CLIMBING THE LEADERSHIP LADDER

WOMEN'S PROGRESS STALLS

INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN'S POLICY RESEARCH

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

What prevents women from reaching the highest rungs of the leadership ladder? This report seeks to answer this by taking a closer look at the representation of women in management and leadership positions across the United States—and the barriers that hold organizations back from achieving full gender and racial equity in leadership. Drawing on the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) analysis of the 2000 to 2018 American Community Survey, as well as existing data from Catalyst and McKinsey & Company, it presents a snapshot of women's leadership in the U.S. to illuminate structural barriers that stubbornly persist after decades of little progress. It concludes with recommendations for employers to break down these barriers and accelerate women's path to career advancement. This report was generously supported by AT&T.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have reached the forefront of public discourse in recent years, with several high-profile companies being criticized for discriminatory actions against women and people of color—or, more broadly, for a lack of diversity in their workforce. There are now numerous efforts to rank companies' DEI efforts, including the Thomson Reuters Diversity and Inclusion Index, the Forbes and Statista ranking of the Best Employers for Diversity, and the DiversityInc survey of the Top 50 Companies for Diversity. This report focuses on one aspect of DEI: illuminating and discussing the barriers that keep all women, and particularly women of color, from rising to the top rungs of the leadership ladder.

Beyond the social pressures for companies to address their internal DEI challenges and hire more diverse workforces, a wealth of research indicates that diversity benefits companies' bottom lines. Research shows that companies with greater gender diversity tend to outperform those with less gender diversity and have higher revenues and net profits (Badal 2014). And companies with greater shares of women in senior executive positions or on their boards tend to produce higher returns than companies with less diverse leadership (Catalyst 2004; Carter and Wagner 2011; Hoobler et al. 2018).

Despite this, progress in increasing women's representation at all levels of leadership has been slow. Women, and especially women of color, remain significantly underrepresented in senior leadership positions. As of 2018, just 26.5 percent of executive/senior management positions at S&P 500 companies were held by women. Further, at these companies only 11.0 percent of top earners were women, as were a mere 5.2 percent of chief executives (Catalyst 2019). The COVID-19 "she-cession"—characterized by the disproportionate economic impact the pandemic recession has had on women—and the staggering drop in women's labor force participation will only exacerbate this issue and threatens to reverse any progress that had been made prior to the pandemic.

To support companies' efforts to increase women's representation in leadership, this report highlights the obstacles that women face in advancing to such positions and identifies strategies to promote diversity and inclusion broadly. The report begins by presenting pre-COVID-19 data on women's representation as leaders at every rung of the ladder. It draws on IWPR analysis of the 2000 to 2018 American Community Survey on women in leadership positions at all types of organizations regardless of size or industry of operation, as well as existing data from sources such as Catalyst and McKinsey & Company, which focus more on women's representation among leaders in larger, high-powered firms. Where possible, the data are broken down by race and ethnicity. Highlights of this analysis include:

- **Despite making up nearly half of the workforce, women struggle to advance to leadership positions, particularly at the top of the ladder:** Women make up nearly half of the workforce and hold four in ten of all managerial positions but hold just one in four chief executive positions. This drop-off in women's representation is even more pronounced at S&P 500 companies, where women are just 4.8 percent of all chief executives.

- **Black and Latina women are even more underrepresented in leadership positions:** Black women hold just 4.0 percent of all managerial positions and 1.4 percent of chief executive positions; Latinas hold 4.4 percent of managerial positions and just 1.7 percent of chief executive positions. At the same time, White men hold more than six in ten chief executive positions even though they make up only one third of the workforce.
- **Women are obtaining greater representation, but progress has been slow:** Between 2000 and 2018, the share of women in management positions grew by almost 10 percent, and the share of women in chief executive positions grew by 26 percent. Growth rates were higher among women of color, although starting from a much smaller base.
- **Women's representation in leadership positions varies widely by industry:** As can be expected, women are better represented in management positions in industries that are more female-dominated such as health care and other social service industries. Construction is the only industry sector in which the share of women as chief executives exceeds their share of the workforce in the industry overall, mainly due to their low representation in that industry.

The report next draws on the research literature to highlight the structural and institutional barriers to reaching gender and racial equity in leadership. These barriers include:

- **A lack of transparency and accountability impedes diversity efforts:** While most companies track gender representation by level, few monitor and analyze diversity in hiring and promotion or in the assignment of high-visibility projects. Further, diversity goals are often not communicated to managers, who thus are not held accountable for progress (or lack thereof) in organizational diversity.
- **Unconscious bias negatively affects women's career advancement at every step and through many different channels:** Performance and behavioral standards are often based on traditionally 'male' traits such as being assertive as a leader. This can create a "double bind" for women leaders: when they conform to the 'male' model of leadership, they risk being perceived as not sufficiently feminine; when they use more collaborative management styles, they are viewed as not showing strong leadership. Such biases can affect women through hiring, promotion, and evaluation practices and hinder their advancement.
- **A lack of family-friendly workplace policies and a lack of uniform implementation can place women on the "mommy track":** Women who are mothers or who could potentially become mothers are often viewed as less competent and less committed to their careers and, as a result, are promoted to leadership positions less often than men (and fathers). A lack of family-friendly workplace policies can result in women taking more time away from work when they have children—perpetuating stereotypical gender roles—and slow their career progress. Work-life policies such as paid family leave, reduced work options, and flexible scheduling, combined with cultural change efforts to ensure that both women and men take advantage of such options, can create a more level playing field for women's advancement.

- **Women have reduced access to the social networks that are often vital for advancement:** Workplace social networks are often built outside of the workplace, at bars, golf courses, and sporting events. Women are less likely to be included in such outings and, as a result, have more limited social networks out of which mentorship or sponsorship relationships can develop.
- **Sexual harassment can lead to reduced organizational commitment, lower productivity, and job and career change:** The #MeToo movement has brought increased attention to the issue of workplace sexual harassment and its impact on women's careers. Estimates vary, but sexual harassment prevalence rates range from 25 percent to 85 percent of all women. Experiencing sexual harassment at work can be very distressing, and can lead women to quit their jobs, change industries, or reduce their work hours, all of which can slow their career progress.
- **Corporate anti-harassment policies, and the fear of being accused of harassment, have sometimes been cited by men as reasons they are uncomfortable mentoring women:** Some men say that they fear becoming the target of suspicion or rumors and therefore avoid socializing with or mentoring junior female colleagues. This results in even more narrow social networks for women and fewer mentorship and advancement opportunities. While this fear is not new, the share of men who report increased reluctance to mentor a woman has risen with the advancement of the #MeToo movement.

Finally, the report outlines concrete steps for companies to address these barriers to women's advancement to leadership positions, improve diversity and inclusion in their own workforces, and ensure that changes are sustainable. While the pandemic has provided an opportunity for all workplaces to expand these policies, companies can continue to make them available to all workers even after the pandemic is over:

- **Commitment to diversity and inclusion efforts needs to come from the top:** One method of reinforcing the importance of company-wide diversity efforts is for senior leaders to identify clear metrics to evaluate progress and set goals. Further, progress toward meeting these goals should be seen as part of managers' duties and be tied to their performance evaluations.
- **Companies must expand workplace policies that support all women and their families and must implement them uniformly:** Implementing policies such as paid family leave, flexible work hours, and teleworking can help women and men meet both their work and family caregiving obligations. Historically, men and women have used such policies at different rates, which has reinforced bias against workers who utilize these benefits (usually women). Additionally, unconscious bias and unclear language in company policies can shape how managers apply policies to different groups of women. Companies must ensure not only that all workers have equal access to these benefits, but that leaders express the importance of all workers feeling empowered to make use of them.

- **Focus diversity efforts on both inclusion and equity:** Companies cannot hope to achieve lasting change in their workforces if they focus only on getting more White women and women of color in the door and into leadership positions. Progress needs to be complemented by organizational culture change, ensuring that *all* employees feel that their thoughts and ideas are valued and feel encouraged to participate fully at all levels. This is especially critical for women of color, as many diversity efforts focus on recruiting diverse groups of women without changing organizational systems and structures to ensure that women of color feel included and valued. This includes making sure that White women and women of color across the organization feel comfortable in reporting unsafe working conditions, problems with their managers, or sexual harassment, without fear of retaliation. Companies should start by conducting a diversity climate survey of their workforces to identify areas that need improvement.
- **Encourage and support affinity groups within the organization:** Affinity groups can help foster an inclusive environment in which different groups of women feel valued at work. They also serve as valuable resources for companies working on expanding or broadening their DEI initiatives, can assist in the recruitment and retention of diverse employees, and can be a source of new and innovative business ideas. Encouraging the formation of such groups and actively supporting their efforts may be an effective way to foster a culture of inclusion within the company.
- **Promote mentorship and sponsorship relationships between junior women and senior leaders:** Relying on informal relationships to develop into mentorship or sponsorship relationships can put women at a disadvantage when it comes to advancement because women are less likely to have access to senior leaders who can help them advance. Establishing more formal mentorship programs can increase women's, and especially women of color's, access to senior leaders who can provide critical career guidance and support.

These policies are even more critical given that women have suffered disproportionate job losses as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Policies that promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace are now even more vital to ensuring that all women are given the opportunity to re-enter the workforce and sustain employment.

INTRODUCTION

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues have taken center stage in public discourse in recent years. In 2019, nearly as many women as men were in the workforce, and the ethnic and racial diversity of the workforce continues to increase rapidly (Hess et al. 2015; Mason, Flynn, and Sun 2020). As a result, a number of efforts have been undertaken to rank companies based on their DEI efforts, including the Thomson Reuters Diversity and Inclusion Index, the Forbes and Statista ranking of the Best Employers for Diversity, and the DiversityInc survey of the Top 50 Companies for Diversity. DEI is also increasingly important to consumers and to employees. This report focuses on one aspect of DEI issues: illuminating and discussing the barriers that keep all women, and particularly women of color, from rising to the top rungs of the leadership ladder.

Given women's disproportionate number of job losses during the COVID-19 pandemic—with more women than men losing jobs or dropping out of the labor market altogether (Mason, Flynn, and Sun 2020)—making progress on this aspect of DEI is or should be an ethical priority (O'Leary and Weathington 2006; van Dijk, van Engen, and Paauwe 2012). Additionally, a wealth of research indicates that diversity may benefit companies' bottom lines in a variety of ways. Increasing gender diversity in leadership is not only good for women but also strongly correlated with higher return and profitability. For example:

- A recent study of 22,000 firms shows that moving from having no women in any corporate leadership positions (including C-suite positions and board membership) to having 30 percent female corporate leadership translates to a 15 percent increase in profitability (Noland, Moran, and Kotschwar 2016).
- Companies with greater gender diversity tend to have higher revenues and net profits (Badal 2014), S&P 500 companies with female CEOs tend to outperform firms with male executives (Peni 2014), and companies with greater shares of women in senior executive positions or on their boards tend to produce higher returns than companies with less diverse leadership (Catalyst 2004; Carter and Wagner 2011; Hoobler et al. 2018).
- A single woman on a company's board of directors has been correlated with improved performance. According to a study of almost 2,400 companies by the Credit Suisse Research Institute, companies with at least one woman on their board have outperformed on their share price performance compared with those with no women on their board (Credit Suisse AG 2012).

Women also represent a large share of business customers and clients with growing power and influence. Tapping into this market is critical to business growth, as women have anywhere between $5 trillion to $15 trillion in purchasing power (Nielsen 2013) and influence more than 85 percent of retail decisions (Holland 2008). Companies are likely to benefit from a reputation as a gender-equitable workplace and by offering gender-equitable products.

