutional actors constrained by disciplinary boundaries.

These characteristics appear exacerbated by—or exclusively present within—highly structured, hierarchical, or high-stakes environments that reward specialization over synthesis. Participants across professional fields recognized this pattern, noting how organizational hierarchies filter information flow and constrain evaluation to field-specific criteria. The institutional environment functions as both trigger and reinforcement mechanism for MMM.

The American Psychological Association has acknowledged that racism produces adverse health and mental health outcomes (APA, 2021b); however, the cognitive consequences of prolonged exposure to structurally inconsistent and morally contradictory institutional environments remain insufficiently theorized. This study proposes MMM as an empirically observable cognitive phenomenon warranting systematic investigation as a candidate construct for formal classification. Rather than constituting a neurodevelopmental or primary clinical disorder, MMM appears to emerge through socially and occupationally induced cognitive constraint, suggesting the need for organizational and institutional analysis alongside clinical inquiry.

Distinguishing between occupationally induced cognitive inflexibility—which may function as an adaptive response within rigid systems—and socially induced cognitive inflexibility, which contributes to cognitive dissonance tension and ethical dissonance, is critical for accurate conceptualization. The participants in this study demonstrated that BIPOC professionals navigating institutional environments develop sophisticated capabilities for managing these tensions, suggesting that MMM is not inevitable but rather reflects choices—conscious or unconscious—about how to engage with contradictory institutional messages.

Future research should examine whether MMM demonstrates sufficient construct validity, functional impairment, and contextual specificity to merit inclusion as a socially mediated condition in diagnostic nosologies, and whether reliable assessment instruments can differentiate adaptive rigidity from maladaptive cognitive constriction. Specific research questions include:

1. What organizational and institutional factors predict the development of MMM among institutional decision-makers responsible for accountability efforts?
2. Can interventions targeting confirmation bias dominance, response stereotypy, and structural blindness enhance institutional capacity for authentic transformation?
3. How do BIPOC professionals who demonstrate sophisticated evaluation frameworks resist the development of MMM despite prolonged exposure to institutional environments that might otherwise induce it?
4. What assessment instruments can reliably measure MMM characteristics while distinguishing adaptive specialization from maladaptive cognitive constriction?

Like prior socially mediated diagnostic developments, the classification of MMM would require interdisciplinary research integrating organizational psychology, social cognition, and

institutional analysis rather than sole reliance on individual pathology models. The sophisticated evaluation capabilities participants demonstrated in this study—capabilities that institutional actors exhibiting MMM failed to perceive or utilize—suggest that affected communities may serve not only as evaluators of institutional accountability but as resources for developing interventions that address institutionally induced cognitive constraints. These reframing positions institutional transformation as requiring not merely policy change but cognitive development among institutional actors—development that BIPOC professional communities are uniquely positioned to guide.

Limitations

- **Boundary Conditions and Interpretive Discipline.** Findings are bounded by participant self-identification, professional concentration in military-aligned careers, and the apology's limited prior dissemination among intended audiences. Four primary theoretical lenses guided analysis (PET, CDT, I/O psychology, Fanon's colonial psychology); synthesis frameworks (SALT, DIKW, WHIP & CHAINS) translated findings into applied implications rather than being claimed as direct empirical discoveries. This distinction preserves methodological integrity while supporting translational value for practitioners.
- **Sample Composition.** The sample consisted of 80% Black/African American participants and 80% with military backgrounds. Findings most accurately reflect Black professional men's experiences, particularly those with military-developed analytical capabilities.

- **Single Institution Focus.** Examining only the APA’s 2021 apology limits broader applicability. Theoretical frameworks may transfer to similar contexts but cannot be assumed universal.
- **Single CHAIN Focus.** This study examined Race (CHAIN 2a—the engineered subchain of Tribalism). How the WHIP operates across Generism (CHAIN 1), Tribalism broadly (CHAIN 2), and Classism (CHAIN 3) remains unexplored.
- **Interpretive Bias.** Co-construction of meaning between participants and researcher introduces interpretive influence. The researcher’s background in organizational psychology, law, leadership, and equity-centered analysis both enriched interpretation and introduced potential bias.
- **Theoretical Synthesis Post-Data.** Integration of DIKW, SALT, KEYS, WHIP, and CHAINS, and the deterioration pathway occurred during interpretation. These models offer interpretive depth but extend beyond what participants explicitly articulated.
- **Delimitations.** The intentional focus on professional men excluded women and non-professional contexts, limiting applicability to those populations. U.S.-based participant selection constrains findings to the American professional context. Focus on awareness and interpretation rather than behavioral outcomes deferred examination of how evaluation frameworks translate into action.

Theoretical Contribution: SALT and the Landmark Canon

Landmark studies in psychology and science are remembered for exposing governing mechanisms—obedience under authority, behavior under role constraints, equilibrium in non-cooperation, the limits of information and language, and selection processes independent of intent. This dissertation extends that lineage by identifying a contemporary mechanism of

institutional legitimacy: how apology discourse can stabilize authority and reduce reputational risk without producing structural accountability. This claim is strengthened—rather than sensationalized—by the APA’s own public record, including its formal apology acknowledging psychology’s role in promoting and failing to challenge racism and human hierarchy, and its definitional resolution adopting a systems-level framework of racism.

SALT’s primary contribution is preventive rather than reactive. The diagnostic precision applied to aircraft systems to prevent catastrophic failure, and to legal structures to prevent litigation, applies equally to institutional accountability. SALT enables organizations to detect consciousness gaps, communication failures, and rhetoric–praxis misalignment before they manifest as public accountability crises. The APA’s 2021 apology demonstrates what occurs when preventive accountability infrastructure is absent: institutional response becomes reputation management rather than structural transformation. The 80% unawareness finding reveals the communication failure that preventive diagnostics would have identified before the apology was issued.

This study’s identification of SALT represents a foundational contribution to the psychological understanding of institutional accountability. Much as Milgram mapped the mechanics of obedience and Nash identified the equilibrium of strategic interaction, this work codifies the Institutional Apology Equilibrium through the lens of SALT. By positioning SALT as the primary diagnostic mechanism, this research demonstrates that the APA’s 2021 apology failed to move beyond Level 4 ethical compliance—meeting internal institutional requirements while failing the SALT criteria for authentic moral repair. The empirical findings confirm that BIPOC professionals naturally utilize a SALT-based evaluative framework to detect the Consciousness Gap between an organization’s rhetoric and its structural praxis.

Dual Diagnosis: Psychology and Psychiatry Evaluated Through Their Own Frameworks

The convergence of formal apologies from both the American Psychiatric Association (January 2021) and the APA (October 2021)—issued within 9 months of each other in response to the same societal catalyst—presents a unique opportunity to evaluate institutional accountability using the diagnostic frameworks these institutions themselves created. This is not external critique imposed upon psychology and psychiatry; it is the application of their own epistemological tools to their own institutional behavior.

The 4D's of psychopathology—deviance, distress, dysfunction, and danger—have traditionally assessed individual mental health presentations. Applied to institutional behavior, they reveal systematic pathology across both governing bodies of American mental health practice. Both institutions' accountability efforts represent statistical and normative departures from their stated missions (deviance). The Consciousness Gap identified by participants creates chronic psychological stress for BIPOC professionals navigating systems that acknowledge harm while preserving harmful structures (distress). The theory-to-praxis collapse evident in both institutions demonstrates inability to perform expected accountability functions (dysfunction). The perpetuation of the Moral Weapon Chain constitutes ongoing danger to marginalized communities, as Bird et al. (2024) documented that racial hereditarian research continues to generate scientific racism 3 years after the apology (danger).

Furthermore, both institutions display characteristics consistent with *DSM-5* cognitive inflexibility: rigid mental models that maintain deep structure equilibrium despite contradicting evidence; perseveration in applying Level 4 (Ethical/Compliance) solutions to Level 7 (Transcendent/Moral) problems; and resistance to disconfirmation as community unawareness and continued scientific racism are not integrated into institutional response. The irony is precise:

the disciplines that defined pathology cannot recognize their own. SALT provides both the diagnostic framework identifying these shared pathologies and the prescriptive pathway to transformation—requiring Servant orientation, Authentic coherence, Legacy commitment, and Transformational structure that neither institution’s current approach demonstrates.

