# Psychotherapy practice, education, and training during the coronavirus pandemic: Members of the editorial board of the Psychotherapy and Counselling Journal of Australia share their experiences

Keith Tudor (Ed.), Cathy Bettman, Alexandra Bloch-Atefi, Elizabeth Day, Timothy Hsi, Del Loewenthal, Poi Kee Low, Gina O'Neill & Emmy van Deurzen

## Introduction – *Keith Tudor*

The invitation from *PACJA* Editor Rhys Price-Robertson to me to co-edit this special issue coincided with the journal's expansion of the editorial board and so I suggested to Rhys that we invite the new members of the board to contribute to the special issue by sharing something about their experience of being a psychotherapist (practitioner, educator, supervisor) during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was motivated partly by my own experience that psychotherapy can be a lonely profession, and that this has been exacerbated by the experience of social distancing, self-isolation, and "lockdown" during the past year—and that now more than ever it's helpful to share our experiences with each other. The other "partly" was of an interest in my colleagues on the editorial board introducing themselves to the readers of the journal. Most of the editorial board members responded to this invitation and we are grateful to them for their various and varied responses. Their contributions encompass the personal, including the emotional; the professional with regard to both clinical and educational practice; and the political.

## Disconnection and Restoration – *Gina O'Neill*

Practising as a therapist during the COVID-19 pandemic, I found that an overall theme for my clients has been an enhanced sense of disconnection. As an Indigenous therapist, working with *whenua* (land) and country has been part of my practice, but since COVID-19 my own deep sense of connection with nature has been a resource. This drew my attention to the boundlessness of nature to provide connection. My practice now is in nature to restore wellness that comes when we live with a felt sense of connection to nature all around us and within us. I use nature therapy methods (e.g., deep nature dialogue, nature as a resource, and thresholds) with gestalt therapy to heal the human/nature split, as well as the internal splits that exist within the person's experience, that is part of the field and not separated. For my online practice, I bring nature to the session by asking clients to find somewhere outside in nature to be and I situate myself somewhere outside too.

Here I share photos of some of my outdoor locations and invite you to connect with what nature reflects for you.
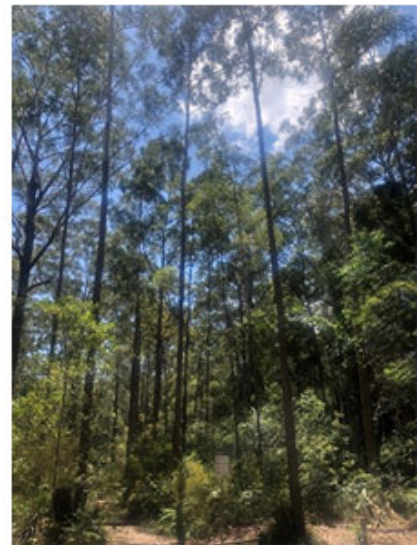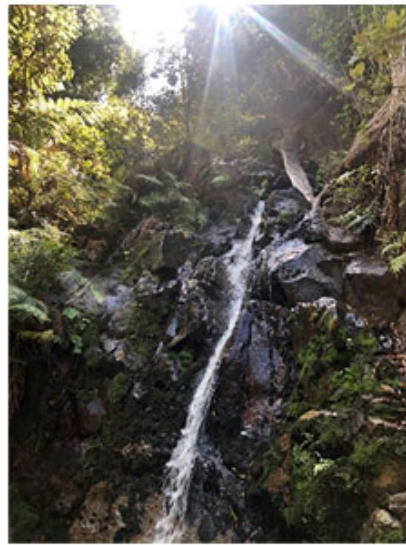


## COVID: The Personal, the Professional, and the Political – *Del Loewenthal*



At the start of the coronavirus pandemic, my wife and I were separated through working at different locations when the travel curfew in the United Kingdom came into force. This—over 14 weeks—was by far the longest time in over 40 years for us not to be together. During this enforced separation, I kept a photo diary through taking a daily photograph with my phone. The first photo I took (when on my then newly initiated jog) was of two shorn-off trees. So much had been and was to be shorn-off.

I hadn't, and haven't, recovered from Brexit, the shorning-off of our cultural and economic future with Europe (and the world). In an attempt to mitigate against this, I'd successfully, and reluctantly, applied for dual British and now Czech nationality. However, because of COVID-19 travel restrictions, the planned initial trip to the Czech Republic with our son couldn't happen. Now, it looks as if our Czech future will remain shorn-off and, as with those trees, will at best be experienced as stunted growth.

My jogging was mainly round the garden for the blind at a local park, where I was to get on nodding terms, together with the occasional brief pleasantry, with a growing group (until the police broke them up) who may have come from some form of sheltered accommodation. Later, graffiti appeared in that garden, first "WE ARE PLAGUE" which might be taken as an expression of wretched isolation and, later, "NO LOVE".

Subsequently, when I was allowed to reconnect with my family, and, as with others, to meet in small groups, I still went for my jogs in the park, but now I wondered what it must be like for those who still didn't have anyone, to see what otherwise might be viewed as picturesque happy reunited groups sitting in varying circles on the grass in the sun with their friends.



One of the most difficult experiences was to be shorn of our grandchildren and not to be able to help our daughter with them—and what is it like for children who were learning to ask who and what they could touch and whether they could have other children at their birthday parties and Zoom birthday celebrations that weren't birthday parties.

There were downsides in not meeting in the flesh, not least for the client to have somewhere to go yet, to my surprise, through COVID-19 my professional work flourished. I chair a critical existential-analytic psychotherapy training (www.safpac.co.uk); we went online and it worked—and there was more work! We've just had a conference which, thanks to Zoom, became a truly international conference. Further, COVID-19 frontline workers accessed therapy for the first time through a free service we set up (www.safpacfrontline.co.uk). Also, I (somewhat crazily) published more than ever.