Additionally, businesses need diversity to ensure they are on the cutting edge of solutions to the most pressing problems confronting society and that they are tapping into the most talented workforce. Research has shown that teams comprised of individuals from diverse backgrounds are more likely to process facts and information more carefully—in other words, they are less likely to make mistakes—and are more likely to present the most innovative ideas and products to the market. In fact, companies who are in the top quartile for diversity in management were 35 percent more likely to have financial returns above industry means (Rock and Grant 2016). While none of these studies establishes definitively that increasing gender diversity causes improved performance and outcomes, these correlations are hard to ignore and suggest that the benefits of increased gender and racial diversity in leadership and executive positions outweigh the costs of change.

Despite this heightened focus on promoting DEI and the numerous policies and laws targeting discrimination in hiring and promotion, increasing women's representation in positions of corporate leadership has moved slowly. As of 2019, just 26.5 percent of executive/senior management positions at S&P 500 companies were held by women. Further, only 11.0 percent of top earners were women, as were a mere 5.2 percent of chief executives in these companies (Catalyst 2019).[1] These are the data for all women, with women of color making up an even smaller share of these positions. Policymakers are increasingly developing measures to address the unsatisfactory rate of progress in achieving equity in management. For example, California has followed the lead of European countries (Burk and Hartmann 2017) by passing legislation requiring gender quotas for women on corporate boards (Smith 2018). Companies seeking to compete on a national and global scale can only benefit from understanding the obstacles that all women face in advancing to leadership positions, and from implementing policies and programs to address these challenges.

The goal of this report is to document what we know about women's representation up and down the corporate leadership ladder, the challenges that they face in advancement, and what companies can do to advance DEI in their own workplaces. Due to limitations in many of the data sources available as well as in the existing literature, this report focuses on women broadly, but we recognize that lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women, as well as gender non-conforming individuals and women with disabilities, face additional challenges being hired and advancing in the workplace. While many of the barriers discussed in this report may be relevant for these communities, they will likely be felt differently and do not include the full range of challenges experienced. DEI strategies will need to take these different experiences into account. Better data collection efforts that include a range of identities and seek to understand the complex experiences of people from diverse backgrounds will be essential to future efforts to advance DEI in the workplace.

This report begins by presenting data on women's representation in leadership positions in the United States at every rung of the ladder. It draws on new IWPR analysis of the 2000

[1] Top earners are not necessarily managers or senior leaders at organizations. Catalyst defines top earners based on companies in the S&P 500 index at the time of their 2016 annual meetings as disclosed in proxy statements filed with the SEC. Individuals are considered top earners if they appeared in the summary compensation table. Although the terms are not synonymous, it is likely that most top earners are also senior leaders in their companies.

to 2018 American Community Survey, which examines women in leadership positions at all types of organizations regardless of size or industry, as well as existing data from well-known sources such as Catalyst and McKinsey & Company, who focus more on women's representation among leaders in larger, high-powered firms. Where possible, the data is also disaggregated by race and ethnicity, to highlight the progress, or lack thereof, for women of color. Drawing on research literature as well as interviews with experts in the field, the report then highlights the major obstacles that women face in reaching the top of the ladder. Finally, the report outlines concrete steps that companies can take to address barriers to women's advancement into leadership positions, improve diversity and inclusion in their own workforces, and ensure that any changes made really stick.

WOMEN'S UNDERREPRESENTATION UP AND DOWN THE LEADERSHIP LADDER

Women's labor market participation has increased markedly over the past several decades. In 1970, for example, fewer than 45 percent of women participated in the labor market compared with about 80 percent of men (Hegewisch et al. 2015), but by 2018 nearly 60 percent of women were participating in the labor market (IWPR 2019a) and women made up nearly half of the labor force (Figure 1). The COVID-19 pandemic has changed this trend, as women have been hit particularly hard by job losses, with Black and Latina women shouldering the largest shares of job losses (IWPR 2021).

Yet despite gains in women's representation in the workforce overall, and the fact that women are four in ten of all of those who are in management positions (Figure 1), they continue to be underrepresented in senior leadership positions. Progress has been made in recent years to support the advancement of women generally, and women of color[2] specifically, into management and executive-level positions. However, the persistent gender imbalance in senior-level positions illustrates that women may be getting "stuck" in lower- and mid-level management positions. Additionally, the gendered nature of child care during the pandemic—with women shouldering a disproportionate amount of the burden of child care and school from home—means we are likely to see even more women leaving the workforce and stepping off the corporate ladder. Companies will need to work harder to recruit and retain women after the pandemic.

Recent data highlights a leadership pipeline that was already cracked and leaking, leaving only a small share of women to fill top executive roles (McKinsey & Company and Lean In 2018; 2019). These leaky pipelines pose even greater obstacles to career advancement for Black and Latina women, whose underrepresentation in senior management positions is even more pronounced. Some industries are faring better than others in terms of women's representation among managers and chief executives and set good examples for women in leadership. These are often female-dominated industries in which the candidate pool includes more women from the start.

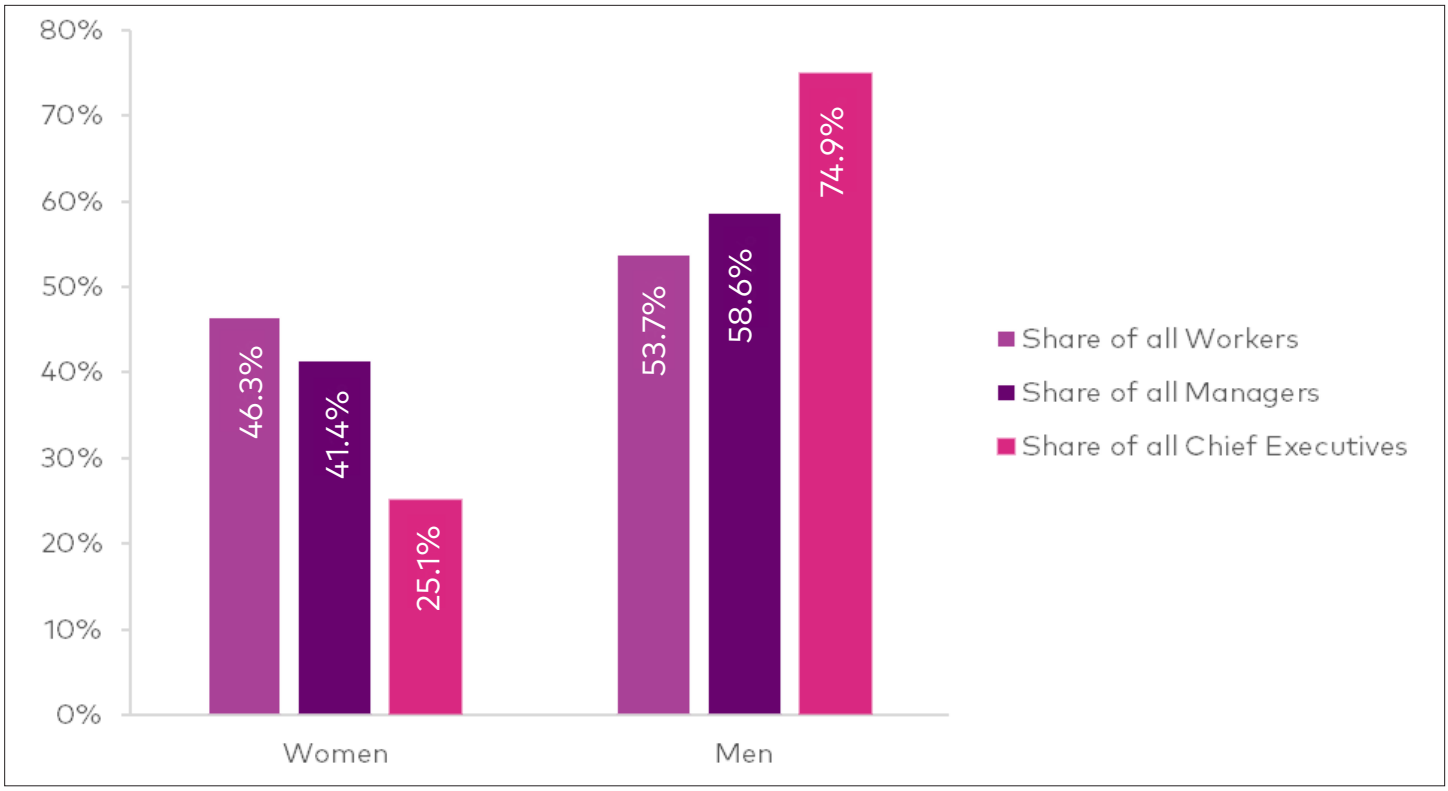
Overview of the Lack of Gender Diversity in Leadership Positions

In 2018, women made up nearly half (46.3 percent) of the non-government workforce in the United States. If represented proportionately in corporate leadership positions, women would also make up about 46 percent of all managers and chief executives, yet such representation has not been reached, particularly when it comes to senior management.[3] In

[2] For the data analysis in this report, women of color include Black, Latina, Asian, Native American, or women who identify as a race/ethnicity not listed in the data source or two or more races. The data are broken down by race and ethnicity where sample sizes allow.

2018, women were almost as likely as their share of all workers to be in management, holding 41.4 percent of managerial positions but only 25.1 percent of chief executive positions (Figure 1). This gap illustrates that there is substantially less diversity among decision-makers than there is among the overall workforce. Men, on the other hand, are much more likely to be chief executives than their share of all workers would suggest (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. Share of Workforce by Gender and Level of Leadership, 2018



Notes: Data are limited to non-government workers, aged 16 and older, and include wage and salary employees working in the private sector or at nonprofits, as well as self-employed workers.
Source: IWPR analysis of data from the 2018 American Community Survey (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, version 9.0).

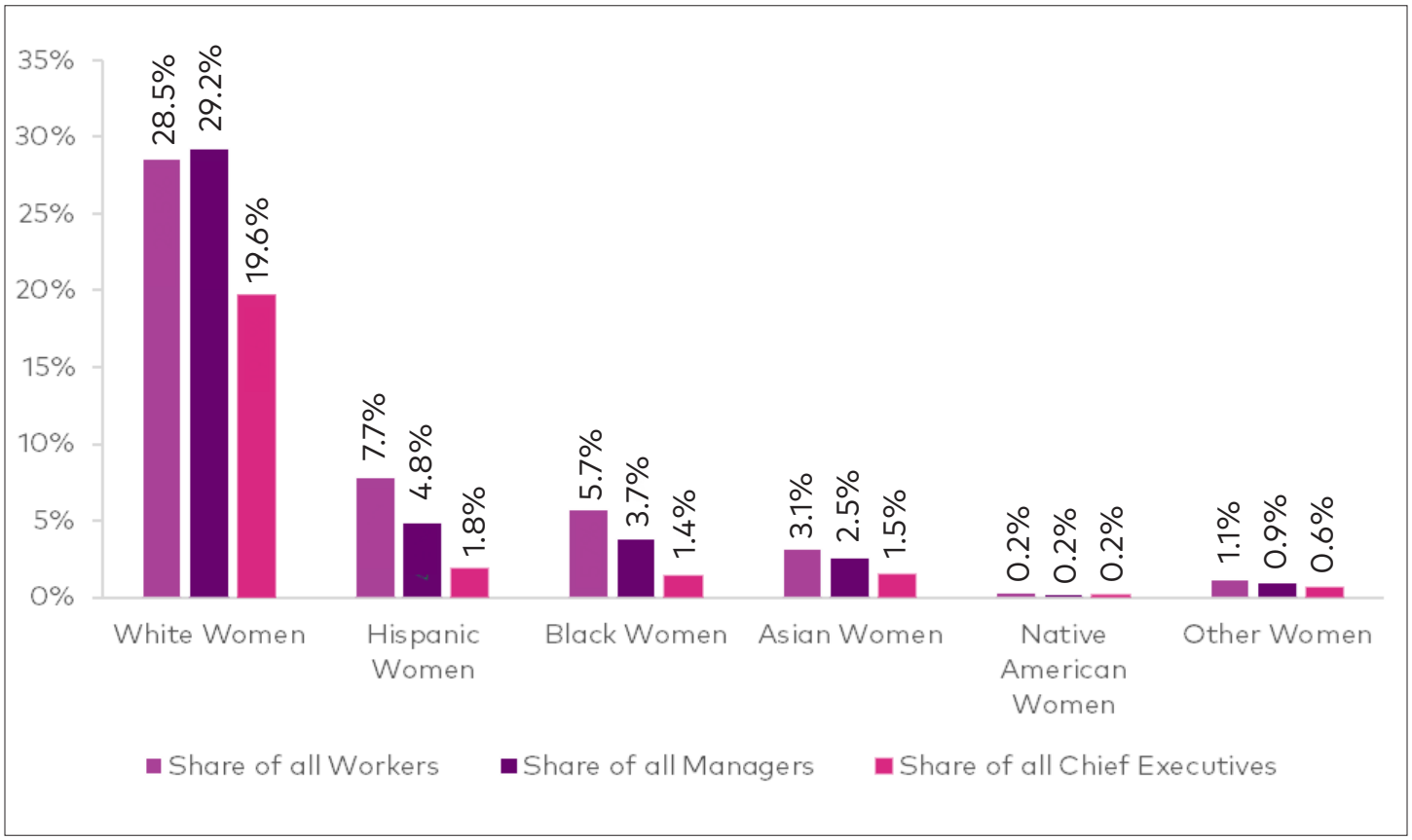
The drop-off in representation is even more pronounced among Latina and Black women. While Latina and Black women make up a relatively small share of the overall workforce (7.7 percent and 5.7 percent, respectively), their representation in leadership positions falls well below their share of the workforce. Just 4.8 percent of managerial positions are held by Latinas and 3.7 percent are held by Black women; only 1.8 percent of all chief executive positions are held by Latinas and 1.4 percent are held by Black women. This means Latinas are 38 percent less likely to hold a management position, and 77 percent less likely to be a CEO than suggested by their share of the workforce; this underrepresentation is almost as stark for Black women, at 34 and 76 percent less likely, respectively.

