**Interview Transcript**

**Participant 6**

Interviewer: So, to start with, I just want you to give like a brief introduction to you, to who you are, to where you're from, to what you do, and maybe like a little bit of employment and education history.

Participant (she/her): I was born in Santa Barbara California. Mid 80s, so I guess I fit that 90s child demographic. Spent my entire childhood in the Santa Barbara area. Went to undergrad at UC Berkeley. Majored in English. And then kind of languished a little bit during the recession right after undergrad. And then got pulled into my first job doing local level advocacy for children with special health care needs, and which pointed me in the direction of public policy, so I moved to Chicago and went to the University of Chicago's graduate school for public policy. Got my MPP there, and upon graduation was matched with a fellowship with the Federal Government in DC where I worked for the Obama White House for about five years implementing the affordable care act, working on health care policy, Medicare, Medicaid, public payer programs. Six years ago, I moved back home here to California, back in the Bay area, so I'm currently in San Francisco. And I’ve been in government affairs with a large biotech company since then.

Interviewer: Oh, wow okay. That's so many things, um yeah, no that's really cool and so remind me again, how long did you say you have been with this current company?

Participant (she/her): This is my sixth year.

Interviewer: Six years ago, okay that's when you moved back. Okay that makes sense um, can you tell me a little bit more about your role in your current job, and also a little bit more about the organization?

Participant (she/her): So my current role, the title is Director of Public Policy, and what that looks like day to day is I'm the middle person in the go-between strategically in connecting the business part in the pharma company with the regulatory and healthcare reform environment at the state and federal government level. And so, in an environment where our country has a lot to say and a lot of opinions around the cost of health care, the role that drug pricing plays in the world of healthcare, I work for a company that makes primarily physician-administered drugs like cancer drugs, like drugs for multiple sclerosis or drugs for hemophilia. They're typically not drugs that you would pick up from the pharmacy, it's like you show up at a hospital and you sit in a chair for about six hours with an IV drip kind of thing. Very expensive treatments and usually for diagnoses that patients have little control over. So my role is in a longer-term strategic type of spot within the company where I'm thinking about what we can leverage as a corporate citizen in moving our healthcare system towards a more sustainable, affordable place. That means that I participate in a lot of conversations around how our products are priced. I am looped into a lot of our conversations in our pipeline development, whether that's something that we are developing and research and from scratch at our own benches, or if that's something that we are developing in partnership with someone else. And I'm sort of the person who translates for other research scientists what it's going to take in order for a new drug to actually reach patient, and what the patient’s experience is going to look like in the physical journey of receiving their care, how hospitals are set up, what the rules are incentives are for healthcare providers, and also all of the landscape around what it's going to cost whom at what point of the process, and what that financial burden looks like for patients, for insurance payers, for the government etc. So it's a very weird place to be in right now.

Interviewer: Sure, yeah I can imagine that. In your day-to-day role, do you interact a lot with other people and in what capacity?

Participant (she/her): I do, and it's very strange because, as soon as we went into pandemic lockdown, I felt like I was more effective at my work because a lot of my communication and work streams have to do with bringing groups of people together. Often they're in different parts of the country—East Coast, West Coast type of thing—and being forced to go all virtual helped with a lot of that because it made it more seamless technology-wise and expectations-wise to bring someone who's based in DC to a conversation with someone who's based here in San Francisco. I would say 80% of my workday is interacting with someone or groups of people. And 20% is like heads-down work.

Interviewer: And those groups of people are typically clients or are they coworkers or a mixture?

Participant (she/her): Predominantly all internal but because my team, and my specific role is not responsible necessarily for executing anything outside of the company, a lot of the times, I feel like the teams that I work with internally at my organization I approach as if they were my clients, in a lot of ways, because I work with like the medical part of our organization, or the marketing part of our organization, so it's, it's always another group that's outside of mine but still within the company.

