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Research Briefing:

Gender Bias in US Job Ads.

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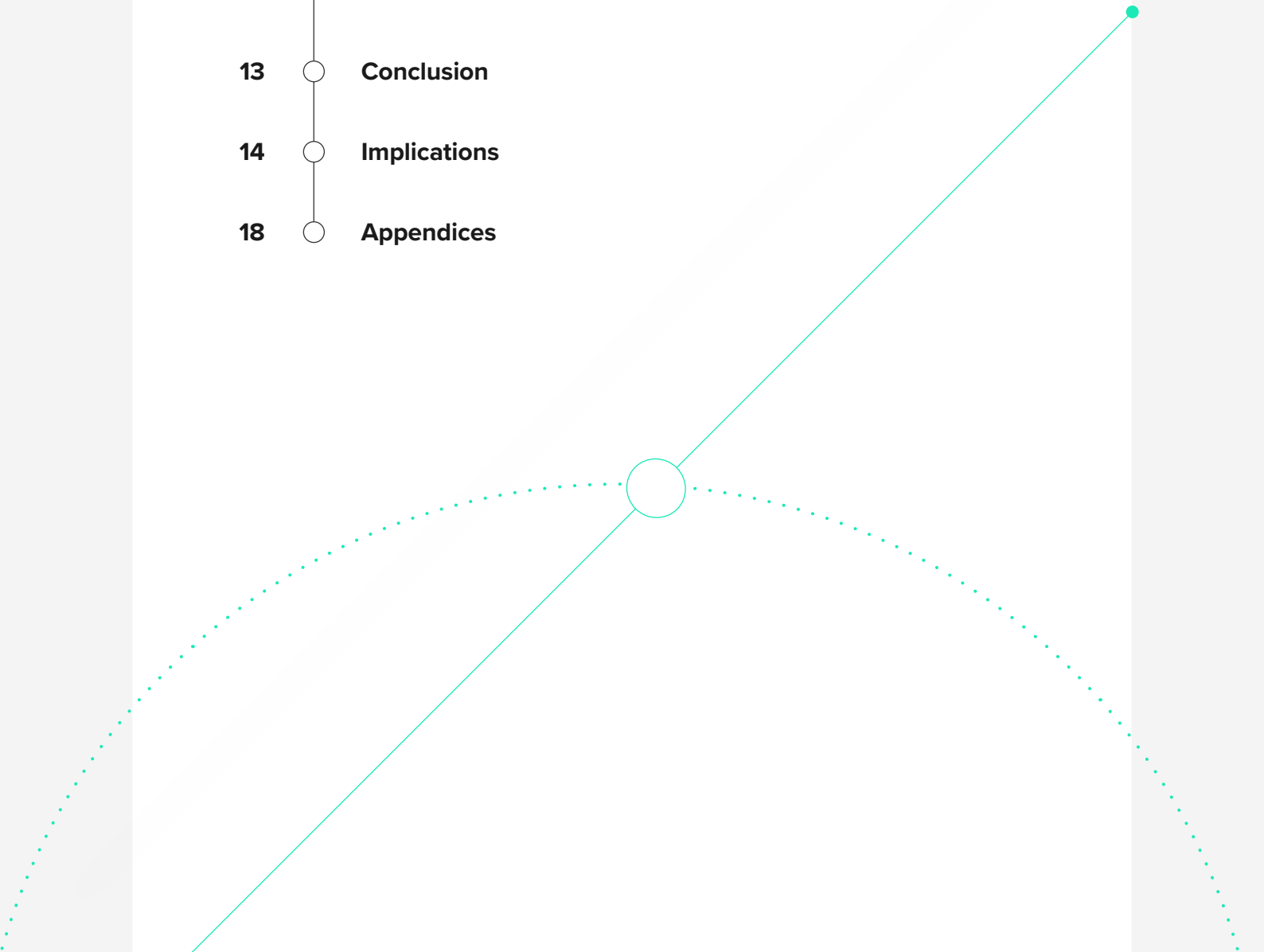
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Summary.

Sia Partners conducted a 6-month study of over **225,000 job ads**, the **largest English language-based study of job ads** that we are aware of. Covering 9 sectors with over 2,600 companies we discovered **systemic gender bias against women across all 9 sectors** analyzed. By segmenting job postings based on their usage of proven masculine-coded* language, we found that US companies searching for **senior executives exhibit greater gender bias against women than when searching for junior roles**, at a 5.89% higher rate, on average. Over the 6-month period of our study, every sector had improved its inclusivity score, with the exception of senior-level job postings across Software & Platforms and Banking & Capital Markets, which surprisingly became **less inclusive**, with their inclusivity scores declining by 1.96% and 1.85% respectively. The persistent lack of inclusivity or attention to language in job ads across sectors coupled with the “motherhood penalty” shows a dim future for female job hopefuls in the post-COVID-19 era, as we project **women are to incur a loss of potential earnings of almost \$1.5 million** over the course of their careers compared to their male counterparts. Companies need to take some simple steps in the upcoming months if they want to fully capture the female applicant pool post-COVID-19, such as including transparent salary information as well as incorporating inclusive language in their job postings.

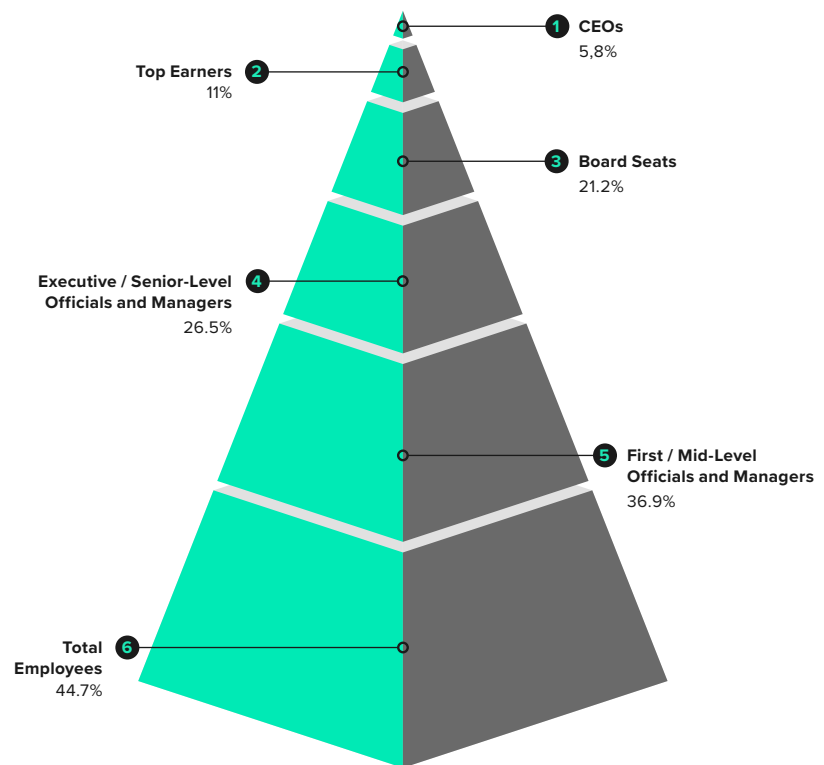
* Gender identity is not binary and we recognize that at Sia Partners. Many identify beyond the traditional gender constructs of “male” and “female.” For the purpose of this study, Sia Partners has examined “gender coded” language used in job advertisements, which has been proven in peer reviewed research to influence the profile of candidates who apply for them. If a job ad contains mainly masculine-coded words, female applicants find these jobs less appealing, in part due to less perceived belonging, which could deter them from applying for these roles. Accordingly, masculine wording reflected in job advertisements primarily serves to keep women out of the areas that men typically occupy. Refraining from the use of male-coded language is critical to ensure job postings equally appeal to female, male, and non-binary applicants, leading to a more inclusive and qualified talent pool.

