



## A Curated Research Report

Prepared by The Center for Women and Business at Bentley University

# Intersectionality in the Workplace: Broadening the Lens of Inclusion



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**Gloria Cordes Larson**  
Center for Women and Business

## About the Gloria Cordes Larson Center for Women and Business (CWB)

Advancing women and fostering workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion

The CWB provides thought leadership and training on critical diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. CWB facilitators lead hundreds of sessions with businesses worldwide, providing knowledge and tools to foster inclusive organizations.

Our dynamic programs focusing on workplace inclusion range from strategic sessions for senior leaders to hands-on workshops for emerging professionals. Topics include:

- Corporate Culture, Unconscious Bias, and Inclusive Leadership
- Allyship, including Men in Partnership to Advance Women
- Building Confidence and Overcoming Unseen Barriers
- The Role of Courageous Conversations
- Mentorship, Sponsorship, and Networks
- Talent Pipeline Issues from Entry Level to the Boardroom
- The Impact of Intersectionality
- Authentic Leadership and Team Development
- Effective Negotiations
- Workplace Flex and Parental Leave
- Taking Employee Resource Groups to the Next Level
- Developing Diversity and Inclusion Metrics
- The Multigenerational Workforce—Issues and Impacts



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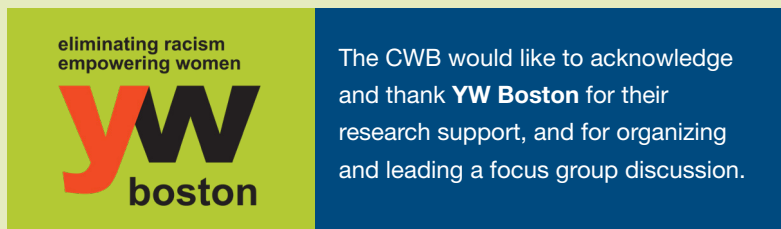
# About This Report

The understanding of workplace inclusion has evolved to recognize the importance of intersectionality. The experience of employees cannot be understood through a one-dimensional lens. Instead, a culture of inclusion values and supports the multifaceted identities of employees and their unique perspectives and experiences.

In this report, the Gloria Cordes Larson Center for Women and Business presents a thorough review of current research and media coverage related to intersectionality. We begin by looking at the historical context of intersectionality and then explore the unique intersectional experiences of individuals across key social identity markers. We consider the impact of being *The Only* at work, and offer insight on an intersectional approach to leadership. We conclude the report with a checklist of interventions to enable organizational leaders and Human Resources to foster a culture of inclusion.

A few notes for the reader...

- In this report, we capitalize all adjectives referencing ethnic or racial groups.
- As much as possible, we remain true to our sources' terms for identity markers, including but not limited to LGBTQ, lesbian, Black, African American, Hispanic, or Latinx.



## Winter 2019

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Intersectionality** describes the unique ways race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, ability, status, and other social and demographic identities come together to inform peoples' lived experiences. Often, the resulting impact is discrimination, disadvantage, or oppression.<sup>1</sup>

In this report, we explore intersectionality in the workplace. The topic, sometimes referenced in business settings as *multi-dimensionality*, is becoming increasingly important in corporate diversity and inclusion (D&I) efforts, as D&I practitioners and business leaders recognize that the key to creating an inclusive workplace is recognizing and valuing the multitude of employees' unique identities.

Before diving in, it is critical for readers to note that intersectionality has its roots in social power, oppression, and marginalized individuals, and that a Black female activist, attorney, and academic, Kimberlé Crenshaw, coined the term. We discuss its origins in greater length on page 3.

On the following pages, we focus primarily on the intersection of gender and the following markers: racial and ethnic identity; sexual orientation; ability/disability; age; religion; veteran status; class status; and cognitive diversity. Because race and gender are so often the focus of intersectionality, much of the report is devoted to this topic.

- We set the stage by providing historical perspectives, then explore the impact of intersecting identities on employees.
- Micro-inequities — subtle and often unintentional manifestations of unconscious bias — are discussed.
- We devote separate sections to the impact of being a minority of one — *The Only* — and the role of corporate leaders.
- Throughout the report, you will find *Inclusive Actions*, where we spotlight real-life impacts or actions to mitigate inequities.
- At the end of the report, readers will find two helpful sections:
  - A checklist of action items to address the negative impacts of intersectionality.
  - A glossary of terms related to intersectionality, diversity, and inclusion.

To provide greater context to the rather limited research and media coverage on intersectionality and the workplace, we conducted focus groups with individuals whose lived experiences exemplify intersectionality. Throughout the report, you will find relevant excerpts and references to those discussions.

**Intersectionality** (is) a recognition that each part of a person's multifaceted identity — race, ethnicity, gender and other traits — has a dramatic influence on the way they interact with employers and other institutions. While the various components of a person's identity lend unique perspectives on work and life, they can also lead to distinct career obstacles or discrimination.<sup>2</sup>

—Lauren Hepler, "Expanding the Definition of Diversity in the Corporate World."  
*San Francisco Business Times*, June 14, 2018



The Diversity Wheel

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## HOW DID WE GET HERE?

It isn't a new concept, yet intersectionality has only recently become part of diversity and inclusion (D&I) discussions in the workplace. Understanding why requires a bit of historical perspective.

**The 1960s and '70s** ushered in affirmative action, equal employment laws based primarily on race and gender, and the earliest employee resource groups (ERGs) — often called affinity groups at that time.<sup>3</sup> From the beginning, the Civil Rights Movement treated Black Americans as a monolithic group and the Women's Movement treated all women, regardless of color, as having similar goals and facing similar inequities. Women of color, and particularly Black women, were enlisted by both movements and fought on both fronts, yet did not fully benefit from either.<sup>4</sup>

**By the 1980s**, businesses were more routinely adopting formal diversity initiatives to increase representation of women and other underrepresented groups in the workplace. And in 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw, law professor, feminist legal theorist, and civil rights activist, coined the term *intersectionality* in recognition of the unique experience Black women were having in the workplace. She observed the way Black women had to categorize themselves either by race or by gender — never by both — when making legal claims of discrimination (despite the fact that the combination of the two identities was the underlying reason for the lawsuits).<sup>5</sup>

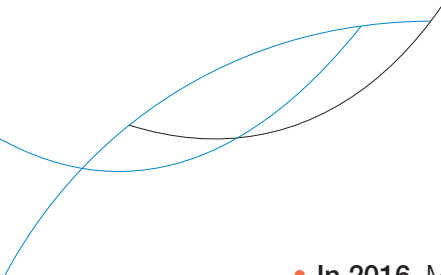
Case in point: at a GM plant, Black men were given all of the factory floor jobs and White women were given all of the secretarial positions, leaving Black women without options. Because discrimination based on both gender and race wasn't part of the legal perspective, the Black women's lawsuits were dismissed.

**During the 1990s**, protections for people with disabilities expanded. The Americans with Disabilities Act was passed, and with it, employers were now required to provide equal access to employment opportunities and benefits and to ensure accommodations. The law provided protections beyond the workplace, prohibiting discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life.<sup>6</sup>

**Since 2000**, we've seen more progress for LGBTQ rights in the workplace. Certainly, legislative and private remedies remain insufficient — with state and federal laws often unclear, inconsistent, and unenforced.<sup>7</sup> However, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) monitors protections via its Corporate Equality Index and estimates that 91 percent of Fortune 500 businesses now have non-discrimination policies on the basis of sexual orientation, while 83 percent have non-discrimination policies based on gender identity.<sup>8</sup>

**The 2000s** have been marked by other significant developments:

- **In 2013**, Sheryl Sandberg urged women to Lean In, with her best-selling book of the same name. It not only encouraged women to push for workplace opportunities and leadership, and generated wider recognition of women's potential in the workplace, but it also spawned the now ubiquitous Lean In Circles — support groups where women can share career ideas and advice, gain skills, and experience solidarity. But the Lean In movement also put a spotlight on the often starkly different work experiences between White women and women of color. Critics have claimed that Sandberg and her positions fail to acknowledge systemic barriers that no amount of "leaning in" can tear down.<sup>9</sup>

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- **In 2016**, Millennials – the most diverse generation yet — became the largest cohort in the U.S. workforce, and they are making their mark. They expect and have demanded significant changes in workplace culture, including when, where and how they work, and businesses are scrambling to meet their needs.
  - **And in 2018**, another important dynamic emerged — #MeToo. The international movement against sexual harassment and assault, especially in the workplace, gained momentum after allegations against Harvey Weinstein broke in the news and actress Alyssa Milano popularized #MeToo on Twitter. However, it was Black civil rights activist Tarana Burke who started the movement over a decade ago. And so to some, this important cause for change has become yet one more example of White women co-opting an issue that impacts women of color.<sup>10</sup>

This decades-long trajectory of initiatives, legal developments, and events has helped move the emphasis to the “I” in D&I, as businesses recognize that diversity is not inclusion, and that people need to feel valued, respected, and heard in order to feel included in their workplaces.

Today, enlightened corporate leaders genuinely appreciate and value intersectionality’s relevance to a positive culture and the bottom line. They also recognize that a singular focus on one identity, such as gender, can diminish the ability to achieve the broader systemic goal of organizational diversity, inclusion, and equity.<sup>11</sup>

## The Feminist and Civil Rights Movements Left Black Women Behind

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Melinda Marshall and Tai Wingfield explore the unique negative impacts of gender and race in their book, *Ambition in Black and White: The Feminist Narrative Revised*. They note that neither the Feminist Movement nor the Civil Rights Movement recognized Black women’s particular challenges in the workplace, “...nor their singularly fraught path toward equality. At the intersections of race and gender, both then and now, Black women have labored unseen, even to those lobbying for their advancement...Fifty years later,

### invisibility continues to cloak ambitious Black women...

Capable and credentialed, a Black lawyer at a Washington D.C. firm explained how she took on an extra-heavy caseload and kept her head down, lest she be seen as ‘an affirmative-action choice.’ A leader at a global investment bank explained how her role came ‘with training wheels,’ with a limited remit and extensive oversight, because senior management wasn’t confident she could be trusted with strategic decisions and couldn’t allow her in such a visible role to fail (thereby exaggerating the likelihood that she would).”<sup>12</sup>

## GENDER, RACE, AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Women of color are projected to make up the majority of all women by 2060, and they already generate \$1 trillion as consumers and \$361 billion in revenues as entrepreneurs — in fact, they are starting companies at four times the rate of all women-owned businesses.<sup>13</sup> Despite this and the well-documented benefits of diverse organizations, women of color carry a double burden at work based on their gender and race.

