



Nevertheless, It Persists:

Disrupting the Vicious Cycle of Institutionalized Sexism

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and Rakeen Mabud**

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“I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.”

– Audre Lorde

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 crisis, the economic recession, and the renewed attention to racist, state-sanctioned violence have underscored what historically marginalized women—particularly women of color and low-paid women—face everyday: the burden of generations of sexist and racist institutions, norms, and policy choices that systematically limit women’s power and devalue the work that women do.

Throughout history, people in power have used identity-based differences¹ as a justification for inequities, privileging some above others and creating social hierarchies. These hierarchies are perpetuated by keeping women² from accessing economic, social, cultural and political power. Such inequities are then further compounded by racism and other intersecting oppressions, including ableism, nativism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia and other exclusionary frameworks (Ridgeway).

In this report, we argue that the intertwined structures of institutionalized sexism and racism are at the root of many negative gendered outcomes exacerbated in this crisis.

1 These differences are based on power constructs, not objective truths. See Kendi 2019.

2 When we refer to women, we mean cis and trans women and femme-identified people, which includes anyone who is not a cis or trans woman but who identifies as feminine or is typically read as feminine by others, including those among them who are non-binary and/or gender-nonconforming. This framework is based on one developed by the Groundwork Collaborative.

We argue that gender-based discrimination, compounded by racism and other exclusionary frameworks, is embedded in our policy choices, workplace practices, and cultural norms. This creates a vicious cycle of power and resource imbalances that continues to hold women back. Ultimately, this power imbalance curtails not only women's — but our entire economy and society's — ability to thrive. We are long past due in developing a new, inclusive approach that fixes historical inequities, addresses social norms and prioritizes the resources that women need to thrive.

In this paper, we lay out a five-point gender equity framework for evaluating policy problems and generating strategies that decision-makers can use to develop new solutions. This framework includes:

- ▶ Upending the hierarchies that sustain institutionalized sexism;
- ▶ Confronting intersecting oppressions;
- ▶ Interrogating the way problems are framed;
- ▶ Ending the myth of neutrality; and
- ▶ Changing systems, not symptoms.

As an immediate project, that means tackling the policies that hold women back — to ensure that women have the tools they need to assume positions of power, and to chip away at an infrastructure that is built around privileging the already powerful. These tactics could include:

- ▶ Diversifying and expanding access to decision making, whether in traditional positions of leadership or expanding nodes of power;
- ▶ Changing the way we value and invest in care and care work, including providing significant funding for accessible, affordable and quality child care, long-term supports and services, paid leave, flexible and predictable work, and good quality care jobs;
- ▶ Eliminating gender and racial pay disparities, including ensuring fair pay by eliminating the tipped minimum wage;
- ▶ Closing gender and racial wealth gaps; and
- ▶ Addressing sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination.

But change doesn't happen on its own. That's why, in all of these endeavors, changemakers' guiding principle should be to broaden their perspective about what power and influence is, who should wield it and where it is held. For centuries, advocates—especially those representing historically marginalized communities—have used collective power to change systems that are stacked against them and made real progress. Looking forward, we must

continue their work and create new norms, structures and systems that center the experiences of women and other historically marginalized groups. This means we must:

- ▶ Center the needs and amplify the voices of those at the intersection of multiple oppressions, whose concerns and experiences have historically been ignored;
- ▶ Expand workplace democracy by ensuring that workers have a voice in decision-making and have the power and agency to act collectively;
- ▶ Embrace and value a diversity of leadership styles and perspectives; and
- ▶ Apply different metrics to assess our progress in breaking down gendered and racialized systems, including measures of collective power, collaboration, and how we value labor such as caregiving.

We are long past due in developing a new, inclusive approach that fixes historical inequities, addresses social norms and prioritizes the resources that women need to thrive.

The COVID-19 crisis, economic recession, and widespread protests against the rampant police brutality against Black people are throwing into stark relief the gender and racial hierarchies that have long existed in our society. These compounding crises are also exposing all of the ways that sustaining a society built on these inequities harms all of us. At a time when women are bearing the brunt of these inequities, understanding the entwined power structures of patriarchy and white supremacy has never been more crucial. Rather than copying and pasting the systems of the past — and expecting a new result — we can use this moment to create a more just, equitable and inclusive society.

The moment to stop the vicious cycle of institutionalized sexism is now.

Introduction:

How Institutionalized Sexism Persists

“Much of Western European history conditions us to see human differences in simplistic opposition to each other: dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior. In a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who, through systematized oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior. Within this society, that group is made up of Black and Third World people, working-class people, older people, and women.” —Audre Lorde, 1980

“History... has shown that gender inequity has remarkable resilience.” —Cecilia Ridgeway, 2011

The COVID-19 crisis has illuminated the deeply entrenched, pervasive sexism that has long held women back in the United States. Low-paid women and women of color in particular are shouldering an immense load as the crisis continues to take its toll (Peck). Of the 20.5 million people who lost their jobs in April, more than half were women (“April Jobs Report”). Many of the women of color on the front lines being deemed “essential” are paid minimum wages and have no health insurance or savings (Johnson and Frazier). Unpaid caregiving responsibilities that have always fallen on women are increasing as schools and child care centers close their doors (Miller, “Nearly Half of Men”).

The global crisis we are facing, alongside the renewed attention to police violence and reactions to it, underscore what women around the country—particularly women of color and low-paid women—face everyday: the burden of generations of policies that have systematically limited women’s power and devalued the work that women do. Throughout history, people in power have used identity-based differences³ as a justification for inequities, privileging some above others and creating social hierarchies (Ridgeway). This gender-based discrimination, compounded by racism and other exclusionary frameworks, is embedded in our policy choices, workplace practices, and cultural norms. This creates a vicious cycle of power and resource imbalances that continues to hold women back from accessing economic, social, cultural, and political power. Ultimately, this power imbalance curtails not only women’s but our entire economy and society’s ability to thrive.

Despite the existing hierarchies, we are slowly moving in the direction of progress. In the United States, the cultural context on which this report focuses, we had seen gains prior to the current crisis in the share of jobs held by women, women’s educational attainment, anti-discrimination laws, and women’s elected office rates; as well as a rise in women’s marches, presidential candidates, candidate forums led by women of color, like She the People⁴ and

3 These differences are based on power constructs, not objective truths. See Kendi 2019.

4 This national network of women of color held the first candidate forum led by women of color in 2019.

Care in Action,⁵ and the momentum behind #MeToo,⁶ TIME'S UP, and campaigns such as Fight for 15 (Gibson; Bauman; “Fifteen States”; Valley). Over the last century, in each decade, women’s organizing and collective action has led to slow, steady progress in laws, customs, and economic indicators.