However, perhaps most importantly, through on-line work, my psychotherapy practice has changed and mainly for the better. There is more equality in my practice now. Whereas previously the client was sitting or lying on the couch, a COVID-19 distance away, now we are an equal distance, and more equal. I've also had reinforced that working with transference and the like is still possible, whilst being less "blank screen", though, at first, this is perhaps more difficult to hear.

Regarding my personal life, when my wife and I were allowed to get back together, it wasn't easy: we had both been even more used to doing things our own way, but we came to love each other again, and replenished, for the better, by our lockdown experiences. Yet, our children and grandchildren had learnt to live without us and whilst in our family our love for each other had, I would like to think, too solid a basis to be fundamentally threatened, there was now a new accelerated independence. This may be

good for them but, like my country through Brexit in its relations with the world, through COVID-19, our family relations may have become prematurely diminished.

Yet I and my family are so much luckier than most in comparison to those who experience disrupted personal development, loneliness, economic suffering, and with more famine and death to come. Moreover, there is an increasingly dominant political reaction which rather than focusing on collectively working for the common good to combat COVID-19, climate change, etc., instead is promoting populism and individualism. This ideology is becoming so insidiously "the new normal" that even the teddy bears we place in our windows for the children walking by to see appear increasingly able to transform into fascistic, misogynistic, egotists. So, is this a moment when through COVID-19, I and others are, apparently against our wishes, having a better glimpse of the reality of our brokenness that was already there? I hope not…

## Reflections on COVID-19 – *Alexandra Bloch-Atefi*

As a university lecturer and clinical supervisor of counselling students, I have seen the impact of the spread of COVID-19 on educational training first-hand, along with the rapid changes that were required in response to it. I was suddenly confronted with the need to continue teaching and to motivate students with social distancing measures in place that called for a swift transition to online classes. On Thursday 19 March 2020, I conducted my last face-to face class in Semester 1 and, the following week, taught and facilitated three courses online via Zoom, managing the additional demands to accommodate this urgent transition.

As a university lecturer, it is already a struggle to balance teaching, research, as well as service obligations, and find the ever-so-elusive work-life balance, but, due to COVID-19, these challenges have increased even further, amongst which having to manage new technologies and adapt the course content to fit the online space without adequate supports or infrastructure in place. This rapid transition posed difficulties for students as well, who had mixed responses to moving to online education. While some of them appreciated the convenience of not having to leave the comfort of their own homes, others struggled with separating home from work and learning, especially those where home-schooling their children coincided with their own training. International students who had not yet made sufficient connections felt the lack of socialisation with others, while being far away from home. Many students named a decrease in their productivity and motivation towards their university work in the first semester, finding the global uncertainties making it more difficult for them to concentrate and engage with the learning material.

While most teaching and learning activities were moved online, most counselling students on placement had to interrupt their field work, uncertain whether they would attain the hours needed for accreditation. Not all agencies were equipped to work remotely, hence only a few students were retained by their placement organisations with arrangements to deliver services in a telehealth format. In seeking to support students on placement, their clinical supervision was facilitated via Zoom and tele-health content was incorporated into various course, subject to reflect the changing need of the profession(s) of counselling and psychotherapy. Additionally, given the pandemic was and is affecting counsellors and clients alike, more focus was drawn to self-care and special consideration needs given to the well-being of practitioners operating within this context.

As a result of COVID-19, we have all seen our world alter in some way, shape, or form. Overall, it can be said that students encounter unique challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, hence counselling educators may need to reconsider how counselling is taught to reflect the realities of the current health landscape.

## Enjoying the Zoom Campus: Who Would Have Thought It? – *Cathy Bettman*

Lockdown came one month after I had begun a new job as a Senior Lecturer (Counselling) in a university School of Arts and Sciences. I locked the door of my quaint office on the first floor of what was formerly a nuns' priory set in a beautiful, leafy, and tranquil campus courtyard, never thinking for a moment that a year later, I still would not be back. I had taught blended subjects for some time in my previous employment, so I was not new to teaching online, but nothing would have led me to believe that I would come to enjoy working from home so much, and that teaching and supervising entirely online could be so satisfying that, in fact and in many ways, I would begin to prefer it. Why is this?

Though not a major consideration, the extra hours at my disposal through not having to battle public transport to get to work through rain and shine truly feels like a gift, but the best part of working online is, ironically, feeling connected! Rather than standing at a distance from students in big, hallowed lecture rooms, fighting the cold or the heat or the stuffiness, talking at them and praying I would get the technology to work, from the comfort of my study and using my own, familiar and more up-to-date computer, I can be much closer and connected. I can see the students in their homes. I can meet their furry and even two-legged friends. It all seems so much more informal, flexible, and logistically possible. We can "go to the library together" just by screen sharing. We have our books and our notes with us and, even getting snacks or drinks does not involve taking long breaks. Meetings can be so much more spontaneous, simply following up an email and for quick bursts of time—and "off the cuff" because nobody has to travel. There have been times when I have even offered tutorials after dinner and have been amazed at the number of students that attend. They can work in the day and still attend whatever is on offer with little upheaval to their lives.

I have found that it works well to post my lectures online so that students can access them at their convenience, watch bits at a time, and re-watch other bits if they choose. In addition, they are not fussed by note-taking because I post the slides as well. This frees up our synchronous online time for interesting things like having discussions, exploring case studies, watching and reviewing videos, and doing role-plays collectively or in break-out rooms. There is a whiteboard, a poll function, break-out rooms, and meetings can be recorded. I am sure that there is much more that can be done; more creative and yet untapped online methods that could be used to make online teaching even more interesting. It seems to me that, whilst it behooves us to explore these opportunities, it is an exciting and futuristic, even global, challenge rather than needing to be stuck in the same old, traditional "Hogwarts'" space. The world seems smaller despite airlines being in total shutdown, the opportunities larger. I feel that I can only be restricted by my own lack of creativity.

