

WHAT IS MENTALIZING? AN OVERVIEW

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This paper attempts to summarize the evolution of interest in the concept of mentalization which has been researched and enriched by the linking of many disciplines alongside that of psychoanalysis and attachment theory. Taking into account the work of Professors Fonagy and Target and many others, the paper describes factors that enable the development of the capacity to mentalize and those that interfere. It will consider how the quality of attachment affects the transformation of pre-mentalized modes of experience to the recognition of psychic reality of self and other. While mentalizing is part and parcel of all therapies, a mentalization-based therapy was developed in the context of treatment of borderline personality disorder patients by Professors Bateman and Fonagy. The paper will illustrate key concepts in the theory of mentalization with the vignette taken from clinical practice.

KEY WORDS: MENTALIZING, EVOLUTIONARY THEORY, NEUROSCIENCE, AGENTIVE SELF, CONTINGENT MARKED MIRRORING, TELEOLOGICAL MODE, PSYCHIC EQUIVALENCE, PRETEND MODE

In this paper I hope to be able to convey the essence of the contribution of Professors Fonagy and Target and many others in the USA and Europe to the development of the concept of mentalization over the past 25 years. In an attempt to do justice to their work, I have focused on three aspects. In the first I will consider the emergence of the concept of mentalization in the French Psychoanalytic School. The second will focus on the emergence of mentalizing and the birth of the agentive self taking into consideration allied disciplines such as evolutionary science and neuroscience. The third part will address the emergence of modes of thinking that pre-date mentalizing and the re-emergence of these modes in the context of interpersonal relationships with emphasis on borderline phenomena. I will illustrate these ideas with a vignette taken from clinical practice.

Another aspect of the aim of this paper concerns the unconscious and mentalization. I hope that it will be clear that I am describing the multi-layered nature of human subjective experience influenced by unconscious internal working models (Fonagy & Campbell, 2015, p. 233) which inevitably steer us through life in spite of near perfect mentalization skills.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY OF THE CONCEPT

Pierre Marty and Pierre Luquet started to think about mentalization as a psychoanalytic concept in France in the 1960s. Professor Fonagy and colleagues have made great strides in developing the concept further. I will give a definition from the French school as well as a definition from current thinking about mentalization.

French theorists propose to explain 'mentalization as referring to a general class of mental operations, including representation and symbolization, which specifically lead to the transformation and elaboration of drive-affects experiences into increasingly organised mental phenomena and structures' (Lecours & Bouchard, 1997, p. 858).

These writers give an example of what is meant by elaboration which I will quote in full:

all psychic contents can be situated on a continuum of increasing 'mental' quality, for example between the poles of somatisation and insight. For instance, anxiety can be actualised and experienced as a somatic lesion (an ulcer), as a bodily activation (increased heart rate), as a motor activity (walking to and fro) or as a dream imagery (a fallen tooth); it may be owned and expressed as a felt emotion (the feeling of anxiety), then repressed and eventually, although obviously only partly if at all, worked through as an insightful construction (fear of competition with a father-figure: castration anxiety) (Lecours & Bouchard, 1997, p. 857).

In somatoform complaints, the psychic elaboration enabled by the mentalizing capacity is kept at a primary level in a 'body-mind-body circuit' (Gaddini, 1982, p. 382). The dimensions of the concept of mentalization are concerned with the quantity and quality of psychic representations constituting the basis of mental life with somatization at one end and verbal thought at the other end (Marty, 1991, p. 11) or from concrete to symbolic thinking. Mentalizing is thought of as the 'immune system' of the psyche (Lecours & Bouchard, 1997, p. 857). Deficiencies in the ability to mentalize are thought to be the consequence of the 'excess, or lack, or disharmony of the affective responses of the mother towards her child' (Marty, 1991, p. 22, my translation).

Fonagy and colleagues, informed by Theory of Mind, have defined mentalizing as 'imaginatively perceiving and interpreting behaviour of oneself and others as conjoined with intentional mental states, shorthand for which is "holding mind in mind"' (Bateman *et al.*, 2012, p. 514).

Theory of mind means that we have a sense that we behave the way we do because of memory, emotions, desires, attributions, intentions and beliefs; in other words because of our intentional mental states *and* that other people behave the way they do because of their intentional mental states.