### The Pay Gap is Bigger for Women of Color

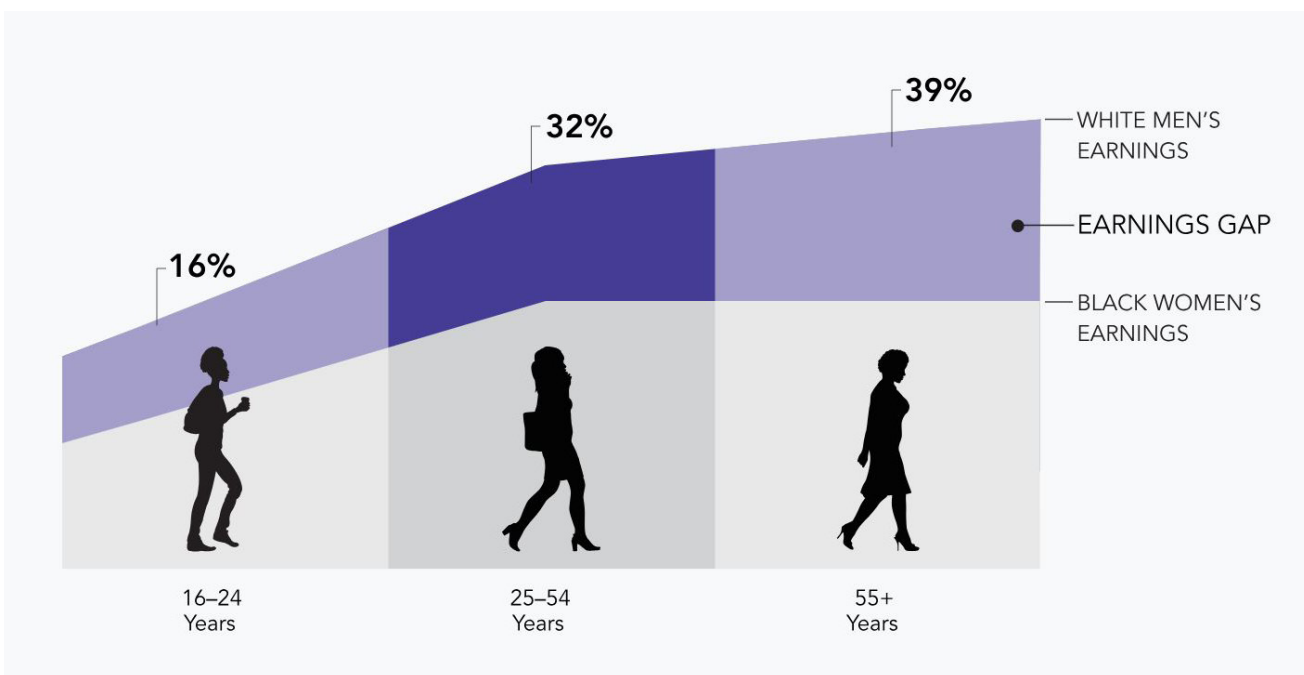
A concrete manifestation of the double burden women of color face is the pay gap. Latinas make 47 percent less than White men and 31 percent less than White women,<sup>14</sup> while Black women make 38 percent less than White men and 21 percent less than White women.<sup>15</sup>

The pay gap starts at entry-level, persisting and increasing throughout women's careers. For Black women, a gap of 16 percent grows to 32 percent by mid-career and 39 percent in the later years.<sup>16</sup> [See Figure 1]

When mothers are the primary breadwinners for their household, the pay gap hits particularly hard, and available data indicates that 80 percent of Black mothers in the U.S. are the primary household income earners.<sup>17</sup>

And yet, a study by Lean In, the National Urban League, and SurveyMonkey found that about half of all Americans don't know about the wage disparity between Black and White women and that nearly half of White men think that issues hindering Black women's progression have been eliminated.<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 1 - The Pay Gap for Black Women Starts When They Enter the Workforce and Increases with Age**



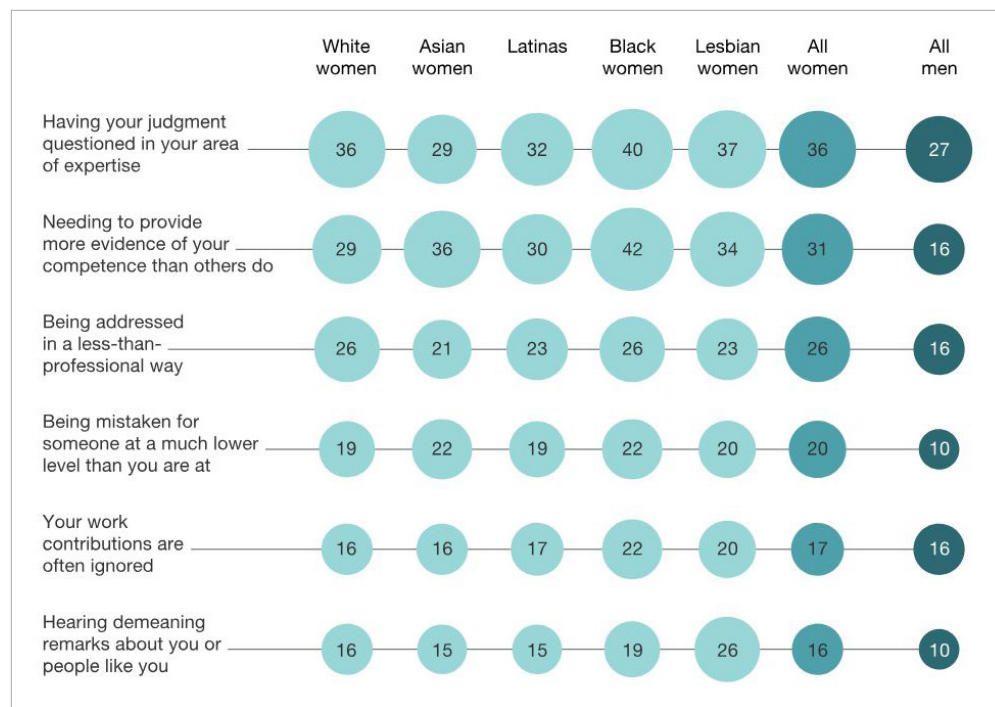
Source: "The Black Women's Pay Gap by the Numbers." *LeanIn.Org*, 2018, [leanin.org/data-about-the-gender-pay-gap-for-black-women#endnote1](https://leanin.org/data-about-the-gender-pay-gap-for-black-women#endnote1).

## Race, Gender, and the Magnified Impact of Micro-inequities

Research indicates that women who regularly experience micro-inequities, regardless of other unique identities, are three times more likely to routinely consider leaving their job compared to women who do not.<sup>19</sup> This in itself is a compelling argument for addressing the more subtle, often hidden bias that results in workplace micro-inequities.

Consider then, that women of color consistently report that they experience workplace micro-inequities, have their judgement questioned in their area of expertise,<sup>20</sup> [See Figure 2] and have less favorable experiences in key areas that impact their desire to remain with their employees.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, women of color become demoralized and isolated, which can lead to reduced levels of engagement.

**Figure 2 - Employees Who Have Experienced Micro-aggressions in the Workplace (%)**



Source: Krikovich, Alexis, et al. "Women in the Workplace 2018." *McKinsey & Company*, October 2018

**Micro-inequities** reflect inequality—while anyone can be on the receiving end of disrespectful behavior, [micro-inequities] are directed at people with less power, such as women, people of color, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people.<sup>22</sup>

—McKinsey and LeanIn.Org, *Women in the Workplace 2018*



- One of the most prevalent examples of micro-inequities is being held to a higher standard than others, and especially more so than White men.<sup>23</sup> For example, in one study, 50 percent of women of color felt they had equal access to high profile projects leading to advancement compared to 81 percent of White men. Moreover, women of color normally receive less support from managers than White women, with Black women receiving the least support.<sup>24</sup>
- Women of color report that they have to “code-switch” to fit in at work with the dominant culture and that they switch to a more authentic self with friends and family. Women who have to code-switch report the mental strain it causes as they try to meet a professional ideal that stifles them. One woman notes, “Your work is judged plus other intangible things. You second-guess yourself and that affects your confidence.”<sup>25</sup>
- While Black women’s access to mentorship and networks is growing, they clearly lag in sponsorship opportunities, being eclipsed by White women and Black men, even in women’s and African American ERGs where they might be members.<sup>26</sup> And not only Black women, but all women of color, generally have to take the initiative to build strong relationships across identities and up, down, and across the organization.<sup>27</sup> These women with less access to influential advisors often fall behind in the corporate pipeline.<sup>28</sup>
- Details about Latinas are more difficult to accurately provide, because much of the data combines men and women. We do know, however, that about half of all Latinos and Latinas say that executive presence at their company is defined by conforming to traditionally White, male standards and that about three quarters of Latinos and Latinas

report repressing aspects of their personas at work. They modify their physical appearance, body language, or communication styles — all components of executive presence.<sup>29</sup>

- Asian Americans – men and women included – present a paradox. Often referred to as *the model minority*, Asians are not considered an underrepresented group because despite making up only 5 percent of the overall population they comprise 12 percent of the workforce. However, they are often slotted for individual contributor roles and are less likely to be promoted to management than any other race, and women are uniquely impacted.<sup>30</sup> The top three challenges Asian Americans overall report are lack of role models, professional growth, and career development.<sup>31</sup> And inclusion programs often exclude them since they aren’t viewed as an underrepresented group. We delve further into the gender dynamic for Asian Women on page 9 under *Gender, Race, and the Leadership Challenge*.

