Mentalizing and the attachment process”

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Menninger Clinic, 22nd March 2013
Some of the Mentalizing Mafia

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- Annelies Verheught-Pleiter
- Rudi Vermote
- Joleien Zevalkink
- Bjorn Philips
- Dr Peter Fuggle

And Rose Palmer for help with the preparation of this presentation.
Articles using ‘mentalization’ in title or abstracts

Source: http://apps.webofknowledge.com, Data collected 10.3.2013
JUST RELEASED!

NEW! IMPROVED!

Washes brains whiter!

Longer than all previous versions!

Let the boy dream Ivan, he is a born dilettante!

You will never amount to anything if you hold a ball like that!

I want to write my PhD on the “Use of low signal-to-noise ratio stimuli for highlighting the functional differences between the two cerebral hemispheres”.

You look smug now but you will lose your hair just like Dad.
Mentalizing: Cognitive vs. Emotional

■ Emotional Mentalizing
  - The capacity to experience affective reactions to the observed experiences of others

■ Cognitive Mentalizing
  - Role-taking ability: The capacity to engage in the cognitive process of adopting another’s psychological point of view.
  - Making inferences regarding the other’s affective and cognitive mental states
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Mentalizing brain networks

Basic Mechanism
- Simulation IFG-IPL
- Self Pain Insula, ACC
- Self-Other VM, TPJ
- Autobiographical Memory MTL-mPFC

Process
- Emotional Contagion
- Emotion Recognition
- Shared Pain
- Affective Mentalizing
- Cognitive Mentalizing

Response
- Emotional Empathy
- Cognitive Empathy

Shamay-Tsoory 2011
Neurochemistry of Mentalizing

- **Cognitive** empathy is related to *dopaminergic* circuits
  - This neurotransmitter plays a crucial role in the **maturation of the frontal lobe** from preschool years (Lackner, et al., 2010)

- **Emotional** empathy is related to *oxytocinergic* functioning (Hurlemann, et al., 2010)
Facilitates empathic facial recognition and in-group trust (Bakermans-Kranenburg, in press)

It increases perceived salience of social cues (Shamay-Tsoory et al., 2009)

It improves empathic accuracy for less socially proficient individuals (Bartz et al., 2010)

Emotional empathic approach recruits mainly left frontal areas. Oxytocin improves altruistic behavior in individuals with relatively higher right frontal activity (Huffmeijer et al., 2012)

By enhancing activity in the Insula and IFG, it improves understanding of others’ emotions, and reduces anxiety by decreasing amygdalar activity, facilitating contingent responses of help and compassion (Bakermans-Kranenburg, in press)
The Empathic Brain Mechanisms

Emotional empathy: Simulation

- Both zones are rich in mirror neurons
- Implied in emotional contagion since infancy
- Implied in emotion recognition
The Empathic Brain Mechanisms
Emotional empathy: Shared emotion and pain

Anterior cingulate cortex (ACC)

Insula

- These areas respond to both observed and felt pain.
- Their intensity of their activation correlates with the explicit judgment about severity of pain.
- Observed pain activation decreases depending on the context: unfamiliar people, people of different race, alexithymia, and in medical practitioners.
The Empathic Brain
Cognitive mentalizing: Theory of Mind

Temporoparietal Junction (TPJ)
Mainly responsible for transient mental inferences about other people, their goals, desires and beliefs.

Medial Prefrontal Cortex (mPFC)
Attribution of more enduring traits and qualities.
- **dmPFC**: understanding others’ beliefs
- **vmPFC**: others’ emotions and the difference between self and others

Hippocampus (HC)
Mainly responsible autobiographical memory: past used to understand events happening to the self and others

Gweon, et al., 2012; Shamay-Tsoory, 2011
The Empathic Brain
Cognitive empathy: Theory of Mind, Mentalizing

Other brain areas implicated in ToM

Temporal Poles (TP)

Precuneus

Superior Temporal Sulcus STS
The Mentalizing Brain

Inferior frontal gyrus
The mirror neuron system is a first step: *Emotional Contagion*

Temporo-parietal junction & superior temporal sulcus
Visio-spatial and cognitive perspective-taking

Frontal and prefrontal Cortex

**mPFC:** Anticipating what oneself or others will feel and behavior prediction

Medial orbital cortex: Emotional perspective-taking

Ventral regions of the medial frontal cortex: thinking about communicative intentions

Temporal poles
Integration of perceived information about others, learnt information about unique persons and contextual information

Frith & Frith, 2006
Mentalizing Profile: A multidimensional model

Implicit-
Automatic-
Non-conscious-
Immediate.