Interviewer: So in that case, are you interacting with like a lot of different people every day, or some of the same people over and over again, as well?

Participant (she/her): A little mix of both. Like I’m regularly introduced to new people but there's probably a core group of contacts that I'm in contact with on a regular basis across the year, and then with seasonality there are different groups of people that I interact with on a cyclical basis.

Interviewer: Sure, so with these coworkers and with the people that you see more regularly are any of them like people you would describe as friends and people that you ever hang out with outside of work.

Participant (she/her): There are one or two people that I have hung out outside of work, with the caveat that I don't really hang out with people period. I'm having a very, very close circle of friends with a small number of people, and we are all spread across the country, and so my personal, social style doesn't really involve getting together in-person with people other than my spouse. I do feel very close to a lot of these people in that within the context of the conversations we have at work, there is a fair amount of personal check-ins and there's a, there's a fair bit amount of sharing what's going on outside of work in some of those conversations.

Interviewer: Sure yeah, and in those cases where you guys are checking in and where you feel close with your coworkers, do you feel like you can just be yourself, or are there maybe certain lines you feel like you can't cross because it's a work setting or you have to act a certain way?

Participant (she/her): With a subgroup of people, I feel very comfortable sharing both the level of detail of information and how I present it. In the concentric circles that move out from there. You can anticipate there's that kind of spectrum of how much I feel comfortable sharing or the way that I present.

Interviewer: Sure yeah yeah. Do you ever vent with any of your colleagues or listen to them vent to you?

Participant (she/her): I listen to a lot of venting. I think that's one of my known roles on the team that I I'm on, is I've got a pretty empathetic ear. I don’t use my work colleagues as an outlet for venting personally. I turn to journaling, or art, or some sort of physical activity, just because I personally don't feel like that's the most productive way for me to deal with the situation. So if I'm in a venting place that is specific to a work item, I'll usually do my own processing of that in some way, and then out of that come up with a plan so that by the time I talk to someone I'm in like ‘here's what happened, here's solutions’ mode and I kind of skip all of that part of the interaction with people.

Interviewer: So how, how is it that you ended up, I mean have you been kind of the person that is known that you can go to vent to for a long time, or is that more recent and how did you end up being that person, you know?

Participant (she/her): I don't know how I ended up being that person. When I was new to the company, that was not my reputation. I think, over the course of getting to know people and working with a broader network, I work on a lot of different topics, and so, in all of these projects we run into snags and barriers, etc. And a lot of the times we go around identifying whatever it is that’s hanging us up, and I've noticed that over time I'm one of the few people who (doesn’t?) feel compelled to jump in with a statement or judgment or observation from my perspective, unless someone requests it. So I think over time, as my relationships have developed, people have just appreciated that my style is to hold space. And that probably just keeps attracting more of that, because when people vent, it's for the purpose of venting I believe, it's not really because they need something out of me, other than just listening.

Interviewer: Sure yeah that makes a lot of sense. You mentioned having like a team, right? Can you tell me how many people are in that team, and also how big about is the organization that you work in?

Participant (she/her): My organization is huge. I don't have the number off the top my head, but I, like it’s national, its global it's like massive. My particular team, we've lost a few people in the last several months, I think, right now, we're at six. So we're pretty small relative to the rest of our organization.

Interviewer: Got it and on like a day-to-day basis how many people would you say you're working with pretty regularly?

Participant (she/her): All of them. The way that we are organizing the type of work we do makes it so that we are not necessarily working with one another on the same project, but we rely on our expertise across the group in order to pitch in or troubleshoot, but the way that our work is distributed and delegated, again, we are mostly facing other parts of the organization. And so it's more like the six of us are dividing and conquering everything else in the organization needs our team to take care of.

Interviewer: Got it, I see that makes sense there's—

Participant (she/her): There’s a lot of commiserating that happens.