### Inclusive Actions

#### Retention WarmLine

To assist in employee retention, Intel established a Retention WarmLine for employees experiencing a lack of progression, isolation, job skills mismatch, or strained relationship with their manager. Within two days of contacting the WarmLine, employees are connected with an advisor who provides confidential advice and support. Underlying the strategy is the understanding that underrepresented groups tend to have less access to support networks than dominant groups.<sup>32</sup>

When I got to the workplace, I felt very safe in my womanhood and very proud to be a woman, but ostracized as a Black person...

So there was something like a fee...there's this box you basically put yourself in to be in corporate America as a Black person. You don't speak a certain way, you don't mention certain things, you don't dress a certain way, you don't wear your hair a certain way...and you don't want to come across as too Black and like you care too much about Black people.

—CWB Focus Group Participant, December 2018

## Women of color report facing an “emotional tax” as a “double outsider” — they aren’t men and they aren’t White — leaving them demoralized and diminished.

A longitudinal study of Black MBA women from Harvard Business School (HBS) confirmed these findings. Within 40 years of graduation, only 13 percent of these students reached the senior-most executive ranks compared to 40 percent of Harvard MBAs overall. And of the Black women who managed to reach the top, many talked about having to cover (see page 10 and glossary).<sup>33</sup>

### Women of Color Multicultural Alliance

PepsiCo established an initiative called the Women of Color Multicultural Alliance in response to the challenge women of color were facing in developing authentic relationships with their managers and their need for development experiences. Since it was established, the Alliance has focused on the attraction, retention, and development of women of color in middle and senior management.<sup>34</sup> The initiative focuses on:

- Advancement opportunities
- Facilitated dialogues with managers
- An annual national leadership development conference
- Networking events
- Career development tools and resources

**Inclusive  
Actions**

## Gender, Race, and the Leadership Challenge

Women of color aren't waiting to get noticed in top U.S. firms. Nearly 4 million Black and Hispanic women currently sit at the helm of their own companies and women of color start between 600 and 800 new businesses each day.<sup>35</sup> But the problem is this: to date, even though their numbers in professional and managerial roles have increased, Black women's advancement into leadership roles has remained stagnant. And qualifications and experience don't explain why.<sup>36</sup>

- While Black women are nearly three times more likely to aspire to a position of power with a respected title than White women, White women are about twice as likely as Black women to achieve that goal.<sup>37</sup>
- Fewer than 1 percent of venture-capital backed female founders in the U.S. are African-American. While the number of start-ups founded by Black women has more than doubled since 2016, they have only raised .0006 percent of all tech funding since 2009.<sup>38</sup>
- According to a 2018 McKinsey report on financial services, women of color represent one in five employees at the entry level but “virtually disappear from representation at higher levels.” Across the 39 financial services companies McKinsey surveyed, there were only ten women of color in C-suite roles. A key factor is promotion rates, which are lower than those for men and for White women at nearly every step in the pipeline. In addition, attrition rates at the entry and middle management levels are higher for women of color than for White women.<sup>39</sup>
- Latinas, too, face negative stereotypes when it comes to leadership. Research indicates that among college faculty, those Latinas who act assertively risk being viewed as angry or emotional even when they report that they are not angry, just not deferential. About 60 percent

of Latinas surveyed as part of the research felt a backlash against expressing anger.<sup>40</sup>

- Mary Min, a senior global executive, grew up in an Asian-American household where there was a major emphasis on respect, and she wants to hold onto that, but believes that the workplace can misinterpret and take advantage of respect, perceiving it as weakness. She feels that in boardrooms made up mostly of White men, her insights have often been dismissed, and she characterizes being an Asian-American woman as a “double whammy.” “We either have to choose to be that meek, compliant Asian person or we have to be a dragon lady,” she says. “There's no middle ground.”<sup>41</sup>
- Senior level women of color in financial services are more likely to view any failure, big or small, as having compromised their success, and they are more likely to think that “playing the game” and being well-liked is critical to success.<sup>42</sup>

### Inclusive Actions

#### Persistence and Support

Women of color who have made it beyond individual contributor and front-line management to senior levels credit a combination of personal qualities and help from others:<sup>43</sup>

- **Ambition.** They all aspire to high status roles with power and influence, and want to impact their firm's strategic goals.
- **Confidence to seize opportunities.** They all believe in their ability as leaders and are able to step outside of their comfort zones to gain new experience.
- **Pursuit of management challenges.** They all believe that challenging experiences as managers have prepared them for leadership.
- **Supportive, influential mentors.** They have all benefited from advisors, sponsors, and role models who helped them gain knowledge and navigate their career journey.

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND INTERSECTIONALITY

*Notes to readers:*

- *Throughout this section, use of the terms LGBTQ and lesbian remain true to the research that we reference.*
- *There is limited data exploring sexual orientation and gender identity in the workplace, particularly for those openly identifying as transgender.*

Like all multidimensional identities, sexual orientation brings with it unique perspectives about work and life along with distinct career obstacles.<sup>44</sup> A significant 71 percent of lesbian women report experiencing micro-aggressions in the workplace. They hear demeaning remarks about themselves and others and are far more likely to feel they cannot talk about their personal lives at work.<sup>45</sup>

The impact of these experiences is all the more meaningful in light of a 2018 Human Rights Campaign Foundation report. It finds that the primary reason LGBTQ workers of any gender do not report negative comments they hear about LGBTQ people to management or Human Resources is that they do not believe anything would be done — and they don't want to hurt their relationships with coworkers.<sup>46</sup>

Like women overall, lesbian women socialize less with their managers and report receiving far less access to senior leaders than do men. Lesbian women generally receive the same amount of manager support as other women, with one critical exception: they get far less help balancing work and personal demands.<sup>47</sup> A recent study indicated that only 39 percent of lesbian women report that their managers help them balance work and personal demands compared to 48 percent of White women and 44 percent of men.<sup>48</sup>

Critically, when at work, one third of lesbian women feel like they can't talk about themselves or their personal lives. When employees behave this way, or "cover," they are suppressing or disassociating from one of their identities. Kenji Yoshino, NYU School of Law Professor and legal scholar, explores this dynamic, noting that underrepresented individuals often "modulate" their identities in order to be accepted by the mainstream.<sup>49</sup> The need to cover is likely a sign of a workplace culture that is not inclusive and therefore inadvertently encourages underrepresented employees to hide aspects of their identity.<sup>50</sup> Covering increases workplace stress, which can lead to poor health, decreased engagement and performance, and decreased retention.

### Like women of color, LGBTQ women often feel that they have to represent their group.

A CWB focus group participant put it well: "I'm often asked to speak for the transgender community, and being gender queer (her identity) is just one slice of that...while it's understandable, it's a responsibility you don't always want to take on."

Another participant pointed out the nuanced aspect of her intersectionality, saying that she was tapped for diversity work as soon as she was hired. She noted, "I remember appreciating that I was tapped but also being resentful, and knowing that my colleagues at the same level were putting their energy into work more directly related to career success...so it was kind of a blessing and a curse."

In addition to covering, being closeted is a significant workplace issue, but the literature on this topic discusses LGBTQ employees in general, not LGBTQ women. The important takeaway on this topic is that closeted employees feel more isolated at work than their openly gay peers. In fact, more than half believe their careers have stagnated compared to just over a third of their colleagues who are out.<sup>51</sup> The possible impacts of being closeted, such as increased anxiety and decreased engagement, are similar to those for covering.

While sexual harassment continues to pervade the workplace and impact all women, more lesbian women – nearly half – report that they have been sexually harassed. Why? Research indicates that women who do not conform to traditional feminine expectations are more often the targets of sexual harassment.<sup>52</sup>

According to the 2018 McKinsey-LeanIn.Org *Women in the Workplace* report, lesbian women are the exception to an issue that is pervasive for all women across all races and ethnicities: while other women carry the brunt of household and family responsibility, lesbian women split the work more evenly with their partners.<sup>53</sup> This is relevant in the workplace context because inequitable work-life balance is a significant challenge for women in their career progression.

Transgender individuals are often left out of gender identity discussions, especially in the workplace. Yet research indicates that 27 percent of trans employees report having not been hired or being fired based on their gender identity. We also know that in 26 states being hired or fired based on gender identity is legal and that 77 percent of trans employees hide their identities at work.<sup>54</sup>

## The Impact and Value of LGBTQ Inclusion

Employers should make LGBTQ workers feel valued and included via hiring and promotion processes, through Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and allies groups, through benefits programs, and even by including pronouns in signatures. For transgender employees, interventions might include all-gender bathrooms, gender-sensitive dress codes, and medical benefits coverage for gender reassignment procedures.

In addition, employers should recognize the business case for LGBTQ inclusion.

- Research demonstrates that LGBTQ inclusive workplaces do a better job attracting and retaining talent as well as winning critical consumer segments and innovating for underserved markets.<sup>55</sup>
- 71 percent of those identifying as LGBTQ and 82 percent of allies say they are more likely to purchase a good or service from a company that supports LGBTQ equality.<sup>56</sup>
- 72 percent of LGBTQ allies say they are more likely to accept a job at a company that supports LGBTQ employees.<sup>57</sup>

**Inclusive  
Actions**

## GENDER AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

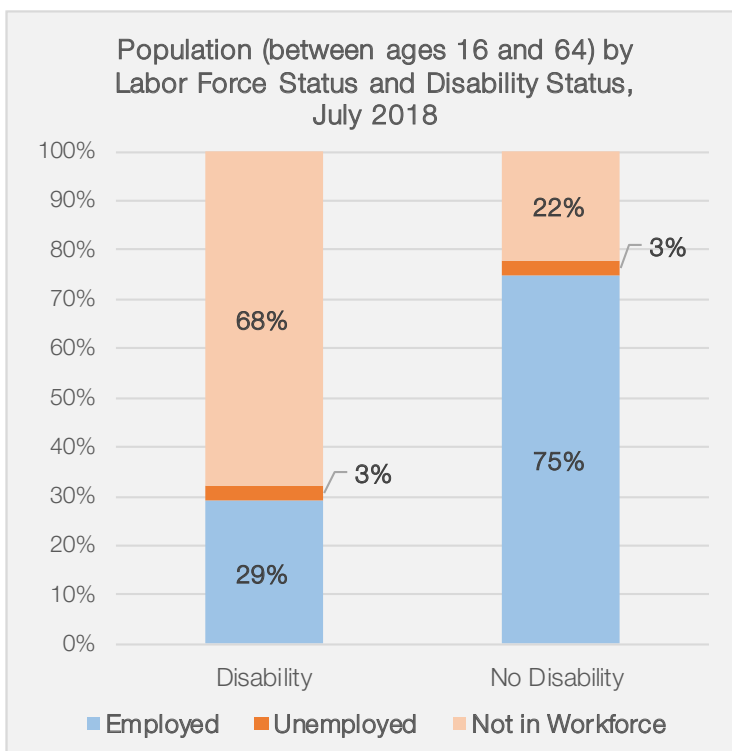
The persistence of cultural, legal and institutional barriers continues to make women and girls the victims of compounded discrimination, both as women and as persons with disabilities. Often, women with disabilities are invisible both among those advocating for people with disabilities as well as those promoting gender equality and the advancement of women.

