

A LOOK INTO TRAUMATIC STRESS DURING INTERTWINED PANDEMICS

How Race-based &
Environmental Trauma
Impact the Mental Health of
Black individuals in the
Workplace & Academia

07.16.2020 | Keshia L. Harris , Ph.D & Farah Harris, LCPC



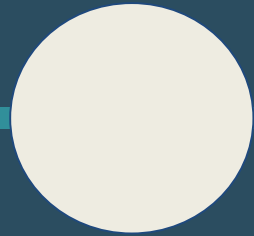
Timeline of 2020 Trauma



January
Death of Kobe & Gigi
Bryant



March
Rise of Covid coverage
Murder of Breonna Taylor



May
Videos of the murders of
Ahmaud Abrey and George
Floyd released



June
Civil Unrest



Mindful
Moment



**What is
Trauma?**




**Harmful or
Life-Threatening**

Definition of Trauma

*An **event**, series of events, or set of circumstances that is **experienced** by an individual as **physically or emotionally harmful** or life threatening, overwhelms a person's ability to cope, and that has **adverse effects** on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual **well-being**.*

(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 2014)



Types of Trauma Exposure



Acute: Results from exposure to a single overwhelming event or experience.



Chronic: May include one or multiple forms of trauma that occur repeatedly over an extended period of time.



Complex: Exposure to multiple traumatic events or experiences in early childhood and its immediate adverse effects.



Historical: cumulative mass group exposure to adverse experiences that occurs across generations

Types of Trauma in Diverse Communities

- Refugee and Immigrant trauma
- Trauma related to sexual orientation and gender identity
- Racial trauma
- Environmental trauma



Environmental Trauma

Hurricane Katrina (2005)

- 62% of evacuees met criteria for Acute Stress Disorder (ASD).
- 38%-49% predicted to meet PTSD 2 years following.
- Blacks had greater symptom severity.

Hurricane Maria (2017)

- 65.7% of Puerto Ricans had PTSD who moved to Florida
- 43.6% of Puerto Ricans had PTSD who remained in PR.

COVID-19 (2020)

- Non-white groups are majority of COVID-19 cases (CDC).
- Hospitalizations for Black and Latino patients are nearly 5 times that of White patients (CDC).



Police Killings and Mental Health of Black Americans: Spillover Effect

Jacob Bor, Boston University, 2018



Measured causal impact of police killings of unarmed Black Americans on mental health of Black Americans.

Each exposure of a killing was associated with an additional 14 poor mental health days for Black respondents.

Compared mental health burden of police killings to mental health burden of diabetes.

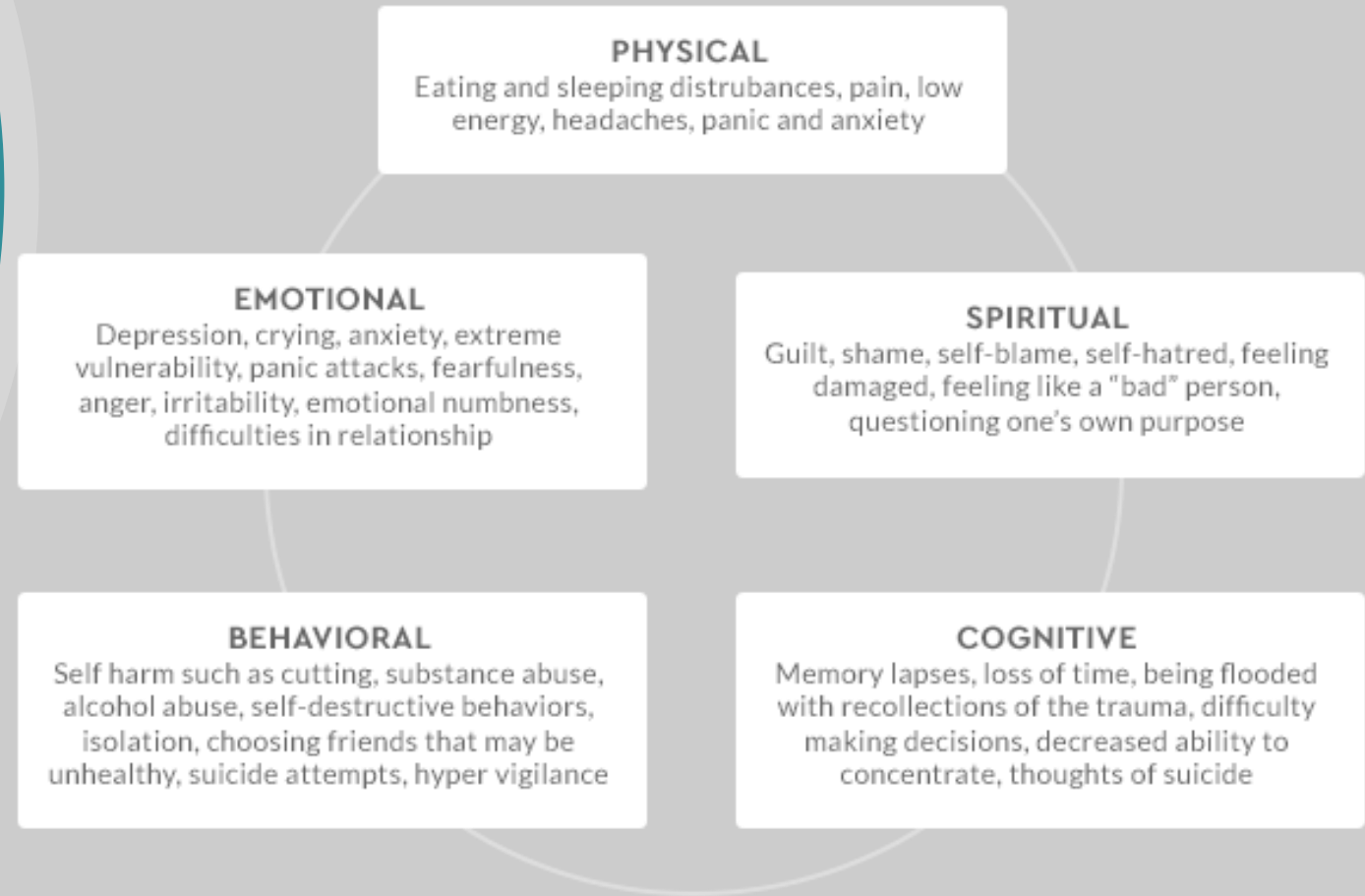
Race-Related Traumatic Events Online and Mental Health of Adolescents