**Mental**
**interior**
**cue**
**focused**

- amygdala, basal ganglia, ventromedial prefrontal cortex (VMPFC), lateral temporal cortex (LTC) and the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex (dACC)

**Explicit**
**Controlled**
**Conscious**
**Reflective**

**Mental**
**exterior**
**cue**
**focused**

- lateral and medial prefrontal cortex (LPFC & MPFC), lateral and medial parietal cortex (LPAC & MPAC), medial temporal lobe (MTL), rostral anterior cingulate cortex (rACC)

**Cognitive**
**agent:**
**attitude**
**propositions**

- Associated with several areas of prefrontal cortex
- Associated with inferior prefrontal gyrus

**Affective**
**self:**
**affect state**
**propositions**

**Imitative**
**frontoparietal**
**mirror neurone**
**system**

- frontoparietal mirror-neuron system
- the medial prefrontal cortex, ACC, and the precuneus

**Belief-desire**
**MPFC/ACC**
**inhibitory**
**system**
Mentalizing Profile Associated with Arousal

**Implicit-Automatic-Non-conscious-Immediate.**
- Mental interior cue focused
  - Amygdala, basal ganglia, ventromedial prefrontal cortex (VMPFC), lateral temporal cortex (LTC) and the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex (dACC)

**Explicit-Controlled-Conscious-Reflective**
- Mental exterior cue focused
  - Medial frontoparietal network activated

**Cognitive agent: attitude propositions**
- Associated with several areas of prefrontal cortex
- Associated with inferior prefrontal gyrus

**Imitative frontoparietal mirror neurone system**
- Frontoparietal mirror-neuron system
- The medial prefrontal cortex, ACC, and the precuneus

**Affective self:affect state propositions**
- Belief-desire MPFC/ACC inhibitory system
Dimensions of mentalization: implicit/automatic vs explicit/controlled in Othello

Why, how now, ho! from whence ariseth this?
Are we turn'd Turks, and to ourselves do that
Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?
For Christian shame, put by this barbarous brawl:

Controlled

Automatic

Love
Spurned/Arousal
That handkerchief which I so loved and gave thee
Thou gavest to Cassio.

By heaven, I saw my handkerchief in's hand.

Dimensions of mentalization: implicit/automatic vs explicit/controlled in Othello’s brain

Controlled

Automatic

Arousal
Dimensions of mentalization: implicit/automatic vs explicit/controlled

Psychological understanding drops and is rapidly replaced by confusion about mental states under high arousal.
Psychotherapist’s **demand to explore** issues that trigger intense emotional reactions involving conscious reflection and explicit mentalization are inconsistent with the patient’s ability to perform these tasks when arousal is high.
Early Development of Mentalizing

- **6 and 10-month-old** infants show **preference for characters that help others** over characters that are not cooperative or hindering (Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom, 2007)

- Infants as young as **12 months** of age begin to **comfort victims** of distress (Warneken & Tomasello, 2009)

- Children aged **14-18 months** display spontaneous and **unrewarded helping behaviours** (Warneken & Tomasello, 2009)

- Children aged **18-25 months** are inclined to **sympathize with others in strife**, which implies an early form of emotional perspective-taking (Decety, 2011)
Development of empathy: Regression?

At 17 months of age, 34.6% of children **helped another child** who was feeling sick.

A year after, 17% of boys and 12% girls stopped showing this behavior.

19% of children who **do not show** empathic behavior at 29 months of age, had **shown it** 1 year before.

- **Ceasing to exhibit prosocial behaviors** during toddlerhood is a **normative aspect** of early social development.
- **Prosocial behaviors** become **regulated** during **preschool years**.
- **Children learn to inhibit prosocial behaviors** as they become aware of the **implicit rules** of social and moral conduct.
- They learn where, when and **whom to help**: reciprocity, equity and **deservedness**.