According to UN Women Watch, girls and women of all ages with any form of disability are among the more vulnerable and marginalized of society, therefore deserving policies, programs, and other special measures to help them throughout society and the workplace.<sup>58</sup> And research suggests that women with disabilities are more likely to experience domestic violence, emotional abuse, and sexual assault than those without disabilities.<sup>59</sup>

Turning to the workplace, we find that much of the data on people with disabilities combines genders. For instance, we know that only 29 percent of working age Americans with disabilities participate in the workforce compared to 75 percent of those without disabilities.<sup>60</sup> [See Figure 4] And we know that workers with disabilities are harmed by discrimination and unconscious bias.<sup>61</sup>

- Research indicates that fewer than half of all companies make job interview candidates aware of the option to request accommodations for an interview.
- A mere 15 percent of businesses utilize personality profile screening tests that allow applicants with a disability to opt out.
- People with disabilities who get advanced degrees earn approximately \$21,000 a year less than those without disabilities who have the same educational qualifications.

**Figure 4 - Untapped Contributors**



Source: Accenture. *Getting to Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage*. 2018. Page 4.

## It Pays to Value Employees with Disabilities

Accenture research finds that

**businesses that champion people with disabilities outperform others on profitability and shareholder returns.**

Their revenues are 28 percent higher, net income is 200 percent higher, and profit margins are 30 percent higher.<sup>62</sup>

The same research suggests that the cost of implementing disability initiatives should not be a concern. Nearly 60 percent of accommodations cost nothing to make, and the remaining interventions typically cost \$500 per person with a disability.<sup>63</sup>

Mental health — an invisible and often unrecognized disability — deserves greater attention in the workplace, since failure to recognize employees' mental health challenges can harm working relationships, productivity, and the bottom line.

- Over 40 million Americans suffer from an anxiety disorder.<sup>64</sup>
- Employers are seeing an increase in health costs for their employees directly correlated to the treatment of mental illness, specifically anxiety.<sup>65</sup>
- While \$17-44 billion annually is lost to depression, \$4 comes back to the economy for every \$1 spent caring for people with mental health issues.<sup>66</sup>
- About 45 percent of straight White men report covering, and mental health is sometimes a reason.<sup>67</sup>

Well-being is central to an inclusive culture because it fosters an environment where everyone can define what self-care means to them. Embedded in inclusion, well-being provides the opportunity for each individual to personalize their experiences in the ways that matter most to them in body, mind, and purpose.<sup>68</sup>

—Dr. Terri Cooper, Chief Inclusion Officer, Deloitte

### **Develop Specific Policies To Help Employees with Disabilities**

Companies that excel in inclusion for differently-abled employees have inclusion policies that explicitly include information about disabilities and equal opportunity policies, rather than falling back on catch-all phrases that inadvertently leave people with disabilities unrecognized.<sup>69</sup>

### **Consider People with Disabilities When Developing Any Policy**

As suggested by a CWB focus group participant, “I think it’s important for employers to think about universal design. So what are the ways that they can promote diversity from the disability perspective, but at the same time benefit all of their employees? Things like flexible working hours are a good example. They are important for people with disabilities who might take a medication in the morning and need to wait for its effects to wear off and then come in later in the afternoon. But I think all employees also benefit from flexible hours.”

### **Benchmark Inclusion Efforts Using the Disability Equality Index (DEI)**

The DEI is a national benchmarking tool businesses can utilize in their efforts to improve inclusion for employees with disabilities. Developed by the American Association for People with Disabilities, a nonprofit resource for business disability inclusion, the Index quantifies disability inclusion policies and practices, measuring a variety of criteria ranging from culture and leadership to support services.<sup>70</sup>



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## INTERSECTIONALITY AND THE GENERATIONAL IMPACT

Millennials (born between 1981 and 1998) now comprise more than half of the U.S. workforce and will make up 75 percent of all workers by 2025, and Gen Z (born between 1999 – present) is poised to become a significant force in the labor market over the next decade.<sup>71</sup>

- According to the Pew Research Center, Millennials are more diverse than previous generations, with nearly 40 percent belonging to a non-White race or ethnicity.<sup>72</sup> And as a generation, they are rejecting the idea of being identified by any single dimension, especially race, gender, and sexual orientation.<sup>73</sup>

“We don’t focus as much on someone’s color, religion or sexual orientation as some of our older counterparts might. What we care about most in other people is honesty, sincerity and — perhaps most important — competence.”<sup>74</sup>

— Josh Miller, “A 16-Year-Old Explains 10 Things You Need to Know About Generation Z,” *Society for Human Resource Management*, October 30, 2018

- Gen Z marks the last generation in U.S. history where a majority of the population is White.<sup>75</sup> This younger group has been shaped by major societal changes — a Black man occupied the White House for most of their lives, and gay marriage became far more common and accepted. As a result, they view a diverse population as the norm.

As these youngest generations are making their mark on the workplace, older employees who have not retired — namely Gen X and Baby Boomers — are feeling the pressure to keep up and remain relevant. In fast growing or quickly evolving industries — such as tech, media, advertising, publishing, communications, entertainment, and even retail — older employees are sometimes the only people from their generation on a team, which can lead to bias and discrimination.

Here’s the paradox: while leaders and hiring managers are now trained to recognize unconscious bias and overt discrimination, age bias — while glaring — does not attract the same level of urgency as other forms of discrimination.<sup>76</sup> And research demonstrates that women are hurt worse by ageism than are men. A salient example is resumes: older women get far fewer callbacks than those of older men and of younger applicants of either gender.<sup>77</sup> Other examples include being marginalized, passed over for promotions, or pushed out to make room for younger employees.

Researchers identify two primary factors behind such bias:

- Age discrimination laws do less to protect women at the intersections of age and gender. It’s simply more difficult to bring legal claims based on actions that violate the Civil Rights Act and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act.
- Older women appear to face more discrimination than older men based on physical appearance — there’s a widely accepted societal view that age detracts more from physical appearance for women than for men.



## Advice to Individuals Facing Ageism

One characteristic, however, may actually benefit older women. Researchers at Stanford, Columbia, and NYU find that older, assertive men face the strongest pressure to decrease their assertiveness, while older women's similar intentions are viewed as less of a threat. The research concludes that women are viewed more sympathetically because they belong to two disadvantaged groups, and they therefore "slip through the space between biases," a phenomenon called *intersectional escape*, which can occur when two stereotypes clash. According to the study's authors, "In this middle space, people can sometimes escape traditional biases."<sup>78</sup>

### Create Opportunities for Multigenerational Connections

To help older employees, businesses should utilize reverse mentoring (younger workers advising older employees), targeted training that keeps older employees up-to-date on skills — especially technical knowledge — and age-oriented ERGs. It's noteworthy that while 90 percent of Fortune 500 companies have some type of ERG, only a tiny fraction have groups for their older demographic.

Airbnb has taken a novel approach. The company established a Wisdom ERG to encourage an age-friendly workplace that is open to any employees over the age of 40 and anyone committed to the goal of a multigenerational approach. The initiative brings people of all ages together, helping both the business and its employees leverage the institutional wisdom and insight of mature employees. The age-oriented ERG addresses generational conflicts in the workplace and demonstrates to older generations that they are valued.<sup>80</sup>

**Inclusive  
Actions**

Here is some of the best advice from experts and recruiters to help individuals combat workplace ageism:<sup>79</sup>

- Know your value.
- Build cross generational networks.
- Manage up.
- Find a sponsor.
- Challenge your own assumptions about age.
- Know your rights.
- Document comments, interactions, and behavior.
- Confront stereotypes head-on.
- Keep your resume up-to-date and disclose dates selectively.
- Request training that's relevant to your work.
- Be open to feedback.
- Consider things from others' perspectives and get comfortable with younger managers.
- Project confidence and good humor.
- Find a like-minded community.

Ageism is defined as a dominant group using its power to oppress or exploit or silence or simply ignore people who are much older or significantly younger. We experience ageism any time someone assumes we're 'too old' for something... instead of finding out who we are and what we're capable of.<sup>81</sup>

—Ashton Applewhite, Principal, This Chair Rocks and Anti-Ageism Activist

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## RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Research indicates that overall, women are more likely to prioritize religion in their lives than are men.<sup>82</sup> Beyond statistics indicating the amount that women pray compared to men (more) and how often they attend religious services compared to men (again, more), relevant information about gender differences is lacking. However, the intersection of gender and religion for Muslim women — and the challenges it presents — is better documented.

We know, for example, that Muslim women, who comprise less than one percent of the U.S. population, confront religious and cultural bias barriers that can be disheartening and degrading. They report not being asked back for second interviews, being overlooked in meetings and social conversations, being passed over for leadership opportunities, and being omitted from succession plans.<sup>83</sup> And Muslim American women who wear hijab — a visible and often misunderstood sign of their faith — encounter even more challenges. Indeed, 69 percent of women wearing a hijab have experienced at least one incident of discrimination.<sup>84</sup>

How can you say you stand for diversity and inclusion when you limit it to external characteristics and don't extend it to the inclusion of worldviews that include some kind of god or not?<sup>86</sup>

—David Miller, Director of the Princeton University Faith & Work Initiative

Surprisingly, during a CWB focus group with women who identify as LGBTQ, the topic of religion dominated. Quite by accident, the majority of attendees realized that they were suppressing aspects of their spiritual identity and that sometimes it was related to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

One focus group attendee introduced the topic, saying she is a practicing Catholic. “I think I feel less comfortable sharing religious traditions (than sexual orientation) in the workplace. I just don't feel like it's a very comfortable topic. But it feeds the fabric of who we are and how we work together...for me personally, I think it could be my fear that I would be judged.”