Asian women are represented slightly better, making up 3.1 percent of the workforce and 2.5 percent of all managers (18 percent less than their share of the workforce). White

[3] Throughout this report, all IWPR analyses of women's representation in the workforce using the American Community Survey have been limited to non-government workers. This definition includes individuals who work for wages or salary for private sector employers or nonprofits, or who are self-employed.

women represent 29.2 percent of all managers, closely mirroring their share of the workforce (28.5 percent). Both Asian and White women, however, experience a significant decline in representation at the chief executive level: White women make up only 19.6 percent of all chief executives (an underrepresentation of 31 percent compared to their share of the workforce) and Asian women make up just 1.5 percent (an underrepresentation of 51 percent; Figure 2).

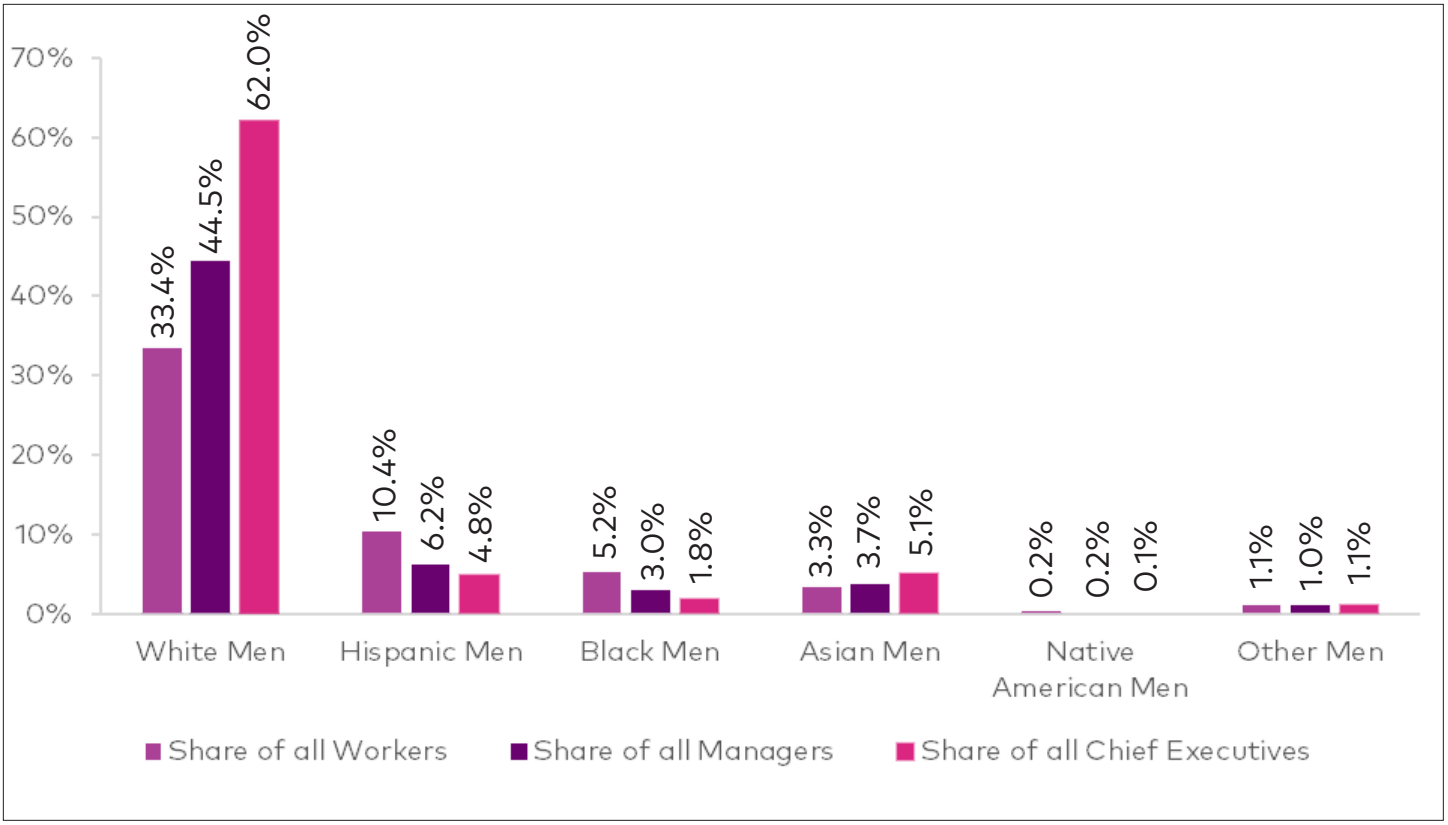
FIGURE 2. Share of Women in the Workforce by Race/Ethnicity and Level of Leadership, 2018



Notes: Data are limited to non-government workers, aged 16 and older, and include wage and salary employees working in the private sector or at nonprofits, as well as self-employed workers.
Source: IWPR analysis of data from the 2018 American Community Survey (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, version 9.0).

Like their counterparts, men of color, particularly Latino and Black men, are disproportionately underrepresented in leadership positions. Latinos make up 10.4 percent of the workforce, yet they are only 6.2 percent of all managers and 4.8 percent of all chief executives. Similarly, Black men make up 5.2 percent of the workforce but only 3.0 percent of all managers and 1.8 percent of all chief executives. White and Asian men, however, are overrepresented in leadership positions relative to their shares of the total workforce. White men make up one third of all workers (33.4 percent), yet they represent more than six in ten (62.0 percent) chief executives. Asian men make up 3.3 percent of the overall workforce but represent 5.1 percent of all chief executives (Figure 3).

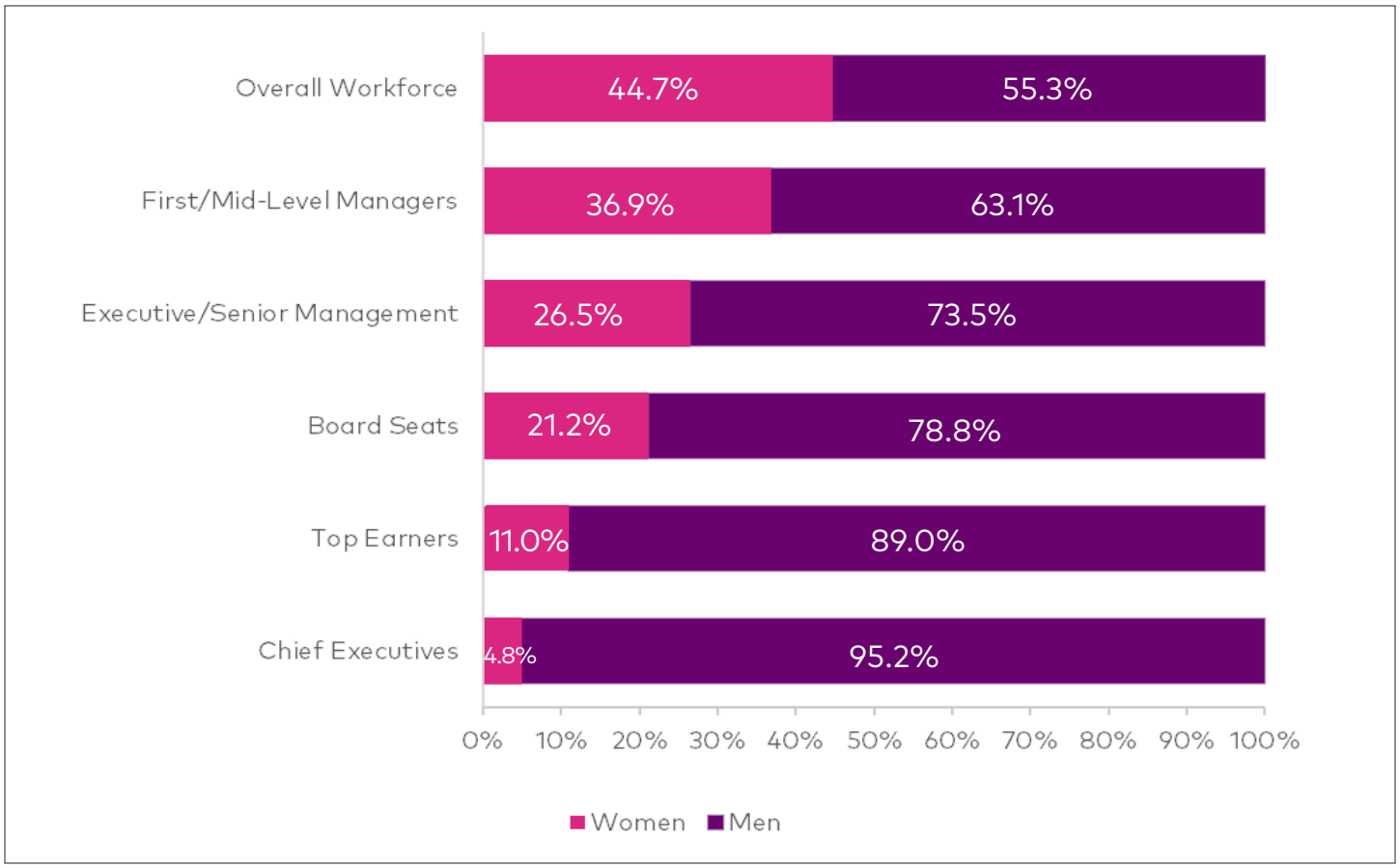
FIGURE 3. Share of Men in the Workforce by Race/Ethnicity and Level of Leadership, 2018



Notes: Data are limited to non-government workers, aged 16 and older, and include wage and salary employees working in the private sector or at nonprofits, as well as self-employed workers.
Source: IWPR analysis of data from the 2018 American Community Survey (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, version 9.0).

