

Attachment and metacognitive capacities

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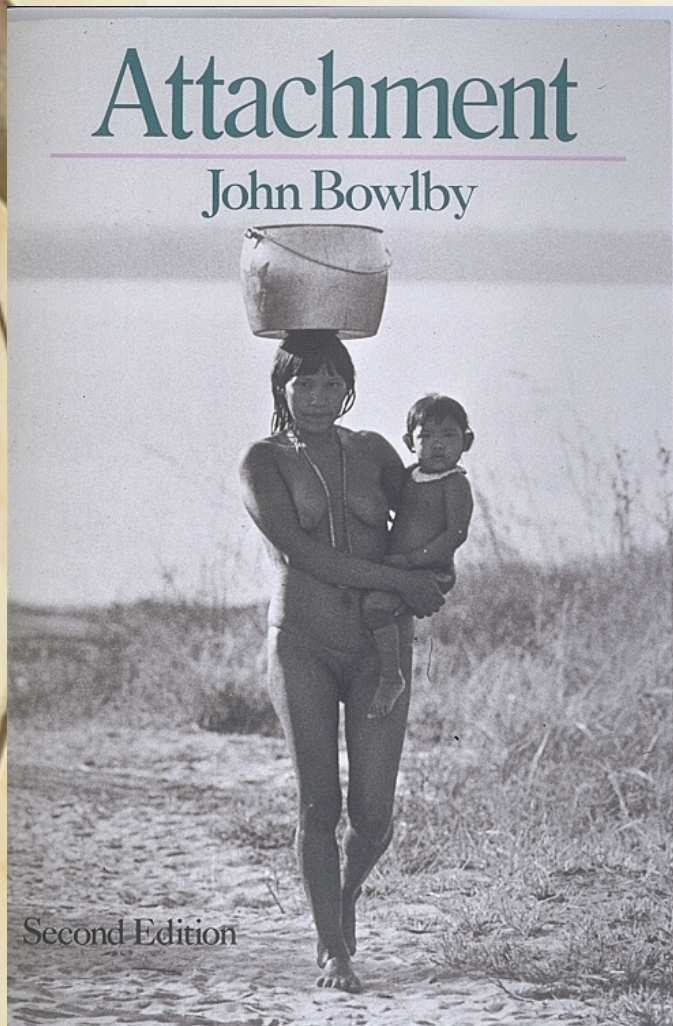
META
cognition

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- Attachment theory is a common ground for many different approaches in psychotherapy:
 - Psychodynamic
 - Cognitive psychotherapy


The extended role for early attachments



- *Attachment confers a selective advantage to humans by the opportunity it affords for the development of neurocognitive social capacities*
- *Evolution has charged attachment relationships to ensure the full development of the social brain*



How are attachment and metacognitive capacities related?

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- Metacognition was originally referred to as the *knowledge about and regulation of ones cognitive activities in learning processes*

○ Flavell, 1979; Brown, 1978

Or, in other words

- Metacognition essentially means **cognition about cognition**; that is, it refers to second order cognitions: thoughts about thoughts, knowledge about knowledge or reflections about actions. So if cognition involves perceiving, understanding, remembering, and so forth, then metacognition involves thinking about one's own perceiving, understanding, remembering, etc. These various cognitions about cognitions are labelled as META-something: “metaperception”, “metacomprehension” “metamemory”



At the beginning

- Flavell (2000) divides metacognitive theory into two areas of study:
 - knowledge
 - processes
- Metacognitive knowledge includes understanding of how minds work in general and how your own mind works in particular. The processes of planning, monitoring, and regulating thoughts are generally known as executive processes, which involve the interaction of two levels



. . .later

- Gradually, the concept has been broadened to include anything psychological, rather than just anything cognitive
- knowledge or cognition about one's own **emotions, motives**, states of mind in general
 - e.g. being aware of his anxiety while solving a problem in an exam paper



Proliferation of metacognitive terms. . .