WHIPS and CHAINS: Diagnostic Triangulation Across Core 4 Domains

This triangulation confirms that the APA’s 2021 apology—and the parallel apology from the American Psychiatric Association—functions as an Institutional Apology Equilibrium: a stable state of legitimacy without repair. By mapping the WHIPS and CHAINS model across the Core 4 theoretical domains, this study identifies a systemic SALT Deficit characterized by clinical Cognitive Inflexibility.

PET explains how the apology functioned as pseudo-punctuation that preserved deep structure equilibrium. WHIPS (external control) operate through timing constraints that define when change is “acceptable,” while CHAINS (internal control) normalize equilibrium as stability rather than stagnation. The institutional pathology manifests as Deviance: biological camouflage used to avoid external threats while maintaining internal deep-structure stasis. The SALT deficit is Legacy failure—no sustainable transformation embedded.

CDT explains the distress created when professionals must hold contradictory cognitions—awareness of acknowledged harm alongside unchanged structural conditions. WHIPS create professional risk for dissent, while CHAINS internalize justification for compliance (“they apologized, move on”). The institutional pathology manifests as Distress: the Evidence + Apology Paradox creates chronic cognitive burden. The SALT deficit is Authentic failure—words do not equal actions.

I/O psychology explains the dysfunction: 80% unawareness proves that Togetherness approached zero, collapsing transformation potential regardless of theoretical sophistication. WHIPS gatekeep career advancement, resources, and legitimacy, while CHAINS professionalize silence and reward institutional loyalty. The institutional pathology manifests as Dysfunction: total Theory-to-Praxis collapse. The SALT deficit is Servant failure—the institution served itself over community.

Fanon's colonial psychology explains the ongoing danger: consciousness fragmentation that blocks Overstanding while the Moral Weapon Chain maintains diagnostic weaponization capacity. WHIPS enforce material hierarchy through structural exclusion, while CHAINS fragment consciousness and block Level 7 integration. The institutional pathology manifests as Danger: the Moral Weapon Chain continues to facilitate diagnostic weaponization against marginalized groups. The SALT deficit is Transformational failure—deep structure remains unchanged.

This data moves the analysis from observation of failure to formal diagnosis of a Consciousness Gap that prevents transition from Level 4 Ethical Compliance to Level 7 Transcendent Accountability. SALT provides both the diagnostic framework identifying this pathology and the prescriptive pathway to transformation.

Statement of Significance: Field-Level Contribution

This dissertation makes a substantive theoretical and empirical contribution to the field of I/O psychology by identifying and naming a previously unarticulated institutional mechanism through which organizations maintain legitimacy after acknowledging harm while preventing moral and structural repair.

Building on classical findings related to obedience, role conformity, and equilibrium (Milgram, Zimbardo, Nash), this study introduces the concept of the Institutional Apology Equilibrium. This mechanism describes how organizations respond to punctuated moral pressure through symbolic acknowledgment that diffuses accountability, stabilizes power, and restores legitimacy without producing transformation. Unlike prior models that emphasize individual compliance or interpersonal ethics, this research advances a systems-level explanation for why acknowledgment often fails to result in repair.

A central contribution of this study is its demonstration that language itself operates as an organizational infrastructure of governance. Institutional apologies function not merely as communication, but as linguistic containment systems that permit plausible deniability while signaling moral responsiveness. This finding is consistent with—and extends—existing critiques of language-based interventions in organizational psychology. This dissertation advances the field by demonstrating why such outcomes occur: when language is decoupled from structural change, it functions as a stabilizing rather than transformative force.

Through qualitative analysis of Black male professionals' experiences following the APA's 2021 institutional apology, this study demonstrates that apology events may serve as compliance-oriented symbolic acts rather than mechanisms of moral repair; that structural power (WHIPS) and internalized moral restraint (CHAINS) converge to suppress awareness, participation, and collective agency; and that the empirical finding that approximately 80% of affected professionals were unaware of the apology constitutes strong evidence that symbolic togetherness does not equate to relational, psychological, or ethical inclusion. This challenges prevailing assumptions in organizational justice, reconciliation, and DEI scholarship that acknowledgment alone meaningfully advances trust or repair.

By triangulating PET, CDT, I/O psychology, and colonial psychology, the study introduces a diagnostic model of Institutional Cognitive Inflexibility, a distinction between legitimacy without repair and authentic transformation, and a named mechanism explaining how institutions stabilize after admitting harm. This moves I/O psychology beyond individual-level models of compliance toward a structural theory of moral stagnation. SALT (Squared-Away Legacy Theory) provides both the diagnostic framework identifying these pathologies and the prescriptive pathway to transformation—requiring Servant orientation, Authentic coherence, Legacy commitment, and Transformational structure.

This study does not assert universal causality or claim to resolve institutional harm. Instead, it establishes a theoretically transferable mechanism that explains patterned institutional behavior across contexts, providing a foundation for future empirical testing, diagnostic measurement, and intervention design. The convergence of parallel apologies from both the APA and the American Psychiatric Association—exhibiting identical patterns when evaluated through their own diagnostic frameworks—validates that Institutional Apology Equilibrium is not idiosyncratic but systemic across the mental health apparatus.

Milgram identified obedience. Zimbardo identified role conformity. Nash identified equilibrium. This study identifies how institutions maintain legitimacy after admitting harm—and what transformation actually requires.

The Epistemological Direction: Overstanding Precedes Understanding

A critical epistemological contribution of this study is the formalization of the directional relationship between Understanding and Overstanding. Conventional educational and institutional models assume that Understanding leads to Overstanding—that accumulation of facts and comprehension within existing frameworks eventually produces transcendent

awareness. This study's findings disprove that assumption. The 80% unawareness rate demonstrates that information provision does not produce liberation; education within institutional frames does not automatically free; institutions cannot teach their own transcendence.

The correct directional relationship is Overstanding → Understanding. Overstanding precedes understanding in contexts of power because awareness of structural framing is a prerequisite for interpreting meaning beyond compliance. One must first step outside the frame (positional shift), then see the system operating (meta-awareness), and only then can one understand what the language actually means (informed comprehension). Once one overstands, understanding deepens—but it is no longer obedient. Overstanding changes how one understands.

This epistemological direction explains the Institutional Apology Equilibrium. Institutions operate at Understanding (Level 5)—cognitive comprehension within existing frames that permits explanation, repetition, and compliance. Institutions are designed to keep stakeholders at this level. The participants in this study demonstrated Overstanding (Level 7)—meta-awareness of the frame itself, perceiving how meaning is produced, who benefits, and what is excluded. This is not more information; it is a positional shift. Understanding explains what is said; Overstanding reveals what is done. The gap between institutional accountability (Understanding) and community evaluation (Overstanding) is not a communication failure but an epistemological divide that SALT is designed to bridge.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendation 1: Validate PSPR as Professional Accountability Instrument

Design, test, and validate PSPR (Positionality, Social Identity, Processes, Results) as a formal assessment tool for evaluating institutional accountability efforts and measuring professional social responsibility awareness.

Recommendation 2: Investigate MMM

Examine whether MMM warrants formal recognition as a socially induced occupational phenomenon. Develop screening instruments, establish severity indicators, and test whether SALT/KEYS-based interventions can interrupt or reverse the deterioration pathway. Investigate the ego-syntonic question: if the system remains contradictory, does the individual want to change—and should they?

Recommendation 3: Test SALT and KEYS Across Contexts

Examine how SALT (Vision) and KEYS (DIKW operationalization) function across organizational contexts. Compare consciousness development in military, government, corporate, and nonprofit cultures. Test whether KEYS activation enables institutional progression from Knowledge to Wisdom.