These data include all types of companies, irrespective of size. The gender divide is even greater in corporations in the S&P 500, which consists of elite publicly-traded corporations that generally are valued above $450 million, and have a reputation for more selective hiring practices than other companies. Catalyst found that, at S&P 500 companies, women made up 44.7 percent of all employees, which is close to the proportion of women in the overall workforce. However, the gender divide is considerably greater at the upper levels of these high-powered companies. In 2019, women held 36.9 percent of first/mid-level management positions and just 26.5 percent of executive/senior level manager positions within the S&P 500. The drop in women's representation among chief executives is even more dramatic, falling to only 5.2 percent (Catalyst 2019; Figure 4).

FIGURE 4. Share of Workforce by Gender and Level of Leadership at S&P 500 Companies, 2019

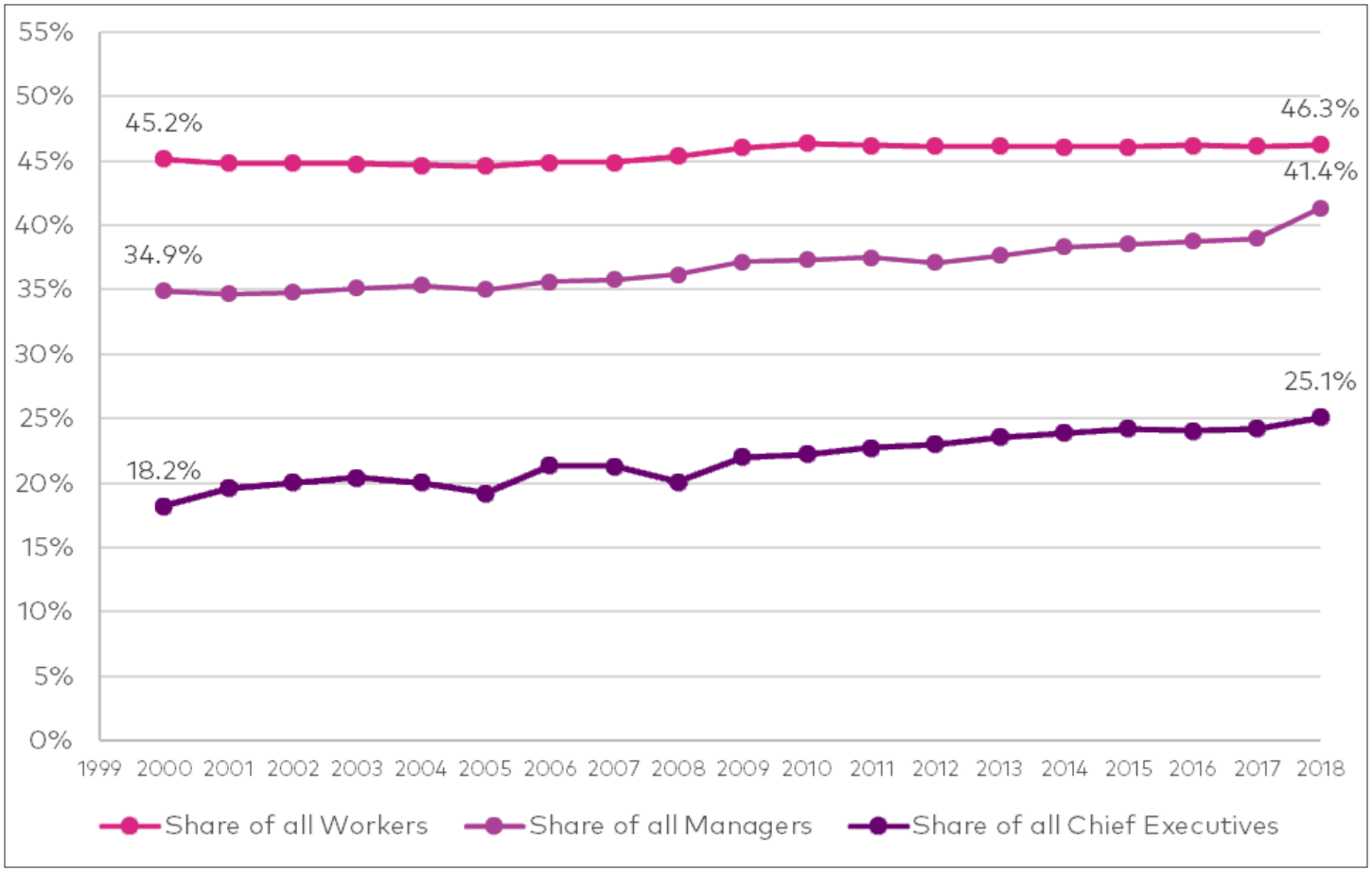


Source: Catalyst (2019).

Recent Trends in Women's Representation in Leadership Positions

Since 2000, women's representation among managers and chief executives has increased steadily, although parity at every leadership level remains elusive. Between 2000 and 2018 women expanded their representation in managerial positions from 34.9 percent to 41.4 percent, a growth rate of 19 percent. Over that same period, women's representation among chief executives grew from 18.2 percent to 25.1 percent, a growth rate of 38 percent (Figure 5). The COVID-19 pandemic seems likely to reverse these trends, as women have been more likely than men to leave the workforce, cut their working hours, or delay reentering the workforce, many citing increased child care and caretaking responsibilities (Thomas et al. 2020).

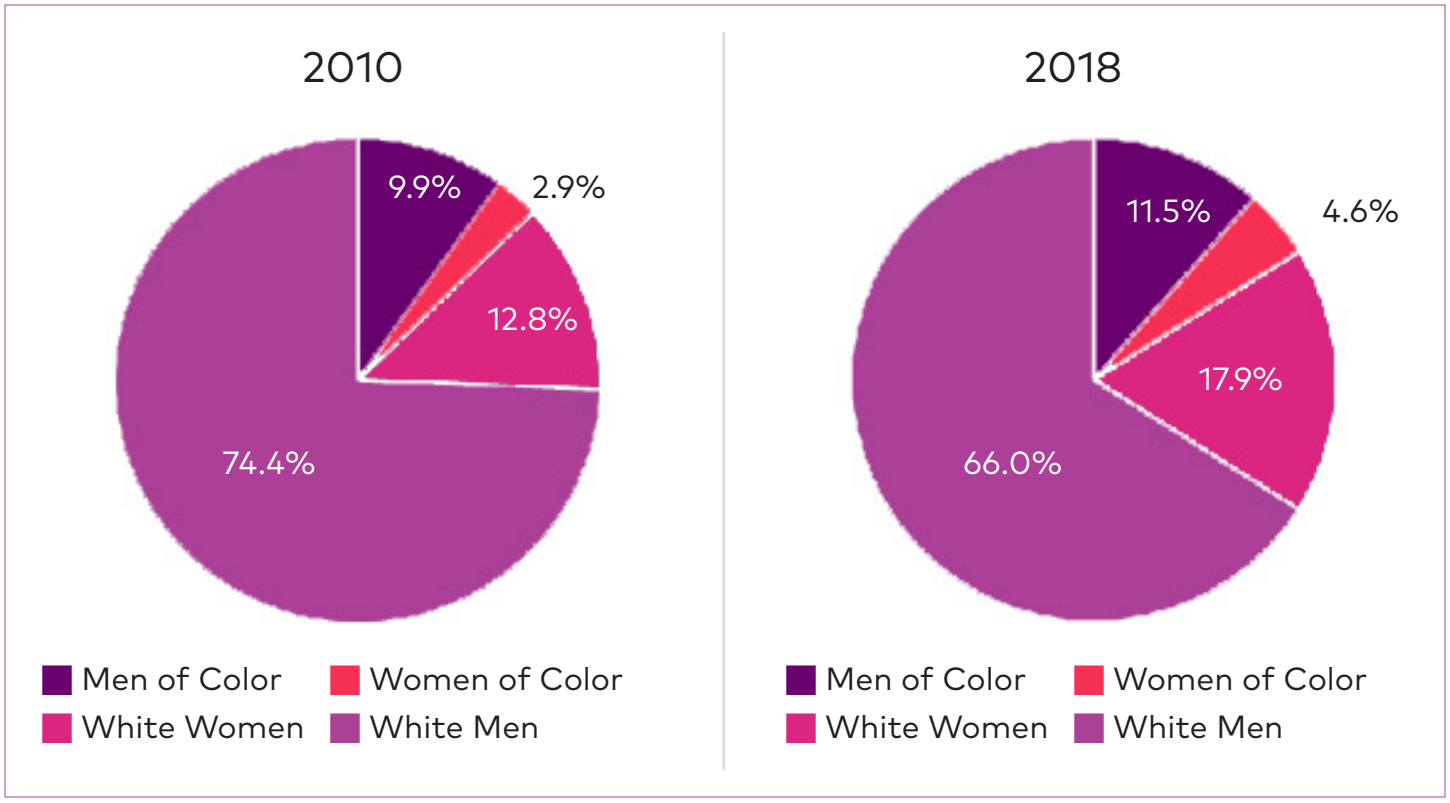
FIGURE 5. Trends in Women's Representation in the Workforce by Level of Leadership, 2000–2018



Notes: Data are limited to non-government workers, aged 16 and older, and include wage and salary employees working in the private sector or at nonprofits, as well as self-employed workers.
Source: IWPR analysis of data from the 2000-2018 American Community Survey (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, version 9.0).

In addition, a recent report by Deloitte and the Alliance for Board Diversity (2019) examined the representation of women and people of color on corporate boards at Fortune 500 companies. The report indicates that women and people of color are increasing their representation in these key leadership roles, though progress has been slow. Between 2010 and 2018, women's share of all Fortune 500 board seats increased from 15.7 percent to 22.5 percent, a growth rate of 43 percent. Similarly, the share of seats held by women of color increased from 2.9 percent to 4.6 percent, a growth rate of 59 percent (Figure 6). These changes are significant because they shape decisions affecting employee pay, benefits, and working conditions, among other matters. The racial and gender makeup of boards also affects how much money will go to shareholders—who are disproportionately white men—and how much will be reinvested in the company to boost salaries and pay for other worker benefits (Holmberg 2018).

FIGURE 6. Share of Board Membership at Fortune 500 Companies by Gender and Race, 2010 and 2018



Source: Deloitte and the Alliance for Board Diversity (2019).