Interviewer: There's a lot of what? Oh commiserating. Oh yes, yes, yes, well that's good because that's relevant to what I’m interested in. I'll ask you a little bit more about that later, I think, but first, can you tell me more about the demographic of the people you work with and like sort of the composition of the overall workplace? I mean, it could be like gender, age, race.

Participant (she/her): Gender-wise we’re balanced um up until today. Today is the last day of one of our guys. But up until today, we were balanced gender-wise and we don't have anyone on our team who identifies as non-binary or otherwise. Racially it's really interesting that in the south San Francisco office like the headquarters where I am based, we reflect the demographics of the local area. So somewhere between 20 and 30% of our employees based here in the Bay Area are Asian. And the numbers for Hispanic and black employees also mirror the Bay Area. That varies depending on what part of the country our employees are located. I spent a lot of time working with our DC colleagues, and they are primarily white and male. And I don't have as many interactions with our global counterparts, but you can imagine that that's pretty diverse looking. Age-wise, my team is solidly within the late 20s to mid 40s, so generationally we're all very similar. The age range is much broader across the company.

Interviewer: Ah in other areas?

Participant (she/her): Yeah and even within our leadership teams, I think gender-wise we're close to balanced. There are definitely more men than women still, but we're close to balanced. Representation racially in our leadership teams becomes more and more white as the levels go up. That's something that the company has specifically looked at in terms of collecting data and looking at recruitment, retention, and promotion recently. And so we're still in the early stages of figuring out exactly how we retain and promote leaders of color and more women, but right now I think our company probably looks a lot like other companies.

Interviewer: Have they come to any conclusions during their kind of investigation into this about why it ended up that so, more, the further up you go, the more white it gets?

Participant (she/her): Their early insights that I have access to as like a minion employee is that our company culture very much reflects typical American corporate company culture. There are certain types of leadership styles that tend to get recognized more than others. When we're evaluating performance and we're looking for particular characteristics for promotion, we tend to favor certain archetypes. And so, for better for worse, those are easier things to pinpoint and work on. It's just that up until recently, our company hasn't made a concerted effort to identify exactly where that happens.

Interviewer: Sure yeah so I mean this is sort of related to this, do you feel like race or age or gender or other identity features matter in terms of how people are viewed or treated at work? In your company, specifically, and not just in general.

Participant (she/her): I think it's highly variable even within my company. I can think of examples where people that I would consider myself close to they have stories where they've personally experienced very obvious instances of bias. Whether that affected their career path or their willingness to stay or how they did their work or who their managers were. There were a couple of times, or upon my own reflection, I question whether some of that has showed up in my own experience. Obviously I would like to think that that wasn't the case, but If I were more honest with myself, I think that it would be more pervasive than I would want to admit. Off the top of my head like this week I can think of a couple of examples where in meetings, it was pretty clear the person that I was trying to influence had a clear bias against people with titles at levels below theirs, so there's a hierarchy dynamic and gender. So, again I didn't feel like it was personal to me because it applied to more than just me in that group. But I don't, I personally don't feel like my experiences reflect that the company is disproportionately bad like I've heard some super horror stories where it's like systemically tilted in a direction that people didn't like. I think my company is cognizant of where it falls short, which I'm grateful for um. But still not perfect.

Interviewer: Sure, yea. What would you say about the company culture or like the social environment or sort of like the overall vibe or mood of the workplace?

Participant (she/her): I feel like my department is very supportive and inclusive. We've gone through a couple of reorgs over the last several years, and the morale has varied across the company depending on to what extent a certain department was affected. Through a lot of these transition periods, my particular department has heavily invested in mental health support resources professional career growth support so. And through all of that there's been a lens of inclusivity, diversity, and belonging. That's been really emphasized, I think that's something that was done well within my department. I know that is not the case with other departments. So it varies across the company. And I've forgotten the specific nature of your question.