Recommendation 4: Examine WHIP Operation Across All CHAINS

This study examined Race (CHAIN 2a—the engineered subchain of Tribalism). Future research should investigate how the WHIP (four levels of systemic enforcement) operates across Generism (CHAIN 1—gender, age, body), Tribalism broadly (CHAIN 2—identity, culture, belonging), and Classism (CHAIN 3—resource access, economic mobility). Comparative analysis may reveal whether institutional accountability efforts addressing different CHAINS require different intervention strategies.

Recommendation 5: Investigate the Ideological Legitimation of CHAINS Through Christianity and Capitalism

The CHAINS framework identifies three primary structural foundations of human hierarchy—Generism, Tribalism, and Classism—with Race operating as an engineered subchain of Tribalism. However, structural hierarchies require ideological legitimation to persist across generations. Future research should examine the two primary ideological systems that have historically legitimized these chains: Christianity and Capitalism.

Christianity and the Theological Architecture of Tribalism. Christianity provided theological justification for racial hierarchy through purity codes, salvation/damnation binaries, and *chosen people* narratives that legitimized in-group/out-group distinctions (Jennings, 2010). The *Curse of Ham* doctrine transformed African enslavement from economic exploitation into divine mandate, while manifest destiny sacralized Indigenous dispossession as religious obligation (Kendi, 2016). Critically for understanding institutional apologies, Christianity’s forgiveness paradigm—wherein acknowledgment plus confession produces absolution—shapes how Western institutions conceptualize accountability. The APA apology operates within this paradigm, implicitly if verbal acknowledgment should satisfy moral demands without material restitution (Minow, 1998). This theological assumption may explain the Ethical-Moral Divide identified in this study: institutions functioning at Level 4 (Ethical Accountability) assume the Christian forgiveness model will suffice, while communities of color evaluating at Levels 6–7 (Moral-Transcendent Accountability) require what Fanon (1961/2004) termed genuine decolonization—structural transformation rather than symbolic absolution.

Capitalism, Racial Capitalism, and the Economic Enforcement of Classism.

Capitalism, particularly what Robinson (1983/2000) termed racial capitalism, provides the

economic enforcement mechanism for classism. As Gaztambide et al. (2024) demonstrated, psychology has been entangled with racial capitalism since its inception, producing knowledge systems that benefited dominant groups at the economic and social expense of marginalized populations. Robinson's foundational insight reveals that capitalism was never race-neutral; economic systems required racial hierarchy to function, and racial hierarchy required economic systems to sustain (Williams, 1944/1994). The WHIP enforces CHAINS through four levels (internalized, interpersonal, institutional, structural), but Christianity and capitalism provide the legitimizing narratives that render such enforcement natural, moral, and inevitable.

Theoretical Integration. When Participant 1 observed that institutions remain “committed to systems that will not facilitate change,” he identified this precise dynamic: institutional apologies address the WHIP's visible manifestations while Christianity provides moral cover, and capitalism provides economic incentive to preserve the CHAINS' structural foundations. Future research should examine how professionals from communities of color navigate institutional accountability efforts when those efforts emerge from organizations whose legitimacy depends upon ideological systems—religious and economic—that historically justified their oppression. Such investigation would extend the WHIP and CHAINS framework from structural analysis to ideological critique, revealing not only how oppression operates and what it maintains, but why it persists despite acknowledged harm.

Recommendation 6: The Racism–Xenophobia–Tribalism Triad

This study's findings, combined with methodological observations during participant recruitment, revealed a significant gap requiring dedicated investigation: the intersection of racism, xenophobia, and tribalism that Hispanic/Latino professionals must simultaneously navigate within Good Ol' Boy Systems. While the APA Resolution acknowledges xenophobia's

impact on Latino/a/x communities, noting that “policies and programs that exclude, segregate, separate, detain, and physically remove immigrants from the U.S. reproduce racial inequalities” (APA, 2021b, p. 1), the complexity of how these three forces interact within informal professional networks remains underexplored.

The study captured a spectrum of Hispanic identity positioning through both included participants and one excluded participant who did not self-identify as BIPOC despite Mexican heritage. This spectrum—from non-BIPOC identification, to contextual navigation (“Dominican when convenient”), to fluid positioning (“I can go either way”)—suggests that Hispanic/Latino professionals develop distinct strategies for navigating informal power structures that differ fundamentally from the experiences of Black professionals who cannot “code-switch” out of racial visibility.

Future research should examine (a) How institutional apologies address or fail to address this tri-dimensional discrimination experience; (b) The psychological impact of managing multiple, sometimes conflicting group memberships for professional advancement; (c) How Hispanic/Latino professionals develop distinct navigation strategies along the BIPOC identification spectrum; (d) Whether organizational accountability frameworks can effectively address xenophobia and tribalism alongside racism; and (e) The role of Good Ol’ Boy Systems in creating conditions that require tri-dimensional navigation.

This research direction has significant implications for I/O psychology practice, particularly in developing culturally responsive organizational interventions that account for the distinct experiences of Hispanic/Latino professionals navigating informal power structures. The racism–xenophobia–tribalism triad represents a foundational concept that emerged from this study and warrants dedicated scholarly attention.

Recommendation 7: Neurological Correlates of Evaluative Sophistication

Neuromelanin—a pigment concentrated in the substantia nigra and locus coeruleus—has well-established neuroprotective functions and plays a critical role in dopaminergic and noradrenergic regulation (Sulzer et al., 2018; Zucca et al., 2017). Advances in neuromelanin-sensitive MRI now permit in-vivo examination of these brain regions (Cassidy et al., 2019), creating methodological opportunities that did not previously exist. Future interdisciplinary research should examine whether neuromelanin distribution, regulation, or resilience correlates with advanced evaluative capacities, particularly those associated with integrative judgment, ethical reasoning, and sustained meaning-making under conditions of systemic constraint.

Such research must adhere to rigorous evolutionary biology, neuroscience, and genetics standards to avoid both deficit-based frameworks that historically pathologized Black cognition and affirming-based claims that lack empirical grounding (Bird et al., 2024). The objective is neither to invert racial hierarchies nor to essentialize biology, but to investigate whether neuroscience has systematically failed to examine correlates of consciousness development that do not align with historically dominant populations or paradigms.

Recommendation 8: PSPR as Cross-Level Analytical Framework

Future research may examine Positionality, Social Identity, Processes, and Results (PSPR) as a cross-level analytical framework bridging psychological, organizational, and biological inquiry. PSPR does not function as a biological determinant; rather, it operates as a marker of adaptive integration across structural, interpersonal, institutional, and outcome-oriented domains. Investigating whether sustained exposure to PSPR-congruent conditions—or prolonged deprivation thereof—correlates with measurable neurological stress, resilience, or regulatory patterns may provide insight into how consciousness development is shaped by

environmental constraint rather than individual deficiency. Such inquiry reframes biology not as destiny but as responsive—a site where systems leave measurable traces.

Recommendation 9: Classification Systems, Legal Construction, and Civilizational Claims

On March 28, 2024, the Office of Management and Budget revised Statistical Policy Directive No. 15, the federal standards governing the collection and presentation of race and ethnicity data. Under the updated SPD 15, race and ethnicity are collected using a single combined question and include Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) as a distinct minimum reporting category separate from “White” (Office of Management and Budget, 2024). This definition encompasses the regions where the first human civilizations emerged—Sumerian civilization in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) developed the first cities, writing system (cuneiform), wheel, and complex legal codes around 4000–3500 BCE. The oldest written languages—Sumerian, Egyptian, Akkadian, Hebrew, and Aramaic—all emerged from regions now classified as “White” origin areas, predating European written languages by millennia.

Legal scholarship provides the framework for examining how these classifications function. Haney López (1996) documented how the legal construction of “White” shifted across cases including *In re Dow* (1915), *Ozawa v. United States* (1922), and *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923), demonstrating that racial categories were shaped by legal and political considerations rather than biological consistency. In *Thind*, the Supreme Court explicitly rejected anthropological evidence that Asian Indians were “Caucasian,” ruling instead that “White” must be understood through “common understanding” rather than scientific classification. This legal history demonstrates that racial categories have never been neutral scientific descriptions but rather administrative instruments whose boundaries expand and contract based on institutional interests—what legal scholars term interest convergence (Bell, 1980).