- Metacognitive beliefs
- metacognitive awareness
- metacognitive experiences
- metacognitive knowledge
 - feeling of knowing
 - judgment of learning
 - theory of mind
 - metamemory
- metacognitive skills
 - executive skills
 - higher-order skills
 - metacomponents
- comprehension monitoring
 - learning strategies
 - heuristic strategies,
 - self-regulation

are several of the terms we commonly associate with metacognition



In the clinical field . . .

- Under the label of “metacognitive capacities” we can list
 - the awareness of self and others mental and emotional states
 - the availability of restricted/flexible emotion regulation strategies
 - the emotion dysregulation processes
 - the adequate/inadequate mental representation of interpersonal goals in social interaction
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Concepts as :

- Mentalization *
- Psychological Mindedness *
- Mindblindness
- Mindfulness *
- Emotion Regulation
- Emotional Intelligence
- Empathy *
- Affect Consciousness*

○ * listed in: Cho-Kain, Gunderson, 2008, The American Journal of Psychiatry, 165, 9, 1127-1135



Therefore we have to . . .

- clear these concepts
 - not all of them have been operationalised into empirical measures
- define the link between the attachment style and the development, or inhibition, of these different dimensions of metacognitive capacities



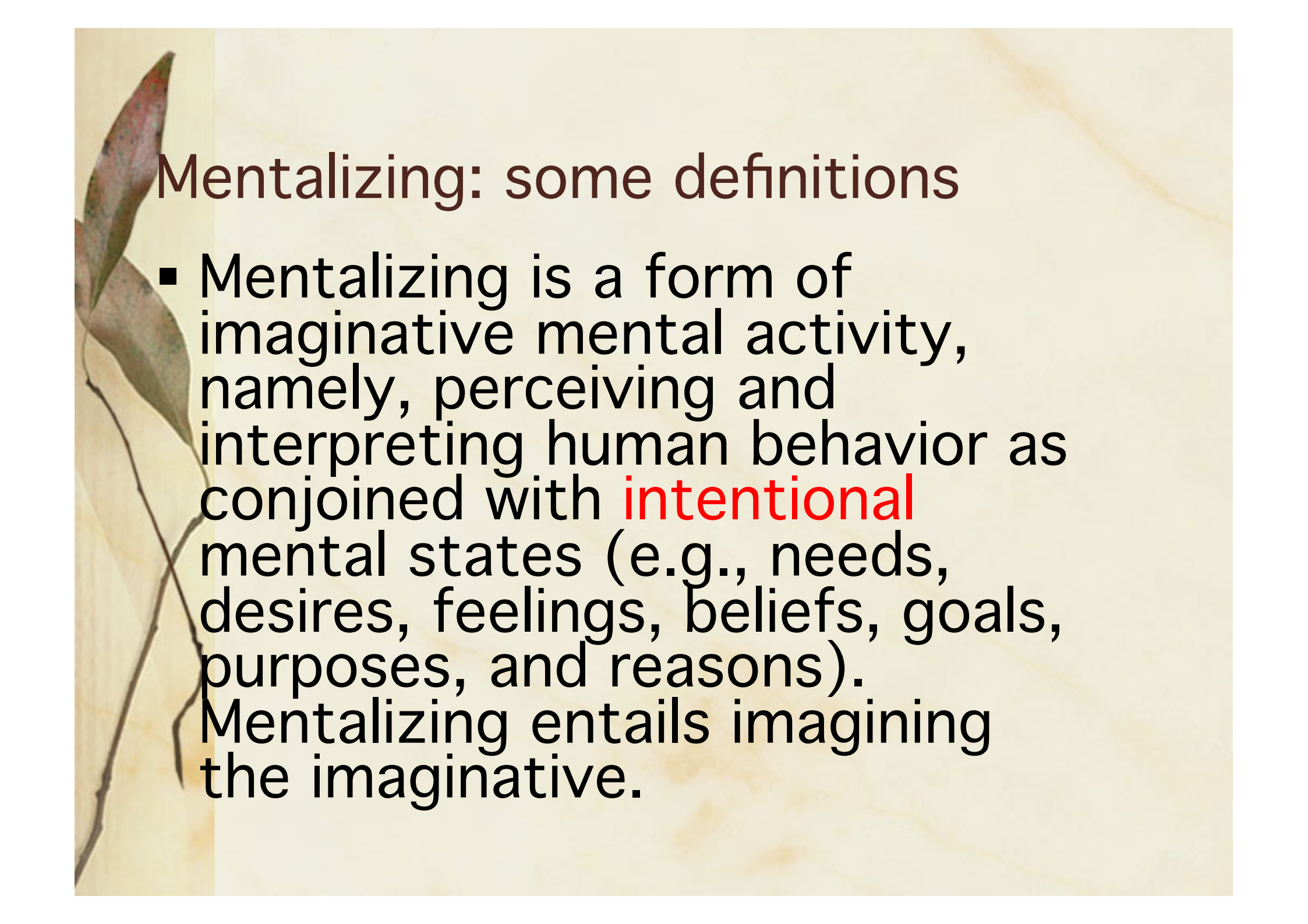
Mentalizing:

A new word for an ancient concept

Implicitly and explicitly
interpreting the actions of
oneself and other as
meaningful on the basis of
intentional mental states
(e.g., desires, needs, feelings,
beliefs, & reasons)

Mentalizing

- Mentalization is procedural and mostly non-conscious
- Central to understanding and regulating emotions
- Mentalization is by definition inexact
 - Have to share internal experiences with others to make it meaningful
- Mentalization is developmental, increasingly complex and only gradually achieved fully



Mentalizing: some definitions

- Mentalizing is a form of imaginative mental activity, namely, perceiving and interpreting human behavior as conjoined with **intentional** mental states (e.g., needs, desires, feelings, beliefs, goals, purposes, and reasons).
Mentalizing entails imagining the imaginative.



Mentalizing: some definitions

- Holding mind in mind
- To see ourselves from the outside and others from inside
- Present, past and future
- Understanding misunderstanding
- Imagining the mind of oneself and others
- Promoting a mentalizing *attitude*
 - inquisitive, curious, playful, open-minded
 - Not creating the *capacity* but rather promoting *attentiveness* to the activity of mentalizing



Mindblindness

- Imagine what your world would be like if you were aware of physical things but were blind to the existence of mental things. I mean of course blind to things like thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, desires, and intentions, which for most of us self-evidently underlie behaviour

Baron-Cohen S (1995) Mindblindness

Mindfulness

- Mindfulness is conceptualised as a state of attentiveness to present events and experiences that is unmediated by discriminating cognition
 - Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007
- It involves paying sustained attention to ongoing sensory, cognitive and emotional experience, without judging or elaborating on that experience
 - Kabat-Zinn, 1994
- Interest in mindfulness has grown from converging research which indicates that higher levels of mindfulness are positively correlated with various indices of mental well being
 - Brown et al., 2007; Falkenström, 2010; Howell, Digdon, & Buro, 2010).
- Mindfulness levels can be increased through meditation or mindfulness-based training
 - Baer et al., 2008; Falkenström, 2010
- However individual differences in mindfulness levels have been noted in those with no prior experience: **mindfulness may be an inherent or dispositional trait**
 - Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006; Brown et al., 2007; Cordon & Finney, 2008; Thompson & Waltz, 2007; Walach, Buchheld, Buttenmuller, Kleinknecht, & Schmidt, 2006






Mindfulness vrs mentalization

○ Similarities

- mindfulness and mentalization involve directing one's attention to one's own experience as a way to mitigate tendencies towards impulsivity and reactivity
- Both emphasize the integration of cognitive and affective aspects of mental states in encouraging simultaneous recognition and participation in internal experience

