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EDITORIAL

Karen Minikin,^{*1}  David Pavón Cuéllar,²  and Keith Tudor³ 

¹Principal, Insights—South West; Leadership team, Black, African and Asian Therapy Network, UK

²Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Morelia, Mexico

³Professor of Psychotherapy, Auckland University of Technology, Aotearoa New Zealand

INTRODUCTION

World events, particularly those following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (in early 2020) and the anti-racist movements after the death of George Floyd (in May 2020), continue to have lasting influence on the political minds at work in psychotherapy and other ‘psy’ professions. Therapists and academics are reflecting on the implications for society and its psychological health. Living through the COVID-19 pandemic alongside the ongoing climate crisis is the backdrop in the ongoing challenge of how to promote thinking and democracy in a world in which high speed social media communications and political polarities seem on the rise.

How do we respond through theoretical reflection and psychotherapeutic practice in a context of both authoritarian government policies justified by the pandemic and current far-right extremism characterized by denial of COVID-19 and of climate change, or to other forms of denialism, conspiracy theories, homophobia and interphobia, racism and antisemitism, and the struggle of conservatives against the constitutional right to abortion in the United States? These are the themes that dominate this August issue of *PPI*, the third issue of this year. From peer-reviewed articles, to reviews of a play and a conference, the question of how to subvert systemic oppression in psychotherapy is explored.

*Contact details: karen@insights-sw.co.uk

THIS ISSUE

In the article entitled, 'Self as a teaching tool', Peter Blundell, Beverley Burke, Ann-Marie Wilson, and Ben Jones make use of personal disclosure to develop trust, empathy, and understanding with diversity in social identity. The article, which was written partly in response to the contributions by Smith et al. (2021) and Proctor et al. (2021), offers an illustration on the use of experiential learning, a sharing of lived experiences—particularly of racism and homophobia—to stimulate discussion and debate. The article also examines the process of doing this and the way in which vulnerability is used to expand consciousness and develop resilience amongst tutors and students alike. Potentially this challenges the power dynamics between tutors and students whilst also modelling affect regulation, openness, and non-defended dialogue.

The question of political bias and differences between therapists and clients is an interesting and stimulating area when it comes to psychotherapy. Evolving consciousness in clients is part of the therapeutic mission. Yet, this is a challenge when working with sensitive political issues, and different, conflicting ideologies between client and therapist. This theme is picked up in both the research-based article on 'Firearms in clients' homes' by Aaron L. Norton, Archer Ziyi Chen, and Tony Xing Tan, and the response to racist comments in psychotherapy by Rosie Hunt. In different ways, these articles present working with a paranoid defence that is nonetheless based on life experience.

Considering the ethics of firearms, young children, and the numbers of deaths in the USA, Norton and his colleagues examine the role of the political beliefs of clinical mental health counselors (CMHCs) on treatment objectives. Nearly 150 licensed CMHCs were consulted, all of whom were members of the American Mental Health Counselors Association. The study aimed to explore the extent to which the political views of the therapists influenced treatment and outcome in clients that had firearms in the home where there were young children.

On the theme of political differences, Rosie Hunt addresses the moral task of the therapist in using their position to address social injustice. Focusing in particular on race and the role of white therapists, she names some of the challenges facing the profession in addressing racism head on. By thinking more about intersectionality, she points to the ways in which privilege and oppression might have more nuanced discussions that are not driven by defensiveness when there are strong experiences of guilt, shame, and inadequacy. She also advocates the need for therapists to understand whiteness such as through making use of the Multicultural and Social Justice Counselling Competencies approach (see Ratts et al., 2016).

Working with an affirmative mindset in intersex therapy is key in the in-depth study of interphobia and right-wing extremism offered in the article by Andreas Hechler. Hechler presents a thorough discussion on the nature of interphobia and binary thinking which is fundamentally challenged when presented with people from the intersex community. As

Hechler asserts, the discrimination faced by intersex people is an ongoing assault for them and it includes therapeutic and psychological settings. Thus, a deep understanding of this is critical in offering an affirmative therapeutic approach. The article examines the process of the German-speaking extreme right to consider how their narratives perpetuate a two-sex hegemony. Connections are made with racism, antisemitism, nationalism, social Darwinism, two-sex ideology, heterosexism, and cissexism, all of which promote binary thinking.