This study proposes the concept of scientific gentrification to describe the institutional use of classification systems to redefine boundaries of legitimacy, appropriating civilizational achievements while marginalizing the populations who created them. Just as urban gentrification displaces original residents while claiming their neighborhoods, scientific gentrification displaces original peoples from their own history while claiming their contributions. Future research should investigate whether historical eugenic practices functioned as the scientific mechanism for this appropriation—operating within the larger system of racial capitalism (Robinson, 1983/2000) that required both the extraction of labor and knowledge from colonized populations and the classificatory apparatus to legitimate that extraction.

Investigating the relationship between imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, and scientific classification may reveal how racial categories function not merely to describe populations but to redistribute historical claims. The 2024 revision to federal race and ethnicity standards represents a critical inflection point in the long-standing MENA classification debate.

For decades, individuals from the Middle East and North Africa were administratively classified as “White,” a designation that functioned as neutral demographic accounting while obscuring distinct patterns of racialization, surveillance, and socioeconomic disparity (Maghbouleh, 2017; Samhan, 1999). The Office of Management and Budget’s creation of a separate Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) category reflects accumulated research and public testimony demonstrating that prior classifications failed to capture lived racial realities (Office of Management and Budget, 2024).

Viewed through the lens of racial capitalism, this shift illustrates how racial classification operates as a bureaucratic mechanism that organizes visibility, allocates resources, and legitimizes extraction. In this sense, Census categories function not merely as descriptive tools

but as institutional technologies that complete processes of appropriation by stabilizing populations within administratively useful racial boundaries (Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2024).

Recommendation 10: Historical Practices and Contemporary Accountability

Future research should examine historical scientific and legal practices not merely as discredited errors but as coordinated institutional efforts with ongoing contemporary manifestations. Bird et al. (2024) demonstrated that racial hereditarian research continues to generate scientific racism supporting policy agendas and extremism. Gaztambide et al. (2024) identified racial capitalism as a system in which racism functions as a divide-and-conquer strategy to consolidate elite power while naturalizing inequality.

This line of inquiry requires both scientific and legal analysis. Scientifically, researchers should examine whether historical practices—institutional sorting, reproductive surveillance, and exclusionary policies—disproportionately targeted specific populations as a function of phenotype rather than stated rationales (D. Roberts, 1997; Washington, 2006). Legally, scholars should evaluate whether documented programs meet criteria for coordinated harm under international frameworks and whether contemporary manifestations constitute ongoing violations requiring remedy. CRT provides the legal–analytic framework for this examination by foregrounding how ostensibly neutral laws and scientific practices produce racially disparate outcomes through structural design rather than explicit intent (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Harris, 1993).

Recommendation 11: Parallel Institutional Governance Systems

Building on Gaztambide et al.'s (2024) framework, future research should examine how economic and religious institutions operate as parallel systems controlling time consciousness,

identity formation, and moral frameworks. Economic institutions govern labor time through fiscal cycles, productivity metrics, and material precarity; religious institutions govern sacred time through calendars, moral reset mechanisms, and identity formation rituals. Together, these systems form parallel governance structures controlling both when meaning happens and for whom.

This extends the consciousness gatekeeping mechanism identified in this study: institutions control not only what can be known but when and how knowledge translates into action. The APA's apology—released in October 2021, disseminated primarily through internal channels, and reaching only 20% of affected professionals—exemplifies how institutional control of timing serves institutional reputation rather than community transformation.

Recommendation 12: Institutional Accountability and Implementation Gaps

The APA's apology acknowledged psychology's historical complicity; however, the discipline has not examined whether this complicity constituted participation in coordinated, population-level harm. This study's finding that approximately 80% of affected professionals remained unaware of the apology 4 years after its release suggests institutional reluctance to engage this history with the rigor it demands.

Future research must determine whether historical practices functioned—and continue to function through contemporary research programs—as mechanisms embedded within scientific and legal systems rather than as neutral errors of the past. The theory–practice gap this study identified is not epistemic failure but structural design, operating through linguistic infrastructure that permits acknowledgment without obligation.

Recommendation 13: Development of Non-Clinical Diagnostic Framework

This study proposes MMM as a non-clinical diagnostic framework for assessing institutional readiness for authentic accountability. Unlike clinical diagnoses applied to individuals, MMM provides organizational psychologists, DEI practitioners, and institutional leaders with a structured assessment tool for identifying cognitive patterns that predict accountability effort failure. Future research should develop and validate MMM assessment instruments for organizational use, enabling institutions to diagnose their own cognitive constraints before launching accountability initiatives likely to fail due to confirmation bias dominance, response stereotypy, or structural blindness.

Conclusion

This dissertation examined how BIPOC professional men interpret the APA's 2021 apology for perpetuating systemic racism. The central finding is unambiguous: punctuation events require DIKW completion to produce transformation.

The APA apology did not reveal anything communities of color did not already know. It confirmed what BIPOC professionals had experienced, observed, and documented for generations. The apology succeeded as a Tenet 1 punctuated event—a genuine disruption at the industry level. But the APA completed only Knowledge. Without progression to Wisdom, the institution produced Understanding without Overstanding, ethical compliance without moral transformation, punctuation without cascade.

This is what happens when individuals and institutions ignore DIKW or do not know how to apply it.

The title of this dissertation—*Apologizing in Theory, Excluding in Practice: Overstanding Oppression and the APA Apology*—captures the phenomenon precisely:

Apologizing in Theory = Knowledge-level output (Understanding, comprehension, acknowledgment)

Excluding in Practice = DIKW failure preventing transformation (addressing the WHIP without transforming the CHAINS)

Overstanding Oppression = What participants demonstrated and what institutions must develop (Wisdom-level consciousness that perceives both how oppression operates and what it maintains)

The theoretical lineage is clear: Adlerian psychology’s social interest provides the foundation; Colker’s (2023) Aligned Leadership explains institutional misalignment; Johnson’s (2016, 2024) Overstanding and SALT provide the developmental pathway; DIKW reveals the failure point; KEYS provides the unlock mechanism; WHIP and CHAINS reveals the architecture of oppression.

SALT provides the lens to see both the WHIP (how oppression operates) and the CHAINS (what oppression maintains). KEYS provides the mechanism to bridge the gap. Without both, institutions will continue to punctuate without transforming.

While this study examined the APA, the American Psychiatric Association—the organization that writes the *DSM* (American Psychiatric Association, 2022)—faces parallel accountability. The tension between these two APAs regarding models of mental illness dates back decades (Grinker et al., 1971), yet both have acknowledged that racism damages mental health without naming, classifying, or addressing the cognitive consequences. This parallels Engel’s (1977) critique of reductionistic biomedical models that ignore how suffering operates across multiple levels from societal to molecular (Borrell-Carrió et al., 2004). MMM may

represent a socially induced form of cognitive inflexibility found in occupational settings that warrants investigation—and raises the question of whether the individual wants to change.

The path forward is demanding but clear. Institutions must progress through DIKW—from Data through Information and Knowledge to Wisdom. They must address both the WHIP (how oppression operates) and the CHAINS (what oppression maintains). They must move from Understanding to Overstanding, from ethical compliance to moral transformation, from punctuation to Legacy.

The APA has punctuated. The question now is whether psychology, and the institutions that shape it, will transform.