○ Differences

- In mindfulness experience is also with inanimate objects
- Mindfulness is present experience oriented, mentalization can concern also past and future
- Mindfulness primary aims at acceptance of internal experience, while mentalization emphasizes the construction of representation and meaning related to these experiences



Psychological Mindedness

- a person ability to see relationship among thoughtsfeelings and actions with the goal of learning the meaning and causes of his own experience and behaviour
- But also a basic interest in the way minds work

Psychological Mindedness vrs mentalization


- Similarities: several mostly in definition
- Differences
 - although mentalization operate bothn implicitly and explicitly, Psychological Mindedness primarily concern explicit or conscious consideation of mental states
 - More concentrate on self mental states, less on others'



Empathy

- Empathy is a complex form of psychological inferences in which observation, memory, knowledge and reasoning are combined to yield insights into the thoughts and feelings of others
 - Decety, Jackson, 2004. the functional architecture of human empathy. Behav cog neurosc rev, 3, 71-100
- What the many definitions of empathy have in common is
 - An affective reaction that involves sharing of another person's emotional state
 - A cognitive capacity to imagine other people's perspective (perspective taking)
 - A stable ability to maintain self-other distinction





Empathy vrs mentalization

- Similarities

- Appreciation of mental states in others


- Differences

- Empathy is more other-oriented, while mentalization is equally self-other
- Can function in the explicit mode, but it is generally regarded in its implicit mode
- Although the process of empathy involves cognitive skills and experience of affects, its content is primarily affective focused



Affect consciousness

- Refers to the relationship between the activation of basic affects and the individual's capacity to consciously perceive, reflect on and express this affect experiences

- 
- the overlap is partial but significant
 - ▣ the awareness, representation and interpersonal communication of affective mental states are at the heart of mentalization concept as it is the basis of affect regulation
 - Differences
 - ▣ focussed on conscious awareness and expression of affective states



