



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP PAPER

# TRUST

## in Black & White

**Social Trust** as an  
**Emotion** and a **Choice**

# Table of Contents

---

<b>Authors</b>	.....	<b>03</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	.....	<b>04</b>
<b>Context</b>	.....	<b>05</b>
<b>Survey Data</b>	.....	<b>06</b>
<b>Trust as an Emotion</b>	.....	<b>09</b>
<b>Trust as a Choice</b>	.....	<b>12</b>
<b>Implications/Action</b>	.....	<b>18</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	.....	<b>21</b>

## Terminology

**Social Trust:** The belief in the inherent goodness of people and that people are honest and fair.

**Gender Solidarity:** Women joining together in good faith, trust, and fortitude for advancing policies, practices, and goals to eradicate inequality. Women include all for whom “woman” is a meaningful identifier or experience, including but not limited to cisgender women, gay women, transgender women, and non-binary individuals.

**Systemic Racism:** A set of public policies, practices, procedures, norms, and strategies that collectively work to perpetuate inequalities based on race. Systemic racism is not attached to an individual, identifiable perpetrator but has historical underpinnings that are deeply embedded in current day practices.

# Authors

---

**Deborah L. Plummer, PhD**  
Getting To We, Inc.  
UMass Chan Medical School

**Amber Banks, PhD**  
Center for Trust and Transformation

**Lori Stevic-Rust, PhD**  
Getting To We, Inc.

**Sharina D. Person, PhD**  
UMass Chan Medical School

**Jeroan Allison, MD, MS**  
UMass Chan Medical School

**Donna M. Skurzak, MA, CDP**  
Getting To We, Inc.

**Ayomi Rajapakse, MPA**  
Center for Trust and Transformation



# Introduction

---

Voluminous research supports the insight that women are the key to social progress. Women are often the first to identify problems within their communities and are motivated to act. Women are influential in perpetuating—or shifting—the values, norms, and ideas that are passed from one generation to the next.

Gender solidarity to advance civic engagement is good in and of itself. It is also the key to the premier challenge of our time: achieving racial equity. Women can be a powerful force in breaking down systemic racism. But mistrust between White women and Women of Color has intensified over the past five years as manifested in the [Women's March](#), the [voting pattern differentials](#), the [Covid impact disparities](#), and [hiring and promotion patterns in organizations](#). These factors, coupled with historical baggage from slavery and residuals of Jim Crow laws, have exposed both the unifying and the dividing factors between Black and White women.

Social trust, foundational to building civic engagement, is a complex and dynamic component of a healthy community. In the context of race relations, it has added layers of complexity. Social trust is both an emotion and a choice informed by our racial group identities and social contexts.

**“ As an emotion, social trust is a feeling of benevolence, compassion, and caring for each other in our racial identity groups. As a choice, it is acting on the belief that the other racial group is honest and fair and that they will show up for us and have our back in a consistent manner on racial equity issues that matter.**

**(Plummer, 2020, The Social Trust Project Listening Circles)**

Social trust, as both an emotion and as a choice, is grounded in an individual's historical context and personal agency. To better understand social trust in this context, we have examined social trust within the context of relationships between Black and White Women.

In this Thought Leadership Paper, we will weave together stories, data, and insights on building and restoring social trust employing a research-backed [relational model](#) for managing the dynamics of human differences. With qualitative data from Getting To We's Listening Circles and Bridging & Bonding Women Social Trust Retreats, we've identified seeds of trust and mapped how social trust operates between Black and White women. With this data, we offer specific action items and recommendations for how social trust between Black and White women can be developed and maintained. Our hope is that it will strengthen the advocacy of “we” between Black and White women in places where they live, work, worship, serve, and play.

# Context

---

In 2020, at the height of civil unrest and the public cry for racial reckoning, Getting to We began hosting Listening Circles for Black and White women. Listening Circles are 60-90 minute dialogue sessions held via zoom with groups of 10-20 Black and White women. The aim of the Listening Circles was to foster more forward-moving conversations about enhancing social trust between Black and White women. These Listening Circles informed the curriculum for subsequent Bridging and Bonding Women's Social Trust Retreats held in 2022 and 2023.

Bridging & Bonding Women's Social Trust weekend retreats aim to enhance social trust as a foundational aspect of a strong coalition of diverse women invested in gender solidarity to advance racial equity. The curriculum for these retreats focuses on Black and White women, described by social scientists as the top and bottom of [America's hidden caste system](#), with application to all women.