Brendesha M. Tynes, University of Southern California, 2019

- Measured exposure to traumatic events online (TEO) and association of mental health outcomes of African American and Latinx adolescents.
- Images/videos of same ethnic group (1) being beaten, (2) being arrested or detained, and (3) a viral video of police killing of an unarmed Black person.
- Participants with higher experiences of TEO reported higher rates of PTSD and depressive symptoms.
- Girls and Latinx adolescents reported higher rates of depressive symptoms.
- Mental health professionals can talk to clients about meaning making around race-related traumatic events.



General Effects of Trauma

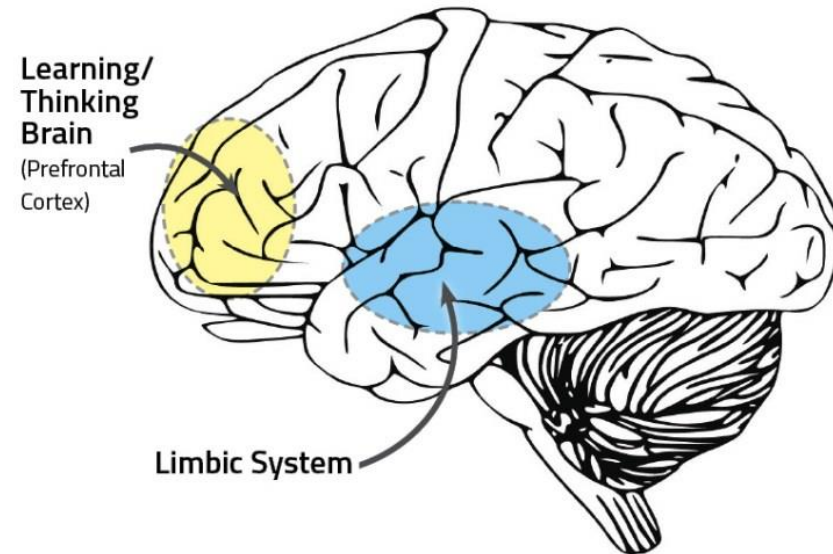


Effects of Complex Trauma

- Brain is conditioned to survive
- Trauma causes survival brain to become overreactive
- Shift to dysregulated state
- Impaired development in thinking/learning brain
- Impaired connections between thinking/learning brain and emotional brain to support regulation

Survival Mode: **Flight/Fight/Freeze**

Frontal lobe (Prefrontal cortex) goes offline
Limbic system / mind and lower brain functions take over



Impact of Trauma on College Students



Physical responses (headaches, depression, PTSD)



Feelings of embarrassment, fear, and isolation



Emotional outbursts at social gatherings



Social withdrawal, mistrust of others from different backgrounds



Difficulty paying attention in class



Difficulty building relationships



Easily triggered by trauma reminders, particularly related to violence or abandonment.





Effects of Trauma on College Student Achievement

- Increased absences.
- Disengagement in course discussions.
- Missing assignments.
- Poor test scores or overall academic performance.
- Imposter syndrome.

Trauma in Academia: #BlackintheIvory

- Black doctors/nurses mistaken for janitors.
- Doctoral students and new professors discouraged from researching communities of color.
- Tenure denials.
- Assumptions about obtaining position because of race.





Faculty and Students of Color in Academia Today

Full Time Professors

- 53% White males and 27% of White females
- 8% Asian/Pacific Islander males, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander females
- 2% Black males, Black females, and Hispanic males respectively; 1% Hispanic females

Assistant Professors

- 39% white females, 34% white males
- 7% Asian/Pacific Islander males and females, 5% Black females
- 3% Black males and Hispanic males and females, respectively
- Black students make up under 9% of doctoral degrees

Voices of Black Academics

“When I got admitted into MIT early action senior year, it was one of the best moments of my life. But then a friend told me a mutual friend said it was because I was Black,” Amherst College visiting professor

