

Editorial

Reintegrating “fathers”, psychoanalysis, and ourselves

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Reintegrating psychology, psychoanalysis, and the system

Welcome to this special edition of *Attachment* on “Fathers”. Before I explore further why I selected this topic as my inaugural edition and introduce the authors who have supported my vision in capturing the overall theme and tone of this special issue, I shall first briefly introduce myself professionally and, in doing so, attempt to set out the new era for *Attachment—New Directions in Psychotherapy and Relational Psychoanalysis*. I will later add a more personal account of my background and experience and acknowledge this is unusual for an editorial. But this likely one-off highly personal account is a new way of framing the editor’s role and identity.

As both an epidemiologist and a clinical psychologist; *and* both an attachment/systemic Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) clinician and a “Freudian”, I present a particular type of outlier, often positioned as “other” in whichever context I reside. When I trained initially as a psychiatric epidemiologist, it was suggested I go off and become a clinical psychologist, having apparently too much “personality” for academia. Whilst training as a clinical psychologist, I was often regarded as too scientific, too academic. When I found myself training both analytically and systemically in tandem, at The Bowlby Centre, I was initially positioned as overly focused on the systemic reality of the world, being asked by one of my peers to explain what exactly is systemic? Whilst over at the Institute of Family Therapy, I was teased quite relentlessly for being a Freudian!

Far from feeling not belonging and excluded, I felt I was crucial, a crucial reminder to the others of the split-off self, that which needed much reintegration. Like the prominent themes in the works of Freud, such exclusion may precede inclusion, though it has been argued we are always left out, when we think we’re most included (Phillips, 2021). Freud tells us that we can only survive by exclusion (Phillips, 2021), and I find this reassuring.

I have a critical task ahead of me, one which I intend to complete with compassionate leadership, academic skill, and rigour, and I hope with humour and play. Play should not be underestimated, Bowlby knew the importance of safe

exploration (Marvin et al., 2002). When I learnt that I was successfully recruited as the new editor, it was important to state that my intention was to create a space where classical psychoanalysis and contemporary attachment-based relational approaches could be integrated, that the journal would provide inclusive space to allow all voices, keeping in line with the values of The Bowlby Centre as inclusive. It would allow psychologists, psychoanalysts, psychotherapists, and clinicians across the board to submit their clinical and academic work in all areas relating to attachment and psychological therapies, both the intrapsychic as well as external world experience.

I contacted Professor Brett Kahr to help me bring to life this vision. Having had the privilege of reading some of his publications, I knew he could take us back on a historical journey to the “father of psychoanalysis”, and bring us right back up-to-date to “Attachment”, provoking and encouraging the reintegration of the very many splits. His historical journey captured eloquently in his essay, was intended by me to serve as the secure base in which we could all reintegrate and venture off, knowing there is a secure space for all.

I strongly believe one must know the past to fully understand the present, and one must move towards the future, and one does so by reintegrating the past in an ever-circular rhythm. This repetition compulsion was not lost on Freud (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1998). That said, I’d like to honour Dr Joseph Schwartz, founding editor; and both Ms Kate White and Dr Orit Badouk Epstein for the legacy that they have left us with. Presently, I would like to acknowledge Ms Linda Cundy for her role in the previous issue as guest editor; this highly regarded attachment consultant to The Bowlby Centre has not only maintained the quality of the journal but provided much needed skilful holding during this transitional phase. I am very grateful to the hard work of my current journal team; Mr Wayne Davis and Ms Gülcan Sutton Purser. Our poetry editor, Ms Yvonne Forward, has chosen to step down from her role. We are grateful to her for her contribution over the years.