Baillargeon et al., 2007; Baillargeon et al., 2011; Brownell, 2013; Hay, 1994.
Development of Empathy

Empathic behavior towards others

Rule-compatible behavior without supervision

Empathic behavior during toddlerhood prevents externalizing pathology and predicts developmental adaptation

It causes greater positive reciprocity in the relationship with close figures

Positive relationship foster mental health and positive socialization trajectories

Kochanska et al., 2010
Development of empathy

Emotional empathy **develops very early**

- It relies on somato-sensoriomotor resonance and mimicry

Newborns and infants become **distressed** shortly after another infant **starts crying**

**Mimicry of facial expressions** starts around **10 weeks**
Development of Empathy

Cognitive empathy develops later

- It relies on more sophisticated functions
  - Theory of mind (ToM)
  - Executive function
  - Self-regulation

This allows for regulated responses to others’ distress, without feeling distressed oneself

- These are implemented in the prefrontal cortex
  - It develops more slowly than the rest of the brain
  - Reaches maturity during adolescence

Greimel, et al., 2010; Decety, 2011
Belief Computation in Infants

Familiarization
Sensitivity to others’ state of mind

- **A. Agent appears**
  - Ball stays
  - False belief for baby
  - True belief for Smurf

- **B. Agent present**
  - Belief formation
  - No change
  - True belief for baby
  - False belief for Smurf

- **C. Agent absent**
  - Reality change
  - Ball stays
  - False belief for baby
  - True belief for Smurf

- **D. Agent returns**
  - Outcome
  - Ball leaves
  - True belief for baby
  - False belief for Smurf

(Adapted from Á M Kovács et al. Science 2011;330:1830-1834)
Sensitivity to others’ state of mind

The two key conditions in Smurf Study: Infant of 7 months considers what agent (Smurf) believes about the status of ball

The social brain: pSTS/TPJ

- Seeing the other’s point of view
  - Prediction
    - Biological motion, eye gaze
    - Predicting complex movements
  - Perspective-taking
    - Joint attention
    - Different physical points of view

Pelphrey et al., 2004a,b; Kawawaki et al., 2012 (review); Mitchell 2013
Brain Regions for **Perceiving and Reasoning About Other People** in School-Aged Children (Saxe et al.)

- **Right TPJ**
- **mPFC**
- **Precuneus**
- **Left TPJ**
Grace and her friend are taking a tour of a chemical plant. When Grace goes over to the coffee machine to pour some coffee, Grace’s friend asks for some sugar in hers. There is a white powder next to the coffee in a container marked “toxic” and Grace gives two spoonfuls to her friend.
Disruption of the right temporoparietal junction with transcranial magnetic stimulation reduces the role of beliefs in moral judgments (Young et al., PNAS)
Mentalizing can be taught

- **Prosocial behaviors** in children emerge around the 2 years of age and are largely **non-heritable** (Deater-Deckard, 2003; Brownell, 2013)

  - They are linked with **positivity** in the relationship **with parents** (Spinrad, 2009)

  - **Maternal responsiveness** at child’s 9 months of age **predicts** child’s **empathy** at 22 months of age (Kochanska, 1999)

  - Mothers with **negative preconceptions** about parenting have children who **show less empathy** towards their mothers (Kiang, Moreno & Robinson, 2004)

  - **Punitive and harsh parenting** is negatively related to prosocial behaviors (Asbury et al., 2003)

Warm and sensitive **attachment relationship** encourages **empathy** and **perspective taking** (Farrant et al., 2012)
Empathy and Attachment

- Avoidant attachment shows a characteristic way of detachment that impedes mentalization and therefore empathy:
  - Avoidant children aged 4-5 years in play with peers, are either manipulative and exploitative or victims of a manipulative relationship. They oscillate between being victims and victimizers.

- Empathy requires regulation of negative emotions:
  - Fearful and insecurely attached 16 and 22 months old girls show progressively less empathy for strangers in distress.
  - During that time span, empathic concern for their mother’s distress increased.

Van Der Mark, Van Ijzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2002; Troy & Sroufe, 1987
Empathy and Attachment

The development of empathy requires an early attachment relation with a warm and responsive adult.

Reactivity to stress is present in young children, but only some can regulate it and react empathically.

Children of responsive mums show more concerned attention and lower personal distress when confronted to distress of the mother and of a stranger.

