

How Informed are Americans about Women's Opportunities?

Research Report: PADS-005 | July 6, 2023

Research Question

Feminist academics argue that “patriarchy,” or the oppression of women in society by men, affects both public and private life. They argue, for example, that male managers exploit their female colleagues in the workplace, male script writers perpetuate demeaning views of women and girls on television, husbands force their wives into near-constant subservience in the home, and that patriarchy not only prevents women from succeeding in society but also causes numerous other problems (Bates, 2021). One activist wrote, “We need...to deconstruct and exorcise patriarchy – which is the root of so many other forms of oppression, from imperialism to racism, from transphobia to the denigration of the Earth” (Enslar, 2021). In apparent agreement, the American Psychological Association now regards masculinity as “harmful” (APA, 2018). Additionally, according to leading sociologist Barbara Risman and others, “challenging men’s dominance is [also] a necessary condition of ending the subordination of lesbians and gay men,” and that, “If as feminists, we believe that gender is socially constructed and used to create inequality, our political goal must be to move to a post-gender society” (Risman, 2004; 2009). Due to the alarming nature of these claims, in this report we ask: “How informed are Americans about women’s achievements and opportunities?”

Methodology

Data Source

- Political Accuracy and Divisions Study (“PADS,” collected August 2022 - October 2022)

Data Quality Control

- All participants in this dataset passed attention, response time, fraud, duplication, and bot checks.

Participants

- 3014 adults in the United States (51.2% Female)
- Average Age = 44.39 years (SD = 17.41 years)
- 46.4% White; 32.2% Hispanic; 21.2% Black

Measures

- Accuracy About Women’s Achievements:** Respondents were asked to guess the correct answer to each question, using a sliding scale from 0% to 100%.
 - If you had to guess, about what percentage of management and professional-level jobs are held by women in the U.S.?
 - If you had to guess, about what percentage of Black women have a college degree?
- Cynicism About Women’s Opportunities:** Respondents were asked their degree of agreement (or disagreement) with the following statement: “I believe women in the United States have no hope for success because of sexism.”

Summary of Findings

- Americans—regardless of age, political orientation, sex or race—only slightly underestimate the percentage of women occupying managerial positions (Fig. 1 – Fig. 4).
- However, respondents who were younger, more liberal, female or who identified as a racial minority tended to *over-estimate* the percentage of Black women with a college degree (Fig. 1 – Fig. 4).
- Most Americans—regardless of age, sex or race—disagree that women have no hope for success because of sexism (Fig. 5 – Fig. 8). Only those identifying as “Very Liberal” tended to believe that women have no hope for success because of sexism.

Take-Home Messages

- Most Americans reject the idea that women cannot succeed in the U.S. because of sexism.
- In our sample of the public, we found that people are generally accurate about the overall proportion of women who are managers, but they often over-estimate the proportion of Black women who have a college degree.
- Very liberal participants in our survey tended to believe that women have no hope for success, despite over-estimating the proportion of Black women having a college degree.
- Have an interpretation of these data? Share it here: research@skeptic.com

SKEPTIC

This report was brought to you by the **Skeptic Research Center** and the Worldview Foundations Research Team.

Become Involved!

skeptical.com/research-center/become-involved

Researchers

Kevin McCaffree, PhD
Anondah Saide, PhD
research@skeptic.com

Suggested Citation

McCaffree, K., & Saide, A. (2023). How Informed are Americans about Women’s Opportunities?. Skeptic Research Center, PADS-005.

