Race & Workplace Trauma During the Age of #BlackLivesMatter

Survey Summary

trauma 🔊

noun | trau·ma | \ˈtraü-mə, ˈtrȯ-\

"Been around white folks all day. I don't think people understand how difficult that it is after another traumatic experience within the black community. They don't feel that pain, that intense hurt, that 'What if someone I love is next?…What if I'm next?' We get a couple of months, a little recovery time, then it happens again."

—Black, Female Millennial following the killings of Alton Sterling & Philando Castile

The above sentiments depict one, often unexplored dynamic of being Black in corporate America—*trauma and its impact in the workplace.* During an age where race based violence and police brutality are more prominent and visible, in part due to social media, employees of all backgrounds are prone to be impacted.

During the summer of 2016, following the murders of *Alton Sterling and Philando Castile*, The Winters Group, Inc. hosted a series of virtual learning labs that explored if and how employees were impacted by these events, and what organizations and leaders could do to support them. Certainly, if the intent of *inclusion* is for employees to feel comfortable bringing their whole self to work, then companies should see themselves as stakeholders in events that go on outside the walls of their organizations. Having some intentional dialogue around this area, not only seemed timely, but way overdue.

As part of the Race & Trauma virtual learning lab series, we invited attendees to participate in a survey that gauged their reactions to, and perspectives towards police shootings that have resulted in a disproportionate number of deaths among black women and men, and the impact these tragedies have on their work environments. We also invited our clients and immediate networks to participate. **Four hundred (400)** respondents completed the survey. The findings and insights shared were powerful and compelling, and a summary is included in this report.
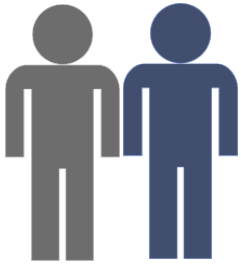
"While the events nationally are troubling, what is most concerning is that my institution has said nothing. It makes me question the values of the institution and whether I belong here."
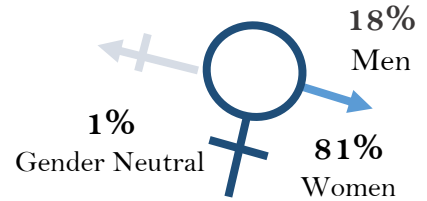*-Survey Participant*
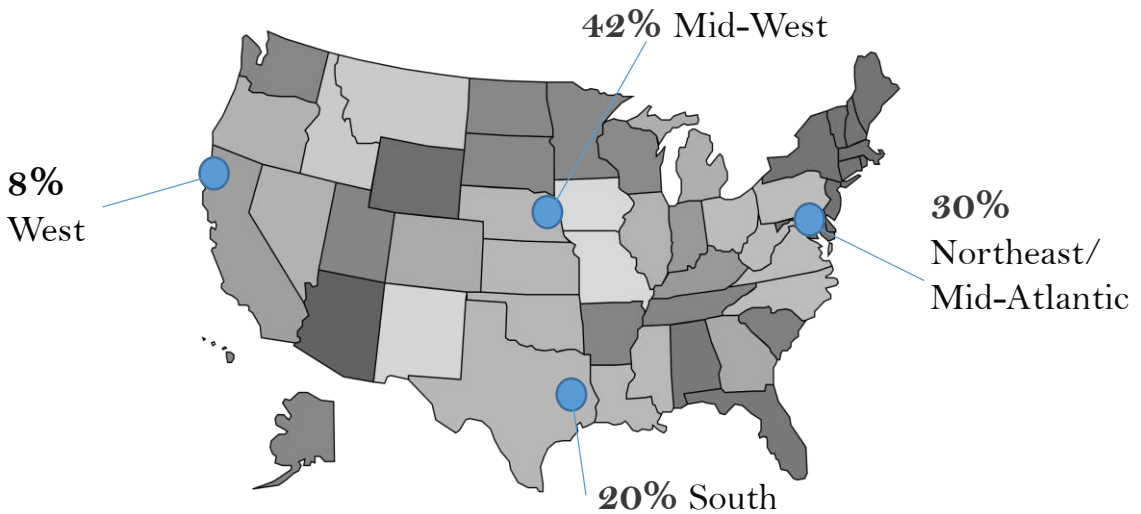
DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