Listening Circles and Bridging & Bonding Women's Social Trust Retreats explore innovative strategies for living within the duality of race and gender and facilitate the necessary competencies for the individual and collective work of advancing racial equity.

**Survey results in this paper are yielded from data gathered from these engagements:**

Twenty-nine (29) Listening Circles with 336 women from all seven regions of the United States representing 20 states and the inaugural Bridging & Bonding Women's Social Trust Retreat held in Cleveland, Ohio, in April 2022 with 42 participants (21 Black and 21 White from 7 states, ages 26-73) and one held in Boston, Massachusetts with 42 participants (19 Black, 2 Latina and 21 White from 4 states, ages 22-71).

**Highlights from the survey data are outlined in the section that follows.**

# Survey Data

A Social Trust Poll and two other surveys were distributed by the Getting To We team as part of the Listening Circles and 2022 and 2023 Bridging and Bonding Women's Social Trust Retreat:

- **Pre-Bridging and Bonding Retreat Survey** with **84 participants** had **54 respondents (64%)** who answered **8** multiple choice questions.
- **Post-Bridging and Bonding Retreat Survey** with **84 participants** had **37 respondents (43%)** who answered **15** multiple choice questions.
- **The Social Trust Poll from the Listening Circles' 336 participants** had **323 respondents (96%)** who answered **11** multiple choice questions and **1 open ended** optional question.

Tables 1, 2, and 3 show the demographic breakdown of respondents by race, sexual orientation, and generational age group.

## Table 1: Respondents by Race

### Pre-Bridging and Bonding Retreat Survey

Race	Raw Data	Percent%
Black	24	44.44
White	30	55.56
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>100</b>

### Post-Bridging and Bonding Retreat Survey

Race	Raw Data	Percent%
Black	12	32.43
White	25	67.57
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100</b>

### The Social Trust Poll

Race	Raw Data	Percent%
Black	72	22.29
White	251	77.71
<b>Total</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 2: Respondents by Sexual Orientation**  
**Pre-Bridging and Bonding Retreat Survey**

<b>Orientation</b>	<b>Raw Data</b>	<b>Percent%</b>
Heterosexual	18	33.3
Lesbian/Gay	1	1.85
Bisexual	2	3.70
Queer	0	0
Asexual	0	0
Pansexual	0	0
N/A	33	61.11
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>100</b>

**Post-Bridging and Bonding Retreat Survey**

<b>Orientation</b>	<b>Raw Data</b>	<b>Percent%</b>
Heterosexual	35	94.59
Lesbian/Gay	0	0
Bisexual	1	2.7
Queer	1	2.7
Asexual	0	0
Pansexual	0	0
N/A	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100</b>

**The Social Trust Poll**

<b>Orientation</b>	<b>Raw Data</b>	<b>Percent%</b>
Heterosexual	288	89.16
Lesbian/Gay	14	4.33
Bisexual	13	4.02
Queer	2	0.62
Asexual	2	0.62
Pansexual	4	1.24
N/A	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>100</b>

## Table 3: Respondents by Generational Age Group

### Pre-Bridging and Bonding Retreat Survey

<b>Orientation</b>	<b>Raw Data</b>	<b>Percent%</b>
Traditional (1922-1944)	0	0
Baby Boomer (1945-1964)	21	38.89
Generation x (1965-1980)	21	38.89
Millenials (1981-2000)	11	20.37
Generation Z (2001-)	1	1.85
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>100</b>

### Post-Bridging and Bonding Retreat Survey

<b>Orientation</b>	<b>Raw Data</b>	<b>Percent%</b>
Traditional (1922-1944)	0	0
Baby Boomer (1945-1964)	20	54.05
Generation x (1965-1980)	10	27.03
Millenials (1981-2000)	7	18.92
Generation Z (2001-)	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100</b>

### Post-Bridging and Bonding Retreat Survey

<b>Orientation</b>	<b>Raw Data</b>	<b>Percent%</b>
Traditional (1922-1944)	12	3.72
Baby Boomer (1945-1964)	145	44.89
Generation x (1965-1980)	92	28.48
Millenials (1981-2000)	74	22.91
Generation Z (2001-)	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>100</b>



# Trust as an Emotion

---

The springboard for the current tension between Black and White women is embedded in our American history. White women made up approximately 40% percent of all slave owners. [Slave-owning women](#) not only witnessed the most brutal features of slavery, but took part in them, profited from them, and defended them. White women were economic actors in the slave system.