Fonagy and colleagues point to the centrality of the early attachment relationship and the quality of attunements that enables the infant to find his mind and the mind of the other. While the French definition gives a good description of the elaboration of

mentalizing towards explicit mentalizing – reflecting on feelings and thoughts and putting them into words, the contemporary definition adds an important aspect which is the implicit, intuitive form of mentalizing – having a sense of other people's feelings (Allen *et al.*, 2008, p. 27).

The mentalizing model is a new paradigm in the sense that it integrates evolutionary science, neurosciences, psychoanalysis, attachment theory and developmental psychology.

AN EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE

The Embodied Self and Subjectivity

Our organism as all organisms is orientated to its own survival. For neuroscientists such as Panksepp and Damasio, the 'urge to self' is in very ancient parts of our brain (Ravven, 2013, chapter 8). For Damasio, the urge to self and survival is dependent on 'basic homeostasis'. Basic homeostasis is the aim of each living organism. Damasio (2010, p. 8) suggests 'two stages of evolutionary development of the self': the first stage concerns the self-as-object and the second the self-as-subject-and-knower that comes over the top of the self-as-object.

The self-as-object is occupied with basic homeostasis, reacting to neural and chemical activity in the body and in the brain, sending signals back and forth, composing patterns representing things and events located in the body or in the external world. The term *map* applies to all representational patterns (Damasio, 2010, p. 18). Body and brain maps give rise to subjectivity, the generation of primordial feelings, and are the foundation of conscious mind and cognition. Dependence of the human infant on caregivers for a prolonged period of time means that body and brain mapping is achieved in the context of the attachment relationship and also that experiences in early attachment are represented in brain and body maps. The first mental processes, the psychic representatives of the bodily impulses and feelings evolved out of a multi-layered sensory emotional and enacted experience with the primary object (Fonagy & Target, 2007b, p. 423).

The second stage of the development of the self-as-subject-and-knower is an extraordinary leap. According to Damasio, the increased activity in an increasingly social world ushered in a new level of homeostasis which he terms 'sociocultural homeostasis' (Damasio, 2010, p. 27). He says 'Sociocultural homeostasis is created and guided by reflective conscious minds' (p. 27). To adapt and survive in a potentially frightening milieu requires conscious reflection and planning of action (p. 291). It is a distinct advantage to have social cognition, to know about one's own and others' thoughts, beliefs and feelings so that we predict others' behaviour and make decisions and regulate ourselves. The material 'me' becomes the 'social' me (p. 23).

In evolutionary terms the human is understood to be an organism seeking homeostasis and in particular within the attachment relationship. The brain has evolved as a means of processing social interaction. It has become the social brain with representational patterns enabling social cognition.

A NEUROSCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVE

The Pre-frontal Cortex

The pre-frontal cortices are a relatively new achievement in the evolutionary journey of the brain and the pre-frontal cortices develop at great speed in the first few years of a human's life through neuron activity.

Damasio (1994) found that damage to the prefrontal cortices of the brain compromises reasoning/decision-making, and emotion/feeling, especially in the personal and social domain. Areas of the pre-frontal cortex are associated with affect regulation systems, sensitivity to social cues and decreased levels of stress and decreased social avoidance. Problems arising in early attachment relationships, such as insecure or disorganized attachment, will compromise the maturation of the pre-frontal cortex resulting in a deficit in social cognition and emotional regulation (Schore, 2001, p. 312). This deficit in the ability to reflect or mentalize emotional states in self and others leaves the individual vulnerable to overwhelming somatic and visceral sensation, a disintegration of self-representations and the collapse of internalized representations of the external world (Schore, 2001, p. 313). In human or mammal insecure attachment not only are the stress-reducing hormones not present but also the cortisol levels flood the brain and the stress response gets worse (Lyuten *et al.*, 2012, p. 392). Emotional regulation is affected, throwing the individual to instinctual modes of defences such as fight, flight or freeze responses activated in the earlier posterior brain. Under chronic or acute stressful situations, aggression to self or others or somatic illness or dissociative states are observable in all primates.

A PSYCHOANALYTIC, ATTACHMENT AND DEVELOPMENTAL
PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

Due to time limitations, I cannot survey the links to psychoanalytic thinking except to say that the mentalization model is firmly rooted in the object relations tradition, with emphasis on ideas of embodied cognition (Fonagy & Target, 2007b, p. 423) and in attachment theory. The notion of Bowlby's secure base and the proclivity of the child to form attachments for exploration and self enhancement are central to the theory of mentalization. Bowlby and developmental psychology have recognized that the infant 'enters the world predisposed to participate in social interaction' (Fonagy, 2001, p. 6).

