“Epistemic trust and attachment: A fresh look at therapeutic processes in personality disorder.”

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The things I feel proud of
(just showing off, not relevant so you don’t need to listen!)
Some of the Mentalizing Family

- UCL/AFC/Tavistock
  - Prof George Gergely
  - Professor Pasco Fearon
  - Professor Mary Target
  - Prof Anthony Bateman

- University of Leuven
  - Dr Patrick Luyten
  - Dr Liz Allison
  - Professor Alessandra Lemma
  - Professor Eia Asen
  - Dr Trudie Rossouw
  - Dr Dickon Bevington

Dr Dickon Bevington
And European recruits to the ‘Family’

- Dr Dawn Bales
- Prof Martin Debané
- Professor Svenja Taubner
- Dr Tobi Nolte
- Professor Finn Skårderud
- Professor Sigmund Karterud
- Dr Chloe Campbell
- Dr Peter Fuggle

• Prof Miriam Steele
• Dr Rudi Vermote

Prof. Howard Steele
Dr Joleien Zevalkink
Dr Bjorn Philips
More Family Members (The USA branch)

- **Menninger Clinic/Baylor Medical College/U Laval/Harvard**
  - Dr Jon Allen
  - Dr Lane Strathearn
  - Dr Karin Ensink
  - Dr Read Montague

- **Yale Child Study Centre**
  - Prof Linda Mayes

- **UCL & Catholic University, Santiago**
  - Dr Carla Sharp
  - Dr Efrain Bleiberg
  - Professor Lois Choi-Kain
  - Dr Elisabeth Newlin
  - Nicolas Lorenzini
The journey from attachment to communication
A working definition of mentalization

Mentalizing is a form of **imaginative** mental activity, namely, perceiving and interpreting human behaviour in terms of *intentional* mental states (e.g. needs, desires, feelings, beliefs, goals, purposes, and reasons).
Articles Published Citing Papers About Mentalizing or Mentalization

Google Ngram of “mentalization”

Google’s Ngram Viewer shows the percentage a word is present in a corpus of 5.2 million books published from the years 1500 to 2008.

Source: Google Ngram Viewer
A Treatise

on

Headache and Neuralgia,

including

Spinal Irritation and a Disquisition on Normal and Morbid Sleep.

By

J. Leonard Corning, M.A., M.D.,

Consultant in Nervous Diseases to St. Francis Hospital; Fellow of the New York Academy of Medicine; Member of the New York Neurological Society; &c.

Author of

“A Treatise on Hysteria and Epilepsy,” “Local Anesthesia,” “Brain Rest,” etc.

1890.

Price $2.75.

Indispensable requisite to the decline of cerebral metamorphosis.

As to the more intimate nature of the metamorphosis incident to cerebration, but little is known with certainty. Hammond has conducted a series of careful urinal analyses, for the purpose of ascertaining the changes in the composition of the urine incident to increased mentalization. From these experiments he is led to draw the following conclusions:

(1.) That increased mental exertion augments the quantity of urine.

(2.) That, by its influence, the urea, chlorine, and phosphoric and sulphuric acids are increased in quantity.

(3.) That the uric acid, on the contrary, is very materially reduced in amount.

(4.) That diminished intellectual exertion produces effects directly contrary to all the above.

More recently, Byasson has demonstrated that the amount of cerebral expenditure is increased.

Moreover, that phosphates secreted from the urine are eliminated from the system of phos- phorus, as is shown by the tests of phosphorus, when a series of mental exercises are performed. For a more detailed account of these experiments than is admissible in a work of this character, see my monograph on “Brain Exhaustion,” D. Appleton & Co., New York.
Some Free Publicity

NEW! SLIGHTLY IMPROVED!

RECENTLY RELEASED!

Washes brains whiter!

But hurry! Only 2,000 copies left!

Longer than the previous version!

Oxford University Press, PLC
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.
Our sense of **self & capacity for self-regulation** are acquired through **interpersonal interaction**.

Caregiver’s **marked mirroring of baby’s constitutional self-states** enables him to begin to **form representations of his experience**, laying the foundation for mentalizing.
Criticisms of attachment theory

From psychoanalysis: “mechanistic”
“reductionistic”
“no real metapsychology”
“broad classifications that lose the subtlety and detail of the original material”

From anthropology: “culturally blind”
“socially oblivious”
“misses different family configurations, e.g., alloparenting”
“empirically based on WEIRD people”

WEIRD: Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich & Democratic
Rethinking the **centrality** of attachment in developmental psychopathology

PDs are **enduring behaviors**; their features include an **intrapersonal component** (dysregulation of arousal, impulse, and affect), an **interpersonal component** (dysfunctional relationship patterns), and a **social component** (which creates conflicts with others and with social institutions). Attachment theory accounts for these characteristics of PDs and provides an ideal standpoint to understand these disorders, integrating psychological, psychiatric, genetic, developmental, neuroscientific, and clinical perspectives.