Threads of White women's power-over relationship with Black women—while benefitting rather than defending systemic racism—persist to the current day. Systemic racism operates at both explicit and implicit levels and shapes how these relationships breed mistrust. Trust becomes even more elusive as Black women have negative experiences with White women.

Unpacking feelings of “benevolence, compassion, and caring for each other in our racial identity groups” is critical to understanding how social trust as an emotion is demonstrated between Black and White women. The historical backdrop of the legacy of slavery and the impacts of racism on Black Americans' access to housing, voting rights, economic opportunity, education, healthcare, and social mobility influences the relationships between Black and White women. The intergenerational effects of past and current forms of racism influence the starting place from which Black and White women build trusting relationships.

The Getting to We Social Trust Poll (n=323) identified ten barriers to achieving social trust between Black and White women:

1. Historical Baggage (slavery, Jim Crow)
2. Current Day Racial Discrimination (wealth gap, healthcare disparities, voting suppression, achievement gap in education, criminal justice system, residential segregation)
3. Stereotypes and Controlling Images in the Media (e.g., Karens and Angry Black Women)
4. Disparate Racial Treatment of Gender Discrimination and Harassment by Men
5. Whiteness that Allows White Women to Choose Racial Privilege over Gender Solidarity. (i.e., White Privilege)
6. Family Socialization Process especially when Socioeconomic Class is Considered.
7. Faith Traditions/ Religious Beliefs that Promote Systemic Racism
8. Competition Over Sex/Love Partners

## TRUST AS AN EMOTION

---

Of the above, the most significant barriers to trust between Black and White women endorsed by the Listening Circle participants were the following:

**Current Day Racial Discrimination [56.97%],**

**Whiteness that Allows White Women to Choose Racial Privilege over Gender Solidarity. [51.39%], and**

**Stereotypes and Controlling Images in the Media [45.82%].**

The Social Trust Poll also asked participants to rate their levels of interracial trust. A survey was completed with 75 Black respondents and 250 white respondents. Trust in the opposite race was measured on a scale of 1 to 5 from lowest to highest.

Compared to White women, Black women are 39 times more likely to endorse the two lowest trust categories for the opposite race while compared to Black women, White women are 5.9 times more likely to endorse the two highest trust categories for the opposite race.

Only three respondents who identified as Black women indicated the highest level of trust (5) with White women. No respondent who identified as a White woman indicated the lowest level of trust (1) with Black women. Only three indicated their level of trust with Black women as a level 2.

Pre/post survey data from the Bridging and Bonding retreat participants suggest that time spent building relationships can have a positive impact on trust between White and Black women. The data further suggests that intentional spaces for Black and White women to engage in personal and collective work around racism, racial identity, and trust can have a positive effect on increasing trust between them.

During the retreat, the research team observed trends related to how each group of women approached trust building. Black women expressed that they were expecting and bracing for racism, ignorance, and/or fragility from White women. White women reported nervousness and anxiety about attending and expressed differing levels of awareness of how they might take up space (i.e., airtime during discussions) and were apprehensive about the role that White women's emotions might have in conversations about race and racism.

Black and White women participated in an exercise entitled Racial Group Identity Introductions. For it, they were separated by race and given the task to introduce themselves to each other as a group of White or Black women. In these breakout groups, Black women presented with a clear, strong racial group identity, whereas White women had a more difficult time identifying and describing their racial group identity. During the debrief conversations, both groups noted how White women were frustrated and irritated with the task, while Black women were joyful and excited. Both groups surmised that there appeared to be higher levels of trust demonstrated between Black women than levels of trust demonstrated among White women.

## TRUST AS AN EMOTION

---

“ We heard and watched the Black women on the other side of the room laughing and quickly forming a group while we struggled to figure out how to come together as a group of white women.

White Woman

---

“ Our side of the room was laughing and able to quickly come up with shared ideas on how to introduce ourselves as Black women, but the other side of the room was quiet and making lists.

Black Woman

---

“ We are going to go first because we know your introduction will be much better—we struggled.

White Woman

---

Participants also noted how White women’s responses were grounded in an individualistic culture, whereas Black women’s responses were grounded in a collective cultural identity. One participant in the White women’s group shared that individualism in White women can be expressed as an ingrained judgment and criticism of each other. As she put it, **“White women can be toxic together because they can afford to.”** Several White women also expressed “envy” of Black women’s joy and connection.

“ As white women, we quickly realized we didn’t know how to talk about ourselves in our white identity—it created tension in our group.

White Woman

---

“ I didn’t realize how hard it is for White women—and how natural we Black women connect to each other.