Race/Ethnicity

45% White
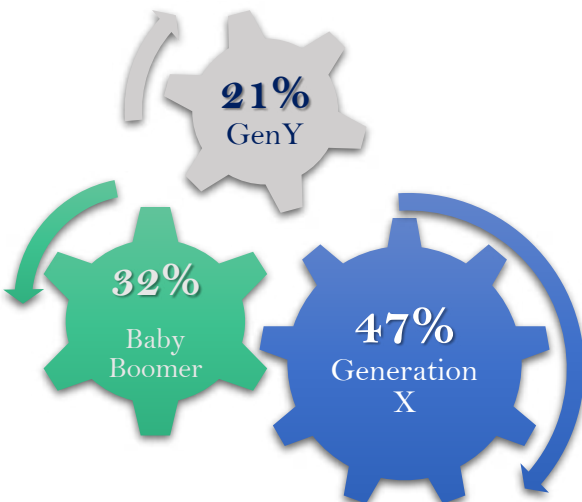**40%** Black
8% Hispanic, Asian, Native American
7% Multiracial

Gender

18% Men
1% Gender Neutral
81% Women

Geographic Region

42% Mid-West
8% West
30% Northeast/ Mid-Atlantic
20% South

Generations

21% GenY
32% Baby Boomer
47% Generation X

Level within Organization

Executive – 15%
Manager – 38%
Individual Contributor – 40%
Consultant – 7%
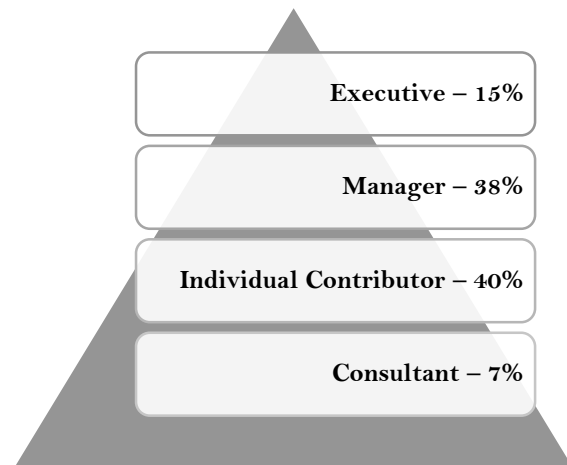
How would you describe the feelings you have experienced as a result of recent events?

"Sadness"
"Frustration"
"Anger"
"Fear"

"All emotions have run through my mind. Fear for my 3 black sons and husband living as black men in America. Anger and frustration that these events are happening on a regular basis without any relief or consequence to the officers that are causing this trauma due to our fears of what I see as amazing, talented, lovable, caring black men. Sadness for my people that we are living in a world of chaos with no end in sight."

"I almost feel numb to hearing these events, which makes me feel sad because I know that I should feel something but it happens so often..."

"Realizing how privilege comes with being born white has left me brokenhearted. There are habits, life-choices, and instincts that I will never have to practice because of this."

"I felt like I was truly grieving. I also felt misunderstood because it did not seem to have affected my counterparts. I felt anger at the trivial things that were being talked about in the office while there was no mention of the tragedies until the cops were sniped in Texas."

"I have felt everything including numbness. another important emotion I have had is feeling motivated. I have felt motivated and compelled to create change and question all authorities and their commitment to the movement for black lives."

"It's disheartening to not feel the company's support of the BLM Movement when they fought so hard for LGBT equality. I'm a member of both groups. Does this mean only a portion of me if valued and respected?"

"I'm in pain and feel I can't express it. To do so in a predominantly white workplace would be taboo. Right?"

"As a white mom of two black sons, I'd add bouts of periodic terror to the list. I'm beyond frustrated that "all lives matter" seems to be the most common response to "black lives matter." If all lives really DID matter, there would be no need for this conversation. The sad reality is all lives DON'T matter; or at least, they all don't matter to the same degree."