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### Religion and spirituality can be a thorn in the side for diversity advocates.

Supporters of gender, race or sexual orientation rights often avoid speaking in support of religious expression in the workplace. And human resource professionals — knowing that religious expression can lead to discrimination, litigation or polarization — often avoid the topic altogether.<sup>85</sup>

Another participant (whose pronouns are “they”) “...found it hard to bring both their LGBTQ and religious identities into the same group. If I went to a student group and mentioned that I was Catholic, they would be very judgmental. And when I went to my Christian fellowship group, they didn’t want to talk about my gay-straight alliance. It was very separate.”

Yet another participant revealed that when she’s in a predominantly LGBTQ or liberal group, she stays deeply in the closet about her religion, but if she’s in a Christian setting, “It’s hard for me to kind of ‘de-queer’ myself. I try to walk a straighter line, or at least not make [my gender identity] be so overt.”

You want to make sure your organization has policies in place [related to spirituality] — and they are being communicated — so people on the front line don’t have to decide how to work through these issues and make things up in the moment.<sup>87</sup>

—Derek van Bever, Faculty, Harvard Business School

### Inclusive Actions

#### Promote Religious Tolerance and Accommodation

Advice from employment attorneys and HR specialists regarding respect for spirituality and religion includes:<sup>88</sup>

- Encouraging diversity and tolerance
- Promoting nondenominational values and ethics
- Training managers on religious discrimination and accommodation
- Following practices to avoid religious bias, just as you would with other matters of equity



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## THE IMPACT OF VETERAN STATUS

Reliable data on how female veterans fare in the workplace compared to their peers is difficult to ascertain. But understanding the experience that all veterans have — and placing it in the context of well-known gender-based workplace challenges — should provide understanding about the compounded challenges these women face when they return to the civilian workforce.

Veterans represent 7.7 percent of the over-18 U.S. population and comprise 4.8 percent of the civilian workforce, and a strong majority who are transitioning to civilian life are interested in pursuing a career outside of their military profession. And yet, more than half of veterans struggle to find work in their preferred post-military fields because employers, who want experienced and educated candidates, often don't realize veterans qualify.<sup>90</sup>

- According to one source, only 17 percent of employers say veterans are viewed as strategic assets in the workplace.<sup>91</sup>
- Nearly half of all veterans leave their first post-military position within a year and between 60 and 80 percent leave before their second work anniversary. While some depart for better jobs, the top reasons veterans report leaving are a lack of career development, work that lacks meaning, limited professional development, and an unfamiliar work culture.<sup>92</sup>

### Recommendations for Veterans Entering the Civilian Workforce

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#### To adjust as a civilian employee:<sup>93</sup>

- Connect with organizations that help veterans and join support groups in the area where you live. Having a network of people who have gone through similar experiences can help immeasurably and can also provide veterans with mentorship opportunities.
- Join or form an ERG for veterans in your workplace.
- Never forget your value and worth. Understand that the transition to civilian work can be challenging.
- It's okay if the first job you take after leaving the military isn't a perfect fit — today's job market is fluid, and it's acceptable to move on.


## Offer Veterans Targeted Education and Engagement

Businesses with a goal of welcoming, including, and maximizing the value of veterans should:<sup>94</sup>


- Widen their definition of diversity to include veterans.
- Provide managers with training about bias and stereotypes ascribed to veterans.
- Design internship and apprenticeship programs such as information technology training.
- Provide targeted onboarding programs and integration processes for veterans.
- Educate managers, recruiters, and leaders about military culture and language.
- Establish an employee or business resource group for veterans.
- Utilize mentors and sponsors for veterans.
- Help veterans connect to the larger organizational goals and missions; this will resonate because they have been trained to fulfill a national mission in the military.

## Veterans Hiring Program

EY created a veterans hiring program several years ago. An EY Director of Inclusiveness Recruiting explained why: “When we look at the skills these veterans bring, their experiences, their insight, their ability to work in a team, their strong work ethic – all these things translate into what we do as a firm as we serve our clients. We’ve benefited immensely from having their perspective and point of view.”<sup>95</sup>



My job is so unpredictable. Being a consultant, there’s no playbook. The clients have different needs every week. Adaptability is huge. The military was very much like that – you never knew what to expect... So learning to have the flexibility, to react to change, and to quickly come up with a plan is a valuable skill here.<sup>96</sup>



—A Veteran Who Joined EY as a Consultant

## THE ROLE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Talking about socio-economic or class status is largely considered taboo, yet class background matters in the business world, and working to make *class migrants* (see glossary) feel more included should be a strategic priority. Indeed, half of college enrollees are now from households in which parents don't hold bachelor's degrees.<sup>97</sup>

Those who grow up with working-class backgrounds often have unique skills that people who grew up economically privileged lack. In fact, research suggests that CEOs who are class migrants have more positive risk-taking tendencies that can propel them up the corporate ladder, and they bring common-sense approaches to client service along with strong work ethics.<sup>98</sup>

Despite this and other compelling data on the abilities of class migrants, they report negative work experiences, feel less included in the workplace culture, find it harder to navigate the unwritten rules of the corporate world and are less likely to be seen as a good culture fit.

Class-based bias, just like gender and racial-based biases, can seep into workplace systems and artificially hinder the career success of those groups.<sup>99</sup>

Researchers at the University of California and Hastings College of Law note that “Class-based bias, just like gender and racial-based biases, can seep into workplace systems and artificially hinder the career success of those groups.”<sup>100</sup> A cogent example is hiring for culture fit, a long-standing practice in many professional firms ranging from law to investment banking and consulting.

2016 research that included a widespread resume audit examined the effects of social class on entry to large U.S. law firms. The study found that higher-class male applicants received significantly more callbacks than did higher-class women, lower-class women, and lower-class men. Interviews with attorneys at major law firms added insight: compared to lower-class applicants, higher-class candidates are viewed as better fits with the elite culture and clientele of such firms.<sup>101</sup>

Interestingly, the same study found that higher class men benefited from a corresponding overall boost in evaluations based on gender and social class, while higher-class women did not. The women faced a competing, negative stereotype portraying them as less committed to an intense career. The researchers referred to this as a *commitment penalty*.<sup>102</sup>

### Avoid Hiring for Culture Fit

Some workplace practices to mitigate the issue of culture fit include:<sup>103</sup>

- Hiring from different colleges and universities
- Clearly defining culture fit when it is used to hire and promote
- Limiting hiring based on referrals, to decrease homogeneity of teams
- Overtly valuing teamwork, which levels the playing field for those less comfortable with self-promotion (as many class migrants are)
- Offering flexible work arrangements for everyone
- Providing alternatives to elite activities such as golf

**Inclusive  
Actions**

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## THE IMPACT OF DIVERSITY OF THOUGHT

Our thinking is shaped by our backgrounds, culture, experiences, and personalities — this is the core concept behind diversity of thought. Organizations that blend people who think differently from each other — analytical workers, conceptual thinkers, creative spirits, or detail-oriented employees — can create energy to drive new ideas and productivity. Cultures that prize diversity of thought also inoculate themselves against group think or, as Amazon’s Jeff Bezos refers to it, “social cohesion.” He encourages his teams to disagree openly in meetings and respectfully challenge decisions in order to drive success.<sup>104</sup>

In theory, a culture that encourages diversity of thought should be a better place for women

and other underrepresented groups, since our cognitive diversity is shaped both by our inherent differences — gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation — as well as our acquired differences, such as where we grew up, the schools we attended, and whether we worked abroad.<sup>105</sup> Gender intelligence — the concept that men and women bring unique cognitive benefits to the workplace based on inherent differences — supports this view.

A word of caution, though: emphasizing diversity of thought can work against inclusion if it detracts from attention to underrepresented groups. Broadening the definition of diversity has allowed corporate boards to claim inroads on diversity by relying on experience-based variations at the expense of demographic differences.<sup>106</sup> See *Inclusive Actions* below for more detail.

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Author Frans Johnson addresses the notion of *intersectional thinking* in his book, *The Medici Effect*. He asserts that the strongest ideas rise from the combination or interaction of varying industry insights. And research supports the idea that

**“...people who are connected across heterogeneous groups and who have more diverse contacts come up with more creative ideas and original solutions.”<sup>107</sup>**

### An Unbiased Selection Process for Board Members

**Inclusive  
Actions**

Researchers from Bentley University, Boston College, and IE Business School find that “Attention once oriented toward underrepresented groups (women and racial and ethnic minorities) is increasingly centered on technical attributes, such as experience and skills.” They note that one result has been a noticeable slowdown in the rate at which women and other underrepresented groups are being appointed to board seats.<sup>108</sup>

One of the study’s authors, Cynthia E. Clark of Bentley University, recommends a redesign of the director selection process that includes:

- Utilizing anti-bias training for nominating committees and board members
- Using more diverse recruitment networks
- Conducting a blind review process that removes demographic identifiers like name, gender, and age

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## A MINORITY OF ONE

What does it mean to be *The Only* or *The Other*? Being *The Only* is something most people have experienced. Typical workplace examples include being the one woman in the room, the only person of color on a team, the only person with a disability at the table, the only junior person at a social event, or the older person in a business unit. All of these experiences are known to increase anxiety, pressure, and a fear of making a mistake or confirming negative stereotypes, but imagine being the only almost all of the time, by virtue of your intersectionality.

Catalyst describes *The Only* experience as *Otherness* — being different or having characteristics that set you apart from the dominant group. As *The Other*, you not only feel different but also feel separated from others. The more different we are, the more strongly we feel like *The Other* or *The Only*. And the impact is significant.<sup>109</sup>

Women *Onlys* are almost twice as likely to have been sexually harassed at some point in their careers. And being an *Only* also affects the way women view their work environment. McKinsey finds that compared to other women, *Onlys* who are women are less likely to think that the best workplace opportunities go to the most deserving

“I was always the only woman on the team at my consulting firm, and an immigrant, too. I think it's shocking that, over five years, I have still not worked for a woman. Why don't firms put multiple women on teams so that we don't feel alone?”