It is true that I am often at my computer until the midnight hour and I know many people have complained about this happening. From my perspective, in COVID-19 times, my teaching and supervising, my immersion  in the online space, has provided a great distraction from the nasties beyond—and do not let me forget, the very cherry on the cake, so to speak, is that excellent professional development has become available and even easier to access, further encouraging a sense of professional connection and opportunity. It has not been too bad after all.

## Reflections on COVID-19 – *Timothy Hsi*

Like a number of members of the *PACJA* editorial board, I am a lecturer with a privately-run Australian educational institution. Additionally, I am also deeply involved in the work of career development in Singapore, first as the Founding President of the Career Development Association of Singapore and secondly as a part owner of a thriving Singapore-based company providing career development certification programmes throughout Asia.

Sometime in January 2020, I was in Singapore for two weeks, running a series of career workshops, attending association meetings, seeing career and counselling clients; and squeezing in time to celebrate Lunar New Year with my extended family there.

In the midst of the packed and exhausting schedule, I remember musing to myself that it would have been much more convenient for me had everyone been more open to online workshops, meetings, and counselling sessions instead of the usual need to have face-to-face modes for workshops, meetings, and counselling sessions.

By the time March rolled around, the world as we knew it had been completely transformed. Due to the travel lockdowns experienced in Australia and Singapore, all the Australian counselling classes I was teaching were shifted online, the scheduled meetings, trainings, and career counselling sessions I had to conduct in Singapore were also shifted online (with a lot of initial resistance from the various stakeholders). Suddenly, I realised my musing in January had become reality!

As we lived in this environment for the past months, what was one key observation for me? That would be: *we all have the ability to adapt to change*.

As "creatures" of habit, we tend to live our lives around predictable patterns because it provides us with a sense of control. We fight to maintain that predictability when we sense an external force encroaching. An example is seen in the emergence of technology disrupting many industries over the past decade whilst many have continually resisted the need to shift to new ways of doing things due to the fear of change (Talwar, Talwar, Kaur and Dhir, 2020).

A similar trend had occurred for counselling profession. The provision of online counselling had started as early as 1995 with the emergence of the internet (Alleman, 2002). Even with technology becoming more sophisticated over the years, doubts and hesitancy around adoption of this modality continued across the profession (Cook & Doyle, 2002; Glasheen & Campbell, 2009; Hunt, 2002; Speyer & Jack, 2003).

COVID-19 literally pushed us to finally embrace online counselling as a viable alternative to the "usual" physical face-to-face modality (Reay, Looi & Keightley, 2020; Wind, Rijkeboer, Andersson & Riper, 2020). My clients in Singapore and across Asia realised that the only way to continue was to accept the use of video conferencing as the modality where our sessions would be held. Initial hesitancy melted away as many realised the quality of service remained consistent. Of course, there were still many clients (and practitioners) who remained doubtful, but it was a situation where resistance to change would mean halting therapy for clients and a loss of income for therapists.

In Australia, more and more counselling services are now confident enough to offer online counselling through the evidence of increasing demand for training on adopting online platforms for telehealth (Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia [PACFA], 2020).

While I do not take away the devastating impact this global event has wreaked on many, it is also a demonstration that we have the ability to adapt to changes. Change is never pleasant, but with the right attitude and mindset, we will find ourselves progressing to the next level of professional relevance and excellence. As Watts (1951) put it: "The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance".

## Learning From Lived Experiences During COVID-19 – *Poi Kee Low*

As a psychotherapist and a social scientist, I am intrigued by the lived experiences of people. Those of my family, colleagues, fellow practitioners, students, clients, and others in Singapore. My reflection will be one that reports on what I saw, heard, and observed of these people around me during these initial months that we were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the professional front, many raised questions on how we should continue to work with and support our clients and their families. Calls and texts were exchanged with fellow practitioners and managers of counselling centres as we sought to form some consensus

on possible models of "business continuity". Others asked about ethical guidelines and additional procedures in providing counselling via telephone or video-conferencing format. Still, some others were trying to make sense of whether counselling, or the broader mental health care and social care, were considered "essential services," thus allowing practitioners to continue seeing clients. Not everyone had the same idea.

On the more positive side, many counsellors along with our friends in the psychology and social work disciplines, in public, private, and people sectors agreed that enhancing psychosocial support for the population was an urgent task. This impetus drove the setting up of a 24-hour care hotline for the general population supported by hundreds of counsellors, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and others.

On reflection, did we know exactly what to do? I am not entirely sure. Nonetheless, we probably did the best we could, wherever we were, with whatever we had, with the best intention in mind for clients and our communities.

As the months passed, I interacted with many. From family members and friends who were most concerned about the supply of masks, sanitisers, gloves, and groceries, to strangers I got to know who were donating items and money to help others. The deepest impression left on me was how differently the pandemic was affecting different people.

I met many who took the risk to travel out of their homes to go to work at the frontline healthcare services and also those in essential services who could not leave their post vacant or work from home. Most could do with better remuneration and recognition even during normal times. Some sang praises for their bravery and selflessness. As I worked with some of them, I could sense that for many it was just another day at work doing what they had committed to do. They are indeed performing truly purposeful and needful work for society.

In the same context, I met a community-spirited individual. She and a few others came together and purchased packed food from local stall holders and distributed the food to welfare institutions and social services. On the one hand, helping those in need, and on the other, helping to keep business flowing for small-time stall holders. She went about doing this quite quietly with her friends.

On another occasion, I met up with someone I worked with in a different capacity. With masks on and off to take the occasional sip of our coffee, we discussed many things relating to our work. Suddenly, he advised me that it was a good time to invest in the stock market as many stocks were undervalued. He meant well; in fact, I was truly touched by his genuine offer of sound advice. He is of course, extremely knowledgeable in the financial sector and himself well-invested. To some, it may seem that he was taking advantage of the poor market conditions; however, I see him and others as just being themselves in yet another otherwise normal day.