Kiang, Moreno & Robinson, 2004; Novartis Foundation, 2007; Spinrad & Stifter, 2009
Closeness of the infant to another human being who via contingent marked mirroring actions facilitates the emergence of a symbolic representational system of affective states and assists in developing affect regulation (and selective attention) => secure attachment

For normal development the child needs to experience a mind that has his mind in mind

- Able to reflect on his intentions accurately
- Does not overwhelm him
- Not accessible to neglected children
High congruent & marked mirroring
Empathy and Attachment

This effect of positive attachment is also observed in adults:

Priming attachment security in adults

Attachment avoidance and anxiety are inversely related to empathy

When perceiving distress, insecurely attached people fail to recruit cortical brain areas normally used to down-regulate negative emotions (ACC and MPFC), which hinders empathic behaviors of help and comfort

Gillath, 2005; Mikulincer et al., 2001; 2005
Empathy and Attachment

- **Dismissively attached women when empathizing:**
  - Show **more activation** in motor, **limbic**, and **mirror** systems
    - Implies *implicit and unmodulated* emotional involvement
    - Impairment in *self-other differentiation*
  - Deactivation of fronto-medial areas: **ACC** and medial pre-frontal cortex
    - Implies emotional *disinvestment* towards social emotions, typical of **dismissive subjects**
    - It compensates the **overactivated** implicit involvement

*Emotional overactivation in dismissive subjects does not result in empathy, but in the retrieval of autobiographical memories of painful attachment experiences, which trigger avoidance strategies when observing pain*

Lenzi, et al., 2012
The caregiver’s perception is inaccurate or unmarked or both

**Attachment Figure**

Absence of a representation of the infant’s mental state

**Child**

The nascent self representational structure

**The Alien Self**

Internalisation of a non-contingent mental state as part of the self

The child, unable to “find” himself as an intentional being, internalizes a representation of the other into the self with distorted agentive characteristics which disorganizes the self, creating splits within the self structure.
Theory: Self-destructiveness and Externalisation Following Trauma

Torturing alien self  Self representation

Perceived other

Unbearably painful emotional states:
Self experienced as evil/hateful

Self-harm state

Attack from within is turned against body and/or mind.
**Theory:** Self-destructiveness and Self-destructive relationships

Self-experienced as evil and hateful

Theory:

Self-destructiveness and Self-destructive relationships

Projective identification is used to reduce the experience of unbearably painful emotional state of attack from within – externalisation becomes a matter of life and death and addictive bond and terror of loss of (abusing) object develops
Self-experienced as evil and hateful

Externalisation & Violence Following Trauma

Perceived other

Unbearably painful emotional states:
Self experienced as evil/hateful

Self-harm state
Projective identification is used to reduce the experience of unbearably painful emotional state of attack from within – externalisation becomes a matter of life and death, the violent act protects against experience of intrusion and addictive bond and terror of loss of abused object can develop
Empathy deficits and attachment
In children with disruptive behavior disorders

Children with higher levels of callous/unemotional traits are more likely to show disorganized attachment.

Disrupted attachment amplify negative effects of temperamental aspects on callous/unemotional traits.

Early attachment disturbances impair children’s ability to reflect on and respond to other people’s emotional states.

In line with impairments in attending to, recognizing and responding to other people’s emotions.

These traits are associated with emotional recognition deficits and low levels of prosocial behavior.

Pasalich et al., 2012
Mentalizing Profile of Prototypical BPD patient

Implicit-
Automatic-
Non-conscious-
Impressionistic

Mental interior cue focused

Cognitive agent: attitude propositions

Imitative frontoparietal mirror neurone system

BPD

Explicit-
Controlled Conscious Reflective

Mental external cue focused

Affective self:affect state propositions

Belief-desire MPFC/ACC inhibitory system

Implicit-
Automatic-
Non-conscious-
Impressionistic

Mental interior cue focused

Cognitive agent: attitude propositions

Imitative frontoparietal mirror neurone system

BPD

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Mental external cue focused

Affective self:affect state propositions

Belief-desire MPFC/ACC inhibitory system

amygdala, basal ganglia, ventromedial prefrontal cortex (VMPFC), lateral temporal cortex (LTC) and the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex (dACC)
lateral and medial prefrontal cortex (LPFC & MPFC), lateral and medial parietal cortex (LPAC & MPAC), medial temporal lobe (MTL), rostral anterior cingulate cortex (rACC)
medial frontoparietal network activated
recruits lateral fronto-temporal network
Associated with several areas of prefrontal cortex
Associated with inferior prefrontal gyrus
frontoparietal mirror-neuron system
the medial prefrontal cortex, ACC, and the precuneus
Prementalizing Modes of Subjectivity