OK! ATTACHMENT IS NOT EVERYTHING!
Attachment not universal: Historically childhood is a state of enduring murderous abuse and brutality

(Ariès, 1973; Stone, 1977)

Infanticide in 19\textsuperscript{th} C Milan was 30-40\% (Marten, 2010)

Women living in extremely deprived conditions in Brazilian ghettos, allowing the death of their infants with apparently little sorrow, but become loving mothers to subsequent children or to children who they previously gave up on as hopeless cases, but appear to go on to survive

Different social environment are likely to trigger different attachment styles as more adaptive
Sensitivity is biologically a group phenomenon

- Use of the sensitivity **construct restricted to single-caregiver** observations (predominantly mother–infant interactions)

- **Non-Western** communities have simultaneous **multiple caregiving without clear place-bound or time-bound task division** (Hrdy, 1992)

- Need to **assess** the **caregiver network’s sensitive responsiveness** to the infant when simultaneous **multiple caregiving** is the norm (Mesman et al., 2016)

  - **Being responded to sensitively** most of the time by many people **fosters trust in** the availability of the **entire network ➔ secure attachment is to a system** rather than an individual
‘The universal socialization task for cultures regarding attachment concerns the learning of trust, not ensuring the “secure” attachment of an individual child to a single caregiver in a dyadic relationship. The question that is important for many, if not most, parents and communities is not, “Is [this individual] child ‘securely attached?’”, but rather, “How can I ensure that my child knows whom to trust and how to share appropriate social connections to others? How can I be sure my child is with others and situations where he or she will be safe.”

Thomas S. Weisner, 2014
A historical overview of shifting frames

Changing one’s favourite instinct:

- Up to age 40: The psychosexual AND aggression instinct – Freud and classical psychoanalysis
- Age 40-60: The instinct for attachment – Bowlby, Ainsworth and early infant researchers
  - Attachment theory extended to mentalizing can encompass:
    - Sexuality – failure of early mirroring
    - Aggression – failure of affect regulation and impact awareness
- Age 60 to †: The instinct for communication – Tomasello, Gergely, and modern developmental research
  - Communication defines attachment relationships
    - Secure attachment ensures capacity to learn from experience
Attachment is not everything…but it is

- Early attachment has **limited predictive power**
  - Poor prediction from **early attachment to later attachment**
  - **Later unfolding** of **genetic** endowment (Fearon, 2013)
  - **Attachment styles** change in **adaptation to genes and environment** (Roisman, 2007; Pinquart, 2013)
  - Poor prediction from **early attachment to later problems**

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**Attachment is associated with** rather than causing **psychopathology**

Mental disorder can be conceptualised as **impairments in the capacity of the individual for social learning** expressed in terms of **epistemic trust vs. epistemic hypervigilance or freezing**

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**Attachment relationships provide the sufficient conditions for epistemic trust**

From attachment to communication: via socio-biology
The theory of natural pedagogy and epistemic trust (Gergely & Csibra, 2008; Fonagy & Allison, 2014)

- New form of evolution (late Pleistocene) based on learning and the transmission of cultural knowledge
As soon as you need to create tools to make tools the process of tool-making becomes, distanced from its ultimate function, opaque in its intent and necessitates communication.
How do young humans learn to use the bewildering array of tools that surround them efficiently?
Five distinctive features of a CULTURE
(Whitehead & Rendell “The Cultural Lives of Whales and Dolphins”)

- A characteristic **technology** that engenders

- A **moral component**, with rules that buttress “the way we do things” and punishments for infraction that creates

- An acquired, not innate, distinction between **insiders** and **outsiders** that permits

- A **cumulative character** that builds up over time that necessitates

- **Teaching** and learning that requires

- Epistemic **vigilance**
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- New form of evolution (late Pleistocene) based on learning and the transmission of cultural knowledge
- The challenge of discerning of epistemic trustworthiness and the need for **EPISTEMIC VIGILANCE!**
- The pedagogic stance is **triggered** by **ostensive** communicative cues (E.G. turn-taking contingent reactivity, eye contact)
- Ostensive cues have **in common**
  - Person **recognized** as a self
  - Paid special attention to (**noticed** as an agent)
Innate Sensitivity to Contingency
Ostensive cues function to trigger epistemic trust:

- Opening channel to receive knowledge about social and personally relevant world (CULTURE)
- Going beyond the specific experience and acquire knowledge relevant in many settings
- Triggers opening of an evolutionarily protected epistemic channel for knowledge acquisition

Mimicry may be protected by human evolution because it generates epistemic trust

- Social smile (recognition of self) increases imitation because smile generates epistemic trust and opens channel to receive knowledge
Experimental illustration of ostensive cues

Gergely, Egyed et al. (2013)

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.
Social Cues that Create Epistemic Trust

- **Attachment to** person who responded **sensitively** in early development is **special condition** for generating epistemic trust ➔ **cognitive** advantage of security ➔ including neural development (Van Ijzendoorn et al.)

