A woman with short dark hair, wearing a dark blazer, is seated at a table in a bright, modern cafe. She is looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression, her hand resting near her chin. In the background, other people are blurred, suggesting a busy, professional environment. A white coffee cup is on the table in front of her.

Beating the Odds: A Portrait of Black MBA Program Alumni

October 13, 2021



HARVARD
BUSINESS SCHOOL

INSPIRATION

AASU

50 YEARS

A. LeRoy Willis



E. Theodore Lewis, Jr.



Clifford Darden

Lillian Lincoln Lambert

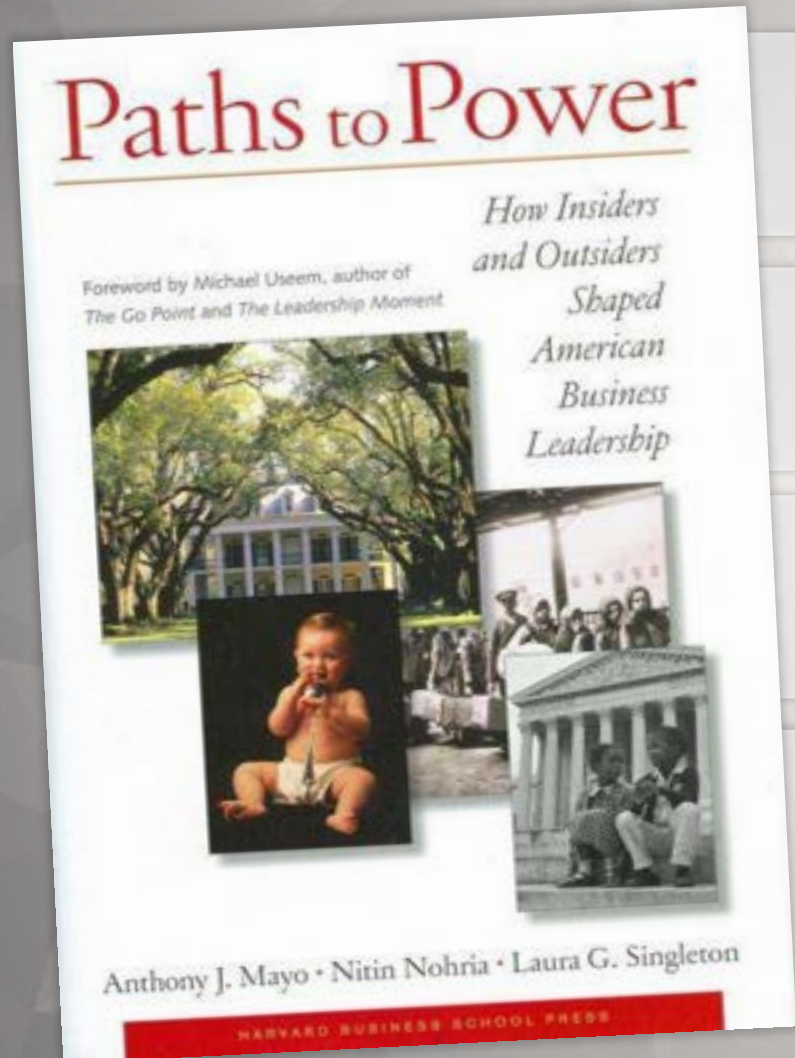
George R. Price



MOTIVATING QUESTION

What can we learn
about the **career paths**
and **perspectives** of
black MBAs?

HISTORICAL CONTEXT



Can anyone from anywhere who makes an effort to advance in business find success?

Is the playing field in business level or is it “more level” for some vs. others?

Who had access to elite positions of business power in the U.S. in the 20th century? Why?

How has access changed? What are the expectations of access and opportunity in the 21st century?

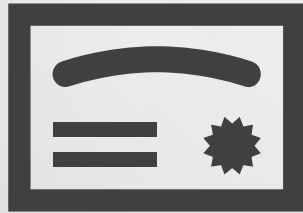
PATHS TO POWER: OUTSIDERS



PLACE



**PERSONAL
NETWORKS**



**PROFESSIONAL
CREDENTIALS**



PERSEVERANCE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

PHASE 1

MBA Black Alumni Career Database

- Demographic data including gender, country of origin, undergraduate college, major, and additional advanced degrees
- Employment data including company, position, function, tenure, and industry (pre and post HBS)

PHASE 2

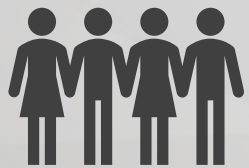
MBA Black Alumni Career Satisfaction Surveys

PHASE 3

MBA Black Alumni Career Profile Interviews and Focus Groups

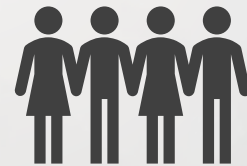
ALUMNI DATABASE – KEY FACTS

Full Dataset



2,274 alumni
1915 – 2017

Analysis Dataset



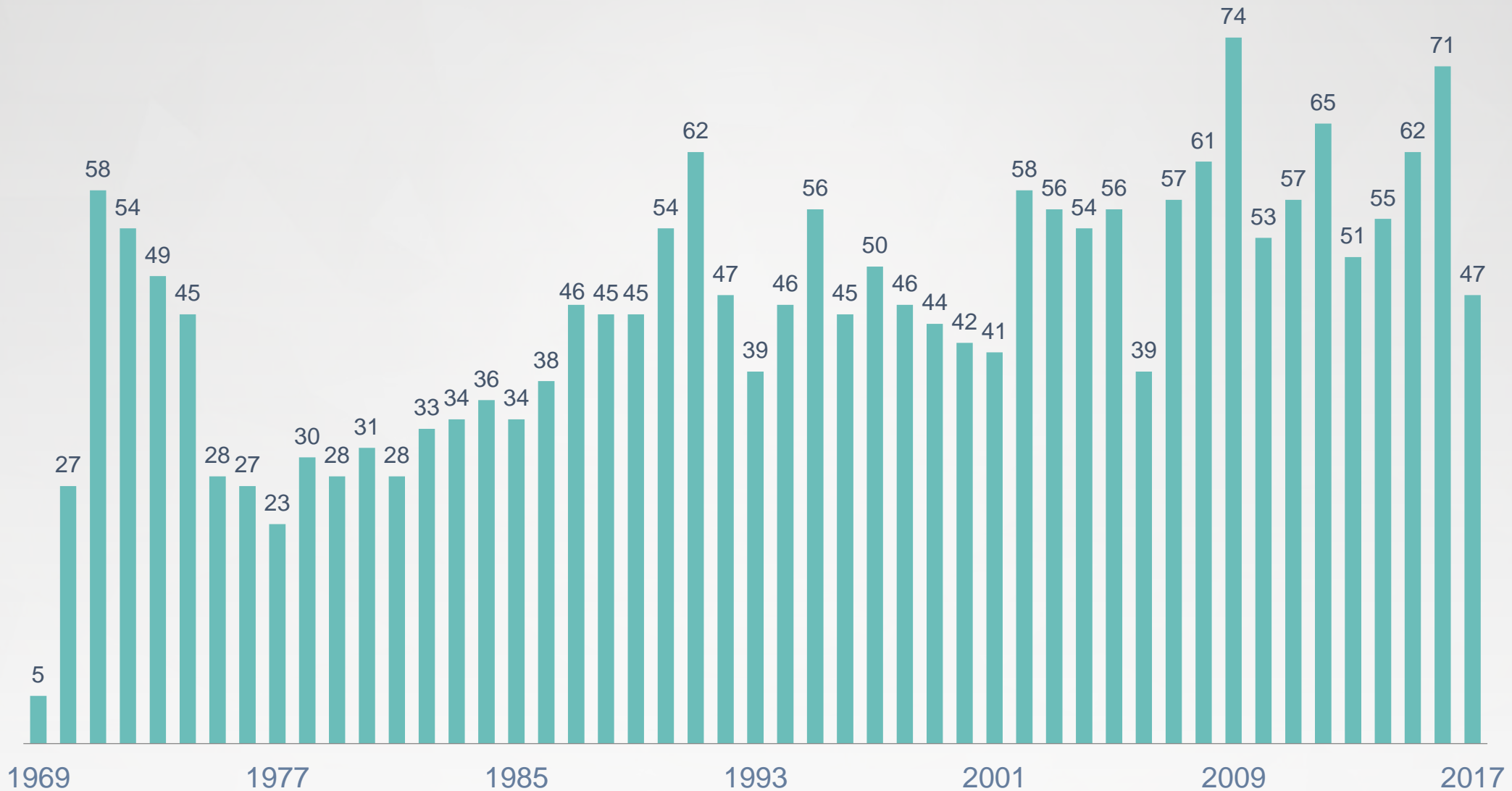
1,821 alumni
1977 – 2015

- 1,381 alumni records with full employment history (76%)
- 109 alumni records with partial employment history (6%)
- 331 alumni records with unknown employment history and/or minimal known employment history (18%)

