

# **Psychological Applications and Trends**

## **2020**

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## FOREWORD

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This book contains a compilation of papers presented at the International Psychological Applications Conference and Trends (InPACT) 2020, organized by the World Institute for Advanced Research and Science (W.I.A.R.S.), that this year had to be transformed into a fully Virtual Conference as a result of the Coronavirus (COVID 19) pandemic.

Modern psychology offers a large range of scientific fields where it can be applied. The goal of understanding individuals and groups (mental functions and behavioral standpoints), from this academic and practical scientific discipline, aims ultimately to benefit society.

The International Conference seeks to provide some answers and explore the several areas within the Psychology field, new developments in studies and proposals for future scientific projects. The goal is to offer a worldwide connection between psychologists, researchers and lecturers, from a wide range of academic fields, interested in exploring and giving their contribution in psychological issues. We take pride in having been able to connect and bring together academics, scholars, practitioners and others interested in a field that is fertile in new perspectives, ideas and knowledge.

We counted on an extensive variety of contributors and presenters, which can supplement the view of the human essence and behavior, showing the impact of their different personal, academic and cultural experiences. This is, certainly, one of the reasons there are nationalities and cultures represented, inspiring multi-disciplinary collaborative links, fomenting intellectual encounter and development.

InPACT 2020 received 240 submissions, from more than 45 different countries from all over the world, reviewed by a double-blind process. Submissions were prepared to take form of Virtual Presentations and Posters. 75 submissions (overall, 31% acceptance rate) were accepted for presentation in the conference.

The conference also included:

- One keynote presentation by Prof. Dr. Michael Wang (Emeritus Professor of Clinical Psychology, University of Leicester; Chair, Association of Clinical Psychologists, United Kingdom).
- One Special Talk by Prof. Dr. Matthias Ammann (PhD, Department of Social Sciences, Uminho; Psychotherapist and psychoanalyst at Equilibrium Oporto; Climate activist, Portugal).

We would like to express our gratitude to our invitees.

The Conference addresses different categories inside Applied Psychology area and papers fit broadly into one of the named themes and sub-themes. The conference program includes six main broad-ranging categories that cover diversified interest areas:

- **CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY:** Emotions and related psychological processes; Assessment; Psychotherapy and counseling; Addictive behaviors; Eating disorders; Personality disorders; Quality of life and mental health; Communication within relationships; Services of mental health; and Psychopathology.
- **EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY:** Language and cognitive processes; School environment and childhood disorders; Parenting and parenting related processes; Learning and technology; Psychology in schools; Intelligence and creativity; Motivation in classroom; Perspectives on teaching; Assessment and evaluation; and Individual differences in learning.
- **SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY:** Cross-cultural dimensions of mental disorders; Employment issues and training; Organizational psychology; Psychology in politics and international issues; Social factors in adolescence and its development; Social anxiety and self-esteem; Immigration and social policy; Self-efficacy and identity development; Parenting and social support; Addiction and stigmatization; and Psychological and social impact of virtual networks.

- **LEGAL PSYCHOLOGY:** Violence and trauma; Mass-media and aggression; Intra-familial violence; Juvenile delinquency; Aggressive behavior in childhood; Internet offending; Working with crime perpetrators; Forensic psychology; Violent risk assessment; and Law enforcement and stress.
- **COGNITIVE AND EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY:** Perception, memory and attention; Decision making and problem-solving; Concept formation, reasoning and judgment; Language processing; Learning skills and education; Cognitive Neuroscience; Computer analogies and information processing (Artificial Intelligence and computer simulations); Social and cultural factors in the cognitive approach; Experimental methods, research and statistics; and Biopsychology.
- **PSYCHOANALYSIS AND PSYCHOANALYTICAL PSYCHOTHERAPY:** Psychoanalysis and psychology; The unconscious; The Oedipus complex; Psychoanalysis of children; Pathological mourning; Addictive personalities; Borderline organizations; Narcissistic personalities; Anxiety and phobias; Psychosis; Neuropsychoanalysis.

