

EDITORIAL

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This edition of the journal will reach its readers when, hopefully, the roll out of vaccines worldwide will result in the worst effects of Covid-19 being held in check. While this edition does not explicitly address pandemic related issues—this will be the theme of the next edition—I have found it impossible, as your guest editor, to ignore thinking about how the production of the journal—the writing of articles and reviews, their submission for peer review, and dissemination in published form—relates to the turbulence, anxiety, and devastation created by the pandemic. It is no exaggeration to say that anxiety about the menace of Covid continues to act in the background to everyday life. As Levine writes:

We cannot easily attenuate its threat by having a “there” and “not there”. We can barely demarcate a safe zone in which we can truly relax our guard. The closest we can come to successfully doing so is near total isolation and sequestration at home. (2021, p. 273)

With public spaces and normal working environments feeling unsafe, home-based working has contributed to the narrowing of physical and emotional distance within sequestering partnerships and families. From this point of view our worlds have become smaller, producing benefits for some but conflict for others as evident by the increased reports of domestic violence. Whether enforced isolation has proved stressful or not, computer-based technology has helped people sustain work and personal ties. As I have worked with colleagues to produce this edition, one recurring and positive experience has been the contribution online communication has made to fostering links worldwide with contributors to the journal. Papers have been submitted from colleagues in the USA, Panama, Australia, India, Brazil, Argentina, Tunisia, and Iran, in addition to those in the UK, while the contents of the *Review of the International Association of Couple and Family Psychoanalysis* and *Dialogue*, listed later in this edition, draw our attention to the work of our French-speaking colleagues. I have been struck by how the increased reliance on communicating electronically with others from my home has dissolved the significance of physical distance and geography. Everyone is just a click on a screen away rather than viewed as living on the other side of the world and this has reinforced a sense of a global professional community committed to promoting a psychoanalytically informed service to couples and families. The contrast between the closed-in domestic world of lockdown and the expansive and accessible world of a professional global community could not be greater.

The six main papers in this edition provide the reader with a stimulating and diverse range of topics and approaches reflecting the different therapeutic contexts from which they emerge. They cluster in two groups of three. The first comprise three papers which separately and in sequence address challenges faced in the anticipation of having children, the abandonment of children, and the death of children, while the second group of three approaches work with couples from different therapeutic perspectives.

Beginning with the first of the child focused papers, Jill Savege Scharff explores the conscious and unconscious motivations of couples anticipating starting a family. A review of social research and psychoanalytic literature demonstrates this to be an under-explored dimension of family life. The conflict and ambivalence which may attend this time is vividly brought to life in a detailed account of therapy with a couple who ambivalently struggle with negotiating this point of transition in their lives. Scharff concludes with a discussion of transference towards the couple therapist where she suggests that she was seen as both an annoying parent to speed away from, and a disturbing child about whom the couple were ambivalent.

In the second paper, Susana Muszkat and Monica Vorchheimer describe how family trauma involving the banishment of a mother and baby in Europe many decades ago leads to the transgenerational maintenance of a family secret in South America which, at the same time, is accompanied by a form of behavioural reenactment mimicking the disguised early trauma. The authors suggest that the failure to mourn and come to terms with the early trauma leads to the ongoing repetition–compulsion. In their discussion they explain the clinical material using link theory and different theoretical approaches to trauma.

The difficulties in mourning the death of a child are the theme of the next paper. Dianna Kenny and colleagues introduce an innovative sixteen-week therapeutic intervention for couples whose child has died. The therapeutic model is based on what they call the unresolved grief triad (UGT) which links empirically based predictors of prolonged or complicated grief, including a history of unmourned losses and couple dynamics that prevent mourning, to couple manifestations of unresolved loss. Couple therapists formulate and make explicit a unique UGT for the couple which then forms the focus for subsequent interpretations. The two case studies presented in the article are part of a larger cohort of cases the outcomes of which are being evaluated and will be the subject of a later report.

We congratulate Judith Pickering, one of the joint authors of this article and a member of our International Advisory Board, who has won the American Board and Academy of Psychoanalysis 2020 Book Award in the clinical category for her book *The Search for Meaning in Psychotherapy*. It has been recognised for its outstanding scholarship and for offering a profound inquiry into the contemplative, mystical, and apophatic dimensions of psychoanalysis.