Black Woman

---

“ When asked to think about my racial identity it occurred to me—how privileged am I that I have never had to think about my racial identity.

White Woman

---

These data highlight the emotions that are aligned with building trust. How we feel toward our own and different racial groups can certainly inform how our relationships unfold. Confirming [research](#) supports that when interacting across racial groups, racial groups have divergent impression management goals with Blacks desiring messages of empowerment (goal is to be respected) while Whites desire messages of acceptance (goal is to be liked). These divergent impression management goals result in cultural mismatch and can slow down the process of building trust in interracial interactions.

“ As a Black woman in America, my experiences with White people have not always been favorable, and particularly White women. Even when I got there [women’s social trust retreat] getting ready for the first thing, I thought it’s only 48 hours what can we do? I started taking it all in.

Black Woman

---

“ I find that I have great relationships with individual Black women, but it is harder to figure out how to navigate a group of Black women.

White Woman

---

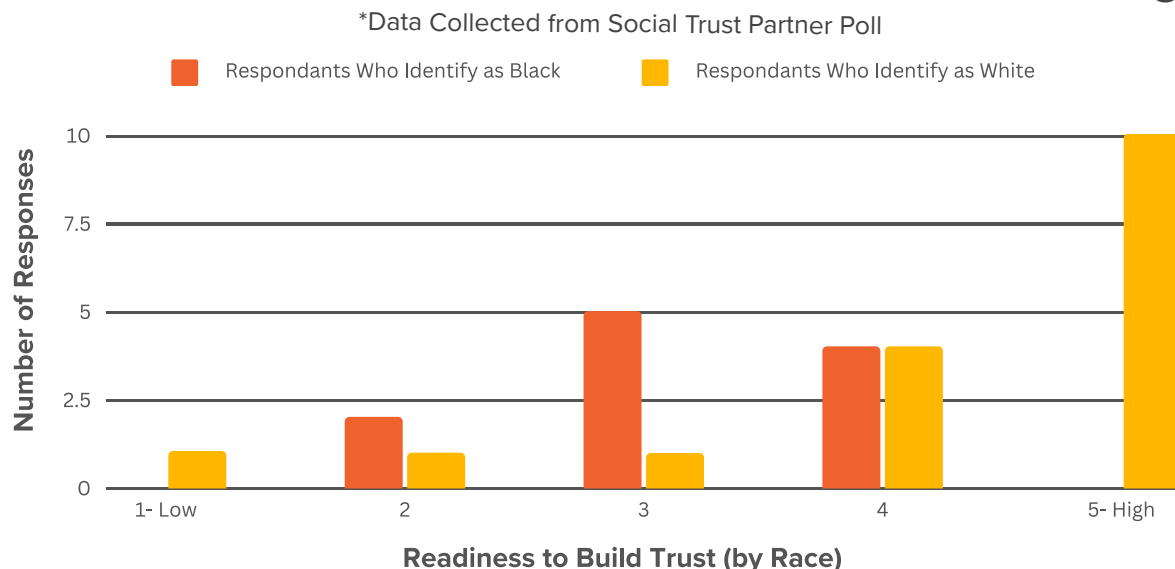
# Trust as a Choice

While social trust is informed by the context in which relationships are formed, there is also personal agency in choosing whether or not to trust someone. From a racial lens, social trust as a choice is acting on the belief that the other racial group is honest and fair and that they will show up for us and have our backs in a consistent manner on racial equity issues that matter: the achievement gap in education, economic exclusion, persistent residential segregation, healthcare disparities, criminal justice reform, and voter suppression are top of the list for achieving racial equity.

To further understand social trust as a choice, we examined the levels of willingness or readiness to build social trust. We also examined how the retreat played a role (if any) in improving their willingness to build social trust. Based on the pre-retreat surveys, most [83%] respondents seemed to feel comfortable reaching out to connect with their assigned trust partner at least once before the retreat. While most [44%] of respondents connected with their trust partner at least once, these connections were primarily [81%] over email. Most respondents found the nature of their conversations to revolve around retreat logistics [61%]. However, fewer respondents identified that the nature of their conversations revolved around “higher stakes” or personal topics like work and professional life [37%], and family [31%].

Survey respondents were asked to rate their readiness to build trust during the retreat on a scale of 1 through 5, with 1 being a low and 5 being high levels of readiness, to measure the retreat participants’ willingness to trust. The majority [88%] of survey respondents were between a level 3 and 5 of readiness to build trust during the retreat.