It is important to state that from a mentalization perspective, the infant seeks relationships to self-regulate and find meaning. Early sensory and affective experience provides the ground for the development of the bodily and mental self.

Fonagy and Target propose 'a dialectical perspective of self-development [which] shifts the traditional psychoanalytical emphasis from internalization of the containing object to the internalisation of the thinking self from within the containing object' (1996, p. 230). Mother has a mental image of her infant. The infant seeks his image in the mind of Mother.

Evolutionary-based processes such as the to-and-fro of oxytocin between mother and baby, mirror neurons, imitation, the baby's innate ability to express and communicate affect, the natural inclination of the baby to seek eye contact, face to face interactions, the mother's characteristic intonation of infant-directed speech (motherese), the mother's ability to read her infant's emotional displays (Fonagy *et al.*, 2002, p. 155) are some of the factors that enable the development of a safe environment within which the infant can develop a sense of self as agent and learn about the self and the world.

THE BIRTH OF THE AGENTIVE SELF

The birth of the agentive self starts in the experience of the body and brain working together at achieving regulation and generating patterns of representations of things and events such as relational patterns. The agentive self relates to the experience of being a 'me' in a relationship (Fonagy *et al.*, 2002, p. 40) in its different aspects. This section will point to the development of the agentive self in relation to four important functions of the attachment relationship: contingent mirroring, contingent marked mirroring, the pedagogical stance and internal working models.

Contingent Mirroring

In the first two to three months of life, the baby, aiming at emotional regulation, seeks perfect contingency to develop a 'primary *representation of his bodily self* as a distinct object in the environment, by identifying what he is in control over' (Bateman & Fonagy, 2004, p. 60, emphasis in the original) – for example my hands move as I am looking at them, the mobile moves every time I kick it. Damasio (2010, p. 203) refers to this event as 'the momentary creation of the core self'. It is a necessary building block to subjectivity.

In the early attachment relationship the experience of the repeated contingent and mirroring affective responses of the mother to the infant's state provide the baby with the opportunity to learn that these responses have the effect of modulating and transforming his affect. The baby then is able to 'coordinate his behaviour with mother and to regulate his own behaviours' (Fonagy & Campbell, 2015, p. 236). The parent's contingent 'emotional expression is internalized and becomes "its" representation' (Fonagy *et al.*, 2002, p. 349). The infant's self as *self-regulating agent* is thought to be established when the infant has a sense of internal states, of the modulation and regulation of his own states as well as of his contribution to bringing about the regulating affect mirroring behaviour from the mother (Fonagy *et al.*, 2002, p. 220).

In experiencing himself as self-regulating agent, the infant has the experience of being in control rather than the control being located in the external world. The locus of control can be experienced as in other people or in the body, for example, that the body is the regulating agent when mentalizing fails. To illustrate the situation where the individual is unable to regulate her affect, I suggest an example of a person using the body to find contingency much as the baby strove to experience a contingent world within his or her own body before venturing out into the social world.

Emma, a young woman who is part of a therapy group for borderline personality disordered patients felt destabilized when she joined the group and suggested that each patient wrote a short biography of themselves so as to avoid being surprised and overwhelmed by other patients' disclosures. She has a tendency to reduce her intake of solid food, preferring fluids. During group sessions, she occasionally leaves for a short period, returning with the obvious sign of self harm. She has drawn blood by scratching her arm and covers it up with a mound of tissues which the group can't fail to notice.

Emma's mother was not emotionally available to her child from the moment of birth because of the mother's pathology. I would suggest that as a result of mother's inadequate provision of contingent responsiveness, Emma has not been able to build up a sense of self as regulating agent. There is a profound disorganization of self-development and specifically in her ability to mentalize (Fonagy *et al.*, 2002, p. 249). She is left with little or no sense of herself as regulating agent, with poor differentiation between self and other and a diffused sense of identity. She is desperate for the experience of contingency which her wounds and her makeshift bandage fulfil because they give her information about herself. Although the group is a source of anxiety, she looks to the group to give her a sense of what she is feeling. The locus of control is placed in the group and she seeks perfect contingent responses from it. Her control of food intake is also an attempt to regulate her internal states.