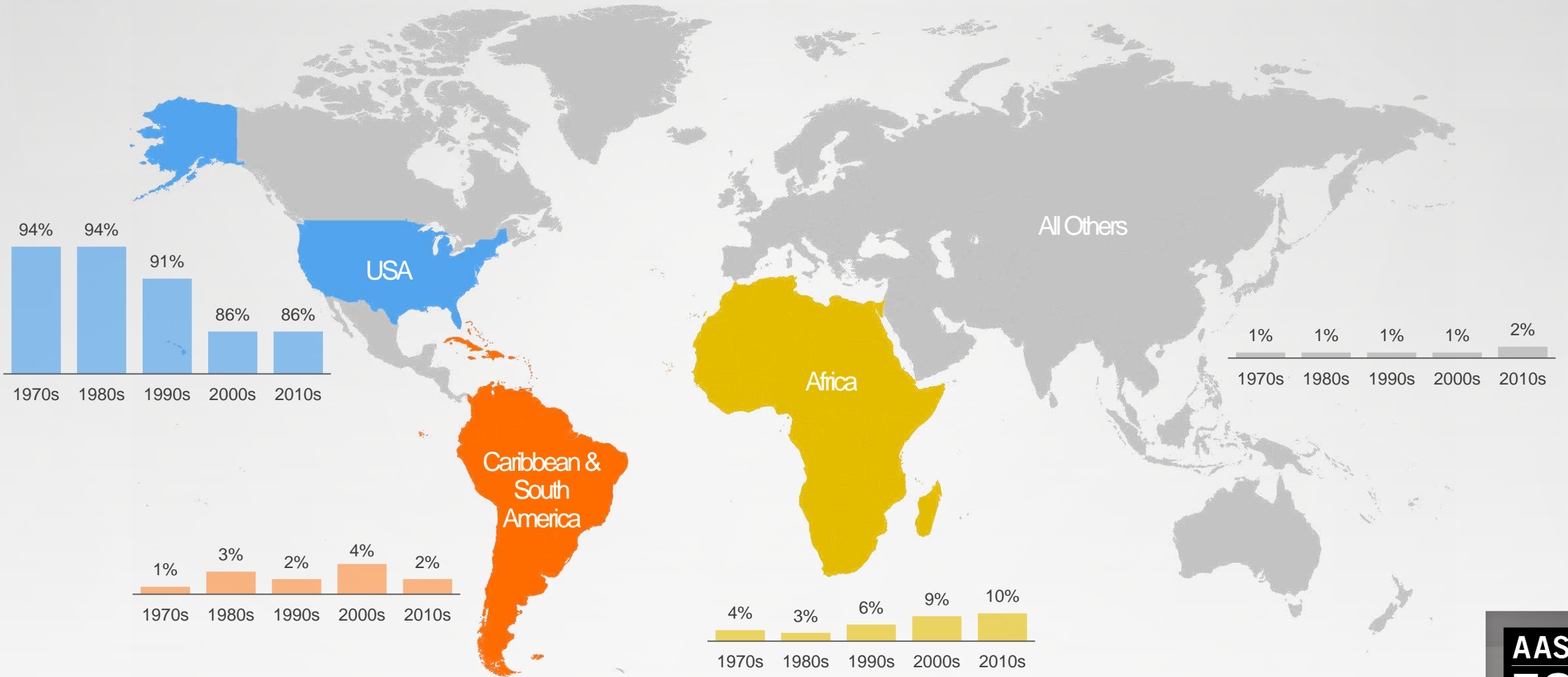


Demographic Data

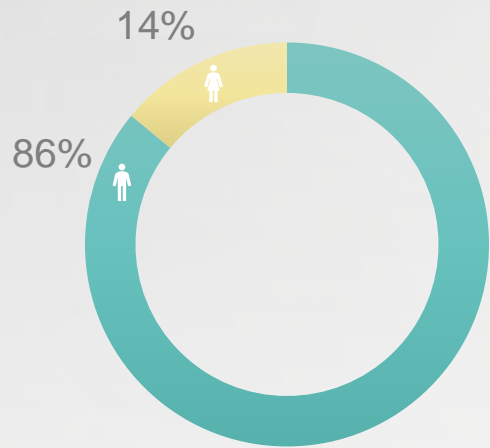
BLACK ALUMNI BY MBA CLASS YEAR



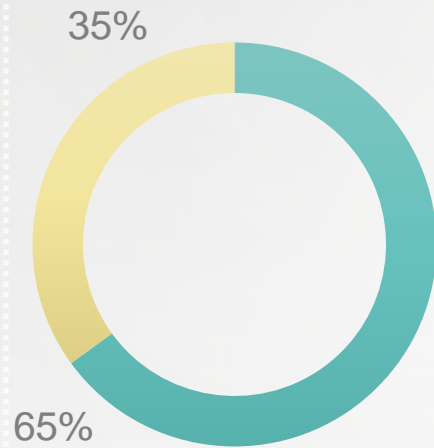
DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION: COUNTRY OF ORIGIN



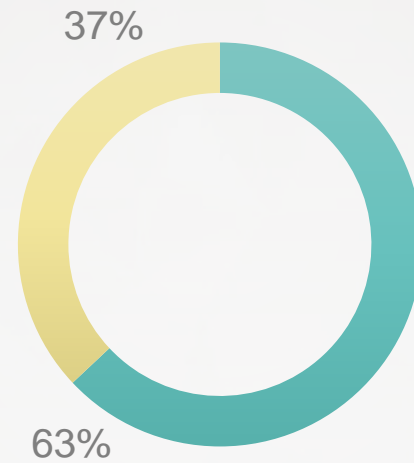
DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION: GENDER