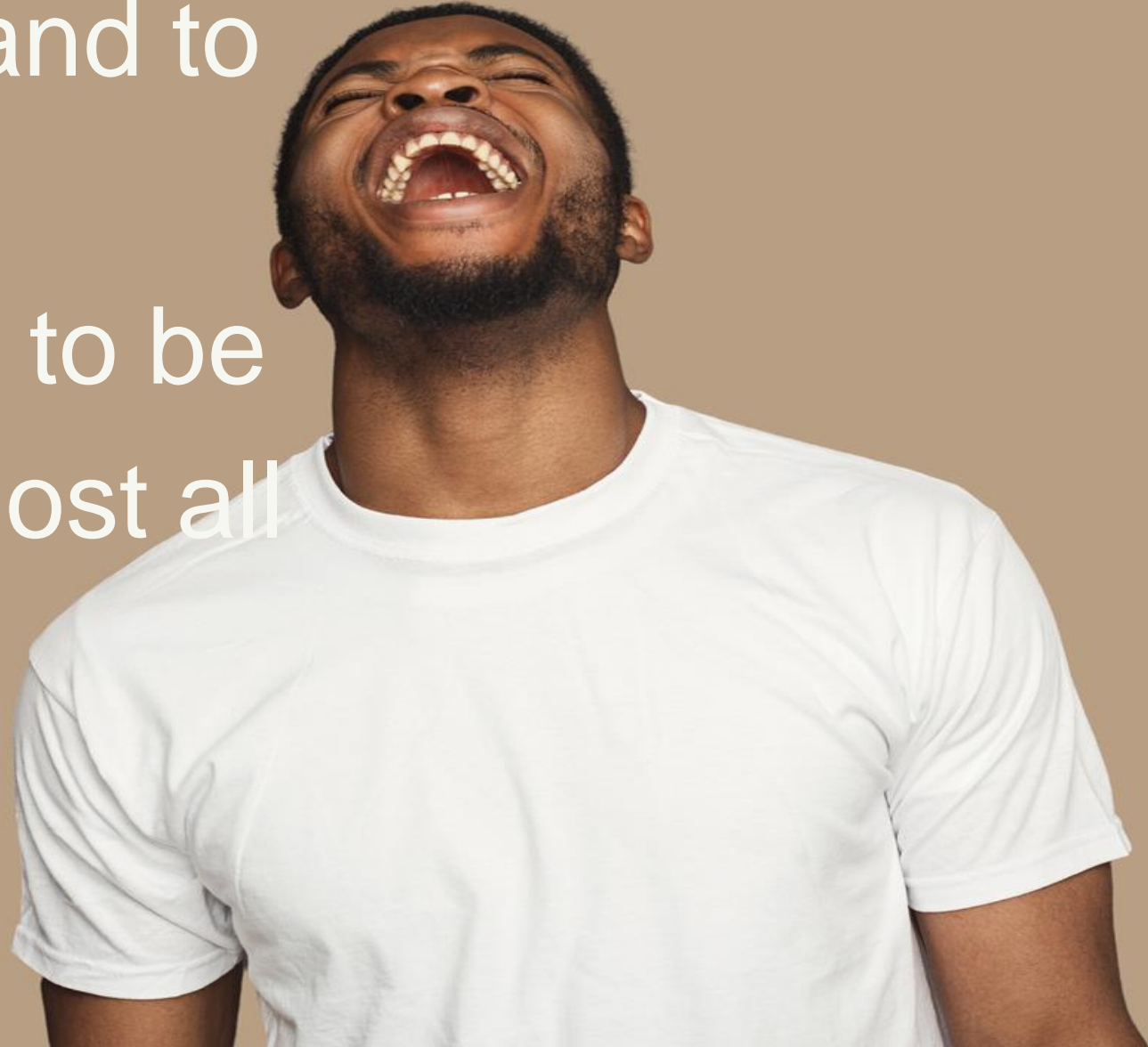
“We’re talking about complex institutions, and faculty, especially faculty of color, always have to look over their shoulder,” Simmons University Professor

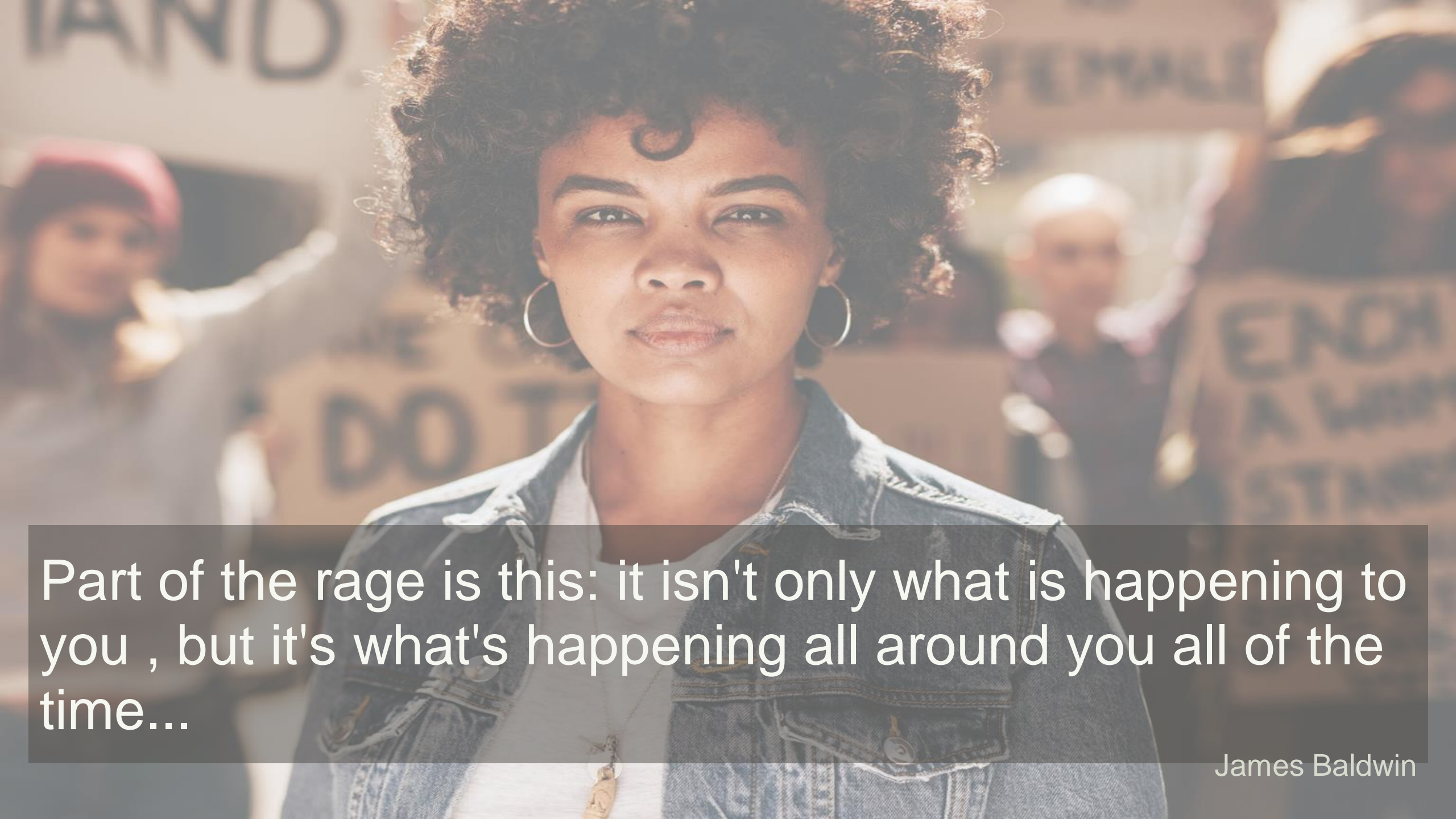
“Seeing your peers get recognized for departmental awards, awards that are less competitive and/or worth less money than the one you got but seeing *no* recognition for the one you got,” Michigan State University PhD Candidate