Yet, imbalances remain and often seem intractable. Today, women are systematically paid less than men, hold less wealth, and are less likely to hold formal positions of power in government and the private sector. They have less bodily autonomy than men as a result of the withholding of sexual and reproductive health care and education, violence, and the objectification of women’s bodies. The disproportionate hours they spend on housework and care are uncompensated and undervalued. And women of color consistently fare worse than white women on these metrics as a result of the United States’ legacy of slavery, the genocide of Indigenous people, the dispossession of Indigenous land, xenophobia, and other factors.

Cultural norms and expectations about gender are linked to the cultural norms and hierarchies that have been established about other aspects of identity such as race, class, sexual orientation, ability, and immigration status, among others. Having one historically marginalized identity causes one set of challenges, but having multiple marginalized identities creates even more complex, intersecting challenges. Kimberle Crenshaw first coined the term “intersectionality” in 1989 to describe the experiences of Black women. She writes, “the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism,” concluding that “any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated” (Crenshaw). Crenshaw’s definition is helpful in understanding the experiences of other oppressed identities: The sum of who we are influences the barriers to gender equity.

In what follows, we examine the myriad ways that intersectional, institutionalized sexism sustains the status quo, slowing the progress of gender equity. We begin by laying out a five-point framework for confronting sexism in society, particularly in the realm of public policy. Using the historical case study of child care policy, we demonstrate how the framework can be applied to interrupt the self-perpetuating loop of institutional sexism and to identify public policy solutions that achieve greater gender equity.⁷

5 The political arm of the National Domestic Workers Alliance gathered 1,000 domestic workers in Nevada in February 2020—nannies, home care workers and house cleaners—to ask the candidates questions about issues impacting their lives. See Jackie Valley, “Domestic workers capture presidential candidates’ attention during a Las Vegas forum,” Nevada Independent, <https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/domestic-workers-capture-presidential-candidates-attention-during-a-las-vegas-forum>.

6 A hashtag coined by Tarana Burke that went viral in October 2017.

7 It is important to note that this report focuses primarily on the interplay of sexism and racism, a choice we made to limit the scope of this paper. Ableism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, classism, ageism, and other forms of discrimination are just as debilitating and all interact with the oppressions that we describe—and with each other—to hold women and non-binary people back.

A New Gender Equity Framework

Below, we outline a five-point gender equity framework that can be used to review both policy challenges and solutions with the goal of upending institutional sexism. The framework interrogates how the various facets of institutional sexism work together to subordinate women. We argue that the factors that stifle women's ability to advance and thrive are the result of choices by those in power. They are deeply intertwined, sustaining each other, and therefore simply addressing each of these challenges individually or sequentially would not fully solve the problems at hand. Rooting out institutional sexism means that we cannot simply time and again repair the harm that persistent gender inequity does, but rather we must tackle the very system that allows these factors to persist.

Together, the factors that we lay out below generate a vicious cycle of policies, norms and expectations, and entrenched power that work together to hold women back.

1. **Upend the hierarchies that sustain institutionalized sexism.** Institutionalized sexism means that those who have historically held power designed a system that holds women back. The result is that the laws and policies lead to women holding less wealth and having less access to formal positions of influence, which in turn hold women back from being able to acquire resources and influence, which are necessary to combat institutional sexism. Gender equity requires disrupting this cycle.
2. **Confront intersecting oppressions.** Disrupting the vicious cycle of institutionalized sexism requires decision makers to recognize how institutional racism and other forms of discrimination that have been built into our society, and how such intersecting oppressions entrench gendered and racialized hierarchies. When we talk about centering women of color or marginalized people, that means starting policy making from the needs of those who have been most oppressed and building from there. After all, exclusionary frameworks like racism, ableism, nativism, xenophobia, homophobia, or transphobia interact with sexism to shape women's experiences in our society.
3. **Interrogate the way problems are framed.** Those who have the power to define the problems, decide what data is collected and collect it, report on what it says, create the cultural narratives, and establish cultural expectations and norms have outsized influence on the types of policy solutions that are considered, developed, and enacted. That means we must interrogate the way problems are framed and the data used as evidence to ensure we are looking at it from all angles and using an equity perspective.

4. **End the myth of neutrality.** As a result of historic power imbalances and the accepted norms, whether intentional or not, policies that seem neutral on their face often actually favor the powerful. The most pernicious form of this framing uses neutrality as a justification for policies that maintain the status quo. Decision makers need to stay on alert for policies that seem neutral on their face but in reality have deeply gendered and racialized roots and implications.
5. **Change systems, not symptoms.** Collective problems require systemic, not individual solutions. Equity requires asking whether we are blaming individuals for systemic problems and creating solutions that require systems to change, not individuals.

Change makers who adopt this framework will be able to quickly see how it improves their analysis of public challenges and development of solutions—particularly in public policy and philanthropy. To demonstrate, we explore how the five factors we lay out above interact in the history of U.S. child care policy. Child care policy choices exemplify how deeply racist and sexist notions of women’s labor and historical norms manifest and maintain the vicious cycle of institutionalized sexism.⁸

Institutional Sexism and Child Care: A Case Study

History shows how sexist and racist cultural norms interact with imbalanced financial resources and formal positions of influence to create the current lack of high quality universal child care in the United States (Vogtman). The lack of care options in turn reinforces cultural norms, imbalances in resources, and access to formal positions of influence. The fundamental problem in U.S. child care policy is a longstanding underinvestment in federal or state child care support. This underinvestment feeds into the vicious cycle and is a direct result of the intersectional oppressions of sexism and racism, the way the problems are framed, particularly with the assumption of neutrality and a focus on individual solutions. The result is not only a lack of a child care system and no support for families to thrive: it also perpetuates norms about self-reliance and gendered expectations about care, and creates immense barriers to women in attaining financial resources and institutionalized power.

⁸ All forms of care work are impacted by institutionalized sexism and racism, and thus U.S. policy and culture under-value and insufficiently address them—whether it’s caring for aging loved ones or providing the supports with daily activities of life that people with disabilities often need. This report focuses on child care, but acknowledges that the issues related to care are much broader.

Historical Antecedents to U.S. Norms Surrounding Child Care

Caregiving has long been undervalued labor, with origins in the institution of chattel slavery that forced Black women to nurse and take care of the children of white landowners—to the detriment of their own children. Child care, therefore, has long been wrongly understood as a job performed by those lower in the social hierarchy—a hierarchy designed to codify white economic superiority and patriarchy. Even after chattel slavery was outlawed, domestic work, including caring for children in others' homes, was often one of the few occupations that laws and culture made available to Black women, at least until the 1960s. For most of U.S. history, Black and immigrant women have disproportionately occupied positions in the field of paid domestic work, including child care (Nadasen and Williams).