"I felt suffocated at work because there was no space to talk about and process events that's happened. I try to distract myself by keeping busy, but it wasn't effective. My productivity was at its all time low. I was suffering quietly on my own at my cubicle. It's ridiculous that it's this way."

"Not once in the past year has anyone asked me how I am doing. The week the Dallas shootings happened everyone rushed to console others, as with the Pulse tragedy. I alone spoke to one of my black managers(subordinate)asking how they were doing, their first response was "I'm great" Then I said how are you really doing, The 26yr old young man burst into tears."

"My husband is African American and my son is bi-racial and every time they leave the house without me, I panic that something will happen to them. I don't want to stop my son from walking to his friends' homes or going for daily runs, but I am terrified he will be stopped by the police and get killed. Even when I am with them, and we are pulled over, it takes all my power to remain calm. If someone hurt my son, I don't know what I would do. He's only 12, but people think he's years older."

"Generally overwhelmed and a bit helpless as a person of color"

"I would also add helpless because I don't know how to best affect change and demonstrate support."
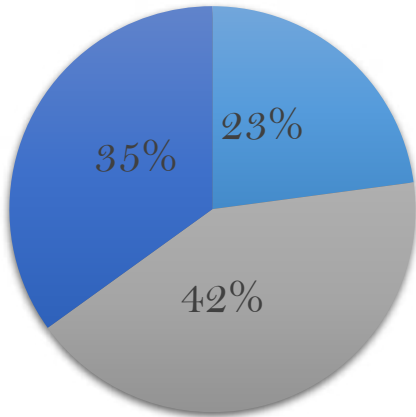
"No one seems to have feelings or empathy for others."
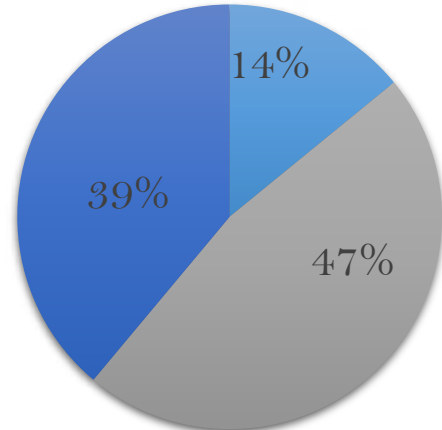
SURVEY INSIGHTS by Race

State of Race Relations

Whites

- ■ Getting better
- ■ Getting worse
- ■ Not much has changed

23%

42%

35%

Blacks

- ■ Getting better
- ■ Getting worse
- ■ Not much has changed

14%

47%

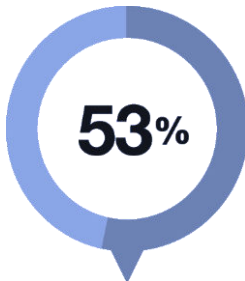39%

To what extent do we understand each other?

6 out of 10 Blacks
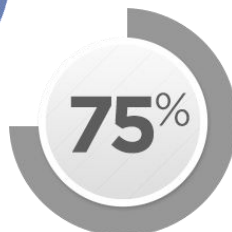*believe their organizations **DO NOT** understand their unique experiences in the workplace*

6 out of 10 Whites
*believe their organizations **DO** understand the unique experiences of Black employees in the workplace*