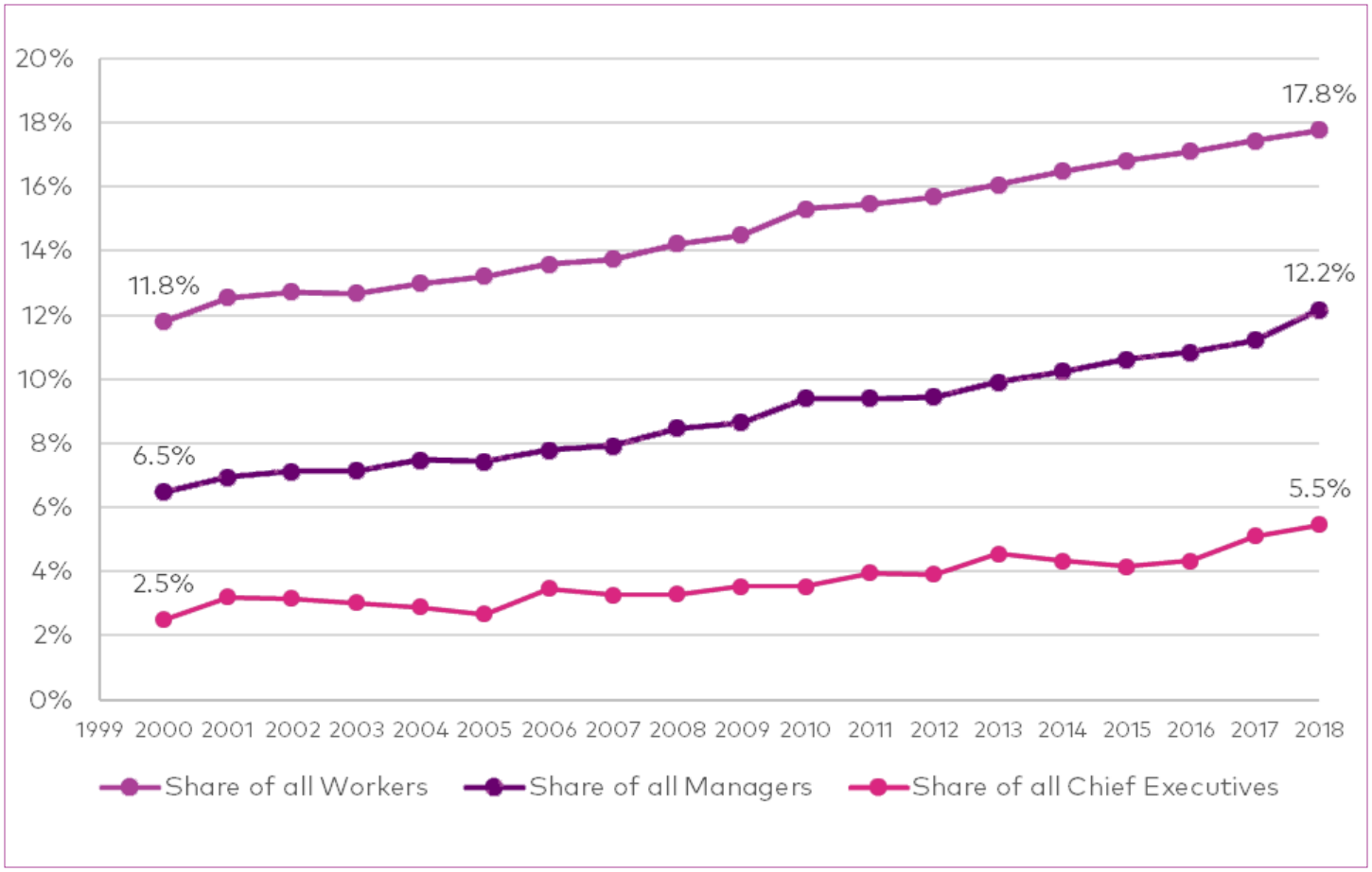
Increasing representation in leadership positions has been even faster for women of color,[4] albeit from a much smaller base. Part of this increase likely results from their increasing share of the workforce overall. Between 2000 and 2018, women of color increased their share of the workforce from 11.8 percent to 17.8 percent, a trend that is likely to continue in future decades (Colby and Ortman 2015). Women of color's representation among managers also increased from just 6.5 percent of all managers in 2000 to 12.2 percent of managers in 2018, a growth rate of 88 percent. Women of color saw the greatest progress, however, at the level of chief executive. In 2000, women of color were just 2.5 percent of all chief executives, but by 2018 their share had more than doubled to 5.5 percent (Figure 7). However, the pandemic has threatened, and in some cases reversed, many of these trends. Between February and December 2020, the number of employed Black women dropped by 9.5 percent, while the number of employed Latinas dropped 8.3 percent—a much steeper change than for White women (5.2 percent; IWPR 2021).

More generally, IWPR's analysis shows that the ranks of managers and chief executives are slowly shifting toward a gender and racial/ethnic distribution that better reflects the overall workforce. While White men are still overrepresented in management and executive-level positions, their shares decreased from 2000 to 2018. At the management level, women

[4] Women of color includes Black, Latina, Asian, Native American, or women women who identify as a race/ethnicity not listed in the data source or two or more races.

and men of color have made gains in their overall representation, while White women's representation has remained relatively constant. At the chief executive level, the share of White women, women of color, and men of color increased between 2000 and 2018 (IWPR 2019b; Figure 7).

FIGURE 7. Trends in Women of Color's Representation in the Workforce by Level of Leadership, 2000–2018



Notes: Data are limited to non-government workers, aged 16 and older, and include wage and salary employees working in the private sector or at nonprofits, as well as self-employed workers. Women of color includes Black, Latina, Asian, Native American, or women who identify as a race/ethnicity not listed in the data source or two or more races.
Source: IWPR analysis of data from the 2000-2018 American Community Survey (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, version 9.0).

Variation in Women's Representation in Leadership Positions by Industry

Women make up less than half of the managers in almost every industry except for "health care and social services," "educational services," and "other services, except public administration," which employ relatively high concentrations of women. And in no industry do women hold at least half of all chief executive positions. The two industries that come closest to having equal representation between women and men, with shares of women as chief executives of at least 40 percent, are "health care and social services" (45.0 percent) and "other services, except public administration" (41.3 percent; Table 1).

Determining whether women are underrepresented in leadership positions within specific industries is not necessarily straightforward. Given the uneven distribution of working women across industries, a 50/50 mix of women and men in leadership positions may not always be an appropriate goal. However, using women's share of the overall workforce in each industry as a benchmark for their expected representation among managers and chief executives reveals that, in many industries, women are still underrepresented in leadership positions at every level.

Interestingly, the share of women in managerial positions equals or surpasses women's share of the overall workforce in 7 of 19 industries: "other services, except public administration," "real estate and rental and leasing," "information," "transportation and warehousing," "utilities," "mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction," and "construction." On the other hand, the largest drop-offs in women's representation in management positions relative to their share of the overall workforce is seen in the "retail trade" and "agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting" industries (Table 1).

Moving up the ladder, construction is the only industry in which the share of women as chief executives equals or exceeds their share of the workforce overall. In the construction industry women make up just 9.8 percent of the workforce (and fewer than five percent of construction workers; Hegewisch 2019) but they are 13.7 percent of chief executives. Conversely, the biggest drop-offs in women's representation in the C-suite compared to their representation in the workforce appear in the "management of companies and enterprises," "retail trade," "real estate and rental and leasing," and "manufacturing" industries (Table 1).

TABLE 1. Women's Representation in the Workforce by Level of Leadership and Industry, 2018

Industry	Share of All Workers	Share of all Managers	Share of all Chief Executives
Health Care and Social Services	78.4%	70.4%	45.0%
Educational Services	66.5%	60.3%	37.0%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	54.4%	47.7%	27.6%
Other Services, Except Public Administration	53.9%	55.2%	41.3%
Finance and Insurance	53.3%	49.8%	33.7%
Accommodation and Food Services	53.3%	48.3%	28.9%
Retail Trade	49.2%	37.6%	25.8%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	47.4%	43.5%	34.5%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	47.1%	48.3%	23.4%
Total	**46.1%**	**41.4%**	**25.1%**
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	43.8%	38.0%	24.1%
Administrative Support and Waste Management Services	40.1%	35.2%	25.8%
Information	37.9%	38.2%	22.9%
Wholesale Trade	30.1%	27.0%	18.4%
Manufacturing	29.2%	26.4%	15.2%
Transportation and Warehousing	23.5%	24.8%	21.1%
Utilities	22.8%	24.9%	18.9%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting	22.3%	14.5%	17.3%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	14.1%	14.4%	9.0%
Construction	9.8%	11.5%	13.7%

Notes: Data are limited to non-government workers, aged 16 and older, and include wage and salary employees working in the private sector or at nonprofits, as well as self-employed workers.
Source: IWPR analysis of data from the 2018 American Community Survey (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, version 9.0).

BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Company efforts to address diversity and inclusion issues have yielded some results: as described above, increasing numbers of women hold management positions. While there is no single way to tackle a lack of diversity, many successful efforts feature similar components. These include programs that focus on inclusion (all employees feel that their ideas are heard); tailoring efforts to the needs of the organization; utilizing concrete tracking measures that hold leadership accountable for progress; addressing both conscious and unconscious bias; and mobilizing support from top leadership (i.e., led or driven by CEO and upper management) (Hunt, Layton, and Prince 2019; Jain-Link, Kennedy, and Bourgeois 2020; Krentz 2019; U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission 1995).

Although the numbers of women in management have increased overall since 2000, those gains have not been felt equally by all women. Women of color, immigrant women, and LGBTQ women remain severely underrepresented on all rungs of the corporate ladder. Significant social and economic barriers persist both inside and outside the workplace that companies must address if progress is to be more broadly shared.

Lack of Transparency

The lack of clear and objective metrics on gender diversity keeps some organizations from increasing women's representation at the highest levels. One study found that, while 85 percent of companies track basic data on gender representation at different levels of the organization, only 17 percent track gender diversity in the assignment of high-visibility projects, which are often central to opportunities for advancement within any organization (McKinsey & Company and Lean In 2017). Further, only a few organizations set diversity targets for employee representation; McKinsey & Company and Lean In (2019) found that just 35 percent of companies did so.

A lack of transparency and systems of accountability also can hinder diversity efforts. Only 23 percent of companies share gender diversity metrics with managers at all levels (McKinsey & Company and Lean In 2017) and a mere 12 percent share with all employees (McKinsey & Company and Lean In 2018). This means that most senior leaders are often not held accountable for progress on diversity metrics. In their most recent survey, McKinsey & Company and Lean In (2019) found that just 35 percent of companies reported setting targets for gender representation, while 55 percent reported holding senior leaders accountable for progress on gender diversity metrics. There has been significant progress in companies making this a priority. Notably, the share of companies that report holding senior leaders accountable for progress increased from 42 percent to 55 percent in a single year (McKinsey & Company and Lean In 2019).

In addition to metrics on gender, however, companies should track information in an intersectional way to better understand the experiences of immigrant women, Black women, Latinas, and LGBTQ individuals, which will highlight areas requiring further work and attention. Organizations will also need to assess the impact of COVID-19 on their employees and create policies that will support women to return to the workforce, sustain employment, and further their careers.

Checking-the-Box Attitudes among Senior Leaders

Organizations face increasing pressure both internally and externally to address gender diversity issues, especially those with all-male executive teams. Many companies spend significant time and resources recruiting a high-profile White woman or woman of color, or promoting a junior White woman or woman of color to the management or executive team, only to abandon their efforts once that woman is in place (Dezso, Ross, and Uribe 2013). This may stem from the fact that many women and men view "equality" differently. For example, one study found that 45 percent of men believe that women are "well represented" in leadership even when only 1 in 10 senior leaders is a woman (McKinsey & Company and Lean In 2018). Women, on the other hand, are more likely to think *more* work needs to be done getting women into corporate leadership when women's representation remains this low (McKinsey & Company and Lean In 2018).

Bias in Promotions and the Pipeline to Senior Positions

Bias affects all aspects of hiring and promoting workers, and has a deleterious impact on women's advancement opportunities, particularly for women of color, immigrant women, and LGBTQ individuals. Bias can be both conscious (having an explicit prejudice against a group of people based on identifiers like race, gender, and age, among others) and unconscious (involving background, personal experiences, and societal stereotypes that may unknowingly affect decisions and actions). Both unconscious and conscious bias affect women in the workplace and can limit opportunities for advancement.

When bias—be it conscious or unconscious—plays a role in a particular advancement decision, women may feel that they have fewer opportunities for advancement more pervasively because of their gender. Women are much more likely than men to say they have missed out on an assignment or advancement and they are less often consulted on important decisions because of their gender (McKinsey & Company and Lean In 2018). Some male managers report that they sometimes hesitate to give women honest but harsh feedback, which can be necessary for improvement and advancement to the next level, because they fear women may react emotionally (Chira 2017).

Biases can influence promotion decisions due to a perceived lack of fit between the person and the job. For example, line roles are often seen as more "mission-critical" and have direct responsibility for a company's profits and losses, attributes that may be perceived as more "masculine." Such roles tend to employ more men (Lyness and Heilman 2006). By contrast, staff roles, such as HR, involve more support functions, and tend to have more women. Women may be 'steered' into those support roles, while men may be seen as a better fit for line roles. Those employed in line roles are more likely to be promoted to senior levels

than those employed in staff roles, even as managers, putting women at a disadvantage for advancing to executive levels within an organization (McKinsey & Company and Lean In 2017).

