

Black People report higher levels of discomfort interacting with City of Melrose institutions relative to white people: Results from the Melrose Racial Climate Survey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Black people had lower agreement than white people that they:

- feel a sense of belonging in Melrose
- feel that they can be their full, authentic self in Melrose
- feel comfortable interacting with Melrose institutions, especially City Hall (including the mayor’s office, clerk, building department and treasurer), the Melrose Public Schools, and the Melrose Housing Authority.

Introduction

In 2022 the City of Melrose engaged in a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) assessment process “designed to collect information about the racial climate in Melrose.”

The DEI assessment consisted of 33 focus groups and a survey. The assessment included people who live in Melrose, people who work in Melrose, people who attend school in Melrose, and parents of young people who attend school in Melrose. The assessment was conducted by the City in collaboration with VISIONS Inc. Results of the survey and focus groups were shared with the public in an online community forum held on June 22, 2022.¹

The purpose of this report, which is based on publicly available data from the DEI survey, is to draw attention to racial inequities in respondents’ sense of belonging and comfort interacting with city institutions. Because the mission of FBLN/Reparations for Melrose is to end anti-Black racism, this report focuses specifically on the experience of Black survey respondents in contrast with white survey respondents.

FBLN/Reparations for Melrose Mission Statement

We are a group working in Melrose Massachusetts to end anti-Black racism. Our objective is to research and document current and historical harms with the goal of making systemic changes and providing reparations for damages done through personal and institutional racism.

Methods

Data collection took place from August 4 through October 4, 2021. Survey recruitment took place via email and through the Mayor’s Blog. Melrose residents received an invitation to participate in the survey on August 4, 2021. Families of Melrose Public School students received an invitation on August 5, 2021. The survey was also promoted by the Melrose Energy Commission and other community groups. The survey was available in English, Chinese, Portuguese, and Spanish. SurveyMonkey was used for data collection. A link to the survey is available at the end of this report.²

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

In total, 1,363 people took the DEI Survey. Survey respondents were predominantly white, female, residents of Melrose, age 31-60. Detailed characteristics of survey respondents are shown in Figures 4 through 7.

Overall Sense of Belonging in Melrose

Black people had lower agreement than white people that they feel a sense of belonging in Melrose and that they can be their full, authentic self in Melrose. Specifically, just about half of Black people felt a sense of belonging (49%), and 58% felt they could be their full, authentic self. In contrast, approximately 80% of white people felt a sense of belonging and felt that they could be their authentic self.

Figure 1. I Feel a Sense of Belonging in Melrose

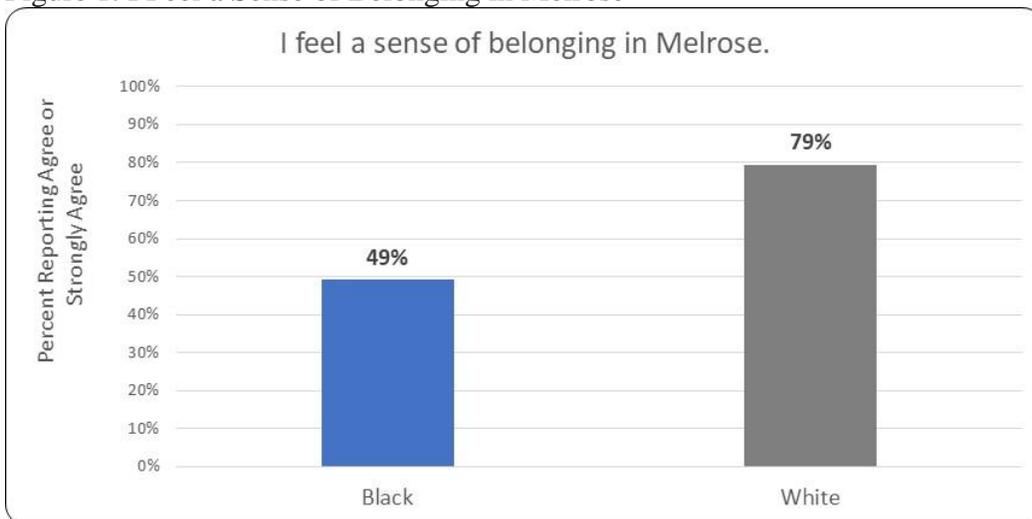
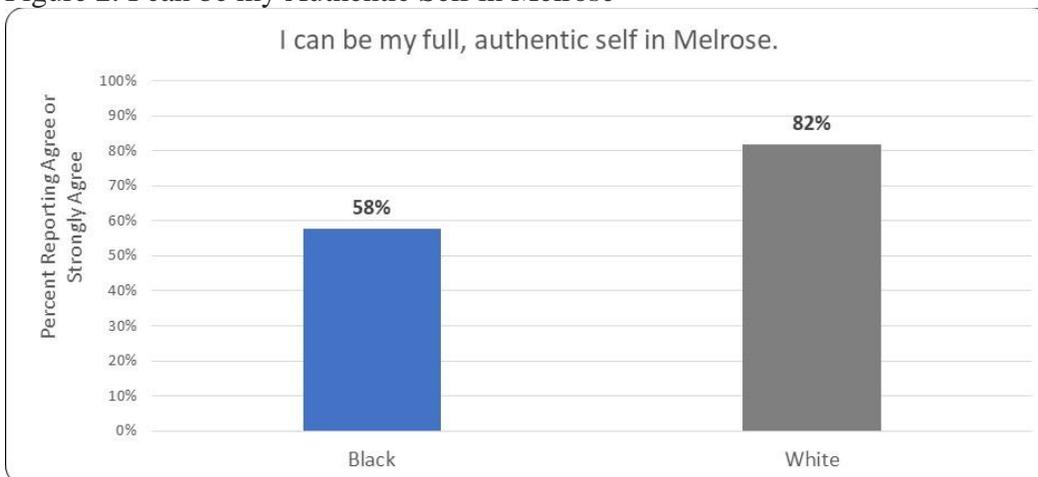


