

# THE EXISTENTIAL HUMANIST

*Celebrating Our Diversity of Being*



Editors: Nader Shabahangi  
and Sonja Saltman

## 2021 EXPERIENTIAL TRAINING DATES

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May 16, 2021

through

May 21, 2021

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## THEMES COVERED IN TRAINING INCLUDE:

- the here-and-now
- the inner search process
- subjectivity and encounter
- the therapeutic relationship

The experientially oriented training teaches existential-humanistic concepts of: resistance, meaning and alignment, existential spirituality, and integrative existential practice.

[www.ehinstitute.org](http://www.ehinstitute.org)

## EHI EXPERIENTIAL TRAINING OCTOBER 2020

*Annual Intensive Training in Existential-Humanistic  
Psychotherapy [COVID-19 Update to be Announced]*

EHI, believing in the meaningfulness, intrinsic value and diversity of life, teaches principles of existential-humanistic psychotherapy and offers in-depth trainings in the practical application of those principles.

The annual experiential training is the core of EHI's programming. It allows licensed professionals and graduate students in therapeutic mental health specialties to come together in a safe environment, get to know one another, and experience how E-H therapy is practiced up close and personally.

EHI Faculty emphasize the key ingredients of the E-H approach, including empathy, acceptance, and genuineness, to model how trainees can create safe, collaborative and life-changing therapeutic encounters. They demonstrate how the therapeutic relationship, in and of itself is a vehicle for healing and change and how therapeutic "presence" cultivates sensitivity and appropriate responsiveness to clients' emotions, relational patterns and inner worlds. These two essential principles: building the therapeutic relationship and working in the "here and now" are the foundational blocks of E-H therapy and EHI training.

## LET'S NOT WASTE OUR PAIN

By Nader Shabahangi, Ph.D.

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*"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" [Alice asked.]*

*"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.*

*"I don't much care where—" said Alice.*

*"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.*

*- from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll*

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Many of us growing up in this modern, so-called 'developed' world, were raised with the idea that we should know where we want to go. We remember being asked during childhood the question of what we want to be: ballerina, pilot, doctor, fire man, police woman. We could see the disappointment in the adult's eyes if we answered that we did not know. Not to know, so we discovered quickly as we were growing up, was somehow not okay.

As we are facing this pandemic, the paradox of knowledge has come to the forefront in a striking way. On the one hand, knowing about the virus, knowing who is infected, knowing of a vaccine, are all powerful forms of knowledge so helpful and life-saving for us all. And yet, our knowledge, the way we use it to live our lives, also shows its shortcomings during this crisis. Actually, the crisis shows how we do not know. In this way, the crisis demands of us to change how we see ourselves and the world in which we live, similar to our

clients who see us in the therapy office – or now online via video – and who struggle with their own inner pandemic of not-knowing, allowing them to find their own way. It doesn't matter where they go as long as it is their own path. Staying with our clients on this path of not-knowing, giving us time to walk while so much in them (and us!) wants to know and know now, is the task and art behind our work as existential therapists. I hope for all of us that we will also give the time we need to understand what this pandemic wants us to know so we do not, as so often happens, jump back into what we call 'normality'. The answer to the question of when will we return to normal will hopefully be: never. Normal got us to the pain we are in. Let's stay with not-knowing for a while so we we do not waste our pain.

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*Nader is EHI's Vice President, a Processwork therapist, a humanistic care advocate, trainer and coach. He is the author of Ambiguity of Suffering and founder and CEO of Elder Ashram and Eldership Academy.*

## ALEX + CORONAVIRUS

By Alex Saltman

Hi, I'm Alex Saltman, and I'm eleven years old. And yeah, the coronavirus stinks. We can't even be home because of it. My family and I escaped to Vermont just as everything shut down on Friday the 13th. I swear it is cursed. Anyways, I miss my home. I miss my friends. And I actually miss school.

And online school, it's just not the same. I don't like doing that much screen time and it's just harder to do class in general. And, the worst part is connection. People freeze all the time, get kicked off by wifi, and it really gets on my nerves.

I even spent a whole online viola lesson sitting there while my teacher tried to play a song for us but we couldn't hear anything!

Although, I am really lucky to have this safe place to flee to, to be able to gather with my family here. And, we can play outside which is more than I can say for my friends in Brookline.

Usually I'm fine but there have been a few times when I get really homesick or just crack. I write stories, and every single idea in my head is a metaphor of the coronavirus.