Emotion regulation

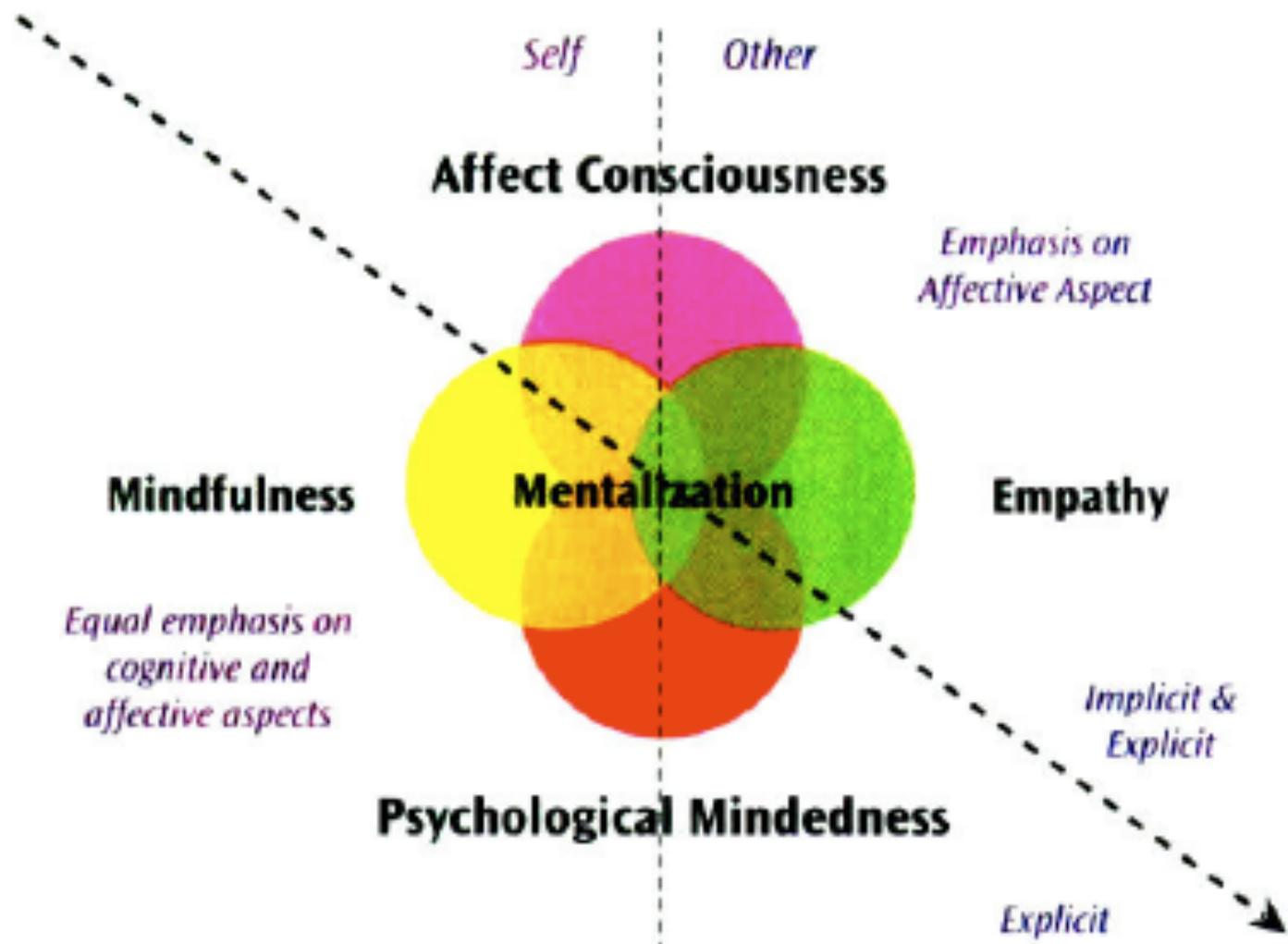
- the ability to monitor, accept and understand emotions and to continue with goal-directed behaviour when emotionally activated
 - Gratz and Roemer (2004)
- Mindfulness training has been demonstrated to impact on emotion regulation at both the neural level and at the cognitive level
 - Goldin & Gross, 2010, Modinos, Ormel, & Aleman, 2010; Jermann et al., 2009
- Furthermore, in disorders of emotion, such as depression and anxiety disorder mindfulness-based interventions alleviate symptoms
 - Jermann et al., 2009; Roemer et al., 2009



Developmental aspects

- Early modulation of emotion is thought to evolve initially from a dyadic management of emotion between caregiver and infant thus implicating the role of early interactions on later emotion regulation abilities.
 - Schore, 2003. Affect dysregulation and the origin of the self: The neurobiology of emotional development. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum
- Siegel (2001) suggested that differences in maternal interaction style may play a mediating role in the simultaneous development of both emotion regulation and mindfulness as higher mindfulness in mothers could result in the mother attending more receptively to the infant's needs and emotional states which would simultaneously promote secure attachment and mindfulness in the child.