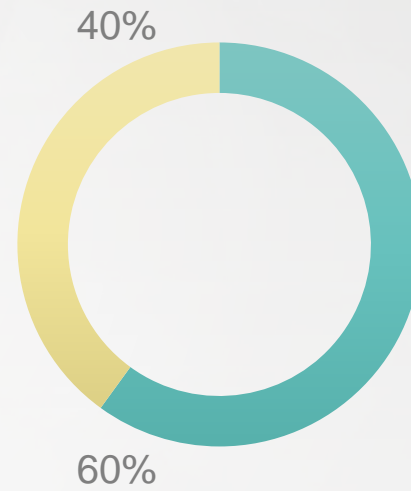
1970's



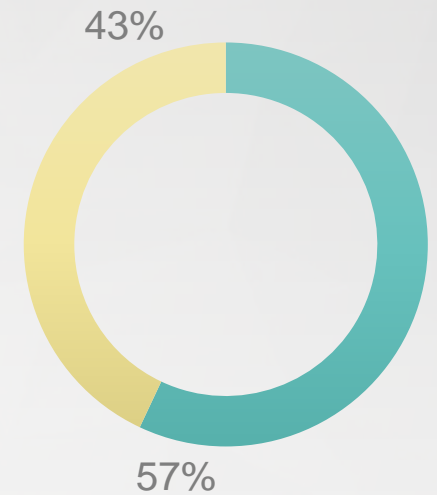
1980's



1990's



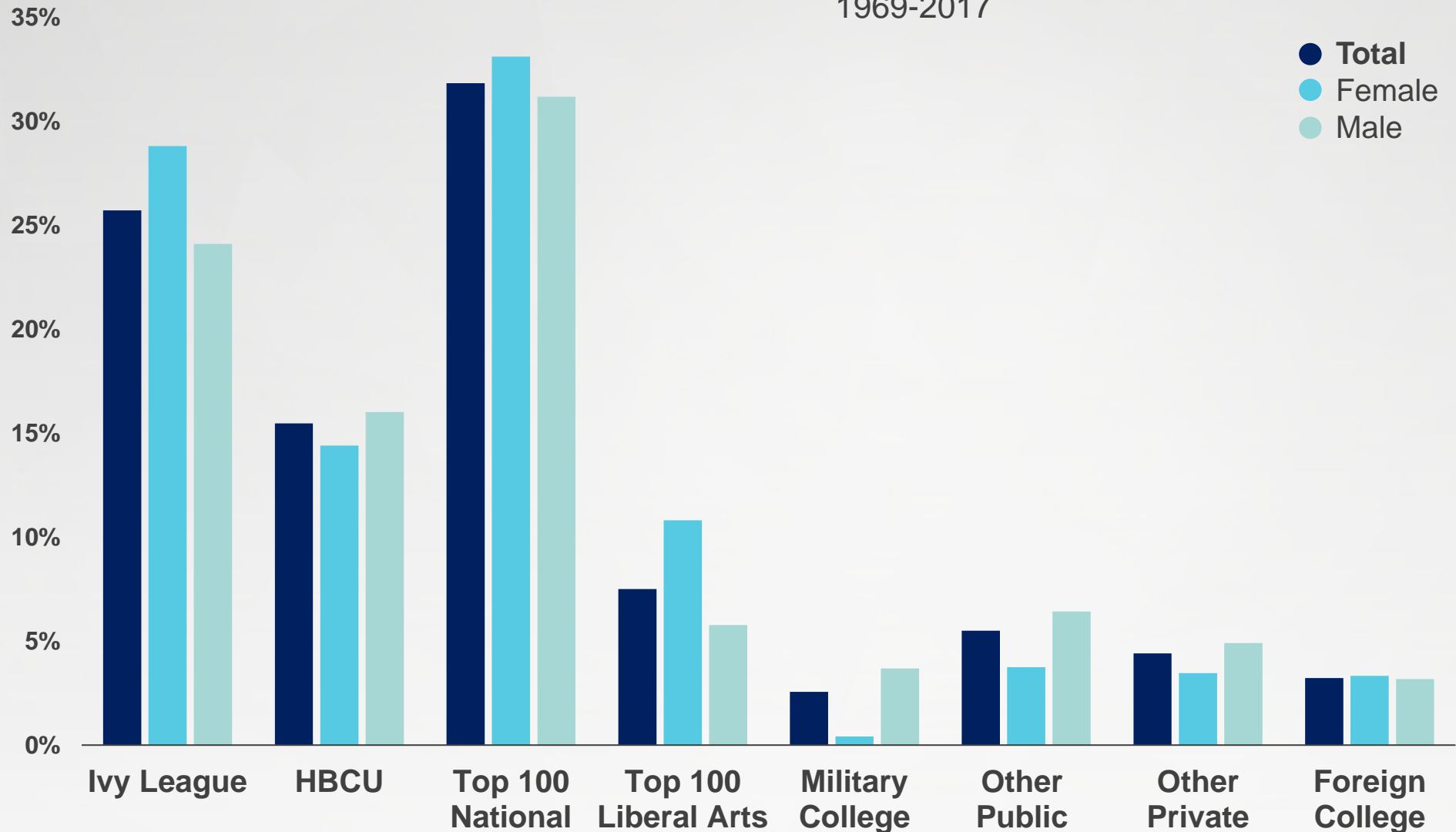
2000's











2010's

UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE

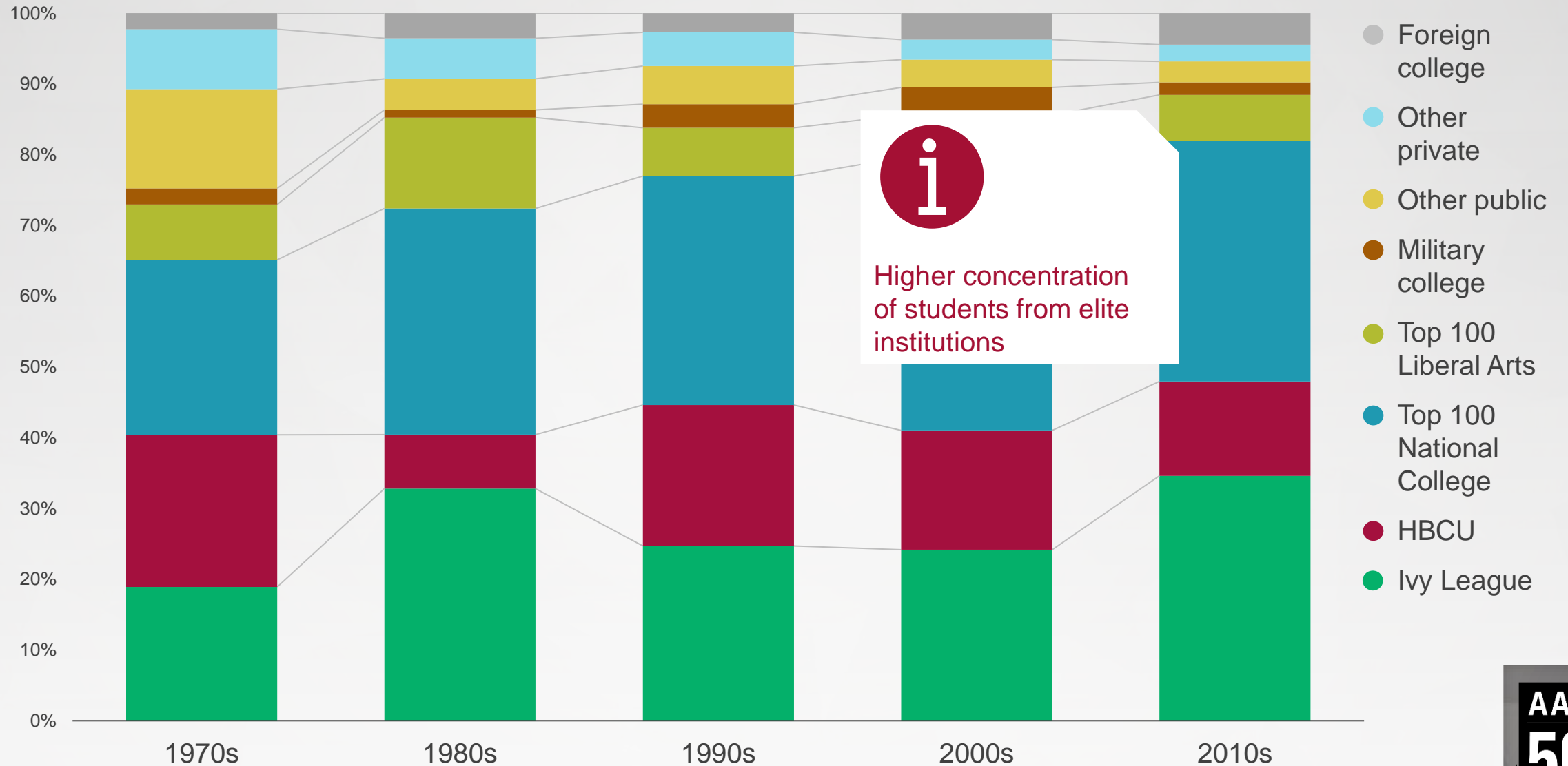
1969-2017

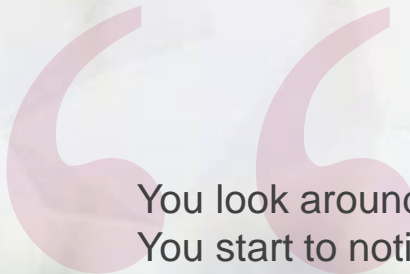
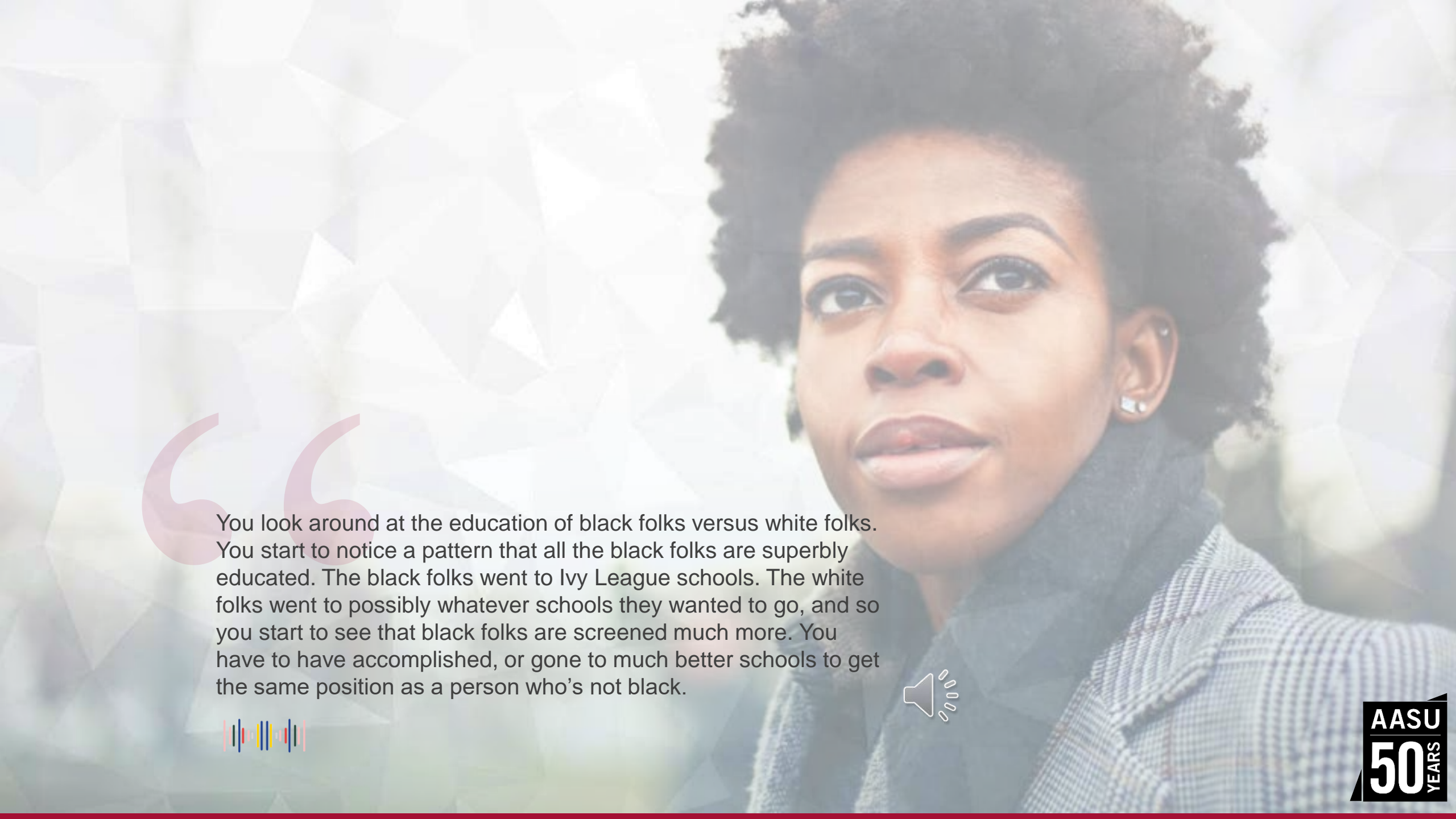


TOP 10 COLLEGES

	216 (11%)
 HOWARD UNIVERSITY	98
Stanford University	83
Yale	75
 Penn UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA	73
 Massachusetts Institute of Technology	72
 MOREHOUSE COLLEGE	69
 PRINCETON UNIVERSITY	46
 BROWN	39
 UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY WEST POINT®	35

UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE BY CLASS DECADE





You look around at the education of black folks versus white folks. You start to notice a pattern that all the black folks are superbly educated. The black folks went to Ivy League schools. The white folks went to possibly whatever schools they wanted to go, and so you start to see that black folks are screened much more. You have to have accomplished, or gone to much better schools to get the same position as a person who's not black.

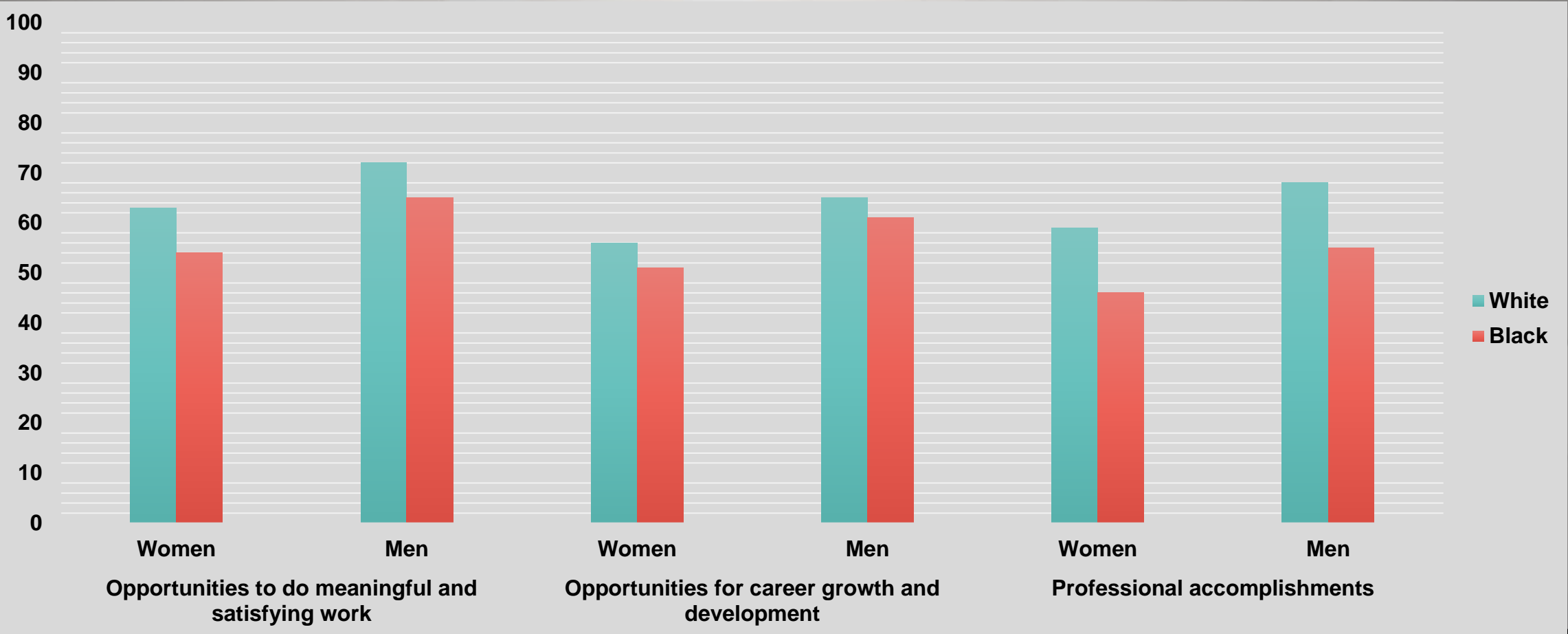




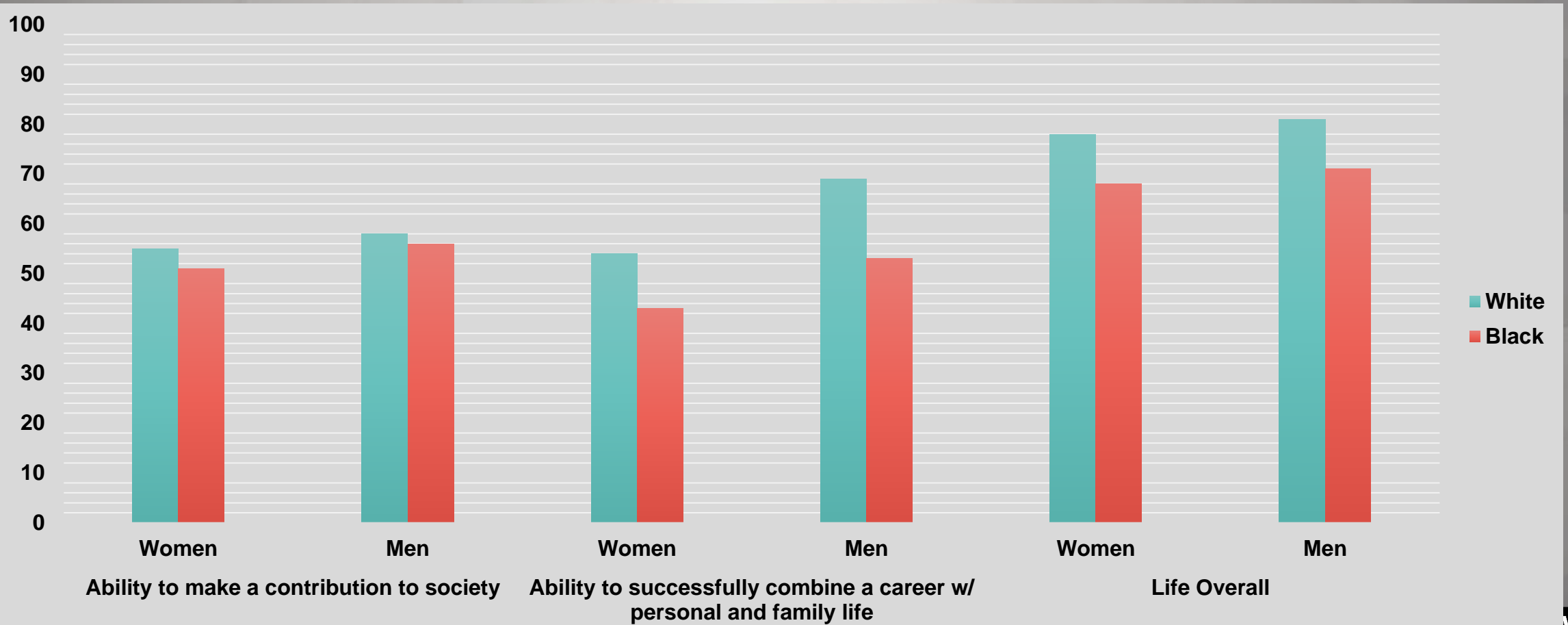
Enablers and Obstacles to Success

Based on responses to the 2015 Life and Leadership After HBS Survey and the 2017 supplemental survey