- 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 **memory as relevant**

- Feeling **contingently responded to** (mentalized) is the **quintessential ostensive cue** and therefore the **primary biological signal** that it is **safe to learn**
Individuals differ in the extent they are able to generate epistemic trust.
Individual Differences in Creating Epistemic Trust

- **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 and recognizing individual **struggle in understanding**

- Massive **difference in ability** of individuals to influence (teachers, politicians, managers, therapists) explicable in terms of varying capacity to **generate epistemic trust**
Knowledge experienced as relevant & generalizable
Communicating without ostensive cueing…

…will be experienced as irrelevant
KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER BLOCKED
When the speaker uses ostensive cues...

...audience hear message as relevant to them.
What you want to communicate
What they are interested in
What you want to communicate

What they are interested in
What you want to communicate

What they are interested in

RAPID, EFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER
Meta-analytic studies of teacher effectiveness

- John Hattie is Professor of Education at the University of Auckland, New Zealand.
- 15 years research and synthesizes over 800 meta-analytic studies 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?

With grateful thanks to Dr Peter Fuggle
Meta-analytic studies of teacher effectiveness

• What makes a teacher the most effective?
  – It is teachers seeing learning through the eyes of students

• The key ingredients are:
  – Awareness of the learning intentions
  – Knowing when a student is successful
  – Having sufficient understanding of the student’s understanding

• Passion that reflects the thrills as well as awareness of the frustrations of learning.

With grateful thanks to Dr Peter Fuggle
Therapist is greatest source of variance in psychotherapy outcome (Wampold et al. 2016)

Odds of a clinical episode in MBT by therapist

6 months periods

Therapist A
Therapist B
Therapist C
Therapist D
Therapist E
Therapist F
Individuals differ in the extent they are able to experience epistemic trust: The impact of maltreatment
Sensitive caregiving

Caregiver’s mentalizing of the infant acts as the prototypical ostensive cue

Which enables...

This lays the foundations for...

Learning channel opens (selectively)

Mentalizing

Successful navigation of social world

Learning from & about others

Learning about the world

Secure attachment

Epistemic trust

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Maltreatment and the failure of epistemic trust

- An abusive or neglectful caregiving environment (the child is not mentalized)
  - Ostensive cues are either absent or undermined by fear or confusion
  - Epistemic vigilance is not relaxed
- Epistemic mistrust (hypervigilance) develops
  - adults’ mind is not considered as a benign or reliable source of knowledge (deferential source – Sperber)
  - possible adult hatred, sadism, fear or indifference ➔ safer not to think about the caregiver’s mental states at all
Maltreatment and the failure of epistemic trust

- Once **epistemic trust is damaged** and the mind is partially **closed to processing new information**:
  - Access to exploring **different ways** of behaving and responding becomes **highly restricted**:
- The presentation of **fresh information cannot be internalized** as personally relevant or meaningful:
  - Knowledge (including social knowledge) is **not updated**:
  - A subjective sense of being ‘**stuck in isolation**’ is created.
- Impaired epistemic trust serves to severely **diminish learning and therefore also responsiveness to psychotherapeutic intervention**.
Early maltreatment hinders associative learning

The world is not a rewarding place

- 41 adolescents exposed to childhood physical abuse
- 40 adolescents with no history of maltreatment

Hanson, JL., et al. (2017). The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry
I hear you but I'm not listening.
In all 3 cases, the individual struggles to learn effectively about either self or world.

Learning channel is closed, indiscriminately open or both by turns.

Ostensive cues are not processed, were absent or misleading.

Mentalizing difficulties with ostensive social cues

- Problems in learning from others
- Problems in adapting to social world
- Insecure/disorganized attachment
- Excessive credulity
- Epistemic dilemma
- Absence of epistemic trust
- Neglect/attachment trauma
- Epistemic hyper-vigilance

Ostensive cues are not processed, were absent or misleading.
ADAPTIVE MENTALIZATION-BASED INTEGRATIVE TREATMENT:
A GUIDE FOR TEAMS TO DEVELOP SYSTEMS OF CARE

Dickon Bevington, Peter Fuggle, Liz Cracknell, and Peter Fonagy
Thank you for bearing with us.
The e-mail for the slides is:

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