

## Editorial

# John Southgate: pioneer of attachment-based psychotherapy

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**B**ack in the summer of 1986, more than thirty-five years ago, I had the privilege of chairing a special symposium on “Psycho/Analysis” at Keynes College, in the University of Kent at Canterbury. Whilst I cannot recall very much about the contents of this event, I do remember the tremendous pleasure of having met John Southgate—one of the key invited speakers—for the very first time.

During the 1980s, long before the creation of any formal registration bodies such as the British Psychoanalytic Council or the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy, most British psychoanalysts and psychotherapists comported themselves in a very sectarian and hierarchical manner. Freudians rarely talked to Jungians; Kleinians loathed speaking to Winnicottians; and very few members of the psychoanalytical establishment even acknowledged the existence of clinicians from the humanistic psychotherapy traditions. In retrospect, one might well describe that period of psychological history as somewhat narrow-minded and elitist, with little respect for theoretical diversity.

But John Southgate stood out most uniquely as an individual whom one could not classify as a “Freudian” or a “Jungian”. Rather, he had long identified himself as a “barefoot psychoanalyst” who endeavoured to assist his clients to undertake their own “self analysis”—a rather different conceptualisation from the more traditional model in which the analyst would “treat” the “patient”. Within moments of meeting John in Canterbury and within minutes of hearing him deliver his presentation, championing the importance of secure attachments, I knew that this original man would make a major contribution to our profession.

Born on 26 May, 1934, John Peter Southgate grew up in the town of Carlton, on the outskirts of Nottingham, in the East Midlands of England, the only child of Daisy May Clara Highfield Southgate—a market trader from a Jewish background—and of Nolan Southgate—a bus driver from a Protestant family. This couple enjoyed a long and fruitful alliance in spite of the narrow-minded prejudice of certain relations

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against an intercultural marriage. It may well be the case that, by having grown up in a proud working-class home, John came to appreciate and celebrate difference, rather than condemn it.

John benefitted not only from his parents' engagement with diversity but, moreover, the young lad learned a great deal from his father's political activism, as Nolan Southgate had worked as both a union organiser and as a Labour Party activist. Indeed, Nolan became so much admired that various political leaders encouraged him to campaign for a seat in the House of Commons, but he refused to do so, keen to devote himself more fully to his family.

Thus, with such well-attached and politically liberal parents, John Southgate grew up in a tolerant and stable atmosphere which provided him with excellent foundations for the future.

In spite of (or, perhaps, because of) his part-Jewish heritage, Daisy Southgate arranged for her son to be baptised so that he could obtain a place at the esteemed Bluecoat School, founded in 1706. After several years of study at this august institution, John left at the age of fourteen and then became a filing clerk in a lawyer's office and, subsequently, a bookkeeper and accountant to Newton Brothers, a spare parts supplier to the aeronautics industry in Derby. At the age of thirty, John attended Garnett College in Southwest London as a mature student, and, subsequently, he undertook a master's degree in management at the University of Sussex on the outskirts of Brighton. With his business experience and with these educational foundations in place, John obtained a post as a teacher in management studies at the Polytechnic of North London (the forerunner to London Metropolitan University).

As an increasingly accomplished specialist in this field, John began to discover numerous American publications about the science of motivation, especially those which described the ways in which human behaviours might impact upon the workplace. John also became exposed to various American writings on the increasingly popular field of "therapy", and he soon began to immerse himself in the contributions of such diverse figures as Eric Berne, Fritz Perls, Carl Rogers, and many others besides. Eventually, John created an innovative programme at the polytechnic, known as "D.A.B.S."—the Diploma in Advanced Behavioural Science—and attracted many students to his Applied Behavioural Science Division. The course proved extremely popular with high-ranking organisational leaders and wealthy chief executive officers and, much to John's amusement, some of these course participants would arrive at the college in chauffeur-driven limousines (White, 2021). In many respects, John helped to pioneer the field of personnel management, exploring the role of institutional power and group dynamics in the work setting.

Through his growing examination of the American psychotherapeutic literature, John began to investigate the very new field of co-counselling, sometimes described as peer counselling, which questioned the authority of some of the old-fashioned psychoanalysts, and he soon began to examine the world of depth psychology more

fully, albeit with a more critical gaze, arising from his Marxist perspective. A huge admirer of the work of Sigmund Freud—whose collected papers he read from cover to cover—John particularly embraced the concept of “free association”, and he would encourage his students to lie down on desks at college and share their inner thoughts, helping them to speak fully and to listen in a respectful and supportive manner. This work certainly encapsulated his notion of the “barefoot psychoanalyst”.

