

Lockdown has finally given us the time to understand each other

By Bethan Tolley, Communications Officer, Centre for Brexit Studies

The evening that lockdown was announced, I was wrapped up in a blanket by the fire, and as soon as Boris left the screen, I headed onto Sky, Netflix and Amazon Prime adding anything and everything onto my lists to get me through the next month or so. Almost two months on, every single show has been watched, I have got through more books than when I was an early teen obsessed with reading and I've even discovered a few new hobbies. I've found it fascinating how easy it has been to fill the evenings after work, bank holidays and weekends.

Now the days, and weeks, are flying by. I spend less time on Houseparty, but more time having two-hour long catch-ups on Zoom. I've swapped time by the fire for blue skies and rattan furniture in the garden – because early summer is suddenly here. I spend less time getting ready in the morning, but manage to squeeze in a couple of extra episodes of Parks and Recreation at night.

When I talk to my family, friends and colleagues, we are all talking more in-depth, rather than 'on the surface' and quick discussions than if we were to have a catch up in a bar or over coffee. We're asking each other how we are, and how we're coping throughout this time, because suddenly, that's the most important aspect over anything else. We're answering, honestly. Suddenly, I'm getting to really know the people I've known for years.

As much as I can't wait to travel around freely, and do whatever I wish, I have in a way enjoyed this aspect of lockdown – getting to really know people.

Talking to my colleagues on Microsoft Teams, I've met their wives, husbands, children, pets, the lot. I've seen beyond what I see every day in the office, and seen that they have, dare I say it, more going on that just work too. Talking to my family I've seen how everyone really spends their days, their routines and where in the house they have to stand to get the best signal. Talking to my friends, I've seen what they wear when

we're not heading to a nice restaurant, what series we've spent our weekends bingeing and how their partners slot into their days.

Although we touch upon the future, and work, and things like income and livelihoods, we talk more about the present. Which, I'll be honest, I've never really done. I've found that I'm very good at sitting around and reminiscing about the past, or being excited for something happening in the future.

But pretty much all my plans have stopped this year; weekends away cancelled, birthday parties cancelled, weddings cancelled. There is uncertainty surrounding holidays and fun things I was going to do later in the year. I simply don't know if I'll be able to do them anymore. Which has meant that I'm being forced to live in the present, and to take each day as it comes. I'm not even thinking beyond a week at the moment, because we can't. We don't know what is going to happen. But I have found that living in the present, and taking our time talking to each other, and not being in a rush to get onto something else, has meant that we are kinder to each other, patient and more caring.

It's not just the people in our lives we're getting to know better either. From celebrities to news presenters; we're getting to see a glimpse of who these people are outside of a work environment. I've become an avid follower of ['Bookcase Credibility'](#) on Twitter, who discuss the bookcases behind interviewees. It's funny, yet incredibly insightful. Suddenly these people feel more relatable, and not a million miles away. They have the same books surrounding them that I do, similar artwork on the walls and they're also having to deal with restless children and barking dogs.

With people talking about how they're finding this experience – and it most certainly is an experience – so openly, and honestly, we're discovering so much more about each other. Like I said in my blog post last month, [life will never be the same after COVID-19, and that's not a bad thing](#). A part of me will miss this stage in our lives when, and if, life does return to some kind of normality. Will we stop talking about actual *life*, what matters to us and how we are within ourselves? Will we still be as kind, and patient with each other? Will we still ask how each other are and actually mean it? And most importantly, will this mean I can no longer see my colleagues dogs?!

Because as much as I can't wait for this to be over, and for the heartache to end, and for the deaths to slow down, and the constant worry about my family members to eventually fade away, I will miss the total unapologetic honesty that has come with lockdown.

No apologies for noise in the background of video calls. No apologies for disappearing from the screen for a while to get some exercise in. No apologies for not looking your 'best' – who cares! It's almost like we've, dare I say it, relaxed a bit. Slowed down. Chilled out. Just been a bit nicer to each other and more understanding. 'Normal' life is hard work; it's been cool to just have a bit of peace and quiet.

No longer feeling guilty about watching the TV or reading a book when I should be doing something more 'productive'. No longer feeling guilty about cracking on with my new hobbies, when I should be out and about doing the shopping, or cleaning the house. We've had all the time in the world – such precious time – and the opportunity to reevaluate our priorities. Suddenly the things that seemed urgent a few months ago, seem laughable now.

Because the time will come when we will have to return to perhaps a new version of normality, and we won't be able to work in lounge wear anymore, arts and crafts will naturally have to take a back seat once more, and the dreaded commute will be a part of the day's routine again.

So right now, it feels good to be living in the present, and knowing that although I'm away from my loved ones and the people that I normally see daily, I actually know them better than ever.