Women in male-dominated fields or in positions that are seen to be more "masculine" are particularly likely to experience bias. Women employed in these more "masculine" roles tend to face increased scrutiny. Lyness and Heilman (2006) found that women in line roles were assessed more negatively on performance evaluations when compared to all other managers in their sample, which included women staff managers and all male managers. Additionally, women who were promoted had received higher performance ratings than men who were also promoted (Lyness and Heilman 2006), indicating that women had to perform at a higher level to get their promotion.

The Double Bind of Women Taking on Leadership Roles

Unconscious bias can be especially detrimental to women working toward management and executive positions. Women and men are often seen as having different leadership styles, with certain traits labeled as "feminine" and others as "masculine" (Catalyst 2007; Horowitz, Igielnik, and Parker 2018). Men are typically seen as more "agentic"—people who are assertive and take charge—whereas women are seen as more "communal," or people who are caring, friendly, and nice (Institute for Policy Research 2016). Effective leaders are typically seen as having agentic or "masculine" traits, which puts women in a double bind (Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb 2013). If they display more "communal" traits, they are not perceived as leaders and can miss out on opportunities for advancement, but if they conform to traditional (or masculine) leadership traits, they are often viewed as "unnatural" or "harsh" (Catalyst 2007; Gipson et al. 2017).

These gendered views of leadership also shape the language used for job descriptions and hiring decisions. Management and executive position descriptions often include terms that are positively associated with "male" traits (e.g., "action-oriented" and "drives results"). Such language can prompt those making hiring decisions to see men as a more "natural" fit for the position; women, on the other hand, may respond by opting out of the application process (Warren 2009).

A recent study, however, indicates that public thought may be starting to shift regarding gendered perceptions of leadership. In their survey, Horowitz, Igielnik, and Parker (2018) found that 57 percent of people still believe women and men have different approaches to leadership. Among this group, the majority (62 percent) said they do not view one style as better than the other, 22 percent believed women generally have a better approach to leadership, and only 15 percent responded that men generally have better leadership styles. Attitudes about leadership styles could be changing as a result of increased numbers of women in leadership positions or increased diversity and bias trainings within organizations.

Perceptions of Women's Focus on Family over Career

Women who choose to have children and simultaneously continue their careers face higher barriers when it comes to advancement. The COVID-19 pandemic and the toll it has taken

on working mothers are likely to exacerbate these effects. Working mothers have seen their caregiving burdens increase markedly as many schools and child-care centers have remained closed. Distance learning—while necessary to help slow the spread of COVID-19—has pushed women to make impossible choices between work and caring for their children. The shift to at-home learning also disproportionately harms Black and Latina women, as they are less likely to have the ability to work from home because of their overrepresentation in low-wage sectors that are least likely to offer remote work arrangements (Mason, Flynn, and Sun 2020). At the same time, once women have children, they are often seen as less competent and less committed to their work (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2004; Heilman and Okimoto 2008).

Research reflects that bias against mothers and pregnant women reduces promotion opportunities as these women are often placed on the "mommy track," leaving them less likely to be trained, developed, or considered for promotion or advancement. A 2004 study asked participants to rate fictitious consultants on traits related to competence and warmth and identify whom they would hire or promote. Survey respondents rated working mothers as less competent than childless women and preferred mothers less frequently for both hiring and promotion (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2004). Heilman and Okimoto (2008) conducted a similar study in which participants rated fictitious applicants for promotion to an upper-level management position. Again, participants rated mothers as less competent than women without children and more frequently eliminated mothers from consideration. By contrast, survey participants did not rate fathers differently from men without children—further evidence that men do not face the parental penalty. Not surprisingly, research shows that many women who already have children work hard to manage perceptions of their commitment to the workplace during pregnancy (Little et al. 2015).

Data from McKinsey & Company and Lean In (2017) suggest that these assumptions about women's commitment to their employers and to their careers, particularly when they have children, may be unfounded. The survey found that women and men planned to leave their current employers at similar rates (27 percent and 26 percent, respectively). Among those planning to leave, only a small fraction wanted to do so to focus on family, with women and men reporting this desire at similar rates (2 percent and 1 percent, respectively). Another recent study confirmed the gap between perception and reality regarding women's commitment to their careers. Though 77 percent of Harvard Business School (HBS) graduates surveyed believed that the biggest barrier to women's advancement was "prioritizing family over work," only 11 percent of female HBS graduates surveyed reported leaving the workforce to care for children (Ely, Stone, and Ammerman 2014).

A Lack of Family-Friendly Workplace Policies

As currently structured, work does not match the reality of today's families. Half of all American households with children have a breadwinner mother (Hess et al. 2015), yet the United States is the only developed nation in the world that does not require employers to provide paid leave for new parents (World Policy Analysis Center 2018). Only 16 percent of private sector employees have access to paid family leave through their employers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018).

The lack of family-friendly workplace policies disproportionately harms women because they tend to take on the majority of family care work. This burden falls especially heavily on women of color, particularly Black women, as they are more likely to be the primary or sole breadwinner and caretaker in their families (Shaw et al. 2020). Specifically, a lack of paid family leave, the high cost of child care, and school days (and years) that do not align well with the work day can all make women more likely to take time out of the workforce around the birth of a child or to reduce their work hours in order to meet their family's care needs (Hess et al. 2015; Pew Research Center 2013). These adaptations can adversely affect women's careers and opportunities for advancement. A survey of over 1,000 working parents conducted by the Pew Research Center, for example, showed that four in ten working mothers but just 15 percent of working fathers felt that being a parent made it harder for them to advance in their career (Pew Research Center 2013). These trends are likely to be exacerbated by a pandemic that has driven millions of women out of the workforce (IWPR 2021).

As discussed above, bias against women means that mothers are typically seen as less committed, particularly when they take advantage of family-friendly workplace policies. And this bias can lead to fewer promotions to management positions, fewer pay raises, or even increased risk of being fired or demoted (Hideg et al. 2018). At the same time, men are often offered less generous paternity leaves (or no leave at all) and are often discouraged from taking leave. A recent survey showed that 73 percent of fathers felt very little support in their workplace, while 21 percent were worried that they might lose their job if they took the full paternity leave available to them through their employer (Levs 2019). Organizational culture influences employees' use of these policies—employees are more likely to use family leave policies in organizations that were seen as supportive toward individuals with families (Allen 2001). These two processes work to perpetuate the stereotype that women are best suited to be caregivers and men are meant to be the providers for their families.

Women's Relative Lack of Access to Mentoring and Sponsorship Relationships

One crucial component of advancing to leadership positions is having mentorship and sponsorship relationships. Although mentorship and sponsorship are similar, they differ in a few key ways. While mentors provide guidance and support, sponsors act as advocates who work to help advance the careers of those they sponsor—connecting them to networks and resources or recommending them for bigger roles (Center for Creative Leadership 2019). Mentorship can help ensure that women are gaining the skills they need and positioning themselves to be ready for promotions. One meta-analysis finds that people receiving mentoring have a slight advantage in their careers over those who are not mentored (Underhill 2006). Another study finds that mentoring in academia leads to more grant income and higher levels of promotion (Gardiner et al. 2007). Mentoring is also strongly associated with job satisfaction and perceived promotion or career advancement opportunities (Underhill 2006).

More than mentorship is needed, however, to help break down the "old boys" network. Women also need a sponsor: someone in the room when it comes time for promotions who will speak up for them and put them forward as candidates for promotion (McKinsey &

Company and Lean In 2017; Warren 2009). Recent research has shown that, while women are being mentored at much higher rates than previously, they are much less likely than men to be sponsored, which is even more crucial for promotion and advancement (Ibarra, Carter, and Silva 2010).

Mentorships and sponsorships are important to success, but women's and men's networks are often different. Since men are more likely than women to hold leadership positions, and men are more likely to sponsor those with whom they identify personally—those whose experiences, backgrounds, and careers resemble their own (Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb 2013)—women may have less access to senior leaders who can act as sponsors and help them advance (Ibarra, Carter, and Silva 2010; McKinsey & Company and Lean In 2018). In fact, fewer women than men report receiving help from a manager when it comes to advancing, with Black women the least likely to report they received help (McKinsey & Company and Lean In 2018). Informal interactions also play a role in advancement, and they can be just as important as merit-based qualifications (Kumra and Vinnicombe 2010), especially once a person moves into middle management and beyond (Tharenou 2001). These informal connections are valuable for gaining mentors, sponsors, and recommendations for positions.

While research has shown that mentees often feel that having a mentor of one's own race or gender is important (Blake-Beard et al. 2011), mentorship should not be focused solely on female-female mentorship, as there are fewer women and women of color in corporate leadership positions than men. Mentorship can also be an effective tool for any diversity program in breaking down bias in managers, as managers who sponsor women of all races and people of color will often come to believe that their mentees deserve training and opportunities (Dobbin and Kalev 2016).

Women's Exclusion from Networks and Informal Social Interactions

Workplace social networks are often built through informal interactions and relationships. One way that men form these bonds is through casual talk over the "water cooler" on stereotypically gendered topics such as sports, cars, and dating, resulting in the formation of in-groups and out-groups and sex segregation within the workplace. This socializing often continues outside of the workplace at bars, golf courses, and other sporting events (Fisher and Kinsey 2014), where business often continues to take place. Women are often seen as outsiders and frequently not invited (Chira 2017). On the occasions that they are invited, family and caretaking responsibilities can often lead women not to participate (Kumra and Vinnicombe 2010). These informal interactions are not just about building one's social circle; they can have significant consequences—such as being put forward to lead major projects and for advancement and promotion—for the careers of both those who are included and those who are not (Fisher and Kinsey 2014).

One way that "boys' clubs" give men an advantage in the workplace is through social capital, enabling them to use those connections for work-related resources (Tymon and Stumpf 2003). Boys' club networks lend social capital to those seeking a job or promotion by offering name recognition, connections, and trust. Since leaders tend to hire and promote people who are more like themselves, the boys' club offers that social signaling (Kumra and Vinnicombe

2010; Fisher and Kinsey 2014; Cross and Prusak 2002). Social capital is also seen as a benefit to employers because those who have it have resources that can offer "ideas, leads, business opportunities...[and] support, which ranges from advice and information to help in setting up deals and transactions" (Kumra and Vinnicombe 2010).

Social capital is formed through the idea of mutual benefit. Given that men hold most managerial and high-powered positions, women are often viewed as being able to offer little in the way of network resources, thus hindering women's ability to build necessary social capital (Kumra and Vinnicombe 2010). Social capital can be just as important to career advancement as formal knowledge and work skills (Kumra and Vinnicombe 2010), especially as one ascends the leadership ladder (Tharenou 2001). When women are not a part of social activities, they are placed at a great disadvantage.

The impact of COVID-19 and companies transitioning to a virtual work environment may also have a negative impact on these types of social interactions and networking opportunities. While colleagues likely maintained existing bonds and relationships working remotely, it may have hindered new ones from forming and perhaps even contributed to some women missing out on valuable opportunities.

Workplace Sexual Harassment

Experiencing sexual harassment at work is a major barrier to career advancement and leadership for women in the United States, affecting anywhere from 25 to 85 percent of all women (depending on how studies define sexual harassment, construct their sample, and frame questions about it; Feldblum and Lipnic 2016). Those who do experience harassment often also have to deal with another form of "mistreatment or incivility" (Lim and Cortina 2005). For example, while gender pay inequity and sexual harassment have generally been considered separate issues, they are related, and both undermine women's safety and economic security (Flynn 2020). Additionally, though White women often experience harassment differently from women of color, research shows that experiencing sexual harassment at work deters women of all races and ethnicities from wanting to advance within a company (McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackstone 2012), which has major implications for career advancement and leadership opportunities.