The New Deal reinforced many of the exclusions that were in place under slavery and Jim Crow. For example, laws codified in the New Deal exempted caregiving roles from many of the key labor protections granted to other occupations. In addition, historically and today, families often rely on the unpaid labor of mothers to provide child care, reinforcing the incorrect ideas that because child care is either uncompensated or less valued, women who disproportionately provide child care are lower in social value, which provides further justification to undervalue care work. The result is a modern child care system where caregivers—disproportionately women of color—are among the least compensated in the labor market (Austin et al.). Many women, especially single mothers, mothers of color, and mothers in same-sex relationships, bear the double burden of working inside and outside the home.

The cultural expectations for where caregivers fall in the social hierarchy is deeply connected to racism and sexism, and have been codified into our laws and institutions in ways that seem hard to root out today (Equitable Growth). These deeply ingrained cultural norms have resulted in a society that does not have comprehensive child care solutions and does not value care work as an important job. The undervaluation of this gendered labor, and the public underinvestment in child care, then prevents women from achieving economic and political power.

As Jocelyn Frye explains:

“Because of the combined effects of entrenched racial, gender, and ethnic biases, women of color historically have not been seen as equal to white women or men—and little consideration has been given to their personal needs and challenges. The assumption has been that they are always available to work for others and that this work should always take precedence over any personal concerns that they might have. This legacy of disrespect, devaluation, and deprioritization remains a potent undercurrent in today’s workforce landscape in which women of color disproportionately work in care-related occupations—for example, as home health aides and child care workers—without sufficient access to caregiving supports to address their own needs.”

For women to achieve higher standing on the social hierarchy, gain financial resources, and be available to pursue formal positions of influence as they currently exist—in other words, to help break the vicious cycle of institutionalized sexism—they need a significant public investment in high-quality, flexible child care options that include valuing the work of caregivers. Those in positions of influence have established and reinforced cultural norms to stop this from happening. These norms include the “bootstraps myth,” the idea that individuals should pull themselves up by their “bootstraps,” meaning that reliance on personal responsibility is the source of all success (rather than acknowledging and addressing institutional barriers); the junk science that argues that non-maternal caregiving would harm children; and holding up traditional gender roles as a key part of the “American Dream” (Reich).

America Experiments with Valuing Child Care

These factors are evident in the longstanding historical debates around universal child care. During World War II, women were needed in the workforce while the men were abroad fighting in the military. To respond to this sudden labor market shock, Congress passed the Lanham Act, which funded child care centers available to all families for up to six days a week, charging families only \$10 a day in today’s dollars. When men returned home after the war, Congress shut down the child care centers and simultaneously engaged in a cultural campaign to dissuade women from the labor market (Davis).

In 1971, near the start of the second wave of the women’s movement, the U.S. Congress passed a bipartisan comprehensive child care bill that would have established a network of nationally funded, locally administered child care centers to provide not only care and education but also nutrition and medical services, making them available universally through a sliding scale based on income (Davis). President Nixon’s veto message, inspired by the political right, reinforced the bootstraps myth of personal (phrased, in this case, as “family”) responsibility, calling the child care bill “family-weakening” and comparing it to communism (Covert).

This message reinforced a key cultural concept on the right: child care should be an individual responsibility, rather than one of the government. The messaging, enhanced by other conservative messengers, suggested that mothers—or at least white mothers—who didn’t care for their own children were hurting the well-being of their children, and that mothers who did not prioritize caring for their children were deviant (Rosenthal). Conservative activists’ messaging on the government’s provision of child care leaned on traditional domestic roles and “strong families,” resulting in a reinforcement of the idea that child care should be about personal responsibility.

Child Care Norms Today

These norms persist today and are exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As Andrea Flynn writes, “like any serious crisis does, [the coronavirus] has elevated the extent to which institutional sexism permeates our lives: impacting the gendered division of labor within the home and also shaping what is possible for women, and particularly mothers, in the public sphere.” As schools and child care programs have closed their doors, and many are working from home, women are again bearing the brunt of maintaining the parenting/homeschooling/working from home “balance” (Daley).

However, the crisis didn’t bring these conditions about: prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, this story was already playing out. In December 2019, USA Today ran a story with the headline: “America’s parents want paid family leave and affordable child care. Why can’t they get it?” The answer: “Nearly half of all Americans still believe kids are best off if one parent stays home with them, preferably the mother” (Ramaswamy).

Whether purposefully or not, men with influence reinforced the norms about personal responsibility, the “appropriate” role of mothers, and gender roles in general to subvert the possibility of achieving universal child care to date. For example, in his book, *Crawling Behind: America’s Child Care Crisis and How to Fix It*, Elliot Haspel explains the role “junk science” has played in reinforcing the idea that when children were apart from their mothers they would be damaged: “Even beloved Dr. Benjamin Spock, as late as the 1958 edition of *Baby and Childcare*, wrote that ‘good mother care during the earliest childhood is the surest way to produce [useful and well-adjusted citizens]. It doesn’t make sense to let mothers go to work making dresses or tapping typewriters in an office and have them pay other people to do a poorer job of bringing up their own children... a day nursery or a ‘baby farm’ is no good for an infant” (Haspel 23).

The cultural understanding of women’s labor—particularly child care—has become so ingrained that its gendered and racialized starting point is nearly invisible. Invisibility is what gives these norms power—and it is when these norms are powerful that they are most able to uphold the racial and gender hierarchies, holding women, and particularly women of color, back from amassing resources, power, and the freedom to express their agency.

The Impact on Financial Resources and Formal Positions of Influence for Women

A recent Oxfam report found that “The monetary value for unpaid care work globally for women aged 15 and over is at least \$10.8 trillion—three times the size of the world’s tech industry” (Coffey et. al. 20). In the United States, if women were paid for the unpaid work they do around the house and caring for relatives, they would have been paid \$1.5 trillion last

year—and that’s if they were paid only the minimum wage, which is undervaluing the way that this kind of labor facilitates the rest of economic activity, let alone its immediate value to human life (Wezerek and Ghodsee).

Women are more likely than men to cut down work hours, turn down promotions, or leave the workforce all together to take on caregiving responsibilities—for both children and other family members. And as the baby boomers age without a public policy plan for their care—no long-term care insurance, inadequate medical care, etc.—the burden will fall on their adult children, and disproportionately their daughters (Small). According to the Center for American Progress, “working women lose an estimated \$8.8 billion in potential wages due to the challenges associated with finding child care as well as an additional \$11.6 billion due to lack of access to paid family and medical leave” (Glynn, “The Rising Cost”).

Studies show that becoming a mother has a direct relationship with loss of earnings over time—in other words, a motherhood penalty in pay (Plumb). This penalty does not exist for fathers, and in fact, some studies have shown a fatherhood bonus that goes along with the cultural norm that men are financially supporting their families (Budig). Thus, women’s roles as mothers, and the cultural norms that don’t value care (deeming it “women’s work”), have a direct impact on their financial resources. Further, the persistent low pay for the disproportionately women-of-color workforce that provides child care, and the high cost of child care, hold women back even more. As Haspel notes, “Childcare costs are vacuums sucking up middle- and lower-class income that would otherwise go to... wealth creation and debt repayment” (Haspel, 23).