“When do Black faculty get to recharge? Take a wellness break, participate in our own meetings to discuss how we feel, be our authentic selves, to discuss trauma by students of color or other faculty, not do more and more without compensation or resources,” New York Medical College Associate Dean

"To be a Negro in
this country and to
be relatively
conscious, is to be
in a rage almost all
the time..."

James Baldwin





Part of the rage is this: it isn't only what is happening to you , but it's what's happening all around you all of the time...

James Baldwin

Forms of Racism

Systemic

- When ideologies, institutions, and policies operate to produce racial and ethnic inequality

Internalized

- is the acceptance of negative stereotypes and social beliefs about one's racial group

Interpersonal

- involves two or more people and can be manifested through bigotry, bias, prejudice, and microaggressions

Racial Battle

Fatigue

Dr. William A. Smith

- Borrows from the idea that stress is created in chronically unsafe or hostile environments.
- the mental and physical stress is not unlike the stress soldiers experience in war.
- The stress of existing in white spaces is “mentally, emotionally and physically draining”



the unnecessary stress of

Microaggressions

"Everyday, Black people are faced with interpreting the subtleties of microaggressions, deciphering the layers of discrimination included in the insults, and deciding whether or not to respond."



Emotional Tax

- Emotional Tax is the combination of feeling different from peers at work because of gender, race, and/or ethnicity and the associated effects on health, well-being, and ability to thrive at work.
- Decades of research tells us that exclusion, discrimination, and bias can be daily experiences. Along with the fear of being stereotyped, receiving unfair treatment, or feeling “othered”
- A lifetime of being marginalized can have uniquely potent effects, including on health and well-being.
- This Emotional Tax can also harm businesses by preventing employees from being able to thrive at work



Work Identity

Code-Switching

- Black people modified their behavior to survive enslavement, in an example of “transgenerational adaptations associated with the past traumas of slavery and on-going oppression.
- Tone
- Speech
- Hair
- Clothes
- Accessories
- Walk