Interviewer: Yeah that answers it, I mean, would you say, like in general, you feel like your job’s pretty laid back, is it like kind of fun and friendly, casual or is it more professional, serious, formal, fast paced?

Participant (she/her): I think the environment lends itself to be more casual because we're in the Bay area, so you see people wear the puffer vests and the jeans, and so at least attire and appearance is a little bit more casual. The attitude culture of the company is very much a high achiever, fast paced, high pressure kind of environment where not only as a collective but individuals expect a lot of themselves/ourselves. I, being in the government affairs type space, like every day has got some fire drill because that is the nature and the flavor of the work where anything that comes out of DC is a slushy headline, is the thing that needed to be addressed yesterday. Somebody's ego is on the line, and it just feels very artificially high stakes. There are a lot of manufactured crises that come up in the part of the world that I live in. It's been a really good exercise in setting boundaries to be like, ‘Is this important? Is this urgent?’ And I think part of the reason why I can make this particular role sustainable for me is because I have a balance between the very rigid nature of public policy and DC balanced with a little bit more of the easygoing environment that exists in San Francisco. Part of the reason why I ended up wanting to leave DC after five years is because showing up to work every day in a suit and feeling like the world was going to end at the you know halfway through every workday was just not sustainable, for me, mentally. And there's just something about not having to wear a suit to work in California that helps.

Interviewer: Sure yeah I can imagine that too. Um so I guess I imagine feeling stressed, or like the world's going to end, you know your previous job, and in this case in this current job, can you think of any scenarios or times when you felt particularly emotional at work—and that could be worried or sad or irritable, angry, or even excited and happy?

Participant (she/her): So I'm thinking of two different scenarios here. One is emotions that come up *because of* my work, where I work, what we do. it's extremely personal to me and to a lot of people at this company, a lot of the employees have some sort of personal story with why they want to be at a pharma company, and I would like to think this is one of the more unique aspects of *my* particular company. Why I chose to be part of this organization is a lot of people have personal connections either themselves or someone they care very deeply about who has experienced as a patient on one of these drugs. A lot of cancer survivors, and so the personal experience of either being a caregiver or having gone through cancer treatment is a highly motivating factor. And so a lot of times there are emotions brought up at work because we center a lot of our teambuilding, programming, and educational efforts internally around real stories from patients, and so there's a lot of emotional connection that happens there. Usually starts with anger frustration sadness. The point is to build resilience and hope, so like here's a story that worked. Here's a patient who managed to get a diagnosis and time had a treatment regimen that worked for them, and now they are living either with a managed illness or in remission etc. And so like ‘here is why your work matters’ kind of thing. More recently, I think, where are the emotions have come up are because of local, national, global events that happen outside of work. And what's really difficult is saying I'm still a human being, outside of work, a lot of this stuff affects me, and I'm still expected to show up and put in my you know requisite eight hours, whatever as if none of that was going on. That's really hard, and I know that I benefit greatly from a manager in a leadership team who recognizes that everybody is doing some version of that.

Interviewer: Can you give certain examples?

Participant (she/her): Oh yeah like this week's shooting, for example, yeah or anytime there's a sort of prominent anti-Asian hate story. I think, because I'm in the Bay area, people are a little bit more attuned to the fact that it's still happening, and it's not like the two stories that came out of 2020, for example. Plus like a third of us are personally anxious about leaving the house, so like there's a little bit more empathy among the people that I work with. But the school shooting this week, there are a lot of parents with younger kids in school, and this hits them super hard, because obviously this is a fear in the back of their minds, every day, but it was just realized for a lot of people. Another example is the January 6th insurrection that happened. So I'm in government affairs and in public policy and I was in a meeting virtually from the west coast, with people who were like ‘I gotta go, I gotta hang up, I gotta go.’ And the rest of the San Francisco office like hadn't heard yet that this was happening, and so I had to show up to my next meeting you know like ‘I don't think I can do this meeting right now.’ And they're like ‘why what's going on,’ you know, like what’s been going on with your family well like no not like actual relational family, but like kind of yeah. And it's bigger than that even so it's mostly the outside stuff that comes in that reminds us, we are more than our jobs, I think those are the harder ones, harder emotions to work with.