Research indicates that sexual harassment and sexual assault at work have negative consequences for women's physical and mental health, as well as for their career outcomes and earnings (Dansky and Kilpatrick 1997; Schneider, Tomaka, and Palacios 2001). Sexual harassment has been linked to increased turnover intentions (McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackstone 2012; Purl, Hall, and Griffeth 2016; Shaffer et al. 2000), increased absenteeism, and reduced job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Willness, Steel, and Lee 2007). Evidence from lawsuits also suggests that sexual harassment at work has a range of associated financial costs for the victims such as missed raises and promotions, job changes and loss of seniority, exit from higher paying careers, and diminished job security. One recent study found that job change, industry change, and reduced work hours were common among women who experienced sexual harassment at work. Whereas some women who left their jobs because of harassment thereafter secured positions that paid as well or better, others

experienced a steep decline in their earnings and career advancement (McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackstone 2017).

Sexual harassment does not just affect the target; research shows that the negative effects of harassment can affect the productivity of an entire group and seep into the overall work environment (Willness, Steel, and Lee 2007). Additionally, fear of unfounded accusations of sexual harassment limit women's ability to access social networks and mentoring relationships. Men in positions of power and influence admit to intentionally leaving women out (Soklaridis et al. 2018), citing fear of becoming the object of suspicion or rumors as one reason for not wanting to socialize with women or be seen alone with them (Fuchs Epstein et al. 1995; Ragins and McFarlin 1990). Many men believe that spending more time with women increases their risk of being accused of harassment or inappropriate behavior (Bennhold 2019; Fuchs Epstein et al. 1995; Lean In 2019; Soklaridis et al. 2018). This refusal to be around or mentor women is another form of "sex segregation" in the workplace. It can have a substantially negative impact on women because it will "cut [them] out of key conversations, networking opportunities, professional exposure, and face time with career influencers" (Fuchs Epstein et al. 1995; Johnson and Smith 2017). Given that men are overrepresented in higher-level positions, these men's reluctance to mentor women often denies women access to mentoring altogether.

Male leaders' unwillingness to socialize with or mentor female subordinates is not a new phenomenon. However, many men have recently pointed to the #MeToo movement and increased reports of sexual harassment as another reason why they avoid social and mentorship relationships with women (Bennhold 2019).[5] In fact, recent surveys of the impact of #MeToo found that 32 percent of men reported feeling more reluctant to meet one-on-one with women, 21 percent cited a hesitancy to hire women for jobs requiring close interactions with men, and 40 percent now have a greater fear of false sexual harassment accusations from women (Atwater et al. 2019; Bower 2019).

Backlash against Diversity Efforts

Majority groups can also feel threatened and can begin to disengage from the organization when marginalized groups become better represented, which typically happens when the marginalized group's representation reaches about 20 percent (Dezso, Ross, and Uribe 2013). One study by McDonald, Keeves, and Westphal (2018) found that, when women or people of color were appointed as CEOs, White men's organizational identification decreased significantly—by 24 to 28 percentage points. Identifying less with the organization can affect several areas of one's work, but one major impact comes in the form of reduced support provided to women of all races and people of color. Managers who identify less with an organization are less likely to provide task-related help to peers and subordinates, provide broad recommendations to peers, or mentor subordinates (McDonald, Keeves, and Westphal

[5] The purpose of the #MeToo movement, founded by Tarana Burke, is to raise awareness around sexual assault and to offer community and healing for those who have experienced it (Me Too 2018). In 2017 the movement quickly jumpstarted a national conversation about the numbers of women who experience sexual harassment and assault on a regular basis. The movement has also contributed to women feeling more comfortable about reporting abuse and harassment, and since the hashtag went viral on social media, the *New York Times* reports that, as of 2019, "more than 200 prominent men [had] lost their jobs" (Bennhold 2019).

2018). Providing less support to peers and subordinates as diversity increases is concerning as women, and particularly Black women, already report that they receive less support from managers—including offers to help navigate organizational politics, to provide the resources needed to succeed, and to promote their accomplishments—all of which can lead women to have lower rates of promotion and an increased desire to leave the company (McKinsey & Company and Lean In 2018).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

The barriers that women face in advancing to leadership positions highlight areas for improvement that employers can target to promote greater diversity in their ranks at every level. While there has been progress in getting more women into management positions, more work still needs to be done to get women into the upper levels of organizational leadership. Unfortunately, there is no quick fix for DEI issues. Rather, this work should be viewed as a continuous practice of building and maintaining a culture of inclusion. Discussed below is a list of recommendations for employers to advance DEI in their workforces and attract and retain more women, including and especially women of color, in leadership positions. This list is by no means exhaustive, and some of these recommendations are currently being employed by many companies, but it does represent some of the key themes in the DEI literature and learned through conversations with companies for our research. These recommendations will also help companies attract and retain women, which is especially important given the large share of women who have lost their jobs or dropped out of the workforce as a result of the pandemic.

Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion Efforts Needs to Come from the Top

Top executives at organizations are the most influential in setting company-wide goals for DEI at every level. Leaders can communicate a commitment to DEI by identifying clear metrics to evaluate company progress toward DEI and setting goals based on these metrics. These efforts require more than simply collecting the "standard" diversity statistics, such as promotion rates or the number of White women and women of color as a share of the workforce at every level. Instead, companies must collect data on other metrics, such as assignments to high-visibility projects, and intersectional data. Data needs to not just be broken down by gender or race, but metrics should include specific numbers on Black, Latina, Asian, Native, and multiracial women, showing where and how these women are situated and their opportunities for advancement and progress within a company or organization. Collecting this data can show companies how they are performing and help identify areas that need to be addressed. It also enables them to set realistic goals for advancing gender and racial equity and provides a basis to evaluate progress toward reaching those goals.

To be truly successful, DEI goals should be transparent and communicated clearly to managers throughout the organization; managers, in turn, must be held accountable for meeting their departments' DEI goals. This means that advancing DEI within their department is seen as a part of managers' responsibilities and is a factor that is considered in their performance evaluations. Transparency and accountability are crucial elements in a DEI initiative. Without these elements, companies can find themselves in the position of having lofty goals without any structure or guidance on how they are going to be achieved.

Tackle Gender Bias in Access to and Use of Work-Family and Other Policies

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the disproportionate burden women and mothers face as primary caregivers for their families. As the country seeks to recover from the "she-cession," it is vital for employers to ensure that policies to help employees meet both work and family responsibilities benefit everyone. While many family caregiving policies are available to both men and women, the disproportionate unpaid caregiving responsibilities that women shoulder means they take advantage of caregiving policies more often than men, sometimes to the detriment of their careers. For example, the cultural norms around caregiving mean men are less likely to take paid paternity leave, which is one factor that has driven gender bias. Thus, it is imperative that when businesses design family-friendly workplace policies that these benefits both be available to all employees, and that everyone is encouraged to use them. Policies alone will not make men take parental leave when they become fathers unless it is both sanctioned by the leadership and expected that they will do so. When PricewaterhouseCoopers in the United States introduced a new parental leave package, it invested strongly in line-manager training and team supports to ensure that men as well as women would make use of such leave, as one way of reducing bias women may face as mothers at work. By 2018, 72 percent of fathers had taken their full six-week entitlement (Scott 2018). Managers who are responsible for implementing these policies need clear guidance on how the policies are to be implemented and should play an active role in normalizing the use of such policies by everyone on their teams, not just women.

Implement a Comprehensive and Intersectional DEI Strategy

Companies have been working to tackle issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion for many years with the hopes of increasing diversity in their workforce. Traditional diversity trainings, however, have limited impact and can even cause backlash among managers. Traditional trainings usually focus on controlling managers' behavior, which tends to activate bias (Dobbin and Kalev 2016). Merely raising awareness about unconscious bias can reinforce stereotypes (McKinsey & Company and Lean In 2017) and lead men to think their gender will make it harder for them to get ahead, even though men's representation in leadership far surpasses that of women's (McKinsey & Company and Lean In 2018).

Research has found that diversity programs are more effective when they engage people in working directly toward greater diversity, increase contact between men and women and among people of all races and ethnicities, and promote social accountability by tapping into the desire to appear fair to leadership, boards, and external partners. Social accountability relies on transparency and reporting on metrics to company leadership or external partners, which has been shown to result in more gender-equitable decision-making in assignments and promotions (Dobbin and Kalev 2016). Additionally, a more intersectional approach to diversity training is needed: racial and gender diversity are often addressed as two separate issues, but women of color, especially Black women, face greater difficulty in advancing to senior positions (McKinsey & Company and Lean In 2018). Intersectional approaches should be incorporated into diversity programs and trainings to ensure that the experiences of women of color are understood and any barriers to their advancement are effectively addressed. In 2017 the EEOC developed a new training program that focuses on preventing

harassment and building respectful workplaces, which seeks to go beyond addressing sexual harassment and highlights ways to build inclusive organizations (U.S. EEOC 2017).

Focus on the Full Inclusion of Women in the Workplace

Increasing the number of women in the organization, or within leadership positions, is only one part of a gender diversity agenda. Unfortunately, this is often where many companies stop, thinking that just having more White women or women of color leaders will fix their diversity problems. Companies cannot just add White women and women of color and stir. For companies to produce meaningful and sustainable workplace change, they also need focused efforts to ensure that employees *feel included and valued* within the organization. This means that all women, especially women of color, and people from other underrepresented groups are seen or their unique experiences and contributions to the organization—and their full participation—is actively encouraged at all levels. In practice, this translates to all women across every level of the organization having avenues to give feedback, provide input, and report issues, and the organization working to ensure that diverse groups of women are included on major projects and involved in decision-making.

Barak (2015) recommends conducting a diversity climate survey as a first step for any organization hoping to cultivate a more inclusive workplace. The survey results will identify areas that the company needs to improve upon, which can in turn help leadership develop targeted strategies to improve. Barak then recommends assessing the connection between these interventions and other management policies and practices and organizational performance. Organizational performance can be measured by evaluating employee job satisfaction and commitment to the organization, the quality of ideas generated by teams, the number and severity of any intergroup conflicts, and overall productivity. Such evaluations help leadership determine the effectiveness of interventions and policies and assess the need for any changes or additional interventions.

Tackle Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Organizational commitment to effectively addressing sexual harassment in the workplace is key to ensuring women's career advancement. While many companies have focused efforts on sexual harassment, the problem is still deeply pervasive. Providing resources and training and developing new tools to prevent and address workplace sexual harassment are critical to making workplaces safer for all workers. Companies can start by assessing the risk factors associated with sexual harassment and conducting climate surveys to measure the extent to which harassment is a problem within their organization. They should also, at a minimum, adopt and maintain comprehensive anti-harassment policies, offer multi-faceted reporting procedures, and "test" reporting systems to determine functionality (Shaw, Hegewisch, and Hess 2018). Companies also need to eliminate any forced arbitration and nondisclosure agreements in sexual harassment disputes (Flynn 2020). Taking swift and immediate action on any sexual harassment claims and communicating a strong stance against sexual harassment is important to counteract the perception that sexual harassment claims are not serious or will not result in a fair investigation (Flynn 2020).

Encourage and Support Affinity Groups within the Organization

Companies can help foster a more inclusive workplace culture by encouraging and supporting employee affinity groups. Such groups usually begin as small, informal gatherings that are started by employees with common interests and issues; they may be composed of people from a particular racial or ethnic group, women, LGBTQ+ people, or another demographic, though they are open to all employees. Each group usually has its own leadership structure, regular meetings, and objectives (Diversity Best Practices 2009).

Affinity groups provide many benefits for employees and organizations. Most obviously, they can help foster an inclusive environment where employees feel a sense of belonging. They can also help the organization by attracting new, diverse employees and increasing retention rates. They may even be a source of new and innovative business ideas (Diversity Best Practices 2009).

Companies can support such groups in a number of ways. They can encourage employees to form their own affinity groups and provide them with adequate budgets and management advice. They can also provide speakers or sponsorships. And companies can ask their affinity groups to be active partners in their recruitment and retention efforts, tapping into their unique insight and experience to help attract a more diverse pool of qualified employees (Diversity Best Practices 2009).