CATCH 22



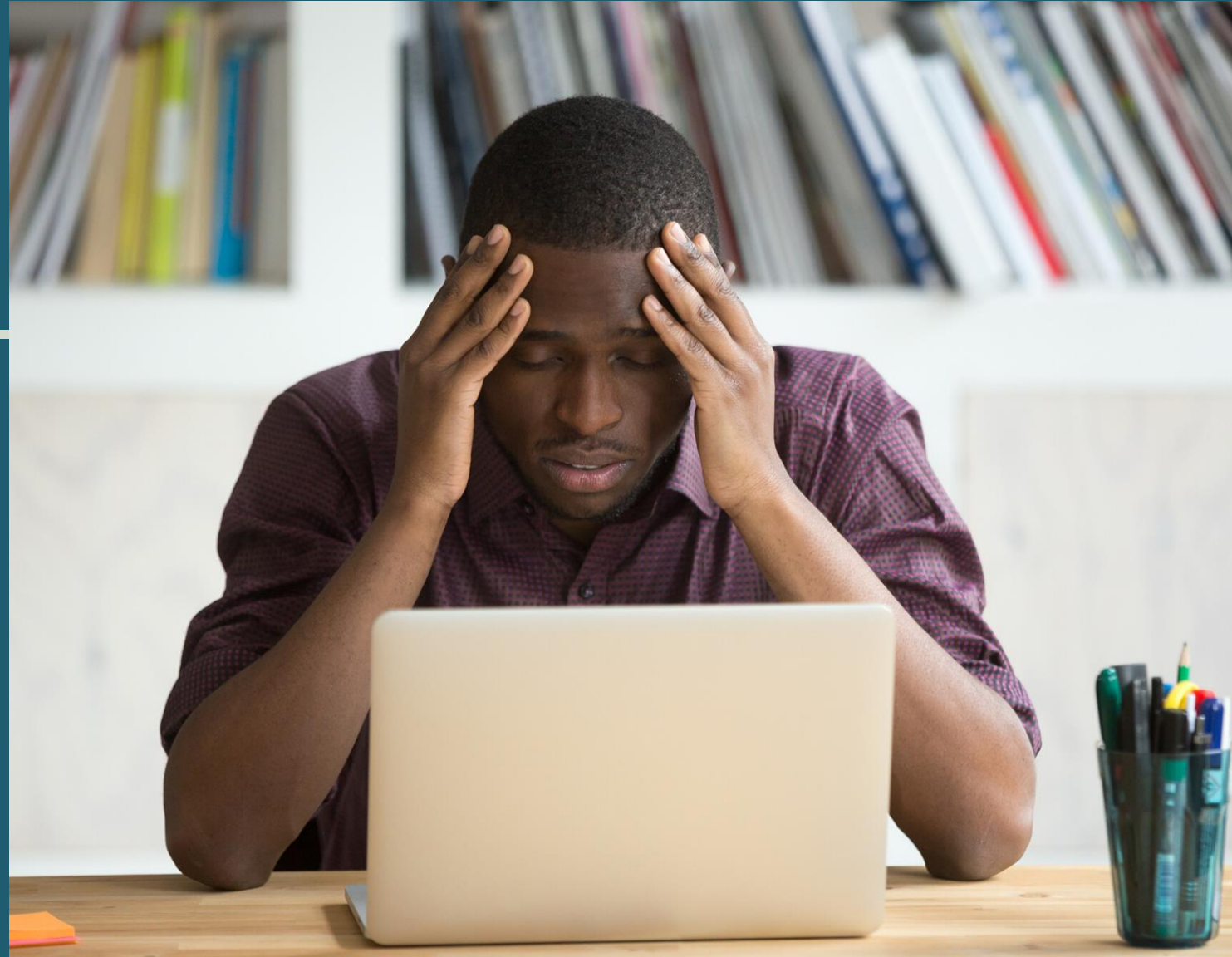
The Pressure to Prove Yourself

To Be the Spokesperson for All Black
People

Being the Only One

Social Media

Engaging in social media, whether it's race related or not, yields higher rates of depression and anxiety.



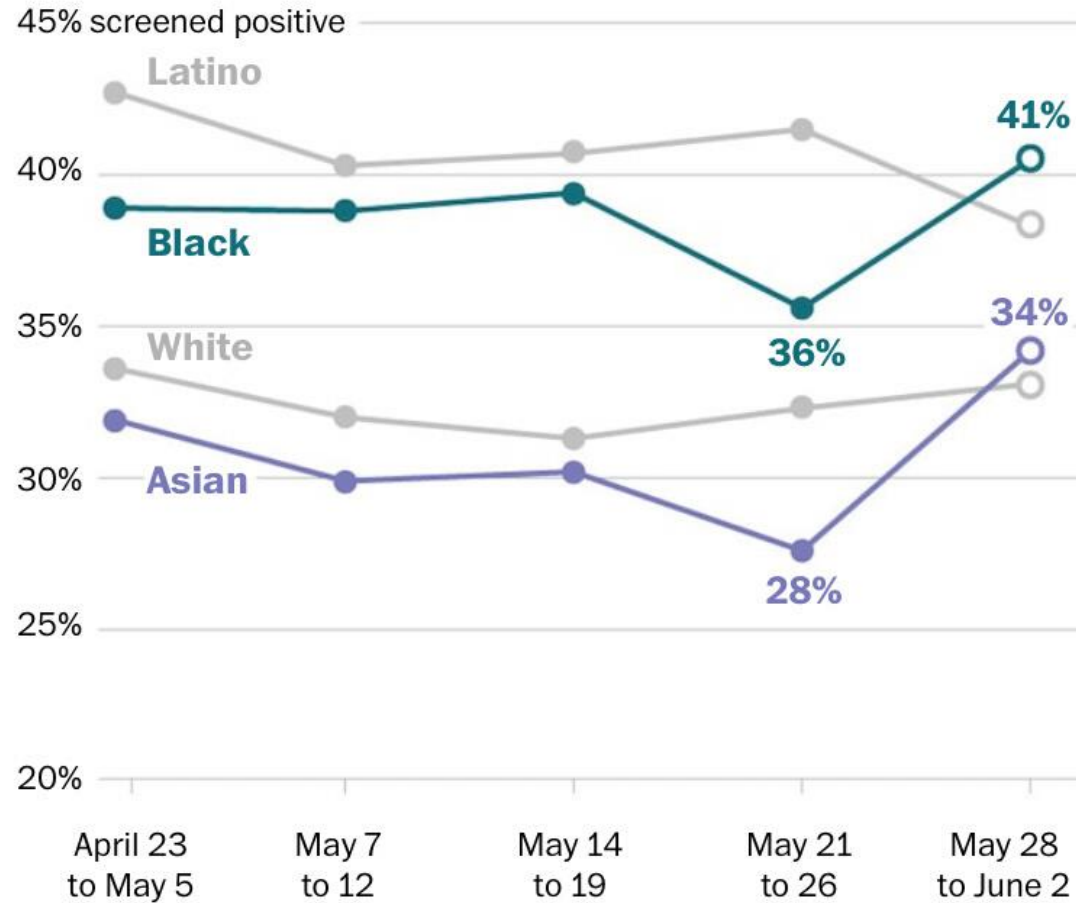
Secondary Trauma

The emotional stress that results from witnessing the trauma of others...

Black people, who are the most likely victims of police violence and hate crimes in America, are also most likely to live with this mental illness.

Anxiety and depression rise for black and Asian Americans after the police killing of George Floyd

Percent screening positive for anxiety and/or depression



↑
Video of George Floyd's killing began to spread on the last day of week 4.