Like, a kid running through the streets while a plane soars overhead, dropping bombs that explode around him. I am the kid, and the plane is the virus, dropping bombs all around me until one hits me and everything shuts down.

But, we also try to just go on with our life. My dad still works every day, I do what I always do, My sister does what she always does, so do my cousins. My mom reads, colors, spends

time with us, my aunt works for long hours, my Grandmom cooks and teaches us kids new things. We train our puppy Magnet. I hang out with my friends even though it is different.

I write in a diary every day, keeping track of this pandemic. It helps me process my thoughts and feelings, and it's a place of comfort. I can say what I want. Whatever is going on in my mind. When this is over, I'll save the diary as a memory of what happened.

Yes, I wish we could go home right now and this virus would disappear. But, it's going to be so hard to get back to normal. This social distancing stuff and quarantine have been going on so long I'm almost used to it. My memories of going to public places are really faint at this point.

Well, I'm praying this virus ends soon, but I think by the time it's over my school year will be over, so we'll probably just stay here through the summer.

I just miss my home so much. I miss my old life. But, in however long it takes, we'll be back to our normal life and the coronavirus will not mean anything.

But I know that it will become infamous, and the memory of the Great Coronavirus Outbreak Of 2020 will stay with me forever.

*Alex is the grandson of EHI's Sonja Saltman. He agreed to share with us his experiences of coronavirus. He is grateful to essential workers like his postman and local grocery clerks who have continued working during the crisis and has been known to write them heartfelt thank you notes that he hand delivered.*

## E-H PERSPECTIVES ON . . . COVID-19 AND SHELTERING-IN-PLACE

By Doug Silberstein, LMFT

Working with clients in the context of COVID-19 presents explicit opportunities for helping them experience and explore fears of groundlessness, meaninglessness, constriction, isolation, loss and death. Often times, the work of helping clients bring presence to their present experience can take time – especially when they are entrenched in warding off existential fears and correlated vulnerable feelings. And yet now those fears and feelings are probably closer; possibly harder to avoid, which can leave clients in both more tender and more receptive states. This tenderness certainly has to be honored, particularly since, as is often the case in a time of crisis, clients are typically looking for support and stabilization rather than excavation. But in facing something this strange and consuming, clients might also be looking at their lives differently and noticing a deep longing to explore who they are and how they are living. In this way, clients might notice a greater willingness to explore how they are willing to live.

As usual in E-H therapy, intrapersonal exploration is scaffolded by the interpersonal – by the nature and quality of the therapeutic relationship. This means that the client's work is not just facilitated by the therapist but alive in and inspired by the interactions between the client and therapist in a context of mutual presence. Clients can get closer to themselves as the relationship nurtures an orientation toward closeness. This process is supported by the sense of being in something profound together – and the context of sheltering-in-place can paradoxically heighten that sense: we are all navigating new and unsettling terrain. Embodied in psychotherapy sessions, this fact reinforces the E-H principles of non-hierarchical

### EHI Recommends EHNW Events

Our Friends & Partners at Existential-Humanistic Northwest are holding online events too!

EHNW serves the healing professions, our clients, and the public through dialogue, education, training, and advocacy. EHNW offers workshops, professional presentations, and salons.

relating and the co-creation of adaptive ways of being in the world. We can make choices about how we relate to this new reality.

That's not to minimize the fact that there is so much suffering in the concrete experiences of illness, financial loss, existential dread and facing a mysterious mortal threat. It's just that this COVID context makes manifest the underlying groundlessness of existence and, therefore, intensifies the importance of existential inquiry and humane, intimate encounter. We all have little control over how life unfolds and now that truth is amplified. And despite that lack of control, we are burdened or bestowed with the responsibility for how to live. As clinicians, we can help our clients face these truths by supporting them in making fundamental choices about how they want to live in relationship to them; we can help them explore adaptive perspectives and processes – including both grief and awe – as we all confront this extraordinary time of loss, anxiety and opportunity for change.

*Doug is an existential-humanistic therapist in private practice and the Treasurer of the Existential-Humanistic Institute.*

## COVID-19 IT IS = THE PAUSE

By Sonja Saltman, MFT

It is a worldwide, manmade health crisis. It also is an invitation to reflect during our imposed quarantine and observe what emerges from the soul, heart and essential being. In my case, the reaction to this world wide disaster vacillated between disbelief, dissociation, worry, calmness and hope.

The new dimension of presence when being in a restricted physical environment and in social isolation.