On reflection, two things struck me most. One was clearly how the pandemic was affecting all of us differently, depending on not just the roles we play in society, the wealth we hold, the perspectives we take, but also simply where we are, what we choose to be

concerned about, and what we do. The second thing was about the constant call on adapting to the "new normal". I find these individuals' lived experience as expressed in their interactions with me revealed the normalcy or equilibrium they were maintaining in their lives. They were still doing what they would do as an essential worker, a financial investor, a good-hearted volunteer, and myself as a social scientist. Essentially, we are all overcoming this pandemic by doing what we usually do, perhaps through slightly different strokes and modes.

## Ontology of a Pandemic – *Elizabeth Day*

To be living in the age of the coronavirus pandemic is to live under a question mark. In Aotearoa New Zealand, just before the government simultaneously introduced and applied alert levels, some of us felt ourselves moving toward a horizon of unease, marked by an amorphous sense of not-quite-right-ness. The news from China and the United States of a pandemic on the march brought a paradoxical pairing of uncertainty and inevitability. When lockdown (at Alert level 4) came in late March, there was a projected sense of collective determination to weather and survive it.

Many of us spoke of our ambivalence: we enjoyed the quiet that descended when the merry-go-round stopped for a while; the abandonment of unnecessary externalities. We worried about those who were unsafe in lockdown; those unfairly impacted through social inequities; those losing their jobs, health, and lives. There were acts of personal, social, and political generosity. There was loss and there was gain. It brought to mind Stroebe and Shut's (1999) dual process model of grief: in the swing between loss orientation and restoration orientation.

We did what was asked and were released from lockdown, the only country in that state at that time. Our borders were mostly closed, but we were free to move about within them. This muted freedom came with an odd sense that there was no one to play with elsewhere on the planet. We lived through 102 days of zero cases of community transmission. So, when the second lockdown came—unequally between Auckland (level 3) and the rest of the country (level 2)—there was a ripple of shock in the country. We'd tried our best and it was not good enough: what now? Everything came under question.

There are the larger questions, too, about the correlation—if not causality—between climate emergency, biodiversity loss, and the origins of the pandemic (Grandcolas & Justine, 2020; Maurice et al., 2019; Turcios-Casco & Cazzolla Gatti, 2020). There are eco-socio-political questions about whether, for instance, international flight is sustainable in the long-term (Chaudhary & Bakhshi, 2020). There are questions about whether increased work from home options are socially responsible or part of a larger managerialism (Parker, 2020), and who this impacts negatively (Bick, Blandin, & Mertens, 2020). There are questions about whether to keep planning for in-person events (conferences, meetings, social events) when they keep being postponed as alert levels and physical distancing regulations fluctuate. There are questions from within the storms

of COVID-19 information, such as: "Are we still only allowed to meet in groups of 10, or has that changed at level 1?", "Are face coverings compulsory or just recommended?", and "Is the university supplying masks if they're requiring us to wear them?"

Like owls on alert, our heads swivel from side-to-side, trying to make sense of what is going on, flipping between the general and the particular of our experiences at this time. We move between the generalisable ("OK, second-wave lockdowns are coming") and the ideographic ("All the bread rolls are soggy because I washed the groceries, as recommended, and didn't see the holes in the plastic bag"); between the ontological ("Existentially, things have never been certain, it's just that this fact is more front of mind now") and the ontic ("I feel queasy and listless after five back-to-back Zoom meetings today").

And there are questions, too, for our profession.

Although many therapists will have been working online clinically for years now, as I have, there is something about the forced move to online clinical work that has generated strong feeling about what constitutes "real" therapy. Some of my psychotherapy students have expressed suspicion about the future for in-person therapy in the face of telehealth. Their sense that something is lost in the therapeutic alliance when in-person therapy moves online (which is contrary to my own experiences), has me contemplating the factors of effective therapy. I can empathise with their many senses of loss at this time as they train for an uncertain future. Nevertheless, I am drawn to enquire further into these assumptions about what constitutes therapy.

What, for example, do we make of the body in therapy, ontologically, if effective therapeutic processes do not after all require a shared room with bodies in it, in real time? (Barak et al., 2008; Fisher et al., 2020). What is required, if not a body, to fire mirror neurons in the neural processes that generate empathy? Exactly what is the mechanism of presence? Can it be that "affect and imagination are more important than physical presence"? (Scharff, 2019).

It seems so for Siegel (2010), who coined the term "mindsight" to describe the way humans are neurologically-oriented to perceive the mind of another being. Similar to mentalisation, mindsight supports a client to feel felt, to feel understood, in order to engender the epistemic trust that allows clients to free up rigidity, and to adapt and learn from their social experiences (Fonagy & Allison, 2014). This emotional resonance occurs when minds engage; and it works across space and time, because the resonance is registered within one's own being. This calls on us to grapple with the fact that consciousness, which is nonlocal, is conveyed through bodies which are local. If I am embodied in my therapeutic engagement with a client online, the resonance—or field effect, or countertransference—is felt within my body.

We resonate with words, across space and time too, such as those of Samuel Pepys (1669/2020) who, from 1665-1669, diarised his perceptions of another pandemic, the Great Plague, as it swept the streets of London. The tone is initially one of surprise and

loss: "But Lord, how empty the streets are, and melancholy". His diarising about the plague offers a blend of statistics, fear, prayers and hope, and a little of the familiar conspiracy theorising around remedies; in his case, smelling and chewing tobacco to ward off the "bad airs". He feels sadness at the sight of a red cross on a door and the words "Lord have mercy upon us," denoting that the family within has perished. The general sense of death and doom reaches into the particularity of his own circumstances: he needs a new wig but worries that it might be made from the hair of the deceased. This, he surmises, might spell the end of wigs as a fashion item.

Then as now, we find the movement between the ontological and the ontic, in rhythm with the dual process of loss and restoration orientation, as the metronomic beat of life pulses us onward; uncertain, as usual.