Psychic equivalence:
- Mind-world *isomorphism*; mental reality = outer reality; internal has power of external
- Intolerance of alternative perspectives → concrete understanding
- Reflects domination of self:*affect state* thinking with limited internal focus

Pretend mode:
- Ideas form no bridge between inner and outer reality; mental world *decoupled* from external reality
- “dissociation” of thought, hyper-mentalizing or pseudo-mentalizing
- Reflects explicit mentalizing being dominated by implicit, inadequate internal focus, poor belief-desire reasoning and vulnerability to fusion with others

Teleological stance:
- A focus on understanding actions in terms of their *physical* as opposed to mental *constraints*
- Cannot accept anything other than a modification in the realm of the *physical* as a true index of the intentions of the other.
- Extreme *exterior focus*, momentary loss of controlled mentalizing
- *Misuse* of mentalization for teleological ends (harming others) becomes possible because of lack of implicit as well as explicit mentalizing
Treatment vectors in re-establishing mentalizing in borderline personality disorder

Implicit-Automatic | Explicit-Controlled

Mental interior focused | Mental exterior focused

Cognitive agent: attitude propositions | Affective self: affect state propositions

Imitative frontoparietal mirror neurone system | Belief-desire MPFC/ACC inhibitory system

Emotional sensitivity | Certainty of cognition

Impression driven | Appearance

Mentalizing in borderline personality disorder

Cognitive agent: attitude propositions

Imitative frontoparietal mirror neurone system

Emotional sensitivity | Certainty of cognition

Impression driven | Appearance
Mentalizing and the pedagogic stance and a general theory for psychotherapy?
The need for human natural pedagogy

- We are born into a world populated with man-made tools whose functional properties, appropriate manner of application or method of (re)production often remain in many respects epistemically opaque.

- The cognitive opacity of kind or category-relevant aspects of human-made functional artifacts raises a learnability problem (of relevance-selection) for the naïve juvenile observational learner.
The Theory of Natural Pedagogy (Csibra & Gergely, 2006; 2009, in press)

- A human-specific, cue-driven social cognitive adaptation of mutual design dedicated to ensure efficient transfer of relevant cultural knowledge
- Humans are predisposed to ‘teach’ and ‘learn’ new and relevant cultural information from each other
- Human communication is specifically adapted to allow the transmission of
  - a) cognitively opaque cultural knowledge
  - b) kind-generalizable generic knowledge
  - c) shared cultural knowledge
The signals whereby an agent makes manifest to an addressee her communicative intention: to manifest some new relevant information for the addressee (i.e. her informative intention).

Infants display species-specific sensitivity to, and preference for, some non-verbal ostensive behavioral signals (see Csibra, 2010, Csibra & Gergely, 2009 for reviews).

Examples of ostensive communication cues
- eye-contact
- turn-taking contingent reactivity
- special tone (‘motherese’)
The Pedagogical Stance is triggered by Ostensive-Communicative cues

- Ostensive cues have **in common**
  - Infant **recognized as a self**
  - Paid special attention to (**noticed as an agent**) 

- Ostensive cues function to trigger:
  - Open channel to knowledge about social and personally relevant world (CULTURE)
  - Go beyond the specific experience and acquire knowledge relevant in many settings
  - Triggers opening of an epistemic superhighway for knowledge acquisition
Ostensive cues ➔ referential expectation in infant

- 6-month-olds followed an agent’s gaze-shift to one of two objects but only when it had been preceded by either eye contact or infant-directed speech (ostensive signals) addressed to the infant (Senju and Csibra, 2008).