I have taken the decision to move forwards without poetry¹. It is not lost on me that the “academic psychologist” has taken the poetry out of the journal, much like Bowlby himself was protested against for taking the “poetry out of psychoanalysis” (Grosskurth, 1982). The “analyst” in me suspects that he did, and I do not deny the decision I have taken here. However; it was a highly considered and thoughtful one, the future vision is to integrate both the academic psychology with the poetry of psychoanalysis. We continue to accept high calibre clinical work in the fields of psychoanalysis and relational psychotherapy. We broaden the literature review section to include reviews of books, films, artwork, music, and poetry. And finally, and perhaps most distinctly moving forwards, we introduce a selection of formally peer-reviewed articles. These will ideally be, but not limited to, original data studies in the field of psychology and attachment. With change there is always loss, but with loss there is also opportunity for growth and surely *new directions*.

(Full details of the new structure and notes to contributors can be found on the final pages of the journal.)

Freud the Jew; my father the Muslim

The theme of fathers is important to me and was an attempt to reintegrate men and fathers back towards the otherwise dominant focus in psychoanalysis; the “mother”. One of my earliest significant memories of my father, whose highest context is his religion, was when he and I (possibly aged nine) went to the local shop and I stole some chewing gum, and rather enthusiastically showed him after we left the shop what I had done; feeling somewhat skilled in my capacity to get away with stealing. He looked down on me and said in his language, Sylheti, something that is loosely translated between “that is not moral” and “that is shameful”. The “shame” was neither to embarrass or cause humiliation and the “moral” was neither righteous or full of indignation. Rather his tone was compassionate and kind and I could feel the warmth coming down from his face, such that I would never ever steal again. The oedipal resolution and superego formation of the father is linked in my mind to something akin to moral authority (Freud, 1924d). I am very grateful to Mr Gordon Alderson for his highly articulate contribution on “The father in psychoanalysis” whereby he revisits in part themes of the oedipal complex and the moral authority of the father.

My father was a kind and compassionate gentle man. His lack of conversation and talk was, I suspect, directly linked to his trauma; somewhat due to this silence, I knew little of. As a Bengali Muslim man born in British India to only lose his mother aged ten, alongside partition, and to endure subsequent civil and secular wars, including the brutality of racism in 1950s/1960s Britain; he was a man who seldom spoke, and his faith in his religion seemed at times to be an avoidant-protective strategy whereby he’d often “hide” in the mosque. The capacity to integrate was learnt early on in my family, whereby we had the compassion of a Muslim father and the nuanced experience of being sent to church by my mother. Up until the age of seventeen, I practised and worshipped routinely in a church and these were some of my fondest childhood memories. This religious integration felt like a privilege. The split off religious and “race” focus in psychoanalysis in favour of gender and sexuality, to some extent has been hypothesised as the product of the very real trauma of Freud’s life (Kahr, 2021). I find it quite extraordinary that modern-day relational therapists sometimes reduce Freud to his work on drives, and wonder if this rather talented, brilliant man miscued them away from his very obvious traumatic life.

My father’s silence was a painful legacy of my childhood despite his otherwise care and love. The Indian or South Asian diaspora, often underrepresented in psychoanalysis, have in my mind at least, had a far less coherent narrative of the intergenerational colonial trauma and subsequent displacement and racial abuse encountered throughout history. The partition and the impact of British colonial power seldom spoken of, perpetuates some kind of traumatic silencing.

There seems to be a particular type of trauma that men face that sometimes appears split and silent. Whether that be the working-class White man with three generations of unemployment and suicide, or the Black (brown skinned) man who is always at the bottom of the social hierarchy, or indeed the Muslim and the Jew.

We seem to split off the vulnerability that men hold from their lived experience of trauma throughout history, and continue to face, choosing instead to locate them through the narrow lens of a highly privileged minority.

As a woman, I am routinely informed by Western feminists' ideas, that I should feel victimised through my experience of misogyny and the patriarchy. Sadly, like many women, I am not immune to the effects of these. However, locating myself through this gendered lens is a single story (Adichie, 2009). I have felt pervasive fear twice in my life. First, in recent years after my mother had a severe cardiac arrest and suffered brain hypoxia leaving her in a degenerative state. Not being remembered by your mother battling with dementia is painful, too painful to describe here. It has taken almost two, nearly three years of night-time terror to begin to feel somewhat OK, after this tragic loss. It was indeed a Freudian interpretation on a compromise formation, that would ultimately provide some soothing.