Contingent 'Marked' Mirroring

During the first year, facial and vocal mirroring of affective behaviour is a central feature of the parental affect-regulative interactions (Fonagy *et al.*, 2002, p. 156). By contingently mirroring the affect, the mother is holding her infant's mind in mind. The infant finds himself in the mind of the other. Describing early infant-mother interaction, Gergely and Watson (1996, p. 1197) have found that mirroring has to be more than contingent because if the affect is not 'marked', the infant will not be able to conceive of the affect as his or hers.

Contingent mirroring gives the baby an accurate representation of the state of his constitutional self, fostering the capacity to understand interaction in terms of mental states (Target & Fonagy, 1996, p. 460). When marking her mirroring, mother indicates that the feeling she is mirroring is not her feeling. Contingent marked mirroring allows the child to perceive his state as his and not that of his mother and to experience a sense of boundary between self and other. He gradually perceives that she has a mind and that he has a mind. Contingent marked mirroring can be seen as the royal road towards the development of the self as mental, representational and intentional agent.

While some aspects of the infant's affect displays such as those connected to sexuality or aggression may not have been marked mirrored because the mother may have difficulty mentalizing those aspects in herself (Fonagy & Campbell, 2015, p. 241), extremely insensitive and misattuned mirroring hinders the process of the

internalization of the representation of his internal state. The child is not able to experience himself as agent with another, his mother.

Young Emma has not been able to develop a sense of herself as a mental, representational and intentional agent. She does not have a sense of her states as mental states and does not know what she feels. She has not been able to develop a sense of the other as an agent with intentional mental states such as desires and beliefs and therefore does not have a sense of why people behave as they do.

The Pedagogical Stance

Alongside the marked contingent mirroring of the infant's internal states, the mother engages the infant in joint activities. Joint attention to the discovery of the world not only helps the baby to focus on various tasks together with the mind of the trusted other but also 'serves as a crucial epistemic function in enabling the infant to learn about the world' (Allen *et al.*, 2008, p. 83). Contingency and joint attention 'creates not only a sense of safety, but also a positively charged curiosity that fuels the burgeoning self's exploration of new socioemotional and physical environments' (Schore, 2001, p. 307). The mother's ability to stimulate her infant is central to the development of the epistemic function (Fonagy & Campbell, 2015). Joint engagement in the discovery of the world is crucial. A threat to the experience of joint attention such as loss, abandonment, trauma is devastating because the child would have the 'experience of the loss of the entire world that the infant and caregiver were in the process of constructing together' (Fonagy & Target, 2007a, p. 923).

It is perhaps too obvious to state that these crucial interactions described as contingent marked mirroring and the pedagogical stance are also crucial interactions in the psychotherapeutic relationship.

Internal Working Models

The experience of self exists only in the context of the other. The attachment system is connected with the process of mapping of second-order representations of the internal states of the infant as well as experiences of the attachment relationships with which internal working models are constructed (Fonagy *et al.*, 2002, p. 40). Internal working models are unconscious and 'more usefully construed as procedural memories, the function of which is to adapt social behaviour to specific interpersonal contexts' (p. 41). It is interesting to note that internal working models are not just a template for later relationships, but rather they determine the capacity to cope or manage intimate relationships. For example, disorganized attachment undermines the capacity to mentalize to develop with consequences on the depth at which a relationship can be processed and enjoyed (p. 7).

Most important in mentalizing work is to understand that the sense of self as thinking and feeling develops in relationship with others and that being able to hold one's own mind and other minds in mind is borne out of these relationships. Understanding the mental world is dependent on benign and reflective relationships in which early modes for representing psychic reality can be integrated.

MODES OF THINKING THAT PRE-DATE MENTALIZING

Modes of representing psychic reality that pre-date mentalizing help the child to make sense of the internal and external world. I will describe the teleological stance, the psychic equivalence mode and the pretend mode. These modes are integrated within the context of the attachment relationship into a unitary mode of representing psychic reality as mentalizing develops. However, pernicious failures of attuned mirroring do not allow for these early modes of representing psychic reality to be integrated. Moreover, there can be a re-emergence of these modes in emotionally intense relational contexts. Emma's presentation in the group will serve to illustrate these modes.