Interviewer: Sure, I mean you've mentioned having a really supportive manager and in terms of understanding that people have things going on outside of work. In terms of everyone else do you feel like it's accepted or acceptable for you to express what you're feeling when you're in a professional space or is that something that you kind of have to constrain or cover up?

Participant (she/her): I don't feel like I have to cover it up, and we are told, from the C-suite level down that if something is bothering you, please speak up about it. I think, individually, people will feel different levels of personal safety in doing so. I think generally when there are high profile national or global events, they will be acknowledged at the leadership levels, and typically there will be some form of communication that goes out that says, “You know, we acknowledge xyz event happened if you need time if you need space, if you are personally affected, please do whatever it is, you need to do.” And so I feel like our company is very supportive in that way. Where I think our company tends to fall short is that it's an immediate example of offering grace with less emphasis on how something like this may continue to affect individuals over the long term. And so that's where I really rely on the fact that I have a very good relationship with my manager, and I've been reporting to this person the entire time I've been here, and so we have a very solid relationship. They're also Asian, which selfishly personally helps me a lot I think in terms of empathy and perspective. But I am able to bring up to my supervisors, for example, like “that thing from six months ago, I'm feeling and again. Just so you know, I'm going to take care of like the three things I need to do today, and then anything else, unless you tell me otherwise, I'm going to punch it to next week.” And we have those kinds of conversations pretty regularly.

Interviewer: Yeah I know that seems really good. For you personally, are you an emotional person, and do you typically express what you're feeling and like what are your emotions on your sleeve, or are you more reserved or private about what you're feeling?

Participant (she/her): I'm changing right now. I think I'm in the process of changing. A lot of that is new for me. I grew up with, I grew up seeing and feeling a lot of anger in my family as a kid. And so I took me a while to learn that there's a lot more to anger than the ragey feeling, and there's a lot more to anger than the physical manifestation of it. Thank you, therapy! And I've only recently in the past three or four years started to explore and be able to identify emotions as they're percolating, as opposed to like waiting for something to erupt and be like, “oh no this is like an example being really, really happy or this, an example being really, really sad.” And being able to tease apart, the new that's on you to me. I used to keep a lot of things bottled up and not express any of it because I didn't know what any of it was. And so, a lot of it just felt threatening and I wasn't prepared to be vulnerable, whereas now, I think I have access to better language, better tools, enhanced relationships, and so in certain places I'm better able to identify what what I'm feeling when the emotions are just starting to come up. And that way I also don't feel like it's wearing it on my sleeve, it's more like giving people a heads up, so you can kind of like explore with that emotion as because before it becomes full blown. That's new for me.

Interviewer: Is there something that prompted that change that you mentioned like a few years ago?

Participant (she/her): yeah um. One was my move from DC to San Francisco and the biggest shift there was not knowing what to do with a new sense of freedom that I was experiencing here on the west coast, because I didn't grow up around any other Asians. I had lived in communities up until six years ago they were predominantly white, and all of a sudden, I am in, I'm located in my houses in the neighborhood that is almost half Asian. My work has a heavy Asian presence, and there was a lot of identity work that naturally came out of that. And I think that spurred a lot of other self-exploration. There was also a particular conflict with my in-laws, where I realized I hadn't had like an anger blow up in like years because I got really good at just making sure that never happened. I didn't like what I saw growing up, I was like I'm never going to do that, and so no matter what, just like keep a lid on it. And a few years ago, there was an incident with my in laws and it happened and I realized, “Oh, it’s because there's a lot of stuff there.” And at that point when like the pot boils over, right. I wanted to unpack that and figure out what happened. So it was both a physical transition and change in a relationship.