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Sitting here and still sitting here  
 and sitting here still  
 jumbled thoughts constrained  
 by the wish to increase their significance  
 is this truly presence, a living in the moment  
 or a mindless being that dictates words  
 on an impersonal computer  
 in search of deeper meaning that doesn't surface easily  
 conflicting stories in the news, me a waiting question mark,  
 the future dictated by someone other than me  
 my only domain of control is this page, these letters, these words and sentences  
 emerging from the keys the fingers hit.  
 Buddha's clearing of the mind of non-essential thinking  
 in search of elevation to a new evolved state of being?  
 Or just being a puppet of circumstances beyond conscious control,  
 pulled by invisible strings?  
 Or is this dissociation that served well in past traumatic circumstances?  
 And slowly, in true existential fashion, paradoxes emerge,  
 instead of fear, hope has catapulted to the top of all emotions  
 Ignoring naysayers and pessimists who thrive on dark tales  
 And fuel fear in susceptible minds.  
 The decision I do control is not yielding to their invitation to cower under the threat of what might be,  
 To deny a fantasy of never ending horror.  
 In my long life I have learned there always is an end and  
 there always is a beginning,  
 there is always a phoenix arising from the ashes of what precedes it.  
 A hard-wrung, heart-felt realization that took longer than it did to type  
 these previously empty words.

And of course, it is more complicated than that!!

*Sonja is an existential-humanistic therapist in private practice as well as the Secretary and a Core Instructor at the Existential-Humanistic Institute. She serves as the Honorary Consul for Austria in Las Vegas and is the co-founder of the nationally ranked Saltman Center for Conflict Resolution at UNLV.*

*NEW WEBINAR SERIES!*

[Depolarizing Our Minds, Our Hearts & Our Nation](#)

Join us on July 11, 2020 10am-1pm for the first workshop

**The Depolarizing of America for Ourselves  
and Our Clients: A Webinar for Therapists**

Facilitated by Kirk Schneider, PhD & Bob Edelstein, LMFT

Co-sponsored by EHI and EHNW

This webinar will present mental health practitioners with a conflict mediation approach that can help them work with the sense of otherness both in themselves and with their clients. This webinar will be both didactic and experiential.

In the wake of the pandemic and recent racial, political, and economic upheaval in our country, this approach addresses practitioners' work and lives. Drawing from his new book *The Depolarizing of America: A Guidebook for Social Healing*, Kirk Schneider, along with colleague Bob Edelstein, will demonstrate this new conflict mediation approach--titled the "Experiential Democracy Dialogue." We will also provide a space for dyads for audience members to try the skills on their own.

The Experiential Democracy Dialogue provides a supportive, highly structured format that invites people from contrasting cultural and ideological backgrounds to learn about and understand each other, rather than automatically being closed to each other's point of view. The upshot of the approach is that it can notably improve people's capacities to humanize each other and to achieve common ground. For practitioners, specifically, it can enhance capabilities to be more present, both within oneself and with one's clients, which is foundational to effective practice. The approach can also help practitioners to work with the divisiveness within themselves in regards to the polarized issues in society, which in turn may help with their work with their clients.

Miss the event? Check the [EHI website](#) to purchase the webinar recording!

Tickets: \$27.50  
Online: Utilizing Zoom

[REGISTER HERE](#)



# WHAT MAKES FOR A “COMPASSIONATE” EDUCATION IN THE TIME OF COVID-19?

By Divine Love A. Salvador, Ph.D., RPsy

A version of this article was published in the April 30, 2020 iSpeak [Opinion] section of Rappler, a Philippine online news website:

<https://www.rappler.com/move-ph/ispeak/259476-opinion-what-makes-compassionate-education-coronavirus-pandemic>

*Mass promotion as a strategy reflects a pessimistic view of our ability to survive, and thrive, in crisis.*

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the landscape of learning all over the world, leaving educational institutions grappling with the question of what it means to educate students during this time, especially when many teachers and students are struggling with the large scale negative impact of the pandemic on their daily lives and wellbeing. In the face of such suffering, it is only natural to want for our pain to be taken away. Perhaps this is why some universities have decided to mass promote their students. In the University of the Philippines where I teach, the idea of mass promotion as “compassionate” education in this time of COVID-19 has occupied the discourse of the past few weeks.

As a mental health professional, I feel that it’s my responsibility to express my concerns on the matter especially since arguments for mass promotion have hinged on a potentially dangerous idea – that supporting our students’ mental health and wellbeing is predicated primarily on avoidance of pain. For me, this kind of educational policy could compromise long-run gains in mental health and wellbeing for its unfortunate beneficiaries.