 *Invisibility is what gives these norms power.*

In addition, the lack of child care—along with fewer financial resources and the way workplace norms and policies were established and continued to evolve to meet the needs of wealthier white men—means that women are less likely to ascend to formal positions of influence. In turn, with fewer women making public policies or establishing workplace policies, child care remains an individual challenge for most families—continuing to contribute to the cycle of inequality.

The answers aren’t that women should stop having children or stop trying to ascend to formal positions. Rather, the child care case highlights the lack of institutional response—no universal child care, no investment in quality jobs—that keeps women from being able to reap the rewards of labor force participation and good wages, to get promoted and be free to pursue formal positions of influence and financial resources. Until the economic value

of care—and the economic cost of not providing it—are recognized; until we address the disproportionate burden our caregiving structure places on women of color caregivers; until the realities of caregiving are addressed, and caregiving responsibilities are more evenly distributed among men and women, then this imbalance will continue to hold women back and perpetuate the gender and race hierarchy. Changing the way we address care and care work is thus key to upending gender inequality.

Disrupting the Vicious Cycle of Institutionalized Sexism

Child care is simply one realm in which we see how this framework holds women back. These factors play out across our cultural, societal, and economic systems to reinforce racist and sexist hierarchies. In the following section, we delve deeper into the various prongs of the framework and begin to understand the pieces that need to be dismantled in order to move towards a more inclusive and just society and economy.

Cultural beliefs about men's superiority to women continually receive new justifications, starting with physical differences, reproductive roles, biology and expanding to occupations, leadership styles, and roles as homemakers, among other factors (Ridgeway). Similarly, physical differences, biology, and occupational differences are some of the excuses used to justify racism. Hierarchy itself is a social construct, through which those on top maintain their dominance, those in the middle follow those on the top, and those at the bottom struggle with few resources and little power (Steinem). There is nothing inherent in being a man or a woman or having darker or lighter skin that makes one superior or inferior. Hierarchy is simply part of a narrative that people in power (at the top of the hierarchy) have perpetuated and people with less power have either internalized or have been unable to upend (Darity et al.).

As our framework lays out, the cultural norm of the hierarchy—especially when it interacts with racism—blocks women from easily achieving formal positions of influence and financial resources. The lack of equitable access to such tools of powerbuilding defines hierarchy itself, and also reinforces the hierarchies that facilitated such an outcome in the first place. While the ultimate goal is to create and successfully wield new tools of powerbuilding, in the short term, recognizing the current imbalances helps us see more clearly the challenges ahead.

Power is the engine that drives cultural norms. The deliberate consolidation of power by wealthy white men throughout history has resulted in a world where white men are expected

to be those who hold power, an expectation that constantly reinforces itself. In addition, cultural norms say that men are breadwinners for their families and therefore need to have financial resources skew their way. Yet the reality is that women are breadwinners in more than 60 percent of families, primary breadwinners in 40 percent of families, and co-breadwinners (earning at least 25 percent of household income) in 23 percent. Black mothers are more than twice as likely as white mothers to be their family's primary source of financial support (Glynn, "Breadwinning Mothers"). Still, the norms persist.

Upending the Hierarchies That Sustain Institutionalized Sexism

In all spheres of their lives—in the labor market, at home, and in leadership positions—women, and women of color in particular, bear the burden of lower pay, hold fewer assets, have less bodily autonomy, and are underrepresented in positions that decide how resources are distributed in our society. These observable characteristics are not accidental; rather, they are the result of deliberate choices those in power have made throughout history.

In this section, we dig into these observable outcomes—all the ways we can measure how women, and particularly women of color, have access to fewer resources and formal positions of influence. But it is crucially important to remember that while we see the imbalances we focus on in this section as measurable, underpinning these outcomes are cultural norms and the intersecting challenges that face women of color, particularly racism, all of which are less readily quantifiable. Cultural, racial, and resource inequities all interact with each other to hold women back, and eliminating persistent gender inequities requires understanding and addressing all of the ways these issues intersect.

Power is the engine that drives cultural norms.

Imbalanced Access to Resources

When women are disadvantaged in the economy and the labor market, it has significant spillover effects. Issues such as pay inequities, occupational segregation, wealth gaps, and caregiving responsibilities significantly affect women's economic security and their ability to get ahead. Income and wealth gaps mean that women have fewer resources than men to make the financial decisions they want to make, build political power, gain formal positions of influence, achieve economic prosperity, and increase their freedom to express their own agency in their lives. Rebalancing access to resources, especially in a society

where resources and power have long been deliberately hoarded by those in power, lays the groundwork for systemic change (Kashen).

Imbalanced Access to Positions of Influence

Formal positions of influence are titles or roles whose occupants are officially on the top of the hierarchy—through appointment, election, or a hiring decision.⁹ A quick scan of the corporate and policy landscape will confirm what many of us suspect: wealthier, white men dominate these positions of power in the United States. From boardrooms and C-suites to political offices in Washington, men disproportionately hold formal positions of influence as CEOs, corporate board members, leaders of television networks and Hollywood studios, members of Congress, governors, mayors, and more. That means they have more decision-making authority, control over the distribution of public and private resources, and influence over cultural norms (“power”). It also means that women’s perspectives, experiences, and approaches are under-included and undervalued.

Appendix A details the ways in which the outcomes of the hierarchy leave women with fewer resources and formal positions of influence.

Resources and How Access to Them Interacts with Formal Positions of Influence

These resource imbalances matter because imbalances in one sphere reinforce those in other spheres. In a political system where access to resources is directly and positively correlated with access to formal positions of influence, women and candidates of color are inherently disadvantaged relative to men—reinforcing their exclusion from a system that is built without their interests in mind (Kohler and Mabud). Meanwhile, those in formal positions of power then write rules to codify the inequalities.

As Heather McCullough writes of the wealth gap: “Prior to the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and the Equal Opportunity Act of 1974, women had limited access to mortgage credit. Single women were denied home loans altogether; married women could not get loans in their own names; and the credit history of divorced or widowed women, whose prior credit was in their husbands’ names, was not taken into account when they tried to get loans in their own names.”

As noted above, women of color face intersecting challenges, which explains why white men have the most wealth and white single women have more than \$15,000 in median wealth as compared to \$200 in median wealth for single Black women and \$100 for single Hispanic

9 Some are also self-appointed, like entrepreneurs.

women (Chang). Both explicit and implicit discrimination stripped—and continues to strip—wealth from generations of people of color. Formal institutions such as slavery, redlining, Jim Crow, racialized New Deal carveouts for domestic and farmworkers, and a carceral system that systematically strips wealth from Black communities has meant that Black families have never had a level playing field when it comes to wealth accumulation. When combined with cultural norms that establish Black Americans—especially Black women—as lower on the cultural hierarchy, we should not be surprised when Black women have fewer savings to lean on in times of need and fewer assets to pass along to their children (McCullough).

