

Meaning and Purpose in Later Life: How Age, Race and Other Factors Shape Our Options for Work, Learning, and Civic Engagement

November 12, 2020





BOSTON COLLEGE
School of Social Work

What is intersectionality and how can we apply it to living a life of meaning and purpose?

Christina Matz, PhD, MSW

Boston College

The Center on Aging & Work at Boston College

*Focuses on a defining issue of our time: the
intersection of aging & work*

Vision

To make longer life a better life.

Mission

To promote quality and choice of paid and unpaid work across the lifespan, with a particular focus on older adults.

*We work to consider the “whole person”—mind,
body, social, and emotional aspects—in the
context of vocation and across the lifespan.*



Overall, the US has seen huge increases in longevity since 1900

MALE LIFE EXPECTANCY BY AGE AND YEAR

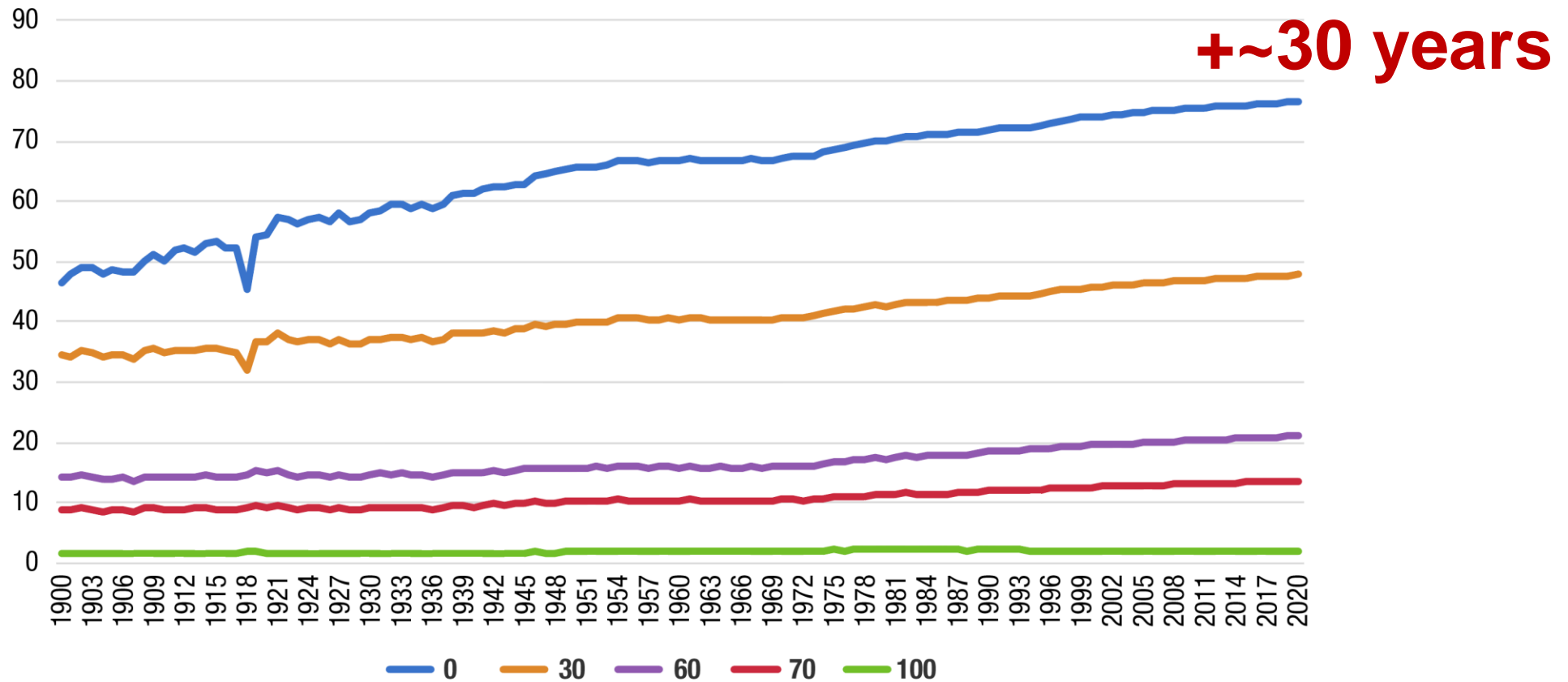


Chart: Manhattan Institute / Source: Social Security Administration

Entering New Territory

“All of us are now in uncharted territory, a stage of life not seen before in human history. And whether woman or man, whether working-class or professional, we are all wondering how we’ll live, what we’ll do, who we’ll be for the next twenty or thirty years.”

*Lillian Rubin, *Sixty on Up: The Truth about Aging in America*, p. 54*

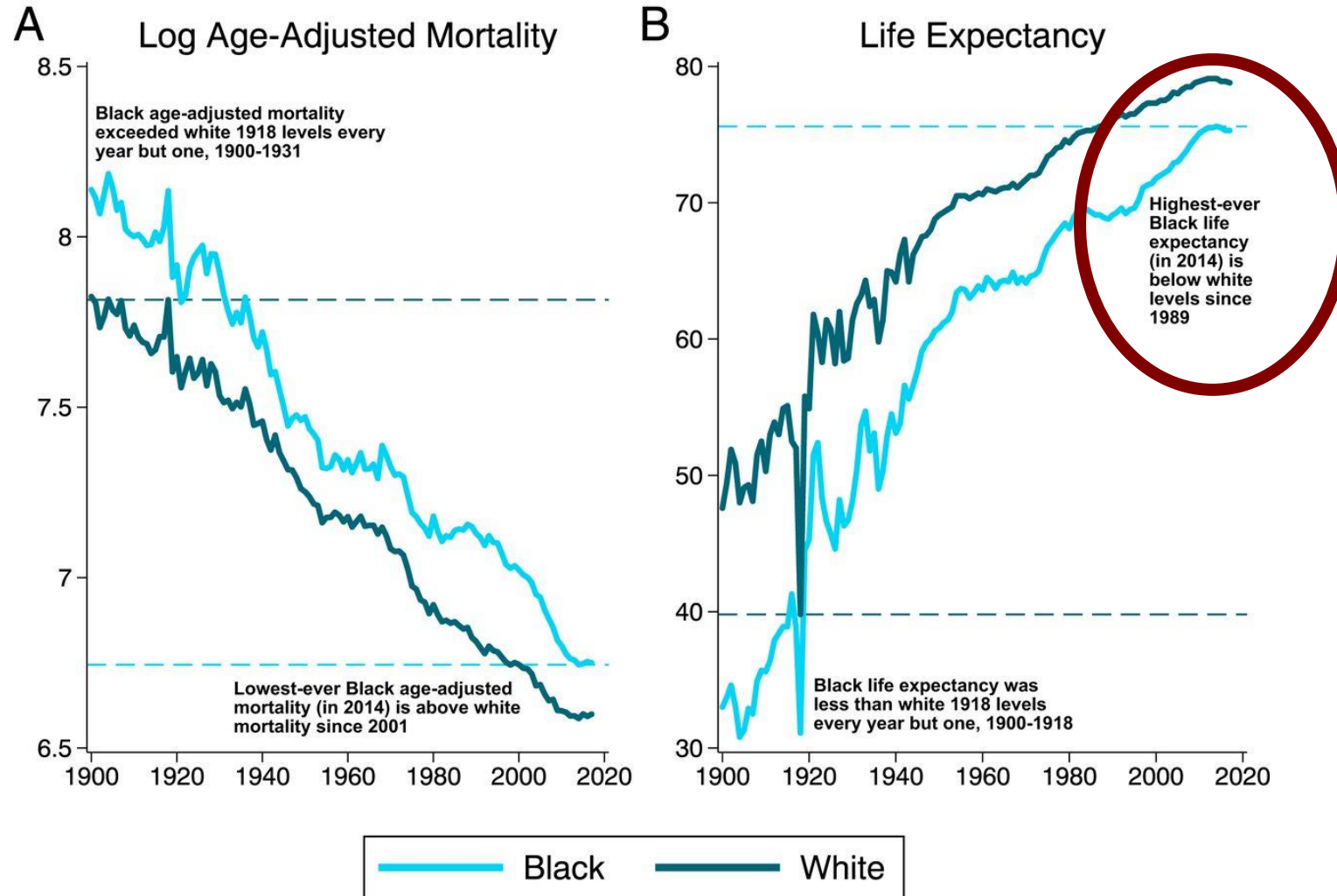


Our Frame Matters

Aggregated data often obscures the most important information- how the most marginalized are faring.



