



**Making the Case
for Affirmative
Action: Women of
Color in Corporate
America**

Center for Women Policy Studies
1211 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 312
Washington, DC 20036
www.centerwomenpolicy.org

Making the Case for Affirmative Action: Women of Color in Corporate America

Affirmative action is a remedy for past and present discrimination which extends our Nation's promise of equal opportunity to women and men of color and to white women. Some affirmative action opponents argue that these programs have fulfilled their mission and others mischaracterize affirmative action as a system that mandates quotas and unfairly penalizes white men.

In recent years, the battle over affirmative action has expanded from the realm of federal policy to voters, policy makers and the courts at the state and local levels. California, Oregon, Texas, and Florida have halted affirmative action initiatives in the public sector -- in employment, education, and government contracting opportunities. On the other hand, citizens in Houston, Texas voted to keep affirmative action in place in their city's contracting program.

Like the voters in Houston, the Center for Women Policy Studies believes that discrimination persists and that strong affirmative action programs continue to be needed – both to prevent a return to widespread exclusionary practices and to fulfill the promise of equal opportunity for women and men of color and white women.

The Center's research into the workplace experiences of women of color supports this policy position. The Center's survey of 1,562 women of color (African American, Asian American, Native American and Latina) in 16 Fortune 1000 companies found that many women believe that their opportunities for career advancement are limited because of their race/ethnicity and or gender.

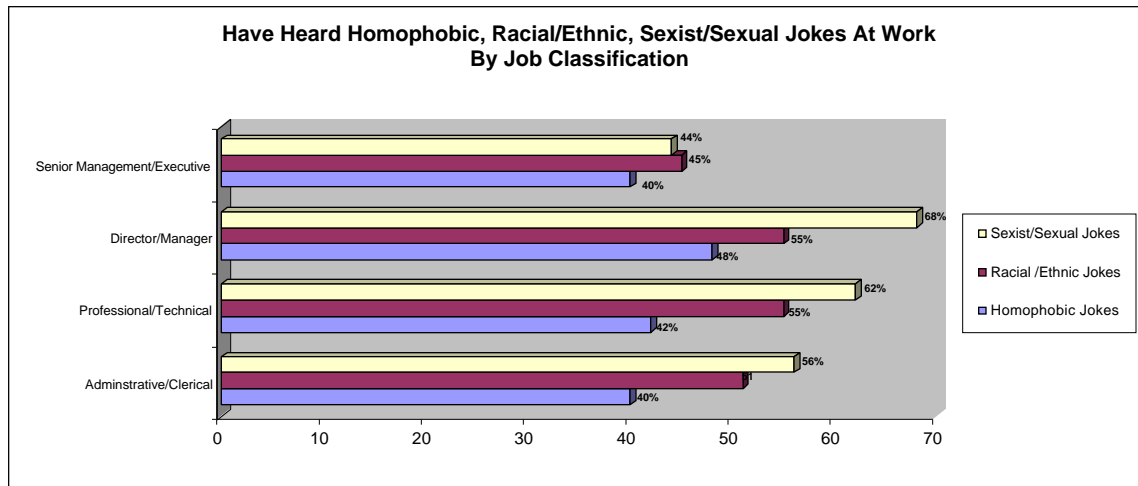


Chart 1

The survey's results, reported in *No More "Business As Usual": Women of Color in Corporate America – Report of the National Women of Color Work/Life Survey* (1999), demonstrate that the current workplace is not the colorblind or gender-neutral place that critics of affirmative action claim it is. In fact, a majority of women of color on every rung of the corporate ladder report that they hear sexist and sexual jokes (61 percent) and racial and ethnic jokes (53 percent) at work (See Chart 1). Fully, 80 percent of Native American women and 60 percent of African American women have heard racial and ethnic jokes at work, as have half of Latinas (50 percent) and Asian American women (49 percent). Similarly, 75 percent of Native American women and 69 percent of African American women have heard sexual and sexist jokes at work, as have 53 percent of Asian American women and 56 percent of Latinas.