Our political system and housing laws are not the only place where these self-reinforcing dynamics show up: examples are littered throughout our society. In the private sector, for instance, the CEO-to-worker compensation ratio was 278 to 1 in 2018 (Mishel and Wolfe). In other words, if the median worker earned \$30,000, the average CEO earned \$8.3 billion. The barriers to having women in formal positions of influence like CEOs means that this ratio further exacerbates the financial resources gap between men and women. Meanwhile, over the last decade, median CEO pay has grown more than 50 percent while women’s median pay has grown less than 1 percent, contributing to the widening gap.¹⁰

Cultural norms further aggravate these challenges. Bias—explicit and implicit—means women receive less support in sponsorship, mentorship, and promotions, and find themselves torn between likeability and ambition, which are erroneously seen as incompatible in women. As Alicia Menendez writes in *The Likeability Trap*: “the leading obstacles to women’s leadership are stereotypes and bias. The thing that feels the most amorphous and the least correctable is also the most pernicious. Among the biases women face: the double bind between likeability and success, and the paradoxical calls for gender-correcting performance and authenticity in a woman leader.” This was made clear in the 2020 Democratic primary, as we heard again and again about the “likeability” (or lack thereof) of the women candidates (Kohler).

Furthermore, without women in formal positions of influence, young women—especially women of color—do not see themselves in leadership. They don’t have role models or inspirations. And when they do, too often the women who “make it to the top” have had to conform to hierarchical and other “masculine” approaches to get there. As Menendez writes: “Rather than reimagining leadership, we’re asking women to reimagine themselves. That is robbing all of us of the opportunity to create a model of leadership that is more expansive, includes more of us, and yields better results.” In other words, reimagining what leadership, power, and influence look like is key to upending gender inequity.

Upending hierarchies requires starting with rebalancing resources and formal positions of influence. Considering the caregiving example, we must recognize care as the valuable public

¹⁰ Calculations by Amanda Novello, senior policy associate, The Century Foundation.

good it is in order to break the vicious cycle. By opening the door for women to accumulate the resources, more women could take on formal positions of influence—hopefully institutionalizing policy choices that center women, thereby beginning to shift social norms.

A starting point for shifting social norms around care is to have more women in Congress to set a policy agenda that prioritizes care. For example, Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), who first ran for Congress as a “Mom in tennis shoes” and Representative Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) recently introduced the Child Care is Essential Act to invest \$50 billion in COVID-19 related child care needs (“DeLauro, Scott, Murray”).¹¹ Here, too, the vicious cycle of institutionalized sexism rears its head, as it is challenging for women to run for public office without access to child care. In 2018, when Liuba Grechen Shirley ran for Congress she successfully petitioned the FEC to allow campaign funds to be spent on child care, which started a series of approvals for this activity (Vazquez). While it is a helpful path forward to ensuring more resources for women to be able to run for Congress, men running for office can divert those resources to advertising and other expenses.

We must therefore work from both ends—implementing immediate policy changes that help more women get into office, and get more resources for child care, using those policy changes to push for a much larger scale societal norm change about the importance of child care and the disproportionate burden of care responsibilities that women bear. Eventually, we can move into a better cycle where child care is valued as a public good, universal child care solutions are much more mainstream, and women, especially women of color, have the ability to set the policy agenda on a broad set of issues.

Confront Intersecting Oppressions

The vicious cycle of institutionalized discrimination is also true for institutional racism and other forms of discrimination that have been built into our society. Thus, the cycle generates even starker consequences for people who face exclusionary frameworks like racism, ableism, nativism, xenophobia, homophobia, or transphobia in addition to sexism. When we talk about centering women of color, or marginalized people, that means starting policy making from the needs of those who have been most oppressed and building from there.

Without pairing the fight for gender equity with an equal attention to other oppressions that hold women back, the fight for progress will never reach its full potential. The cultural

¹¹ This is not to say that men don't sponsor or support child care related bills, but that when women are in formal positions of influence they are more likely to lead on such legislation.

hierarchy that we are describing, after all, is not simply about sex or gender. Throughout modern history, those in positions of influence and financial advantage have been white cis men, and whiteness has worked to protect itself. The result is that white women have been granted higher status on the hierarchy than women of color, and in many ways have tried to maintain that status out of a false sense of scarcity (Elkholy).

Those at the top of the social hierarchy perceive themselves as having a lot to lose, which is something we have seen as movements towards gender inequity have left women of color behind. This is apparent in the suffrage movement of the nineteenth century, where white movement leaders abandoned extending the right to vote to Black women when leaving them behind proved politically expedient (Staples).

Without explicit and deliberate attention to racism and the myriad other oppressions that women face, the movement risks leaving behind the most vulnerable women and non-binary people—in other words, those at the bottom of the existing hierarchy.

Any new paradigm that is designed to support women must center those who are at the intersection of multiple oppressions. This requires empowering those who have the ability to change laws, norms, and practices in the short term to replace hierarchical structures and institutions in the long term. The child care example demonstrates this well.

Without explicit and deliberate attention to racism and the myriad other oppressions that women face, the movement risks leaving behind the most vulnerable women and non-binary people.

Another example is the issue of Black maternal mortality: Black women are 2.5 times more likely to die in childbirth than white women (Cirruzzo). This is not just an issue that affects low-income Black women, but high-profile and wealthy women as well, exemplified by Beyoncé and Serena Williams' well publicized experiences (Chiu). These maternal health outcomes are

the result of a toxic combination of racism, sexism, and other barriers to important policy interventions, such as the lack of paid family and medical leave, equal pay, universal child care, universal health care, and other family-forward policies in the United States.

Addressing such concerns requires more women—particularly Black women—in positions of influence. After all, who writes the rules matters. Without Black women at the table ensuring that the structural barriers that they face are addressed, we will not be able to upend those barriers. For example, it was only last year that Black women in Congress founded the Black Maternal Health Caucus to address Black maternal mortality through policy solutions

(Taylor). Putting Black women in charge not only put the issue on the table: it also reframed the issue to incorporate and directly challenge the racism and sexism that no one policy solution will ever be able to address.

At the same time, we need a wholesale rethinking of the system—a rethinking that must start with the single moms, Black and Latinx women, and other women of color who have always been working, are in need of solutions, and have been kept on the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy by racist and sexist policies. The hierarchies here are clear: underpaid and undervalued Black and immigrant women disproportionately shoulder the brunt of the child care work. Messages in psychology and sociology and on TV, film, and elsewhere about maternal responsibility and the appropriate roles of women continue to cause women guilt, conflict, and impossible choices—and the feeling that it's on them to solve the problem.