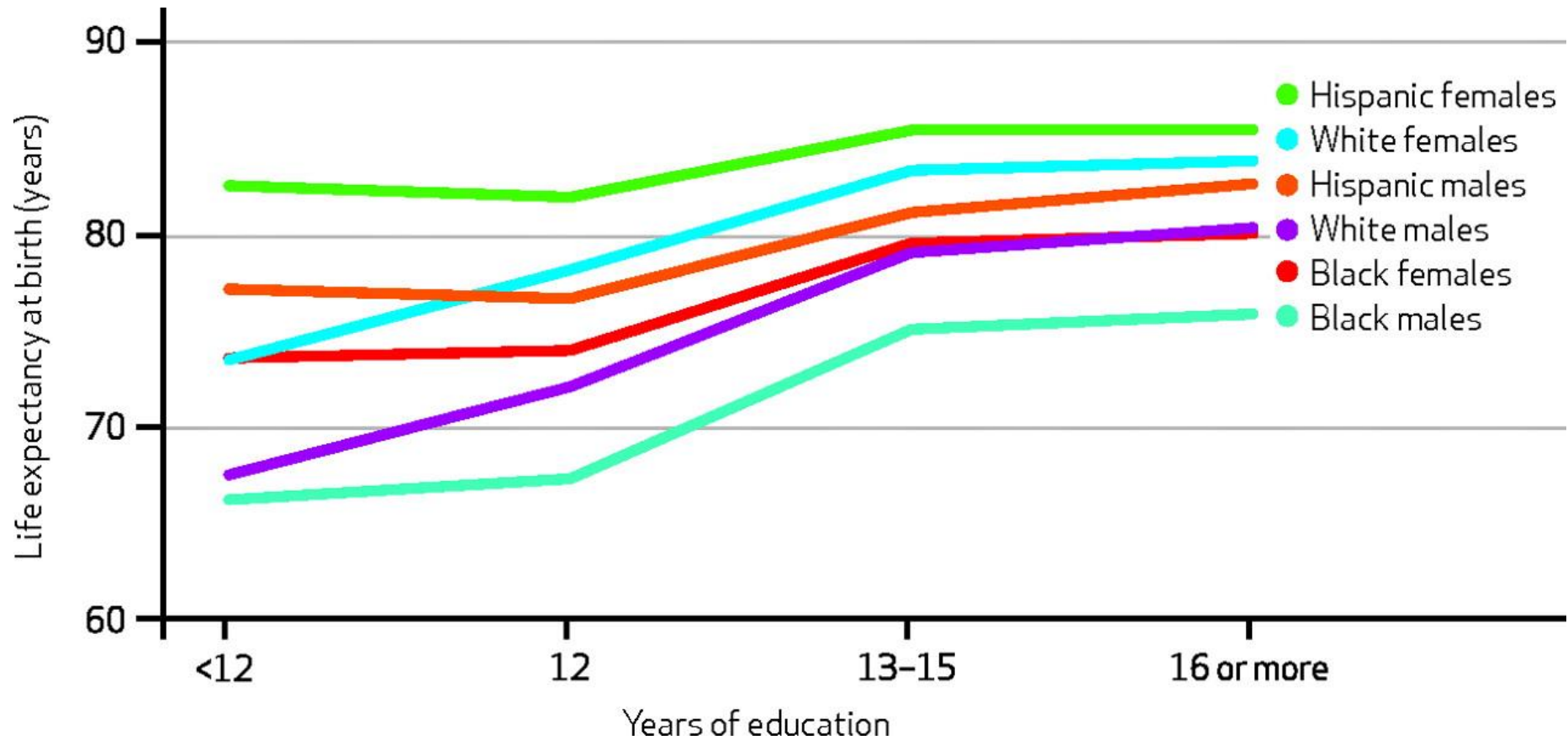
US Black and White (A) logged deaths per 100,000 and (B) life expectancy, 1900–2017.



Elizabeth Wrigley-Field PNAS 2020;117:36:21854-21856



Racial, Gender, Social Class Inequalities in Life Expectancy: Life Expectancy at Birth by Years of Education at Age 25 (2012)

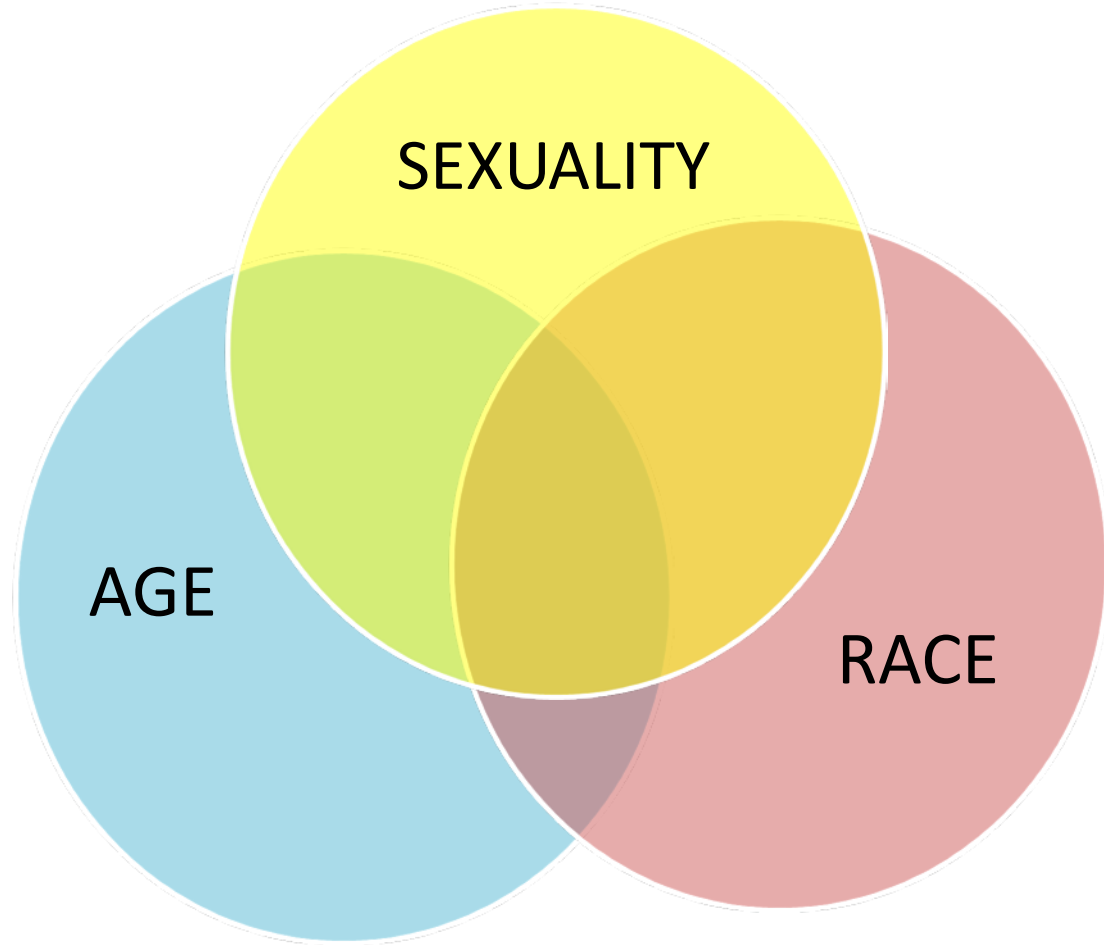


Olshansky S J et al. *Health Aff* 2012;31:1803-1813

©2012 by Project HOPE - The People-to-People Health Foundation, Inc.

HealthAffairs

So, what is intersectionality?



Some identities garner **privilege** and **power**, while others **oppression** and **marginalization**.

Identities are **not mutually exclusive** and you must look at their intersection so as to not miss important injustices faced.

What are some social identities?

- Age
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Gender identity
- Sexuality
- Religion
- Language
- Nativity
- Education
- Occupation
- Wealth
- Family/Friends
- Ability/Disability
- Health/Wellness
- Appearance
- Region/Locality
- Weight
- Mental Illness/Diagnosis
- Among others...

Why Black aging matters, too

POVERTY :: by JUDITH GRAHAM | KAISER HEALTH NEWS | SEPTEMBER 6, 2020 | VIEW AS "CLEAN READ"



Old. Chronically ill. Black.