Amid his wide-ranging studies of psychological thinkers, John discovered the writings of the German-born, American-based psychoanalyst, Dr Karen Horney (1926, 1939, 1942, 1967), whose publications had received little attention on this side of the Atlantic Ocean; but John derived much inspiration from her critique of classical Freudian female psychology and from her championship of cultural differences, as well as her promotion of self-analysis, as these ideas corresponded with his own developing viewpoints.

On 22 January, 1976, John Southgate co-founded the Association of Karen Horney Psychoanalytic Counsellors, and he became Secretary to this new, blue-sky organisation, inaugurated in collaboration with his colleague, Rosemary Randall, who served as Treasurer. Together, they published a manual entitled *The Barefoot Psychoanalyst: An Introduction to Karen Horney Counselling. Book One. The Association of Karen Horney Psychoanalytic Counsellors* (Southgate & Randall, 1976), followed by a revised edition, *The Barefoot Psychoanalyst: An Illustrated Manual of Self Help Therapy* (Southgate & Randall, 1978), which appeared not long thereafter. These clearly written handbooks—each illustrated by Frances Tomlinson—constitute an important development in the public dissemination of psychoanalytical concepts (ranging from the nature of the unconscious to the art of coping in a crisis).

Both Southgate and Randall (1976) endeavoured to make their work as widely accessible as possible, offering associate membership in their organisation for only £5.20 per annum, in other words, the affordable sum of ten pence per week!

In due course, John developed a close collegial relationship with his namesake, John Rowan, one of the founders of the humanistic-integrative psychotherapy movement in the United Kingdom, and, eventually, Rowan co-opted John into the Institute of Psychotherapy and Social Studies, one of the first formal psychotherapy training organisations in this country, founded in 1978 by a group of colleagues who engaged with virtually all forms of psychological writing in a very inclusive manner. John also participated in his own personal psychoanalysis with Margaret Rustin, an esteemed child psychotherapist at the Tavistock Clinic in London.

With such foundation stones in place, John embarked upon a private clinical practice as a psychotherapist and worked extensively as a teacher at both the Association of Karen Horney Psychoanalytic Counsellors and at the Institute of Psychotherapy and Social Studies. John Rowan often referred to him as a “neophyte!!” (quoted in White, 2021), by which he meant a lover of everything *new*—a truly cunning encapsulation of John’s engagement with fresh ideas from all corners of psychology, especially those which emphasised the vital role of equality and social justice.

Eventually, John decided to establish his own psychotherapeutic training organisation and founded the Institute for Self Analysis—a small and liberal group of colleagues based, predominantly, in Hampstead, in North London, which launched in January, 1987. During this time, John continued to explore not only the work of Sigmund Freud and Karen Horney more thoroughly but, also, the bold writings of the Swiss psychoanalyst Dr Alice Miller (1979, 1981), who wrote transparently and bravely about the realities of child abuse and trauma—particularly emotional abuse—in its many forms at a time when few mental health professionals knew much about this aspect of parental cruelty (Southgate, 1987a, 1987b).

To the best of our knowledge, no other British training organisation had ever assigned the writings of Alice Miller back in the 1980s. In due course, John became increasingly astute about the role of trauma and, eventually, dissociation in the development of states of extreme psychological distress. Indeed, Miller's concept of advocacy for the child within became central to John's radical reformulation of the role of the psychotherapist.

In the 1980s, John's life became greatly enhanced when he met Kate White, who provided training for district nursing students at London's South Bank Polytechnic. Eventually, she invited John to deliver talks and to host experiential workshops for her students about psychological aspects of health care. Kate also undertook her own training in psychotherapy. The couple married in 1989.

John and Kate spent the summer of 1988 reading and discussing the famous trilogy on attachment and loss written by the British child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Dr John Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980; cf. Southgate, 1990, 2015). Hugely impressed by these remarkable texts, John wrote to Bowlby and enquired about arranging clinical supervision with this unique octogenarian. Although the elderly Bowlby could readily have refused such a request, he felt quite grateful to John for his growing interest in attachment theory, not least as many of the more conservative members of the British psychoanalytical community regarded Bowlby as an anti-Kleinian heretic at that point in time (e.g. Grosskurth, 1982a, 1982b). The two men enjoyed a rich clinical collaboration, and Bowlby's wise—indeed genius—insights no doubt increased John's professional acumen and his sense of authorisation.

In the wake of this collaboration, John transformed the Institute for Self Analysis into the Institute for Self Analysis and Centre for Attachment-Based Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy in 1994, and then, into the more crisply named Centre for Attachment-Based Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy in 1995, and, ultimately, in 2008, some years after the death of his mentor, into The Bowlby Centre—the very first mental health organisation to foreground attachment theory in such a prominent fashion.