That's the power of authentically centering those at the intersection: when we start with the people who are facing the most oppression, we come to understand the myriad ways those oppressions interact to create the outcomes we are trying to solve. It reveals the nature of the issues in all their complications, and forces us to confront the limits of the solutions already on the table.

In the context of child care policy, this requires ensuring that policies are designed to support women who are at the intersections of multiple oppressions. Janelle Jones explains this as “Black women best”—the idea that measuring “success by what happens to Black women” will ensure that our policy solutions don't leave behind those who have always been left behind, resulting in better supports for all workers (Holder). Anne Price explains another way: “Centering Blackness may be one of our greatest hopes to build solidarity and work together to achieve economic liberation and equity.”

Advocacy groups led by Black, brown, and immigrant women have long been prioritizing the needs of the historically excluded. For example, Mothering Justice in Michigan, a group led by Black women working to return “decision making power to the ones affected by these decisions the most.” Their “Mama’s Agenda” includes affordable child care among other priorities, and they work to engage mothers and lawmakers in addressing what working families need (“Mothering Justice”). Make It Work Nevada, is another Black woman-led organization who works “to disrupt the traditional methods of organizing in cultivating substantive and authentic relationships with community members that are trying to make it work.” They host kitchen table conversations to learn about the hardships and disparities that the women they work alongside face, so that those conversations can lead the policy work, which also includes prioritizing child care (“Make It Work Nevada”). Bringing the voices of those most impacted to the table and translating their stories into policy solutions that put them first is key to this work.

Interrogate the Way Problems Are Framed

Those who have the power to define the problems, decide what data is collected and collect it, report on what it says, create the cultural narratives, and establish cultural expectations and norms have outsized influence on the types of policy solutions that are considered, developed, and enacted. That means we must interrogate the way problems are framed and the data used as evidence to ensure we are looking at it from all angles and using an equity perspective.

After all, we cannot address what we cannot see. This is readily apparent when it comes to addressing persistent wealth disparities. Because wealth is most often measured at the household level, it is impossible to separate out wealth holdings by gender. While we know gender wealth gaps persist by comparing the wealth holdings of single men and women, the overall picture remains murky—and therefore hard to get traction on in a policy context.

We are also seeing how this plays out in the COVID-19 pandemic. Crucial data that measures the effects of the pandemic are not consistently disaggregated by gender in the United States—and indeed, data on COVID-19 deaths by race were only collected after loud calls from Rep. Ayanna Pressley and Sen. Elizabeth Warren. Even now, finding data on the impacts of COVID-19 by race and gender is at best difficult

and at worst nearly impossible. As a result, policymakers have very little insight into how the crisis is actually affecting people on the ground, leaving a vacuum for lawmakers to impose their own, potentially biased framing.

We see this in Republican lawmakers' approach to the pandemic response, which prioritizes keeping deficits in check and reopening the economy over people's health and safety, especially people who are already most vulnerable because of the consequences of institutionalized racism and sexism (Brufke; Taylor). By dismissing calls for paid leave for all,

“When we start with the people who are facing the most oppression, we come to understand the myriad ways those oppressions interact to create the outcomes we are trying to solve. It reveals the nature of the issues in all their complications, and forces us to confront the limits of the solutions already on the table.”

cash assistance and housing assistance, Republicans have framed the conversation to focus on whether the policy fits into existing ideologies—rather than focusing on what families really need. The deficit frame itself is one that is ostensibly “neutral,” but usually results in curtailing the funding of programs that would help those who needed it most.

The child care example also provides an excellent model of this. If we had framed the problem from the beginning of “how can we support Black women and their families?” instead of allowing conservative messengers to ensure that “individual family responsibility” and “women’s work” as a prevailing frame, we may have a child care system today where child care was seen as a social responsibility instead of an individual one. Instead, conservative messengers made communal solutions sound harmful and created an uphill battle for universal child care. This type of rhetoric has come from both sides of the aisle, ingraining these harmful tropes into our cultural narrative (Kendi 238).

When the problems are defined as individual, the solutions are similarly defined as individual, even when the problems are much more complicated and structural. Using a structural frame to understand the problems with our existing child care policies would lead to solutions that don’t just tinker around the edges, but reimagine the system in a wholesale way.

Ending the Myth of Neutrality

The most pernicious form of framing uses neutrality as a justification for policies that maintain the status quo. However, as a result of historic power imbalances and the accepted norms, whether intentional or not, policies that seem neutral on their face often actually favor the powerful. “Neutrality” arguments are a great flag that a policy problem or solution needs a deeper level of investigation.

For example, consciously or not, wealthier, white men have also created many barriers to women accumulating wealth through ostensibly gender-neutral policies in the tax code and fair housing laws. As Katy Milani, Melissa Boteach, Steph Sterling, and Sarah Hassmer write in their report examining gender bias in the tax code, “The tax code’s treatment of inherited wealth and preference for income from wealth over income from work allow the very wealthiest—disproportionately white men—to pay lower effective tax rates than what workers pay on their wages” (13). Nothing in this policy explicitly names gender or race, but since white men are the most likely to have wealth, they are the most likely to benefit from this policy.

In addition, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress passed an emergency paid leave policy to provide paid time to care for oneself or one's family members as a result of COVID-19 related illness or school and child care closings. The White House, during negotiations, lowered the wage replacement for caring for family members. On its face, this is a neutral policy. In reality, we know that women are more likely to be the caregivers, and therefore, this attempt to once again undervalue caregiving hurts women more.

Even laws that are seemingly neutral in their outcomes often have much more insidious roots. Take, for example, agricultural and domestic worker carveouts from U.S. labor law. These carveouts mean that specific categories of workers are explicitly barred from unionizing, as well as minimum wage and overtime protections (although years of organizing have helped rectify most of those Fair Labor Standards Act exclusions) (Rogers and Andrias). While the exclusions are based on occupational categories—and ostensibly race and gender neutral—they came about because the Roosevelt administration cut a deal with racist southern Democrats to exclude Black and brown workers from the protections of the New Deal. As explored by Ira Katznelson in his seminal book *When Affirmative Action was White*, southern senators ultimately developed the definition of “employee” in the National Labor Relations Act, locking in the power that white, male plantation owners had over Black workers (Katznelson 55). In a recent report, Sharon Block and Ben Sachs explore how these exclusions have been copy and pasted in legislation over the years, resulting in today's race and gender neutral understanding of the exclusions—but with deep consequences for the economic security of some of the most precarious workers in our economy: Black and brown workers, immigrant workers, and women, who continue to largely occupy the domestic work sector.

How best to frame the issue is the subject of long-standing debate. Seemingly neutral arguments that child care policy is about all children's wellbeing, school readiness or a positive economic return on investment, erase the ways that the lack of child care solutions disproportionately hurts women, Black communities, Latinx families, and children with disabilities and their families. One of the consequences of this erasure is that “high quality child care” gets defined without accounting for the role of the workforce in providing that care. It also leads to a mismatch between child care schedules and the work schedules of their parents. Definitions of quality, scheduling considerations, and all of our child solutions must upend cultural norms and neutrality myths. That does not mean policies should ignore quality, but it does require contextualizing it so that it reflects a much broader perspective.