Through these uninvited and giddying changes, it is the very *knowing* of this reality as it is in the present moment—the embodied conscious awareness, that sits outside of space and time—that I attend to as the source of my continuity and of my capacity to respond.

## Pandemic Lockdown Feelings – *Emmy van Deurzen*

The lockdown has affected many of us deeply. While it may initially have seemed like a relief to some of us to be able to stay home for a while and no longer have to face the daily trek into work, ultimately the threat of the pandemic has brought deprivation and hardship to most of us. With our entire lives on hold and potentially in jeopardy, we had to learn to make do with less. We missed out on many events we looked forward to and we began to realise how quickly everything can turn bad in a crisis. The experience of being cut off from family members we care about and could not visit was an eye-opener about the importance of affection and connection. The realisation that we are dependent on so many others to keep society going, especially on those who provide health care, was also a revelation. We had to rethink life and find new ways of communicating. For some people the crisis became a catastrophe, when they lost their jobs, or their loved ones to the virus. Many who have had the virus and survived it continue to see negative effects on their overall health.

Existential therapists come into their own at a time of calamity when everything is turned upside down and when change and loss abound (van Deurzen & Arnold-Baker, 2018). We are used to dealing with moments like these, when everything is suddenly in question and we realize that nothing will ever be the same again. We know that people have an inner capacity for transformation and resilience that is quite astounding. Camus' (1947/1948) novel *The Plague*, is suddenly very topical, but one of his famous phrases from another essay "Return to Tipasa" (Camus, 1952/1975) is most apt: "In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer" (p. 181). We know that no matter how hard the world and nature push against us, there is within us, something stronger—something better, pushing right back. We speak of the possibility of finding the existential courage to seek new meaning, not despite but because of the fact that we suffer the loss of so many things we used to take for granted. Paul Tillich (1952) spoke insightfully of courage as the "affirmation of being in spite of the threat of non-being" (p.

55). He described self-affirmation as the act of an individual in participating in the world. Since our participation in the world is now much restricted, it will be vital for us to find creative ways of connecting, for it is essential for our mental health that we continue to be capable of contributing something of value to the world.

It is Jaspers (1951) who was perhaps the most outspoken about such experiences of disaster and difficulty. He affirmed that these kinds of limit situations that push us to rediscover ourselves and to realise what truly matters to us, are the only way in which we finally find and become ourselves. We need suffering and defeat in order to come to our senses. When we are confronted with death, guilt, suffering, struggle, and chance, we learn to engage and communicate in a much more real way. Experiencing such challenging circumstances, we learn how to be true in the loving struggle of life.

In the final analysis, however, in order to find fresh strength and courage, we can do no better than to turn to Nietzsche, who is probably the best-known existential philosopher when it comes to asking us to get ready to pick up the gauntlet that fate has thrown at us. He challenged us to overcome not just our predicament, but ourselves. He admonishes us to allow ourselves to be deeply touched and transformed by our trials and tribulations. In his book *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (Nietzsche, 1883/1961), he said: "*But there is something in m*e that I call courage: it has always destroyed every discouragement in me… For courage is the best destroyer—courage that attacks: for in every attack there is a triumphant shout" (p. 177, italics added).

Faced with the pandemic, we are all having to come to terms with feelings of dread and discouragement and we can do a lot worse than turning towards the authors who wrote about this with such verve and depth of understanding. Their words can help us to find new meaning and inspiration in our plight, as we rediscover the source of existential courage within us.

## COVID-19, Resilience, Melancholy, and (The) Dubliners – *Keith Tudor*

There were so many different moods and impressions that he wished to express in verse. He felt them within him. He tried to weigh his soul to see if it was a poet's soul. Melancholy was the dominant note of his temperament, he thought, but it was a melancholy tempered by recurrences of faith and resignation and simple joy. (Joyce, 1914/2020)

### The Personal

I am a full-time employed academic and had done my main teaching face-to-face with students before COVID-19 hit and we, in Aotearoa New Zealand, went into Alert level 4 ("lockdown") on 25 March 2020. Since then, to date (the week beginning the 12th of October), we have spent five weeks at level 4, six weeks at level 3 ("restrict"), seven weeks at level 2 ("reduce") (and, in Auckland, four weeks at level 2.5), and the remaining 12 weeks at level 1 ("prepare") (New Zealand Government, 2020). Personally, I had quite enjoyed being at and working from home during the first phase of Alert levels (April and May) and, like many others, during this period had got quite a lot done around the house

—and, like Del, had also been quite productive. I was on board with the New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's approach of "Go hard, go early"—a good and resonant rugby metaphor in the land of the All Blacks! During those first months, I generally had a sense of "the team of five million" working together and looking out for each other; and, along with the rest of the country, celebrated when, on the 8th of June, we got to level 1 Alert which meant that, apart from the borders being closed, life returned to normal or, rather, "the new normal".

However, in early August, there was a community outbreak of COVID-19, in response to which, on 12th of that month, we returned to Alert level 3. Like many others, I found that second phase of "lockdown" (August and September) much harder and, despite my own resilience, supported by sustaining relationships, an openness to and interest in change and uncertainty, employment, and a degree of material comfort, I have also felt down, defeated, and, at times, quite melancholic. In some ways, this has been good for me: after all, if I am going to write about uncertainty (which I am), it is good to *feel* it! I have also been curious about how I have coped and, as someone who is interested and engages heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990; Tudor, 2017), I have noticed my increased interest in looking back to certain aspects of my life. This has included:

- Undertaking further research on my ancestry;
- Listening to audiobook recordings of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories (which I read in my childhood and teenage years). I have found something particularly comforting about Greg Wagland's reading of these (on Magpie Audio) which is perhaps unsurprising when I discovered from his website (https://www.gregwagland.co.uk/) that he is from a town which is less than 40 miles from where I was born;
- Playing music from my formative years, and, most recently (and as I was writing this contribution), from The Dubliners, an Irish folk group which I listened to in the 1970s and '80s; and,
- Listening to audiobook recordings of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter stories (which both my son and I read when he was a child in the early 2000s).