This book contains the results of the different researches conducted by authors who focused on what they are passionate about: to study and develop research in areas related to Psychology and its applications. It includes an extensive variety of contributors and presenters that are hereby sharing with us their different personal, academic and cultural experiences.

We would like to thank all the authors and participants, the members of the academic scientific committee, and of course, to the organizing and administration team for making and putting this conference together.

Looking forward to continuing our collaboration in the future,

Respectfully,

Prof. Clara Pracana

*Full and Training Member of the Portuguese Association of Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy, Portugal  
Conference and Program Co-Chair*

Prof. Michael Wang

*Emeritus Professor of Clinical Psychology, University of Leicester, United Kingdom  
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## KEYNOTE LECTURE

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### THE PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

**Prof. Dr. Michael Wang**

*Emeritus Professor of Clinical Psychology, University of Leicester;  
Chair, Association of Clinical Psychologists (United Kingdom)*

#### Abstract

Every country and every people have been profoundly affected by the pandemic as governments struggle to contain the infection, and health and social care service are put under enormous pressure. Much of the population of the world are in, or have experienced “lock-down” resulting for many in social isolation and interruption of normal community activity and support. Many of us have friends and relatives who have the infection and sadly, some of us will have been unexpectedly bereaved because of Covid-19. For most of us, this is the most severe national crisis we have ever experienced.

In addition to medical, social and economic impacts, the pandemic is also taking its toll on public mental health, worsening the condition of those who have existing psychological problems and provoking widespread health and death anxiety in those who previously were psychologically stable. The loss of normal social intercourse, and interruption of relationships and communication, will make society more vulnerable to depression and suicide. Lock-down also creates huge challenges to those in abusive relationships. Those with obsessional compulsive difficulties may be worsened by the very real risk of infectious contamination from strangers and friends alike.

Frontline health and social care staff are particularly exposed, with incredible levels of work stress, frequent confrontation with death of their patients, who cannot be comforted by their relatives in their final hours, alongside fear of personal infection and the possibility of bringing that infection home to their loved ones. What is the role of psychology in this exceptional situation? How can we assist with public anxiety and individual mental health in these extraordinary circumstances? Do we have a role and responsibility to support frontline medical, nursing and care staff in our hospitals and residential care homes?

I will describe my own experience as Chair of the Association of Clinical Psychologists UK; my interactions with senior management in the British National Health Service; national provision for psychological support, especially for healthcare staff; and the particular problems faced by Covid-19 patients during ICU admission and after discharge.

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#### Biography

Prof. Michael Wang, BSc(Hons), MSc(Clin.Psy), PhD, C. Psychol., FBPsS, is Emeritus Professor of Clinical Psychology in the Clinical Psychology Unit, Centre for Medicine, University of Leicester, and former Director of the National Health Service-funded Doctoral Postgraduate Clinical Psychology Training Course (2005-2014). He is a former Chair of the Division of Clinical Psychology of the British Psychological Society. Prof. Wang is also a full practitioner member of the BPS Division of Neuropsychology and a member of the BPS Division of Health Psychology. He is Chair of the Association of Clinical Psychologists UK.

He has worked as a clinical psychologist for more than 35 years. Prior to his appointment in Leicester he was Director of the 6-year, integrated Doctoral Clinical Psychology Training Course at the University of Hull. Throughout his academic career he has maintained an Honorary Consultant role in the NHS, treating patients with anxiety disorders, depression and obsessional compulsive disorder. He has more than 20 years' experience of examining patients with traumatic brain injury for the UK courts.

He obtained his three degrees from the University of Manchester: following graduating with a BSc in Psychology in 1978 he began his professional postgraduate training in Clinical Psychology in the Faculty of Medicine. Subsequently he completed a research PhD in 1990 which investigated learning and memory in alcoholics.

