



## COVID-19 Online LISTENING POST

**Part 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS & EXPERIENCES, PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES, PART 3: ANALYSIS & HYPOTHESIS FORMATION**

**Ireland, Dublin, 22nd May 2020**

Up to 17 members (14 women and 3 men) participated in the listening post though two dropped out part way through the proceedings (a man and woman) and others had intermittent difficulties in connecting. Five were based in Ireland and others came from various European countries, Israel and Singapore.

### **Sharing experiences together**

From the beginning the meeting was dominated by an overwhelming sense of loss. This sense encompasses the primary loss of bereavement due to Covid-19 and the secondary losses of contact with loved ones, and normal social and work-life activities arising from the pandemic lockdown. This emotional tone of profound sadness and mourning persisted through the opening session. It was also later accompanied by expressions of fear, anxiety and (survivor) guilt: *“I am paid while others have lost jobs”*. The dominant tone rendered it difficult to stay with the session and be attentive: *“wanting to shut down, and not face the reality”*.

There were a number of countervailing responses. Some celebrated the new connections made with neighbours. Others cited the digital connections and reconnections sparked by the crisis. Self-improving and life-enriching activities including yoga, gardening and other hobbies also featured. One could research and write. The positive effects on the natural environment were noted. People reported reflecting on previous lifestyle choices, for example regarding travel.

The opening session concluded with a report of a dream, where the dreamer, on waking, realised that characters in the dream were not socially distancing. He was sad to recall that Covid-19 still prevailed in the waking world and angry at the seeming endlessness of its baleful effects.

### **Making meaning in groups**

The four small groups varied significantly in their approach to the task of identifying themes and framing hypotheses. The first devised a well-formed hypothesis about the emergence of defences against loss, rooted in the individual psychodynamic system. The second confessed to ‘wooliness’ of thinking, speculating on whether this Covid “movie”, that we are all in, will have a happy or a sad ending: *“What will the ending be?”* and explored the wider socio-political system, articulating an anger against governmental authorities that had gone

unexpressed in the large group. The third group explored the symbolic system, and used the image of an ancient olive tree to convey persistence and hope in the face of the serious trauma and insult. The fourth group analysed participants' experience as a series of inverse and dualities - loved ones become threats, *"beggars seem comfortable on the streets now, while we are uncomfortable"*, we are locked down to keep us free from harm, *"connected but alone"* and so on. At the same time as we experience loss on so many levels, we are also exposed to new opportunities for growth and renewal. This group dealt largely with inter-personal and inter-group dimensions of the reported experience.

### **In(con)clusions**

The listening post finishes but we cannot say that it concludes. The trauma is ongoing and the end is unknown, so analysis feels premature and hubristic. The challenge to our omnipotence is painful - *"the gods have put us in our place"*. We need to be allowed to *"stay within the process"* and persist in a state of unknowing. While appreciating the opportunity to participate in the listening post (LP) - *"support for just not knowing"* - participants question the adequacy of the methodology, and in particular the insistence that hypotheses be formed at this stage in such an ongoing calamity.

Is the pandemic too big for the LP methodology? : *"too soon to tell"*.

One can recognise in this position a classic resistance to task, while at the same time acknowledging that the objection may be valid given this unprecedented global pandemic.

The online listening post, by including people from various countries, can itself be seen as a reaction against the restrictions that have been imposed, that prevent us from travelling and moving about freely. Our online revelations allow us to touch each other emotionally when that is physically impossible with 'social distancing', and to enact our belief in the value of pursuing understanding even as understanding continues to elude us at this time.

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