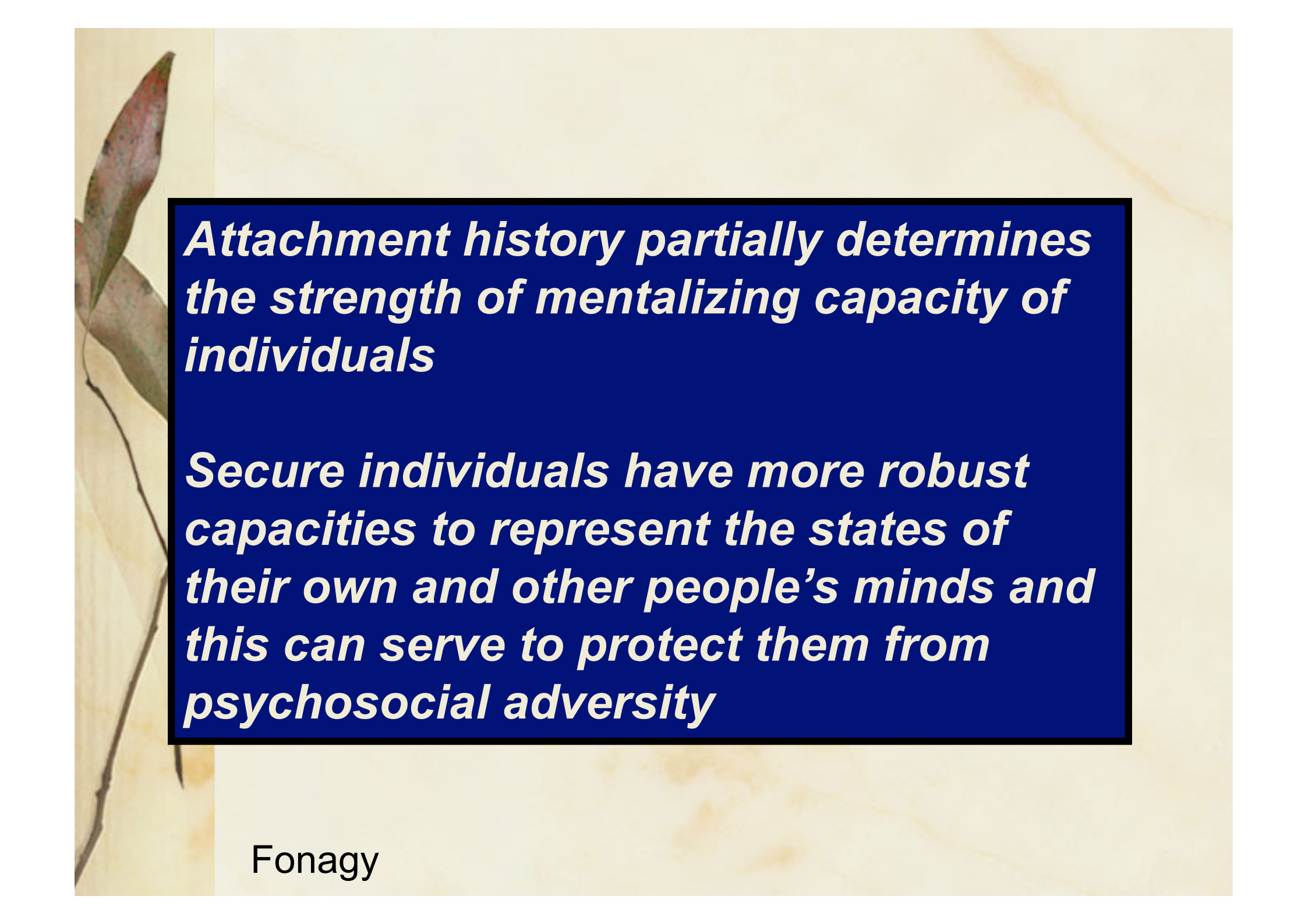
FIGURE 1. Mentalization Map: Dimensional Features and Conceptual Overlaps^a





The Development of Mentalization

- 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



Attachment history partially determines the strength of mentalizing capacity of individuals

Secure individuals have more robust capacities to represent the states of their own and other people's minds and this can serve to protect them from psychosocial adversity



Mentalization Based Treatments

○ The aims

- To promote mentalizing about oneself
- To promote mentalizing about others
- To promote mentalizing of relationships

○ Via

- Structure
- Therapeutic Alliance
- Focus on interpersonal and social domain
- Exploration of patient-therapist relationship

GRAZIE PER L'ATTENZIONE