Figure 1

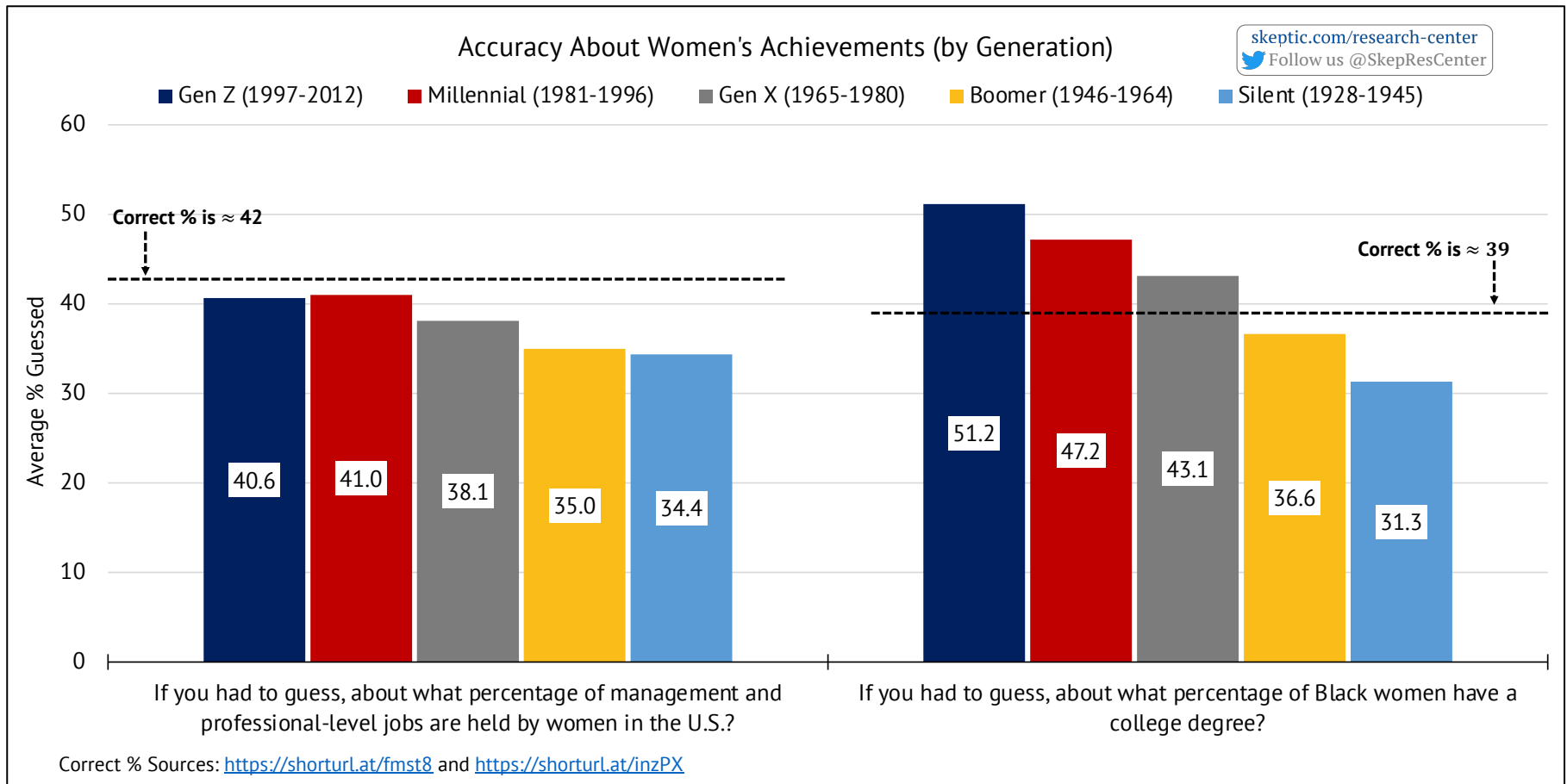


Figure 2

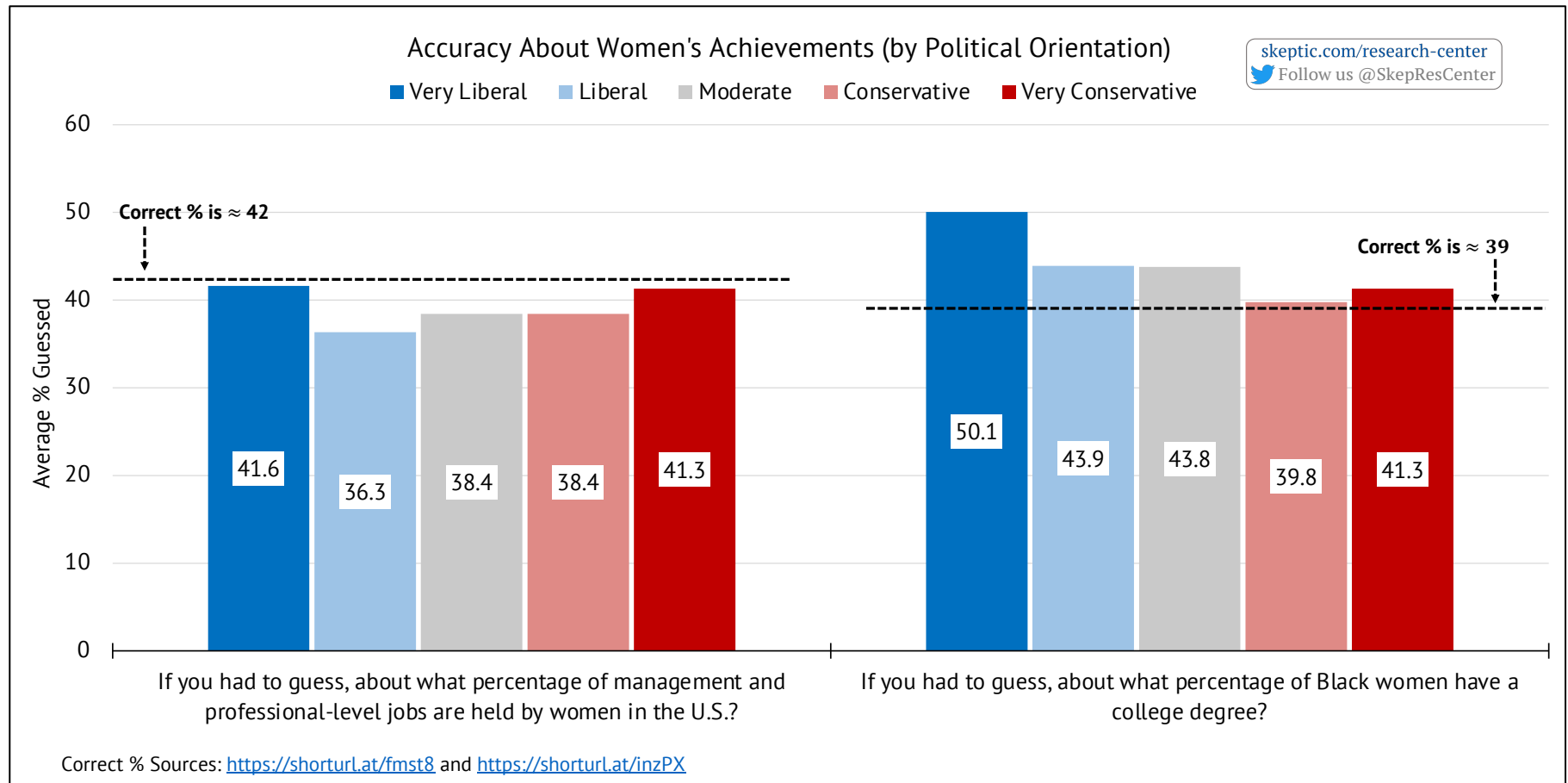


Figure 3

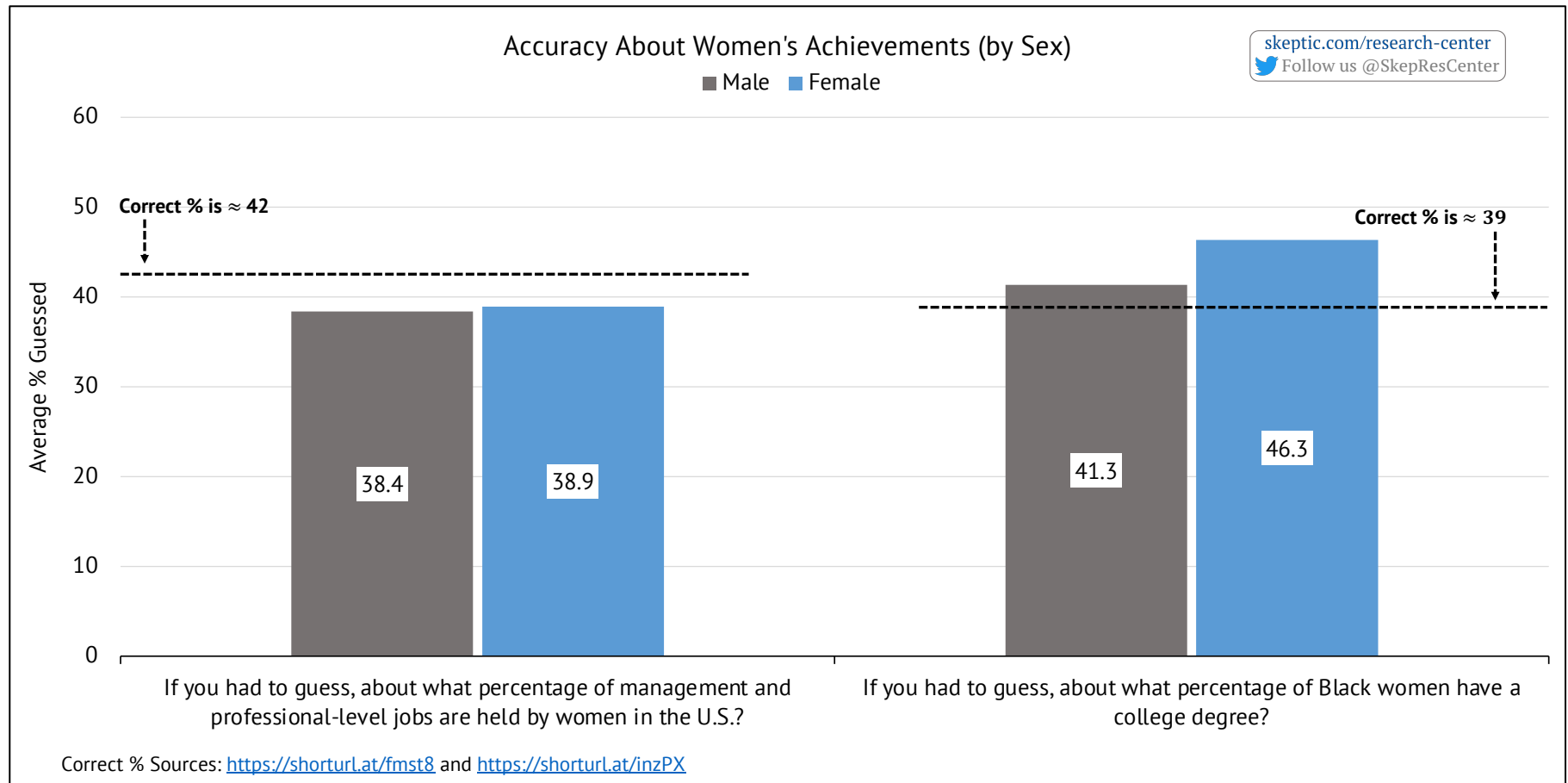


Figure 4

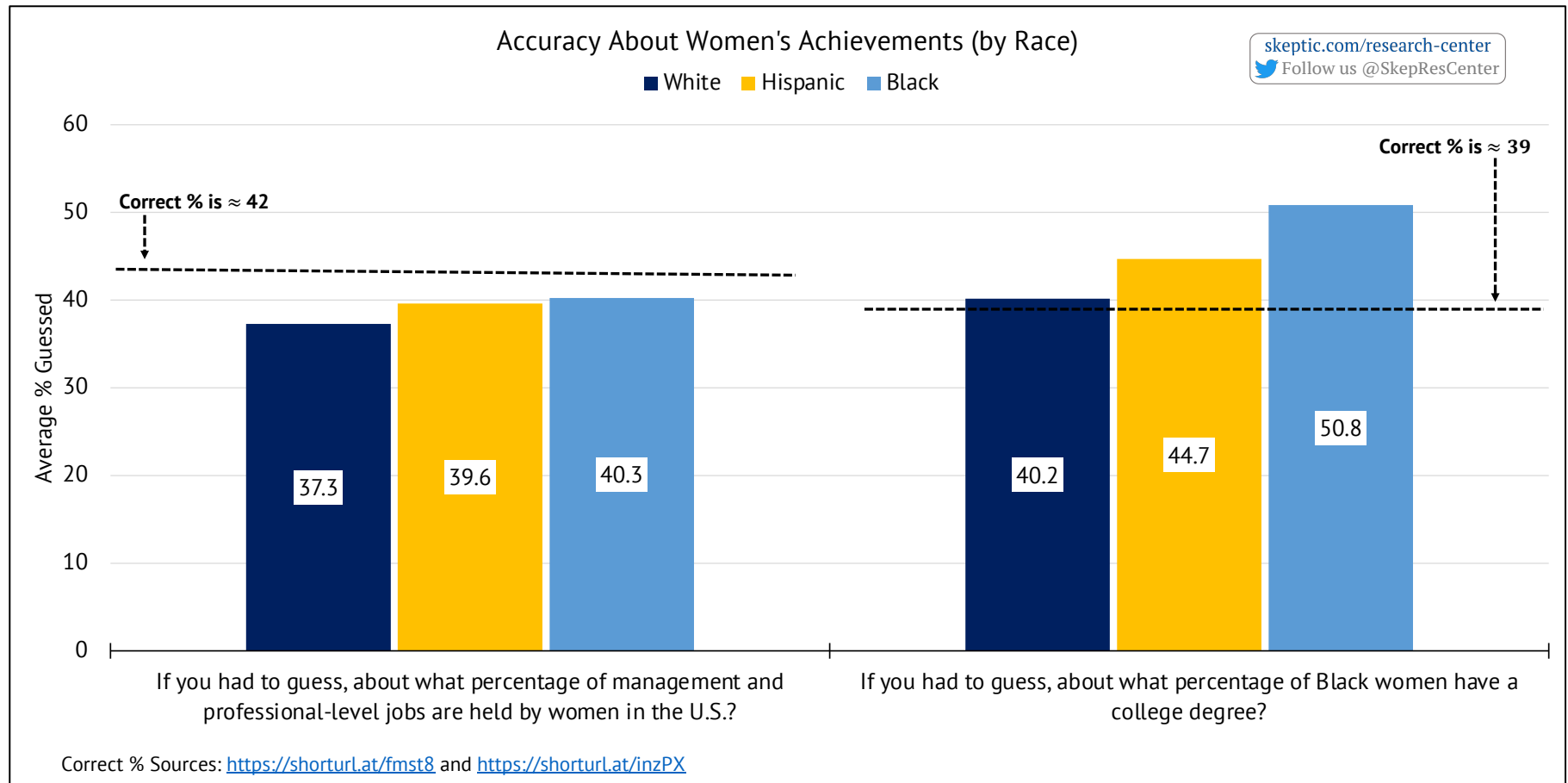