I think there is a fairly clear theme here of seeking and finding comfort and familiarity in the face of discomfort and uncertainty.

## The Professional

Professionally, I have been very busy, partly in the context of changing the focus of my work this year (from management to research), and partly in the context of post-COVID-19 travel and social restrictions of shifting academic supervision and lectures online—but also as a result of engaging with experiences of working online. As a result, I have been engaged in writing three articles about different aspects of the experience of the transition of therapy from face-to-face in-person settings to face-to-face, online platforms (Embleton Tudor et al., 2020; Ioane et al., 2020; Rodgers et al., 2000); in editing or co-editing three

special issues/sections of journals devoted to this topic; in supervising one piece of research on the subject; and in applying for a research grant to undertake a national survey of therapists' experiences of online therapy.

While much of this work and additional work is of my own making, I am aware of the additional demands of the situation and of employers, including my university, on its staff to maintain contact with students, which, quite often, means extending contact—and the working day, as Cathy describes in her contribution, and a blurring of the boundary between home and work. Overall, I am excited by the possibilities that working therapeutically online affords in terms of greater access for clients, including some who could not and cannot afford face-to-face, in-person therapy, as well as a certain levelling of and in the therapeutic relationship. Nevertheless, I think we still have a lot to learn about the efficacy of online therapy and different forms of therapy, and that that needs researching.

### The Political

Finally, I have some concerns about the politics of COVID-19. A lot of the messages about restrictions on travel and social distancing focus on how "we"—as communities, workplaces, citizens, even nations—are in this together. However, while this may be good for morale and compliance, it ignores or minimises the differential impact of the coronavirus itself and of political decisions about health, as evidenced by the following statistics: according to Statistics New Zealand (2020), in New Zealand, in the June quarter of 2020:

- Hours worked fell a record 10.3%;
- The number of people not in the labour force rose 37,000; and,
- The number of employed people fell 11,000.

While, during the first wave of the COVID-19, Māori and Pasifica were 14% of all cases, in the second they formed 87% of cases in the Auckland community outbreak. One article estimates COVID-19 infection fatality rates for Māori as 50% higher than that of non-Māori (Steyn et al., 2000).

While New Zealand has a relatively high proportion of people with access to the internet (Statistics New Zealand, 2018), some studies have suggested that the digital divide is worse than the government claims (Dashfield, 2020),

At the beginning of this contribution, I mentioned that I am a full-time employed academic, as I wanted to acknowledge that I am in a privileged position. The fact that I have a dedicated work space at home makes homeworking easier and the distinction between the working day and home life easier to maintain. Others are not so fortunate: poverty, homelessness, overcrowding, lack of access to the internet, lack of privacy, etc., all contribute to different and differential experiences of the pandemic and its impact. We are all in this together?—not so much, or, as Thomsen (2020) puts it: "Yeah, nah"!

## Authors

**Keith Tudor** *is Professor of Psychotherapy at Auckland University of Technology (AUT), Aotearoa New Zealand, where he is currently engaged in establishing a Centre for Research in the Psychological Therapies. He is the author of over 500 publications; the editor of Psychotherapy & Politics International and of a series of books "Advancing Theory in Therapy" (for Routledge/Taylor Francis); and sits on the editorial board of a number of journals, including PACJA. He is also chair of the organising committee of PCE2021, the conference of the World Association of Person-centred & Experiential Psychotherapy & Counseling, being held in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, in June 2021.*

**Dr. Cathy Bettman** *has lectured and practised counselling in diverse contexts for over 20 years. Currently, she is a Senior Lecturer (Counselling) at the University of Notre Dame, as well as Program Coordinator for the Master of Counselling and Discipline Coordinator of the Undergraduate Counselling major. She also supervises students, interns, and practitioners in clinical and research settings. For her PhD, Cathy conducted a qualitative research study in the area of domestic violence. Her thesis was entitled, Patriarchy: The Predominant Discourse and Font of Domestic Violence. This study resulted in her achieving a reputation as a feminist researcher and though extremely proud of this, she prefers her philosophical stance to be understood as more inclusive. Having been trained in humanistic and systemic frameworks, she embraces social constructivist, constructionist, and dialogical paradigms.*

**Dr. Alexandra Bloch-Atefi** *is a course co-ordinator and lecturer in the Graduate Program in Counselling and Psychotherapy at the University of Adelaide, specialising in trauma-informed and body-based modalities. She is a member of the PACFA Research Committee and the PACJA Editorial Board Convenor as well as a Conference Committee member. Alexandra holds memberships with Association of Soul Centred Psychotherapists and the Australian Psychological Society. Her research interests include trauma, mindfulness, and somatic approaches, as well as how to advance the field of counselling and psychotherapy.*

**Elizabeth Day**, *PhD, BA (Hons), is Head of Department, Psychotherapy and Counselling at the Auckland University of Technology, where she lectures in the Master of Psychotherapy and provides research supervision for Masters and PhD students. She is a member and past chair of the Research Committee of the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia. She has published on field theory, mindfulness, gender and sexuality identity, the philosophical bases of psychotherapy, COVID-19, and professional practice. She co-edited the book* Psychotherapy and counselling: Reflections on practice *(2016, OUP). Her therapeutic practice is informed by the Common Factors research, phenomenological methods, and training in depth mindfulness and gestalt psychotherapy. She and her wife teach yoga and meditation at their studio in Kihikihi, Aotearoa New Zealand.*

**Dr. Timothy Hsi** *is a counsellor educator, psychotherapist, and coach. Originally from Singapore, Tim started his journey as a counsellor in a high school in 1997 where he had to learn everything from the ground up. Subsequently, he joined the Singapore*