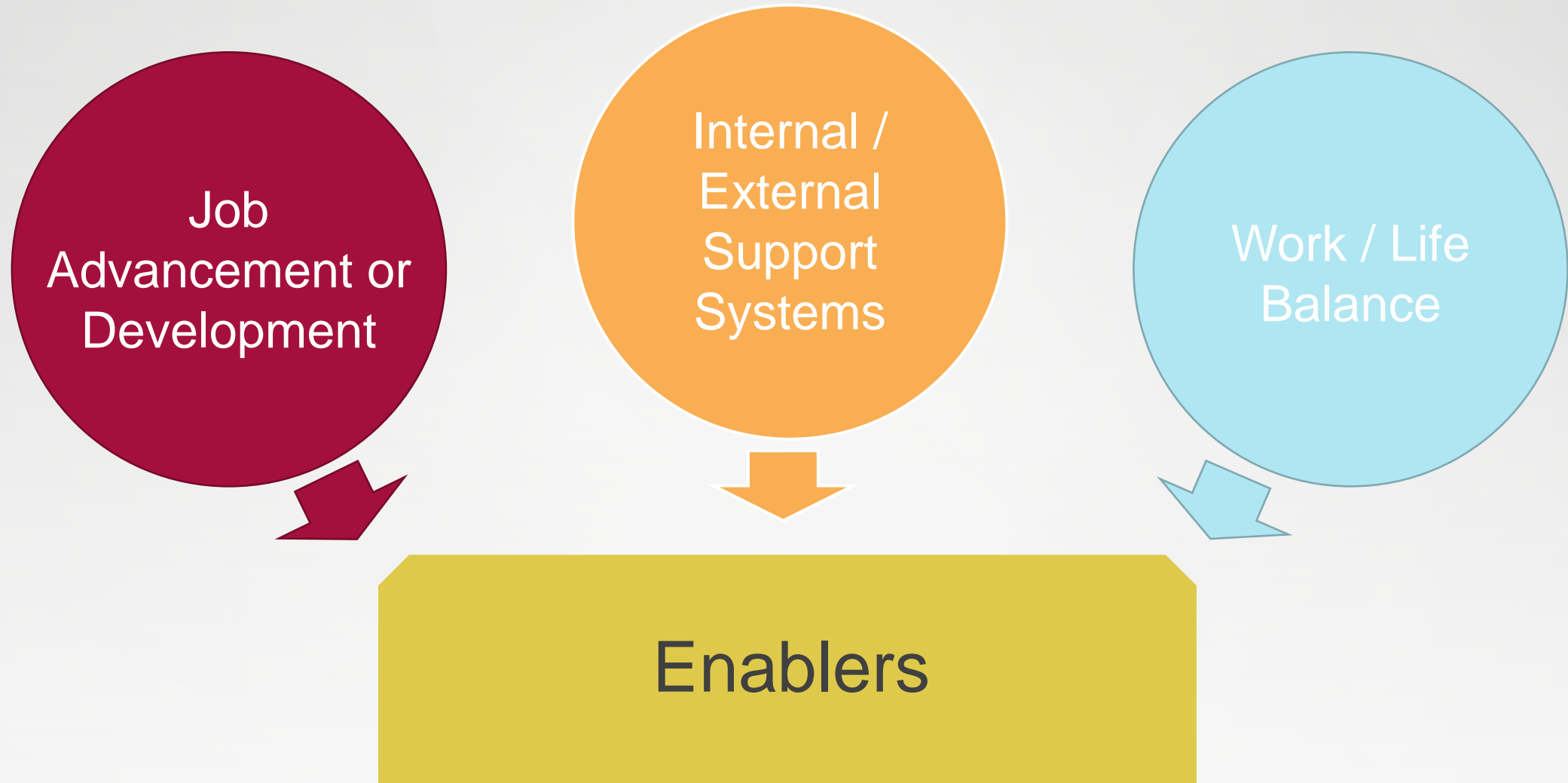
Satisfaction by Race: Work Metrics



Satisfaction by Race: Personal Metrics

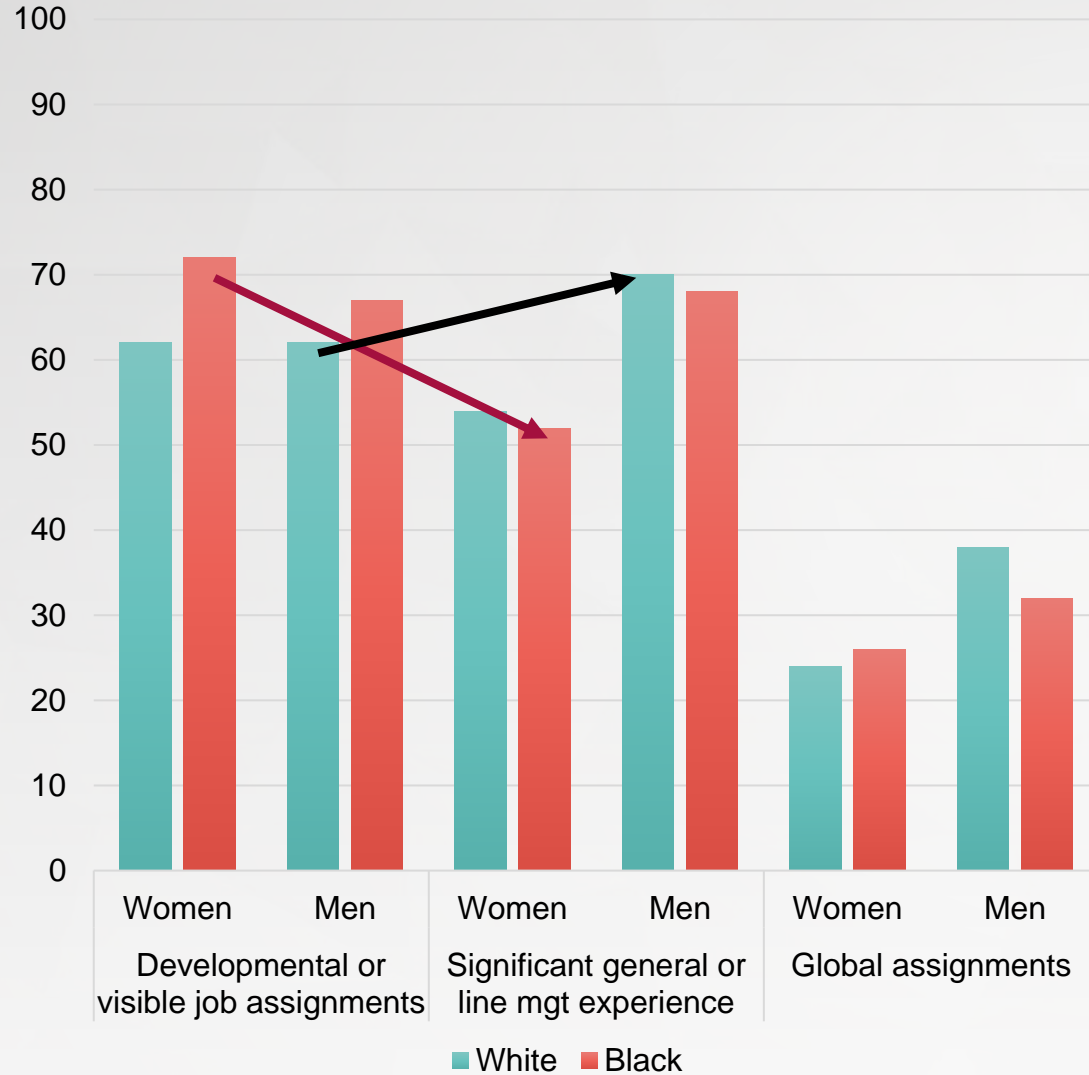


CAREER FACTORS

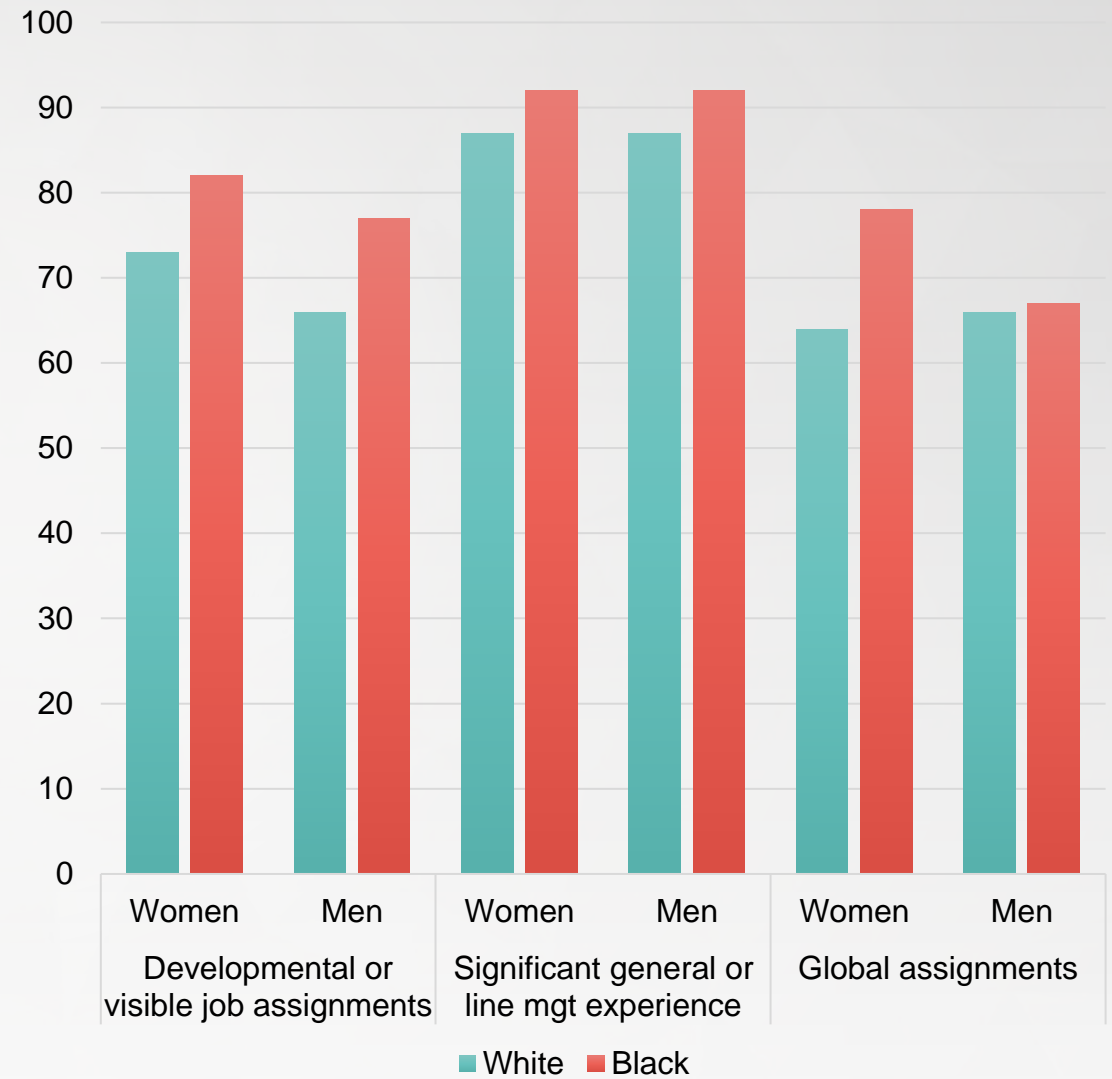


JOB ADVANCEMENT OR DEVELOPMENT

