

Editorial

An Analyst's Snapshot of Covid-era Sessions

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Editorial

I listen in silent attention to my patients. Now that we can't see each other the phone-line and the auditory channel are our intensely charged medium and method of communication. Sessions begin with deep sighs, halting interruptions, there's little privacy when everyone is working or schooling from home. Patients tell me they feel frustrated, heavy, overtaxed, worn down, uncertain of everything... unable to see ahead, to plan, or even hope to make plans. Others love the protective shielding of working from home, they wonder if they'll ever be able to reintegrate with life 'outside'. Still others accustomed to travelling and exotic holidays are unable to adjust to staying 'still'. Uncertainty and the lack of liberty to move freely about seem to be the prime existential problems of New York patients today. Unable to have what they took for granted they don't know where to turn or how to organize their inner and outer lives. Everyone seems to have been devoured by the passive pleasures of Netflix and those who can afford it to online shopping. Children act-out and loom large in everyday problems of home-schooling, home discipline, restricted outings. The omnipresent mask and washing of hands yet another source of conflict for hostile adolescents. Food deliveries are soaring, while those who enjoy it are cooking more than ever. Emotions usually filtered through the daily rush and noises of a hectic city are now bare and raw, unvarnished and exposed to the light of simplified yet infinitely more taxing days. Couples fight, some hate while others love more; one long-time feuding couple is divorcing now, as the pandemic rages, their children confused, dispersed, and uprooted. Disorientation, insecurity, insulation, and unsureness vis a vis the 'other,' have outstripped isolation as the current communal complaint, the mask protecting, but also hiding, the inner self. The dullness of daily routines is disrupted by disquiet, a new sense that nowhere is safe anymore, that the enemies are within and around, all

the time. Anxiety, angst, and suspiciousness have supplanted fear of a contagious disease that kills, as everyone saw their Capitol assaulted and the land that was once everyone's, is now a land shaken by danger and division. At no time has it been more a privilege than now to be a practicing psychoanalyst. Unlike many I have specifically avoided zoom contacts with patients and kept to phone sessions. This method of communicating not only improves the quality of the more reflective mind-to-mind-interaction by drastically restricting the range of distracting stimuli and forcing verbalization, but also gives patients far greater freedom of expression, all funneled through the vocal and verbal line. Now tone, timbre, delays, halting silences or explosive streams of loud flowing speech, all these paralinguistic tropes become the main source of descriptive input. My ears grow highly attuned as I listen carefully to breathing, noises, silences, speed or slowness of speech... I can almost hear my patients 'thinking' when contemplating a pointed question. The dialectic dialogue is super-charged now, as the sessions and my voice become the only constant secure moorings for many, a safe space to release tensions, find solid containment, complain freely, and shed mounting ambivalence now that families are cooped up in New York apartments most of the time. And then there's that formidable unique instrument, the dream, as keen and deeply revealing as an MRI, a direct window to the unconscious and indispensable tool of all psychoanalytic work. The dreams have proliferated! With daytime activities so curtailed and restrained it's as though nighttime escapades have more appeal. Paradoxically with less free movement people seem to tire more and dreamlife, in addition to a cozy escape, affords all the pleasures and adventures that are unattainable now, in this era of Covid 19.

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