*Management University in 2003 and single-handedly started and led the counselling service to the point of the Centre becoming the first donor-named counselling service in Singapore (Mrs Wong Kwok Leong Student Wellness Centre). In 2015, he left the university and founded a company that specialised in providing training and certification for career development coaching and counselling and was instrumental in introducing new training programs, such as the Knowdell Job and Career Transition Coach certification and the National Career Development Association's Facilitating Career Development trainings to Singapore. In 2018, Tim was offered a role as a permanent academic staff at the Australian College of Applied Psychology. He heads up the Graduate Certificate in Career Development Practice program and is also the Level 300 year coordinator for the Bachelor of Counselling program.*

**Del Loewenthal** *is Emeritus Professor of Psychotherapy and Counselling at the University of Roehampton and Chair of the Southern Association for Psychotherapy and Counselling (SAFPAC), London, United Kingdom. He is an existential–analytic psychotherapist and chartered psychologist, with a particular interest in phenomenology. Del is founding editor of the European Journal of Psychotherapy and Counselling (Routledge). His books include: Phototherapy and Therapeutic Photography in a Digital Age (Routledge 2013); with Samuels, A., Relational Psychotherapy, Psychoanalysis and Counselling (Routledge 2014); Critical Psychotherapy, Psychoanalysis and Counselling (Palgrave Macmillan 2015); with Proctor, G., Why Not CBT? (PCCS 2018); with Avdi, E., Developments in Qualitative Psychotherapy Research (Routledge 2019); with Shamdasani, S., Towards Transcultural Histories of Psychotherapies (Routledge 2020); with Ness, O. and Hardy, B., Beyond the Therapeutic State (Routledge 2020); Love, Sex and Psychotherapy in a Post-Romantic Era (Routledge 2020); and Critical Existential-Analytic Psychotherapy (Routledge 2021). For further information, see* www.delloewenthal.com *and* www.safpac.co.uk.

**Dr. Poi Kee Low**, *a practising counselling psychologist with over 20 years of experience, has a firm belief in the scientist-practitioner model. Currently, Dr. Low is an Associate Professor of Counselling at James Cook University. His core research interests revolve around interdisciplinary collaborations in schools, school counselling, and counselling for vulnerable groups (persons with special needs, individuals affected by child abuse and family violence), and refugees' education and mental wellbeing. He is primarily involved in qualitative research but is keen on mixed-methods projects as well. Dr. Low is a Registered Psychologist, Counsellor and Social Service Practitioner in Singapore. He is also a chartered psychologist in the United Kingdom and an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society.*

**Gina O'Neill** *(she/her) is a descendant of Ngāti Kahungunu, Rangitāne, Ireland and Germany, living and working currently on Eora and Bundjalung lands in Australia. Gina is an experienced psychotherapist and ecotherapist in private practice, an educator, and a supervising consultant (MasterGestalt Therapy, GradDipCouns, and BAppSocSci). She has 20 years of clinical experience supporting individuals, families, and groups presenting with addictions, mental health, relationship issues, and trauma-related experiences. Gina*

has worked in private psychiatric clinical settings, non-government organisations, and in the public health sector. She is a member of the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia's (PACFA) College of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Practices and the PACFA Research Committee. As a New Zealand Māori woman, her interest is in growing her Indigenous healing practice informed by te Ao Māori in reciprocity with the natural world, and the intersection with gestalt psychotherapy to support healing relationships with people and our environment.

**Emmy van Deurzen** is a philosopher and existential therapist. She is also a Professor of Psychology and Psychotherapy with 17 books to her name, which have been translated into a dozen languages. She is the Founder and Principal of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling at the Existential Academy in London, which offers post-graduate training courses in partnership with Middlesex University (see www.nspc.org.uk and www.existentialacademy.com). Born and raised in the Netherlands, Emmy lived and worked in France for many years before coming to the UK in 1977. Amongst her books are the bestsellers Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling in Practice (3rd ed., Sage 2012), Psychotherapy and the Quest for Happiness (Sage, 2009), Everyday Mysteries (2nd ed., Routledge, 2010), and Paradox and Passion (2nd ed., Wiley, 2015). Her book Rising from Existential Crisis is due to come out with PCCS books in 2021.

# References

Alleman, J. (2002). Online counseling: The internet and mental health treatment. *Psychotherapy, 39*(2), 199-209. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-3204.39.2.199

Barak A., Hen, L., Boniel-Nissim, M., & Shapira, N. (2008). A comprehensive review and a meta-analysis of the effectiveness of internet-based psychotherapeutic interventions. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, *26*(2-4), 109-160. https://doi.org/10.1080/15228830802094429

Bick, A., Blandin, A., & Mertens, K. (2020). *Work from home after the COVID-19 outbreak.* CEPR Discussion Paper No. DP15000. https://doi.org/10.24149/wp2017

Camus, A. (1948). *The plague* (S. Gilbert, Trans.). Knopf. (Original work published 1947)

Camus, A. (1975). Return to Tipasa. In *The myth of Sisyphus* (J. O'Brien, Trans.). Hamish Hamilton. (Original work published 1952)

Chaudhary, C. A., & Bakhshi, P. (2020). Responsible business conduct for the sustainable development goals: Lessons From COVID-19. *International Journal of Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity*, *11*(1), 2835–2841.

Cook, J. E., & Doyle, C. (2002). Working alliance in online therapy as compared to face-to-face therapy: Preliminary results. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, *5*(2), 95-105. https://doi.org/10.1089/109493102753770480

Dashfield, B. (2020). *Digital divide worse than appears in latest report*. 20/20 Trust. https://2020.org.nz/blog/2018/06/22/digital-divide-worse-than-seems-in-latest-report/

Embleton Tudor, L., O'Neill, G., Solomon, M., & Tudor, K. (2020). Reflections on online psychotherapy in the age of COVID-19. *Psychotherapy and Counselling Journal of Australia*, 9(1).