—CWB Focus Group Participant, December 2018

employees, that promotions are equitable, and that ideas are judged fairly rather than by who raised them — and they consistently feel scrutinized, believing that their actions reflect positively or negatively on others like them. Women *Onlys* are also 1.5 times more likely to consider leaving their job.<sup>110</sup>

The Wall Street Journal reports that when women are a minority of one at work a sense of invisibility pervades their work experiences. Paradoxically, they describe feeling conspicuous at the same time — excluded but also closely watched.<sup>111</sup>

“In so many scenarios, I've felt invisible, not as valued as my White male counterparts. On the converse side, do I also feel like I'm under a microscope? All the time,” says Adrienne Lofton, an African-American senior global marketing executive.<sup>112</sup>

While all women experience being *The Only* in corporate settings, the figure for women of color is much higher, rising from 20 percent to 45 percent. And the odds of experiencing discrimination at work are higher when women find themselves alone in a group of men.<sup>113</sup>

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Remember that an intersectional approach requires recognition of the voices of those directly impacted.

**Allow individuals to tell their stories...they may effectively become *thought leaders* for diversity in your organization.**

A social justice expert asserts, “Valuing voice allows those who are affected by policies to play a substantial role in building their own story.”<sup>114</sup>



## Encourage Courageous Conversations

Courageous Conversations are a powerful practice in cultures working to help *Onlys* integrate and feel included. These conversations break down barriers and build bridges across differences, and such dialogue helps us understand others' views and behavior, increases understanding and empathy, and leads to healthier, more productive working relationships. Importantly, the onus should not fall on the less empowered person to initiate a courageous conversation.

Courageous Conversations don't necessarily require an agenda, a problem to be solved, or an explicit goal. Their purpose can be as simple as getting to know someone different. Regardless of the context, consider these guidelines before you enter a courageous conversation.

- Assess the situation — does it warrant a discussion, and what are the roadblocks?
- Address real or perceived personal roadblocks.
- Be aware of emotions — listen with empathy and accept feedback calmly.
- Assume positive intent — put judgment aside.
- Focus on dialogue — not debate.
- Demonstrate personal and cultural humility.
- Be vulnerable, transparent and willing to admit mistakes.
- Create trusting, safe spaces.
- Expect and accept lack of closure.
- Fully commit to the conversation by speaking up about bias, gender and other representation issues.

**Inclusive  
Actions**

According to Catalyst,

**“The potential to create a culture of inclusion is diminished every time we shy away from genuine conversations about the very things that make us unique.”**

“Imagine having to hide or cover an aspect of your identity — by altering your appearance, not showing emotion about recent news events, or avoiding certain behaviors — out of fear of reinforcing a stereotype.”<sup>15</sup>

I was the only Black woman in the business, but I eventually ended up with a female boss who identified openly as lesbian...I felt like my success there was strongly linked to feeling comfortable and that she helped make me feel that way because she understood my situation.

—CWB Focus Group Participant, December 2018

## AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP

An intersectional approach acknowledges systemic discrimination due to sexual orientation and identity, gender and gender identity, race, economic and class status, immigration status, national origin, ability, religion, diversity of thought, and more. But recognizing these barriers to opportunity is only the first step.

Solving the intersectional challenge needs to start at the top of the organization. CEOs and senior executives — seats held mostly by White men — can start by acknowledging that talent at the intersections is sometimes invisible to them, and that this is a real phenomenon due not to racism or sexism, but one often resulting from unconscious bias and privileged positions. For all of us, it is easier to trust and promote someone who reminds us of ourselves. Once leaders recognize this unconscious bias, they need to bravely and visibly create a culture in which people at the intersections of unique identities have equal access to opportunities and advancement.<sup>116</sup>

Author and science journalist Dan Goleman asserts that in order to succeed at intersectional leadership, CEOs and other senior executives must embody emotionally mature leadership and empathy, which he defines as “the ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people and [the] skill in treating people according to their emotional reactions.” In fact, Goleman sees empathy as the “antidote” to the challenges of cross-cultural dialogue, because empathy helps us navigate cultural differences and potential misunderstandings based on those differences.<sup>117</sup>

Leaders of smaller companies have a potential advantage when it comes to intersectional leadership: they can start early. Global Head of Atlassian D&I Aubrey Blanche has driven a

To tap the talent of leaders whose identities lie at the intersections (surely a majority of the men and women working in corporate America today),

### **we need leaders who create constant opportunities for cultural intersections**

where commonality can emerge, and who incentivize sponsorship of diverse talent by rewarding those who resist the reflex to advocate for “mini me’s.” In that inclusive workplace, sponsorship can arise organically across difference, and no one worthy of consideration for leadership falls off the radar.<sup>120</sup>

significant increase in female technical hires very quickly. She contends that small companies have the unique opportunity to succeed early and sidestep a corrosive factor she refers to as *diversity debt* — an escalating difficulty in building a diverse workforce if your first hires all look alike.<sup>118</sup> Her pointed advice includes:

- Dropping the notion that your firm is a meritocracy. MIT research demonstrates that organizations calling themselves meritocratic are actually more likely to discriminate, because managers at these companies believe they are more impartial and therefore less self-aware and less likely to root out their biases.
- Starting as early as possible. “Getting a first woman on the team is a lot easier when there’s only three employees and they’re all men, as opposed to when there are 20 that are all men,” says Blanche. And this early team sets the long-term culture of inclusion, which is essential in order to sustain momentum.

Corporate executives need to take their inclusive leadership efforts to an even higher level by publicly acknowledging the profound impact that race and identity-based violence may be having on their employees, and giving those individuals safe places to reflect, talk, and heal. An Intel D&I report says it well: “It means we create space at work to discuss issues that are tough and often uncomfortable, such as the topic of racial injustice and race and identity-based violence. We recognize that when an employee is experiencing grief or trauma, and it is not acknowledged or heard, it impacts their experience in the workplace.”<sup>119</sup>

“There is no higher purpose than standing for equality in all of its dimensions. [We need to create an inclusive culture where] no one feels they have to check some fraction of their identity at the door.”<sup>121</sup>

— Tony Prophet, Chief Equality Officer, Salesforce

### Inclusive Actions

Deloitte recommends an inclusion index that provides meaningful insight and holds leaders accountable. The index incorporates a personalized digital dashboard that provides inclusion analytics and illustrates the potentially unconscious impact individuals are having on others. The metrics give data points for leaders and their organizations to critically examine potential issues. It’s possible to track similar information without an index, using periodic employee surveys that tie results to teams and leaders.<sup>122</sup>

Regardless of method, the type of data collected is critical to success. In addition to traditional metrics, inclusive approaches might gather the following information about employees:

- Self-identified unique aspects
- Personality profiles like Myers-Briggs
- Interests and skill sets
- Flexible work requests
- Stretch assignment wishes
- Individual goals
- Community engagement
- Counselors or mentors



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## INTERVENTIONS CHECKLIST

We have spotlighted corporate and individual remedies for the challenges of intersectionality and underrepresentation throughout the report. Below, we provide a checklist of interventions for organizational leaders and for Human Resources. As you review the list, bear in mind that an inclusive environment is one that creates opportunities for all employees to realize their unique potential.

### Recommendations for the C-suite

**Lead the way by building and modeling an inclusive culture** and by serving as an active ally to underrepresented groups, and hold everyone in your organization accountable.

- See Intersectionality and Leadership, page 24.

**Drop the notion that your firm is a meritocracy.**<sup>123</sup>

- As noted on page 24, MIT research demonstrates that organizations calling themselves meritocratic are actually more likely to discriminate, because managers at these companies believe they are more impartial and therefore less self-aware and less likely to root out their biases.

**If you are a small, young firm, address intersectionality and inclusion now.**

- Adding a veteran or a person with a disability to the team is easier while you are small, and it builds D&I momentum.

**Honestly assess your culture to understand the root causes of inequities.**<sup>124</sup>

- Tap your HR team to use approaches such as focus groups, engagement surveys, exit interviews, and courageous conversations.

**Make inclusivity a core value.**<sup>125</sup>

- If micro-inequities are a problem in your business, inclusion is lacking.
- Incentivize inclusivity through specific goals and targets, linking them to employees' performance and pay.

**Widen your definition of diversity to the many aspects of unique identity** discussed throughout this report, and talk to your employees to learn about more.<sup>126</sup>

**Make sure your leadership group and board of directors reflect diversity and inclusion.**<sup>127</sup>

- Consider expanding the size of your board to add members from underrepresented groups. Over time, as the board becomes truly diverse, you can decrease the size once again.

### **Encourage and model intersectional viewpoints.**

- Executives should put themselves in uncomfortable situations by meeting and networking with people who represent different backgrounds and experiences.
- Authentically and visibly initiate and support initiatives related to underrepresented groups. Examples include Pride parades, women's marches, Equal Pay Day, monthly culture talks, and ERG programs.

### **Actively value knowledge-sharing among colleagues.<sup>128</sup>**

- Create an environment where team members feel comfortable sharing new ideas, asking questions, and giving feedback to one another.
- Vary knowledge-sharing approaches to honor unique identities. In addition to brainstorming, consider: making unique spaces available for collaboration; modeling transparency; asking team members what they want to learn more about; and building a shared idea book.<sup>129</sup>

### **Give those with unique identities a voice.<sup>130</sup>**

- Allow them to tell their stories, become thought leaders for diversity, and help shape the policies that impact them.

### **Hold courageous conversations** and make sure your employees are doing the same.

- Encourage dialogue and critique of systemic, structural policies and infrastructure.<sup>131</sup> See page 23 to learn more.

### **Intentionally connect with people who are different than you.**

- Have coffee or lunch with people who don't look like you — small gestures mean a lot.<sup>132</sup>

### **Establish *table rules*, for meetings that protect the most vulnerable**, ensuring that they are fully respected.<sup>133</sup>

- One example is making sure everyone has a chance to speak at all meetings.
- At a major audit, tax and advisory firm, bowls with red flags sit on all conference room tables. If someone observes a micro-inequity in action, they take a red flag from the bowl and hold it up; a moment is taken to speak about the issue.