The pandemic is a global disaster, and we are only at the beginning of a process that brings with it destabilization. Naturally, the immediate calls are for practical and psychological “rescue”. Emotions and tensions run high, and people become liable to making forecasting errors at the beginning of this process. It is normal for people to feel consumed, overwhelmed in their confusion, anger, fear, loss of control. For many, this could lead to a pessimistic view of the future and their own ability to live through tough times.

Mass promotion as a strategy reflects a forecasting error and a pessimistic view of our ability to survive, and thrive, in crisis. It assumes that our sense of destabilization will not recede and that we do not have the capacity to make the best out of an admittedly bad situation. It assumes that our situations will either not change or that they can only change for the worse. It communicates an implicit message to our students that, even if given time, they will never find pockets of hope and security, will never carve opportunities to maintain a minimum sense of continuity in their lives and mastery in their endeavors.

Studies on mental health and wellbeing show that those of us who are able to tolerate distress are better positioned to achieve long-term gains in mental health and wellbeing. This trade-off, of short-term pain for long-term gain, means that we cannot shortcut the process because to do so would be to rob ourselves of the opportunity to learn how to manage our negative emotions, view ourselves with kindness especially when we are not at our “best”, get to know who we are when we are not performing our public personae, and find out what is truly important to us.

Clarifying what we value doesn’t happen when times are kind and we have it easy. Instead, it is during crisis, when we suffer, that we are given opportunity to discover what is truly important. This time of pandemic is ripe for us to ask ourselves, what is the real value of receiving an education?

For me, it is instilling in students a compassionate curiosity about their own experiences including and especially painful ones that could refine and enrich them.

## CONT FROM PAGE 7: WHAT MAKES FOR A “COMPASSIONATE” EDUCATION IN THE TIME OF COVID-19?

The capacity and willingness to accept, even embrace, and create meaning from harsh experience, is a gift that will serve them well no matter where they end up. It is especially critical for future mental health professionals whose own wellbeing could have a huge impact on the wellbeing of clients they will be working with. Now more than ever, we need mental health professionals who are

competent, compassionate, and courageous in the face of others' pain. How, then, can we expect our students to sit with others who suffer if we are the first to let them avoid facing, and working through, their own suffering?

*Divine is a current EHI Certificate program student, a licensed psychologist and Assoc. Prof. of Clinical Psychology at the Dept. of Psych. in UP Diliman. Divine is also a Clinical Supervisor at UPD PsycServ, which offers free telepsychotherapy service to the public during this crisis.*

## CONTRASTING MOMENTS

By Scott Gibbs, MA, MBA, MFT

The headline read: “UK PM Johnson Condition Worsens, Admitted to ICU.” In a sea of terrifying news, this report was stunning and chilling for me. It hit home. ICU, it seemed, meant death. Just a week or two before, Boris Johnson tested positive for Covid-19. Just a day or two before, he entered the hospital for tests for “persistent symptoms.” The situation continued to deteriorate. Reality then pierced denial. No one was immune. Not from the virus. Not from the incomprehensible whim of Fate. Not ultimately from death. Life can turn at any moment, for anyone. Death waits in the shadows.

A few days later, however, the news read: “Boris Johnson Out of Intensive Care, Sitting Up.” The relief for me was as palpable as the horror of the earlier headline. Order was restored. Comprehensibility and control commanded the field. Safety, and I suppose denial, returned. Upon reflection, furthermore, gladness curiously swam in the same waters as relief. And the feeling offered still another moment of surprise. What did it mean, to be glad in this situation? For me? About existence itself?



EHI welcomes  
our newest  
member to  
the Board:  
Scott Gibbs!

Scott Gibbs is a licensed psychotherapist and professional executive coach in private practice in San Francisco, CA. He is an authority on the psychological and emotional underpinnings of conflict and the restoration of relational harmony.

These contrasting moments were a gift, a reminder, interestingly, of the power of the jolt of surprise, when something may “hit home.” That experience is a potential gift in a clinical setting, a possibility for healing and transformation. It’s also an offering in life. In this case, the jolt reminded me of the profundity of life and the ephemerality, good and bad, of living, birth to death, moment to moment. And it momentarily pierced my denial, exposing a call, a demand.

