Black Women Are Leaning In And Getting Nowhere

**Ambitious women are repeatedly sidelined, a new study shows. July 27, 2016**

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Sheryl Sandberg, chief operating officer of Facebook, has famously advised women to “lean in.” Women of color have been doing that for a while, though.

Black women want a seat at the table. And yet they are close to invisible at the highest ranks of corporate America, reveals [data](https://womenintheworkplace.com/) released Tuesday morning by consulting firm McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.org, the nonprofit women’s leadership organization founded by Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg.

This is the second year the organization has released the data, among the most comprehensive looks at how women are faring in the business world.

Overall, it’s not going [terribly well](http://graphics.wsj.com/how-men-and-women-see-the-workplace-differently/). Women drop out of the corporate pipeline at high rates: For every 100 women promoted to manager (the first step on the track up the ladder), 130 men are advanced, the study found. Women get more pushback when they negotiate for raises, and are more likely to get labeled pushy or bossy by the higher-ups and generally receive less support from senior colleagues.

But women of color have it particularly bad, the study found.  Defined as black, Asian or Hispanic, women of color make up just 3 percent of executives in the C-suite at the 132 North American companies surveyed, which include JP Morgan Chase, Procter & Gamble, General Motors and Facebook. Yet, these women comprise 20 percent of the United States population.

White women were also nowhere near parity in those high-level offices, but at 17 percent are doing much better by comparison.

“When women are stuck, corporate America is stuck,” Sandberg said in a statement. “We know that diverse teams perform better and inclusive workplaces are better for all employees, so we all have strong incentives to get this right.”



Women of color are far less likely to make it to the top in corporate America.

“Women of color are the most underrepresented group in the corporate pipeline,” write the authors of the [report](http://womenintheworkplace.com/), which also surveyed women within these companies.

This is the [second year](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/gender-equality-at-work_us_560b00a4e4b0af3706de64c4) that LeanIn.org and McKinsey have done this [landmark survey](http://www.wsj.com/articles/whats-holding-women-back-in-the-workplace-1443600242). Though last year some data on women of color was included, the report did not break out pipeline data on women of color.

The latest study looked at promotion and attrition rates at the various companies, which together employ more than 4.6 million people. Additionally, more than 34,000 employees at the companies responded to a survey on gender biases, work-life issues and career opportunities at their companies.

Women of color who responded to the survey, especially black women, tended to perceive their offices as less fair. Only 29 percent of black women said the best opportunities at their company go to the most deserving employees, compared to 47 percent of white women, 43 percent of Asian women and 41 percent of Hispanic women.

“This study makes clear that while all women remain underrepresented in the corporate pipeline, women of color face the steepest drop-offs,” Lean-In.org’s president Rachel Thomas said.

When Sandberg’s corporate feminist manifesto *Lean In* came out in 2013, one of the most [potent](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/angelica-perezlitwin-phd/sheryl-sandbergs-lean-in_b_2901372.html) [criticisms](http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2013/04/can_black_women_lean_in_like_facebooks_sheryl_sandberg/) of the best-seller involved race. Many said the book, which urges women to speak up and be more ambitious at work, was less relevant for [women of color](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/she-the-people/wp/2013/03/25/do-black-women-need-lessons-on-leaning-in/), who face different challenges at the office.

Sandberg famously wrote that many women were giving up on attaining leadership roles in corporate America before their careers even took off. Women “leave before they leave,” she wrote, echoing a widely viewed [TED Talk](https://www.ted.com/talks/sheryl_sandberg_why_we_have_too_few_women_leaders?language=en) she gave in 2010. Essentially, the argument goes, women anticipate that they won’t be able to have full-throttle careers because at some point marriage and children will intercede. So they deliberately hold themselves back.

This may be a specific problem of white women, however. Women of color, according to surveys and plenty of anecdotal evidence, are far more ambitious. Indeed, black women participate in the labor market at [higher rates](http://statusofwomendata.org/earnings-and-the-gender-wage-gap/womens-labor-force-participation/) than any other group of women.

While white women seem to struggle with whether or not to seek advancement at work, black women are far less ambiguous, according to a [2014 survey](http://www.talentinnovation.org/publication.cfm?publication=1460) from the Center for Talent Innovation.

“In our research, we find black women are nearly 3 times more likely than white women to say they aspire to a powerful job with a prestigious title,” Tai Wingfield, one of the report’s authors and senior vice president of communications for the Center for Talent Innovation and managing director at Hewlett Consulting Partner, told The Huffington Post.

In this year’s LeanIn.org survey, 48 percent of women of color said they aspire to leadership positions at their company, compared with 37 percent of white women. The difference is most stark at the entry level, where only 27 percent of white women aspire to be a top executive, compared with 41 percent of women of color.

Yet it’s white women who are far more likely to land top roles. After Xerox chairman and CEO Ursula Burns leaves her post this year, there will be no black women CEOs in the Fortune 500, noted Melinda Marshall and Wingfield in a recent piece for [Harvard Business Review](https://hbr.org/2016/07/getting-more-black-women-into-the-c-suite).

“The problem is leadership isn’t seeing them ― those qualified, well educated black women who are vying for leadership but are being overlooked,” Wingfield told Huffington Post.

“Black women are already ‘leaning in,’” Valerie Purdie-Vaughn’s, a psychology professor at Columbia University, wrote last year in a [fascinating piece for Fortune](http://fortune.com/2015/04/22/black-women-leadership-study/) on black female leadership.

Xerox chairman and CEO Ursula Burns, an African American, is seen at the 2012 International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Jan. 11, 2012. The company [refers to Burns](https://www.xerox.com/en-us/about/executive-leadership/ceo) as “chairman” rather than “chairwoman.”

Part of the problem is “invisibility,” Purdie-Vaughns writes. When the average person thinks of a “woman leader,” she argues, the image that comes to mind is a white woman ― like Sandberg. If you picture a black leader, you’re more likely to think of a black man than a black woman.

“Because black women are not seen as typical of the categories ‘black’ or ‘woman,’ people’s brains fail to include them in both categories,” Purdie-Vaughns writes. “Black women suffer from a ‘now you see them now you don’t’ effect in the workplace.”

In Wingfield’s study, black women tell painful stories of how this plays at the office. One woman, after asking her boss about new opportunities at her firm, was told to be happy with what she’s achieved. “You’ve reached a milestone you’ve probably never imagined,” he tells her. “Do we really need to talk about what you haven’t yet achieved?”

Yvette Miley, a senior executive at MSNBC, describes her experiences in the 1990s speaking up at editorial meetings only to see her ideas get ignored until a male colleague repeated it and had the buy-in of the room.

What seems clear is that the managers and executives who make decisions about promotions and advancement may have unconsciously absorbed some of these stereotypes and are holding back women of color.

And to make things even tougher, many companies aren’t very focused on racial diversity to begin with. According to Lean-In. org.’s numbers, 55 percent of companies say racial diversity is a top priority. Gender diversity gets far more attention, with 78 percent of companies saying they’ve made it a top goal.

**Reading Logs: One to three pages.**

**Heading: title of article or assignment and author, full name, class and date.**

**Typed paper, 12 inch font, double spaced, typed on one side.**

 **Summarize with major details in the article in one or two paragraphs. Write your comments/thoughts about the article. What do you think? Do you agree or disagree with the theme, outcome or recommendations? Did you learn anything new or does it confirm what you know?**

 **Make any connections with the people, situation, etc. Write a question or two for the class to discuss or to clarify.**