Change Systems, not Symptoms

“If every woman and girl learned to love herself fiercely, the patriarchy would still be intact; it would demand that she be killed for having the audacity to think she was somebody. Individual blame isn’t enough to solve the problem.” —Brittney Cooper, 2018

Equity requires asking whether we are blaming individuals for systemic problems—solving collective problems requires systemic, not individual, solutions.

Simply bringing more women into formal positions of influence will not immediately solve the broader systemic inequities. Ultimately, we need to broaden our perspective about what power and influence is, who should wield it, and where it is held. Power, after all, has always also been distributed in ways that do not depend on hierarchies—but our institutions have long suppressed these collective power structures, keeping them from reaching their full potential. Upending the cultural norms that hold women back requires developing norms, structures, and systems that value different ways of approaching leadership, including collective action and collaboration.

The imperative is not to simply diversify those who occupy positions of power: we need to create new systems, such as those that rely on collective power in which women can thrive and our intersecting identities are celebrated, not denigrated. For example, diversifying the CEO slots in the Fortune 500 companies will only go so far: we also need to ensure that women across those same firms can exercise power through unions and other institutions of collective power.

Disrupting longstanding power dynamics in our society will require building a powerful infrastructure that helps us move towards a more equitable future. This requires both power that radiates from the grassroots and influence that can be wielded from the top[end].

As long as power is concentrated in formal positions of influence, these seats command incredible ability to generate change. Women’s underrepresentation in positions of influence therefore is not only a problem but also a symptom of the underlying norms, policies, and institutions that hold women back.

Ultimately, we need to broaden our perspective about what power and influence is, who should wield it, and where it is held.

Historically, the progress that has been made on equity in general, and women’s rights specifically, has come from collective action. When women won the right to vote in 1920, giving white women the vote, Black women remained disenfranchised until their


collective action led to changes with the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Furthermore, when Black women won the minimum wage and overtime for domestic workers in the 1970s; when President Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act of 1963—these were all the results of people coming together to demand change.

The changes started with a cultural awakening; from there, a backlash to the historical exclusion of women and people of color required the amassing of financial resources and the building of new forms of informal and formal influence to elicit change. From protests to consciousness raising groups to marches and viral moments in social media, women and co-conspirators coming together has had an extraordinary impact. Consider the current organizing efforts of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, Jobs with Justice, Justice for Migrant Women, Mothering Justice in Michigan, Make It Work Nevada—all collective power building efforts led by women of color. This suggests that positions of influence don't have to look like a white male CEO or a congressman. They may instead look like a sea of diverse women working together to invoke real change.

Women should be able to ensure that systems act in their interests no matter where they are—whether that is the C-suite or the factory floor. That means expanding the number and type of roles that hold power—not just the people in the seats. The goal is not to simply flip the hierarchy: it's to knock it down altogether and change the way power and influence are distributed beyond “formal positions.”

Systemic change requires us to examine problems and understand how to change the existing power dynamics. In the context of child care infrastructure, systemic approach would clearly define child care as a public good and develop child care as a part of a public system—thereby changing societal power dynamics around women's labor. Historically, we have seen how decision-makers have repeatedly approached the problems presented above with tweaks and adjustments, rather than understanding the issues with child care as—and therefore solving those issues as—a structural problem. Such a systemic approach is deeply important in order to change the narratives around women's labor.

That means affordable, quality, accessible child care for all. As Anne Price writes in the context of racial wealth inequality, a systemic approach to child care: “must include a race-conscious approach to the provision of universal goods as a means to true freedom

 ***Disrupting longstanding power dynamics in our society will require a new infrastructure that requires both power that radiates from the grassroots and influence that can be wielded from the top.***

and dignity” (24). We need an economic foundation of care built on a strong structure that recognizes and addresses historic inequities and also creates collective solutions. This includes building a care system based on shared values of care, love, equity, justice, community and family. Every stakeholder should have a voice, and new solutions like worker owned cooperatives must be part of the framework. Especially as we build a new framework to respond to the Black Lives Matter movement and the impacts of COVID-19, we have an opportunity to create a foundation of care that supports women, no matter what their job or relationship to care.

This Is Our Moment

The cultural hierarchies that have held women back for generations must come to an end. The COVID-19 crisis reveals how deeply harmful these hierarchies are for our well-being and communities. Women and women of color in particular are disproportionately frontline workers, allowing society to continue to function in a pandemic. Women are still taking on a disproportionate amount of the caregiving, a burden that has been expanded by stay-at-home orders and school closures.


It is no longer possible to deny the fact that women have been undervalued, and for so long; nor to deny that the lack of support they experience is harming all of us. As we pick up the pieces after this pandemic and continue the long fight for racial justice, we need to rebuild our structures and center our responses around ensuring that women can build power. Doing so will be uncomfortable. It will require critical examination and elimination of the deep roots of sexism, racism, and other oppressions that have existed for so long that we sometimes forget that they are not inevitable.

In the short term, we must diversify the ranks of the already resourced and powerful. After all, who writes the rules matters—and we need more people in power to create the institutions that generate equitable outcomes for those who have long been left out of policy considerations. Doing so brings perspectives and experiences that have never been centered in our society before. But even these changemakers must bring a structural lens to the problems they solve so as not to entrench existing inequities. Over time, this approach will mean that our societal problems will be framed and addressed with women, and particularly women of color, at the center.

Ultimately, we must address the underlying structural foundations of the problems. Our guiding principle is to dismantle the hierarchies that entrench inequity, which means

broadening out the distribution of power, and assessing our success differently by lifting up different ways of approaching leadership, including collective action and collaboration. Power, after all, has always also been distributed in ways that do not depend on hierarchies—but our institutions have long suppressed these collective power structures, keeping them from reaching their full potential.

For centuries, advocates—especially those representing historically marginalized communities—have used collective power to change systems that are stacked against them—and made real progress. Looking forward, we must continue their work, and create new norms, structures, and systems that center the experiences of women and other historically marginalized groups and value different ways of approaching leadership, including collective action and collaboration.

 ***Our guiding principle is to dismantle the hierarchies that entrench inequity...***

This means we must center the needs and amplify the voices of those at the intersection of multiple oppressions, whose concerns and experiences have historically been ignored. It also requires embracing and valuing a diversity of leadership styles and perspectives and diversifying and expanding access to decision making, whether in traditional positions of leadership or expanding nodes of power. Additionally, expanding workplace democracy by ensuring that workers have a voice in decision-making and have the power and agency to act collectively is a significant part of flipping the power imbalances. We must also apply different metrics to assess our progress in breaking down gendered and racialized systems, including measures of collective power, collaboration, and how we value labor such as caregiving.