The Teleological Stance

At about 9 months of age, the infant discovers that he has impact on the world. His smiles, his cooing or complaints prompt mother and others to respond. This experience drives the process of bonding (Fonagy & Target, 2007b, p. 429). The infant develops a teleological stance (Fonagy *et al.*, 2002, p. 222). This stance has been referred to as the '9-month social-cognitive revolution' (p. 222). The teleological stance means that the infant is able to interpret actions as purposeful (I smile for the purpose of engaging you in play) and that when action is efficiently directed, there is a result (Allen *et al.*, 2008, p. 77). The infant is able to modify his action in order to bring about a favourable outcome. The outcome, however, is judged according to the concrete physical outcome. The infant has not yet developed theory of mind capacity to represent self and others' intentional states. This ability is also present in primates and in children with autism (Fonagy *et al.*, 2002, p. 237).

While chimpanzees have not (yet?) evolved beyond the teleological stance, the human child is developing a sense of his self as intentional agent. He is starting to sense that he is a person with thoughts, feelings, desires and beliefs which the mother has reflected back to him (Fonagy *et al.*, 2002, p. 348). He is increasingly curious about his mother's mind to make sense of her actions and to find his mind in her mind (p. 349). He is developing a theory of mind. The securely attached child becomes a self as representational agent.

Emma is functioning in a teleological mode in her perception and expression of her internal state. The self-harm behaviour is an action with a purpose. The action is the only possible way for her to restabilize herself because seeing her self-harming wounds is a way of knowing that she is in distress. Wounding herself is a teleological mode of providing to herself information about what her feelings are. As she returns to the group in a wounded way she feels better able to present something about herself which had eluded her earlier: a sense of what she feels. Now she feels she can engage with the group in seeking more information about what she is feeling.

Psychic Equivalence

In psychic equivalence mode, the child believes that what happens in the mind also happens in the physical world. Feelings and fantasies are experienced as reality and

not as mental states representing reality (Fonagy *et al.*, 2002, p. 199). Furthermore what is in the mind of the person in a psychic equivalence mode is thought to be known to the other. In infancy it is a reassuring way of experiencing the world but when the child experiences confusion or fear, the world becomes very frightening (Fonagy & Target, 2007a, p. 926).

For Emma, other people's thoughts and feelings and words in the group make her feel bad. They are experienced as concrete things that threaten her fragile sense of self. Asking for short biographies from members of the group is an attempt, in the teleological mode, at feeling more in control by avoiding anything unpredictable.

Similarly, Emma's avoidance of solid foods is an example of psychic equivalence. Solid foods bring discomfort and it feels bad. Because solid foods make her feel bad, it means that they are bad so they are avoided. In the psychic equivalence mode solid foods threaten to overwhelm her so relying on fluids only is an attempt at self-regulation.

Pretend Mode

In pretend mode, the child is able to seek refuge away from the psychic equivalence mode where everything feels too real (Target & Fonagy, 1996, p. 471). The child enters the world of 'pretend' as a means of constructing his own world, where he imagines, he arranges things just as he wants them to be, and he plays. At those moments, the child's play is real to him, his teddy *is* his friend but the child is also dimly aware of the 'as if' quality of his play. In contrast with the experience of psychic reality in the psychic equivalence mode where things feel all too real, 'the child's understanding of mental states as representations is greater while in "pretend" mode' (p. 465).

For the child, pretend mode is a healthy disconnection of the internal world from the external because the experience of the external world in psychic equivalence mode is felt to be too threatening. The adult who joins in with his play and is able to 'hold the frame of external reality while accurately re-presenting the child's mental state' (p. 472) facilitates the transition towards the integration of the two prementalized modes (psychic equivalence and pretend) of experiencing psychic reality and the development of the capacity to mentalize.

Emma's failure to mentalize is compounded by the persistence of the undifferentiated psychic equivalence mode and pretend mode of representing external and internal experience (Fonagy & Target, 2000, p. 853). In an attempt to survive unbearable internal states within a group that she experiences in psychic equivalence mode (threatening her with emotional contagion), she dissociates. Fonagy and Target suggest that 'a key part of dissociation as a phenomenon is the re-emergence of the pretend mode, the mode in which the very young child fully enters a separate psychic world, and cannot simultaneously maintain contact with ordinary reality' (p. 864). Hence she disconnects from her experience of the group as threatening and, although her dissociation allows her temporarily to have an experience of the group as benign

and containing, it also leaves her feeling lost and empty because the experience of the group as benign and containing is disconnected from ordinary reality.