The thought of the extreme right operates not only through binarism, but also through denialism, as has currently been seen in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Denial of reality is examined by Alschuler, who links this with the repressed anxiety and defensiveness in facing the prospect and potential destruction of climate change. Alschuler makes the link with Jung's work on the belief of flying saucers, sightings of which increased dramatically at the time when the world feared a nuclear explosion. This fear, especially in the 1950s and '60s, fuelled beliefs in alien invasions in the same way that the fear of the coronavirus and/or responses to it fuels current conspiracy theories.

As the issues about the pandemic (or 'pandemic') are both complex and controversial, we are pleased to have contributions from two authors who take different views of this phenomenon and the challenges it poses. Alschuler's article critically analyses the social reaction to the pandemic, while Bert Olivier's piece on 'Beyond Agamben's *'Homo Sacer'*' and the pandemic prefers to focus his critique on economic, media, political, and governmental powers. Using the pandemic as an example of systemic oppression, Olivier presents a fascinating history and argument for the dynamics driving the power base in many nations during the pandemic. He draws on Giorgio Agamben's ideas to explain how in antiquity the principle of 'sacred man/human' meant someone was seen as 'bare life', and therefore as being fit for execution, and different from ritual sacrifice which was seen as soul saving. He makes a case that contemporary times have seen greater treatment of humans as 'bare life', making it possible for biopolitical and pharma-political atrocities during the pandemic. The challenge Olivier presents to the reader also sheds some light on how and why there has been a mass dissemination of conspiracy theories and other forms of social suggestion.

Further evidence of the trend towards the systemic and collective mindsets are offered in the review by two of the editors (Karen Minikin and Keith Tudor) of Farhad Dalal's (2018) brilliant book *CBT: The Cognitive Behavioural Tsunami* on the politics behind the widespread use of cognitive behavioural therapy in the UK. Dalal's analysis of the use of power and the mindset behind it is clearly relevant for practitioners and academics in the UK, though his book also has international appeal in its critique of how politicians, scientists, psychologists, and other professionals in mental health think about and respond to human minds, psyches, and bodies.

Another piece with a scope that is as applicable globally as it is specifically British is the play 'For Black Boys Who Have Considered Suicide When the Hue Gets Too Heavy', by Ryan

Calais Cameron (2022), reviewed by Rotimi Akinsete. This play places six young black men in a clinical setting as they tell their stories in contemporary British society. Commenting on the relevance of the play in the field of mental health, Akinsete emphasises the strength of young people like those in the play. He underlines their ability to go beyond what is expected of them, but also acknowledges their vulnerability and the risks they face due to their discrimination in white societies.

Akinsete's reflection is made from the perspective of his experience, which he himself describes as that of a 'black, male counsellor', with a training 'in a white, Eurocentric, psychotherapeutic tradition'. Experiences like this are precisely what inspired the *White Therapies Black Clients Conference*, which is reviewed by Karen Minikin. The review reveals that this was a refreshing conference and an important indication that things are changing—especially in the West with regard to the writing, the authority, and public presence of Black therapists who have moved the subject of race from the margins to the centre.

Sadly and worryingly, some recent events show that things are moving backwards, and further marginalising people. Once such event took place at the end of June this year when the United States Supreme Court reversed the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling (*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 2022) which gave women in the USA a constitutional right to choose to have an abortion. We wanted to acknowledge this in this issue and are very grateful to Jessica Benjamin and Christine Schmidt for their Notes from the Front Line on this matter. We also encourage further submissions on the impact of this retrogressive ruling, exploring its psychopolitical impact, especially on the lives of women.

LOOKING FORWARD

As we noted in our previous editorial, the next issue of the journal will be a special issue on 'War, Trauma, and Refugees: Psychopolitical Responses', the call for which is as follows:

Against the backdrop of the invasion of the Ukraine, this issue invites submissions from psychotherapists and those in allied 'psy' professions to consider the psychopolitics of war and its impact; present and intergenerational trauma; and the experience of being a refugee and/or working with refugees from war. This might include discussion of the terminology used in this field, for instance, regarding invasion rather than war, and 'forcibly displaced people' rather than 'refugees'. We are particularly interested in articles and other contributions—Controversial discussions, Talks, Notes from the Front Line, Reviews, Art and Poetry—about the differential treatment and different experience of people of colour in these situations and positions.

We refer to this again as, although the deadline for submissions for peer-reviewed articles for this special issue has just closed (as we go to press with this issue), we are still accepting

contributions for other sections of the journal such as Art and Poetry, Notes from the Front Line, and Reviews.

We are planning ahead for issues next year and considering special issues on gender, on neurodiversity, and on psychotherapy education and training, the call for papers which will follow. Please feel free to submit articles for generic issues as well as these special issues.

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