People who fit this description are more likely to die from COVID-19 than any other group in the country.

They are perishing quietly, out of sight, in homes and apartment buildings, senior housing complexes, nursing homes and hospitals, **disproportionately poor, frail** and ill, after enduring a lifetime of racism and its attendant **adverse health effects**.

Yet, older Black Americans have received little attention as protesters proclaim that Black Lives Matter and experts churn out studies about the coronavirus.

Race & Age

COVID-19 Takes Aim at Aging Black Americans

Death rates per 100,000 U.S. population by age, race and Hispanic origin

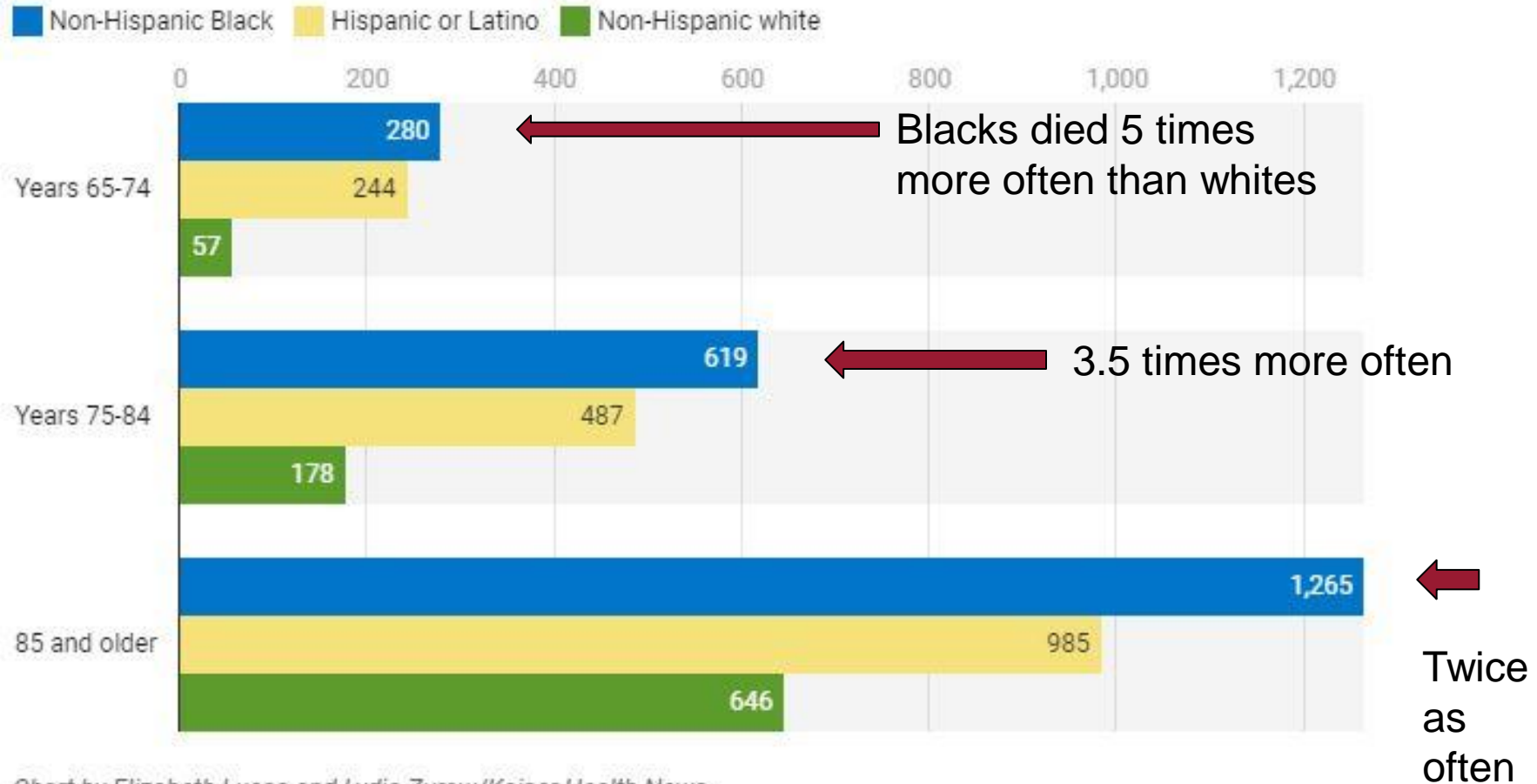


Chart by Elizabeth Lucas and Lydia Zuraw/Kaiser Health News

Source: KHN analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data from the week ending Feb. 1 through the week ending Aug. 8.

[Embed](#)

(Source: <https://ctmirror.org/2020/09/06/why-black-aging-matters-too/>)

Why?? Social Determinants of Health

Social Determinants of Health:

“the conditions in the places where people live, learn, work, and play that affect a wide range of health risks and outcomes.” (Healthy People 2020)

Older adults from communities of color and indigenous people are more likely to experience cumulative adversity in their lifetime, the outcomes of which are magnified by the lack of health insurance and adequate access to health care over the life course.

(Buchmueller et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2016).

What can we do?

*Those most proximal to the inequity must be given voice to propose and implement solutions.

<p style="text-align: center;">Ageism Intersecting with Racism and other 'isms</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Dismantle structural racism and other ingrained systems of inequity and to interrogate the assumptions that shape access to choice and opportunity across the life course and in later life.</p>	
<p>Work environments and employment policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good quality jobs across the lifecourse that pay a living wage• A comfortable retirement	<p>Caregiving and other forms of care work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Properly supported across the lifespan and in later life particularly• Individuals and families have increased control and choice and reduced stress.
<p>Diverse opportunities to give back to others and to engage socially</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Civic engagement• Informal helping• Social connections	<p>Age-friendly educational institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accessible, inclusive, affordable• Allow for developing new knowledge and skills across the life course