SEEKING MINDS – CLOSING MINDS

It is important to say that factors such as genetic factors, trauma and stress interfere with the development of mentalization. In this paper I have focused on the development of the ability to mentalize in the context of a secure early attachment relationship and have illustrated how pernicious gaps in mentalizing arise from insensitive and misattuned mirroring and its consequences. Unlabelled, confusing and uncontained affect generates further dysregulation of affect. The child cannot build up second-order representations of his constitutional self. The traumatized child cannot think about the mind of the perpetrator and rejects mentalization with further negative consequences on the development of the capacity to mentalize (Fonagy & Target, 2000, p. 858).

A failure of attuned mirroring of ‘the infant’s constitutional self creates a desperation for meaning, and a willingness to take in reflections from the other that do not map on to anything within the child’s own experience’ (Fonagy & Target, 2000, p. 865). ‘The internalized other remains alien and unconnected to the constitutional self’ (Fonagy *et al.*, 2002, p. 11).

Not being able to make sense of his internal world, the person has to renew his efforts to seek contingent responses from the external world to find meaning about his internal states and to regulate his feelings. Scrutinizing the mind of mother and of others for information about himself is a question of survival. To defend against unbearable internal states connected to the alien, unconnected internalized representations of himself, the evacuation of intolerable states into significant others is his only means of achieving a sense of control over his experiences not only because of the relief associated with projections but also because the projection provides an important link to the external world: the recipient of the projection tends to act out feelings engendered by projections, hence providing information to the ‘projector’ about his internal states (Fonagy & Target, 2000, p. 859). The intensification of the attachment is accompanied with fear and hypervigilance. The consequences of impairment in mentalization and the persistence of undifferentiated modes of representing external and internal modes of experience lead to distortions in the perception of self and others. Real or perceived threats to the attachment relationship plunge the individual into despair because the other is a necessary container of his unbearable states and also is the potentially meaning-making other. The mind of the other is both sought and avoided because in a psychic equivalence mode, the mind of the other is a potential threat. This is a self-perpetuating pattern of relating with its devastating consequences on sustaining relationships.

Emma experiences unbearable internal states that she cannot make sense of. She seeks the group to tell her how she feels but, in the psychic equivalence mode, she feels that the group is pushing thoughts and feelings into her. It feels bad. She has developed several strategies in an attempt to stabilize herself. In the face of

overwhelming affect connected to her fear of minds, she rids herself of her fear and rage by massive projection into the group who is at risk of acting out the projection, she dissociates from her own and others' mental states which leaves her feeling empty and lost, she attempts to gain control over her internal states by self-harm and by controlling her own feeding.

The group is the container for unbearable internal states and is experienced as threatening, but the group is also potentially the source of information about how she feels. Emma positions herself emotionally inside of the group as, when a child, she may have positioned herself near to her mother, helpless, frightened and hypervigilant, desperately seeking herself in the mind of mother. The work of the group is to provide the container within which Emma can start to understand her own actions and those of others on the basis of mental states and to gradually build up a sense of her own experience (Fonagy & Target, 2007a, p. 928). Enactments are inevitable but each group member takes responsibility to keep their focus on reflecting on why people do things, on what goes on in people's minds.

CONCLUSION

Mentalizing is a remarkable evolutionary and developmental achievement. It is a process that we are continually engaged in whether implicitly or explicitly. The French psychoanalytic school envisaged levels of mentalization from the most concrete to the most creative symbolic expression. In this paper, I hope that I have presented the essential ingredients to understand the concept, namely the contribution of evolutionary theory as regards the development of humans as social beings, the importance of the search for contingent responses to achieve self-regulation and the significance of the concept of theory of mind as a major factor to the development of the mentalizing capacity. Mentalizing blends affect and affect cognition to maximize emotional regulation in the social world. But the development of the capacity to mentalize can be easily compromised; genetic factors, disorganized patterns of early attachment, trauma and stress can expose the person to impairments in the ability to recognize mental states in self and others. At those times, pre-mentalized modes of thinking come into effect and tend to push the person further into regression in an attempt to maximize contingency and restabilize the sense of self.

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