CDC Employees Call Out Agency's 'Toxic Culture Of Racial Aggressions'

- More than 1,200 current employees at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have signed a letter calling for the federal agency to address "ongoing and recurring acts of racism and discrimination" against Black employees.
- CDC has been MIA on race and COVID-19
- After a presentation a former Black employee was asked to remove content related to racism as it was said to make White people uncomfortable.

"Failing to address racism's role in causing health problems, is a key reason why we have witnessed little progress in reducing many of these disparities in the United States over the past 50 years

"We are squandering genius...we're squandering insight. We're squandering talent within the CDC that could then lead CDC's mission to address the health issues of the nation

Loss of Talent

Silence is Loud

In a study, **38% of black professionals** feel that **it is never acceptable to speak out about their experiences of bias** — a silence that makes them more than twice as vulnerable to feelings of isolation and alienation in the workplace. Black employees who feel muzzled are nearly **three times as likely as those who don't** to have one foot out the door, and they're **13 times as likely to be disengaged.**



STRESS: It Will Take You Out

Excess of the stress hormone, cortisol, blocks the immune system and clogs other hormone receptors.

HOW STRESS AFFECTS THE BODY

BRAIN

Difficulty concentrating, anxiety, depression, irritability, mood, mind fog

CARDIOVASCULAR

higher cholesterol, high blood pressure, increased risk of heart attack and stroke

JOINTS AND MUSCLES

increased inflammation, tension, aches and pains, muscle tightness

IMMUNE SYSTEM

decreased immune function, lowered immune defenses, increased risk of becoming ill, increase in recovery time

SKIN

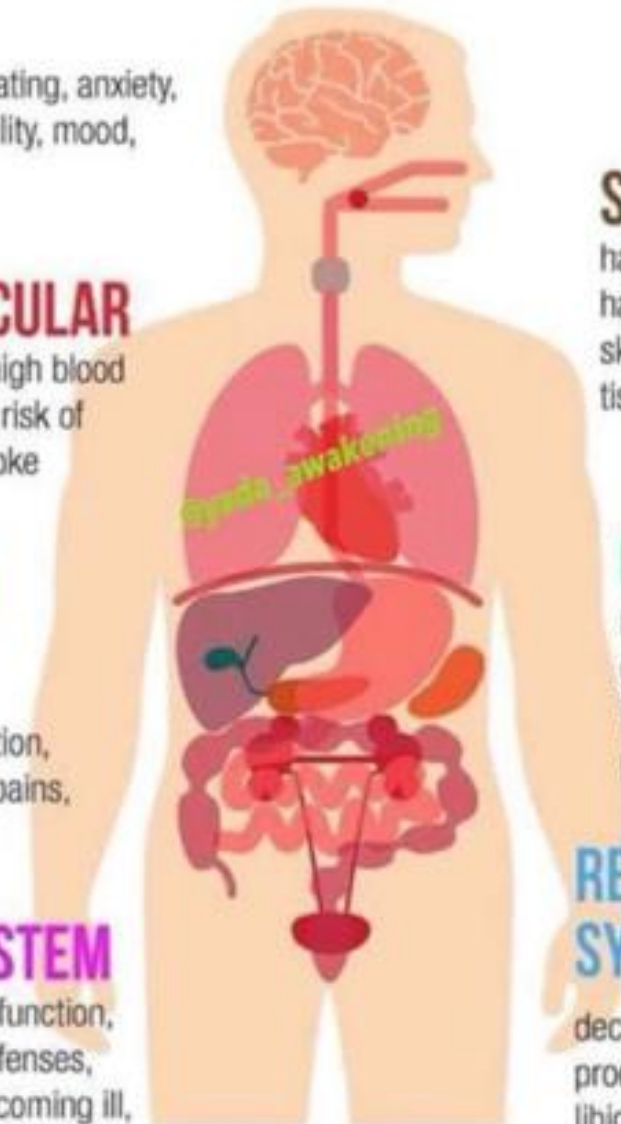
hair loss, dull/brittle hair, brittle nails, dry skin, acne, delayed tissue repair