Context and Literature Review.

A robust research literature examines gender bias and discrimination in the workforce, from gender discrimination during the recruitment process through discrimination during the promotion process. First surfaced approximately 50 years ago, research examined how job advertisements that overtly specified a preference for male applicants discouraged women from applying, and vice versa (Bem & Bem). They found that explicit references to men and women as candidates for specific jobs and placing advertisements in sex-segregated newspaper columns discouraged qualified men and women from applying to opposite-sex positions. This type of overt bias in job advertisements likely no longer exists, as companies and HR professionals do not explicitly target a particular gender when creating a job posting. However, many still subconsciously or inadvertently use verbiage that positions the postings in a way that biases them against a specific gender. Academic research over the past 10 years has provided a conclusive evidence base, confirming that the use of masculine-coded words (i.e. words that reflect broader cultural stereotypes) and phrases in job postings deters applications from individuals that do not identify as masculine (Gaucher et al, Born & Taris). In June 2020, The World Economic Forum (WEF) highlighted the use of gendered language in job ads as a contributor to trends in gender inequity in the workplace (World Economic Forum, 2020). WEF has urged companies and governments to use tech-enabled solutions, including AI-powered text analysis, to address this challenge.

Despite women's greater access to leadership roles in recent years (United Nations Development Programme), statistics show women remain underrepresented in upper-level management and leadership in both the private and public sectors in the United States (Catalyst, 2020).

Proportion of Women vs. Men in Roles at S&P Companies



Various cultural, interpersonal, structural, and multilevel organizational barriers contribute to this gender discrepancy in leadership positions. The barriers include gendered social status, perceived incongruities between female stereotypes and leadership roles, and biased and discriminatory hiring decisions (Lyness & Grotto, Hoover et al., Schwanke). Americans surveyed on this topic cited higher standards for women and lack of readiness by companies to hire women as the major reasons that more females are not in top leadership roles in business, even as the majority of the population says that men and women make equally good leaders (Pew Research Center, 2014). Additionally, male-dominated leadership has been shown to have a powerful effect on many aspects of the organization, and evidence has suggested that males are more likely to hire other males than females for leadership positions, all things being equal (Bosak & Sczesny).

Although there has been significant progress in closing the leadership gender gap, the United States is not closing the gap fast enough relative to other countries (Lyness & Grotto). For example, the United States falls short on political empowerment (World Econ. Forum, 2016), “which may have far-reaching effects on women’s leadership aspirations and facilitation of female leader empowerment” (Lyness & Grotto). With more women in top jobs, companies reap reputational benefits, as the presence of female leaders is thought to be viewed by consumers and investors as positive information about the company’s cultural values and future performance (Kulik & Metz). Moreover, gender inclusive leadership is also associated with positive organizational outcomes, as women’s presence in senior leadership generally has a positive impact on a variety of indicators of organizational performance, especially sales performance

(Hoobler et al.). Beyond the imperative in today’s social climate to actively and legitimately cultivate gender inclusivity amongst senior leadership, companies who do not may fall behind economically by not taking advantage of the valuable talent and human capital of the female half of its population.

While women remain underrepresented in leadership across the public and private sectors, women are also underrepresented in specific sectors regardless of level of seniority. Despite the fact that the growth of STEM jobs has outpaced overall U.S. job growth in the country, (Pew Research Center, 2018) women are still underrepresented in several STEM occupational clusters. While women make up 47% of the total U.S. workforce, just 25% of professional computing occupations in the 2020 U.S. workforce were held by women (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Several complex factors come into

play that affect the number of women who choose a career in STEM that span beyond the control of companies in the field. Much of the research on this topic focuses on gender bias in education as a major reason for pushing girls and women away from STEM (Etzkowitz, Kermelgor, & Uzzi). This discrimination manifests itself in all levels of education. For example, Leaper and Brown (2008) found that over half of the adolescent girls in their sample had experienced academic discouragement in domains related to math and science. In another study on high school girls who aspired to have STEM careers, women in STEM undergraduate majors, and women in STEM doctoral programs, 61% of participants reported experiencing gender bias in the past year (Robnett). While society has begun addressing the hard issues surrounding the STEM gender gap, we are currently in the beginning stages of a much needed progression towards closing this gap.



Our Approach.

Sia Partners' approach built on research previously conducted in the UK, which was based on Gaucher et al's study. The study found that the more masculine-coded language used in job advertisements, the less appealing they were to women, due at least in part to a perceived lack of anticipated belonging. When job advertisements were constructed to include more masculine than feminine wording, participants perceived more men within these occupations, and importantly women found these jobs less appealing.

Sia Partners examined over 225,000 job postings from over 2,300 companies across 9 sectors between October 2020 – March 2021, using standard gender-coded language lists. We assessed the degree of gender bias across all job ads for 9 sectors in total in the US, and aggregated inclusivity scores for each ad, using a 100-point scale system. Scores above 50 indicate the use of less masculine words and therefore more inclusive language, while scores below 50 indicate the use of more masculine words and therefore more exclusive language. Masculine-coded job ads attract men, while discouraging women to apply, making those jobs ads more exclusive and gender biased.





Analysis and Findings.