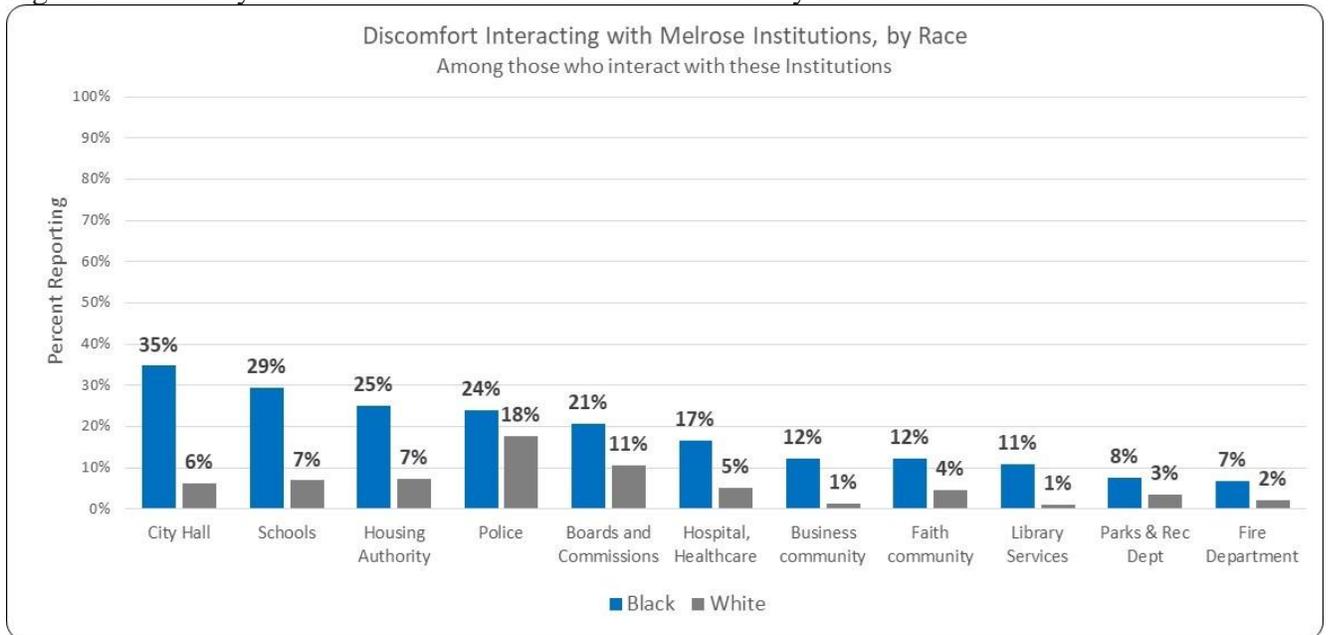
Figure 2. I can be my Authentic Self in Melrose



Discomfort Interacting with Melrose Institutions

Most people are *not* uncomfortable interacting with city institutions. However, Black people had substantially greater discomfort interacting with Melrose institutions than white people (Figure 3). Disparities in discomfort were greatest for city hall (including the mayor’s office, clerk, building department and treasurer), the Melrose Public Schools, and the Melrose Housing Authority. Black and white people were similarly uncomfortable interacting with the Melrose Police Department. Among Black people, the Melrose Fire Department was the city institution that produced the least discomfort. Among white people, the business community and the Melrose Public Library were the institutions that produced the least discomfort; however, more than 1 in 10 Black people were uncomfortable interacting with these institutions.