The other time I felt profound fear was after the World Trade Centre bombing on 11 September. I thought I'd receive a phone call one day to learn my father would be attacked or, worse, murdered. I recall him looking quite frightened soon after the event and he had said, "The Muslims may be forced to leave the UK." I remember thinking how stupid he was, as if to think why on earth would anyone have the power to force the Muslims from their own country. It was I who was *stupid*, profoundly so, at my complete adolescent ignorance of his real-life lived experience of multiple displacements and attempts of annihilation. First at the hands of the British, then the Indians, and then the Pakistanis. At the time being only nineteen, I used to wish he wouldn't wear his "Muslim hat" on the streets, thinking why on earth would he make it so obvious he was Muslim. It took years to realise that the implicit fear in my body was this. Given my own church-attending background and the subsequent secular lifestyle, I would make it very clear at social events that my father was Muslim, to prevent people unwittingly saying something Islamophobic, though it seldom prevented the microaggressions.

It took me almost two decades to fully understand my father's context. He was not afraid, precisely because he was Muslim. He had internalised a secure base within him, informed by his faith, his identity, not necessarily his attachment to others. It makes me think of the very moving scene in the *Oliver Twist* TV mini-series adaptation (2007–2008) where Timothy Spall's characterisation of "Fagin the Jew" is asked to denounce his Jewish faith at his most critical moment. After a poignant pause he says, "I can't do that." My father, now in his mid-eighties, continues to take care of my eldest sister born with a severe learning disability and my mother who lives with dementia. My father would want you to know that he is Muslim, and I would want you to know, that I am never more internally secure, than when I am my father's daughter.

Detoxifying masculinity

It seems to me that fathers, to some extent, have always been split off, and in more recent decades that dominant Western feminists' ideology seems to want to split

men off altogether, to the point where the man no longer exists and, if he does, he should feel shame at every aspect of manhood. I have never liked or used the term “toxic masculinity”, first the term toxic, to the scientist in me, compels me to think of chemicals and substances that cause poisonous harm. I find it hard to imagine entire groups of people and relationships in this way. Whilst I acknowledge misogyny, abuse, and trauma, I remain unimpressed with the way this term has entered our modern-day vernacular, and concerned of the implications of such discourse (Foucault, 1977, 1997). The inclusion of Ms Victoria Settle’s paper on “Double father trouble”, and the very poignant story of “Alex”, was included precisely to make legitimate space for misogyny and trauma.

I had the privilege of being taught and supervised by Dr Taiwo Afuape. Her paper on “The myth of Black father absenteeism” spoke to the theme of gendered racism, specifically the ways in which Black men by virtue of being both Black and *male* are subjected to a level of abuse. This was an impressive discussion of an otherwise split experience. I wish to focus on an equally split way in which gendered racism occurs. My lived experience is that I am often forced to choose between racism and misogyny. Often joining spaces where I am the only “not white” female, I have routinely been racially victimised, sometimes in very overt and abhorrent ways, primarily by women. By virtue of being both White and *female* my “abusers” would seem to get away with bullying, racism, and a general “toxicity” in ways that I can’t imagine any White heterosexual man would get away with.

In her thought-provoking book entitled: *White Tears/Browns Scars*, Ruby Hamad (2020) explores exactly how White feminism betrays women of colour. This wouldn’t feel quite so relevant if my experiences of racism weren’t layered with complex feminist arguments. First, the ways in which the White female become the “victim”, the need for others to look after her and collude with her White female fragility can often leave the direct victim of racism feeling disorientated in a way that is bewildering. In challenging racism amongst White females, I have often heard narratives focusing on their felt sense of attack at their “petite-ness” or “blond-ness” or indeed the role of the patriarchy, all of which feels equally dementing at times. This type of splitting forms a particular kind of gendered racism that White women seem to get away with. I once recalled a White female friend comment on how *women* are victimised in the world far more so, in the context of my telling her about my experience of racism. Initially, I felt deceived by such a statement; wondering why on earth she did not see me as a woman!