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Appendix A: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

- Self-identify as self-identify as **BIPOC men**
- Aged 25 to 55 years old
- Have at least 2 years of professional work experience
- Reside in the United States
- Willing and able to provide informed consent

Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals who do not self-identify as **BIPOC men**
- Under 25 or over 55 years of age
- Lack of significant professional work experience (less than 2 years)
- Individuals with a personal, familial, academic, or professional relationship with the principal investigator (i.e., myself)
- Inability to provide informed consent or complete the survey/interview in English

Appendix B: Initial Recruitment Letter/Referral Email

Adler University Doctor of Psychology Industrial Organizational Program

Subject line: Recruiting participants for a research study

Dear _____,

I am a current student at Adler University, where I am working toward my Doctor of Psychology in Industrial Organization. As part of that program, I am conducting a study and seeking research participants. The purpose of this email is to see if you might be interested in participating in this research. As well request referral for other possible participants.

You are invited to participate in a research study examining how BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) men in various professional fields respond to the American Psychological Association's 2021 apology for perpetuating systemic racism. This study is being conducted by Calvin R. Johnson, a doctoral candidate in Industrial and Organizational Psychology at Adler University, under the supervision of Dr. Irene Jones.

This study aims to understand how awareness of institutional apologies shapes professional experiences and responses to organizational change efforts. Your participation will contribute to knowledge about effective institutional communication and racial equity initiatives in professional settings.

You may be eligible if you:

- Identify as a BIPOC
- Male
- Are between 25-55 years of age
- Currently work in a professional field

Your participation will remain confidential. All identifying information will be removed, and pseudonyms will be used in all research materials.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please contact me at kjohnson7@adler.edu and include the following information below. I will schedule a meeting to provide you with additional details about the study.

Name/Email/Phone number

If you know of others who might be interested in participating in this study, please feel free to forward this email to them. Thank you for considering being a participant in this study.

Best regards,
Calvin R. Johnson
706-681-2099

Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer

JOIN THE STUDY

Voices Matter

Seeking BI POC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) men for an important research study.

Help us understand systemic racism and its impacts through meaningful dialogue and research.



YOU MAY BE ELIGIBLE IF YOU:



- IDENTIFY AS A BI POC
- MALE
- ARE BETWEEN 25-55 YEARS OF AGE
- CURRENTLY WORK IN A PROFESSIONAL FIELD

WHAT?

- Complete a brief pre-interview questionnaire (approx. 10 - 15 minutes)
- Participate in a approx. 30 - 60 minute interview (virtual - HIPPA compliant)
- Potential brief follow-up for clarification if needed.

WHY?

- Share your voice and experiences with a BI POC professional.
- Contribute to research on institutional accountability and racial equity.
- Help shape recommendations for more effective organizational change efforts.
- Receive a summary of research findings if desired.



SCAN FOR
PARTICIPATION
ELIGIBILITY

Your participation will remain **confidential**. All identifying information will be removed, and pseudonyms will be used in all research materials. All information collected will remain confidential and handled in accordance with HIPAA regulations to protect participant privacy.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

Kalvin R. Johnson is a BIPOC professional, retired Air Force veteran, and doctoral candidate in Industrial and Organizational Psychology at Adler University, conducting this research under the supervision of Dr. Irene Jones (irjones@adler.edu).

CONTACT INFORMATION

To learn more about participating in this study, please contact:

Kalvin R. Johnson
Doctoral Candidate, Industrial
and Organizational Psychology
Adler University



kjohnson7@adler.edu



803-216-1423

RESOURCES

General Therapy Directories

- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists>
- <http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists>
- <http://www.goodtherpay.org/find-therapist.html>
- <http://locator.apa.org>
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255 or chat at www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.nationalsuicideline.org)
- <https://www.therapistlocator.net>
- <https://www.therapyessentialworkers.com>
- <https://www.inclusivetherapists.com>
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)**
- **Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 (Press 1)**

BIPOC-Specific Mental Health Resources

- <https://borishensonfoundation.org> - Provides directory for Black mental health providers
- <https://therapyforblackgirls.com> - Online space dedicated to encouraging mental wellness for Black women and girls
- <https://www.melaninandmentalhealth.com> - Connects individuals with culturally competent clinicians

DISCLAIMER: *THIS INTERVIEW IS NOT COUNSELING AND SHOULD NOT BE MISTAKEN FOR A THERAPY SESSION*

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Please reflect on these overall questions (for interviewer reference only): How does awareness of the APA's 2021 apology shape BIPOC people's interpretations and responses? How do professional contexts influence both awareness of and responses to the apology? What initial reactions do BIPOC people have upon learning of the apology? What patterns emerge across different awareness groups?

Pre-Interview Information

1. Could you please state your name and preferred pseudonym?
2. Could you confirm your age?
3. How do you identify in terms of race and ethnicity?
4. What is your current professional field and role?
5. How long have you been in this field?

Core Questions for All Participants

1. What are your thoughts about this institutional statement?
2. In your professional experience, how do professional organizations typically communicate significant statements?
3. Can you describe how racial dynamics have influenced your professional experiences?
4. How do you usually learn about significant developments in your professional field?
5. What factors influence how you receive and interpret communications from professional organizations?
6. What would make an institutional apology meaningful to you professionally?
7. How might this type of institutional statement potentially impact your professional perspective?
8. Have you discussed this apology or similar institutional statements with colleagues? If so, what were those conversations like?
9. What impact, if any, has this apology or similar institutional statements had on your professional identity or practice?
10. What actions would you expect to see following such an institutional statement?
11. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your perspective on this apology or racial equity in your profession?
12. What questions do you have about this research?

Ethical Considerations

- Voluntary participation
- Confidentiality assured
- Option to skip any question
- Neutral, non-leading language
- Focus on professional experiences

Post-Interview

- Offer study summary
- Provide contact information for follow-up
- Thank participant for their time

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Apologizing in Theory, Excluding in Practice: The APA’s Reckoning with Racial Justice. A Qualitative phenomenological study examining how BIPOC people in various professional fields respond to the American Psychological Association’s 2021 apology for perpetuating systemic racism.

Name of Researcher(s):

Advisor/Principal Investigator: Dr. Irene Jones

Researcher/Co-Investigator: Calvin R. Johnson

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Before agreeing to participate in this research, we strongly encourage you to read the following explanation of this study. This statement describes the purpose and procedures of the study. Also described is your right to withdraw from the study at any time. You may ask any questions you have. When you are ready to decide, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study is to examine how awareness level of the American Psychological Association’s 2021 apology influence its effectiveness as a punctuation event among BIPOC people across diverse professional fields. This study aims to understand both the reach and impact of institutional apologies while considering how professional experiences, racial consciousness, and industry cultures shape responses to institutional change efforts.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete a pre-interview questionnaire to gather demographic information and assess your level of awareness about the APA’s 2021 apology. You will then participate in a semi-structured interview with researcher Calvin R. Johnson.

Where will this take place and how much time will this require?

The interview will take place via video chat or in a place of your choosing that provides appropriate privacy. The interview will last approximately 30-60 minutes.

Will there be any benefits by participating in the research?

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, the anticipated benefit of participation is the opportunity to share your professional experiences and perspectives on institutional change efforts, and to contribute to understanding how institutional apologies are received by BIPOC professionals. Your insights may help inform strategies for enhancing the impact of institutional transformation efforts and promoting racial equity across professional settings.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

There are minimal risks associated with this study. Some participants may experience mild discomfort when discussing experiences related to racism or professional challenges. The researcher will respect your boundaries during the interview and will allow you to skip any questions you do not wish to respond to. You may take breaks as needed or discontinue the interview at any time.

Who will see the information about me?

The information gathered during this study will remain confidential in secure premises during this project. Only the researchers will have access to the study data and information. There will not be any identifying names on the questionnaires or interview transcripts; they will be coded, and the key to the code will be kept locked away. Your name and any other identifying details will never be revealed in any publication

of the results of this study. The recordings will be destroyed at the completion of the study. The key linking participant codes to identities will be stored in a separate password-protected file on an encrypted computer accessible only to the principal investigator. Recordings will be permanently deleted from all storage locations using secure deletion methods after study completion. The results of the research will be published as a doctoral dissertation and may be published in professional journals or presented at professional meetings.

Can I stop my participation in this study?

You are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time without prejudice or penalty. You are also free to refuse to answer any question we might ask you.