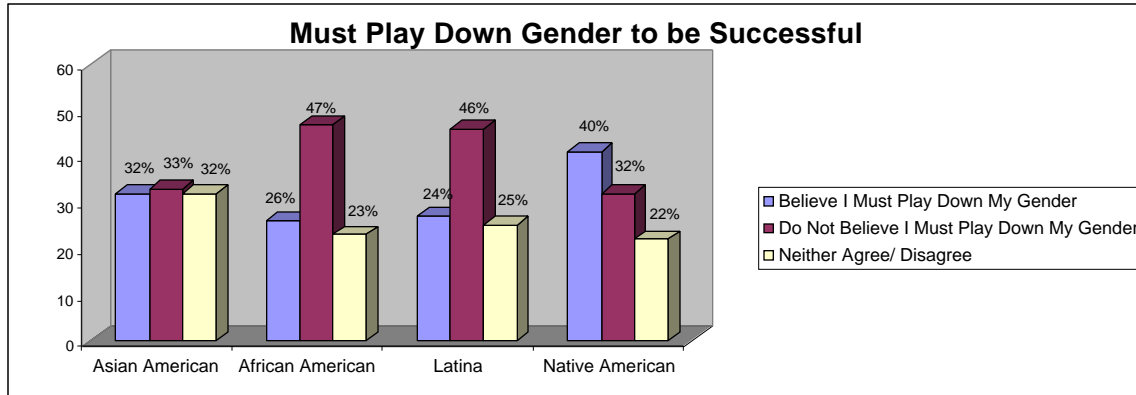


Chart 2

In such a workplace climate, it is not surprising that one of five women of color (21 percent) do not feel that they are free to “be themselves” at work. Indeed, more than one third of women of color — ranging from 28 percent to 44 percent — believe that they must “play down” their race or ethnicity to succeed and more than one quarter — ranging from 24 percent to 40 percent — believe that they must play down their gender to succeed (Charts 2 and 3). Finally, nearly a quarter of women of color (22 percent) report they must play down both their race/ethnicity and their gender at work.

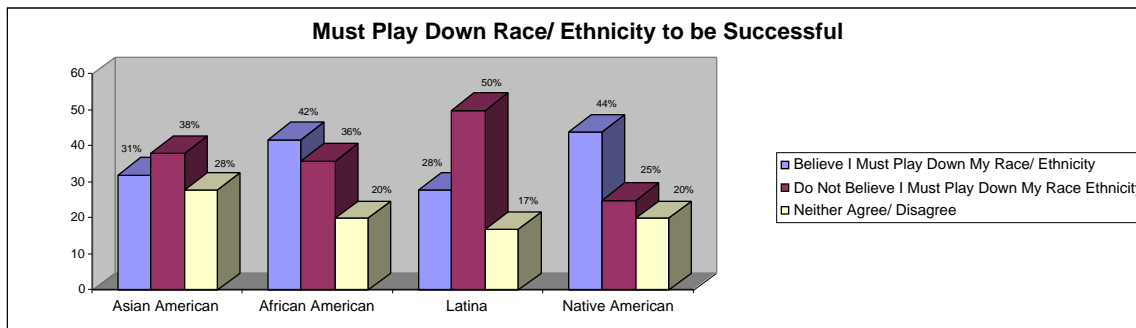


Chart 3

Women of color also report that they face unequal treatment and unequal opportunity for promotions, that their company’s leaders lag in their commitment to implementing diversity policies, and that discrimination remains pervasive in their workplaces:

- Two in five women of color (42 percent) believe that they are not afforded equal opportunities for promotion as compared to their colleagues with similar qualifications. Half of African American (50 percent) and nearly half of Native American women (47 percent) and one third of Latinas and Asian American women report this unequal treatment (See Chart 4).
- Nearly half of women of color (44 percent) believe that their companies are led by executives whose actions are inconsistent with their statements of support for diversity. African American women (52 percent) and Native American women (49 percent) are most likely to share this opinion of their corporate leaders, as are 38 percent of Latinas and 33 percent of Asian American women.