*Scott is an EHI Board Member at Large, an author, and an Existential-Humanistic therapist in private practice.*



## NEW BOOK! *THE DEPOLARIZING OF AMERICA: A GUIDEBOOK FOR SOCIAL HEALING*

Author: Kirk J. Schneider, Ph.D.

\$21.95 [Order here](#)

Release Date: June 15, 2020

Publisher: University Professors Press

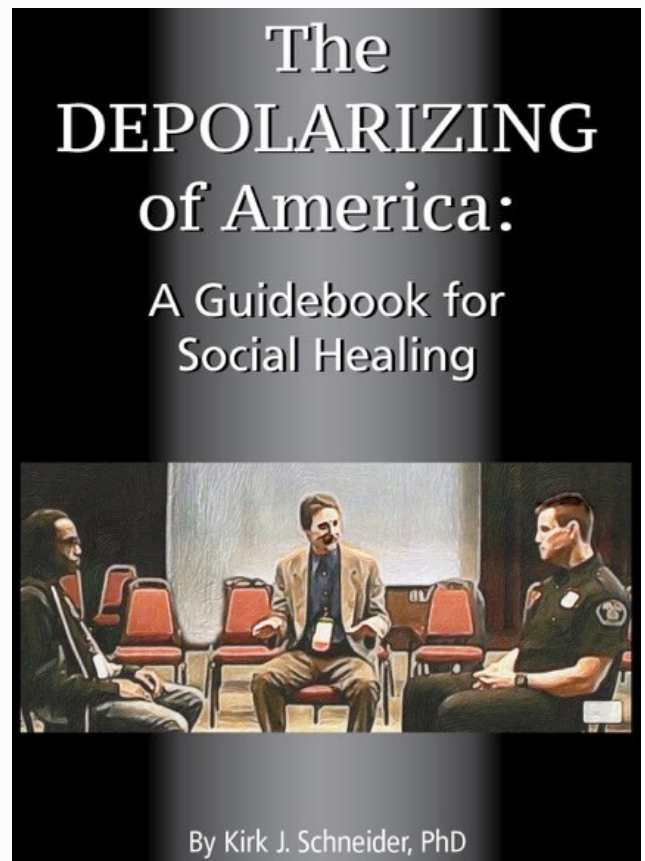
A follow up to Schneider's groundbreaking book, *The Polarized Mind*, *The Depolarizing of America* is an essential read for those who are striving for social healing and positive collective change.

*Our nation needs healing dialogues—  
especially now!*

In the wake of the coronavirus, many of the issues dividing us as a nation and world—such as politics, race, class, gender, climate change, globalism, and religion—have only been magnified, and although the U.S. Surgeon General has called for an end to bickering and partisanship, it is unclear to what extent this will take effect. What is clear, however, is that safe, mindfully structured dialogues are imperative if we are to salvage our republic and the democratic principles on which it is built.

This is the companion book to the July 11th online workshop!

[The Depolarizing of America for  
Ourselves and Our Clients:  
A Webinar for Therapists](#)



*“The book draws on my experience with humanistically oriented conflict mediation groups and provides practical, structured formats for both laypeople and professionals to use in a variety of settings.” ~Kirk Schneider, Ph.D.*

*Kirk is the current president of EHI, a candidate for APA President, a member of Braver Angels and an Existential-Integrative psychologist in private practice. He is the author of *The Polarized Mind* and *The Spirituality of Awe*.*



EHI Board from left to right: Troy Piwowski, Sonja Saltman, Doug Silberstein, Doug Silberstein, Nader Shabahangi, and Kirk Schneider. It is our goal to provide students and professionals interested in a humanistic, existentially informed attitude to helping our clients, a home where they feel supported for their non-mechanistic, more complex and validating approach to psychotherapy.

## THE EXISTENTIAL-HUMANISTIC INSTITUTE

EHI offers courses in the principles of existential-humanistic practice, existential-humanistic theory and practice. Most of EHI's instructors have studied extensively with such masters as James Bugental, Irvin Yalom and Rollo May, and are, like Kirk Schneider, acknowledged leaders within the existential-humanistic movement today.

The institute, via its curriculum, website and newsletter, supports existentially & humanistically oriented psychotherapists throughout the world.

### Our Vision

EHI, believing in the meaningfulness and intrinsic value and diversity of life, teaches principles of existential-humanistic psychotherapy and offers in-depth trainings in the practical application of those principles.

### CONTACT US

If you have questions about EHI, the Existential-Humanistic education offerings or the E-H training programs please contact us. We would like to connect with you!

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