It became apparent that these silencing tactics from a place of White female fragility served to do a number of things readily recognised (DiAngelo, 2018; Hamad, 2020). Second, Hamad (2020) talks us through the historic othering of women of colour as “Lewd Jezebels” and “Exotic Orientals”, in my opinion to such a degree that women who are not White are so unseen by White women that their fundamental womanhood is denied, our non-European bodies attacked or fetishised, and our hair so politicised, this is particularly the case of afro hair. We are therefore seen only through a “masculine trait” lens as “angry”, that is to say, the “Angry Sapphires, Bad Arabs”, we are positioned as only angry and aggressive, despite the brutality

and injury of racial trauma and the legitimacy of the anger. Attempts to show any kind of vulnerability or distress, professionally or personally at later stages, are routinely pathologised, often by the same women. Third, Hamad (2020) goes on to describe these silencing tactics as “when White tears become weapons” (p. 105) and “only White damsels can be in distress” (ibid., p. 77), demonstrating the different ways in which aggression is not seen, and vulnerability too often readily seen, when displayed by White females.

In reading her work I felt that language had been used to describe the disorientating split that occurs when the interaction between racism and gender collide. She, in her sophisticated way, explores essentially how White women use strategic tears to silence women of colour. She gives voice to the much internalised experience of how women like myself encounter White Western feminism (Hamad, 2020). I’m not saying the patriarchy does not play a role, but I’m curious where exactly is the “toxic masculinity”? I was particularly struck by the quote she uses by Luvvie Ajayi in her opening chapter—“We talk about toxic masculinity but there is (also) toxicity in wielding femininity in this way”. I’ve established my dissatisfaction with the use of the word “toxic” and by no means encourage its use for female relating. I, instead, suggest we reintegrate the split off misogyny and racist parts in all of us, and perhaps it’s time we detoxify masculinity.

Returning to the father’s gaze

I find the idea of the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975) an unintegrated split narrative, because it seems to position the female “other” as simply being the passive object of the gaze as opposed to being impacted by it, having agency in eliciting it, holding the gaze and returning the gaze to reinforce future gaze. But crucially it misses something fundamentally important that is often captured in mother–infant narratives. When Schore (2016, p. 90) talks of “sparkle eyed gaze”, it seems to me that many fathers do this with ease, they look upon their baby and seem to fall in love with her. I was moved when my father once said he was at the births of us children. Given his age, I suppose I suspected back in his time he wouldn’t have been. It has occurred to me that given the nature of natural birthing, in a heterosexual context, the father is quite possibly the first person to *see* the baby, quite literally. I recall a highly amusing and equally powerful account, when a father described how he saw his baby enter the world, face up, and was impacted profoundly by the baby’s face looking back at his. There is evidence that after birth, a father can have a reduction in testosterone (Gettler et al., 2011). Subsequent contact with baby can increase oxytocin and in fathers, particularly play/stimulating contact can increase oxytocin (Feldman et al., 2010); fathers aren’t just “daddy playtime”. These floods of chemicals dopamine, serotonin, and subsequent oxytocin are entirely the same as those we encounter when we speak of attraction and attachment in the romantic “falling in love” scenes (Schneiderman et al., 2012). So, fathers can, and often do, literally “fall in love” with their children. I don’t wish to labour the point, but I think we know that our friend “The Freud”, was probably on to this.