**Figure 1: Rate your current level of readiness to build trust during this retreat on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high**



## TRUST AS A CHOICE

---

Figure 1 shows the same survey question broken disaggregated by race. This figure shows that most [75%] respondents who identify as Black fell between a readiness level of 3 and 4. In contrast, most [82%] respondents who identify as White fell between a readiness level of 4 and 5.

Only five women endorsed the two lowest ratings (1 and 2) for readiness to build trust, with no difference by race. However, 64.8% of women overall endorsed the two highest ratings (4 and 5), with White women more often endorsing the highest two categories (76.7% vs 50%;  $p=0.041$ ). Therefore, compared to Black women, White women were approximately 53% more likely to endorse the two highest categories for willingness to build trust.

A reoccurring theme of “effort” was evident in dialogue sessions during the retreat. Black women expressed they had to expend more energy and carry undue burden to fight racism. Both groups engaged in conversations about how White women often do not make the extra effort and remain comfortable avoiding conversations about race. Black women participants requested that White women actively demonstrate courage and empathy by having uncomfortable conversations about race and being dedicated allies.

- “ *No matter how well-meaning we may be as white women, entering into racial conversations can be hard to know how to start.* ”
- “ *When I hear a Black woman say she is tired of telling her stories, it says to me—stop asking about the stories and start thinking critically for myself.* ”
- “ *The conversation starters and stopper exercises were really helpful—it gave me tools to engage in the hard conversations.* ”
- White and Black Women** \_\_\_\_\_
- “ *Don’t enter the conversation unless you are willing to do something. Do something.* ”
- Black Woman** \_\_\_\_\_

It was also noted that during the retreat Black women often tried to guide White women in their exploration of White racial identity by educating, reasoning, or promoting tips for how they could achieve a healthy racial identity resolution process. Doing so lessened their own energy for doing their work toward a healthy Black racial identity resolution that was not defined Whites’ perception of being Black or one that was distinguished from other racial groups who experience marginalization (i.e., Native Americans, Latinx, Asian Americans, Biracial and Multiracial Americans).

Although racism was a central figure in how both Black and White women defined themselves as racial beings, Black women had a stronger sense of racial identity apart from racism while White women struggled with defining a White racial identity that was not tethered to racism. Vulnerability about expressing racial identity experienced by both racial groups led to bonding in gender solidarity evidenced by cheering after each group’s presentations, appropriate silences in contemplation for what was being said, and lots of laughter.

## TRUST AS A CHOICE

---

Groups that did more preparatory work for the retreat were able to engage better during the retreat. The 42 women participants in the 2022 retreat had all experienced a Listening Circle session as well as a mandatory orientation session and pre-work (readings, videos, racial identity status survey and antiracist assessment tool) prior to the retreat experience. As a result, they had a stronger sense shared goals during the retreat.

### **Black Women (2022 cohort)**

- “ Happy to be a part of a mixed race group that was more alike.
- “ Power of connections between all Black women and White women.
- “ As Black women I understand now why we may be exhausted but we cannot abandon the work.

### **White Women (2022 cohort)**

- “ Just by doing something, we are moving the needle.
- “ Value of gracious learning by Black women. Whites need to help in that learning.
- “ Racial fatigue for Black women is greater than White women know—help give them a rest.

Women participants in the 2023 retreat had only written communications about the retreat and its framework, and less than half of the 42 participants attended an optional orientation session or had completed the pre-work. As a result, the 2023 participants were not as familiar with a relational model for managing racial dynamics. This affected the interactions between Black and White women as they attempted to reach the goals for shared understanding, shared values, and a desire for learning new competencies to foster continued work as women in solidarity and equity.

### **Black Women (2023 cohort)**

- “ We need to let the guard down to reach our common goals.
- “ We are all sisters. We need to lean into sisterhood.
- “ I know I have to recognize my bias.
- “ Trying to get to “WE” is not going to happen in silos.
- “ I’m realizing not all White women are the same.

### White Women (2023 cohort)

- “ There’s a need to see beyond self and let go of guilt to feel the power of what we can do.
- “ It was overwhelming to see the connection of love and strength among black women.
- “ I know I want to connect, but don’t yet know how.

While a lack of a shared knowledge base coming into the retreat affected interactions, there were common threads expressed between both Bridging and Bonding cohort experiences. During the Racial Group Identity Introduction exercise, the 2022 and 2023 Black women broke into their group, were louder, laughed more, and generated more comments than White women. With the 2023 cohort, as the volume in the room increased, the White women moved to another room. There, they formed an orderly circle, spoke one at a time and collectively participated in reflective thinking. They chose their words carefully when addressing one another, and intentionally decided to focus what was “good” about being a White woman.