Fisher, S., Guralnik, T., Fonagy, P., & Zilcha-Mano, S. (2020). Let's face it: Video conferencing psychotherapy requires the extensive use of ostensive cues. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*. http://doi.org/10.1080/09515070.2020.1777535

Fonagy, P., & Allison, E. (2014). The role of mentalizing and epistemic trust in the therapeutic relationship. *Psychotherapy, 51*(3), 372-380. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036505

Glasheen, K. J., & Campbell, M. A. (2009). The use of online counselling within an Australian secondary school setting: A practitioner's viewpoint. *Counselling Psychology Review, 24*(2), 42-51.

Grandcolas, P., & Justine, J. L. (2020, April 30). *COVID-19 or the pandemic of mistreated biodiversity*. The Conversation. https://theconversation.com/covid-19-or-the-pandemic-of-mistreated-biodiversity-136447

Hunt, S. (2002). In favour of online counselling? *Australian Social Work*, 55(4), 260-267. https://doi.org/10.1080/03124070208410984

Ioane, J., Knibbs, C., & Tudor, K. (2020). *The challenge of security and accessibility: Critical perspectives on the rapid move to online therapies in the age of COVID-19*. *Psychotherapy and Politics International, 19(*1). https://doi.org/10.1002/ppi.1581

Jaspers, K. (1951). *The way to wisdom* (R. Marsheim, Trans.). Yale University Press.

Joyce. J. (2020). *Dubliners*. Project Gutenberg. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2814/2814-h/2814-h.htm (Original work published 1914)

Maurice, M. E., Ebong, E. I., Fuashi, N. A., Godwill, I., & Zeh, A.F. (2019). The ecological impact on the distribution of pangolins in Deng-Deng National Park, Eastern Region Cameroon. *Global Journal of Ecology, 4*(1), 8-14. https://doi.org/10.17352/gje.000009

Moustakas, C. E. (1990). *Heuristic research: Design, methodology, and applications*. Sage Publications.

New Zealand Government. (2020). *About the alert level system*. https://covid19.govt.nz/alert-system/about-the-alert-system/

Nietzsche, F (1961). *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (R. J. Hollingdale, Trans.). Penguin. (Original work published 1883)

Parker, L. D. (2020). The COVID-19 office in transition: Cost, efficiency and the social responsibility business case. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, 33(8).* https://doi.org/10.1108/AAAJ-06-2020-4609

Pepys, S. (2020). *The diary of Samuel Pepys*. https://www.pepysdiary.com/diary/1665/04/ (Original work published 1669)

Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia. (2020) *Telehealth platforms: Security and additional information for PACFA members.* https://www.pacfa.org.au/telehealth-platforms-security-and-additional-information-for-pacfa-members/

Reay, R. E., Looi, J. C., & Keightley, P. (2020). Telehealth mental health services during COVID-19: summary of evidence and clinical practice. *Australasian Psychiatry, 28*(5), 514-516. https://doi.org/10.1177/1039856220943032

Rodgers, B., Tudor, K., & Ashcroft, A. (2020). Online therapy and person-centred approach in the context of a global pandemic. *Person-Centred & Experiential Psychotherapies*. https://doi.org/10.1080/14779757.2021.1898455

Scharff, J. (Ed.). (2019). *Psychoanalysis online 4.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429458248

Speyer, C., & Zack, J. (2003). Online counselling: Beyond the pros and cons. *Psychologica*, *23*(2), 11-14.

Statistics New Zealand. (2018). *Stocktake for the digital nation domain plan 2018.* New Zealand Government. https://www.stats.govt.nz/methods/stocktake-for-the-digital-nation-domain-plan-2018

Statistcs New Zealand. (2020). *COVID-19 lockdown has widespread effects on labour market*. https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/covid-19-lockdown-has-widespread-effects-on-labour-market#:~:text=In%20the%20June%202020%20quarter,rate%20fell%20to%204.0%20percent

Steyn, N., Binny, R. N., Hannah, K., Hendy, S. C., James, A., Kukutai, T., Lustig, A., McLeod, M., Plank, M. J., Ridings, K., & Sporle, A. (2020). Estimated inequities in COVID-19 infection fatality rates by ethnicity for Aotearoa New Zealand. *New Zealand Medical Journal*, *133*(1521). https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.04.20.20073437

Siegel, D. (2010). *Mindsight: The new science of personal transformation*. Bantam.

Stroebe, M., & Schut, H. (1999). The dual process model of coping with bereavement: Rationale and description. *Death Studies, 23*(3), 197-224. https://doi.org/10.1080/074811899201046

Talwar, S., Talwar, M., Kaur, P., & Dhir, A. (2020). Consumers' resistance to digital innovations: A systematic review and framework development. *Australasian Marketing Journal, 28*(4), 286-299. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ausmj.2020.06.014

Tillich, P. (1952). *The courage to be.* Yale University Press.

Thomsen, P. (2020). *We're all in this together? Yeah, nah*. E-tangata. https://e-tangata.co.nz/comment-and-analysis/were-all-in-this-together-yeah-nah/

Tudor, K. (2017). The fight for health: An heuristic enquiry. In K. Tudor *Conscience and critic: The selected works of Keith Tudor* (pp. 143–168). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315460970

Turcios-Casco, M. A., & Cazzolla Gatti, R. (2020). Do not blame bats and pangolins! Global consequences for wildlife conservation after the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. *Biodiversity and Conservation, 29*, 3829-3833. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10531-020-02053-y

van Deurzen, E., & Arnold-Baker, C. (2018). *Existential therapy: Distinctive features*. Routledge.

Watts, A. (1951). *The wisdom of insecurity: A message for an age of anxiety*. Vintage.

Wind, T. R., Rijkeboer, M., Andersson, G., & Riper, H. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic: The "black swan" for mental health care and a turning point for e-health. *Internet Interventions*, *20*(1), 1-2. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.invent.2020.100317

---

Return to Articles