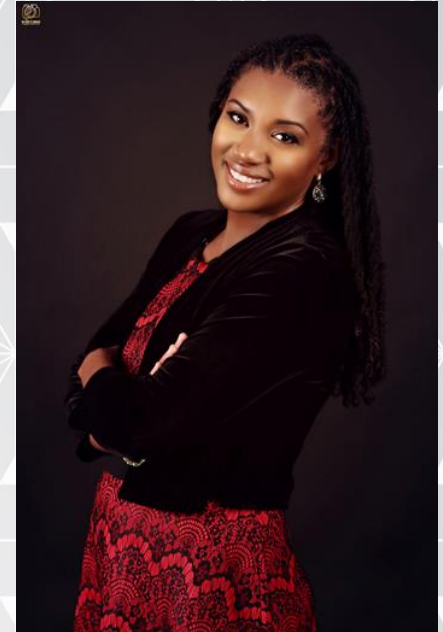


UNC CHARLOTTE

College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

Department of Sociology

**RACIAL INJUSTICE AT WORK, COVID-19, AND
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
BLACK LOW-WAGE WORKERS**



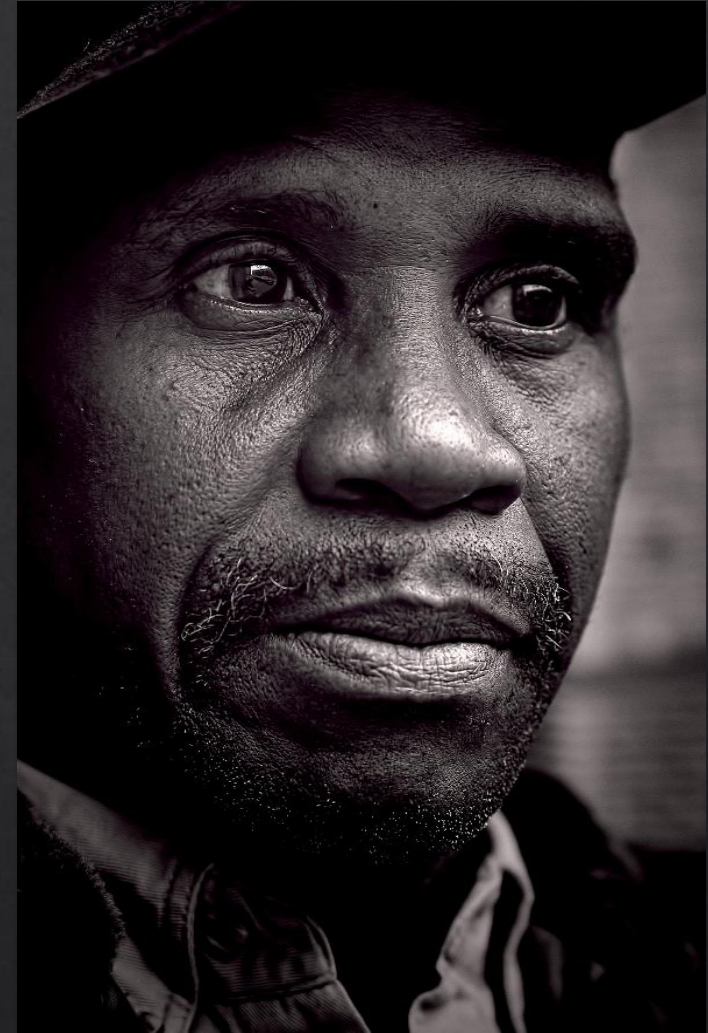
Kendra Jason, PhD

My Research Objectives

- ◆ To identify the health and work challenges of older Black, low-wage, full-time workers with chronic illnesses
- ◆ To understand how workplace environment fosters or hinders their ability to work
- ◆ To identify workers' strategies to remain engaged in the workforce despite health problems
- ◆ Further develop intervention and recommendations to help them remain in engaged in work for as long as they desire

Please see my website for research, teaching, service and recorded talks:
<https://pages.uncc.edu/kendra-jason/>

Black workers disproportionately face
challenges in labor market
compensation and retirement benefits

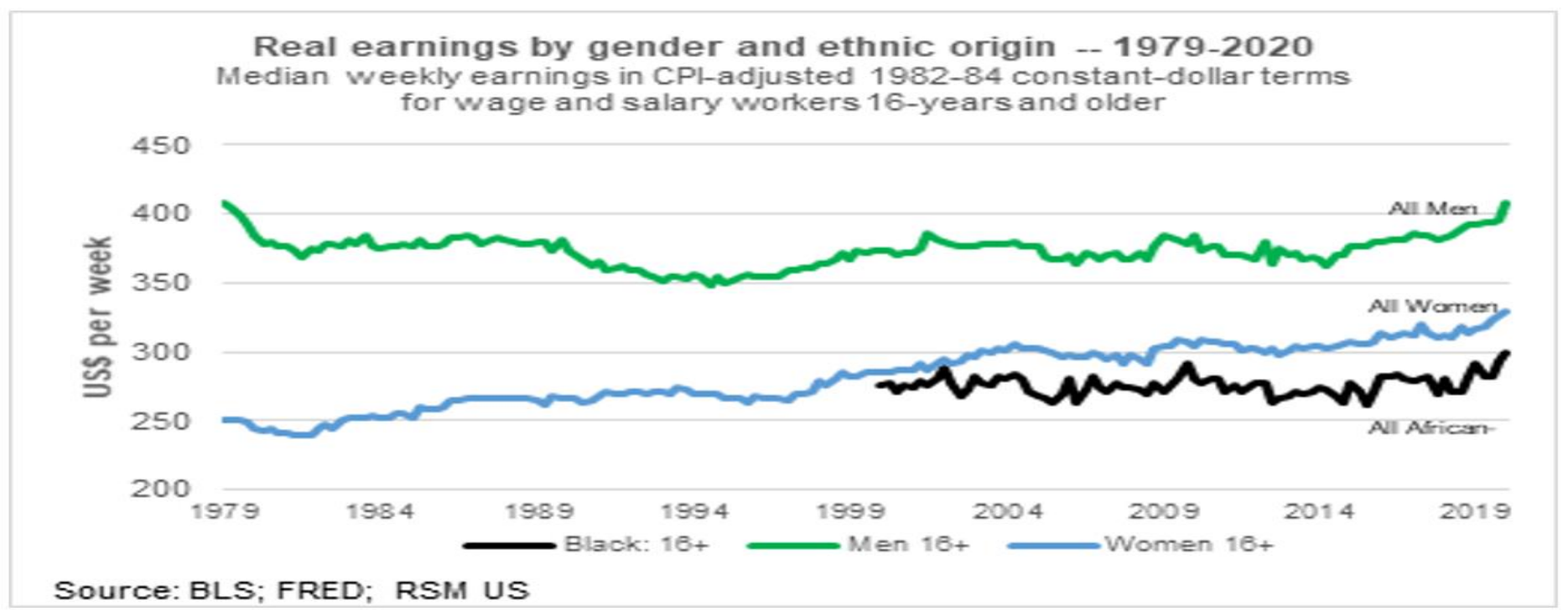


Working Longer

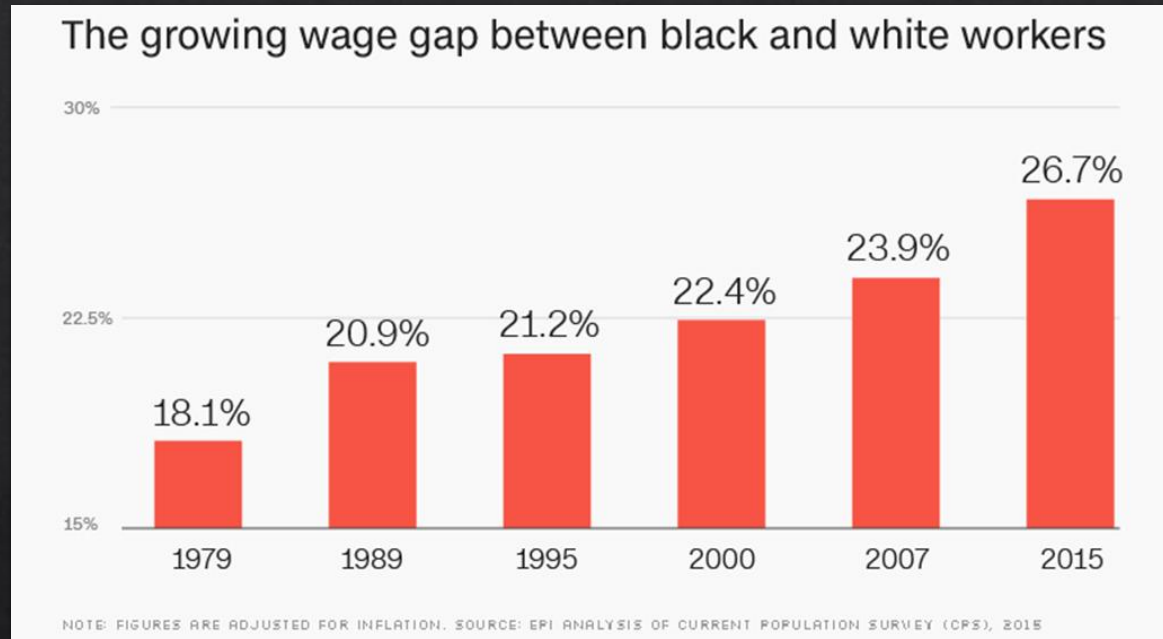
- ◆ Black adults to remain in the workforce longer for financial support and health insurance
- ◆ This relationship is further compounded when the individual is a low-wage worker and cannot afford to retire

Wagner and Neal 1994

Earning Differences



The Wage Gap Continues to Grow



Racial Discrimination & Economic Oppression

- ◇ Government-sponsored retirement programs and employer benefits (social security, pensions, 401k) are directly tied to individual employment history and wages
 - ◇ Black workers earn less income over the life course
 - ◇ Black workers are less likely to have insurance support in comparison to their white counterparts in older age
- ◇ Diminishing unionization decreases workers' access to defined benefit plans