The Bowlby Centre, a burgeoning training institute, served not only as an arena in which colleagues could explore attachment theory and traumatology more fully, but this new professional body also became a means of paying tribute to John's esteemed supervisor. John knew that attachment theory would become more vital

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with each passing year and, with a strategic aim in mind, he came to appreciate that by foregrounding Bowlby and attachment theory, as well as trauma theory, this would help to place his organisation in a more secure position within the broader British psychoanalytical and psychotherapeutic communities, hopeful that this work might help to modernise some of the more arcane members of the profession and thereby benefit many more individuals who sought psychological support. In fact, John became particularly committed to the training of those younger men and women who would engage in long-term attachment-based psychotherapy with clients.

After the death of John Bowlby in 1990, both John and Kate developed very warm relationships with all of the members of the Bowlby family, not least with Bowlby's son and daughter-in-law, Sir Richard Bowlby and Xenia, Lady Bowlby, both of whom became great advocates for, and champions of, The Bowlby Centre and authorised John and Kate to launch a memorial lecture in honour of that great man. This special lecture served as the foundation of what has since become a full-blown annual conference (often resulting in the publication of some wonderful books (e.g. White, 2004; Yellin & White, 2012)) and this remains one of the high-lights of the British psychotherapeutic calendar to this very day.

John devoted himself to the psychotherapy profession with compassion, enthusiasm, and wisdom and, in doing so, he helped to give birth to an entire generation of new practitioners steeped in both trauma theory and attachment theory—two key thematics which have, in fact, since become the very bedrock of most forward-thinking psychological trainings worldwide. Though often softly spoken, John could also be quite feisty, and these qualities helped him to transform the mental health profession rather significantly in this regard through his intelligent and passionate advocacy of attachment theory and social justice.

Speaking more personally, I can happily report that, having known John Southgate since 1986, I cannot think of many people more kindly or more wise or more thoughtful, and I enjoyed many friendly and appreciative conversations with John, even if we disagreed about certain clinical or theoretical matters from time to time. In 1991, John and Kate generously invited me to speak to their trainees as part of their "State of the Art Seminars" and offered me the opportunity to teach students about the history of child abuse. The following year, in 1992, John appointed me as Consultant in Psychology and Psychohistory to the organisation, and, over nearly thirty years, I have had the pleasure of working with some of the very best young colleagues in the country. I owe this experience entirely to the trust and warmth of John Southgate.

During the time of John's leadership of The Bowlby Centre (and its earlier organisational incarnations), this endeavour progressed from strength to strength. Not only did he and Kate create an annual memorial lecture and conference in honour of Dr Bowlby, but John also implemented a special clinical service, staffed by members of the organisation who offered either free or low-fee, long-term attachment-based psychotherapy for members of the public who could not afford the

financial cost of the traditional private practitioner. This important contribution would eventually be renamed as the Blues Project—inspired by “the blues”, pioneered by black jazz musicians, and reflective of John’s great talent as a pianist and as one of the key players in the group Jazzindo. Fortunately, the Blues Project continues to flourish to this day and has provided essential psychological care for untold numbers of people across the years.

After John’s diagnosis of Alzheimer’s in 2009, his partner Kate, along with family and friends and companions, cared for him with immense love and compassion and came to appreciate that the more one can create secure attachments with an ageing person, the more likely that individual will be able to enjoy a fuller, richer life. Kate shared her wise and sensitive insights with us all in a remarkable essay, “An Attachment Approach to Understanding and Living Well with Dementia” (White, 2019), part of a truly ground-breaking book, *Dementia: An Attachment Approach* (White et al., 2019)—essential reading for each one of us.

Eventually, John required full-time care and Kate found him the very best of nursing homes which looked after John and his fellow residents with love, enjoyment, and safety during the horrific coronavirus pandemic. John died peacefully on 24 April, 2021, at the age of eighty-six years. This remarkable man—a psychotherapist, a teacher, a writer, a leader, a theoretician, a jazz musician, a fighter against injustice, and so much more besides—will be hugely missed by his beloved partner, Kate White, by his children, Leon Southgate and Ela Southgate, and by all of his family, friends, and colleagues, and, moreover, by those who turned to him professionally over many decades for help and for care. We all feel very privileged to have known John Southgate, whose legacy will remain both bright and bountiful.

### Acknowledgements

I dedicate this tribute to my dear friend and colleague, Kate White—a remarkable woman in her own right as well as the long-standing, loving partner and comrade to John Southgate. Unless otherwise indicated, the biographical information contained herein derives from a most helpful and most memorable interview with Kate, held on 5 July, 2021, and from subsequent personal communications with her, as well as from my own reminiscences. I thank Kate immensely for her willingness to speak to me at a time of mourning and to offer her reflections about, and evaluation of, John’s work in her characteristically generous fashion.

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