'It Can Be Hard to Concentrate or Focus on Something Else'

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After George Floyd was killed by police officer Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis, as three other police officers looked on, images and videos circulated via news and social media. Weeks earlier, video of Ahmaud Arbery's killing[*content warning: the linked post contains descriptions of graphic violence*]went public, prompting the long-overdue arrest of the two white men who killed him. On social media, Black people expressed frustration that it took this graphic, viral video — shared widely by white people — to get justice. Both deaths reignited debate over the dissemination of images and videos depicting dead Black people, and the trauma they inflict on Black people who see them.

The experience of routinely witnessing Black murders in the media has been likened to PTSD, or a kind of "secondary" trauma. Data confirm what Black people have long known to be true: Police are much more likely to use excessive force against them than white people. Absorbing the endless evidence of this violence adds another layer of trauma for Black people, particularly when each news cycle ends and nothing changes.

Here, Black psychologists and health experts explain how racial and secondary trauma work, how that trauma impacts the body and brain, and what Black people experiencing this trauma yet again can do to take care of themselves.

Monnica Williams, associate professor of psychology at the University of Ottawa and editor of *Eliminating Race-Based Mental Health Disparities*
There are all sorts of things covered in the media like tragic car accidents and plane crashes, but we don't see the dismembered, mutilated bodies because we've decided that's not appropriate to show. But for some reason, we're going to show a dead Black person lying on the ground? Maybe that's not appropriate either. It's traumatizing to see dead bodies. Nobody shows dead white bodies, so why is it okay to show a dead Black body?

We need more discretion in terms of how we show and disseminate these images.It can be traumatizing to see images of violence done to other people. Just seeing these images often enough can cause trauma. I think a lot of people of color are feeling genuinely traumatized from living in a society that is riddled with racism, and these reminders of the trauma are triggering, and compound the existing trauma further.

As a mental-health professional, I'd say it can be very helpful to talk to a supportive person, whether that's a therapist or someone in your life who's a really good listener, and who won't be judgmental or tell you what to do, but will just be there. Take some time to step away from social media — you don't have to watch the video, you don't have to look at the pictures over and over again. There's a lot of healing to be found through advocacy and activism — making meaning out of something bad that happened. Making George Floyd's life stand for something and bringing about change in your community and workplace or school can be a good way to harness a lot of that energy that you don't know what to do with.

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