My capacity to see men the way I sometimes do perhaps has something to do with the father's gaze I internalised. It was important to include the perspective of a gay father and I had commissioned Mr Tom Higgins to write from this perspective. The essence of his article I feel captures beautifully what it means for a father to be a father. I thoroughly enjoyed reading about him brushing his daughter's hair. It reminded me viscerally of how my father brushed and plaited my hair every day before school. He would start at the far side of my head and work the brush over from the front to the base of my neck, navigating the curve around the ear with one hand. With the other hand he would begin to hold what was the beginning of a pony tail. He would work his way through front to back, from one side to the other side over the head, by which time he would have the whole of my hair in a full pony tail in the clasp of his other hand. His final brush stroke would be underneath. This he would do in one sweep and this was by far the nicest part. Sometimes I would ask him to do the underneath again.

Despite my father's lack of verbal expression, I always knew from his gaze the love he felt. My mother has many strengths and the limits of this short article prevents further discussion. But, in many ways, in my mother's eyes, I could never do right. But with my father, I simply had to show up. It's no surprise that my first partner was very similar temperamentally to my father. In the early years of our relationship, he would often awake before I would. And when I woke up, I would see his face beaming down at me. It would feel like waking up to sunshine, his gaze dazzlingly bright. In many ways I felt he didn't see me, or know me, but his gaze let me know what he felt for me.

Similarly, the closest attachment I had to a secure base outside my parental home, was with my PhD supervisor. Again, temperamentally very similar to my father, a rather shy, avoidant sort of man. I recall a scene just before he and I were to attend my PhD viva voce. I went to the bathroom whilst he waited for me outside. Initially seeming a very obvious and not an unusual thing to do before a lengthy interview. However, catastrophic cognitions and increasing anxiety got the better of me. At first, I worried about the PhD, then I worried about failing the viva, and then taking longer than anticipated, I worried about being late, and, ultimately, I began to panic like a little girl taking too long in the toilet, worried daddy would be outside angry. When I stepped out of the bathroom, I will never forget the look on his face. Warm, kind, patient, and delighted to see me, ready to take me to school. My anxiety immediately allayed and as it happens, I had a wonderfully playful viva experience.

There are countless examples I can draw on; but the father's gaze ultimately became live in my mind during my two years with my final male training therapist. Despite the misattunements and the painful experiences often transferred onto him, not to mention the unconscious attempts to reenact an ending to mirror the way my original female therapist suddenly abandoned me, he worked harder than any man I knew, to hold on to me through the training until I registered (Klein, 1995). Every time he wrote to me, he would end telling me he was "looking forward to seeing me" and every time I saw him look at me, I believed him. His gaze at the start of every session, nothing but delight.

A space for all parts

There is so much more that could be said and parts which are well integrated but the limits of this short piece make it impossible to include. I often think the task and outcome for all therapy is to grieve. My favourite and most relished paper by Freud is “Mourning and melancholia” (1917e). I feel he and Bowlby were most integrated on this topic. Bowlby contributed substantially to our empirical understanding of separation and loss (Bowlby, 1980) but for me Freud added the poetry to sweet melancholia. My childhood experiences like many are multi-layered, complex, and highly nuanced, but ultimately one key aspect of my relationship to my parents, particularly my mother, was it was very hard emotionally for me to become a mother. This failure and wish unfulfilled is a grief with unlimited mourning. I wish more would see the ways Freud might have made space for this beyond “penis envy”. It sometimes feels there isn’t enough space in contemporary psychotherapy to grieve a “mother’s” failed capacity to be a mother, and it occurred to me that there was perhaps even less space for a father. The paper commissioned from Mr Christian Howes, is a painfully raw and beautifully told story of expectant fatherhood in the consulting room. I am grateful to him for his authentic contribution.

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Dedication

“Fathers” was inspired by the men and “fathers” in my life. I dedicate this small tribute to my father; *Haji* Abdul Jalil, Keith, Robert, and, perhaps most of all, to my male psychotherapist—“I will always look forward to seeing you”.

Note

1. Two poems have been included as a final homage to the role poetry has played in this journal over the years. First, a poem by Tara Sutton about the difficulty in watching your father grow older and becoming ill and not having the power to protect or save him. And last, and by no means least, we end this special issue on “Fathers” with a poem written for the man who inspired it.

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