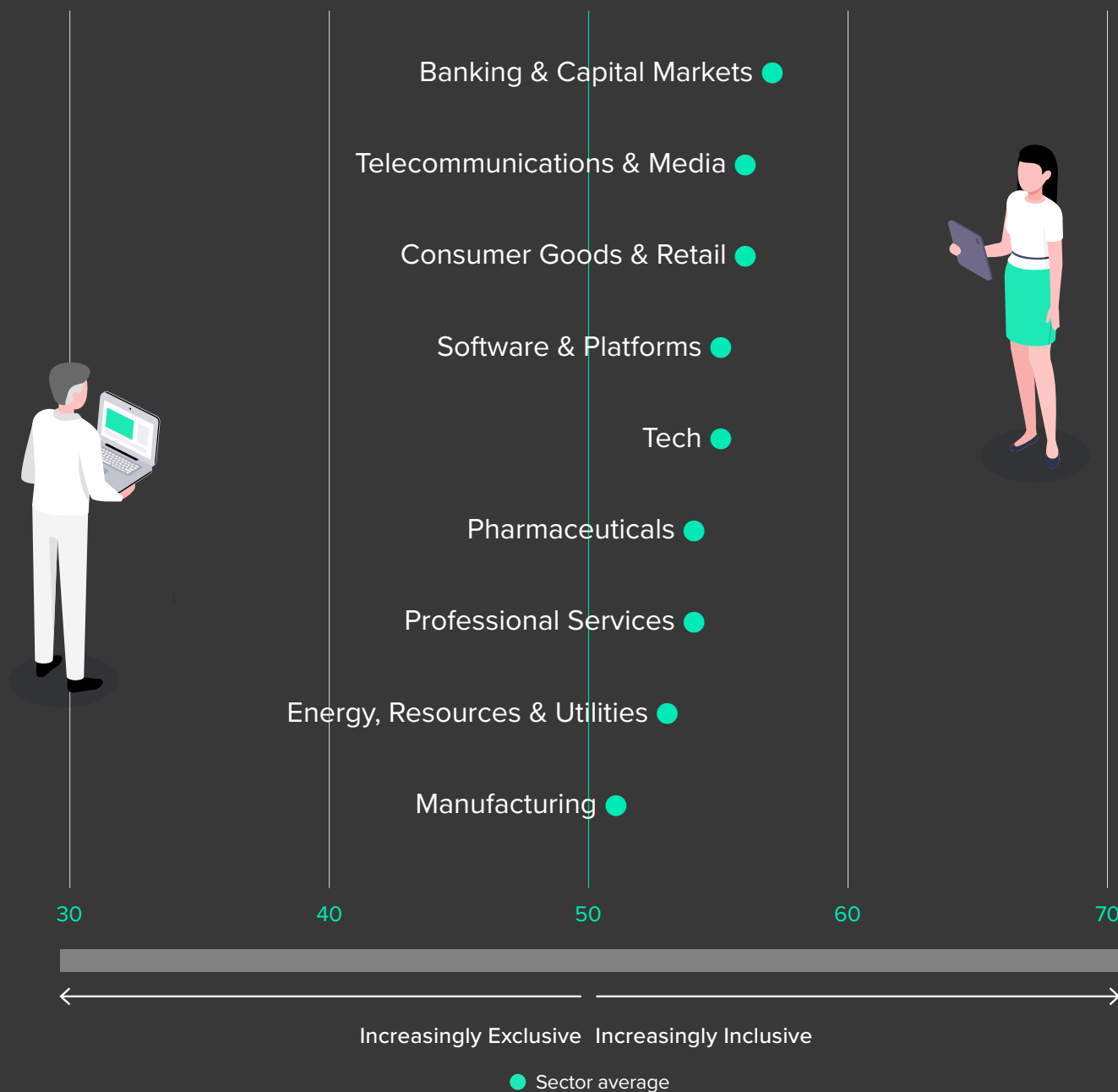


ANALYSIS 1

• Average inclusivity per U.S. sector •

First, we assessed the degree of gender bias across all job ads for each of the 9 sectors in the US. We found that while **all sectors fall on the more inclusive side of the spectrum, none rank any higher than 60**, indicating that all sectors

continue to deter women from applying to jobs by using masculine language. As a whole, Banking & Capital Markets used the most inclusive language in their job ads, and the Manufacturing sector used the least inclusive.

