

Sensationalizing Pain Through Social Media

Dear readers, what I am writing about today is very painful to even think about. I am becoming more and more upset with how many are using social media to spread news about private, painful, or violent events involving individuals, families, and communities. Oftentimes, videos or photos of actual violence or murder scenes are being shared without any thought almost universally on social media. Please, let's stop this. This practice demonstrates insensitivity, and a lack of empathy and understanding of how doing this drives greater pain into the hearts of the families involved. It appears that in The Bahamas we love to sensationalize the pain of others. We seem to enjoy and thrive on the pain and misery of others, until it is our time when we cry for help.

When we place videos or photos of a murder scene or of personal incidents on social media, we are invading the privacy of people. We are also making it difficult for them to process what took place in their own time and space. It makes it even much more complicated because the videos and photos will be circulating the world for a very long time. The private lives of these people will forever be scrutinized by all and sundry.

In a December 2017 article by a student at Fitchburg State University, Massachusetts, USA, entitled "Sensationalism of Social Media," the writer expresses these sentiments: "Throughout the decades, technology has significantly advanced to become a fundamental part of human communication, however, within recent years the problem of sensationalization has become an enormous problem among social media sites, and has darkened the media in a way in which violence and negativity has become the main news source in day to day life."

How true it is! Why do we in The Bahamas have a greater need to sensationalize? The author continues: "Often times representations of crime, influence people's conception of their lives and communities far out of proportion to actual incidence of criminal activity." Sensationalism is used to bring out fear within people and the constant questions of who can be trusted and who can't. With the uprise of sensationalism, social media in particular, has become a beacon for negativity and hate."

Interestingly, the very makeup of social media websites like FaceBook and WhatsApp, have a way of seducing individuals into becoming "news reporters" about anything, no matter how personal or violent it is. In the article "4 Reasons Why Social Media Has Become So Toxic and What to Look for Next" the author writes: "Today's social publishing environment rewards sensationalized content, thereby damaging healthy relationships online. These platforms reward "engagement" by highlighting highly liked posts more prominently in newsfeeds, accustomizing social media users to attempting to post that sensationalized content themselves." It becomes a trap to lure people into sensationalizing violent behavior. Many of us are not aware that because of this, FaceBook viewership has declined.

Having a smart phone with a powerful camera, can be a plus for taking solicited photos or capturing our beautiful environment. On the other hand, it is upsetting to watch people stop what they are doing and take out their phones to record a fight, violent action, or insulting argument. What they should do is call the police and seek to stop the fight. Or better yet, do not reward those fighting or arguing by recording the actions and placing the video or photo on social media. If the actions are being recording for the police, then let it be that, and that alone.

Once again, the frightening truth is that the over exposure to so much violence and sensational news causes us to lose the ability to empathize and truly understand what is really happening in society. It lends to a glorification of the pain in others. Violence isn't violence anymore, it seems. Far too many of us have become desensitize to the violence and grief around us. I am disgusted when people laugh at others involved in a violent fight or argument. It is just like they are watching a movie and cheering for one side thinking there is no harm in doing so. How pitiful! We have become numb and insensitive to the pain of others.

Dear readers, would you join me by becoming an agent of change in our land? Would you join me by speaking out against this kind of behavior? When someone sends you a video or photo of a violent act or belligerent behavior, will you avoid forwarding it to those on the social media list. You can send it to the police and then delete it. Remember, when you forward these videos and photos to your circle of friends, they are becoming a part of the wider conspiracy to dumb-down the value of your fellow human beings. You will also be making it that much more difficult for the families involved to effectively process the event and heal. Be an agent of change today.

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