- An automated eye-tracker based study used an infant-induced contingent reactivity paradigm to demonstrate that 8-month-olds gaze follow an unfamiliar object’s bodily orientation response towards one of two targets, but only when the object had been reacting contingently before (producing self-propelled body movements such as tilting) to being looked at by the infant (Deligianni et al., 2011).
Experimental illustration of ostensive cues
Gergely, Egyed et al. (in press)

Subjects: 4 groups of 18-month-olds
Stimuli: Two unfamiliar objects
1: Baseline – control group
No object-directed attitude demonstration

Simple Object Request by Experimenter A

Subjects: n= 20 Age: 18-month-olds
Ostensive Communicative Demonstration
Requester: OTHER person (Condition 1)
Learning from Attitude Expressions

18-month-olds

Ostensive Expression - Generalization
Non-Ostensive (Non-Communicative) Demonstration
Requester: OTHER person (Condition 2)
Learning from Attitude Expressions

18-month-olds

Ostensive Expression - Generalization

Non-Ostensive Expression - No Generalization

Percent Giving Positive Object

71

40
Condition 4: Non-Ostensive (Non-Communicative) Demonstration Requester: **SAME** person
Learning from Attitude Expressions

18-month-olds

Ostensive Expression - Generalization

Non-Ostensive Expression - No Generalization

Non-Ostensive Expression - Person-Specific Attribution

Egyed et al., in prep.
Epistemic trust and secure attachment

- **Secure attachment** is created by a system that also induces a sense of **epistemic trust** that the information relayed by the teacher may be trusted (i.e. learnt from)

- **Evidence**
  - Cognitive **advantage** of secure attachment
  - **Contingent** responsiveness to the infant’s own (at first, automatic) expressive displays in secure attachment
  - During **“mirroring” interactions**, the other will “mark” her referential emotion displays in a ‘manifestative’ manner to instruct the infant
How Attachment Links to Affect Regulation

The forming of an attachment bond

Down Regulation of Emotions

BONDING

EPISTEMIC

TRUST
Social Cues that Create Epistemic Trust

- **Attachment** is special condition for generating epistemic trust
  - Generally any communication marked by recognition of the listener as intentional agent will increase epistemic trust and likelihood of communication being coded as
    - Relevant
    - Generalizable
    - To be retained in semantic memory

- **Influential** communicators
  - use ostensive cues to maximum
  - create ‘illusion’ of recognizing agentiveness of listener
    - Looking at audience
    - Addressing current concern
    - Communicating that they see problem from agent’s perspective
    - Seeing Recognizing individual struggle in understanding

- Massive difference in ability of individuals to influence (teachers, politicians, managers) explicable in terms of varying capacity to generate epistemic trust
Meta-analytic studies of teacher effectiveness

- John Hattie is Professor of Education at the University of Auckland, New Zealand.
- 15 years research and synthesises over 800 meta-analyses relating to the influences on achievement in school-aged students.
- Builds a story about the power of teachers and of feedback, and constructs a model of learning and understanding.
- Is there a set of predictors to good teaching outcomes based on:
  - The child?
  - The home?
  - The school?
  - The curricula?
  - The teacher?
  - The approaches to teaching?
Meta-analytic studies of teacher effectiveness

Things that do not work:

- Mobility (shifting schools) -0.34
- Television -0.14
- Summer vacation -.09
- Ability grouping 0.10
- Ability grouping .10
- Individualized instruction .20
- Homework .30
What makes a teacher most effective?

- It is teachers seeing learning through the eyes of students; and students seeing teaching as the key to their ongoing learning.

The key ingredients are:

- **Awareness of** the learning intentions
- Knowing when a student is (feels) successful
- Having sufficient understanding of the student’s understanding
- **Know enough** about the content to provide meaningful and challenging experiences

**Passion** that reflects the **thrills** as well as awareness of the **frustrations** of learning.
Implications: A mechanism of change

- *Mentalizing* (seeing behavior in terms of mental states) entails **collaboration**
  - Seeing from **other’s perspective**
  - Treating the **other as a person**
  - Recognizing them as an **agent**
  - Assuming they **have things to teach you** – since mental states are opaque
Implications: The nature of psychopathology

- Social adversity (most deeply **trauma**) is the destruction of trust in social knowledge of all kinds → **rigidity**, being **hard to reach**

- Cannot change because **cannot accept** new information **as relevant** (to generalize) to other social contexts

- **Personality disorder** is not disorder of personality (except by old definition of being enduring) but **inaccessibility to cultural communication** from
  - Partner
  - Therapist
  - Teacher