### **Join CEO Action for Diversity and Inclusion.**

- Join the Center for Women and Business and more than 500 corporate leaders who have publicly committed to CEO Action for Diversity and Inclusion. This initiative is a powerful effort to cultivate work environments where diverse experiences and perspectives are welcomed, and where employees feel comfortable and encouraged to discuss diversity and inclusion.
- Take Action as an individual — take the I Act On Pledge at [www.ceoaction.com](http://www.ceoaction.com).



## Recommendations for Human Resources

### **Offer unconscious bias training for all of your employees, and address intersectionality.**

- Training can range from a two-hour session to an ongoing series. Regardless, be sure that it is not a one-off; it must be tied to other, ongoing initiatives, programs, and policies in order to make a lasting impact.

### **Provide as much flexibility as possible in work schedules and working locations for all employees.**

- Recognize that your employees — regardless of identity — are often the primary caregivers for multiple generations.
- Workers with control over their schedules are more empowered, and more satisfied with their jobs.<sup>134</sup>
- Companies that prioritize work-life balance have a recruiting edge.<sup>135</sup>

### **Hire and promote people based on what they have accomplished, not on their potential.**

- Underrepresented groups tend to be judged on what they have accomplished while the dominant group tends to be assessed on potential.<sup>136</sup>

### **Create diverse hiring teams and prepare them.**

- Train your recruiters on intersectionality and the impact of unconscious bias in the recruitment and hiring process.<sup>137</sup>

### **Create diverse candidate slates, including your final slate.**

- Data shows that being *The Only* on a hiring slate highlights the person's differences from all others and nearly always results in that person not being hired.<sup>138</sup>
- Utilize hiring tools such as GapJumpers, Blendoor, Textio, and Hundred5 that flag biased words, and strip resumes of names and non-essential information that can trigger bias.

### **Ensure that your underrepresented employees have a say in developing policies and programs that impact them.**<sup>139</sup>

- Speak to employees with disabilities about the accommodations and training they need.
- Speak to nursing mothers about lactation rooms.
- Utilize your ERGs to help address language gaps in the evolving terminology of LGBTQ inclusion.

**Be sure to provide proper accommodations and demonstrate more subtle forms of respect for underrepresented groups.** Employees who identify as trans or non-binary might benefit from:

- Healthcare coverage for gender reassignment procedures
- All-gender bathrooms
- Forms and policies that are transgender inclusive
- Dress codes that allow people to present themselves comfortably and authentically
- Inclusive language, using correct gender pronouns. People who are trans or gender nonconforming might use *they, them, theirs* instead of *he, him, his* or *she, her, hers*.

**Make sure your succession plans incorporate diversity.**<sup>140</sup>

- Develop future leaders who have broader sets of competencies – leaders who embrace differing points of view and who are curious and innovative.
- Well-designed and executed sponsorship and mentorship initiatives are key strategies for developing a diverse pipeline of leaders.

**Continually monitor and correct pay inequities,** and provide a confidential, reliable vehicle for employees to inquire about compensation.

- Consider a tool like Principal Financial's Ethics Hotline, which allows all employees to report compensation concerns anonymously.<sup>141</sup>

**Use meaningful data to set targets, assess progress, and hold people accountable.**

- Whenever possible, disaggregate data like race, ethnicity, sexual identity, ability, etc.
- Research demonstrates that the more targets a company establishes the more progress they will make across the board.<sup>142</sup>

**Consider use of an inclusion index** that includes a personalized digital dashboard, incorporates inclusion analytics, and illustrates the potentially unconscious impact individuals are having on others. The metrics give data points for leaders and their organizations to critically examine potential issues.<sup>143</sup> See page 25 for additional details.

**Offer targeted training for employees from underrepresented groups.**

- Specific onboarding and integration programs help veterans acclimate to a new culture.<sup>144</sup>
- Technology workshops often benefit those re-entering the workforce after a long absence.
- Ongoing sign-language training helps employees who are hearing-impaired.



### **Do not focus on one identity.**

- A singular focus on one identify, such as gender, can diminish the ability to solve the broader systemic problem of diversity and inclusion.<sup>145</sup>

### **Make leaders from underrepresented groups — including those in middle management — visible so that younger people can see them.**

- Role models are critical for everyone, and especially those whose identities put them in the minority.

### **Give members of underrepresented groups strategic, visible assignments that are challenging.**<sup>146</sup>

- Employees from underrepresented groups are often underestimated and isolated.
- Give underrepresented employees stretch assignments that expose them to leadership, and provide them with formal sponsorship or ask them to lead an ERG.

### **Provide safe feedback loops for all employees who might be experiencing discrimination or micro-inequities.**

- Consider Intel's WarmLine (see page 7). It provides an advisor in a safe, accessible, confidential manner for employees experiencing isolation, skills mismatches, or other difficulties.<sup>147</sup>

### **Be sure that your underrepresented groups have ERGs that support their uniqueness,** provide safe places for discussion, and foster members' connections to the organization's business goals.

- Help ERGs acknowledge their members' unique, intersecting identities.
- Build bridges between ERGs that foster bonds and a broader sense of community. Encourage them to collaborate on programs, to share information, and to support each others' initiatives.

### **Establish allies' initiatives and provide ally training.**

- Ally training is often the next step after unconscious bias training. You can take a formal approach — such as a gender-focused male allies group — or an informal approach that provides guidelines to help employees from dominant groups better support their underrepresented colleagues. For more details, see the CWB report *Men as Allies: Engaging Men to Advance Women in the Workplace*.

### **Offer sponsorship and mentorship to underrepresented employees.**

- Research demonstrates that underrepresented groups are more likely to feel affinity for their organization, and remain more invested in their jobs, with some kind of formal mentoring, sponsorship, or networking in place.<sup>148</sup>
- Options are abundant and budget need not be a concern. Programs can be voluntary, run as pilots, or coordinated by ERGs. And while sponsorship always takes the form of a one-to-one relationship, mentorship offers more options, such as group settings, remote mentoring, or speed mentoring. See the CWB report *Mentorship, Sponsorship, and Networks: The Power and Value of Professional Connections* for more information.



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## GLOSSARY OF INTERSECTIONALITY TERMS

**Ability:** Refers to a person's developmentally appropriate capacity to perform tasks; includes physical, psychological, cognitive and developmental indicators.<sup>149</sup>

**Accessibility:** Refers to a physical space or location's ability to accommodate differently abled individuals. One example of accessibility is a building having a wheel chair accessible ramp as an alternative to stairs.<sup>150</sup>

**Ageism:** Discrimination, prejudice, or stereotyping against an individual or group of people based on their age.

**Ally:** A person who seeks to create equitable environments that affirm diversity and inclusion. The term was originally used to communicate straight allyship with LGBTQ communities. The term is now used more broadly, and can refer to White allies for individuals who advocate for racial justice and male allies for men who advocate for women's equality efforts.

**Assertiveness Bias:** A bias related to how one's assertiveness is perceived at work. One study on how assertiveness bias shapes an individual's experience at work suggests that older women who are assertive are better received than older men.<sup>151</sup>

**Cisgender:** A person whose gender identification matches the biological sex assigned to them at birth. A term used to refer to individuals who do not identify as trans.

**Class:** Also referred to as socioeconomic status (SES), class is a social construct to describe an individual's current financial resources, including inherited wealth and salary.<sup>152</sup>

**Class Bias:** A criterion used to gauge an employee's *culture fit* within an organization. Class bias places individuals from working class backgrounds at a disadvantage or unfairly advantages individuals from middle and upper class backgrounds. Questions that can indicate class bias include: Does the candidate golf? Did the candidate attend an Ivy League School? Does the candidate know the same people I know?<sup>153</sup>

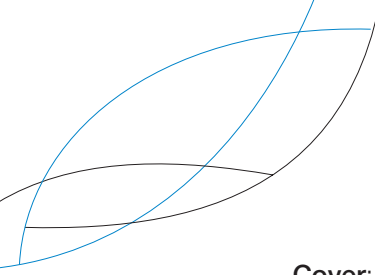
**Class Migrants:** Individuals from working class backgrounds who have "migrated" up the socioeconomic ladder due to educational and financial attainment. See Class Bias.

**Closeted:** A LGBTQ individual who has not shared their sex, sexuality, sexual identity, or gender identity; the term is often used to describe workplace behavior.<sup>154</sup>

**Code-switch:** Code-switching describes how individuals adjust their mode of communication, behaviors and other interpersonal interactions. The purpose of code-switching is to either hide or reveal affiliation to a particular group and to blend in and gain acceptance within that group.<sup>155</sup>

**Coded Language:** Generic language that, while intended to be general, evokes associations to underrepresented groups. Examples of coded language include *inner city*, *illegal aliens*, and *emotional at work*.

**Concrete Ceiling:** A term used to describe a barrier to workplace leadership facing women of color. Unlike the term *glass ceiling* — a metaphor for barriers to women's leadership that they can see through and possibly break — a *concrete ceiling* signals not knowing what's behind the ceiling and an inability to penetrate it.<sup>156</sup>



**Cover:** A term that describes how individuals suppress or hide aspects of their identities; underrepresented employees who feel they cannot be their authentic selves in the workplace may cover. The term was first used in 1963 by sociologist Erving Goffman and was further developed by Kenji Yoshino in 2006.<sup>157</sup>

**Disability:** A legal term used to refer to persons with a physical or mental impairment. The U.S. Census Bureau currently measures six disability types including but not limited to: hearing; vision; cognition; ambulatory ability; self-care; and independent living.<sup>158</sup>

**Disability Accommodation:** Organizational efforts to facilitate equal access to persons with disabilities. Telecommuting is sometimes requested as a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act.<sup>159</sup> Employers are not obligated to agree to such an accommodation in all cases, but they are required to engage in the standard give-and-take with respect to a requested accommodation.

**(The) Disability Equality Index:** A national benchmarking tool businesses can utilize in their efforts to improve inclusion for employees with disabilities. Developed by the American Association for People with Disabilities, a nonprofit resource for business disability inclusion, the Index quantifies disability inclusion policies and practices, measuring a variety of criteria ranging from culture and leadership to support services.