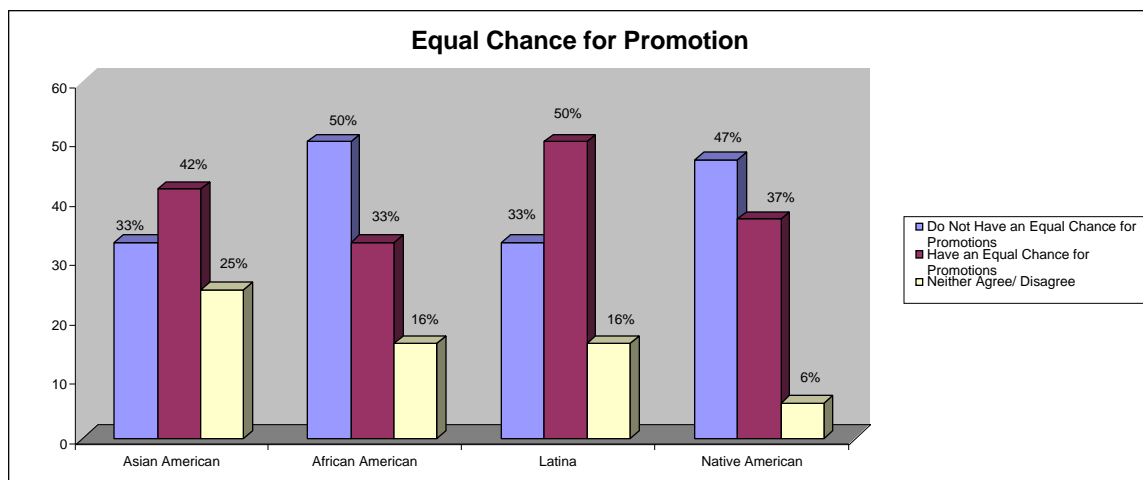


Chart 4

Learn more about the Center’s research on women of color in corporate America and to order a copy of *No More “Business as Usual”: Women of Color in Corporate America - Report of the National Women of Color Work/Life Survey (1999)* at www.centerwomenpolicy.org/diversity.htm.

For more information on affirmative action, contact the following organizations:

Americans for a Fair Chance
1776 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 510
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202-822-9221
Fax: 202-822-9267
www.fairchance.org
info@fairchance.org

Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights
2000 M Street, NW, Suite 400
Washington, D.C. 20036
Phone: 202-659-5565
www.cccr.org

Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
1401 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20005-0400
Phone: 202-662-8600
Fax: 202-783-0857
www.lawyerscomm.org

Leadership Conference on Civil Rights
1629 K Street, NW, Suite 1010
Washington, DC 20006
Phone: 202- 466-3311
Fax: 202- 466-3435
www.civilrights.org

MANA: A National Latina Organization
1725 K Street, N.W., Suite 501
Washington, D.C. 20006
Phone: (202) 833-0060
www.hermana.org

Mexican American Legal Defense and Education
Fund
634 South Spring Street, 11th Floor
Los Angeles, CA. 90014
Phone: (213) 629-2512
Fax: (213) 629-0266
www.maldef.org

National Asian and Pacific American Legal
Consortium
1140 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 1200
Washington, D.C. 20036
Phone: 202-296-2300
Fax: 202-296-2300
www.napalc.org

NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund
99 Hudson Street, 16th Floor
New York, NY 10013
212-965-2200

National Partnership for Women and Families
1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 710
Washington, DC 20009
Phone: 202-986-2600
Fax: 202-986-2539
www.nationalpartnership.org

National Women's Law Center
11 Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 1400
Washington, D.C. 20036
Phone: 202- 588-5180
Fax: 202-588-5185
www.nwlc.org

NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund
395 Hudson Street, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10014
Phone: 212-925-6635
Fax: 212-226-1066
www.nowldef.org