Who can I contact if I have questions or concerns?

If you have further questions once the interview is completed, you are encouraged to contact the researchers using the contact information given below. Please feel free to contact Calvin R. Johnson at (803) 216-1423 or kjohnson7@adler.edu, or Dr. Irene Jones who is overseeing this research at ijones@adler.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Adler University Institutional Review Board at irb@adler.edu or 312-662-4000

I, _____ (name; please print clearly), have read the above information. I freely agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to refuse to answer any question and to withdraw from the study at any time. I understand that my responses will be kept anonymous.

Participant Signature _____ **Date** _____

If you're experiencing any distress or would like to speak with a mental health professional, the following resources are available to support you:

Therapy Resources

- **Psychology Today Therapist Directory:** Find therapists in your area who match your preferences and insurance needs at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists>
- **Inclusive Therapists:** Connects clients with culturally responsive therapists, with special focus on BIPOC individuals at <https://www.inclusivetherapists.com>

Crisis Support

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** Available 24/7 at 1-800-273-8255 or chat at www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

BIPOC-Specific Resources

- **Therapy for Black Men:** Directory of therapists specializing in supporting Black men's mental health at <https://therapyforblackmen.org>
- **Asian Mental Health Collective:** Resources and provider directory specifically for the Asian American community at <https://www.asianmhc.org>

These resources are confidential and many offer options for both immediate support and ongoing care. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you need assistance.

Attachment A:

APA (American Psychological Association) Apology to Black, Indigenous, People of Color

Appendix F: Data Analysis

Table F1

Frequency Codes

Code	Frequency
Actionable Change	8
Assumptions	9
Awareness Building	12
Barriers	15
Code Switching	6
Communication	11
Gaps	
Competency	14
Proving	
Cultural Dynamics	13
Curiosity	5
Denial	4
Diversity Value	7
Educational Impact	10
Effective Labeling	6
Empowerment	8
Future Research	9
Historical Context	12
Hollow Gestures	6
Identity Formation	11
Inadequate Support	5
Innovation	8
Institutional Change	13
Leadership	10
Representation	
Mental Health	7
Impact	
Organizational	9
Trust	
Professional	14
Development	
Psychological	16
Impact	
Racial Dynamics	18
Recognition	12
Representation	15
Resistance	6
Skepticism	11
Social Justice	13
Systemic Issues	17
Tokenization	7
Underrepresentation	8
Validation	5
Workplace Culture	14

Table F2*Data Extracts*

Data extract	Code	Frequency
Participants noted that racial factors play a limited role in their professional experiences. Participant 5 stated “I don’t think so” when asked about racial factors in his career journey.	Denial	4
Participants described having to “code switch” in their language and professional interactions, with Participant 1 noting “you do have to code switch, right?”	Code switching	6
Participants mentioned lacking appropriate supervision and understanding from supervisors who couldn’t relate to their experiences as people of color.	Inadequate support	5
Some participants stated they were motivated to work harder to show that Black professionals “can do this too” and can “be very successful doing it.”	Proving competence	7
Participants noted the scarcity of Black males in their professions, with Participant 3 stating “there’s not a lot of Black males in this profession.”	Underrepresentation	8
Participants described experiencing passive aggressive behaviors when diversity programs were introduced, labeled as “fraud, waste and abuse.”	Resistance	6
Participants expressed that people may “presume to think how you’ll perform based off how you look” until competency is established.	Assumptions	9
Participants stated they wanted to learn more about the APA apology, with Participant 3 saying “I just wanna learn more about it” and “that does affect me.”	Curiosity	5
Participants described needing people from different backgrounds and experiences to prevent workplace stagnation and bring innovative thinking.	Diversity value	7
Participants noted that a meaningful apology should include specific actions, timelines, resources, and ongoing accountability measures.	Actionable change	8
Participants expressed that professional organizations often fail to follow through on apologies with concrete policy changes.	Hollow gestures	6
Participants described feeling tokenized or exploited when serving on committees as the only person of color, leading to burnout.	Tokenization	7
Participants noted that the apology could help with “effective labeling” of their experiences and provide validation for feelings they’ve had.	Validation	5

