

U.S. Markets open in 5 mins

S&P Futures

2,830.50
+2.75 (+0.10%)



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25,581.00
+23.00 (+0.09%)



Nasdaq Futures

7,236.25
+7.75 (+0.11%)



Michelle Obama's quip about the 'Lean In' philosophy [being "shit" that "doesn't work"](#)—which she made during a stop on her *Becoming* book tour—generated plenty of headlines and Internet guffawing this week. But her assessment told us what we already know: That the 'Lean In' gospel preached by [Facebook](#) COO Sheryl Sandberg in a book of the same name has not been as effective at launching women into positions of power as she (and we) had hoped. Sandberg [admitted as much last year](#): “[I]n terms of women in leadership roles, we are not better off” than we were in 2013, when the book was published, she said.

But Obama's remark is still worth dwelling on—in its entirety. Here's the whole quote, [according to Vanity Fair](#):

“Marriage still ain't equal, y'all. It ain't equal. I tell women that whole 'you can have it all'—mmm, nope. Not at the same time—that's a lie. It's not always enough to lean in, because that shit doesn't work.”

Sure, her colorful candor was surprising, maybe even endearing. (If there's anything worthy of four-letter words, it's gender inequality, am I right!?) But her segue from unequal relationships in the home to inequality in the workplace was more than just a rhetorical flourish—as a fascinating new study makes all too clear.



Michelle Obama speaks with Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie during a London stop on her massive 'Becoming' book tour.

The research, which will appear in a forthcoming edition of the journal *Gender and Society*, comes to this conclusion, as reported by [The New York Times](#): “Most of [Americans] say that while women should have the same opportunities as men to work or participate in politics, they should do more homemaking and child-rearing.”

The findings, based on data from 1977 to 2016, provide clues as to why women's charge toward workplace equality seems to have stalled, even with increased educational and professional opportunities for women in that same timeframe.

That sentiment—that men are breadwinners and women are caregivers—plays out in real life, with women putting [4 hours a day toward unpaid household work versus men's 2.5](#). The belief is also reflected in U.S. policies related to paid leave, child care, and flexible work schedules that don't

account for women *also* being in the labor force. So women are taking on more paid work as they continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid work or domestic duties—and they don't have the resources to get it all done.

The importance of women's unpaid work can't be overstated. "If women stopped doing a lot of the work they do unpaid, then the whole economy would collapse," Shahra Razavi, chief of the research and data section at UN Women, [told CNN earlier this year](#). But those outside contributions are sucking up time women [could be spending on growing their careers](#).

In short, it's more than appropriate to connect unequal marriages or households and women's continued struggle to make meaningful progress at work, as Obama did. So she didn't just debunk the 'Lean In' strategy in her statement, she also hammered a (hopefully final) nail in the coffin of the idea that "work" and "life" are separate, equal forces capable of being balanced.

This essay originally appeared in the [Dec. 5, 2018 edition of The Broadsheet](#), Fortune's daily newsletter about the world's most powerful women. [Subscribe here](#).

Just 'Lean In': Michelle Obama Hosted Another Talk About Working Women on 'Becoming' Book Tour

Claire Zillman

Fortune December 5, 2018

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