Discrimination Effects in Later Life

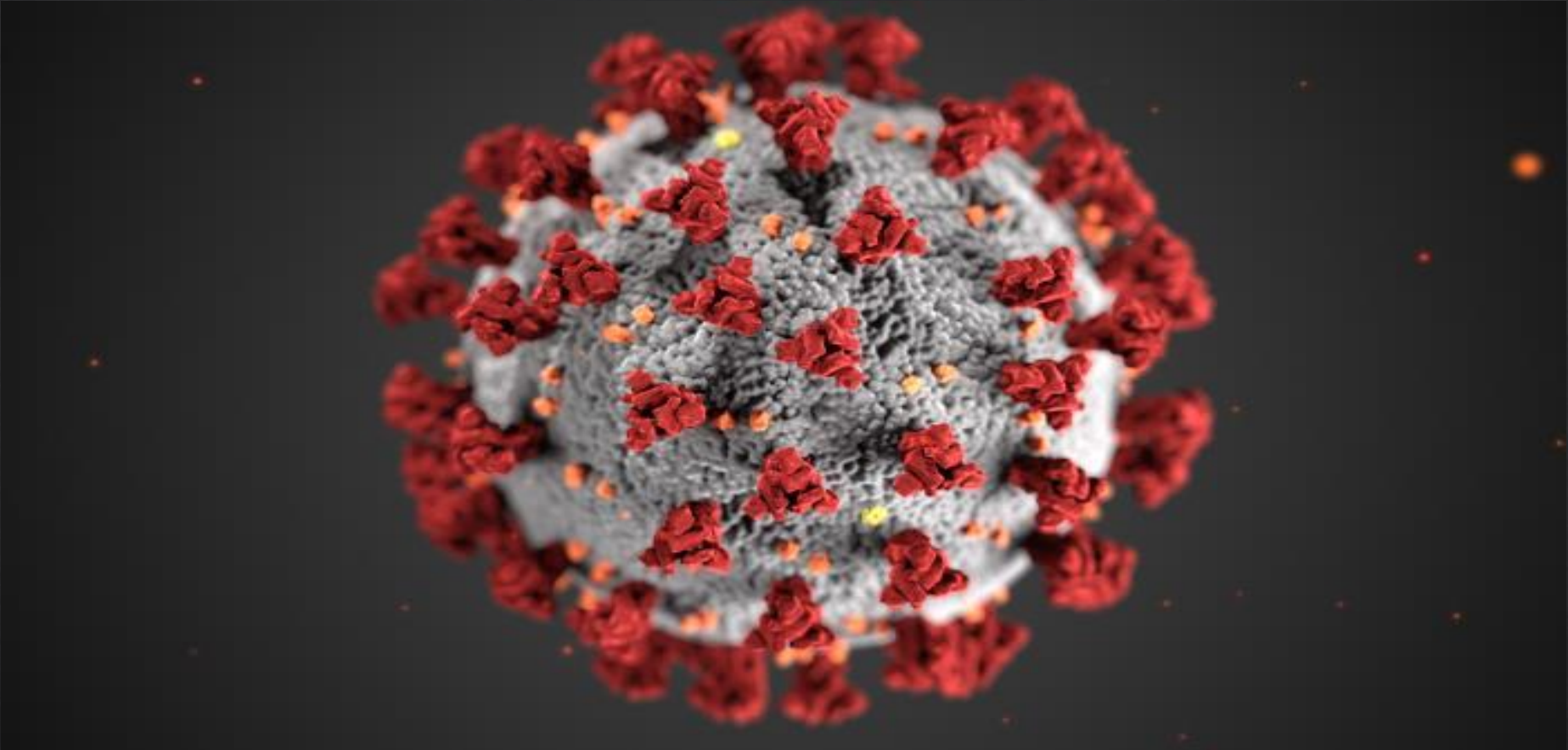
- ◆ Those who face regular discrimination are disproportionately burdened by multiple chronic conditions (MCC) and thus face greater challenges with respect to continued employment
- ◆ Perceived discrimination produces frequent stressful circumstances that increase risks related to the deleterious effects of MCC on the ability to function in later life

Williams, David, Harold Neighbors, and James Jackson. 2003, Shadmi, E. 2013, 2014

Black-White Health Disparities in Later Life

- ❖ Black adults suffer from more chronic illnesses, poor health outcomes, and death at higher rates compared to nearly all other racial groups
- ❖ Black adults report higher rates of diabetes, hypertension, asthma, arthritis, and obesity in comparison to Whites
- ❖ Older Black adults experience relatively higher depressive symptoms relative to older White adults





Covid-19
Racial injustice
Employment precarity

Health Risks for Older Workers will Continue to Raise their Unemployment Rates

Oldest Workers Hit Hardest

In a typical recession, older workers are less likely to lose their jobs because of their tenure and experience. But the recession caused by the coronavirus pandemic has been anything but typical.

Age	Number Employed February 2020	Number Employed May 2020	Percentage Change
25-54	98.8 million	87.5 million	-11.4
55-64	27.2 million	24.4 million	-10.5
65+	11.1 million	9.2 million	-16.6

Source: Economic Policy Institute.

**Health Equity
Considerations & Racial
and Ethnic Minority
Groups, CDC, July 2020**



People from some racial and ethnic minority groups are disproportionately represented in essential work settings such as healthcare facilities, farms, factories, grocery stores, and public transportation. Some people who work in these settings have more chances to be exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 due to several factors, such as close contact with the public or other workers, not being able to work from home, and not having paid sick days.

(Older) Black Workers & Covid-19

AARP, The National Employment Law Project/Economic Policy Institute, etc...



- ◆ Among Older Workers, Blacks and Women Face Higher COVID-19 Risks
- ◆ Coronavirus: over-55 main victims of employment crisis, watchdog finds
- ◆ Health workers, especially minorities, at high risk for COVID, even with PPE
- ◆ Black workers face two of the most lethal preexisting conditions for coronavirus—racism and economic inequality
- ◆ Black Essential Workers Twice as Likely to Experience Retaliation During Pandemic

The “Color of Covid” is Well Documented

- ◆ The Color of Covid: Structural Racism and the Pandemic’s Disproportionate Impact on Older Racial and Ethnic Minorities (Garcia, Homan, Garcia & Brown-[The Journals of Gerontology: Series B](#))
- ◆ Older Black Americans During Covid-19: Race and Age Double Jeopardy (Chatters, Taylor & Taylor- [Health Education and Behavior](#))
- ◆ Racial Disparities and Covid-19: Caution and Context (Chowkwanyun- [New England Journal of Medicine](#))
- ◆ Structural Racism, Social Risk Factors, and Covid-19—A Dangerous Convergence for Black Americans (Egede and Walker-[New England Journal of Medicine](#))
- ◆ COVID-19 and African Americans (Yancy- [Journal of the American Medical Association/JAMA](#))
- ◆ Racial Capitalism: A Fundamental Cause of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic Inequities in the United States (Laster Pirtle- [Health Education and Behavior](#))
- ◆ A growing list of reports from CDC, Pew Research Center, AARP, The National Employment Law Project/Economic Policy Institute, etc.

Workplace Recommendations

1. Creative and innovative ways to better support older workers working longer (e.g., flexible work arrangements, staged retirement, ergonomics)
2. Better adherence to the American Disabilities Act (ADA)
3. More social support programs and policies that seek to understand how racism, sexism, ableism, operate locally
4. Stronger enforcement on race, gender, and age discrimination sanctions at work
5. Work with legislature and create policies to ensure economic security and safety through Social Security, retirement, or public assistance

Research Recommendations

1. Center the experiences of Black workers to better gauge the health of the nation and the state of the economy
2. Center the experiences of older Black women workers: caregivers, low-wage, service, professional, marginal, and socially mobile
3. Center the workplace as a point of analysis
4. Fund community-based research designs
5. Support & fund Black health disparities researchers



Thank you!