In thinking about the second set of three papers describing work with couples I was reminded of the therapist's need to feel grounded in, and committed to, an internalised theoretical approach alongside a need to be

reflectively self critical of that approach and open to new ideas in order that creative learning and professional development can take place. We are fortunate in having three clinical papers which, while being very different from each other, I can guarantee will challenge and, possibly, revise readers' preconceptions about their own internalised theories.

All are concerned with what accomplishes significant change in couple functioning in the to and fro of the consulting room. The first of these papers is by Julie Friend whose explicit focus is to unpick the phenomenology of creative experience and, in doing so, adds to Mary Morgan's concept of the creative couple. She draws on Winnicott's notion of transitional experience—the intermediate area between internal and external reality—and augments this idea by considering the contributions of Bion, Goldman, Ogden, and Peltz. A central idea in her article is that non-verbal aspects of containment need to be valued alongside verbal interpretations of projective processes.

In the next article, Carla Leone explores a related phenomenon to that developed by Friend but from a Kohutian perspective. She proposes that Kohut's concept of "selfobject" experience is fundamental to the understanding and treatment of couples. For readers who are unfamiliar with Kohut's ideas, Leone provides an introduction to his theory which emphasises the importance of listening in a closely attuned way to the patient's point of view so that disavowed vulnerabilities can be acknowledged allowing narcissistic withdrawal or narcissistic omnipotence to be relinquished. She explains, through her clinical example, that psycho-education can also be helpful in allowing clients to view their world and that of their partner differently. In this way the aim of therapy is to move to a point when each partner can become a positive "selfobject" for the other. Readers familiar with the principles of mentalization-based therapy will be interested to explore the parallels and differences between approaches.

The final main article discusses questions which are of perennial importance to all couple psychotherapists. Yun Pang, the author, is a couple psychotherapist based in New Delhi, India, and, in describing her therapy with a couple, tangles with the intersections and conflicts between a conventional model of couple therapy, which treats partners as equal and autonomous agents, and patriarchal social values. The therapy commences with a young couple seeking help following the wife having an affair and the first two years of work focuses on issues surrounding her infidelity. However, the public concern about a particular rape case prompts the wife to re-evaluate her role in the marriage and of her total responsibility for its apparent failure. As she becomes more assertive it emerges that the husband had also been unfaithful but that his behaviour was understood as justifiable "encounters" rather than shameful "affairs".

Yun Pang vividly and openly describes how she comes to view shame as a social construct as well as an intrapsychic phenomenon. In her reflections on her work with this couple, she very movingly considers how working with shame necessarily rebounds with how this has influenced the therapist's internal world. Yun Pang suggests that her redefinition of shame has

implications for rethinking technique by introducing questions about its relevance early on in a therapy.

The devastation brought about by the pandemic is a reminder that the Tavistock Clinic grew out of, and was profoundly shaped by, two world wars. These developments are traced in *The Tavistock Century: 2020 Vision*, a new book celebrating the clinic's first hundred years and reviewed by Stanley Ruszczynski. Couple psychotherapy is well represented with contributions from Andrew Balfour, Mary Morgan, Brett Kahr, and Paul Pengelly. Three other book reviews follow. Perrine Moran reviews *Sexuality and Gender Now: Moving Beyond Heteronormativity*, edited by Leezah Hertzmann and Juliet Newbegin; Christopher Clulow reviews *Working with Attachment in Couple Therapy: A Four-Step Model for Clinical Practice* by Jim Donovan; and David Hewison reviews the novel, *Jack*, by the Pulitzer prize-winning author, Marilynne Robinson.

Our reviews section concludes with three arts reviews. Erica Herrero-Martinez reflects on *Normal People*, the TV series; Maureen Boerma reviews a performance of *Aida*; and we conclude with Susan Pacey sharing her thoughts about A. E. Stallings' poem "Aftershocks".

In her review of the poem Susan Pacey mentions that reading poetry has become an important feature of her self-care during the pandemic. I hope that amid the turbulence the pandemic has produced, this journal, too, contributes to our professional self-care by sustaining a sense of continuity and normality, complementing other forms of support from the idiosyncratic to the shared activities of supervision, case discussion groups, and conferences. I believe its production and dissemination, involving authors, reviewers, editors, and readers, embodies continuity, creativity, and dialogue and, in this way, acts as a counterpoint to the pandemic's anti-life forces and images. To all involved in its production I extend my thanks.

Reference

- Levine, H. B. (2021). Covidian life. In: H. B. Levine & A. De Staal (Eds.), *Psychoanalysis and Covidian Life: Common Distress, Individual Experience* (pp. 263–278). Bicester, UK: Phoenix.