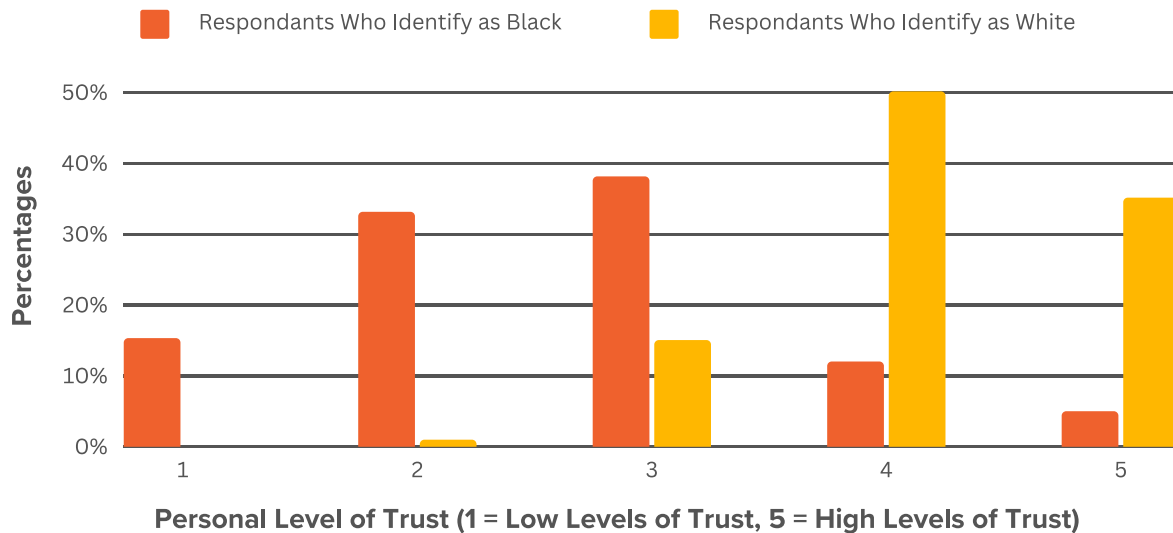
Other common themes for both cohorts were that White women demonstrated more individualistic thinking patterns while Black women evidenced more collective thinking patterns. White women expressed feelings of guilt and insight into their privilege and the recognition that they have power they can use to effect change by using their “Whiteness” for good. Black women expressed awareness of race, referenced wisdom from elders, and variations of spirituality as collective themes.

Of particular note, readiness for the retreat experience and some kind of screening for the desire to bridge and bond rather than divide and conquer is a critical mindset for building trust. First you have to want to, then you can. This note has special implications for building trust and suggests that given the historical baggage and current day manifestations of racial dynamics, creating tools and experiences to achieve readiness for building trust are necessary prerequisites for establishing trust between Black and White women.

While Black women’s trust in White women started relatively low (Figure 2), participants demonstrated an openness to building trust with participants of the opposite race. Participants often chose to sit with their trust partner at lunch or at similarly cross-racial lunch tables. There was also a trend around Black trust partners calling out insightful comments or actions that their White partners displayed during the sessions. On several occasions, Black women called out their White partners when they said something that resonated by saying “that’s my partner!” This public claiming was a show of appreciation and notable that it was mostly Black women applauding White women for their courage and/or insights around racial equity.

### Figure 2: What is your personal level of trust with Black Women (for White Women) and White Women (for Black Women)

\*Data Collected from Social Trust Poll



The closing session of the Bridging & Bonding Women’s Social Trust Retreats featured a chorus of both Black and White women who demonstrated increased motivation to continue having meaningful cross-racial conversations aimed to enhance trust. This included Black women continuing to explore their identity and barriers to relationships with White women and White women deepening their understanding of Whiteness and working toward a healthy White identity apart from racism.