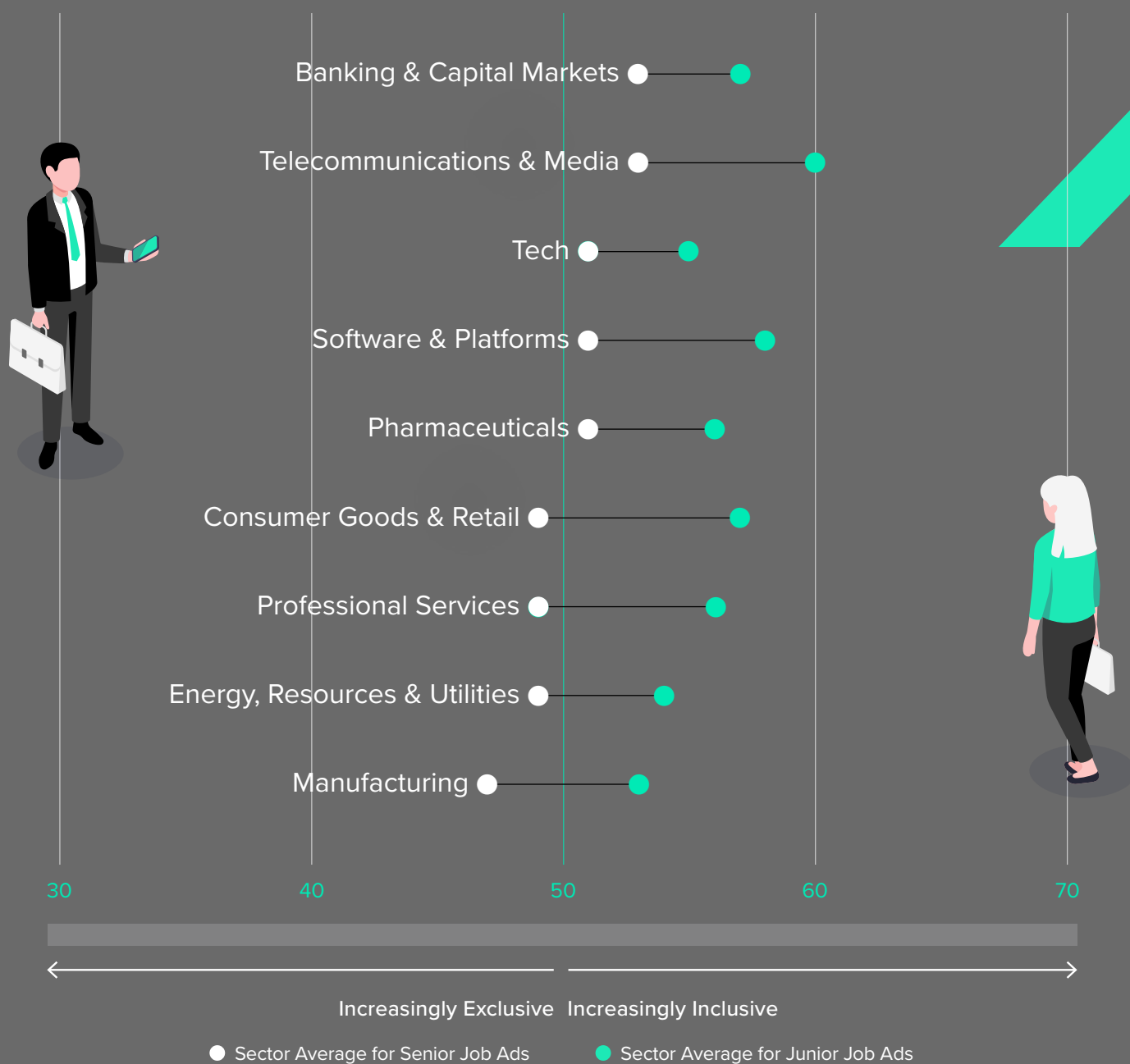


ANALYSIS 2

• Inclusivity per U.S. sector by seniority •

Narrowing our data set to only include job advertisements that specified seniority level (Appendix 2), we then analyzed inclusivity scores of sectors, focusing on the disparity between junior and senior roles. This led to a smaller but more substantiated dataset with approximately 115,000 job ads from over 2,300 companies. Breaking down the sector-wide job ads by junior and senior roles, our study revealed

that across **all sectors**, senior positions used less inclusive language, on average, than roles posted for junior positions. In other words, US companies searching for **senior executives** exhibited greater gender bias against women than when searching for junior roles. We measured this difference to be at a 5.89% higher rate of exclusive language (50.33 / 56.22) across sectors.

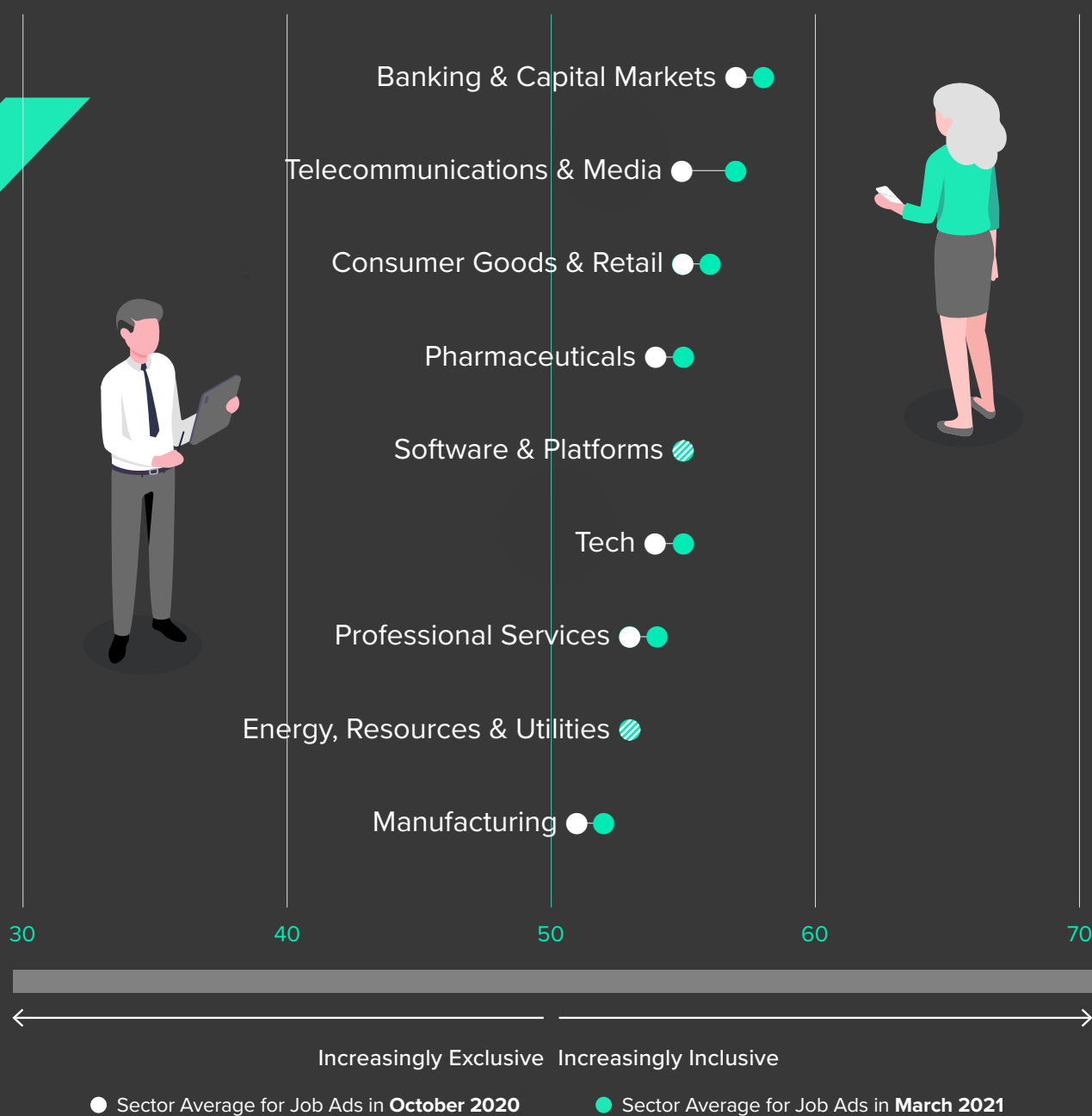


ANALYSIS 3

• Inclusivity per U.S. sector – 6-month comparison •

Building on ANALYSIS 1, we then tested the inclusivity scores of all sectors over a 6-month timeframe, comparing values from October 2020 and March 2021. We found that 8 of the 9 sectors (89%) became more inclusive over time, demonstrating an improvement over a 6-month period, on average. The only sector that did not record an increase in its inclusivity score was Software & Platforms. Yet, despite a slight

increase in inclusivity scores across the remaining sectors over time, the change was not particularly significant, with an average increase of 0.89% across all sectors. Thus, comparing sectors' inclusivity scores from October 2020 to March 2021, we still conclude that all sectors continue to deter women from applying by using exclusive language in their job advertisements.