GUT

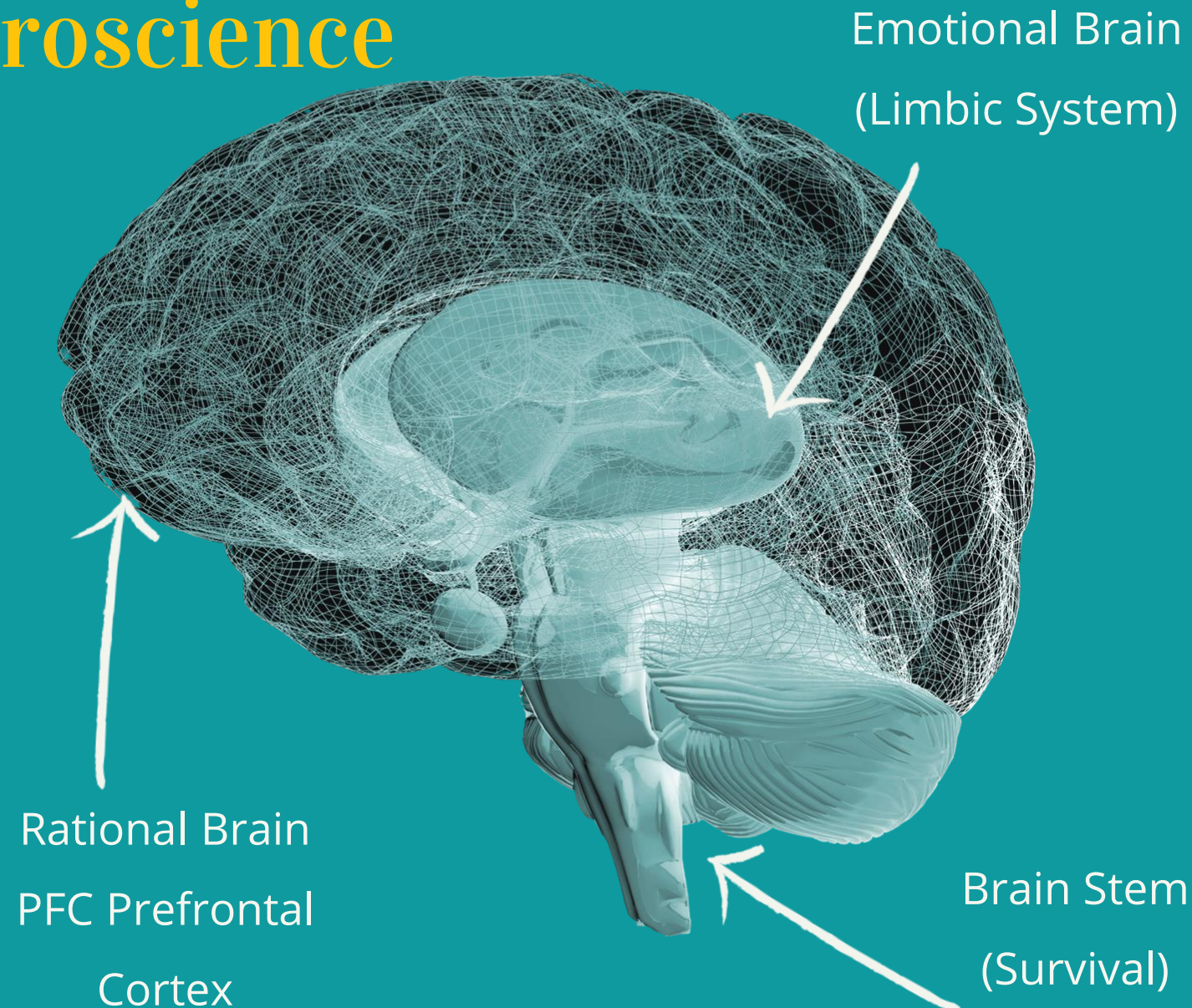
nutrient absorption, diarrhea, constipation, indigestion, bloating, pain and discomfort

REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

decreased hormone production, decrease in libido, increase in PMS symptoms



How We Deal With Stress: A Bit of Neuroscience



Clinical Implications

- Research suggests that Black individuals may respond with more passive coping strategies when confronted with race-related stress compared to general life stress.
 - These passive approaches such as keeping it to yourself or accepting it as a fact of life may exacerbate the effects of the resulting stress and promote harmful adaptations such as those exhibited in dissociative symptoms
- One study reported that cognitive avoidance in response to experiences of racial/ethnic discrimination was associated with avoidance symptoms (e.g., emotional numbing, behavioral inhibition), which are common responses to traumatic experiences (Sanders Thompson, 2006).
- There is evidence to suggest that avoidant strategies such as acceptance and resignation, while common, prove to be more harmful compared to more active approaches like problem-solving or seeking support.

Clinical Implications Con't

- The detrimental effects of racial discrimination are well documented, as it has been consistently linked to poor physical and mental health outcomes across various racial and ethnic minority groups.
- Racial discrimination was associated with a lifetime history of major depressive disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder and substance use disorder independent of SES, age and gender.
- Race-based events may yield emotional and psychological injury that negatively impacts mental health through eliciting traumatic stress.
- An attack on an individual's sense of self could in turn threaten their sense of safety and security, and consequently trigger a stress response (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Carter, 2007). Thus, maladaptive reactions to experiences of racial discrimination may compromise the individual's mental health.



So that the first problem is
how to control that rage so
that it won't destroy you.

James Baldwin

Stigma in Black Community

- Lack of safe places
- More afraid of the ridicule than the symptoms we experience
- Healthcare discrimination (past & present)
- Asking for help is a sign of weakness
 - Strong Black Man/Woman Complex
- Faith/Religion
- What's done in the house stays in the house

Finding a Therapist

- [inclusivetherapists.com](https://www.inclusivetherapists.com)
- [Therapyforblackgirls.com](https://www.therapyforblackgirls.com)
- [Melaninandmentalhealth.com](https://www.melaninandmentalhealth.com)
- [Therapyforblackmen.org](https://www.therapyforblackmen.org)
- [Openpathcollective.com](https://www.openpathcollective.com)
- beam.community/bvtn
- [nqttcn.com](https://www.nqttcn.com)
- [lgbtqpsychotherapistsofcolor.com](https://www.lgbtqpsychotherapistsofcolor.com)



A close-up photograph of a chain-link fence. A metal padlock is attached to a horizontal bar of the fence, secured with a heavy metal chain. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with a blue sky and some greenery.

Boundaries

Keeping the Good in and the Bad Out

Emotionally

Mentally

Spiritually

Physically

A person is shown from the back, wearing a dark blue hoodie with 'KING' and '01' printed in white on the back. They are also wearing a dark cap with 'SHADAWEAR' written on it. The person has a beard and is looking down. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a building and a fence.