53%
*of Blacks believe their co-workers have **little to no understanding** of their feelings around recent events…*
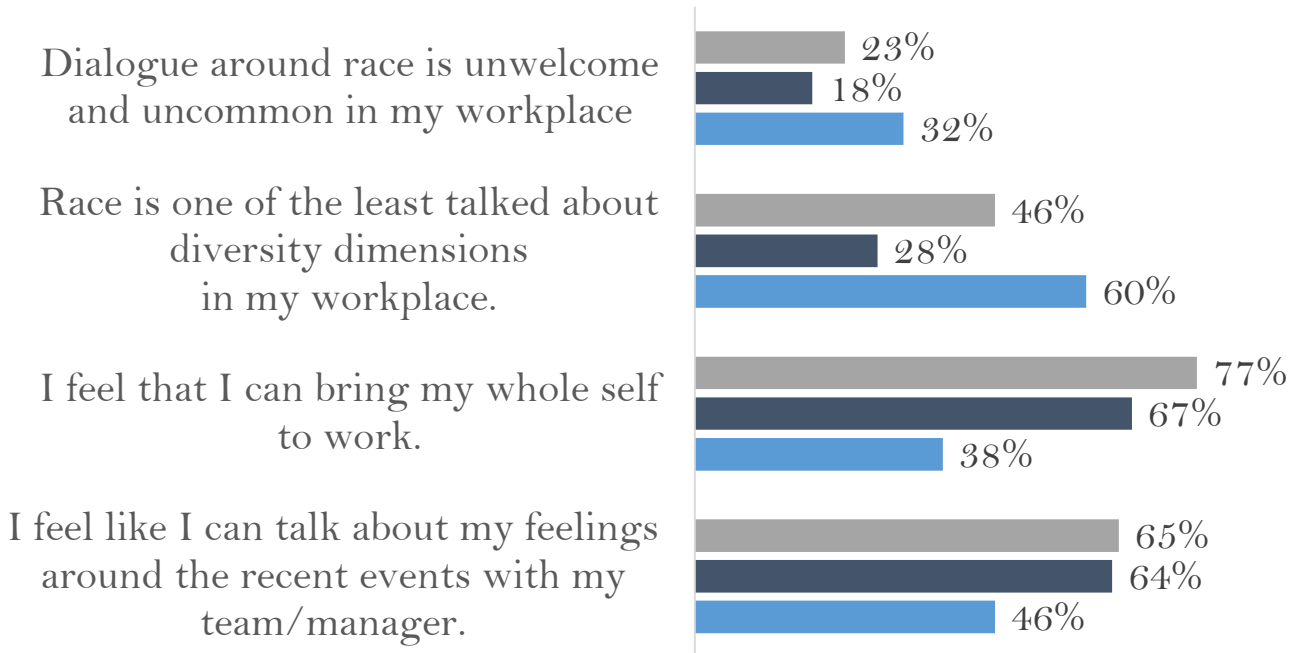
75%
*of Whites believe they **somewhat or fully understand** their coworkers' feelings*

SURVEY INSIGHTS by Race

% Agree or Strongly Agree

■ Other ■ Whites ■ Blacks

Dialogue around race is unwelcome and uncommon in my workplace
- Other: 23%
- Whites: 18%
- Blacks: 32%

Race is one of the least talked about diversity dimensions in my workplace.
- Other: 46%
- Whites: 28%
- Blacks: 60%

I feel that I can bring my whole self to work.
- Other: 77%
- Whites: 67%
- Blacks: 38%

I feel like I can talk about my feelings around the recent events with my team/manager.
- Other: 65%
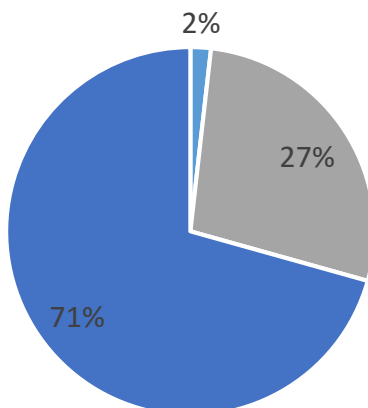- Whites: 64%
- Blacks: 46%