<https://pages.uncc.edu/kendra-jason/>

Reimagining meaning and purpose in later life from an intersectional perspective

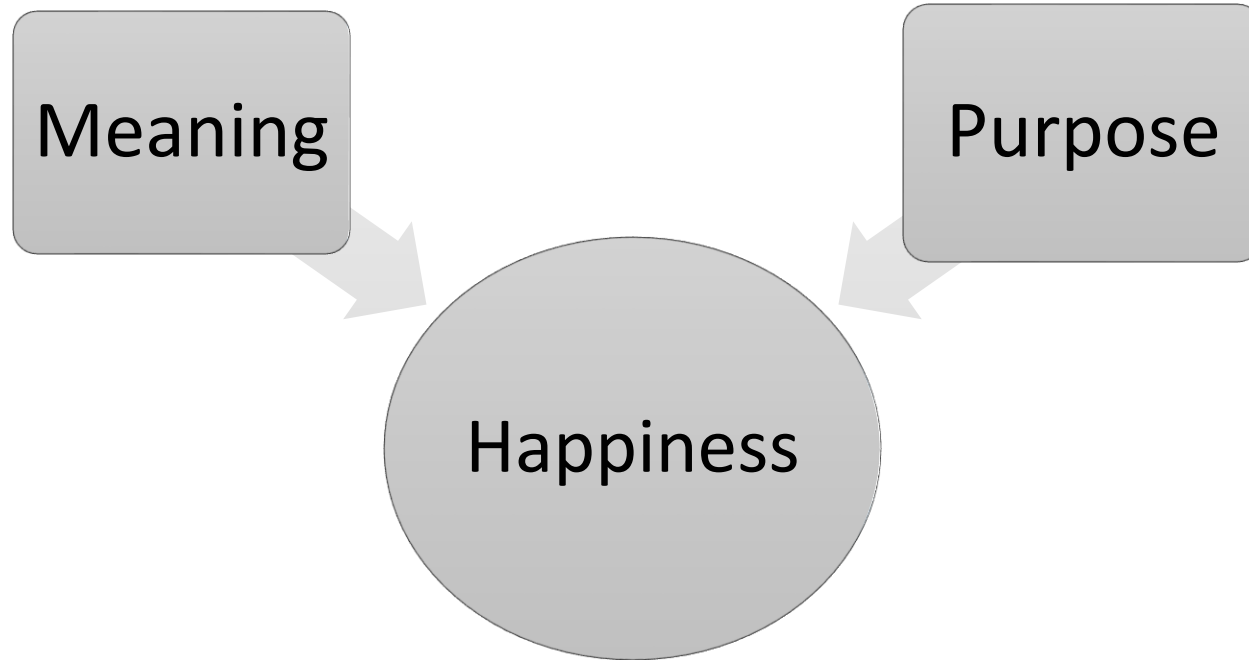
Rocio Calvo, PhD

Boston College



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What do we mean?



A happiness paradox

Older Hispanics are more satisfied with their lives than other older adults in the US

Why?

Less wealthy, poorer health, spend less time than non-Hispanics in activities traditionally associated with meaning and purpose, such as volunteering

Lessons learned

Older Hispanics derive more meaning than non-Hispanics from ordinary activities, such as cooking and religious participation. Specially, if friends and family members are involved.

Looking forward

Expand our thinking on what contributes to meaning and purpose in later life among different populations



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Increasing Diversity in Self-Employment and Entrepreneurship in Later Life

Cal Halvorsen, PHD
Boston College



Strategies to Engage Marginalized Adults in Education

Presenters:

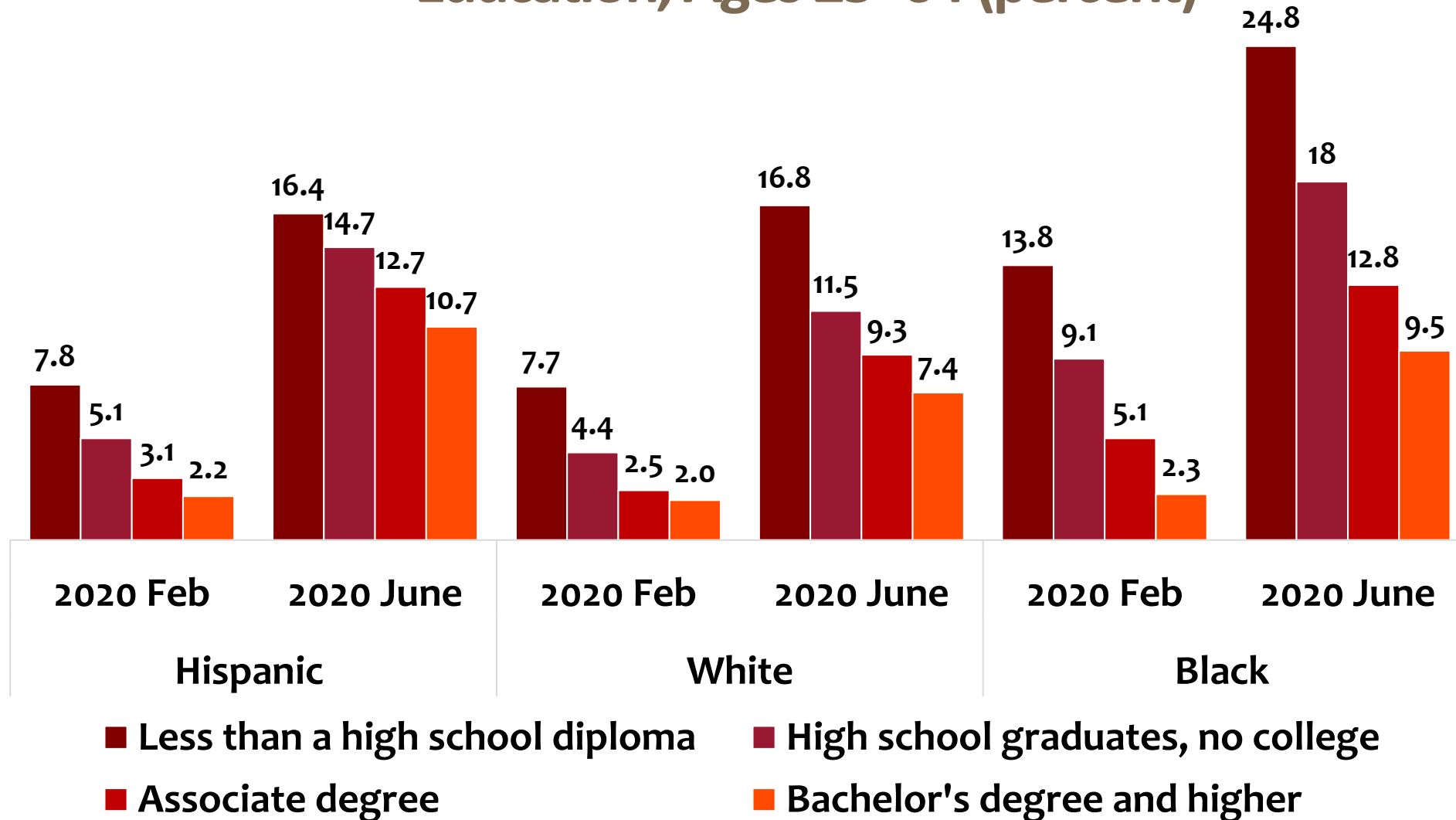
Abigail Helsing, MS, Scripps Gerontology
Center, Miami University