Experienced

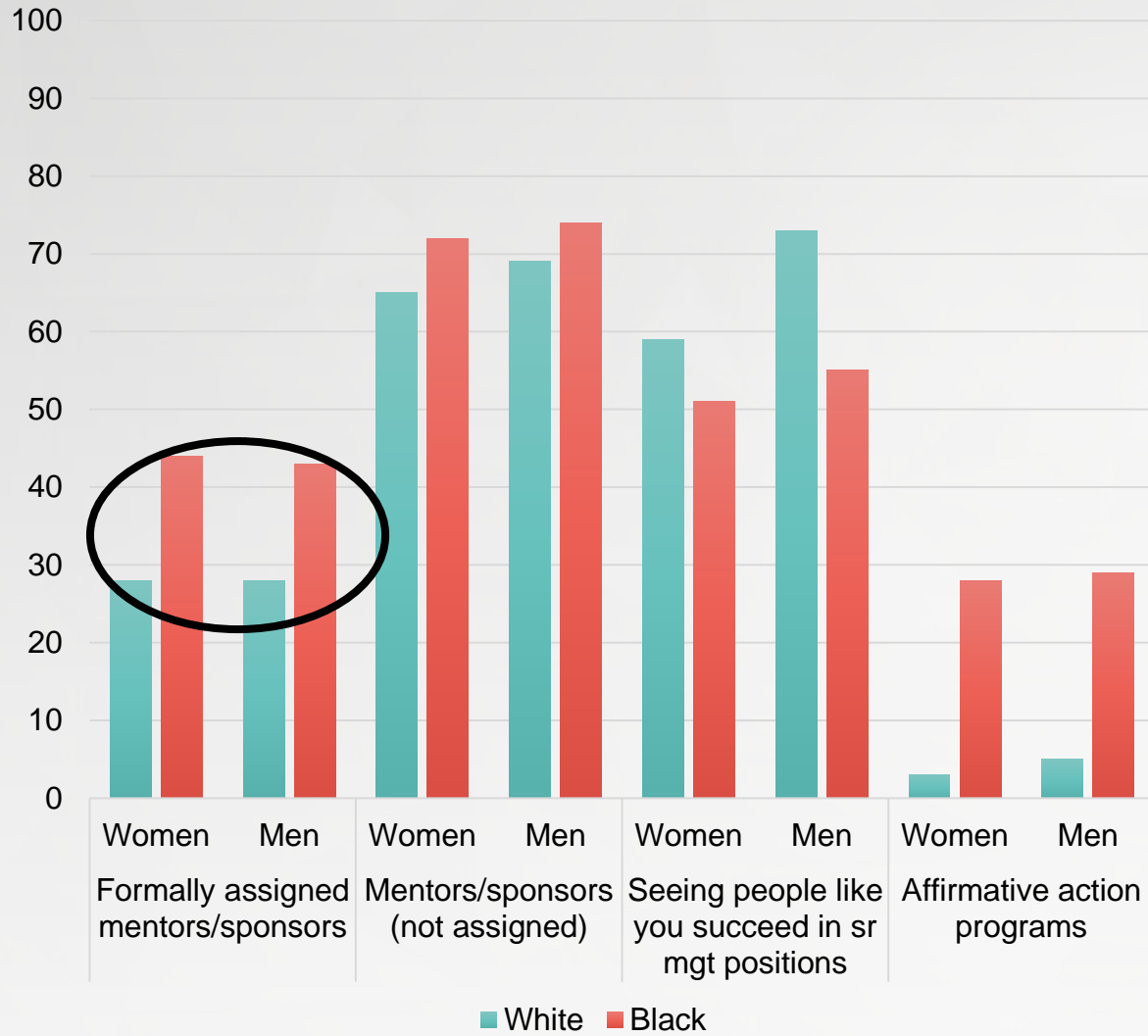


Beneficial

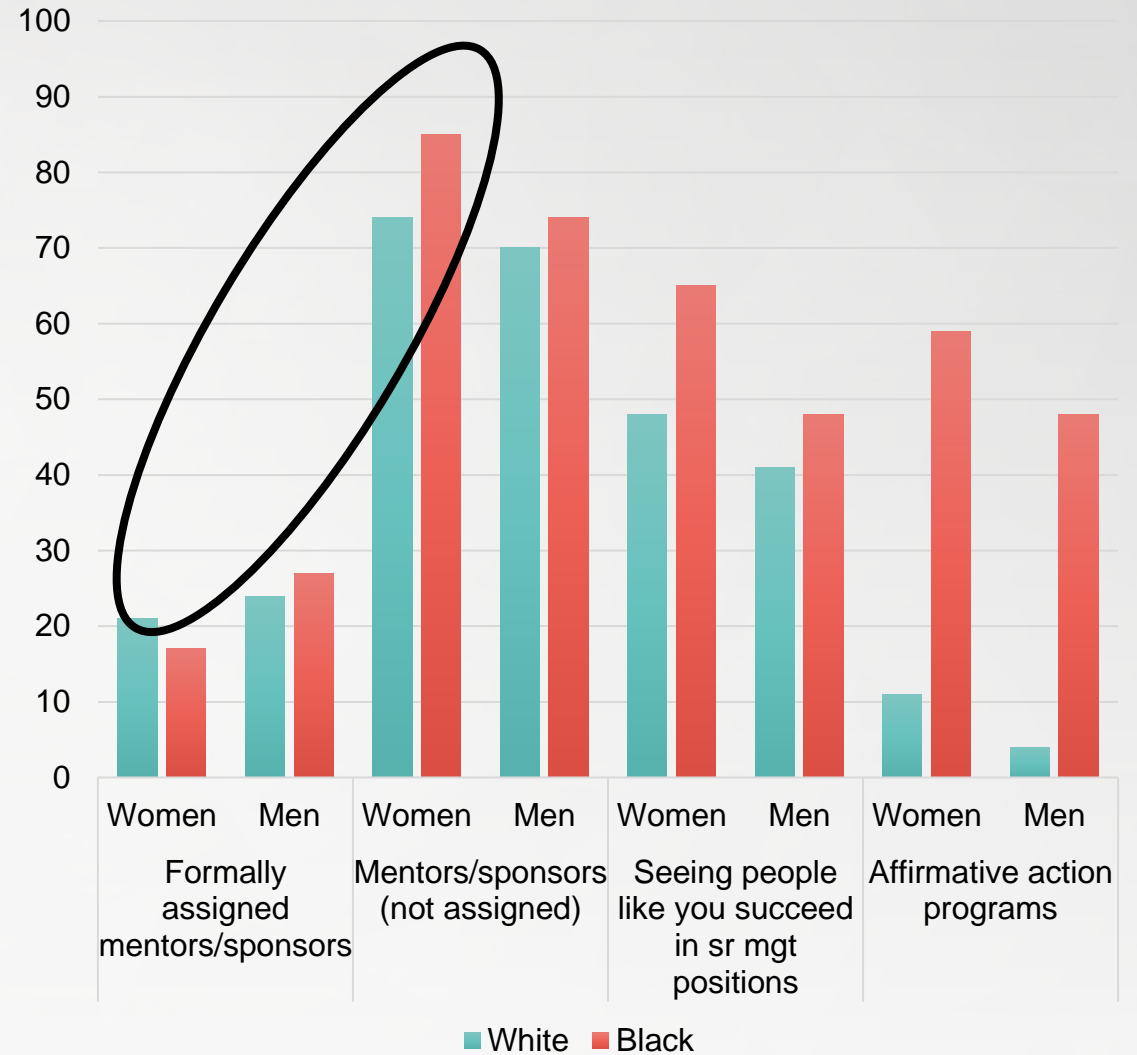


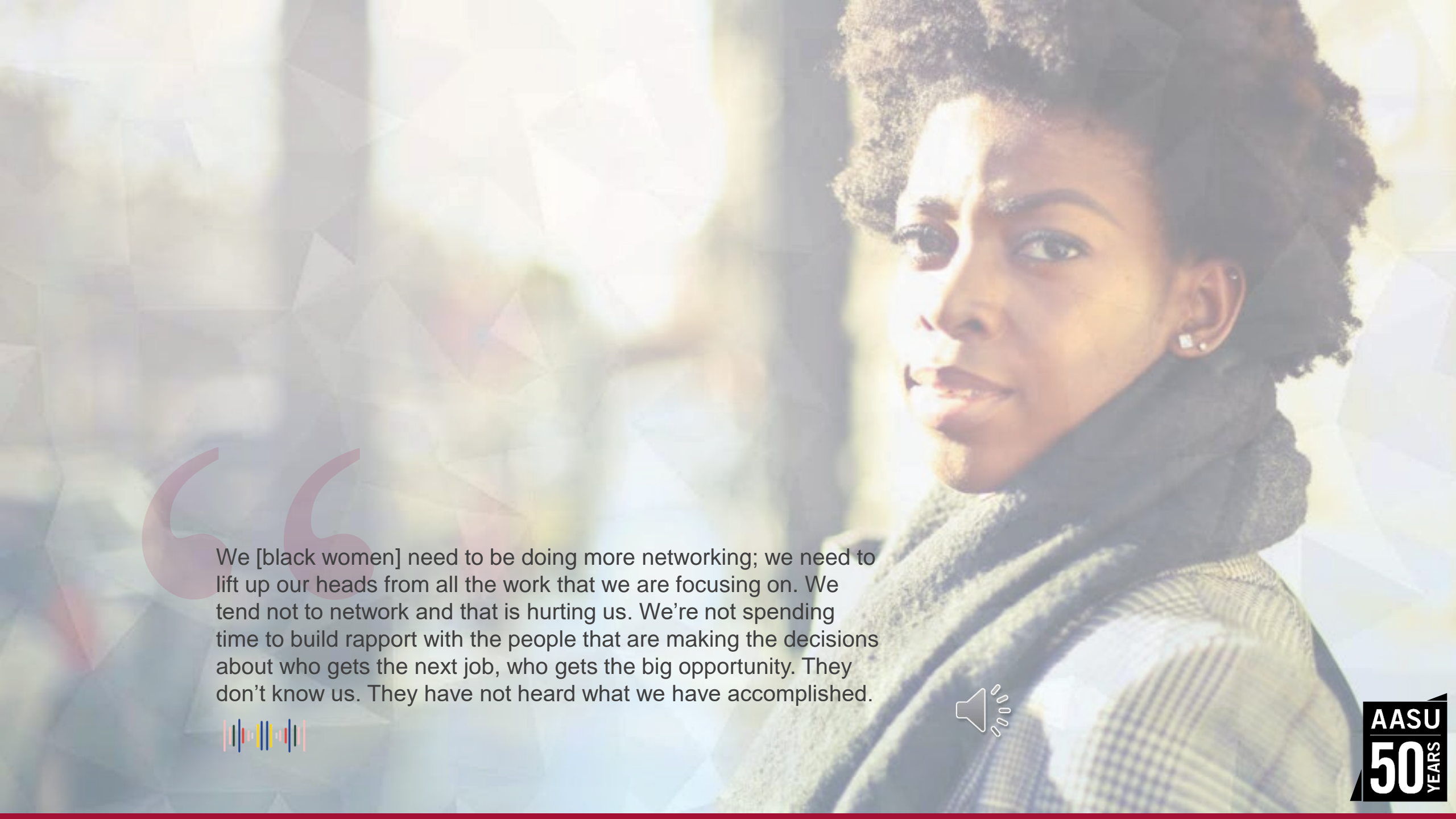
INTERNAL & EXTERNAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Experienced