Micro-Aggressions & Biases in the Workplace

How often do you personally experience micro-aggressions or biases that you perceive to be based on your race in the workplace?
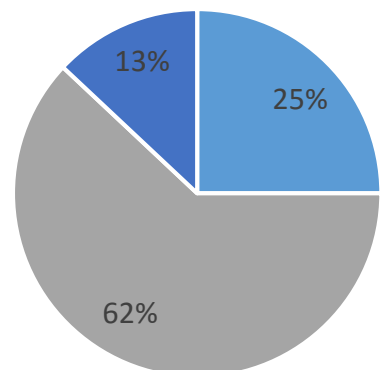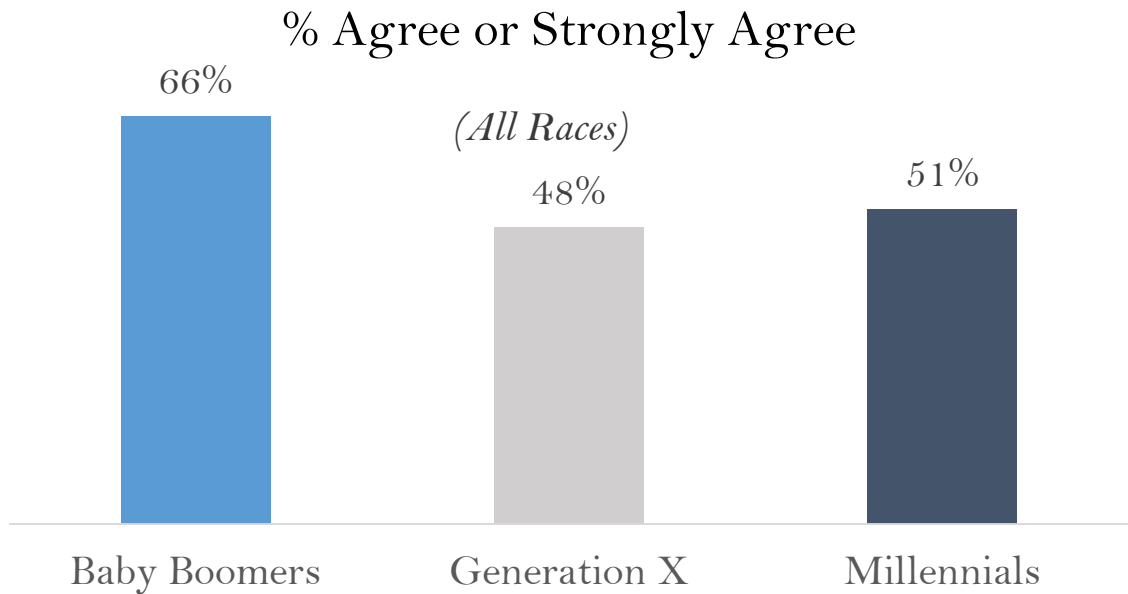
% Whites

■ Frequently ■ Sometimes ■ Not at all

- Frequently: 2%
- Sometimes: 27%
- Not at all: 71%

% Blacks

■ Frequently ■ Sometimes ■ Not at all

- Frequently: 25%
- Sometimes: 62%
- Not at all: 13%

"I feel that I can bring my whole self to work"

% Agree or Strongly Agree

66%

(All Races)

48%

51%

| Baby Boomers | Generation X | Millennials |

Race & Generation

Only...

50% Black Baby Boomers

36% Black Gen X

27% Black Millennials

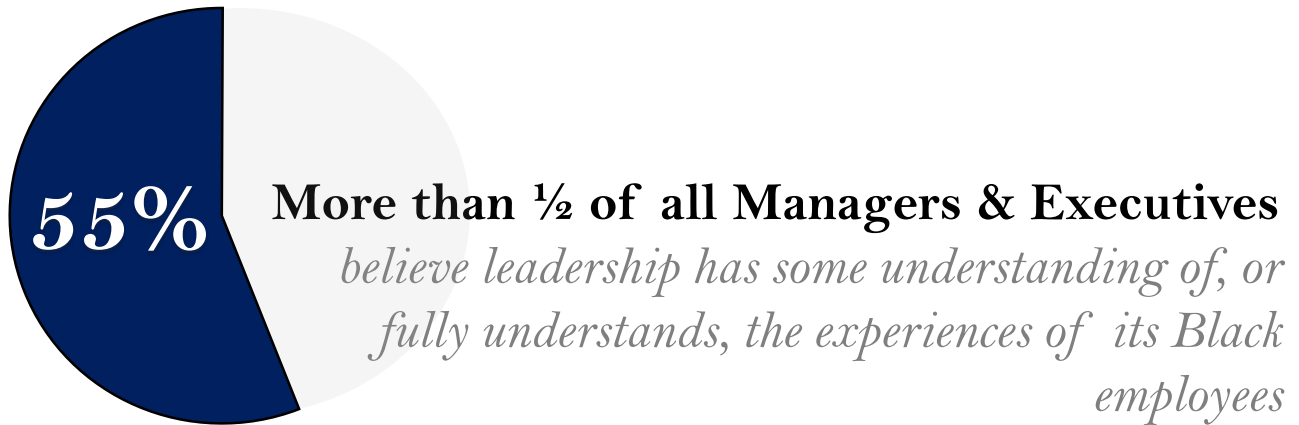*...agreed or strongly agreed that they could bring their whole self to work*