Interviewer: Did you ever, or do you ever experience, I mean, so you mentioned how you're now in this setting that's a lot more Asian both where you live, and in the city generally and also at work. Do you ever experience any kind of stereotyping or racial comments or discrimination, even though you're in that sort of setting?

Participant (she/her): I feel like it happens more because I am.

Interviewer: Oh, really.

Participant (she/her): Okay yeah which is at first, I felt really ironic and then I realized, you know what the reason why the the cases of these incidents are still high in places like San Francisco, New York, LA, you know, major cities in Texas, for example, it's because it's where the Asian people are. Like your chances of running into a racially based incident are going to go up the more you have, the more opportunities you have basically the populations bigger. And so on. Like I personally experienced more outright racism, having moved back to the Bay area. Whereas in Chicago and in DC what I've learned is that the racism that I experienced may not have been lesser in frequency, but the nature of them was much more coded. So, for example here in San Francisco I can walk to like my local neighborhood coffee shop or whatever and somebody might yell “go back to where you came from,” which is a very like overt, aggressive verbal attack, whereas, you know, compare that to my DC experience of buying a sandwich during a workday and the person behind me in line would ask like “don't they give you food at your Embassy?” Right, and so it's like assuming that I'm like, and I'm tying it together now, because I know better, but I'm like “Oh, they assume that was foreign, not that I worked for our own government,” right? And so it's just a very different type of encounter, and also just the progression of time like there’s just more happening now. But I think I am more kind of cognizant now, especially at work, thinking about how others might perceive me. I think about that more now because it's even more important to me that I factor that in with my professional development strategy, because in DC I could take for granted, and I could see more readily that people did not believe me or did not see me as leadership material, you know, like all of those things. For better for worse, you could take for granted that everybody in the room, was going to know and believe in the model minority myth. Whereas I feel like it's a little bit more insidious, not insidious, maybe insidious. Here, because the community is aware, enough of these stereotypes to be able to say “Oh, but I don't subscribe to those.” But it's one thing to say that, and it's another for like, those beliefs still trickle in somewhere. And so I would argue that there's probably more here than the other like majority-white environments that I've historically been a part of.

Interviewer: Do you feel like that happens at work, too, is that something that like and if it does, like how in what ways does it manifests?

Participant (she/her): So I think at work, because our company is making conscious efforts to change a lot of this stuff, it's harder to point to systemic issues that aren’t already being addressed. But I feel like individually, I still have to think about “Okay, well, I need to make sure I say something in this meeting.”

Interviewer: Just in general?

Participant (she/her): Yeah like the whole like, I don't speak up a lot in meetings period. I like to take in a lot of information and process in my own timeline and then come back like that. Like unfortunately both my strengths and my styles reinforce the Model Minority stereotype, like the quiet observer, don't want to raise a fuss kind of thing. But what I tried to do is be very strategic in the way that I show up. So I've put more emphasis in developing what my voice sounds like when I do speak up. Um, and I just said um, but another thing I'm working on is getting rid of verbal tics, and so when I do communicate something it comes across with confidence, it comes across with clarity, body language, and trying to make sure that I get enough exposure to upper leaders so they get used to the idea that I can operate at their levels. I think, had it not been for awareness of these stereotypes, I wouldn't be trying so hard to buck them, and I think, knowing that the company wants to meet me halfway in dealing with how we respond to these biases, it gives me a little bit more confidence to bring up when these biases show up. You're like, “Remember you said you were working on this? Here's an example of us together working on this, yes?” And they're like, “Oh yeah.” I'm like “Mm hmm.” And that gets easier with practice, so a lot of it is showing up and trying to make sure that if I'm contributing a work product that I get to be the person who presents it to higher level people. A lot of that is designed to combat built-in systemic barriers at least the way that I perceive them.

Interviewer: This awareness of the model minority myth and like wanting to combat stereotypes, is that something that had come up come around when you were doing identity work and, like after the move and whatnot?