“ *Moving forward I will think of all women as my sisters.* ”

“ *Moving forward I will use my privilege to challenge racism.* ”

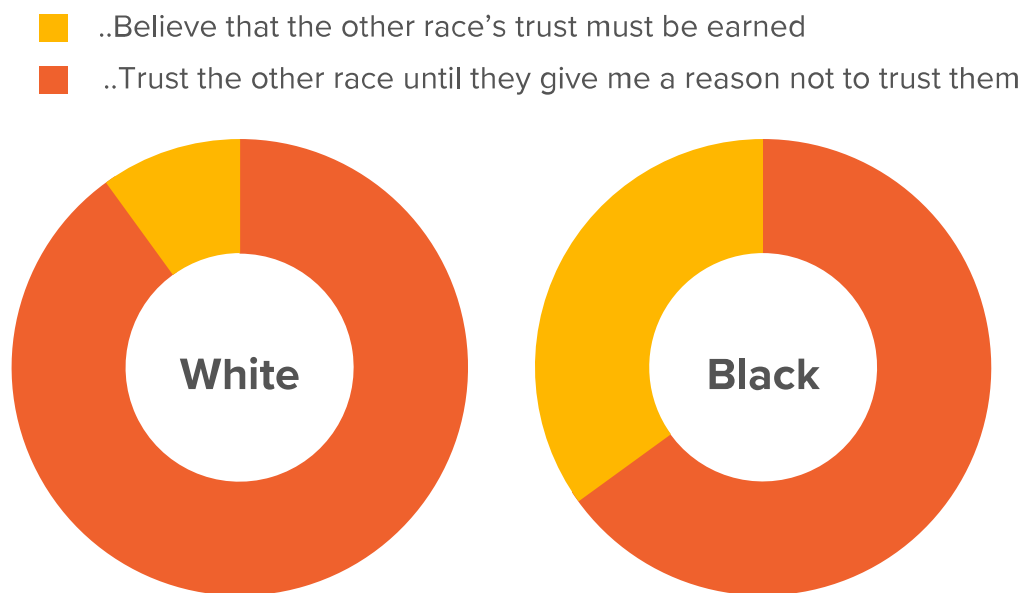
“ *Moving forward I will work on my racial stamina to build gender solidarity to achieve racial equity.* ”

“ *Moving forward I will focus on self-care to continue to do the work.* ”



- “ *Moving forward I will listen as if I am wrong.*
- “ *Moving forward I will continue to tell my story in the hopes that it will inspire others to tell theirs so that we can come to solidarity.*

**Figure 3: When it comes to race relations with Whites (if you are Black) or Blacks (if you are White)...**



Trust as a choice is a critical consideration for building relationships between Black and White women. As Figure 3 highlights, Black and White women have different views on whether trust must be earned. Of the 323 women who completed this survey, only 13% (n=42) agreed that trust of the other race must be earned rather than trusting until the other race gave a reason not to trust. Among those who were Black, 34.5% felt that trust had to be earned, in contrast to 6.8% for those who were White ( $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, Black women were five times more likely to feel that trust is earned rather than assumed.

Earning another's trust requires a commitment to engaging in trust-building behaviors over time. Creating spaces and support for Black and White women to consciously choose to build trust is the critical work ahead.

# Implications / Action

---

In the section below we offer specific action items individuals can take within their organizations, neighborhoods, communities, educational institutions, and social networks to build trust between Black and White women. We also offer how this learning can be generalized to other groups experiencing mistrust.

In general, confronting the challenges of building trust between Black and White women can unlock new relationships and new learning. The Bridging and Bonding retreats increased participant's racial stamina for productive conversations about race. These conversations helped break down stereotypes and gave participant's opportunities to learn and practice trust-building together.

## Lessons Learned for Building Trust

At the Bridging and Bonding Retreat, we observed that the following connection points may serve as fertile ground for building trust. Each of these connection points is not a standalone action but when combined with the other actions can yield powerful results.

### Shared Social Networks

Before the retreat, partners were invited to connect before the retreat, and 83 percent of participants made contact in some form. This made for a warmer welcome when the participants gathered at the retreat.

In addition, many participants had a prior relationship or connection to the retreat facilitators or to other participants. This transfer of trust can be an essential strategy for establishing trust during the experience. Very often, when we are introduced to someone new by someone we trust, we start with a higher baseline level of trust because of the trust we have in the person we know.

### Shared Values

The Bridging & Bonding Retreat as Getting to We's core work supports gender solidarity as a pathway to racial equity. Participants invested in racial equity and this shared value paved the way for increased trust. Particularly for Black women, knowing that the White women who participated in these retreats were committed to racial equity, set an important foundation for honest conversation about the emotions surrounding trust.

Black women participants who do not share these values and who are committed to demonstrating a fixed racial identity or who believe that White identity is rooted in

## IMPLICATIONS/ACTION

---

inherent racism, prove to be disruptive to the process of building trust in the community. In the retreat, these Black women tend to shut down the voices of White women who fear being attacked, as well as mute the voices of other Black women who fear they will be labeled as “not Black enough.”