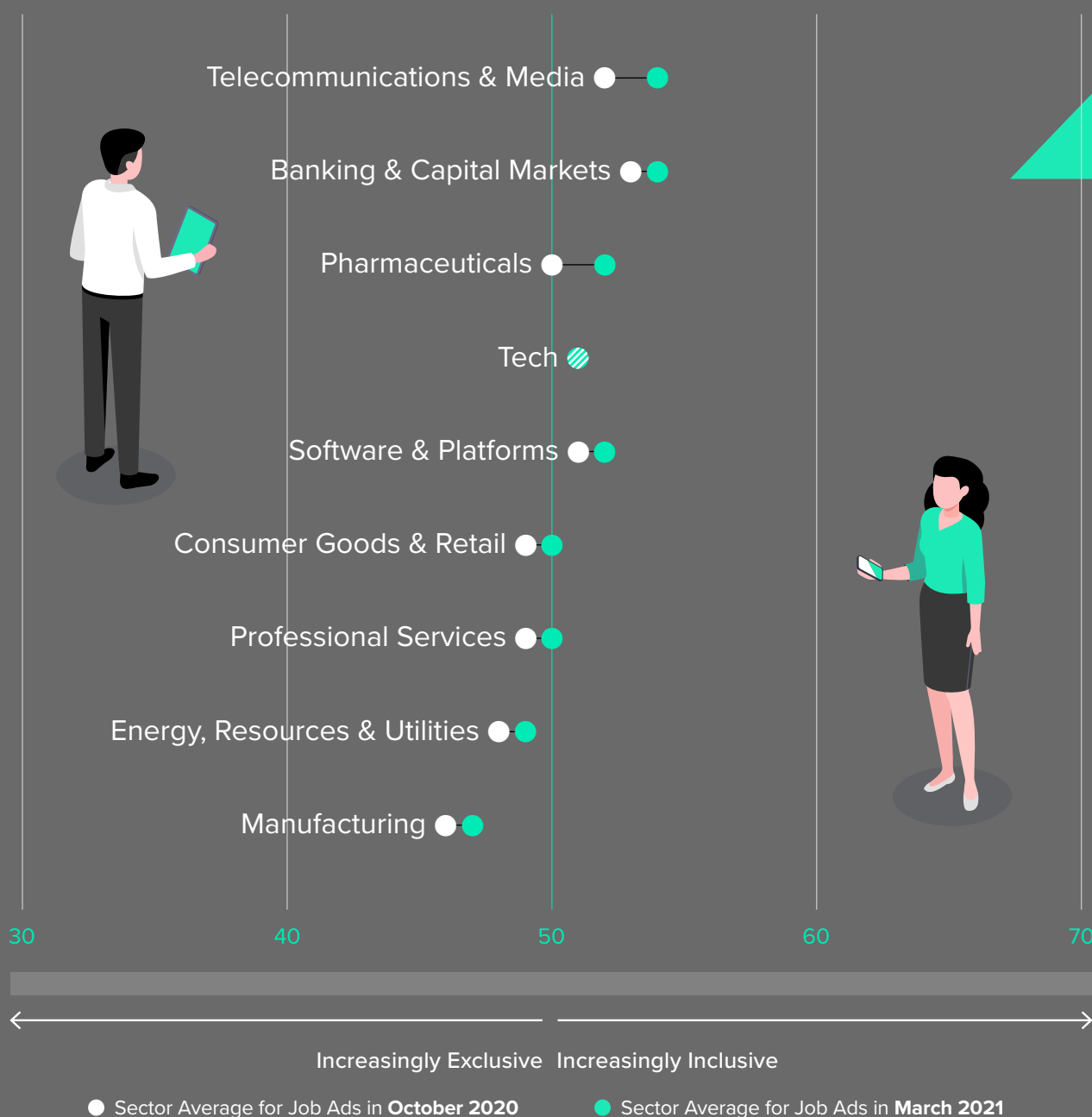


ANALYSIS 4

• Inclusivity per U.S. sector for Senior – 6-month comparison •

Combining ANALYSES 2 and 3, we then test the inclusivity of job advertisements for senior roles over time, using the same 6-month time frame. Fairly consistent with ANALYSIS 3, we found 6 of the 9 sectors (67%) to be more inclusive over time, when it comes to their job ads for senior-level roles. In other words, US companies across 6 sectors searching for **senior executives** exhibited less gender bias against women, on average, over a 6-month period spanning from October 2020 to March 2021. On the other hand, US companies operating within Banking & Capital Markets and Software & Plat-

forms exhibited **greater gender bias** against women when searching for senior executives, using even more exclusive language over the 6-month period, on average. The decline in these two sectors' inclusivity scores is 1.85% and 1.96% respectively. Additionally, the inclusivity score for senior-level jobs ads remained stagnant for the Tech industry. It is also important to note that regardless of recorded improvement in 6 of the 9 sectors' inclusivity scores for senior-level jobs ads, all of the sectors' inclusivity scores remain below 60, demonstrating consistent gender bias in job ads across sectors.





Conclusion.

Our results indicate that companies have recently taken preliminary steps to address the larger problem of gender inequity in corporate America by actively using less exclusive language in their job titles. However, we found that job advertisements in all sectors continue to deter women from applying to jobs by using masculine language, with job ads for senior roles employing more masculine-coded language than junior roles across all sectors. This finding shows that gender-coded language may be a contributing factor to larger inclusion and equity issues at senior levels of organizations. Moreover, while senior job ads were less inclusive than junior roles across all sectors, regardless of seniority, Software & Platforms, a sector that has been historically dominated by men, is the only sector that remained stagnant over time. Additionally, when analyzing senior roles over a 6 month period, Software & Platforms, along with Banking & Capital Markets, showed a regression in inclusivity. Thus, while senior jobs ads are less inclusive in general, they have been becoming even less inclusive over time for sectors that have been notorious for their lack of representation.

In order to address the gender inequity that exists in senior roles, HR professionals and organizational leadership need to be cognizant of the talent they are deterring by using gender biased language in their job postings. We hope this analysis can help highlight this issue and bring attention to the use of exclusive language at different levels of seniority. We are happy to discuss these findings in more detail.



Implications.

