

Nevertheless, It Persists

Disrupting the Vicious Cycle of Institutionalized Sexism

PUBLISHED JULY 2020

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. For example:

- ▶ Women make up [half of essential workers](#) and are [overrepresented](#) in the service industry. These workers are at high risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19.
- ▶ Many of the [women of color](#) on the front lines being deemed “essential” are paid minimum wages and have no health insurance or savings.
- ▶ Caregiving responsibilities that have always fallen on women [are increasing](#) as schools and child care centers remain closed, even as businesses begin to reopen.
- ▶ As the economic fallout from the COVID-19 crisis has deepened, unemployment rates for Black and Hispanic/Latinx women have been [rising at much faster rates](#).

In this unprecedented moment, a new report from TIME’S UP Foundation brings this vicious cycle of racism and sexism—and the need for urgent action—into sharper focus.

In [“Nevertheless, It Persists: Disrupting the Vicious Cycle of Institutionalized Sexism,”](#) Julie Kashen, director of women’s economic justice and senior fellow at The Century Foundation and Rakeen Mabud, director of research and strategy at TIME’S UP Foundation, investigate the ways in which **institutionalized sexism has held women¹ back for generations**. They 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 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.

¹ 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.

To address these power imbalances, and the impact it has on all people, changemakers in philanthropy, the private sector, government and advocacy organizations must take aim at the deeply embedded sexism and racism that pervades our laws, policies, norms, and culture. **In this moment of crisis, we have a responsibility to rebuild our democracy, economy, and society to be more inclusive and equitable—not just for women, but for *all of us*.**

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 amplifying 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.

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, 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.

Learn more and get involved at www.timesupfoundation.org