Samuel Van Vleet, Miami University,
Department of Sociology and Gerontology

Background

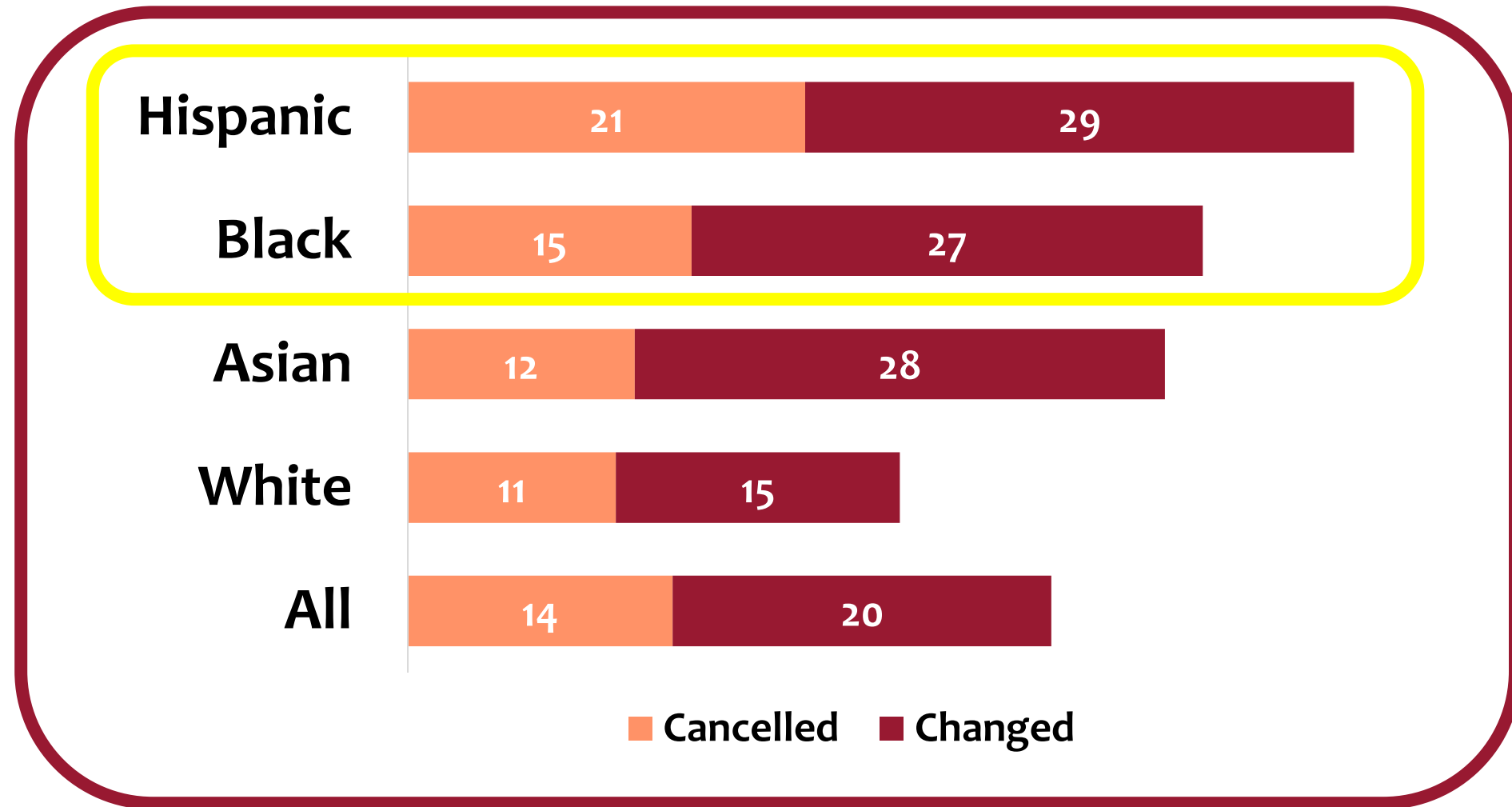
- Our team conducted virtual interviews with 61 experts in adult education and training (AET) in 10 countries.
- Engaging and retraining racial/ethnic minority middle-aged and older adults in AET is often challenging due to multiple barriers.
- Opportunities to engage in AET are most often pursued by higher-income or higher-skilled adults.
- Lack of training opportunities for older workers may place them at a disadvantage.
- COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted racial/ethnic minority groups.

Unemployment Rates Pre- and Post-COVID 19 by Race/Ethnicity and Education, Ages 25–64 (percent)



U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2020). Table 10. Employment status of civilian non-institutional population by educational attainment, age, sex, race, Hispanic or Latino and non-Hispanic ethnicity.

Revised Education Plans as a Result of COVID-19, Ages 18-65 (percent)



Strada Weekly online surveys March 25-May 28, 2020. Base: Americans ages 18-65, n=8,085

A person is sitting at a wooden desk, writing in a notebook with a silver pen. To their right is a silver laptop. In the foreground, there is a blue coffee cup on a saucer, a smartphone, and a small white teapot. The background is slightly blurred, showing a person's hands holding a red object. The overall scene suggests a study or work environment.

Situational Barriers

The cost of education, lack time, childcare, transportation, and support of family and friends

Financial Barriers

- **Regarding formal education for those aged 40-45:** “Those people don't have the ability to change direction because if you want to do formal educational training in Australia, if you want to do university education, it's going to cost you. And it means withdrawing from the workforce.”
(Australia)



Institutional Barriers

Lack of time and information needed to complete an educational program, lack of access to computer/internet, difficult enrollment process, and inconvenient, inflexible course scheduling

Technology

- **“Older adults’ access to technology and skills is actually quite limited.” (Australia)**
- “Our education system needs to change to allow people to dip back into the system and learn more continuously because people are going to need to update their skills ... Somebody who went to school over a decade ago isn't going to be very familiar with technology now and not only would they need that to return to school but they might need it in their next role.” (Canada)

Percent of Americans, by Race/Ethnicity, who indicated it would be extremely/very challenging to secure reliable internet or computer access for the purpose of pursuing education and training



A photograph of a person with long blonde hair, wearing a green top, sitting at a desk and typing on a silver laptop. The laptop is open, and the person's hands are on the keyboard. In the foreground, there is a smartphone lying on the desk. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a classroom or lecture hall setting. The overall lighting is soft and focused on the person and their work.

Dispositional Barriers

Lack of confidence in ability, concern about being too old, being tired of school, and lack of enjoyment in studying

Feelings of Failure

- “... Second chance learners, so those learners who were returning to study after having a checkered history of learning in school... They had very negative perceptions of themselves as learners, that they were stupid, that they couldn't learn, they'd never been a good learner, they didn't have the skill or capabilities to learn. Which is terrible, to think that these people had held these ... internal dialogues about their capacity to learn for so long.” (Australia)

Concerns about Being Too Old

- “There are very few programs for people above the age of 45.” (Italy)

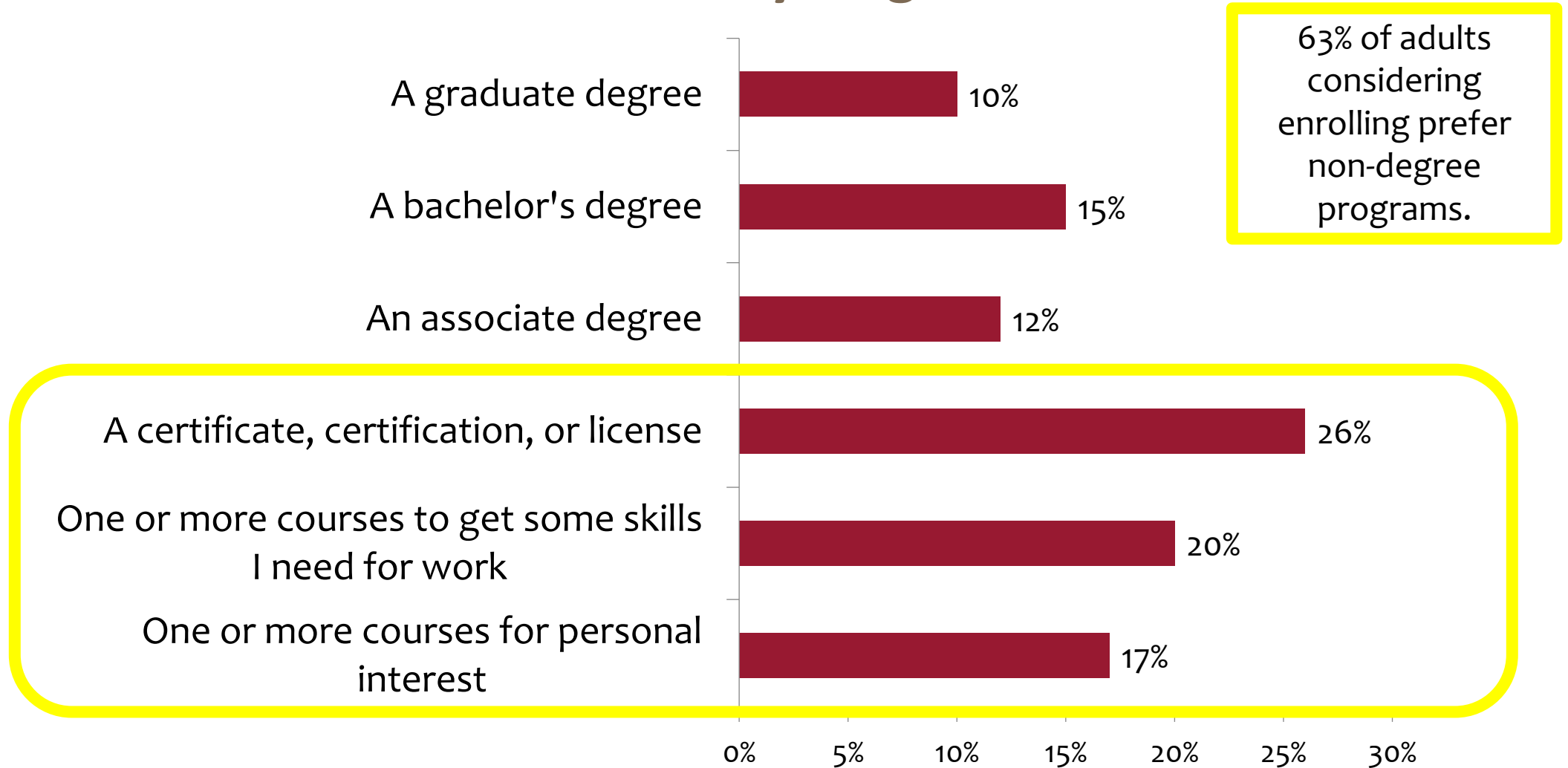
Lack of Motivation and Confidence

- “They have that opportunity, but you have the problem we mentioned before that it is not always easy to motivate other people to start schooling again. So, that is a problem.” (Norway)