It is well documented that a leading contributing factor to the gender disparity amongst leadership is that the burden of childcare and domestic labor typically falls on women. Around the world, women spend two to ten times more time on unpaid care work (i.e. cooking, cleaning, taking care of children, etc.) than men (Ferrant et al.). This unequal distribution of caring responsibilities is linked to gender gaps in multiple labor outcomes, such as labor force participation, wages and job quality (Ferrant et al.). COVID-19 has exacerbated this issue, disproportionately affecting women (particularly working mothers) and heightening these inequalities that exist every day for women in the workforce. More than 2.5 million women left the labor force between

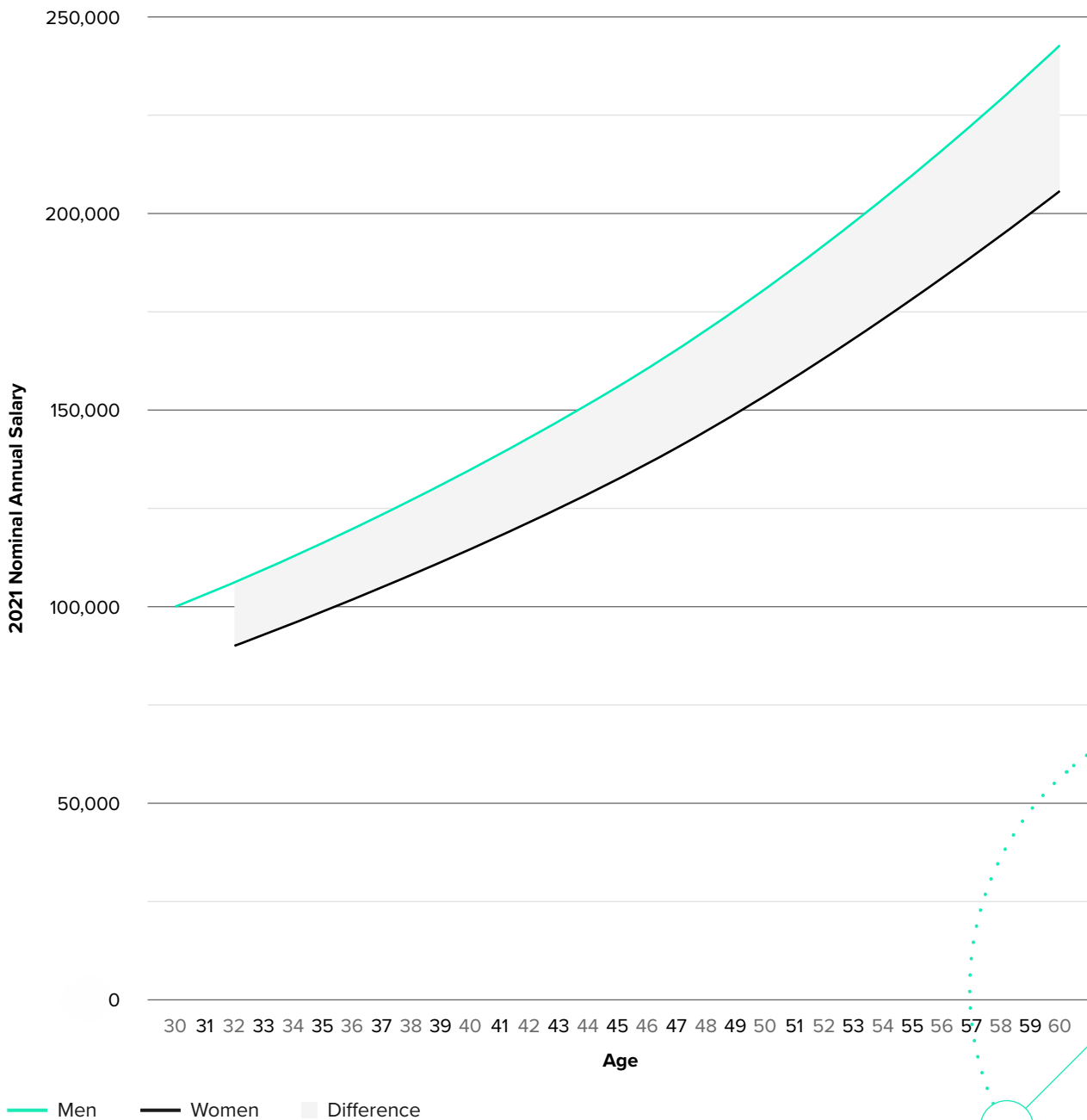
February 2020 and January of 2021, compared to 1.8 million men (Marte & Michalska). After schools and daycare centers closed, parents - particularly mothers - had to reduce their hours or leave their jobs entirely to care for their children. According to research from the Census Bureau in July 2020, one in five working-age adults were unemployed because COVID-19 upended their child care arrangements; of those not working, women were nearly three times more likely than men to remain home for the kids. In another study, women were more likely than men to have taken time off work during the pandemic, especially for childcare reasons (Ranji et al.). Nearly half of all women (46%) said they took unpaid sick leave when their child's school or daycare was closed

due to COVID-19 (Ranji et al.). Multiple studies and surveys have confirmed that COVID-19 has more negatively impacted women compared to men (Collins et al., Rhubart, Krentz et al., Haggness) with significantly more women than men reducing their work hours, leaving work to care for their children, and spending more time on education and household tasks (Kashen et al.). Additionally, women who have taken time off to care for their children and who have been homeschooling kids are apprehensive to return to the workforce for fear of having to leave again, obstacles to securing child care, concerns about workplace flexibility, and fear of being judged for being a mother (Marte & Michalska).

When it comes to applying for jobs, research shows that women only apply for jobs they feel they are 100% qualified for (Mohr) whereas men usually apply if they feel like they meet 60% of the criteria. As such, women end up applying to 20% fewer jobs than men (Ignatova). While job growth rates are increasing and more women are returning to the workforce, they may be applying for jobs that they are overqualified for, and/or not applying to more senior jobs they are qualified for. The importance of inclusive job ads plays a role here as well; as discussed previously, exclusive job ads deter applications from individuals that do not identify as masculine. The disproportionate amount of time women took off com-

bined with the disproportionate number of women who left the workforce during COVID-19 has already set women back, and the ratio of women working has now fallen below 57% for the first time since 1988 (Gogoi). However, if women are only applying to jobs they feel 100% qualified for once they return to the workforce, coupled with gender bias found in job ads, they might be encouraged to enter at a lower level than when they left it. This has long-term negative effects on the career progression of women in leadership, and could lead to fewer women in the most powerful positions at firms since their careers could end before they put in an equal amount of time in a given role as men would.

Impact of Women Taking a 2-Year Hiatus During COVID-19



It's no secret that women have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in the workplace. The "motherhood penalty" is a well-documented phenomenon by which women's pay decreases once they become mothers, (Chung et al., Corell et al.) since women remain more likely than men to take time away from the workforce or to reduce their work hours because of caregiving responsibilities. Evidence shows that due to COVID-19 school and child care closures, mothers with young children arranged reductions in their work hours that were four to five times greater than the reductions arranged by fathers (Kashen et al.).

In one study, more than one-third of non working Millennial mothers reported "caring for children not in school or [child] care" as their main reason for not working, whereas Millennial fathers were nearly three times less likely to cite child care as

their main reason for not working (Morrissey). The above graph depicts the cumulative wealth disparity between a man and a woman, both aged 30 with the exact same career growth up until that point (salary of \$100,000). COVID-19 has forced many women to take extended time off (2 years) to look after their children; when they return to the workforce, women only apply to positions they feel that they are 100% qualified for, as discussed previously. Taken a step further, women are hired to lower paying positions when they return to the workforce because they are perceived to be less qualified than when they first left (Payscale). Gender bias in job ads creates an additional barrier to re-entry and, when compounded with the "motherhood penalty" is estimated to result in women returning to work at a lower level and / or salary than prior to their exit. Demonstrating with round numbers, assuming a \$10,000 salary

decrease for a woman after post-COVID-19 re-entry, and a 5% annual pay increase for both thereafter (accounting for a 2% average annual inflation rate), women today face a **potential disparity of almost \$1.5 million in total lifetime earnings** compared to her male counterpart.