Beneficial

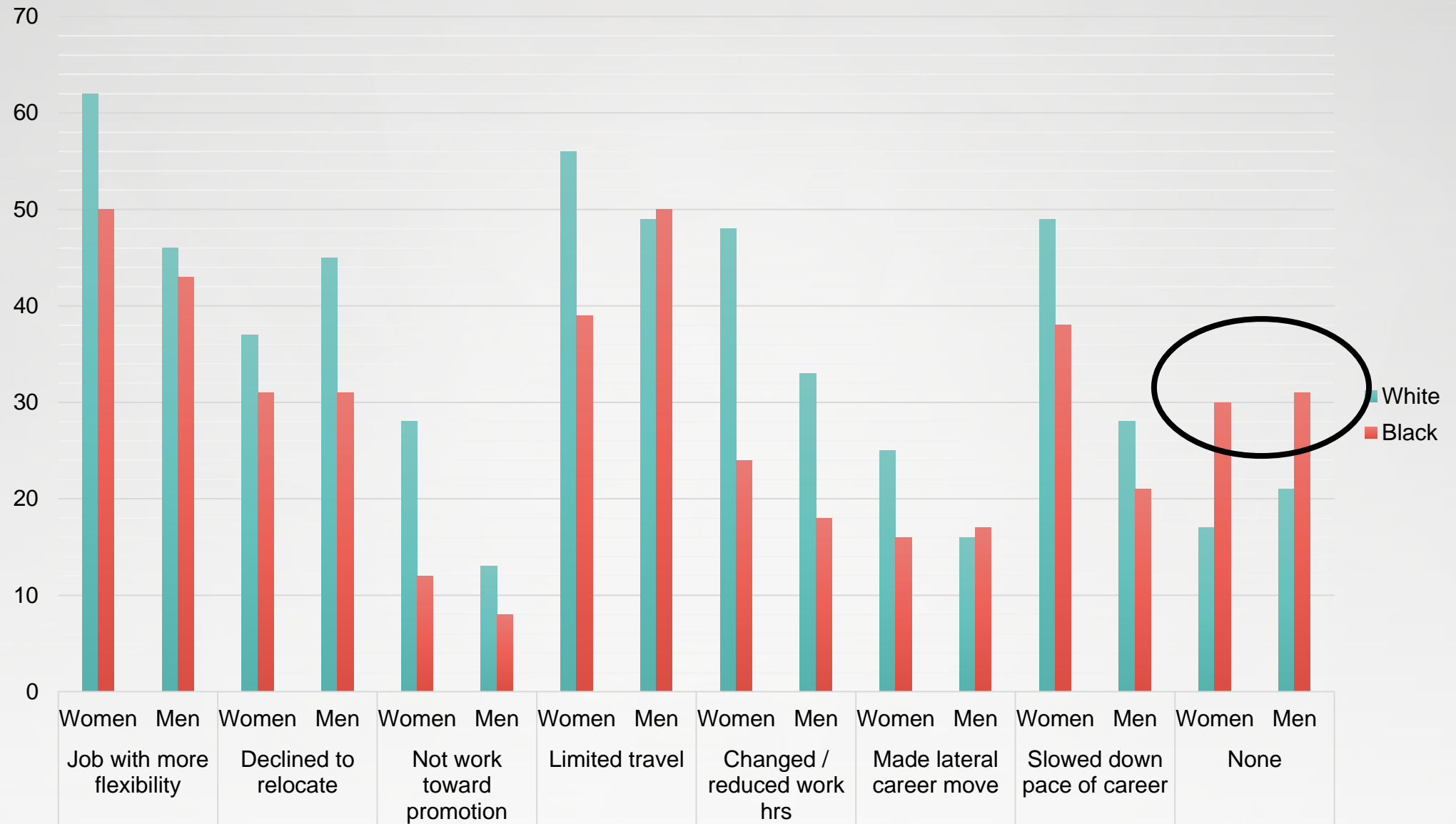




We [black women] need to be doing more networking; we need to lift up our heads from all the work that we are focusing on. We tend not to network and that is hurting us. We're not spending time to build rapport with the people that are making the decisions about who gets the next job, who gets the big opportunity. They don't know us. They have not heard what we have accomplished.