SPOTLIGHT ON PROCTER & GAMBLE

Procter & Gamble (P&G) has been actively working to advance gender diversity and tackle diversity issues within its organization. The company's research and development (R&D) division developed two programs for women: Experienced Women of Research & Development (EWORD) and Women in Innovation (WII). While both started organically as affinity groups, P&G leadership recognized their importance, and subsequently formalized and provided corporate support for both programs.

Experienced Women of Research & Development (EWORD)

EWORD is for women in leadership positions (at the director-level and above) within R&D and has been an official P&G program since the early 1990s. The goal of EWORD is to support female leaders by helping them both to improve their own skills and to sponsor other capable women for leadership positions.

EWORD offers leadership trainings, creates mentorship programs, and owns and analyzes data regarding gender diversity within R&D. The women who run EWORD report directly to the head of R&D and work with the broader leadership team to ensure that the division remains committed to increasing gender diversity.

Over the decades EWORD's work has evolved, including investing in external research to help strengthen action plans. While EWORD has always been supported by R&D leadership, the program also receives support from the P&G C-suite: the CRDIO (Chief Research, Development, and Innovation Officer) has made diversity and inclusion in R&D a priority and meets annually with EWORD.

Women in Innovation (WII)

WII also began as an affinity group whose goal was to create a community among female scientists within R&D, it became a formal R&D program in the early 2000s. WII's focus remains community-building among female scientists, especially those who have worked less than 10 years at P&G. The goal of the program is to make sure that women feel they have a voice and are valued for the work they do. The group provides a forum for women to voice their ideas and concerns and know that any issues raised will be reported to those at the top. WII also works to tackle unconscious bias and connect younger scientists to role models and mentors to help position them for advancing into leadership roles with P&G.

BROADER CORPORATE CULTURE AND LESSONS FOR SUCCESS

Working on the EWORD and WII programs has taught P&G valuable lessons. First, backing from senior leadership is key to success, as much DEI work involves evaluating company policies and making systematic changes. While grassroots and affinity groups are valuable, making and sustaining real progress requires meaningful commitment from the top.

Setting clear goals with measurable metrics and supporting continued research and evaluation is also crucial to sustain change. Identifying and tracking specific metrics permits organizations to see when progress has stalled so they can dig deeper, perform additional research, and find solutions.

Finally, P&G program participants have found that regular check-ins with leadership are essential. Regular check-ins permit leadership to hold the group accountable for its goals and allow the groups to hold leadership accountable for making progress within the broader company and sharing lessons learned. With accountability and buy-in at all levels, more holistic, multi-faceted solutions will arise.

Promote Mentorship and Sponsorship between Junior Women and Senior Leaders

As discussed, mentorship and sponsorship are critical to career advancement because they can help aspiring leaders gain new insights, develop their skills, and make the connections required to take on greater responsibilities and rise through the ranks. Both relationships are important to professional development and, because they serve slightly different functions, both types of relationships are needed (Center for Creative Leadership 2019).

Relying on informal relationships within the workplace developing into mentorship and sponsorship relationships puts women and people of color at a disadvantage because they are less likely to have access to senior leaders who can help them advance (McKinsey & Company and Lean In 2018). People often tend to form relationships with people who are like them, meaning that male leaders (who are more common than women leaders) may subconsciously be more inclined to mentor and sponsor other men (Center for Creative Leadership 2019). Further, particularly in the wake of the #MeToo movement, some male leaders have purposely been avoiding such relationships with female co-workers for fear of becoming the target of suspicion (Soklaridis et al. 2018; Ragins and McFarlin 1990).

Establishing more formal mentorship programs within organizations can help level the playing field by increasing women and people of color's access to senior leaders. Mentorship programs should be tailored to the organization's particular needs and goals, but could include matched one-on-one mentoring in which pairs are matched based on background, interests, and needs; resource-based mentoring in which pools of potential mentors are developed and mentees initiate the relationship; group mentoring, where mentors meet with several mentees at once to discuss common interests and goals; training-based mentoring, where mentors assist mentees as they pursue a specific training program and help them develop their skills; or executive mentoring, which is a top-down model (Management Mentors 2015).

Starnes (2019) and Hess (2012) offer guidance to those looking to build a mentorship program. Companies should ensure that their mentorship program aligns with the company's mission and culture. The company also must identify potential mentors who are eager to participate. Starnes recommends forming a support system for mentors and mentees that outlines how and when participants will work together, what types of activities the mentorship relationship involves, and how individual goals will be tackled. The system should also offer incentives for continued participation in the program. Finally, the mentorship program must be evaluated regularly for effectiveness.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN

In 2018, the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) launched the **Gender-Smart Investing Resource Hub** to build awareness of how gender affects business, provide tools for companies and investors to identify priority areas and develop action plans, and highlight ways to meaningfully integrate gender into screening and evaluation processes. While the Resource Hub specifically targets four sectors—agriculture, off-grid energy, power infrastructure, and health care—within emerging and developing country markets, any organization can use its tools and resources to integrate gender equity considerations into its practices and policies.

The Resource Hub includes five main elements:

1. A gender briefing (one for each sector) that explains why gender equity matters overall, specifically why it should be considered in the sector, and how it can be incorporated into the organization.
2. A Gender Opportunity Explorer guide, which is an interactive online guide that helps individuals evaluate how to advance gender equity in different settings (e.g., on the board, in senior management/employees, with contractors, and with consumers, among others).
3. Visuals and materiality maps (for each sector) to help individuals and companies see where and how gender matters, where and how to prioritize action plans, and where actions could affect the organization's bottom line.
4. Case studies illustrating how companies have integrated gender into their operations, and the resulting business and social benefits.
5. A Gender Scoring Tool, a questionnaire that gives a company a personalized gender scorecard. This tool takes a deeper dive into women on boards, in the workplace, the supply chain, and the community, to give a more nuanced score for companies. It covers issues such as recruitment and retention, pay inequalities, and gender-equitable policies, among many others.

While the tools within the Resource Hub are industry-specific and targeted principally at developing countries, ICRW believes that these tools can be useful for companies across sectors and contexts. The Gender Opportunity Explorer guides offer useful tips and action steps, especially regarding efforts to increase diversity

on boards, in senior management, and among employees. Additionally, the Gender Scoring Tool can be used by any company: using the first 26 questions—omitting the last questions—will produce a gender score card for workplace policies and practices.

The Resource Hub's focus is gender equity, but the Hub plans to include other diversity measures as well. For example, while the Gender Scoring Tool does not currently allow for an intersectional score, the Hub is in the process of incorporating that measure in the future.

CONCLUSION

During the last few decades, the labor force in the United States has changed dramatically. Nearly five in ten workers, and over four in ten managers, are women. But gender equality in the higher echelons of corporate leadership has been elusive, and progress in integrating senior management remains painfully slow. Further, women of color continue to be disproportionately excluded. Women of color, especially Black women, do not get the same opportunities for advancement as White women, meaning they are even less likely to hold leadership positions. At the same time, women of color are often expected to fit in to the White male-dominated culture and structures, so while companies have increased their diversity numbers, they have not worked on the equity and inclusion of women of color, which can lead many women of color to leave these positions for other opportunities where they will be more valued.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the challenges women faced prior to the "she-cession," contributing to women's drop in labor force participation. As the country moves toward a post-pandemic future, it will be essential to ensure that all women can return to work, fully participate in the economy, and further their careers. To do so, and to fully safeguard the gains women have made in achieving greater representation in leadership, organizations must rethink and reimagine workplace policies that allow their employees to balance work and family obligations. This includes ensuring that these policies are gender-equitable—available to both women and men—and that company culture shifts to encourage equal use of these programs by both women and men.

APPENDIX: SOURCES OF DATA ON WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

Women's representation in leadership positions may be measured in several ways. At the most basic level, one could assess the share of women in managerial positions. This captures all women who have some level of authority in the workplace and assume at least some leadership responsibilities. This figure does not measure the extent of power and authority held by women in these positions. Evaluating the scope of women's power requires examining the share of women in senior-level management, executive or board positions. These posts wield considerably more management and leadership authority; in some instances, individuals in these positions may directly affect the organization's success or failure.

Different data sources are available to measure women's representation in leadership positions up and down the corporate ladder. Each has strengths and limitations, but together they present a comprehensive picture of diversity in corporate leadership. This report draws heavily on three data sources:

The American Community Survey (ACS) is a nationally representative sample of the entire U.S. population. The ACS provides detailed information on individuals' employment status and, among those who are employed, the characteristics of their job(s). Of particular interest for this report is information on each respondent's occupation. ACS occupation codes allow researchers to aggregate different managerial occupations into a broader "All Managers" category, which includes occupations such as marketing managers, financial managers, and human resource managers. The ACS occupation codes also permit researchers to examine the characteristics of workers who identify as "chief executives and legislators." These data are available for leaders at all organizations regardless of sector or industry of operation, size, or other factors. Unfortunately, it is not possible to separate the two in the publicly available data. To address this, we limited our analysis to non-government workers (those not employed by federal, state, or local governments), as legislators would be classified as government employees. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), legislators make up a relatively small fraction of the combined "chief executive and legislator" group (1.1 percent). The share of women as a fraction of chief executives reported by BLS data is only slightly higher than the share of women who are non-government chief executives that IWPR estimated in the ACS data (26.9 percent in 2018 compared with 25.1 percent; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019).[6]

Catalyst frequently publishes estimates of women's representation at several levels of corporate leadership including: first/mid-level officials and managers, executive/senior-level officials and managers, board seats, top earners, and CEOs. This added level of detail is an advantage of the Catalyst data. Additionally, Catalyst typically focuses on women

[6] The BLS data draw on the Current Population Survey (CPS). While CPS data allow researchers to separate chief executives from legislators, its sample sizes are significantly smaller than in the ACS. The larger sample sizes in the ACS allow researchers to examine diversity among chief executives along multiple dimensions including gender and race/ethnicity.

in high-powered corporations, usually the S&P 500, Fortune 100, and Fortune 500. While this limited focus on top-performing companies does not present a full picture of women's representation in leadership positions, it does illuminate challenges to advancement that women face in larger corporations.

Finally, since 2015, McKinsey & Company and Lean In have been conducting an annual survey on the state of women in corporate America. The survey is fielded both to companies (more than 300 in 2019) and to employees (more than 68,000 in 2019). Like the Catalyst data, these data focus more on the representation of women in larger corporations, but not necessarily in the S&P 500, Fortune 100, or Fortune 500. The data also present a detailed picture of the corporate pipeline, providing data on women's representation at the manager, senior manager/director, vice president, senior vice president, and chief executive level.

Comparing the three data sources, the ACS presents the highest estimates of women's representation in leadership positions, estimating that 25.1 percent of chief executive and legislator positions and 41.4 percent of manager positions were held by women in 2018 (Figure 1). Data from McKinsey & Company and Lean In closely track these findings, estimating that 22 percent of chief executive positions and 38 percent of manager positions were held by women in 2019 (McKinsey & Company and Lean In 2019). Due to Catalyst's focus on women in S&P 500 companies, the non-profit's data differ significantly from the other two sources: Catalyst estimates that just 5.2 percent of CEOs and 36.9 percent of first/mid-level officials and managers were women in 2019 (Catalyst 2019).

As noted above, this report draws on data from all three sources to present a more complete picture of women's representation in corporate leadership. The ACS enables an intersectional analysis, providing data on women and men of all races and ethnicities in leadership positions at both the manager and chief executive and legislator levels. The Catalyst and McKinsey & Company and Lean In data, on the other hand, provide more detailed information on women's representation throughout the corporate pipeline and illustrate the levels of leadership where women in high-powered companies are particularly underrepresented; by contrast, the ACS focuses on women in organizations of all sizes.

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