

## **Politics and Mental Health: Hand-In-Hand Throughout the COVID-19 Crisis**

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Our colleague on the Global Psychology Task Force, Christy Lewis, was recently interviewed on a Dallas Texas radio station. Midway through the conversation, there is an interesting turn of events. She was brought on this show to talk about psychology and what we can do to safeguard our mental health right now. What occurred though, is that the conversation inadvertently turned to politics. What in the world you ask does that possibly have to do with mental health? It seems so very random--in actuality it's not, and here's why.

Now adays, most every conversation about COVID is first about Social Distancing. Timidly a joke may come out about keeping your distance, maybe a chuckle, then on to the more serious topic of safeguarding our health and the fears and unknowns surrounding this virus. Then the conversation somehow pivots to the economy, and all our fears and uncertainty about what this will do to our economy. A little back and forth on this topic will ensue, and then nine out of ten times the conversation will take what seems to be a drastic and arbitrary turn towards politics. Why?

People are terrified right now, terrified for their health and the economy, and just generally terrified of all the unknowns, and there are many unknowns right now. For the first time ever for many people they are faced with a situation that is completely out of their hands and out of their control. The natural reaction to this is to either look for someone to blame, or someone we can hold up as our savior. "Trump is terrible he made this all happen and is going to destroy us," or "Trump is amazing he is going to fix all of this and save us all!" This is actually a very

primitive and instinctual survival tactic and if you really strip it away, has nothing to do with politics. This is psychology at its root!

We are unknowingly but instinctually trying to fight the virus that threatens to take us all. On a primitive level, we are trying to gain control in the best way we know. Having an opinion about what is being done right, or what was or is being done wrong gives us the illusion of control. Not to mention that debating politics is a national pastime in the best of circumstances—so these exchanges also give us a much-needed sense of normalcy and mutuality. Since we have no control over this situation what we try to control is our opinions and responses to it. Also, there is an important process operating unconsciously that is implicit in the act of blaming someone or canonizing someone. We are unconsciously trying to bolster and essentially save our mental well-being.

It's a way to be proactive. Since we can't fight this virus, we can certainly fight politics and put our 2 cents of opinion. Although this may all seem negative and argumentative; it's actually giving people much needed social discourse and connection; "yes, I agree with you, we are now bonded through that, or no I don't agree with you, but we are still all in this together." In the end what it boils down to is this: no matter what your feelings are globally this is a shared experience. In talking politics, we alleviate (at last temporarily) a lot of our fears and anxieties as well as our pent-up anger. Either subconsciously or consciously, this political discourse shows us that we are all one in this crisis—no matter what our beliefs might be.

What is so rare and so amazing about this whole experience, is that we all have garnered a collective consciousness. We are all in this together, no matter what our beliefs, race, political ideations, financial status, etc.. The division among us that we have seen for so long is melting away, and the gap is closing. Our real salvation in all of this is the unity it has created, and our unprecedented ability to take action and work together. Yes, we are all separated at home, but in taking that necessary step simultaneously, we are now more unified than we have ever been. Momentarily, we are intrinsically connected, we are One, and THAT is a beautiful thing. This is

something to be revered. This political discourse is beyond encouraging for our mental well-being. Maybe at the end of the day, that is what it's all about. Maybe just maybe there is a greater plan at work here.....