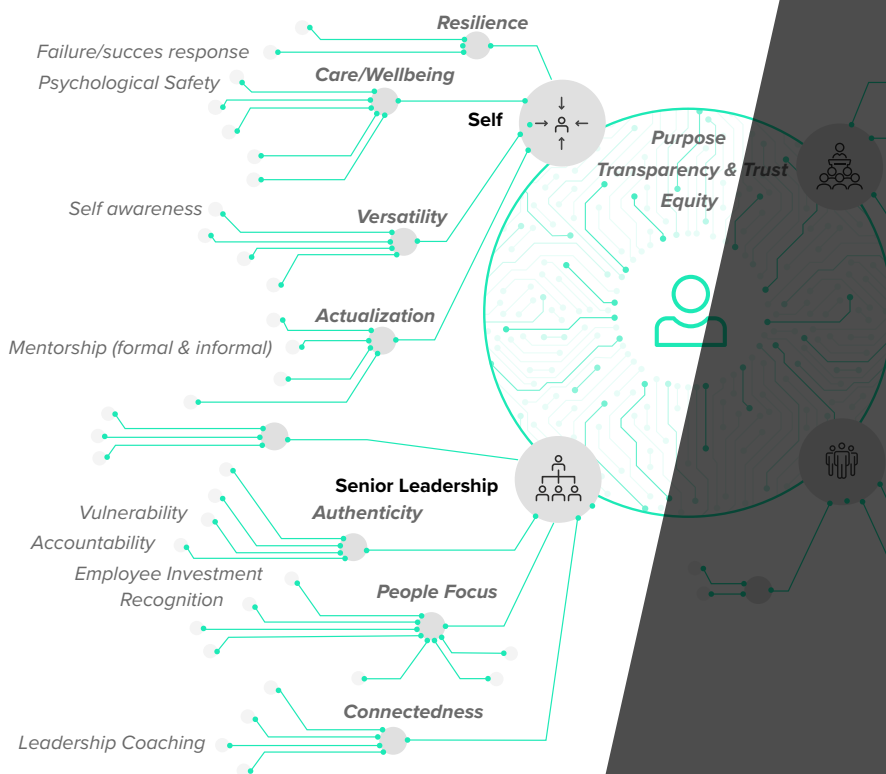
As we emerge from the pandemic, companies need to take simple but urgent steps to ensure women feel enabled and empowered to join the workforce at the role and pay level they deserve. Knowing how much a job pays, as well as benefits information about flexible working policies, parental leave, or healthcare is significantly more important for women (Tockey & Ignatova). By instituting measures like transparent salary information, being intentional about the number of requirements listed, and using inclusive language in job postings, firms can increase the number of females that will assume senior positions for years to come.



How mature is your organization?

Company Culture is defined by an employee's personal experience of four relationships

Gender bias within job ads is part of a larger discussion as we advise clients on culture. Sia Partners defines company culture using a data-driven approach and our AI-backed solutions through the lenses of Purpose, Transparency & Trust, and Equity. Our tiered framework allows clients to make informed, data-driven decisions to transform their company culture and get prioritized action points on how to enhance employee engagement. This research on Inclusion and Gender Bias is housed in our **Organizational Health and Effectiveness (OH&E)** practice, where we work with clients to renovate their culture. How mature is your organization?





Appendix 1.

Detail from Gaucher et al., (2011)

List of coded words

Male-coded words are those associated with societal ideas of male stereotypes. Female-coded words are those associated with female stereotypes. It is important to be aware of the cumulative effect the use of “coded” language may have on applicants within society at large.

Note. The asterisk denotes the acceptance of all letters, hyphens, or numbers following its appearance.

Masculine Words

Active; Adventurous; Aggress*; Ambitio*; Analy*; Assert*; Athlet*; Autonom*; Boast*; Challeng*; Compet*; Confident; Courag*; Decide; Decisive; Decision*; Determin*; Dominant; Domina*; Force*; Greedy; Headstrong; Hierarch*; Hostil*; Impulsive; Independen*; Individual*; Intellect*; Lead*; Logic; Masculine; Objective; Opinion; Outspoken; Persist; Principle*; Reckless; Stubborn; Superior; Self-confiden*; Self-sufficien*; Self-relian*



Appendix 2.