Figure 3. Summary of Discomfort with Melrose Institutions by Black and White Race



Conclusions

This report illustrates that Black people feel less of a sense of belonging in Melrose and less able to be their full, authentic selves, relative to their white peers. Black people report higher levels of discomfort interacting with nearly all city institutions relative to white people. Taken together, these findings suggest systemic barriers to Black people feeling fully a part of the community and being able to access city institutions. Melrose institutions would do well to expand on this initial study to delve into why Black people are less comfortable interacting with them, so systemic barriers can be addressed.

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Figure 4. Race and Ethnicity of Survey Respondents

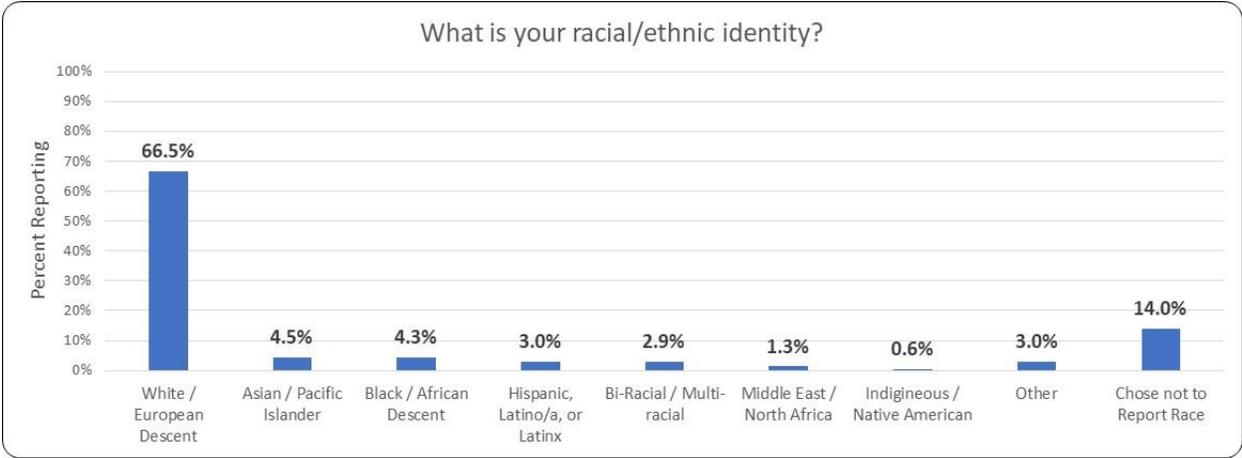


Figure 5. Gender Identity of Survey Respondents

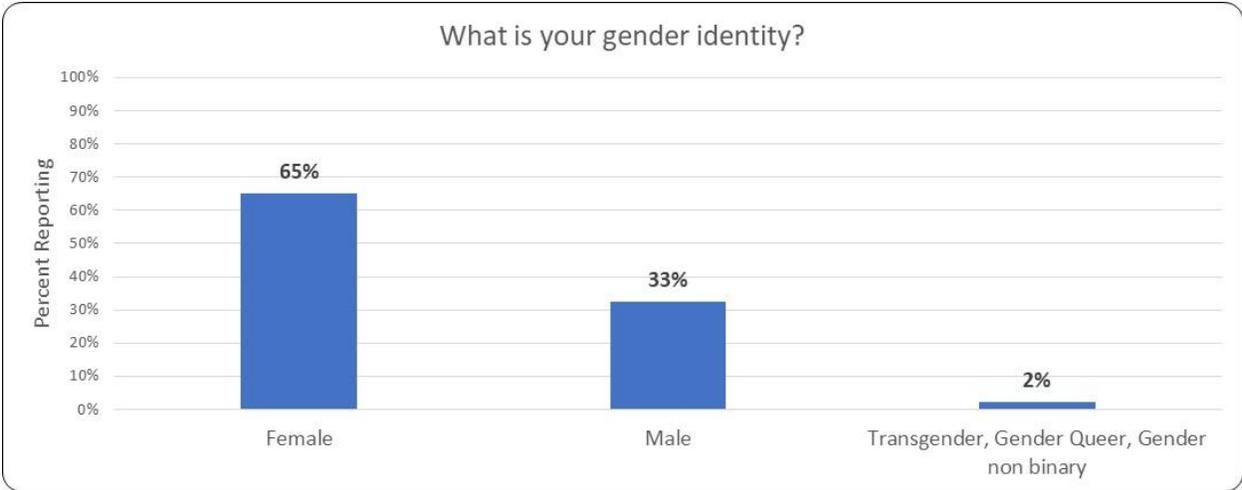


Figure 6. Community Role of Survey Respondents

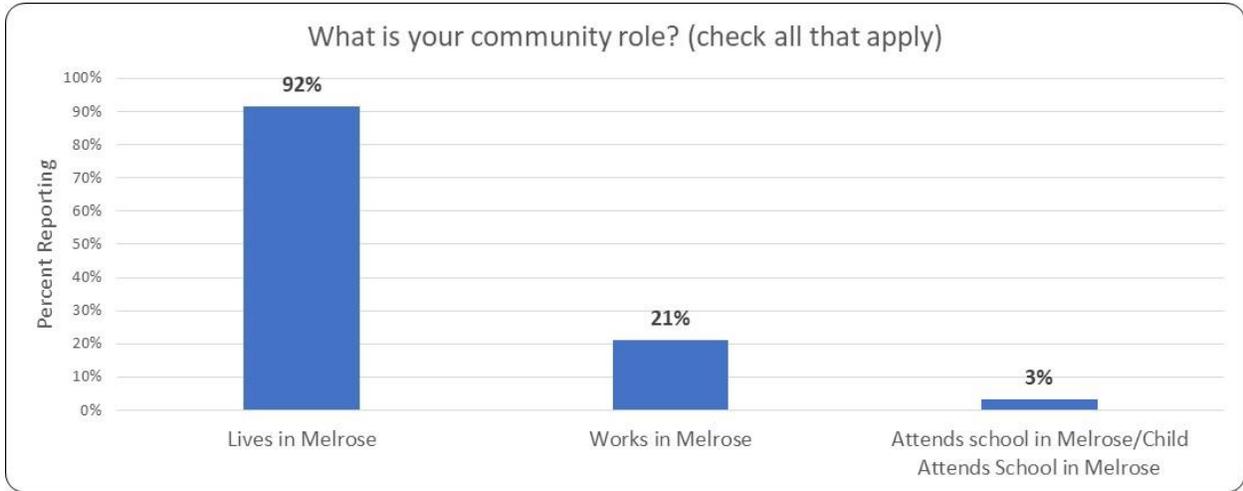
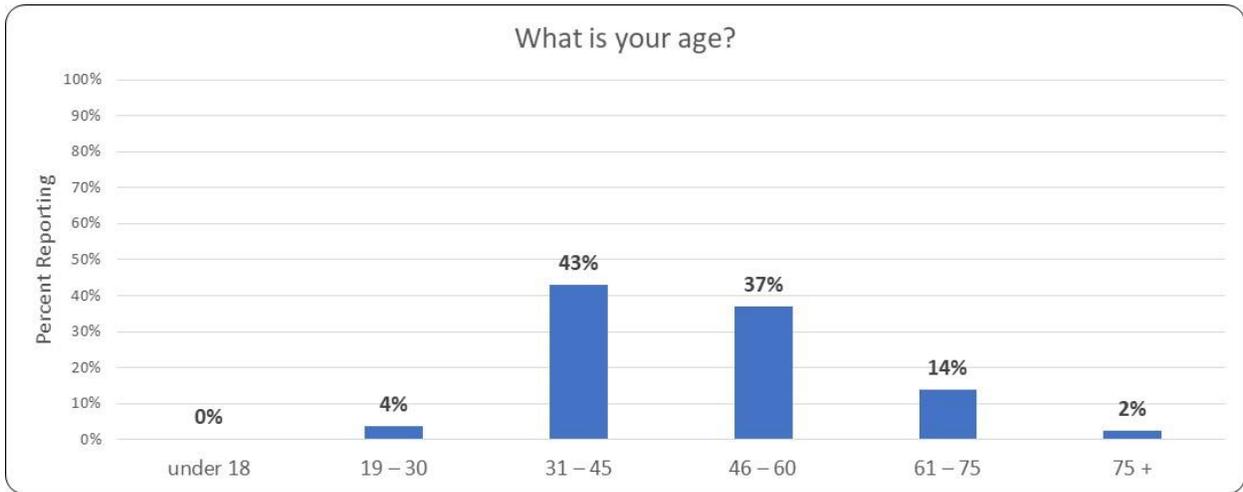


Figure 7. Age of Survey Respondents



Acknowledgements

This report is a product of Reparations for Melrose. The report was written by Jane Allen with data prepared by David Valade, based on a concept by Cory Allen. Jim Bennett, David Valade, Grace Berte and Carolyn Cronin provided substantive comments on drafts of this report.

Sources

1. Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Community Forum June 22nd 2022. <https://vimeo.com/724592993>
2. Link to the online Survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/QH5NDPG>