

Mental-wellness professionals chronicle last year's sessions with clients



MELINA MARA/THE WASHINGTON POST

5 therapists look back on 2020

BY ELLEN MCCARTHY

It was a year of relentless trauma, and day after day Americans who could afford to poured out their grief into the patient ears of the nation's therapists. They were the confidants for feelings of disorientation, resentment and hopelessness. Secondhand witnesses to medical horror, cabin fever and money panic. The job was to catch grief and to try not to absorb it, or let it compound their own sorrow. New patient inquiries came in almost by the hour. We were hit with so much, and we needed to talk about it.

The Washington Post talked to five counselors about what they heard in sessions with clients this year — and what they felt as the tumult of 2020 upended their own lives.

Gracie Bates-Davis is a Chicago therapist with patients ranging in age from 13 to 65.



ASTRID RIECKEN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

She lives with her husband, who is a police officer, and three Boston terriers.

Alan Lefkowitz has been in practice in Manhattan since 1972. He is a married grandfather of nine who works with a lot of comedians and tech professionals.

Lori Gottlieb is a counselor and author in Los Angeles who lives with her teenage son and sees mostly couples.

Ty David Lerman is a Houston counselor who works extensively with the LGBT community. He lives with his husband and three Australian shepherds.

Jessica MacNair is a therapist and owner of Virginia's Falls Church Wellness Center (where the number of mental health counselors on staff has doubled this year to keep up

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TOP: Health-care professionals like registered nurse Nicole Murray of Vista, Calif., were unable to take part in therapy during the early days of the pandemic. ABOVE: Social justice demonstrations after the killing of George Floyd added a kind of hopefulness.

BOOK WORLD

Boundless love of two enslaved men

BY NAOMI JACKSON

In his debut novel, "The Prophets," Robert Jones Jr. ambitiously reimagines a past in the antebellum American South and pre-colonial Africa in which Black queer lives are foregrounded. At the center of "The Prophets" is a love story between two enslaved men, Samuel and Isaiah, who dare flout their owners' intended use of them for breeding by choosing to love each other instead.

Their relationship sets off a chain of events on the aptly named Empty plantation in Mississippi, including malicious interference by a jealous older man who claims to preach the gospel.

The book also conjures a mythical African kingdom ruled by a female king where same-sex desire is honored. In a gesture that acknowledges the historically fraught relationship between Black LGBTQ communities and the Christian church, the book's chapter

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A six-year, four-winds romance

The international date line couldn't divide them. The pandemic brought them together.

BY ASHLEY FETTERS

In the six years since they met, Sam Morrison and Shifra Samuel have been apart more than they've been together, their respective geographical locations dancing around each other in ever-shifting shapes. They've made their relationship work while living in different states; in different countries; on different sides of the international date line; in different boroughs of New York City (almost as challenging as the other three, if you ask a local).

But Sam and Shifra, who are 30 and 28 respectively and both freelance art directors and filmmakers, had never before done long-distance the way they had to in 2020: stranded on different continents, each thousands of miles from where they met and fell in love, with virtually all travel across the globe halted indefinitely.

"There were definitely some days that were super tough, especially because we just didn't have any timeline," Shifra said in a Zoom interview from Amsterdam.

"That was the hard part. If you know it's going to be six months, you can mentally prepare," Sam chimed in from beside her on their couch.

Researchers suspect that long-distance relationships are more common nowadays than they were 20 years ago, as remote communication is cheaper and more efficient. But even with the help of texts, emails, FaceTimes and Skype calls, long-distance relationships like Sam and

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SJOERD BOOU PHOTOGRAPHY

Sam Morrison's proposal to Shifra Samuel in Amsterdam featured tube-man costumes and a boat ride. While the stressors of the pandemic have broken some relationships, they have only strengthened others.

Don't call the radical right 'conservative'



Margaret Sullivan

You hear the word "radical" a lot these days. It's usually aimed like a lethal weapon at Democratic office-seekers, especially those who want to unseat a Republican incumbent.

Sen. Kelly Loeffler, the Georgia Republican, rarely utters her challenger's name without branding him as "radical liberal Raphael Warnock."

Such is the upside-down world we've come to inhabit. These days, the true radicals are the enablers of President Trump's ongoing attempted coup: the media blowtowers on Fox News, One America and Newsmax who parrot his lies about election fraud; and the members of Congress who plan to object on Wednesday to what should be a pro forma step of approving the electoral college results, so that President-elect Joe Biden can take office peacefully on Jan. 20.

But instead of being called what they are, these media and political figures get a mild label: *conservative*.

News outlets that traffic in conspiracy theories? They're branded as "conservative." Politicians who are willing to bring down democracy to appease a cult leader? ("Acting on the basis either of fear of the president or

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