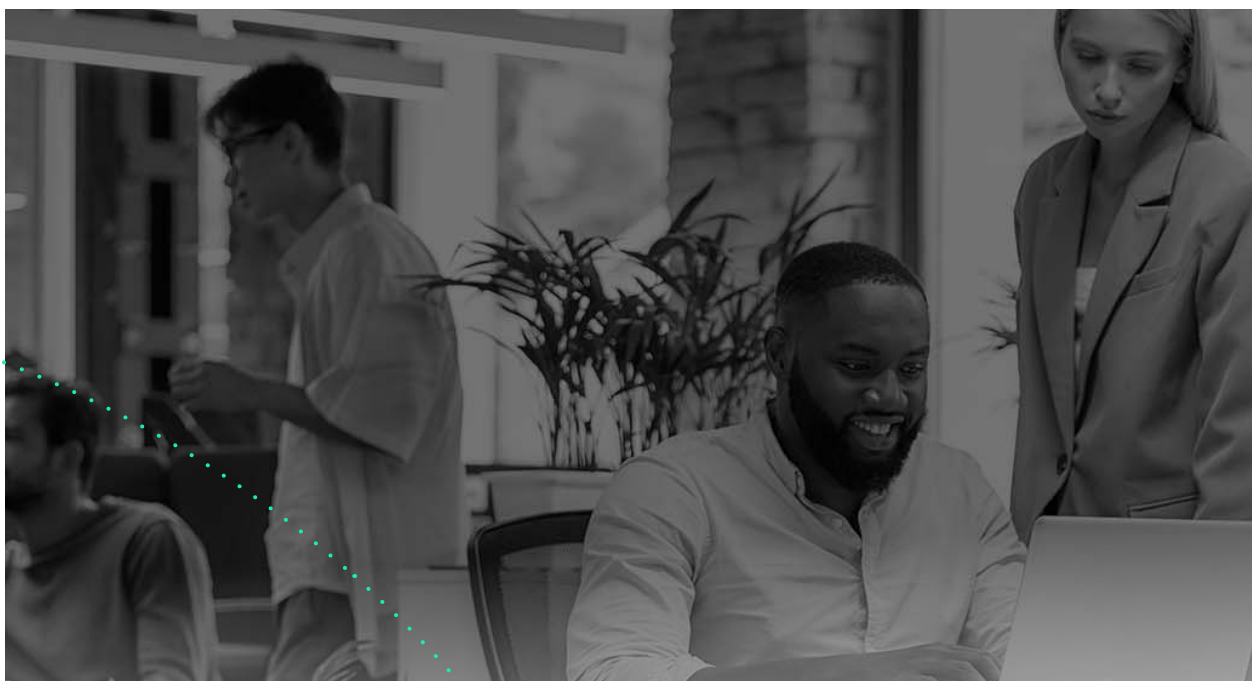
List of words indicating seniority

Senior Indicators

lead	COO
leader	CFO
head	CPO
chief	CTO
manager	Chief Operations Officer
director	Chief Financial Officer
partner	Chief People Officer
VP	Chief Technology Officer
President	CHRO
CEO	
principal	

Junior Indicators

junior	associate
assistant	analyst
support	«senior analyst»
entry	«senior business associate»
trainee	«senior associate»
employee	«sr analyst»
started	«sr business associate»
intern	«sr BA»
Jr.	
entry-level	
early	





Appendix 3.

Most frequent gender-coded words in job adverts in the US, October 2020 – March 2021.

Most frequent masculine coded words identified:

Lead*

Active

Individual*

Leadership

Decision

Most frequent inclusive words identified:

Respon*

Understand

Collabor*

Commit*

Share





Appendix 4.

Gender-coded words in context (notional examples)

Examples of male-coded phrases:

“You are actively results driven...”

“Must be successful in a competitive atmosphere”...

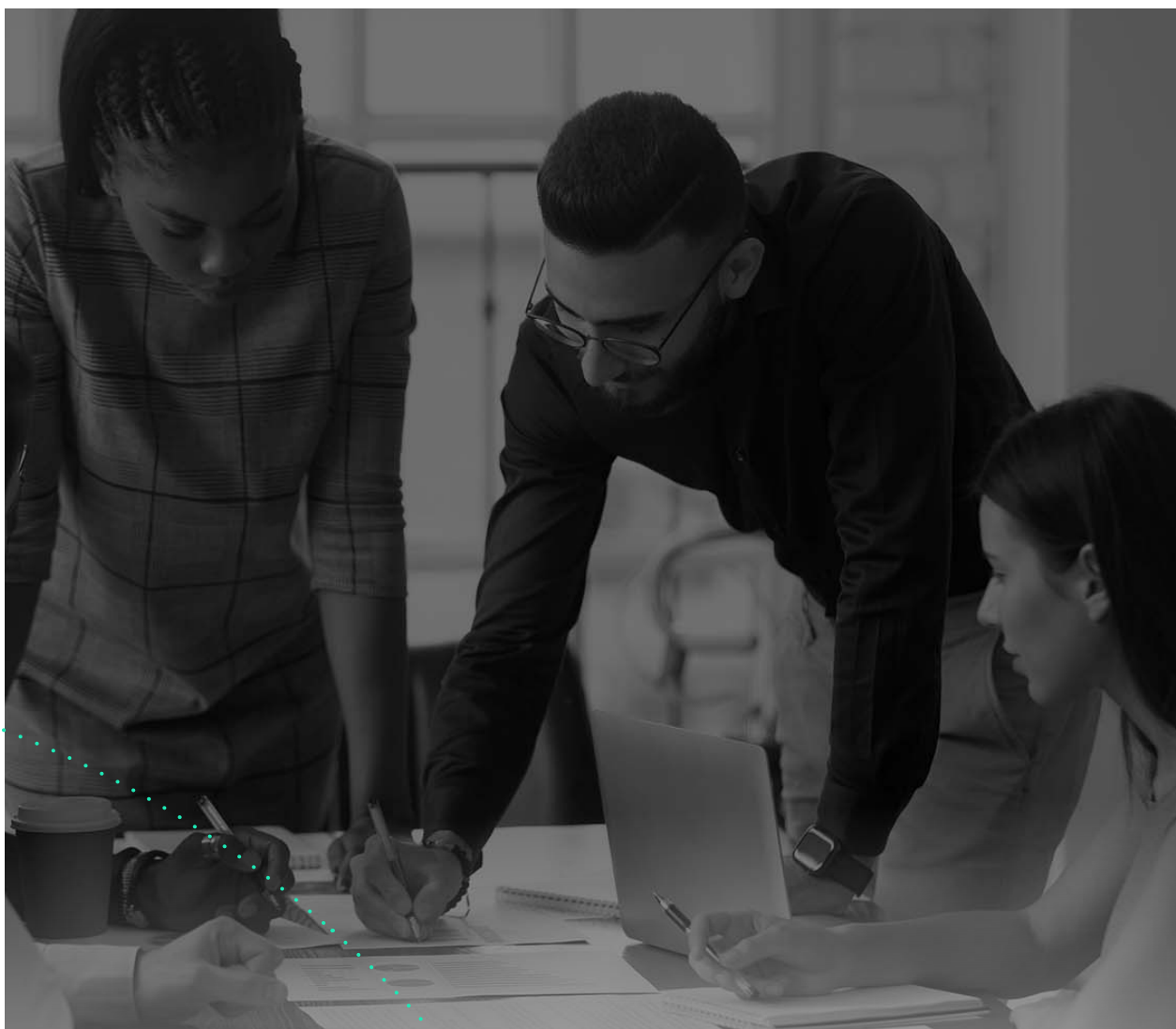
“You are assertive...”

Examples of the same sentences with inclusive phrasing:

“You are able to achieve results

“Must be successful in an environment with changing priorities”

“You dig into the “why” behind an assignment...”





Appendix 5.

Sectors Used for the Study

Banking & Capital Markets (i.e. Goldman Sachs, E*Trade, The Blackstone Group)

Software & Platforms (i.e. Microsoft, Apple, Amazon)

Telecommunications & Media (i.e. AT&T, Simon & Schuster, CBS Media)

Consumer Goods & Retail (i.e. Starbucks, Procter & Gamble, Walt Disney Company)

Energy, Resources, & Utilities (i.e. ExxonMobil, BP, Chevron)

Pharmaceuticals (i.e. Novartis, GSK, CVS Health)

Professional Services (i.e. Accenture, Booz Allen Hamilton, H&R Block)

Tech (i.e. Cisco, Intel, Oracle)

Manufacturing (i.e. 3M, GE, Honeywell)





Appendix 6.

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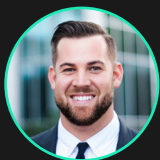


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