Figure 5

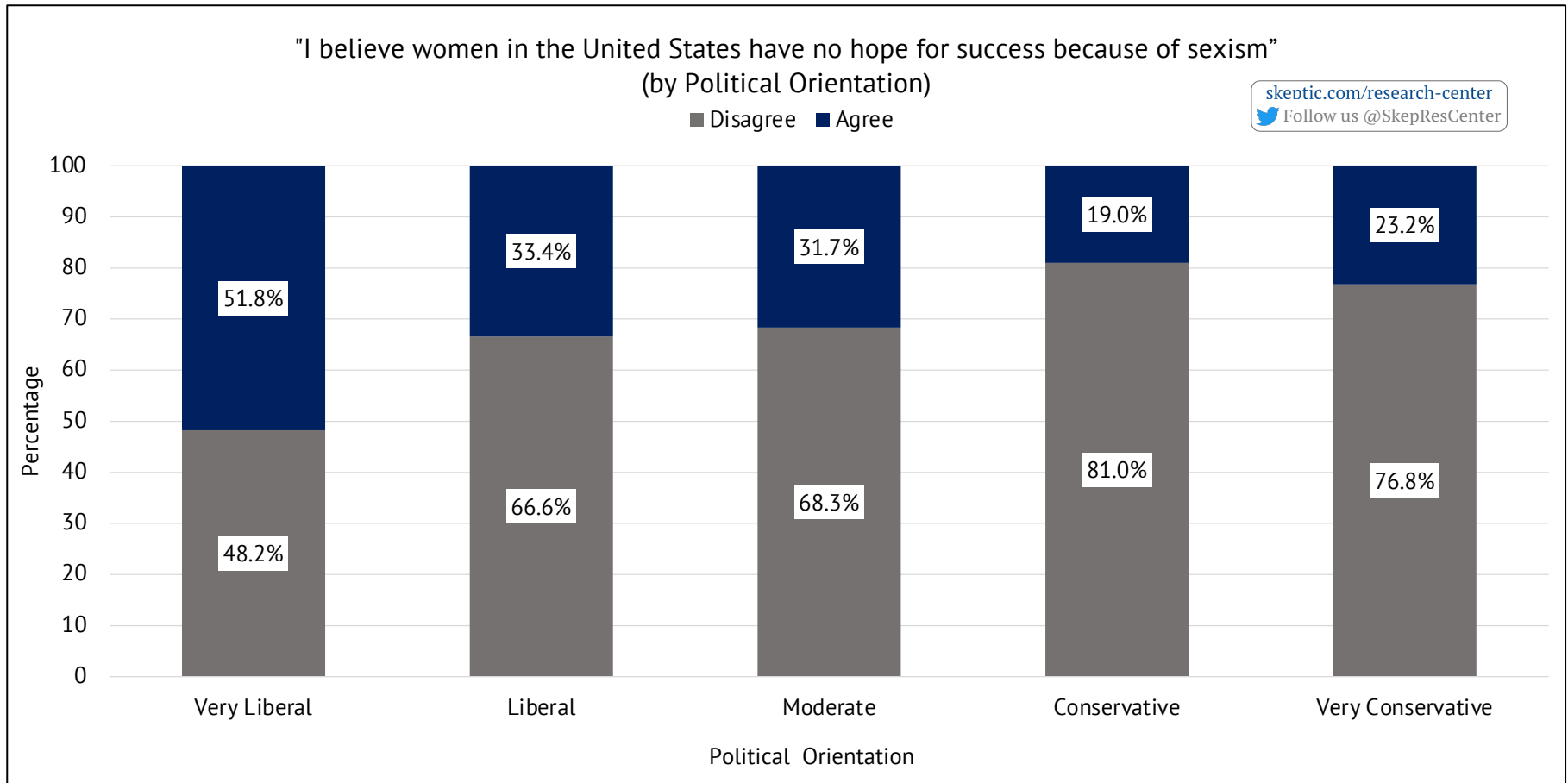


Figure 6

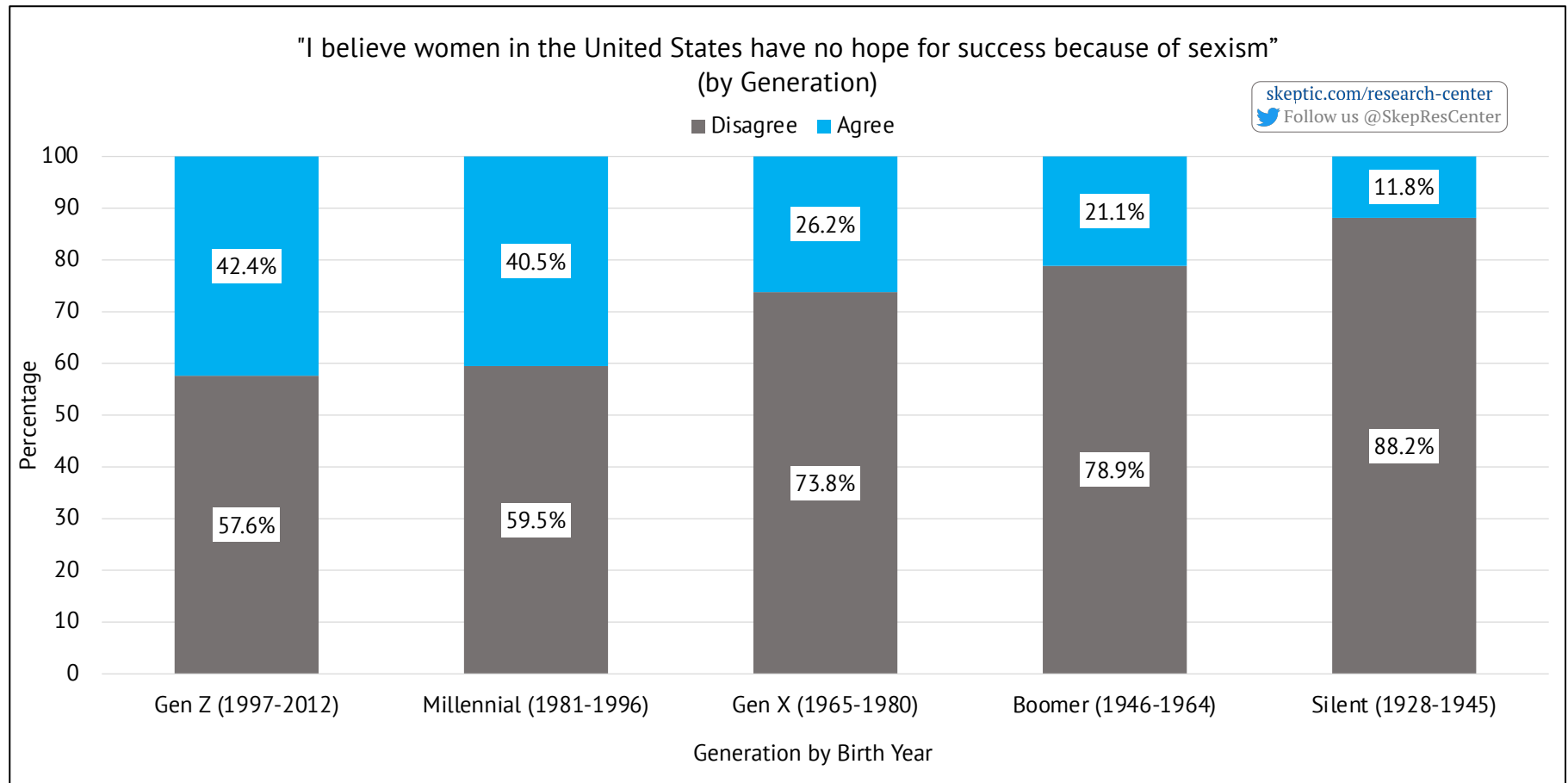


Figure 7

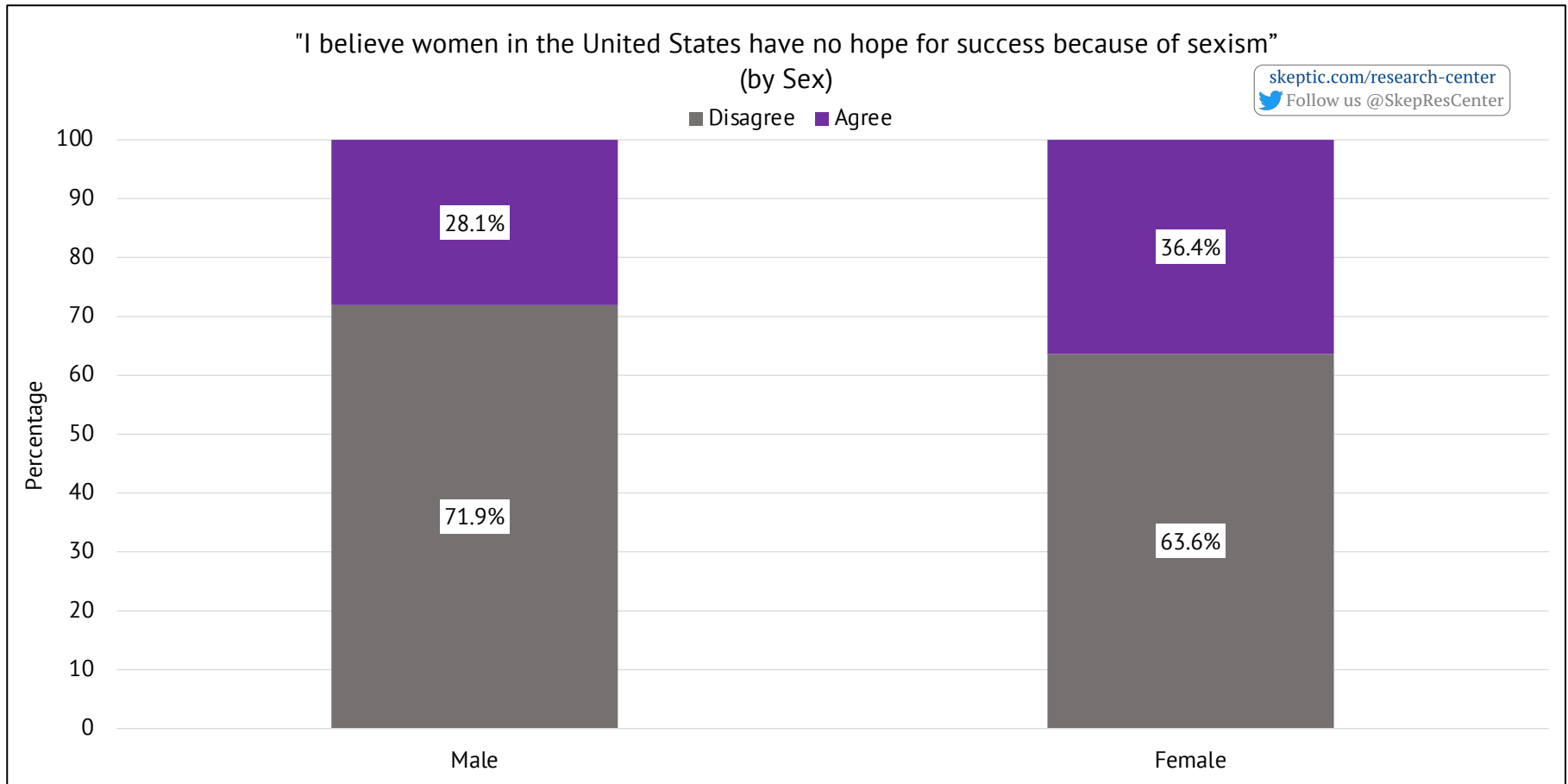
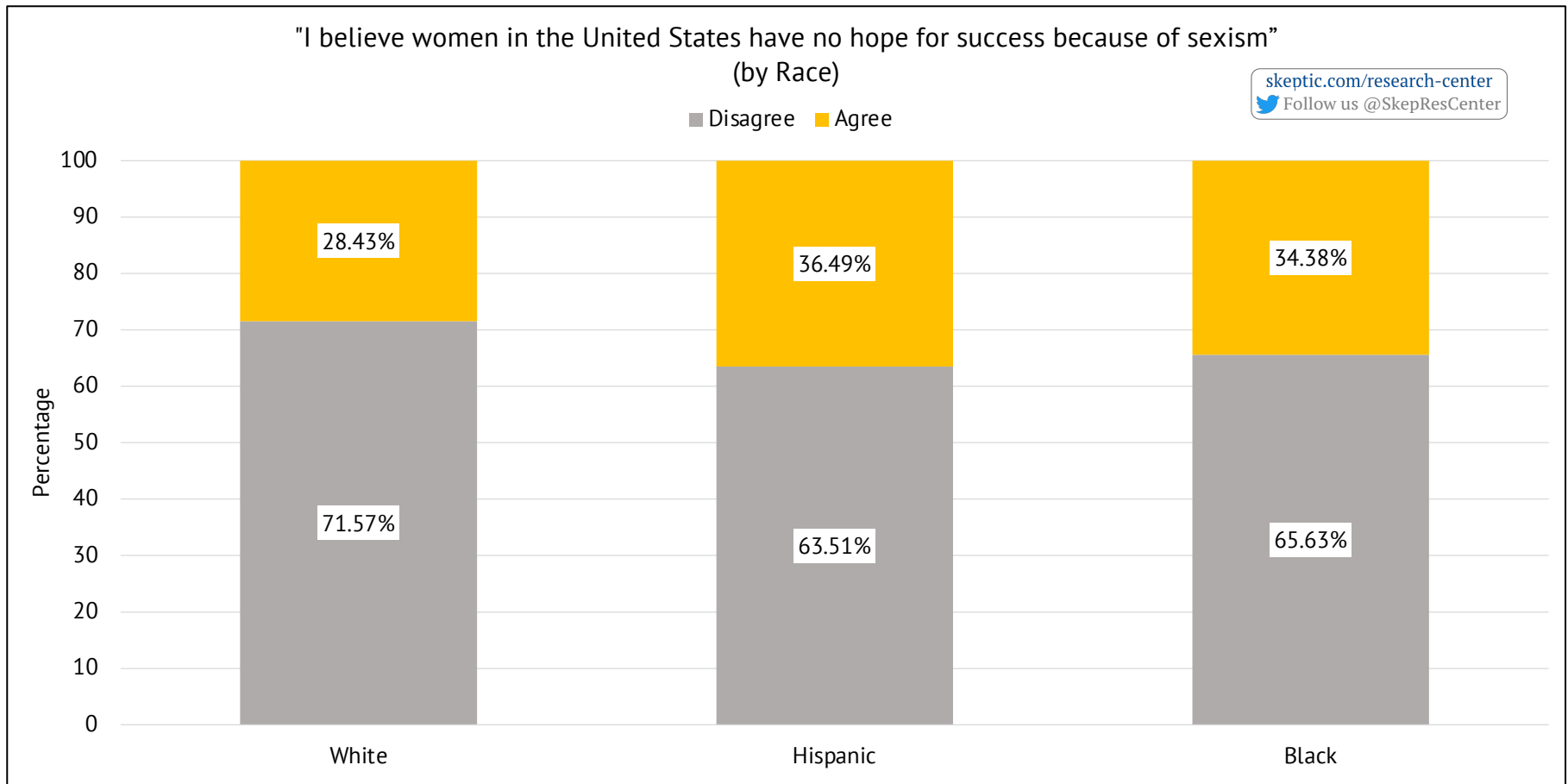


Figure 8



References

- Bates, L. 2021. *Patriarchal Violence: Misogyny From the Far Right to the Mainstream*. Southern Poverty Law Center. (URL: <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2021/02/01/patriarchal-violence-misogyny-far-right-mainstream>).
- Ensler, E. 2021. *Disaster Patriarchy: How the Pandemic Has Unleashed a War on Women*. The Guardian. (URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/jun/01/disaster-patriarchy-how-the-pandemic-has-unleashed-a-war-on-women>)
- American Psychological Association (APA), Boys and Men Guidelines Group. 2018. *APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men*. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/about/policy/psychological-practice-boys-men-guidelines.pdf>
- Risman, B. 2004. *Gender as a Social Structure: Theory Wrestling with Activism*. *Gender & Society* 18(4): 429-450
- Risman, B. J. 2009. *From doing to undoing: Gender as we know it*. *Gender & Society*, 23(1), 81-84.