Over recent years Prof Wang has gained an international reputation for his research on cognitive and memory function during general anaesthesia. In 2004 he organized the 6th International Symposium on Memory and Awareness in Anaesthesia and Intensive Care (in Hull) – the foremost international forum for clinical research in this particular field. He has held appointments on a number of prominent committees in the British Psychological Society including the professional accrediting body for clinical psychology training, and a committee that is in the process of determining national standards for competence in the use of neuropsychological tests. He has served as an expert advisor on a NICE (UK) Committee in relation to the monitoring of depth of anaesthesia and also as an expert member of the Royal College of Anaesthesia's National Audit Project 5 (a national audit of anaesthetic awareness reports). In 1999 he was made Fellow of the British Psychological Society and is also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine.

In 2015 he was awarded the Humphry Davy Medal by the Royal College of Anaesthetists for his contribution to the understanding of accidental awareness during general anaesthesia.

Prof. Wang has published more than 60 papers in peer-reviewed journals, and numerous book chapters. He has been an invited speaker at international conferences on more than 30 occasions. In collaboration with colleagues he has won more than £1.2 million in research funding. He has supervised more than 40 doctoral research projects over the past 25 years. He has been a regular contributor and session chair at recent InPACT conferences, and recently joined the conference team as a co-organiser.

# HOW PSYCHOANALYSIS CAN HELP US TO BEAR THE THOUGHT OF CLIMATE CHANGE?

**Matthias Ammann**

*Department of Social Sciences, Uminho (Portugal)*

### Abstract

A growing number of people are realizing that climate change might be a real threat to present and future generations. Despite protests of some people, and parts of us which do not want to see it, a growing amount of scientific evidence shows us day after day that our way of life might endanger human existence on the planet in a scale never seen before. Dealing properly with this fact is not easy, because the individual psyche cannot bear the pain of these thoughts, using different strategies to repress, negate or even disavowal completely this reality. Psychoanalysis has much to say about it. The present paper suggests a relational approach to deal with the emotions brought up by the growing evidence about this subject. Once we realize and accept the scientific evidence and regain our social and relational strength, we might still have a chance to make real changes and promote a sustainable life.

**Keywords:** *Anxiety, climate change, disavowal, dark optimism, conviviality.*

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## 1. Introduction

Every day more and more scientific evidence shows us that: 1) climate change is a scientifically-proven reality; 2) human behavior is responsible for the vast majority of it; and, 3) we have to drastically change our way of interacting with nature to secure our survival as a species.

According to Anderegg et al. (2010), more than 97-98% of the peer-reviewed scientific articles support the idea of anthropogenic climate change. In the United Nations (UN) IPCC (2018) report, 1.300 scientists from different countries affirmed that, with a probability higher than 95%, human activity is responsible for the largest part of the climate change in the last 50 years. In 2019, a letter was published in the *Journal of BioScience* with more than 11.000 scientist's signatures from 153 countries (Ripple et al., 2019) stating that we are in a climate emergency and that we have to take real measures to assure a sustainable life in the future.

Evidence is around us. Although many of us are still reluctant to deal with this problem. Understanding the actual environmental crisis without understanding how the human psychic deals with painful ideas is a mistake.

One way of looking at the problem is by focusing on the human rational evaluation and decision making/actions. A perspective many times adopted by political scientists, communications experts, economists and some psychology experts from the cognitive and behavior areas. Certainly, all areas have much to contribute and different epistemic approaches are crucial to address the current environmental crisis which can be seen as a hyperobject (Morton, 2013) – an entity of such vast temporal and spatial dimension defeats traditional ideas about what a thing is in the first place. But, surprisingly, the psychoanalytical field and its abundant theoretical, clinical and conceptual resources are underrepresented despite efforts of some academics as Searles (1960), Nicholzen (2002), Randall (2009), Dodds (2011), Weintrobe (2013), Lertzman (2015) and others.

The present article aims to summarize some central ideas in the psychoanalytical theory, putting them in the context of environmental changes and then emphasizing the importance of good relations for comprehending the environmental reality. A comprehension that needs to integrate the thought of our dependency on the natural world and also our profound impact on it.

## 2. Psychoanalysis

It is always important to remember that, according to psychoanalysis, we are not a revealed, unitary, rational and self-aware entity. Rather, we are complex and dynamic parts which most of the time conflict with each other.