Participant (she/her): It's been a tough thing for me to navigate because on the one hand, I don't want to. I don't want to fight against something just because I know that a stereotype exists, and I feel like I need to disprove it as a stereotype. There's this tension between like what if the stereotype is actually true for me? Like in my case, like there are, there are ways in which the stereotype reflects a truth about myself, in which case I need to be okay with that. And I need to figure out how to coexist with the idea that there's an aspect of the stereotype that may just accurately describe who I am. And so, what I'm trying to figure out is okay, well then, how do I present that piece of truth, along with, like, the rest of me, that is also true so I don't feel like I'm falling into racially based beliefs?

Interviewer: Does that seem difficult to go through all these different thoughts about how you want to show up at work and whatnot?

Participant (she/her): Yeah. I would love, if I could figure out how I wanted to show up in general and be able to apply that in every context. And my ability to do that, because of the company that I work at, and because of the team that I’m on, there isn't a huge gap. But there still is one, like, for example, I don't swear at work. My spouse knows that I swear a lot um. I have been experimenting lately with being a little bit more sarcastic at work, which is risky because I work with a lot of lawyers. And fortunately, the lawyers are just as cynical as I am, and so the sarcasm usually lands where it's supposed to, but I've also recognized that when I feel like my cynicism is running on all cylinders, it's a sign that I'm a little bit burnout as well. So I've had, I've asked a couple of close colleagues to help check me, like if you see mark my sarcasm ratcheting up in a week, like across the week, let me know if you're observing that because that's also another key for myself. But I, prior to a couple of years ago, I would have reigned all that in, like my snarky comments, etc. like, I would have held that down. But since it's a useful data point for others as well, I'm starting to let that just happen, a little bit more.

Interviewer: And does that seem OK?

Participant (she/her): So far. I think I probably need to continue to contain it to a certain extent, like it's never just got to be like a free-flowing snark fest at work, because that ultimately gets seen as extremely unprofessional and again with workplace culture masking.

Interviewer: Sure, and do you feel like there are certain rules around how people are allowed to express their feelings or what they're allowed to feel while they're at work—implicit rules?

Participant (she/her): Yeah um, especially during the pandemic and when the invasion in Ukraine first happened, we were affected very much as a company because of what we do. People were putting in a lot of extra hours. It was high stress, and you could see very, very tired and frustrated faces on our Zoom calls, and people would be saying things like “I'm really frustrated with XYZ.” Except we're all experiencing a lot of the same issues, and so like to see a downtrodden face and to hear this like resigned tone of voice, you know that's not 100% accurate portrayal of what this person is feeling, and so there's this understood like, you can state the I am feeling blah blah blah or I am you know, whatever. But you still have to do in a measured tone. Like there's no such thing as showing up at work in your like full-frazzled self, acting and looking as out of control as you feel sometimes because at the end of the day, it's still work.

Interviewer: Sure. Do you feel like there's anything specifically different around how you, you know perceive those rules because you're Asian or because you're a woman?

Participant (she/her): I feel like I get less leeway. I feel like for every calm-sounding statement a person makes, mine needs to be a little bit softer, a little bit gentler. Like If I were to show up and say, “I find XYZ process really frustrating,” that's probably the most animated I could be able to, I would be able to say it. Whereas I'm imagining some of my other colleagues who are like white guys, they could definitely get away with including swear words, for example, whereas like I would just never imagine me, you know, cussing at work. They would probably—I've seen examples where like the gestures are a lot bigger. They take up a lot more space in the room when they, you know, standing up to make the statement, for example. Or like it just wouldn't occur to me. And you get like the raised eyebrows and the, and the widened eyes, when people like “Oh, this is… they really mean it,” right? Like that's the response, as opposed to if I did that, I would be seen as out of control, and I would lose credibility.