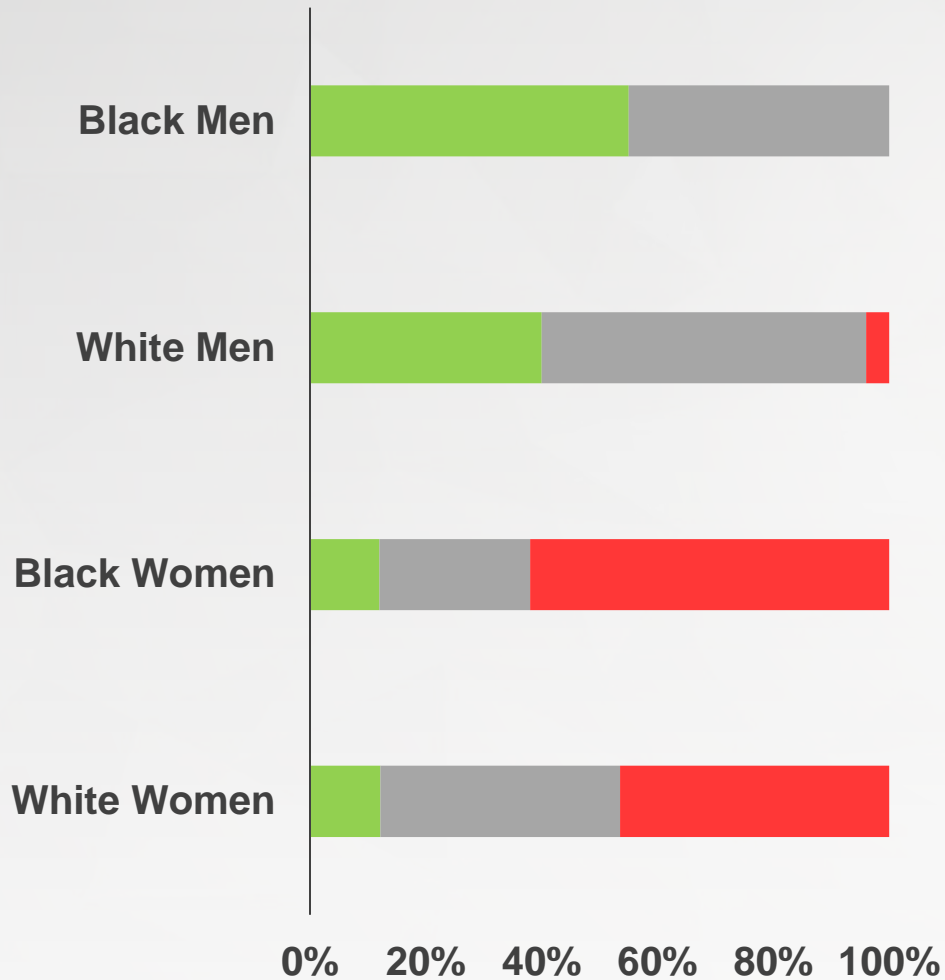


WORK ACCOMODATIONS

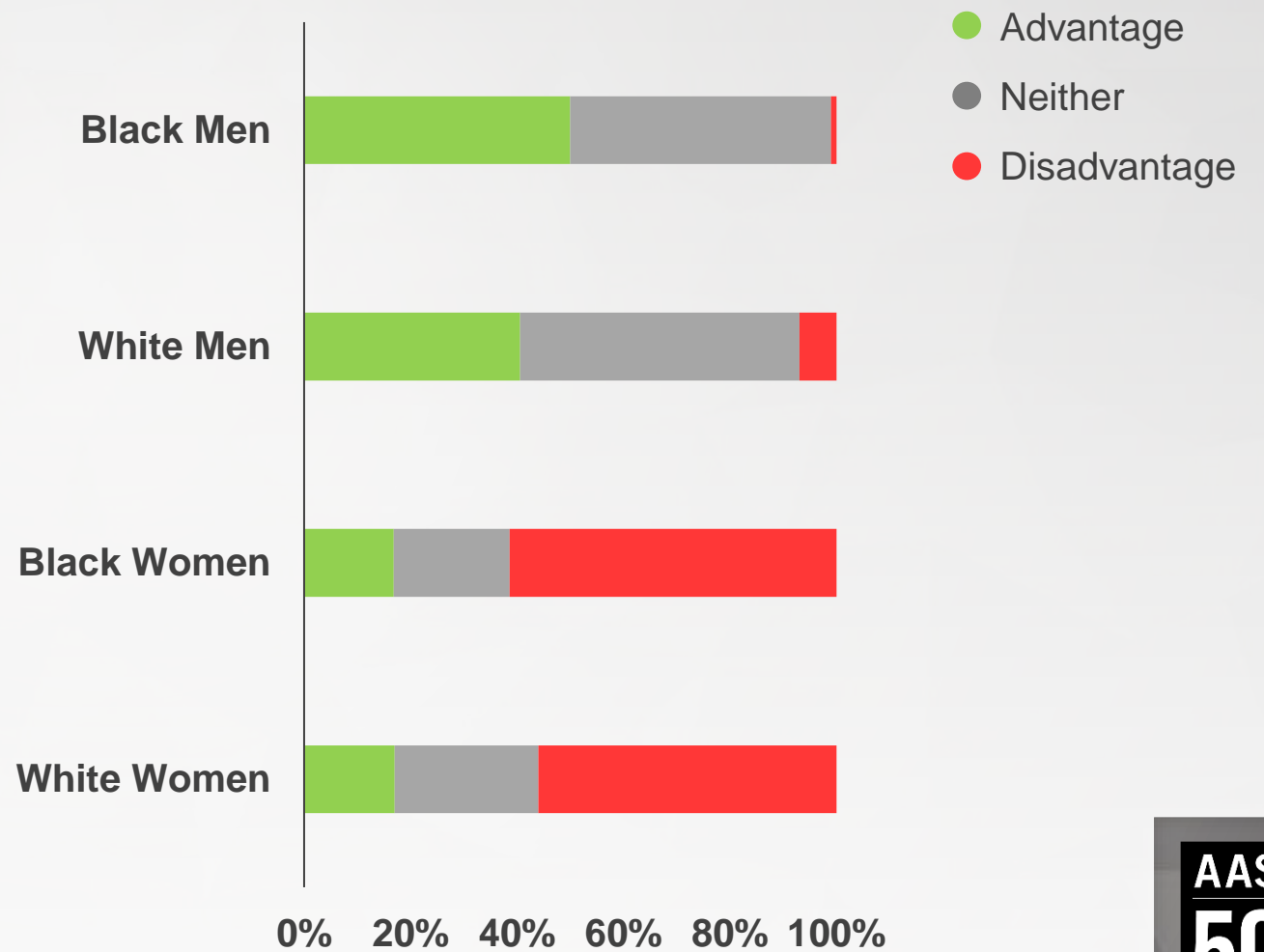


IMPACT OF GENDER ON CAREER

Leaving HBS

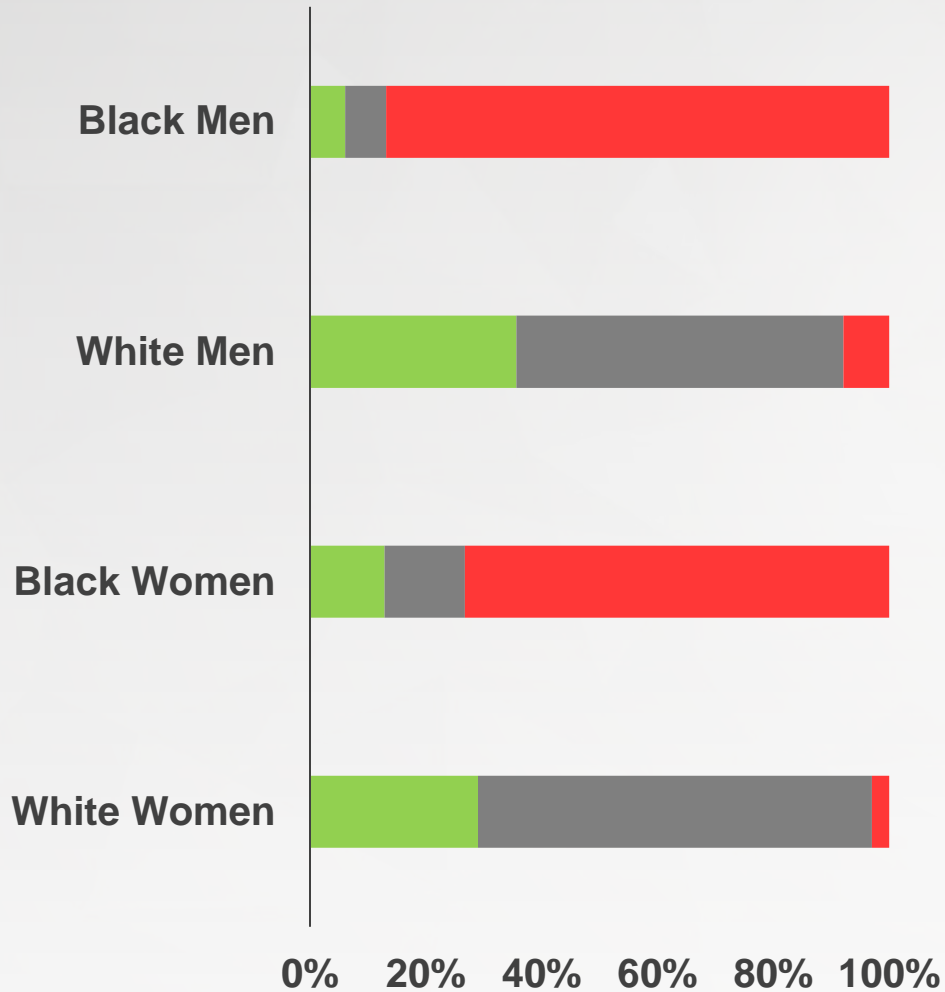


Looking Back on Your Career

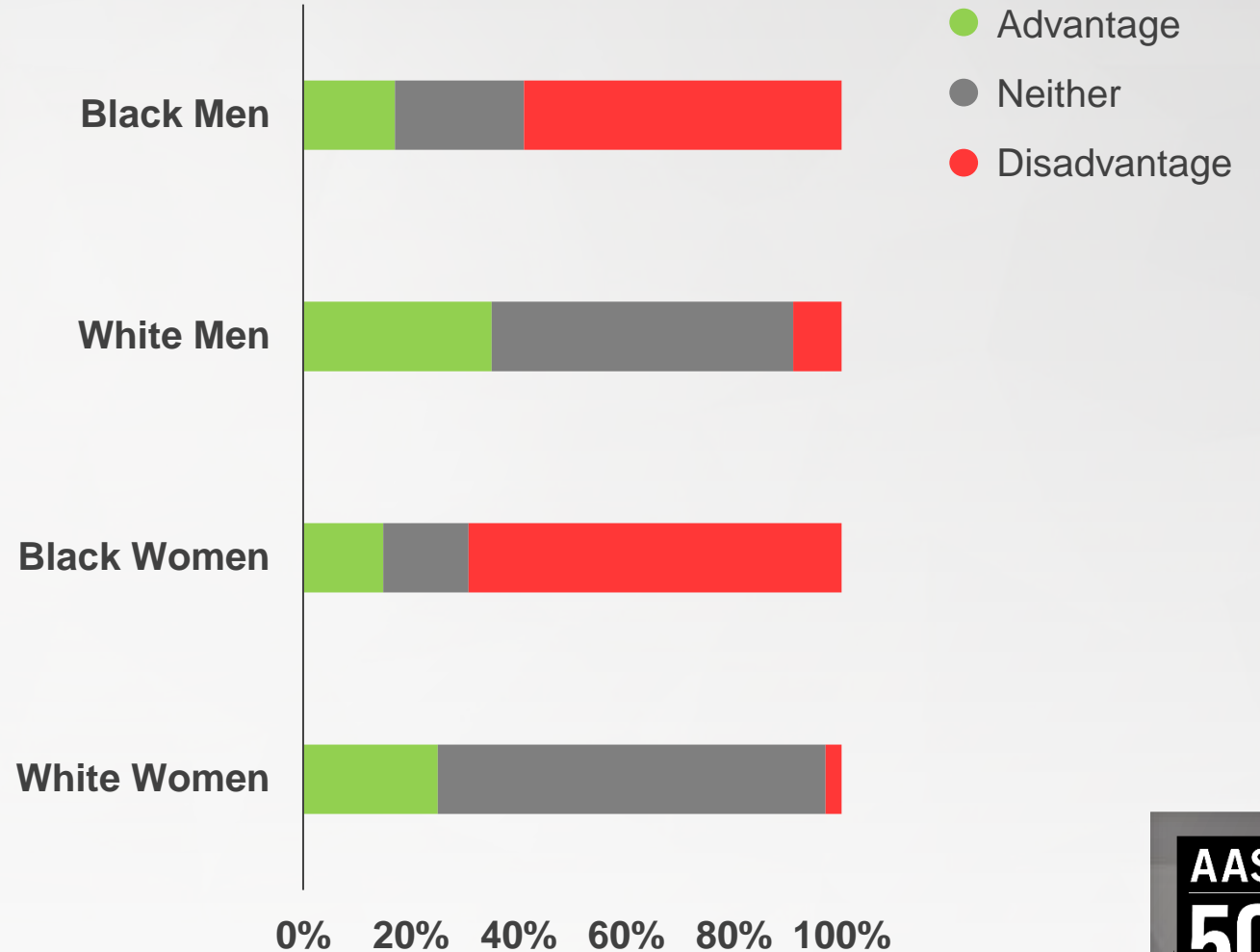


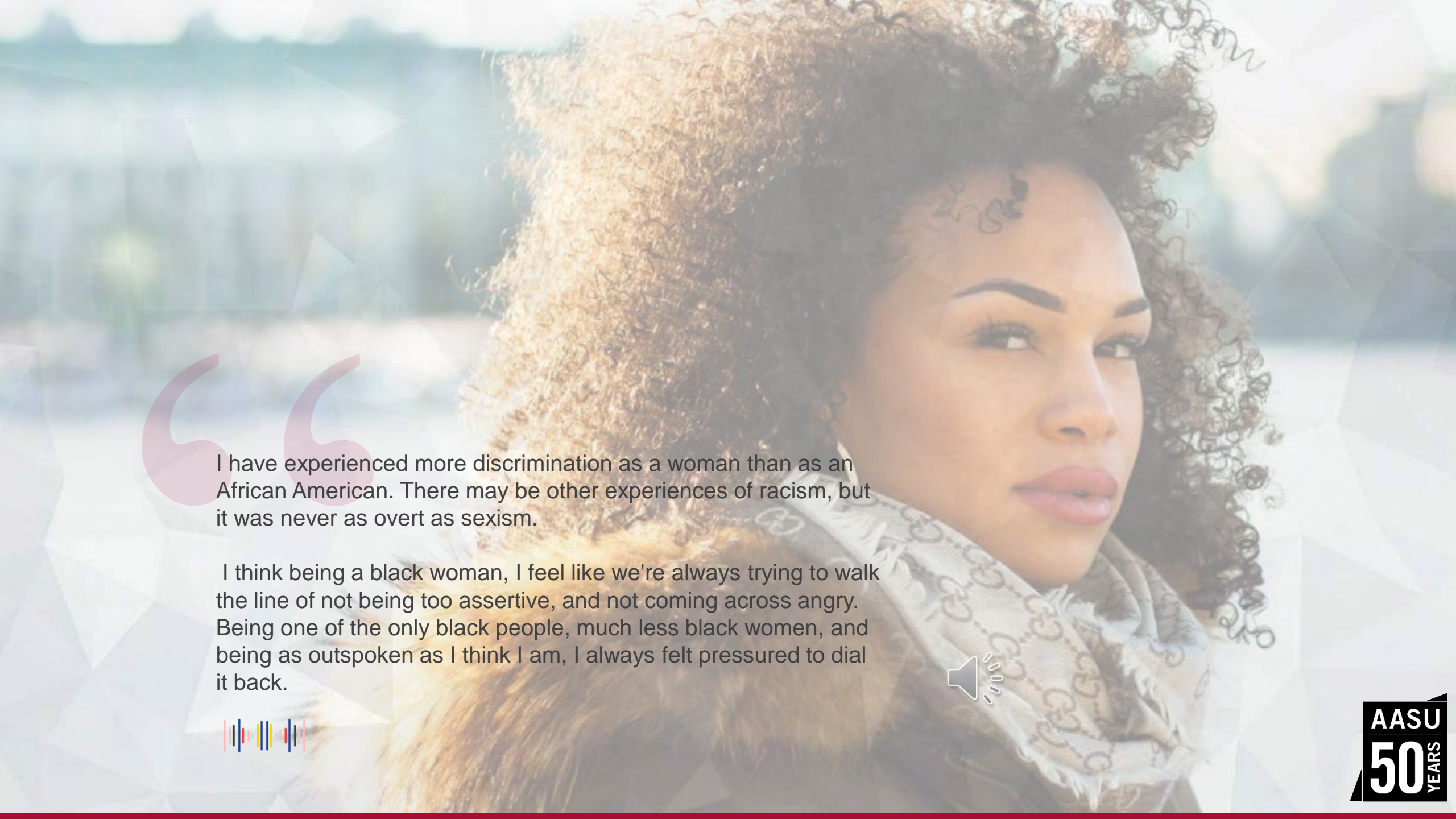
IMPACT OF RACE ON CAREER

Leaving HBS



Looking Back on Your Career





I have experienced more discrimination as a woman than as an African American. There may be other experiences of racism, but it was never as overt as sexism.