Importantly, we must also be open to new, creative solutions that we haven't even thought of yet, made possible by moving outside of sexist and racist frameworks.

This is a moment where we have the opportunity to shift norms, narratives, resources, and policy. Using an institutional analysis to better lay out how we got to where we are today will help us make sure we carve out a more inclusive path forward. There are not many moments where we have the chance to reshape our society from the ground up. This is our moment.

Appendix A: The Factors That Reinforce Sexist and Racist Hierarchies

Cultural norms that put women—and especially women of color—lower on societal hierarchies perpetuate the imbalance of resources women have at their disposal. The lack of these resources thus further perpetuates established hierarchies and the imbalance in formal positions of influence. In this Appendix, we lay out the factors that perpetuate these hierarchies.

Imbalanced Resources

Unequal Pay and Occupational Segregation

Women are consistently paid less across industries: Latina and Black women, for instance, are paid fifty-four and sixty-two cents, respectively, for every dollar paid to white non-Hispanic men (“Wage Gap: The Who”). This imbalance is caused by a combination of outright discrimination (in pay and promotions), occupational segregation, the chronic underinvestment in caregiving, workplace harassment issues, and other factors. As the Washington Center for Equitable Growth points out, “Occupations with more men tend to be paid better regardless of skill or education level. This is because if work is done predominantly by women, then it is valued less in the labor market. As the rate of women working in a given occupation increases, the pay in that occupation declines—even when controlling for education and skills” (Equitable Growth). In other words, when women enter a male-dominated occupation, the pay for that occupation declines (Miller, “As Women Take Over”).

Domestic and Care Work

Women, especially women of color and immigrant women, comprise the vast majority of workers in the domestic and care work fields. Care work is one of the most poorly compensated sectors of the economy. Furthermore, outside of the professionalized caregiving space, women devote a disproportionate amount of their resources to unpaid caregiving responsibilities, including housework and caring for family members. According to one report, women perform an average of four hours of unpaid work per day compared to men’s two and a half hours (Wezerek and Ghodsee). Despite its extreme value to the well-being of society, this work is vastly undervalued. Moreover, the opportunity costs of household and caregiving responsibilities are high. Our current economic framework explicitly privileges those who can pay for care over those who cannot. In addition, paid caregivers face a double care burden as they face their own care responsibilities for their own

families in addition to underpaid care jobs. Without reimagining an economic framework that values care and domestic work, and equalizes the burden of such labor across gender and race, women will not have access to the resources necessary to attain positions of power—run for office, get promoted, or exercise their creativity.

Wealth Gaps

Wealth is “a store of resources to be used for emergencies. It includes savings for college or a secure retirement; resources to be leveraged into investments, like a home or a business; and it can be passed on to the next generation,” and is often one of the clearest measures of overall economic well-being (McCullough 2). Single women on aggregate hold about \$0.32 of wealth for every dollar that single men hold. When disaggregated by race, the gaps become even more stark: single Black and Hispanic women hold less than one cent for every dollar of wealth held by single white men (Chang). According to Anne Price, “Black women have far less wealth than white women, regardless of level of education” (30). Having assets can help women weather emergencies, such as leaving a job where they have to endure harassment or an abusive relationship. Wealth, in other words, adds up to power and the freedom to express one’s agency—which makes the gender and racial wealth gaps that women face in the United States all the more important to resolve.

Imbalanced Influence

Politics

Across our political landscape, women are hard to find. Of our forty-five American presidents, all of them have been men; forty-four of them white. And even though a record number of women ran for office and won in 2018, Congress still is composed of less than one quarter women and only 9 percent women of color (“Current Numbers”). Only 18 percent of the governors in the United States are women—only one of whom is Latina, and none of whom are Black. There are only ten women of color serving as mayor in the nation’s 100 largest cities, and less than a quarter of mayors in the majority of United States cities are women (“Current Numbers”).

Private Sector

Corporate America has never seen many women in leadership. In 2019, the CEOs of Fortune 500 companies were only 33 percent women—the highest proportion of women CEOs in history (Sahadi). Women hold about a fifth of all board positions, and given what we know about the revolving doors of power, board seats simply serve as another means by which men who hold political power can accumulate wealth (2020 Women on Boards; Palmer and

Schneer). Bed Bath & Beyond's Mary Winston is the first black woman to serve as a Fortune 500 CEO since Xerox's Ursula Burns stepped down two and a half years ago, and Winston is in an interim post at that (Zillman). For every 100 men in entry-level positions who are promoted to manager, just 68 Latinas and 58 black women are promoted. Likewise, for every 100 men hired as manager, 57 Latinas and 64 black women are hired. In 2019, only 7 percent of vice presidents, 5 percent of senior vice presidents, and 4 percent of C-suite executives were women of color ("Women in the Workplace").

Cultural Influencers

Among industries that control what stories we see and who is represented on our screens, women are significantly underrepresented. Women of color comprised only 8 percent of film directors across the top five global film festivals in 2017–2019, and of the top ten major film festivals in North America, only 29 percent of competitive film directors were women ("Inclusion at Film Festivals"). Meanwhile, how we see women in our entertainment matters, yet only eleven of 2018's top 100 grossing movies starred or co-starred a woman of color (nearly tripling 2017's four) (Montpelier). Seeing men, especially white men, as leading men, heroes, and people with power, and seeing women as objects of desire, sidekicks, or underappreciated moms on our screens influences the way we view men and women in life. In advertising, another sector that holds the keys to the ways that women are portrayed in popular culture, very few women hold the prized creative director role (Hanan). And tech, a sector that shapes much of how we interact with the world, especially in the post-COVID-19 world, is dominated by men. Of the 25 percent of women working in the sector, Asian women make up just 5 percent of that number, while Black and Hispanic women accounted for 3 percent and 1 percent, respectively, and only 24 percent of leadership positions are held by women (White).

Philanthropy, Nonprofits, and Unions

While women comprise a disproportionate number of leaders in foundations, there remains a gender gap in pay, and women of color remain underrepresented throughout both leadership and staff ("Women Lead"). This is reflected in giving as well. For example, only 0.6 percent of foundation giving was targeted to women of color in 2016 (Daniel). In nonprofits with an annual budget of more than \$50 million, 18 percent have a woman as CEO. And in nonprofits with budgets between \$2.5 million and \$5 million, women CEOs are paid 23 percent less than men in the same jobs (Guerrero). Women are also underrepresented in nonprofit board membership, and especially in nonprofits with bigger budgets, comprising only 33 percent of memberships on the boards of nonprofits with budgets of \$25 million or more (Brew). Women are also less likely to be in union leadership positions (Women in Unions). About 15 percent of the nation's unions have women in the top positions, and few state federations are led by women (Gruenberg).

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