Interviewer: Sure. So you did talk a little bit about getting burned out at work, do you, do frequently feel like ever, or ever feel like emotionally exhausted while you're there? And I mean it sounds like maybe. And is there a particular context where you feel like that happens more regularly.

Participant (she/her): The circumstances under which I can guarantee I'm going to feel that way are when rules and protocols go out the door. So one key example is the end of 2020. The Trump administration was announcing all sorts of policies and programs left, right and center as he was leaving, and none of that adhered to known protocols for how public policy and government actually works. And the chaos that created was too much. I mean, on the one hand, I had to help coordinate the government side of that so it's like a lot of it was working with law firms and figuring out how we sue to stop. Not even based on the merits of what the policy was, but just because he didn't go through the process in the correct way. And then, at the same time, managing expectations and understanding within the business, because every time the administration announced something, it would show up in national headlines, and people across the company read these newspapers and they see these headlines, but they don't have the context to understand that just because an out-of-line President says XYZ doesn't mean that the way that we do something tomorrow is going to change. So there was a lot of there's a lot of work that went into going to our like regulatory internal regulatory teams commercial legal groups to explain, “nothing is going to change overnight here. We have a plan to stop this.” You know “here here's what it's going to look like over the next couple weeks,” but I felt like every two hours, there is a new version of that. And that got extremely exhausting. So that was difficult professionally and it was also very trying personally, because a lot of these proposals, I felt like affected me as an individual as well, so there's that like panic, on top of all that.

Interviewer: How did you cope with that when it was happening.

Participant (she/her): I knew it was time limited. So, knowing that there's going to be an end was very helpful. When it's stuff like that violence against Asians and there's no end in sight, that's a lot harder to deal with. It's also not a work thing. When there’s stuff like mass shootings, when there’s stuff like global wars, like all of these things where they don't have an end date, that's a lot harder to deal with. So it's trying to manage boundaries and energy moment to moment. A lot of just deprioritizing things and communicating that I'm deprioritizing things.

Interviewer: overall do you like your job, and if you have to read it on a scale from one to ten with ten being the best and one being the worst what number, would you give it?

Participant (she/her): What I do, and why I do it? Ten. The company environment? Six. And a lot of that is because it feels like a lot of leadership right now is running around like a chicken with their head cut off, and I kind of want people to just be adults. At the end of the day, I know we're going to figure it out, we always do. It just doesn't feel organized right now, and I love feeling organized. So I am committed to health policy and committed to public policy. If I weren't doing it here at this company, I would be doing it somewhere else.

Interviewer: Is there anything else about your workplace habits that you would want to talk about?

Participant (she/her): So one thing that's come up in my company a lot recently, in the context of our conversations about belonging, is a lot of the examples and a lot of the internal culture building, like we have a lot of guest speakers, we have a lot of activities that bring in different cultures and perspectives and experiences, and that is all wonderful because it grows awareness and appreciation. There's been an undercurrent lately that's gaining more traction around people who are—not masking this—they’re Trump Republicans, they're based in the South in a lot of instances, and now they're piping up and saying, “We don't feel like we belong.” This company is very left leaning in its politics, the way it shows up. The goals that we state publicly, we want to work towards, for example, we want more patients of different ethnicities and our clinical trials, you know there's a scientific reason behind that, but there are people who feel like this is an attack on their whiteness. And so they're starting to say, “As a Republican, as a white person I feel like I no longer belong in this company.” And there's no direct answer to that from our leadership. Right now, what we're hearing is “we want everybody feel like they belong, bring your full self, whatever that is” but not directly acknowledging that, and I'm curious to see if that answer evolves because if or when that ever changes, I'm interested to see if it does so at my expense. So there's always this feeling of like waiting for the other shoe to drop. Like it's been, progress towards diversity and inclusion has been pretty good for a while. It's been consistent, and I'm like nothing lasts forever, and so I'm kind of like what's going to happen here.