In Freud's work, we can find successively words as conflict, ambivalence, opposition, ambiguity, contradiction, partial tendencies, deformation etc. And these words try to better portray the enigma between desire-censorship, pleasure-culture, pleasure-reality, ego-id, superego-ego, erotic-auto conservation drives, Eros-Thanatos, manifest-latent dreams content and finally conscious and unconscious.

Realizing that we are not one homogenous unit and that many times we are not in control is what Freud (1917) called the third blow on the human narcissism. The first was done by Copernicus showing we are not the center of the universe, then Darwin showing we are not different from other animals and finally the psychological blow showing we are not even sovereign in our own minds. We could argue a fourth blow, realizing we are totally dependent on the environment we live in.

Our psychic mind has many partial instincts, drives, needs and desires. Some of them are conscious or known (*Bewusst*) and some unconscious – less known or totally unknown (*Unbewusst*). These partial tendencies carry conscious and/or unconscious qualities and depending on the topologic, dynamic and economic (intensity) arrangement there is more or less gray, but never just black or white.

Despite our rational desire to organize, categorize and control life in binary boxes, there is usually complex and contradictory internal relations, some more evident and others less.

When we talk about apathy, we are most likely talking about one strong tendency that dominates or suppresses the rest, but there is always a counterhegemonic potential.

As you might know, *pathos* is a Greek word that means feeling, suffering and emotion. Apathy or the absence of *pathos* is surely a matter of perspective once nobody alive has a total absence of emotions. However, our more regressed and sensible parts will often try to isolate us from the “dangerous” and vital flow of emotions

Psychoanalysis has given special attention to the different pathologies (studies of the suffering, feelings). A vast field of study that tries to understand the complex compositions built between joy/meaning and pain/suffering/ignorance in each historical period.

A riddle that changes every day and can never be completely understood once it varies from person to person and also within oneself along time, but that usually has some invariant elements.

One invariant element is that, unlike other animals, we are not born “ready”. We depend on our immediate environment and relations to survive and create a meaningful existence for an extended period of time.

First, more on a sensorial level and associated with our immediate needs and then, gradually, more on an abstract and symbolic level which allows us to build complex symbolic systems – cultures.

Despite a certain level of autonomy that we might obtain during life, it is also true that we are continuously dependent on our natural e cultural environment, a reality that our narcissistic and regressed parts cannot easily accept as Weintrobe (2013) points out. Narcissism or bad narcissism is always a reaction to an unbearable reality (Ammann, 2017). If there is a deep fall into nothing, we construct a self-sustaining ideal bridge. Celestial bridges which might never disappoint, but that do not connect anything. On the other hand, they pull us away into a solipsist and empty existence.

The less we need creating impossible and fantastic solutions, the more we are exposed to reality and are capable of feeling, thinking and dealing with our temporary existence.

But seeking for the impossible is not only an individual creation. Surely there are people who are more sensitive than others, but a vast amount of turning the impossible possible can be created in intimate and meaningful relations. Especially the first child-caretaker relations offer a privileged space for that. Nevertheless, if we had bad initial relations, we still might have a later chance to resume our maturation in good enough (Winnicott, 1986) restorative relations.

Relation(s) that offer a generous holding and progressively adapts to the person's needs creating self-confidence and, later, feelings of gratitude and concern towards the caring environment. Relations that also sustain the limits, absences and incomprehensive pieces of reality in content and content (Bion, 2004) interplay enabling the possibility to think together these difficult situations and, therefore, creating an apparatus to think reality for ourselves and in contact with others.

The first offers an internal and hopeful landscape on which existence might be built on. The second, builds a capacity to deal with existence without appealing to quick fixes or magical solutions.

Freud (1911) emphasizes how important it is to tolerate discomfort and avoid the reproduction of old quick-fixes which are actually escapes from reality or symptoms.

Tolerating the pain and being able to find better and integral solutions depends directly on the strength of the ego (Freud, 1923). Otherwise, people tend to repeat old defense mechanism not being able to grow, change and learn from experiences (Bion, 1962) and, therefore, amplifying the disparity between fantasy and reality.