"Don't internalize an external narrative"

Farah Harris, MA, LCPC



Helpful Apps

SHINE

Motivation and affirmation

ABIDE

Christian meditation

HEADSPACE

THEUNDERBELLY

RELAX MELODIES

INSIGHT TIME

~~SAMPLE~~ HABIT

LIBERATE MEDITATION

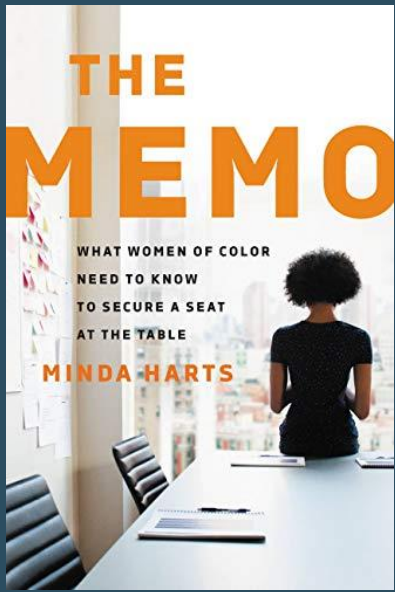
Meditations for People of Color

ELEVATE-INSPIRATIONAL LIVING

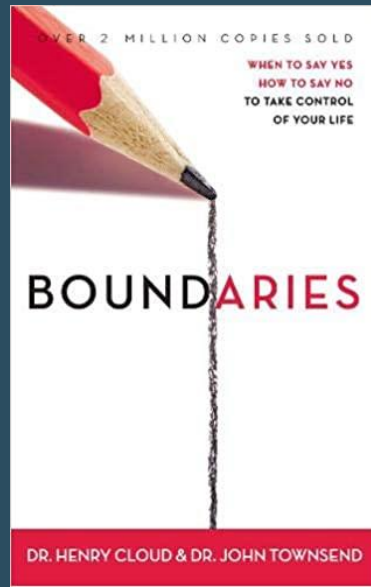
For People of Color

JASPER LITE

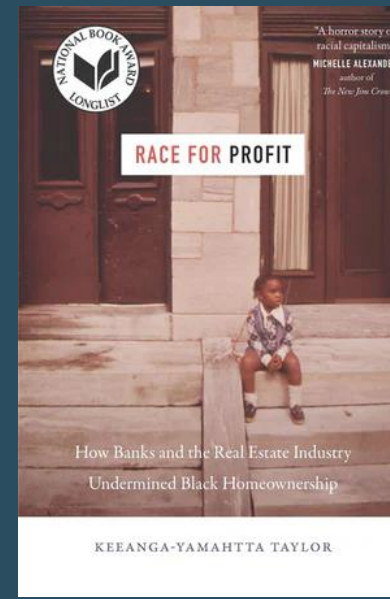
Meditations, blogs, etc for People of Color



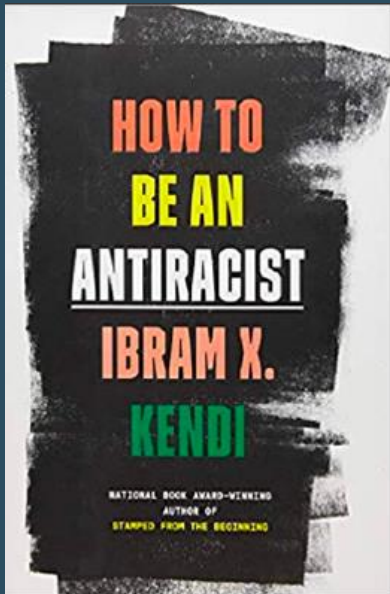
By Minda Harts



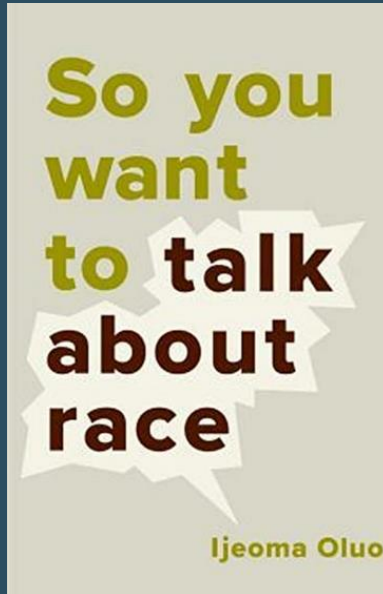
By Cloud & Townsend



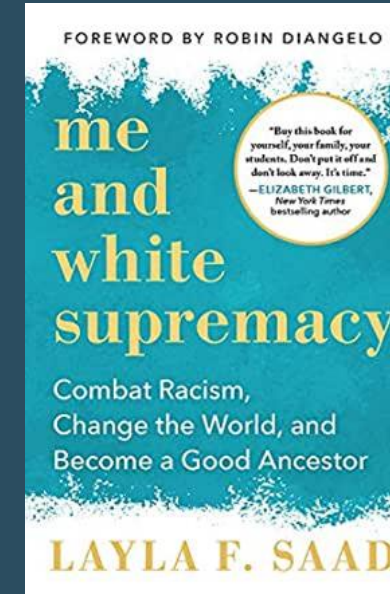
By Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor



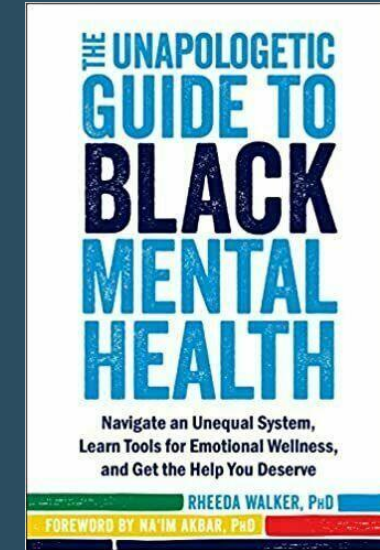
By Ibrahm X. Kendi



By Ijeoma Oluo



By Layla Saad



By Rheeda Walker PhD

Resources



Podcasts

- Living Corporate
- Therapy For Black Girls
- #SecureTheSeat
- Living Over Existing
- DIVE In



Let's Get Social!



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FARAHHARRISLCPC.COM



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