Appendix G: CITI Training Completion Certificate

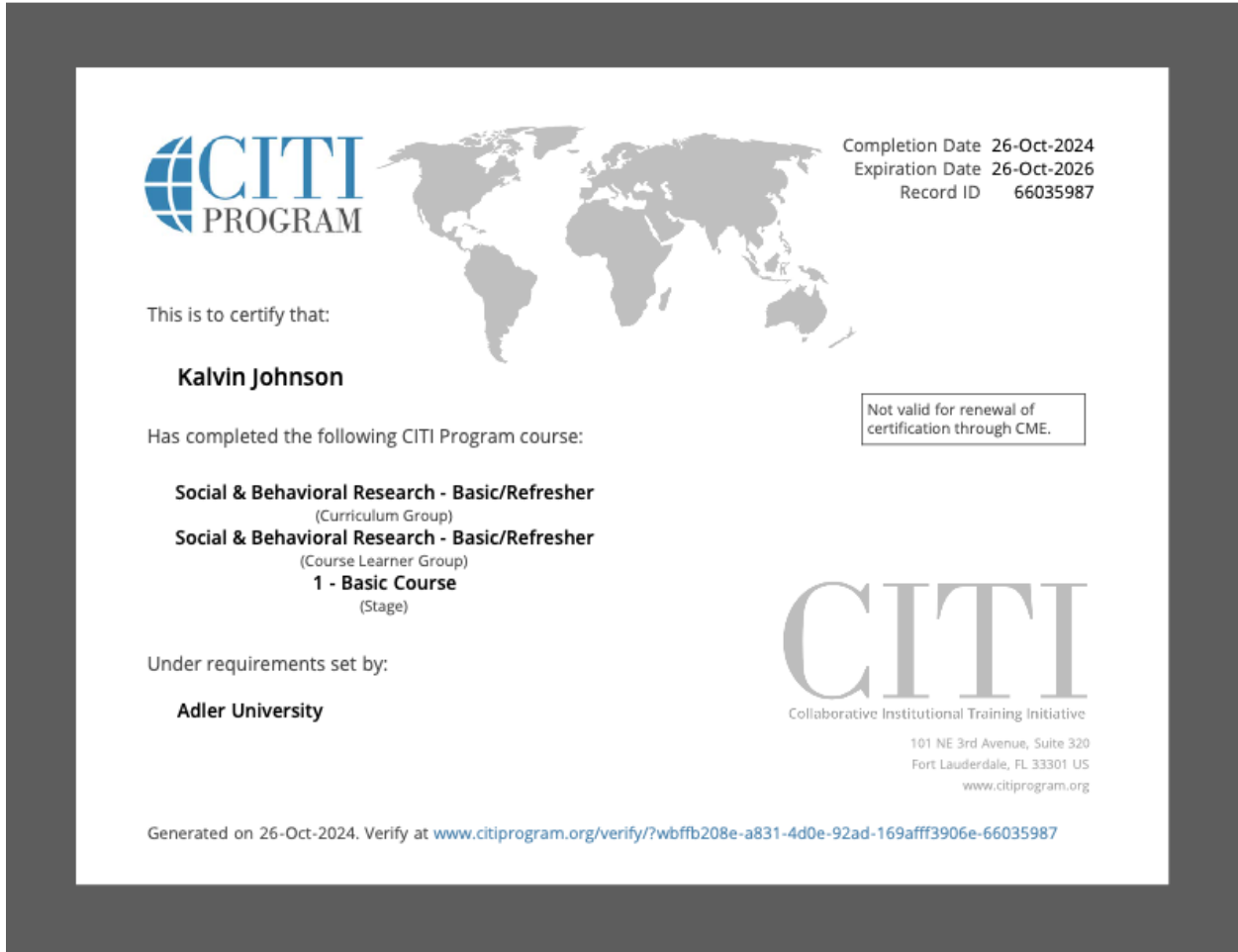


Figure H2

SALT/RIOT Framework With Bolman and Deal Organizational Frames

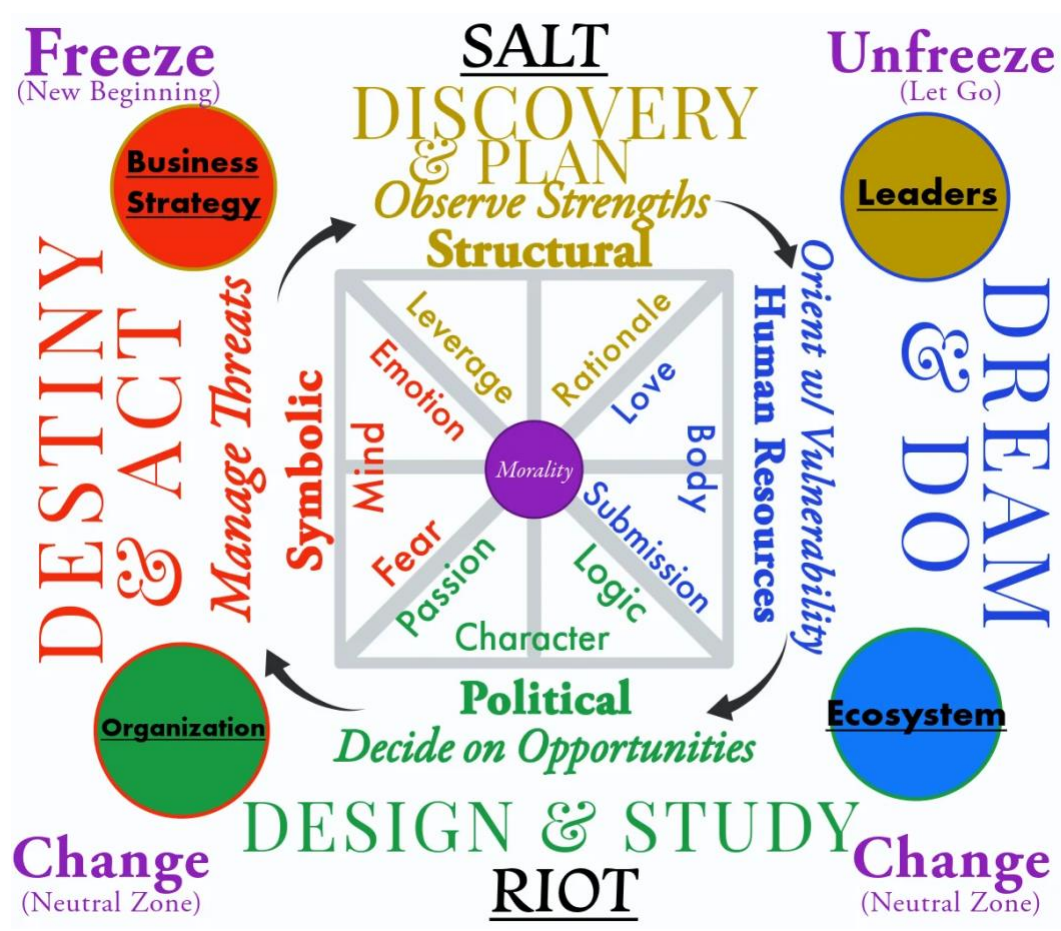


Figure H3

APA Tenets Integration With PSPR and Game Theory

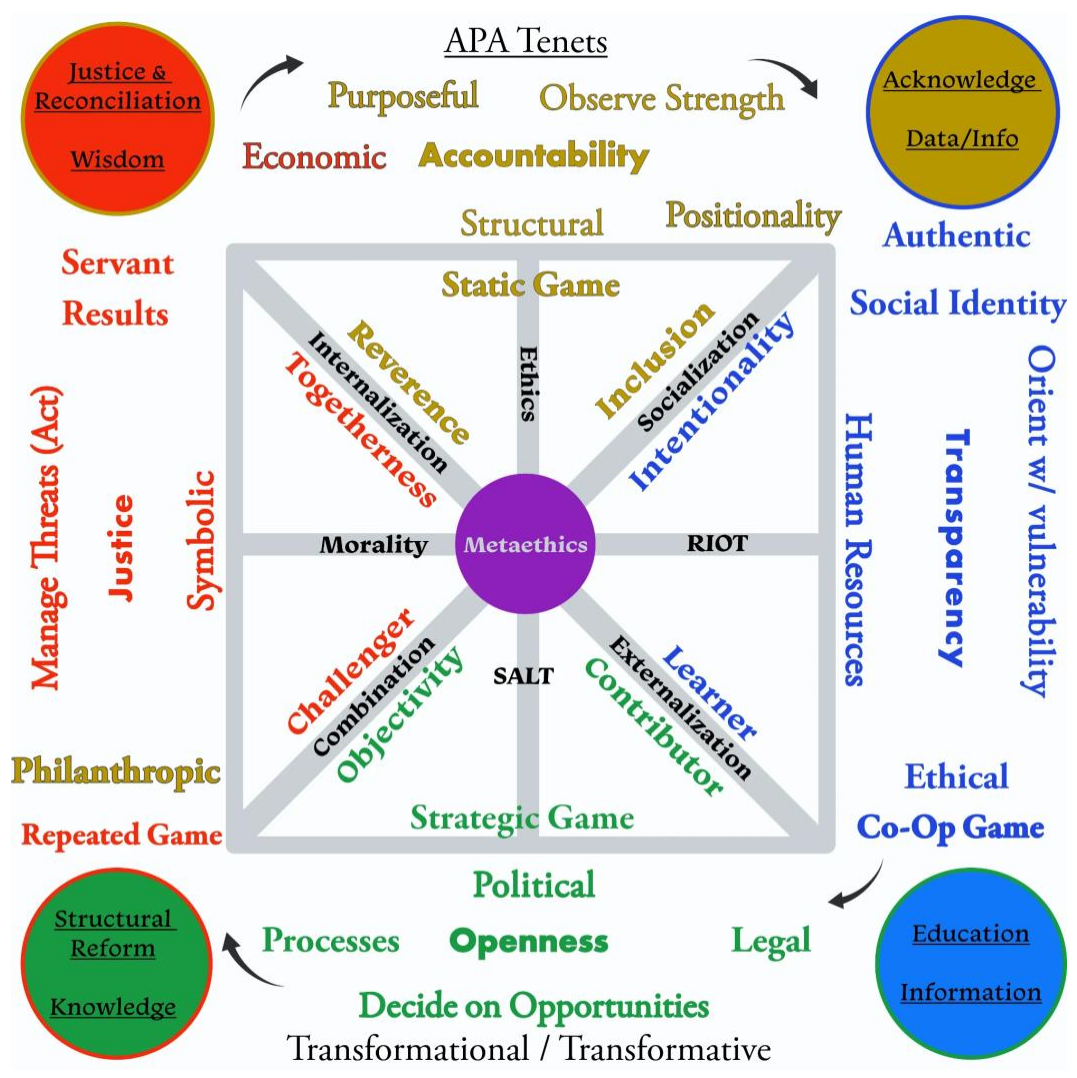


Figure H4

Core 4 Theoretical Framework With WHIPS and CHAINS

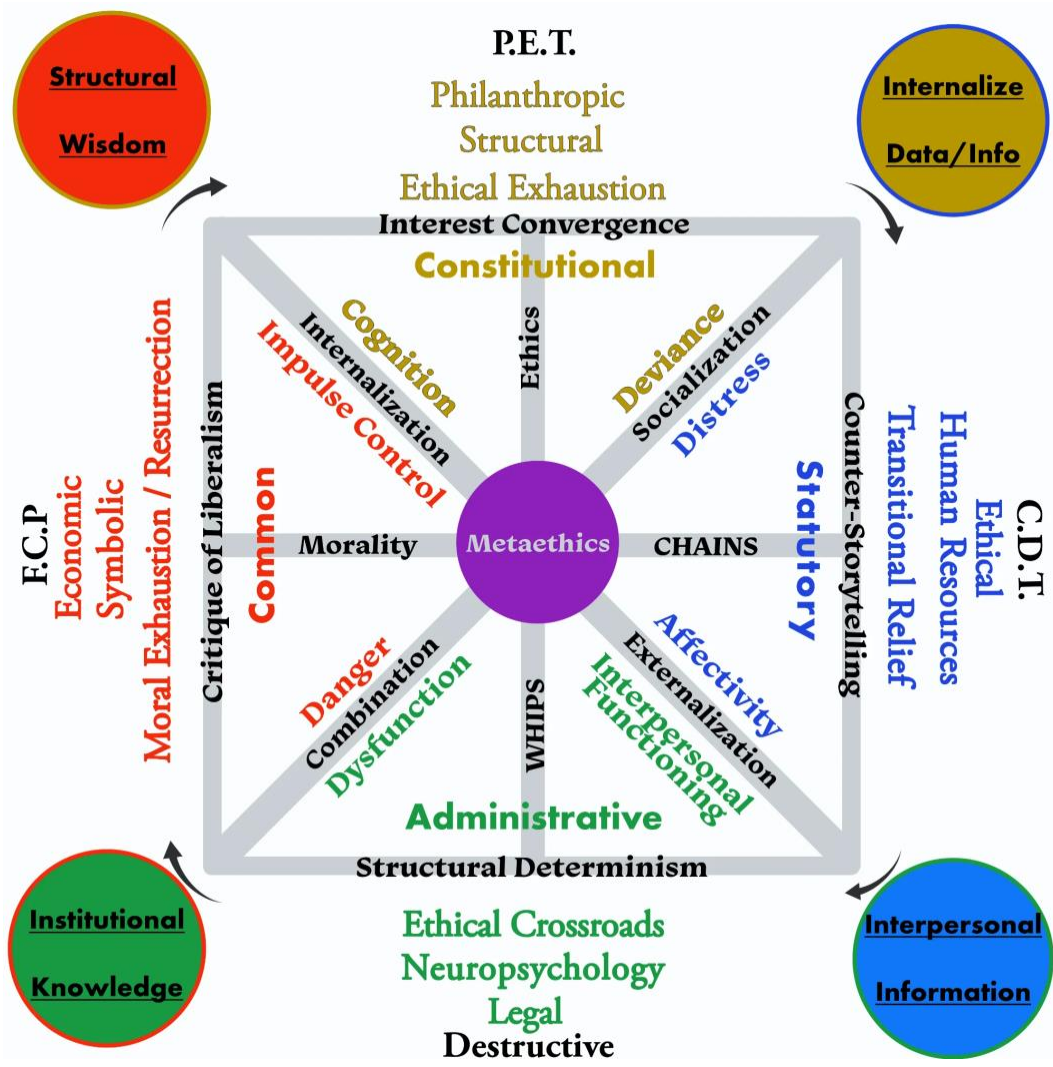
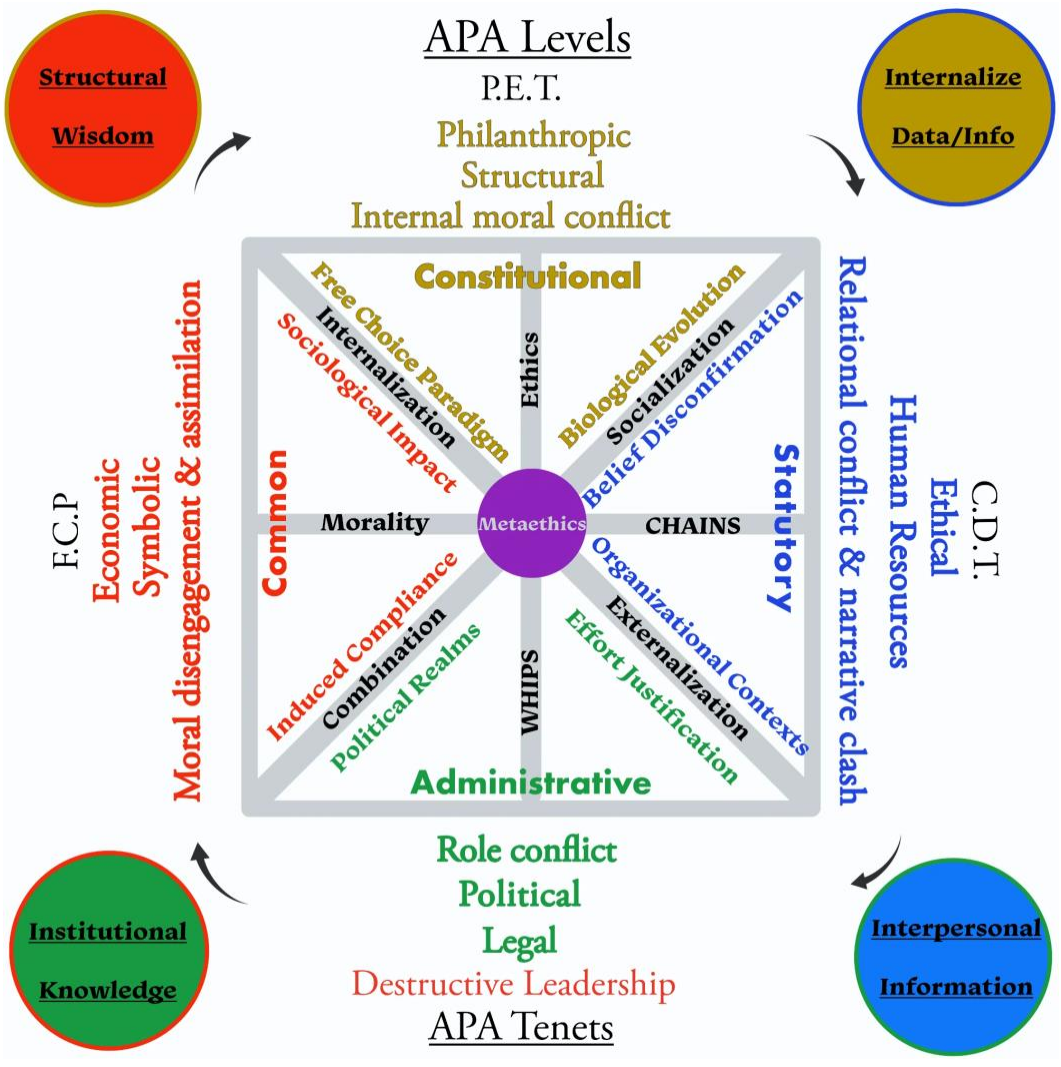


Figure H5

APA Levels Application With Core 4 Framework



Appendix I: IRB Approval Notice



June 4, 2025

Dear Calvin R. Johnson,

The Institutional Review Board evaluated your submission.

Researcher Name: Calvin R. Johnson,

Protocol Title: Apologizing in Theory, Excluding in Practice- Exploring the APA Apology

Protocol Number: 25-057

Chair: Dr. Irene Jones

Submission is a First time submission, Revision to a protocol, First time submission of an amendment, Revision to an amendment, Use of archival dataset

Your protocol or amendment has now received **Approval**. This decision means that you may proceed with your plan of research as it is proposed in your protocol, or amended protocol.

Please note that if you wish to make changes to your protocol, you must provide written notification to the IRB in advance of the changes. **You may not implement those changes until you have received an Approval letter from the IRB.** Please note that once you as a student graduate from Adler University, or you as a staff member, core faculty member, or adjunct faculty member are no longer employed by Adler University, that the IRB approval for your research will be considered expired. Should you decide to continue your research, you will need approval from the IRB review board at your respective place of employment or institution. Please feel free to contact myself or other IRB committee members should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Kotecki, Ph.D., LCPC, ATR-BC
Assistant Professor
Core Faculty, Department of Counseling: Art Therapy
Institutional Review Board

ProQuest Number: 32444320

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