But as we said above, we are not a unity. All of us have a concerned, grateful and reality loving part built through the environmental care relations; but also, some narcissistic, sensitive and fragile parts which tend to flee from reality using omnipotent thinking to avoid unbearable pain.

The first part loves reality and readily accepts complex notions of proportionality and causality which might come from science, sensorial experiences and other forms of cultural interactions. This part is built continuously in emotional and meaningful relations and creates an expansive and curious position towards complex, different and even difficult realities. The second part, still overwhelmed by helplessness and aloneness creates magical solutions sustaining grandiose and delusional states which deny substantial parts of reality and prevents the person or community to take responsibility for its present and past actions once recognizing them would imply being able to feel guilt, shame and loss.

And let's remember that the first and the second position are many times unconscious and, most of the time, not exclusive. In other words, it is very likely that there are two parts – a concerned part and an avoiding part – acting simultaneously and, therefore, configuring a psychic conflict.

### 3. Psychoanalysis in the context of environmental inter-dependency

If we accept inter-dependency as the core of the ecological principle, i.e., that we are a part of a big interdependent living system and add up our past and current destructive impact which is producing an environmental hyperobject that overwhelms us as it endangers our survival, an avalanche of extreme feelings comes up. Loss, anger, guilt, shame and fear are some of these feelings and being able to contain, digest and transform them into something meaningful is not easy.

Recognizing that a big part of our western identity is based on an exploitive economy and that we are responsible for destructing the environment we love and depend on is a difficult task. And even if our narcissistic parts deny that we are another being in a closed system called earth and we depend directly on this ecosystem, another part understands the dimension of the destruction, which leads to more anxiety. Unfortunately, it is also true that the bigger the anxiety, the more primitive and far from reality defenses we tend to use. Omnipotent thinking, projection and denial are a few ways to diminish or eliminate the anxiety that comes from reality (Weintrobe, 2013).

Omnipotent thinking usually tries to create magical solutions. Probably the most invested magical thought in our society orbits around technology. Many people think that a solution in a *deus ex machina* mode will come and save us all. An idea that neglects the intensity and the extent of the problem.

Projections try to put the problem away. Blaming some groups like the North Americans and Europeans, China, the wealthy, the oil industry, Government, etc. In a way, it is true that these groups bear a large amount of responsibility, but blaming them can be a way to avoid our share of the problem.

Denial is probably one of the most complex ways of dealing with it. In denial we have negation which is usually the first step of mourning, i.e., once we have a shocking loss, negate it might be a transitory phase to later, gradually, feel the anger and pain of the loss and being able to grieve. But far more complex than negation is disavowal – a radical excision of reality. Different from negation, disavowal might belong to a more organized and enduring defensive structure.

In a way, disavowal became a central issue in our society and culture. Besides perverse groups that intentionally fund media campaigns to corrupt scientific evidence, disavowal sets in under the following conditions:

the reality has become too obvious to be ignored, there is anxiety that damage is too great to be repaired, it is felt that there is not enough help, support and containment to bear the anxiety and suffering that insight brings and there is anxiety that parts of the self will not survive change that now feels catastrophic and too much to face. (Weintrobe, 2013, p. 40)

When the reality becomes too painful to bear, evading it might be the only “solution”.

The recognition of reality carries always a quantitative or economic dimension. The amount of joy, fear, reward or pain plays a central role in the mind. If we recognize that the gap between problem-solution is becoming bigger, our underlying anxiety might also become bigger appealing to stronger defenses “against” the ecological truth. But it is also true that in trustful social bounds, we can bear more intense and complex realities.

On this point, it seems that psychoanalysis has a central contribution. Besides the efforts of communications experts to give more, better or more tailored information, we need to create social spaces/bounds able to support the vulnerable parts of ourselves in the context of the painful idea of climate change.

Admitting and sheltering the helpless parts, which are usually hidden under narcissistic, magnificent and magical solutions or blasé faces of indifference, needs social support.

If there is not enough individual and collective support, is more likely that the person can jump back to radical forms of disavowal.

#### **4. Depressive position, dark optimism and thinking with the other**

Minimizing the problem, negating, disavowing or playing dead (apathy) most likely hides strong feelings of impotence, helpless and aloneness.