"I have to dilute my blackness to make others more comfortable"
-Survey Participant

"I'm not worried about me – the white male manager, I'm concerned about our many African American employees."
-Survey Participant

"To what extent do you feel your organization's leadership understand the experiences of its Black employees?"

55%

More than ½ of all Managers & Executives
believe leadership has some understanding of, or fully understands, the experiences of its Black employees

48% **Individual Contributors**
of all races believe leadership has some understanding of, or fully understands the experiences of its Black employees

Race & Organizational Level

43%

Less than ½ of all Black Managers & Executives
believe leadership has some understanding of, or fully understands the experiences of its Black employees

40% **Black Individual Contributors**
believe leadership has some understanding of, or fully understands the experiences of its Black employees

If they do understand, its their best kept secret, because none of these events have been addressed or commented on in any company-wide communication. It's like it doesn't exist.
-Survey Participant

Key Takeaways

This survey data only begins to scratch the surface in understanding *Race & Trauma* in the workplace. However, the insights shared offer organizations and leadership an opportunity to identify how they will begin or continue to create environments for fostering *trust*, authentic *dialogue*, and ultimately, true *inclusion*.

❏ Employees across races agree that race relations are getting worse. Polarizing viewpoints and worldviews have the potential to cause conflict and distrust in the workplace. Leaders should be intentional in creating opportunities for authentic dialogue, keeping in mind that team/organizational readiness and cross-cultural competence are key.

❏ Disconnects in how employees perceive their organization's level of inclusion and understanding of their experiences should be addressed. Leaders should consider the cues or implicit messages they may be communicating to employees that suggest understanding and inclusion (or a lack thereof).

❏ The proverbial goal of bringing one's "whole self" to work still seems to be unrealistic for many employees, especially Black Millennials. It would behoove leaders to identify the specific areas of opportunity or barriers that are making this goal more unrealistic for some, than others. Consider facilitating focus groups or administering an internal survey by demographic. Depending on the culture of trust within the organization, it may be more valuable to engage a third party vendor.

❏ Race continues to be diversity's "Four Letter Word." Though a taboo and challenging topic, race should not be minimized in an organization's D&I strategy. Primary dimensions of diversity, like race, can have a significant impact on one's cultural self-identity. An organization's lack of acknowledgement around issues pertaining to race can send messages that suggest some aspects of one's identity matter less than others.

About The Winters Group, Inc.

The Winters Group, Inc. is a minority, women owned global diversity and inclusion and organizational development consulting firm headquartered outside of Washington, DC. For 32 years, The Winters Group has inspired ingenuity through inclusion, supporting organizations, large and small, with developing sustainable diversity and inclusion strategies for game-changing organizational performance.

Our Vision

Our vision is *a world that values, respects and leverages our similarities and differences.*

Our Mission

Our mission is *to create transformative and sustainable solutions for individuals and organizations in support of their efforts to create more equitable and inclusive environments.*

Mary-Frances Winters, CEO & Founder

Mary-Frances Winters is a world renowned thought leader in the diversity and inclusion space. She is president and founder of The Winters Group, Inc., a 32-year-old diversity and inclusion consulting firm specializing in diversity and inclusion strategic planning and education. Mary-Frances has been recognized as a leading authority in the diversity and inclusion field, including being named "Diversity Pioneer" by *Profiles in Diversity Journal* and receiving the "Winds of Change Award" from the Forum on Workplace Inclusion. Mary-Frances is also author of three books: *Only Wet Babies Like Change: Workplace Wisdom for Baby Boomers, Inclusion Starts with I* and *CEOs Who Get It: Diversity Leadership from the Heart and Soul.*

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