  } Epistemic Mistrust
Implications: The nature of psychopathology

- **Epistemic mistrust follows** experiences of maltreatment or abuse
  - Therapists ignore this knowledge at their peril
- Personality disorder is a **failure of communication**
  - It is not a failure of the individual but a **failure of a relationship**
  - It is associated with an **unbearable sense of isolation** in the client generated by epistemic mistrust
  - Our inability to communicate with client causes **frustration in us** and a tendency to **blame the victim**
  - We feel they are not listening but actually it is that they find it **hard to trust** the truth of what they hear
Implications: The nature of psychotherapy

- **Mentalizing** patients may be a **common factor to** psychotherapy **not** because we need **to learn about** our **minds** to learn about those of others.

- **Mentalizing is** a generic way of establishing **epistemic trust and achieving change**
  
  - Our subjectivity being understood is necessary **key to open up** wish to learn about world including social world.
  
  - Open a key biological route to information transmission and possibility of change **epistemic super-highway**
  
  - Experience of **feeling thought** about makes us feel **safe** enough to **think about social world**
Implications: The nature of psychotherapy

Therapy is not just about the **what** but the **how** of learning:

- **Opening the person’s mind** via establishing **epistemic trust (collaboration)** so he/she can once again trust the social world by changing expectations.

- It is **not just what is taught** in therapy that teaches, but the evolutionary **capacity for learning from social situation** is rekindled.

- **CAMHS interventions** are effective because they open the child to **social learning experience** which then feed back in virtuous cycle.
Psychotherapy may be effective for two reasons

- Learning **content** → by focusing on **trustworthy aspects of context**
  - We may have some **wisdom** that is worth communicating
  - Once epistemic superhighway is open the client can learn from us

- Learning about **sources of knowledge** → by providing a clear **social illustration of trust** we undo epistemic isolation
  - By using **ostensive cues** and establishing a sense that we are concerned to see the **world from the client’s standpoint** we model a situation of interpersonal trust
  - **Improved understanding** of social situation → Leads to better understanding of attachment figure → more trusting (less paranoid) interpersonal relationships → it opens up the potential to feeling sensitively responded to in **virtuous cycle**
Implications: Learning beyond therapy

What is the process at work:

- **Limitless** therapies - 1,246 different ways to understand

- But each model capable to provide a **content to treatment** that makes person feel understood

- The **rationale** of the treatment and the **model** of pathology and the model of **therapeutic** effect gives the treatment the content to create the process

- Mentalizing by itself is not a realistic therapy – it does not tell the therapist what to focus on, **just focusing** the patient **on their thoughts** and those of others around them **will not achieve change**

- Improvement based on learning from **experience** beyond therapy
Implications: Learning beyond therapy

- **The specific frame of the therapy** around which mentalizing occurs
  - the model of mind,
  - the model of interaction,
  - the model of underlying dysfunction,
  - the model of therapeutic goals

- The enhancing of mentalizing is also a common factor that achieves **improved social relationships**

- Improved sense of epistemic trust enables **learning from experience** ➔ change due to what happens beyond CAMHS

- The **enhancing of epistemic trust** may be achieved by treatment but also a consequence of improved social relationships and consequent on what happened in the social world.
Gaps in Therapy Outcomes Research

- No solid evidence for **who will benefit** from what type of psychotherapy

- ‘**Inexact therapies**’ → partial effectiveness

- ‘Attachment to methods’ → ‘**guildification**’ of interventions
To Sum Up
Getting comfortable in the social world

Adapting to the social world is a steep learning curve
Getting comfortable in the social world

For example, it is not obvious what is the true function of all the objects we use.
Getting comfortable in the social world

Luckily, humans have evolved to teach and learn from each other quickly and efficiently…
Getting comfortable in the social world

-..quickly and efficiently if certain conditions are met...
Getting comfortable in the social world

...but this special interpersonal channel for learning about the social world is not always tuned in.
Tuning in to the interpersonal channel

When there is abuse, there is no trust; the mind is blocked and it is impossible to move forward.
Trust opens up the social communication superhighway, enabling us to learn and change... and they will tune in to you!

Win the other person’s trust by responding contingently to their feelings and thoughts, showing them that you are hearing and thinking about what’s going on in their mind...
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