Integrating *pathos* in our life is not easy, once we inevitably contact unpleasant feelings and it is very difficult to do it alone.

Being in intimate, safe and honest relations with others (analyst, counselor, friend, group of people) is the only way to undo a fragile individuation, being contained by a reliable environment (Bion, 2004), placing the difficult emotion in scene and, gradually, with support, giving meaning to it and perhaps, after a while, being able to express concern and the need to repair the current and past destruction.

Talking, expressing ideas and emotions in a non-judgmental space while still being listened to is only possible in a social surrounding able to empathically accept and tolerate difficult feelings such as loss.

A place that inevitable alternates paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions (Bion, 2004) and is especially capacitated to sustain the last. The depressive position is a privileged position in which we realize our love/pain of losing and potency/destructiveness. A paradoxical position that many times people try to avoid, but which is central to existence and to the ability to think. In a way, consolidating a thought is only possible in a depressive position.

Once we start dipping our toes in the pond of *pathos*, we inevitably become wet. Anger, fear and anxiety come up, but also more and more joy, pleasure and strength.

On one hand, we live in dark times which can be sad, on the other hand, with the closeness of a possible finitude, people might actualize/concentrate the vitality/strength in the present as also the capacity to transform life.

Dark optimism is an expression coined by Shaun Chamberlin it summarizes the need to face dark truths while believing firmly in the human potential. A potential that necessarily is around the loving parts and needs to be increased and sophisticated in collective relations. Potential to contain and be contained, create and be created.

A position of curiosity and unlimited acceptance of the environmental scientific truth and also a position that stimulates the need to be in contact with the other(s), to share, to learn and to become more.

Thinking about painful ideas alone easily can bring up narcissistic and “magical” solutions to avoid reality or push people into a melancholic and helpless position. In intimate, generous and meaningful relations, we expand vastly our capacity to face difficult realities, support them in our minds and gradually care/think about them. An approach especially needed when we are facing a hyperobject that outranges every singular attempt to address it.

#### **5. Loss, support and conviviality**

Creating support structures for dealing with the consecutive and continuous losses is central for this task. One to one psychotherapy sessions, group sessions, gatherings, talks, etc. are ways people might have a chance to express and fully recognize their emotions regarding the subject.

In climate change, people usually split the present losses and project them into the future making it catastrophic and unmanageable (Randal, 2009). But many losses are happening now and many more will happen if we do not start seriously addressing the problem.

And, besides mourning our impact on the environment, we also have to mourn or deal with the complex and ambivalent feelings of our way of life (having cars, travelling, eating meat etc.) and all its reminiscences that are strongly entangled with our identity but that might show themselves more or less incompatible with a sustainable future.

Recognizing losses and mourning is always a process and it takes time. It is impossible to realize and mourn the implications of climate change at once. But with a few steps, we can make it easier.

First, we must start telling the truth (Randal, 2009). Avoiding the truth or hiding the problem only amplifies the amount of anxiety.

Second, we have to choose leaders that recognize the problem. Leaders that are not afraid to tell the truth to the public and deal with painful and unappealing realities. Surely, many people prefer that someone would save them with magical quick fixes and a promised land, but endorsing these thoughts only amplify underlying anxieties.

Third, creating support structures based on careful listening and acceptance, avoiding moralistic and judging readings.



And, fourth, stimulating a culture of conviviality (Illich, 1976). Our society has created an individualistic and isolated existence that contacts itself mainly in the competitive space of the market. Although, the capacity to live together and rely on each other, despite the protest of our narcissist parts, might be a good way to feel again a sense of belonging and using the full human potential of cooperation and thinking together.

To conclude, loss is painful and we “need to detach ourselves piece by piece from what is past and gone, or from that which is no longer sustainable. We need to grieve, with the full range of emotion which that implies. Only then will we become able to re-make our futures using all of our creativity, reason, feeling and strength” (Randal, 2009, p. 20). In addition, more than dealing with the loss and its painful ideas, we also have to rediscover or create the joy in the encounter – encounter with the other and with nature.

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