**Diversity Debt:** Refers to the escalating difficulty of creating a diverse workforce if an organization's initial hires are homogeneous.<sup>160</sup>

**Double Outsider:** Often used to refer to the double challenge women of color face — particularly in the workplace — based on both gender and race. See *Emotional Tax* for additional information.

**Emotional Tax:** Refers to the unpaid, implicitly expected emotional energy spent by underrepresented groups to counter the impact of unfair treatment — such as bias, exclusion, or discrimination — that requires constant vigilance. According to Catalyst, marginalized employees describe this as a “constant state of being on guard.”<sup>161</sup>

**Ethnicity:** A term used to identify an individual's cultural background usually based on an individual's heritage or country of origin.

**Gender:** A socially constructed identifier for biological sex attached to a set of expectations based on societal and cultural norms.

**Gender Identity:** Self-identifier related to one's individual experience and expression of one's gender.<sup>162</sup>

**Genderqueer/Gender Variant/Gender Nonconforming:** Different identities chosen by individuals who do not identify within the binary notion of female and male.

**Hispanic:** A term referring to an individual from a Spanish-speaking country.

**Inclusion:** A term used to indicate the extent to which individuals from diverse backgrounds within organizations feel valued and represented within all levels of the organization's hierarchy.

**Inclusion Index:** An analytical tool to measure the effectiveness of workplace inclusivity efforts. We feature Deloitte's index in this report on page 25; it incorporates a personalized digital dashboard that provides inclusion analytics and illustrates the potentially unconscious impact individuals are having on others. The metrics provide data points for leaders for leaders and their organizations to critically examine potential issues.<sup>163</sup>

**Intersectional Escape:** The idea that individuals who experience multiple stereotypes related to different identities can fall in between stereotypes and thus escape the negative impact of such stereotypes.<sup>164</sup>

**Intersectionality:** A lens to understand an individual's experience of multiple identities — such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and religion — that lead to a unique experience of discrimination or disadvantage.<sup>165</sup>

**Intersectional Thinking:** The concept that better ideas come from the consideration of multiple and opposing industries and sectors.<sup>166</sup>

**Latina:** Refers to a female individual of Latin American descent.

**Latino:** Refers to a male individual of Latin American descent.

**Latinx:** A more recent and gender-neutral term to refer to an individual of Latin American descent.<sup>167</sup>

**Male Ally:** A male who serves as a resource for women and advocates for gender equity.

**Micro-aggression:** A term that refers to conscious, unconscious, and often unintentional behaviors or verbal statements that undermine another person based on their social identities.<sup>168</sup> Micro-aggressions can be interpersonal and environmental; an example of an environmental micro-aggression is the lack of female representation in an organization's management team. Sometimes micro-aggression is used interchangeably with micro-inequity.

**Micro-inequity:** A term that refers to unintentional and subtle slights – acts of discrimination – that undervalue and demean people. Examples include being talked over in a meeting, having contributions ignored, being given office housework like note-taking, or being excluded from male-oriented social activities. See *Second Generation Bias*.

**Multiple Discrimination:** A term that describes discrimination based on two or more grounds of self-identification, including but not limited to race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, and religion.<sup>169</sup>

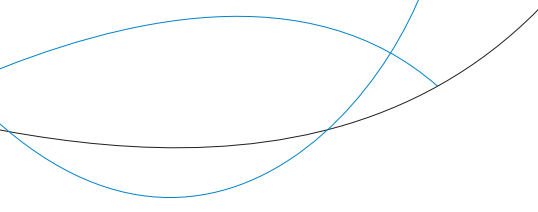
**Nationality:** Usually used to refer to an individual's country of birth.

**Pansexual or Polysexual:** An individual's sexual identity that denotes feeling attraction to any gender expression or sexual identity.

**Privilege:** Unearned advantages and access to opportunities related to one's perceived affiliation to the various dominant social identity groups. Examples of privilege include White privilege, male privilege, and citizenship status.

**Pronouns:** Refers to an individual's pronouns used to communicate gender identity. While *she/her/hers* and *he/his/him* are assumed, there is an increasingly common practice to ask for pronouns in order to explicitly affirm individuals of all gender identities, and the neutral pronoun *they* is becoming more commonly used, especially by individuals who do not identify as gender binary and may identify as gender nonconforming.

**Race and Racial identity:** A socially-constructed categorization of an individual based on characteristics such as skin color and heritage.



**Reasonable Accommodations:** A term that describes an adjustment made in a system or organizational structure to accommodate an individual based on a proven need.<sup>170</sup> See *Disability Accommodation*.

**Safe Space:** A term used to refer to facilitated discussions that center the experiences of marginalized identity groups with the intention of undoing inequity and unlearning stereotypes.<sup>171</sup>

**Second Generation Bias:** A term attributed to Harvard Professor Robin Ely that describes the subtle, less explicit and often unintentional bias impacting underrepresented individuals in organizations. It is contrasted with first-generation bias, which refers to explicit discrimination.<sup>172</sup>

**Sex:** A person's biological identity, based on physical characteristics assigned at birth and without taking into consideration an individual's gender self-expression. Biological sex categories include male, female and intersex.<sup>173</sup>

**Sexual Orientation:** An identity marker used to refer to a person's romantic attraction, including attraction to individuals of the same gender, another gender or no gender. The spectrum of sexual orientation identities includes same-gender loving individuals such as lesbians and gay men, as well as asexuals (not attracted to any gender).

**Social Model of (Dis)ability:** A framework intended to counter the original disability model, which pitched differently abled bodies as bodies that need to be fixed to fit into social norms and societal expectations. The social model proposes that it is societal barriers that hinder the full development, participation and success of differently abled individuals.<sup>174</sup>

**Socio-economic Status:** A person's economic social standing determined by income, education, and occupation. Unlike other demographic identity markers like race, socio-economic class can change within a person's lifetime.<sup>175</sup>

**Stereotype:** A stereotype describes a set of characteristics that a person associates with a group of people, often falsely assuming that all the members of that group embody a particular set of behaviors or traits.<sup>176</sup>

**Tokenism:** The act of including one or few individual representatives of a community or identity group to symbolize diversity. In addition to underrepresentation, tokenism is characterized by lack of access to decision-making power and lack of full and equal participation within the group or institution.<sup>177</sup>

**Trans/Transgender:** A person whose gender identity is different from gender assigned at birth. Trans is sometimes used as an umbrella term that includes non-binary gender identities.<sup>178</sup> See *Genderqueer/Gender Variant/Gender Nonconforming*.

**Transsexual:** A person who has undergone the medical surgeries to match his or her physical appearance with his or her gender identity.

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The Center for Women and Business (CWB) develops curated research reports that synthesize current literature, practical research, and solutions to key issues impacting diversity and inclusion.

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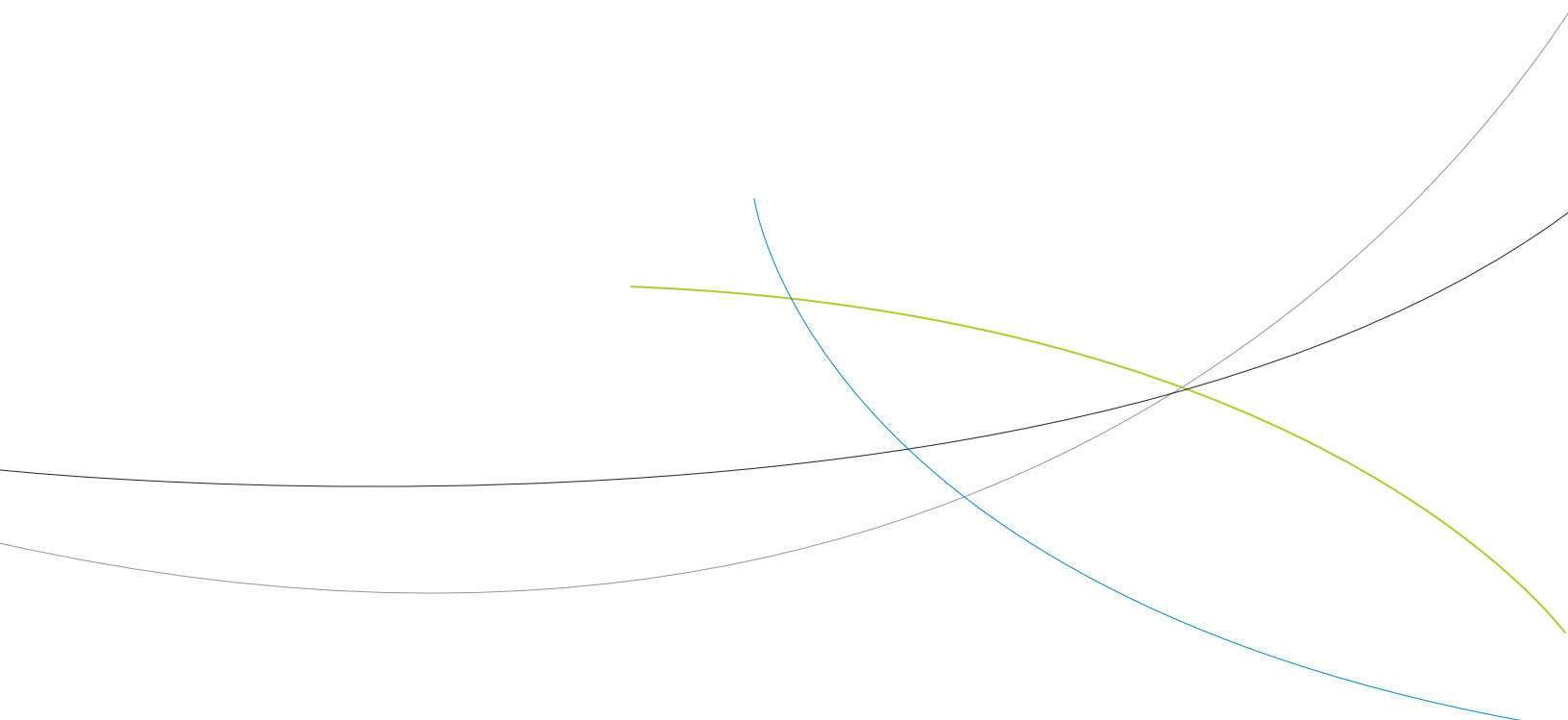
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