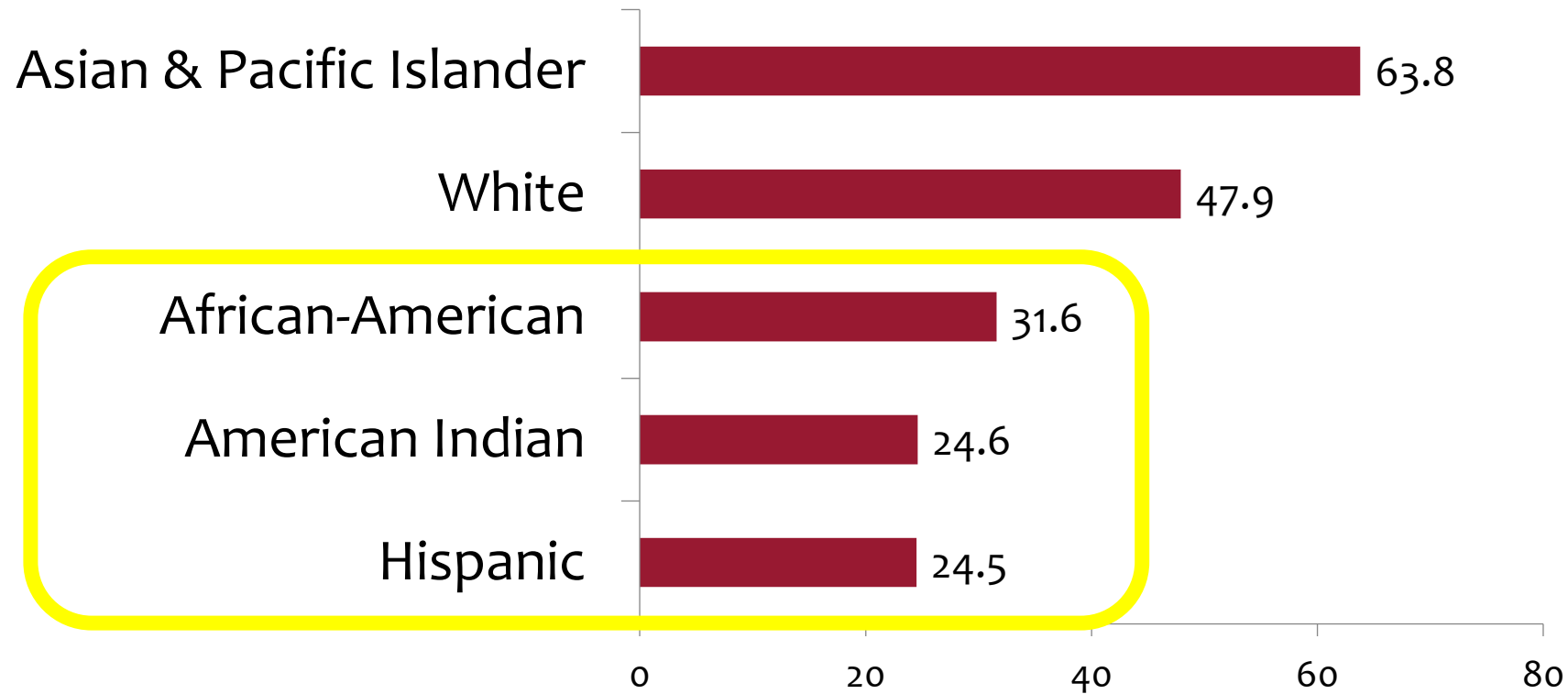
Relevant approach

- “Herein lies a fundamental problem with educational training ... It puts out curriculum that says here's what you have to learn; here's what you have to know. It takes no account of what people already know. A lot of people have had really rich lives, they can do almost anything. They can't necessarily sit in a room and be bored ... by people using pedagogies and content and technologies which are alien to them. It's the worst form... It's the worst form of abuse that you can get, is to put people through that.” (Australia)

If you were to enroll in education or training in the next 6 months, what would be your goal?



Attainment of Associate's Degree or Higher Ages 25 - 64 by Race/Ethnicity: U.S. (percent)



Summary

- Participating in adult education and training is critical to have skills demanded by employers.
- Lack of training opportunities for older workers may place them at a disadvantage.
- COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted racial/ethnic minority groups
- Recruitment efforts tailored to support underserved minority middle-aged and older adult workers are needed.
- Administrators should operate from an equity and inclusion lens as individual experiences are not monolithic.
- To retain adult learners, multiple learning forms are necessary, including formal, non-formal, and informal learning.

Acknowledgments

- The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant R305A170183 to Miami University and the University of Maryland Baltimore County. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.



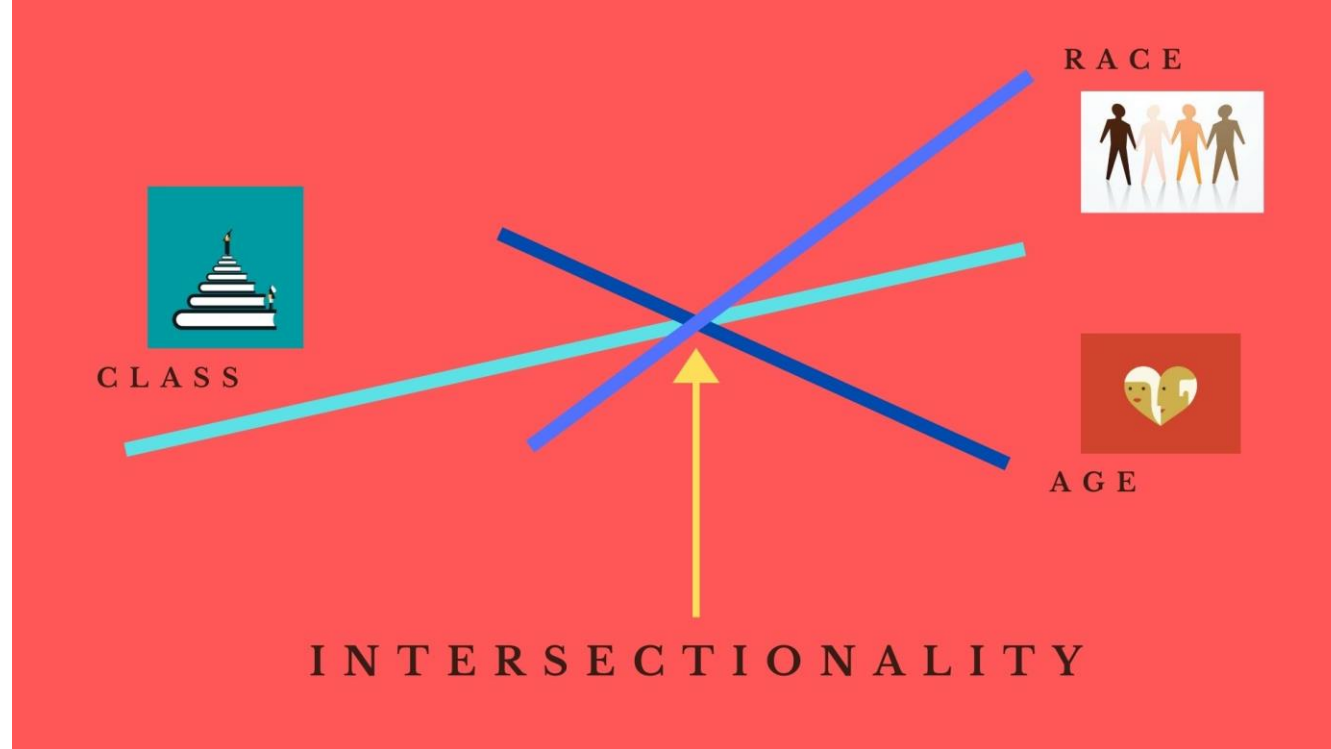
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Question & Answer

Please submit questions in Q&A.

Moderated by Jacquelyn James, PhD

Boston College



Thank you for attending the webinar.