White women committed to racial equity who experience themselves as racially fragile and naive and who demonstrate unhealthy guilt about the current state of race relations also interrupt the trust-building process by fostering an unhealthy relationship dynamic where they cleanse their collective guilt through the experience and unconsciously create a dynamic where Black women (and other Women of Color) extract self-worth from Whites. This dynamic maintains a divide and conquer scenario as opposed to a bridging and bonding scenario that is the work of building social trust.

### **Racial Identity Resolution Process**

Loaded by the U.S. socialization process that focuses on race as a demographic category and a biological construct, we are prone to settle from birth and prematurely on our racial identity without exploration. Bridging & Bonding Women’s Social Trust Retreats allow dedicated time for racial identity exploration. In our racialized society, achieving social trust between Black and White women requires different but related tasks for White and Black women.

White women are encouraged to work to understand their racial identity outside of the cancerous nature of racism. By doing so, they establish a racial identity rooted in authenticity and honest sharing of thoughts, feelings, and experiences. They experience a healthy White racial identity that fosters meaningful contact with others and provides them with the agency needed to challenge any level of system (personal, interpersonal, group, organizational, or societal) that supports inequality, oppression, and social justice.

Black women are encouraged to embrace their racial identity as not defined by racism but as women of deep racial consciousness and high race esteem rooted in agility, creativity, wonder, and stamina. By doing so, they experience race as an integral part of their multiple and intersecting identities that comprise the self. They safely explore a true sense of self, act with confidence, and receive support for practicing healthy self-care.

### **Shared Identity**

Although there were racial tensions, there was also evidence of gender solidarity in how women related to one another and how they claimed gender as part of their identity. Shared aspects of our identities (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, class) can be foundational to connecting across differences. In many cases we find we are more alike than different!

## IMPLICATIONS/ACTION

---

With social trust, both White and Black women can demonstrate a high level of fluidity and intentionality about one's actions and experience a positive racial identity in its full integration of the many dimensions of diversity and within our multiple identities that characterize us as human beings.

### **Shared Experiences**

Laughter, humor, sharing a meal, playing, and dancing are forms of glue that can bind partners and groups together. These shared experiences create opportunities for bonding and getting to know one another. As retreat participants have stated, building trust is soul work, and the more we can engage all aspects of ourselves, the more we build ties that bind us together.

### **Shared Goals**

When a group has a common goal, people are often more willing to navigate the discomfort of having difficult conversations about race. In the retreats, participants had a shared goal of learning and building trust with one another which created an atmosphere of increased understanding and curiosity.

### **Shared Risk**

Trust can take longer and be more complicated when the stakes are high (e.g., sharing in a zoom meeting vs. at an in-person weekend retreat). However, knowing that others are willing to be vulnerable and take the risk to build trust with each other, despite past and present negative experiences with racism, can be a powerful connection point. Mutual vulnerability can invite greater trust between Black and White women and other multiracial groups.

# Conclusion

---

In the work to build cross-racial trust, we must attend to trust as both an emotion rooted in our complex and sordid history of racism in America's past and in its current day manifestations, and as a choice that can be fostered through personal connection, dialogue, and new ways of knowing and being.

The Bridging & Bonding Women's Social Trust Retreats are an extraordinary example of creating an environment where participants can unpack emotions around trust and make conscious choices to build trust with one another. The papers in this series will continue to go deeper into cross-racial trust dynamics and how we can continue to advance racial equity through gender solidarity.

## About Getting To We

Getting to We is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping people understand their shared, core identity as humans and relate to each other without fear. We create learning communities, research-backed resources, digital tools, visual media, DEIB edutainment, and competency-building learning experiences that create a better society for everyone. We believe that intentional multicultural, multiracial living provides us with the experiences necessary to turn us and them into We.

Our Thought Leadership Papers serve to incubate new ideas for building social trust as the bedrock of a healthy society and a foundational aspect for achieving equity.

We are grateful for our donors who help to fund this research. Special thanks to *Jo Salvatore, Bridging & Bonding Event Organizer and Getting To We Circle of Advisors Jill Ellen Karp, Karen Tucker, Eve Bridburg, Scilla Andreen, and Anne E. McCollum* for their participation, sage advice, and generous support of this initiative.



Please direct questions or comments on Getting To We Thought Leadership Papers to the lead author, [Debbie@Gettingtowe.org](mailto:Debbie@Gettingtowe.org). As an open access paper, it can be found, along with other valuable resources, on Getting to We's website: <https://gettingtowe.org/resources/>