I think being a black woman, I feel like we're always trying to walk the line of not being too assertive, and not coming across angry. Being one of the only black people, much less black women, and being as outspoken as I think I am, I always felt pressured to dial it back.





Senior Executive Black Women

Research from “Beating the Odds,” *Harvard Business Review*, March-April 2018

HR.ORG MARCH-APRIL 2018

Harvard Business Review

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Peter Cappelli and Anna Tavakoli

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Thriving in the Gig Economy
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DOUBLE ISSUE

BETTER BRAINSTORMING

Why questions matter more than answers

PAGE 64

RACE Beating the Odds

By Laura Heggan Roberts, Anthony J. Hayes, Nelson J. El, and Dorela Thomas
FROM THE MARCH-APRIL 2018 ISSUE

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Amy list of top CEOs reveals a startling lack of diversity. Among the leaders of Fortune 500 companies, for example, just 32 are women; with the recent departure of Ken Chenault from American Express, just three are African-American; and not one is an African-American woman. What's going on?

This spring marks the 20th anniversary of the founding of the African-American Student Union at Harvard Business School, and in preparation for the commemoration we have been studying the careers of the approximately 2,300 alumni of African descent who have graduated from HBS since its founding, in 1908. From that group we identified 532 African-American women who graduated from 1977 to 2015. We analyzed the career paths of the 67 of them who have attained the position of chair, CEO, or other C-level executive in a corporation or senior managing director or partner in a professional services firm, and we conducted in-depth interviews with 30 of those 67.

How did these women beat the odds? Certainly, they are well prepared and highly competitive in the job market, according to our data, they have invested more years in higher education, at more-selective institutions, than their colleagues and their non-African-American classmates. Yet as is the case for all those who have managed to scale the heights of corporate America, it wasn't simply personal strengths and talents that got them there. It was the willingness and ability of others to recognize, support, and develop those strengths and talents. We wish to speak to both elements of success.

Too often we see business leaders struggle to advance members of underrepresented groups because they model their development strategies on their own paths to success. They believe they're good at spotting and supporting talent, but their support is informed by their own experience. "I looked like that five years ago, and this is what I needed to grow into the next level." Our research suggests that company leaders are best able to recognize talent and understand others' development needs when those talents and needs present themselves as they did, they often overlook—or are baffled by how to develop—talent that looks different. So in our study we asked: What lessons can aspiring leaders—specifically, women of color and members of other underrepresented groups—take from the careers of highly successful African-American women? Moreover, what can corporate leaders learn about how to spot and develop black women's talents, and what might such lessons teach us about how to cultivate the talents of underrepresented groups more generally?

"I think the experience of being black in America creates resilience—a steady steadiness. And it creates courage and pride. Not pride in a boastful way, but being proud, as you need to be in moments when you feel completely rejected, completely ignored, overlooked, sidelined."

—A senior executive of a Fortune 50 financial services firm

In simple terms, the answer to the question of what it takes to succeed can be reduced to a single capacity: resilience. To be sure, resilience has been widely celebrated as a character virtue in the past decade, and it plays a role in every success narrative, regardless of a person's race or gender. But the African-American women we interviewed seemed to rely more heavily than others on that quality, because of the frequency with which they encountered obstacles and setbacks resulting

AASU
50
YEARS

▶ Top Executive Analysis

	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	Total
Alumni	33	167	356	493	332	1381
Women	9	61	123	199	140	532
Men	24	106	233	294	192	849
Top Executive	14	48	90	68	8	228
Women	3	14	23	23	4	67
Men	11	34	67	45	4	161

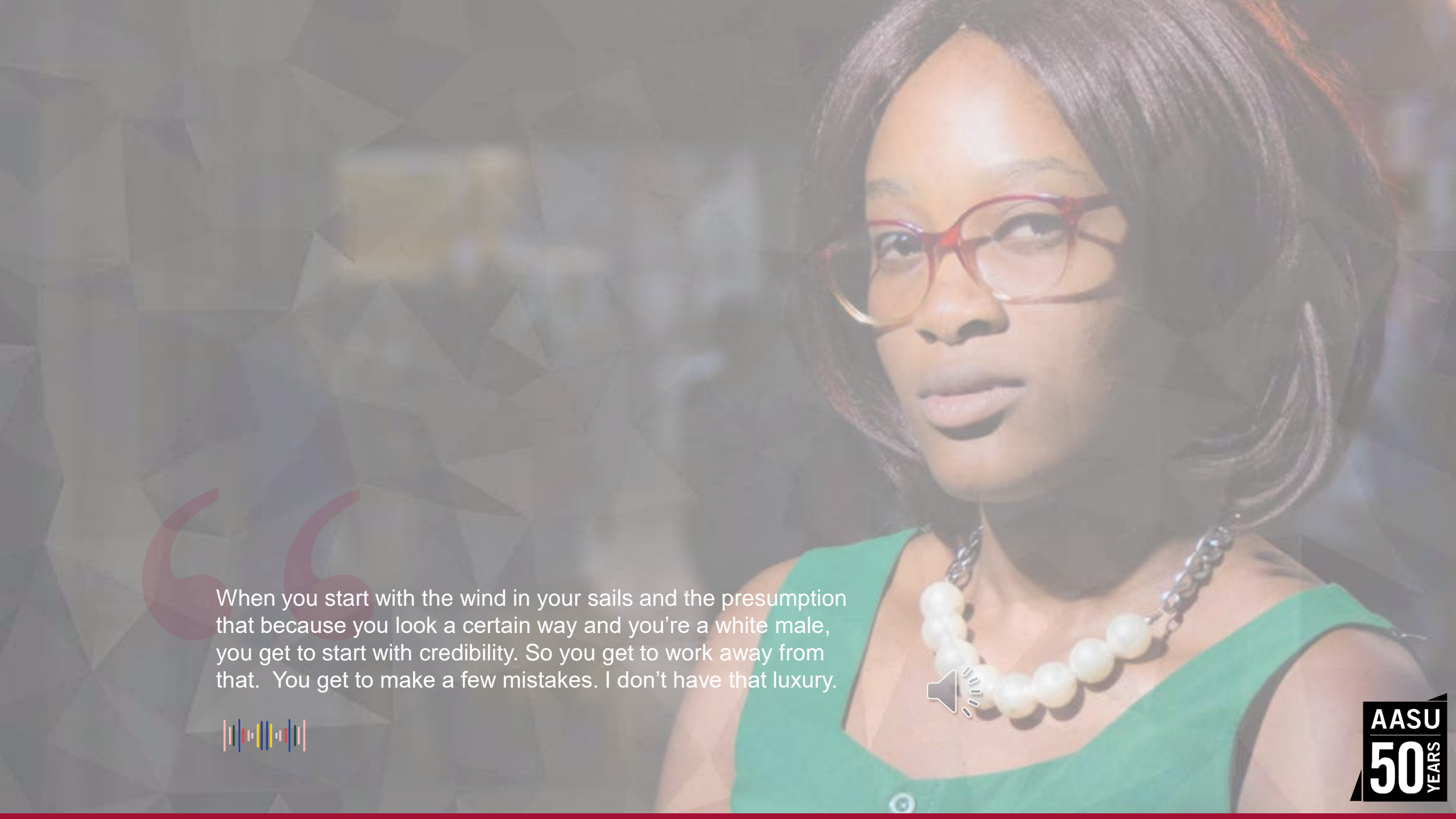
▶ Top Executive Analysis

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 Less than 13%
 made it to the top

▶ Navigating the Visibility/Invisibility Conundrum

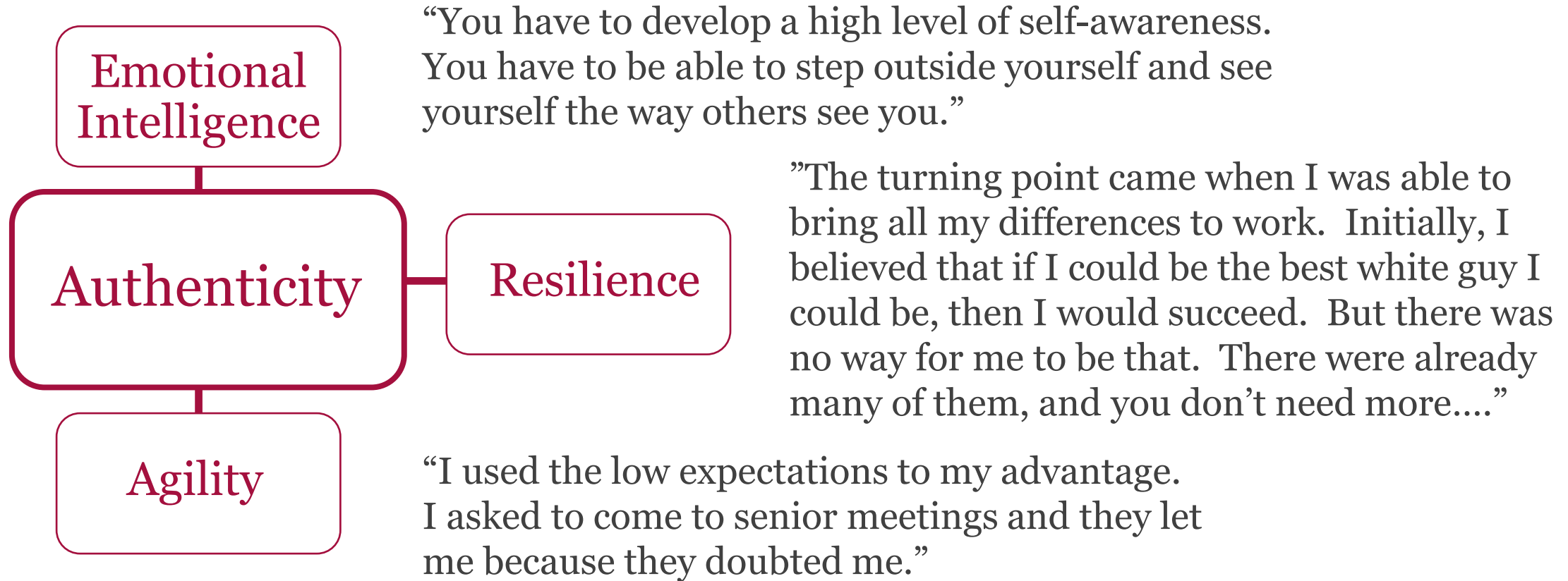




When you start with the wind in your sails and the presumption that because you look a certain way and you're a white male, you get to start with credibility. So you get to work away from that. You get to make a few mistakes. I don't have that luxury.



▶ Beating the Odds



▶ What Organizations and Leaders Can Do

- Real commitment to the pipeline
 - Connect diversity to business results
 - Broaden awareness of potential bias
 - Move away from “one size fits all” approach to diversity
 - Measure progress and make it visible
 - **Cultivate and develop relationships across difference:
Mentors and Champions are essential**
-

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

Still Important for Outsiders



**PERSONAL
NETWORKS**



**PROFESSIONAL
CREDENTIALS**



PERSEVERANCE

Keys to Success

MENTORS & SPONSORS

**THIRST FOR
LEARNING**

RESILIENCE