



Anna Freud

MBT Glossary of Terms

attachment trauma: Trauma in attachment relationships which is mediated over time by developmental mentalizing vulnerabilities. **Adversity** becomes traumatic when it is compounded by a sense that **one's mind is alone**. The **other mind** provides **social referencing** that enables us to frame a frightening and otherwise overwhelming experience

automatic - controlled polarities of mentalizing: automatic mentalizing beneath the level of awareness is fast and efficient and works well in everyday interaction; we do not stop to think very explicitly or reflectively about what is going on. We slow down and control our mentalizing when uncertain and want to check something out. Excessively controlled mentalizing can feel rather like hard work and unspontaneous while excessive automatic mentalizing makes unwarranted assumptions that work against the to and fro/serve and return of interactive mentalizing.

cognitive-affective polarities of mentalizing: cognitive capacity to identify, label, and invoke reasoning about mental states in oneself or others; the opposite pole, affective mentalizing, is concerned with the *feeling* of what is going on - again, in oneself or in others. Overuse of affective pole leads to an unnatural lack of hesitancy and to a particular certainty about ideas that emotional conviction can add to beliefs; makes anything that is thought feel as if it is real c.f. **psychic equivalence**. Dominance of cognitive pole may help protect against being overwhelmed by emotions; however, in the absence of the experience of feeling it can feel disconnected from reality, becoming a form of **pretend mode** functioning

contingent responsiveness: a high but imperfect level of caregiver responsiveness to infant behavior and mind state that facilitates the infant's attention to the caregiver's mental states about their, the infant's mental state, and thereby lays the developmental foundation for mentalizing and learning about themselves. See also **marked emotion/mental state**

dimensions of mentalizing: Not dimensions in the normal use of the word, more components of mentalizing that are commonly activated together. Now better known as **polarities** of mentalizing. See **polarities**.

egocentrism: the default mentalizing mode of equating others' mental states with one's own

emotional intelligence: a multifaceted assessment pertinent to mentalizing emotion of self and others that includes competence in perception and expression of emotion as well as emotion understanding and emotion regulation

empathy: as Simon Baron-Cohen defines it, identifying others' emotional responses and responding with appropriate emotion; broadly conceived, mentalizing is more inclusive than empathizing in encompassing empathy for the self as well as others

epistemic trust: created through effective mentalizing with others; openness to the reception of social communication that is personally relevant and of generalizable significance. Through use of **ostensive cues** (e.g., eye contact, turn-taking, interested tone of voice, use of the person's name, accurate empathic reflections), we communicate to other people that we are seeing them and engaging with them as unique individuals, thus enabling them to feel like our communications are credible, meaningful to them, and applicable beyond the specific interaction; they trust in and learn from our information

excrementalizing: slang for distorted mentalizing; mentalizing, but doing a very poor job of it, for example, when trashing oneself in a depressive state

external and internal poles of mentalizing: inferring someone's mental states from external cues, such as their facial expressions, as opposed to using our sensitivity and imagination about what is going on for them; exclusive external orientation can make a person hypervigilant and there will be a corresponding lack of conviction about one's own intuitions and an excessive need to seek external reassurance. Excessive focus on external states can also cause an individual to be highly reactive to other people's physical actions and behaviours because the individual is unable to anchor their response in a coherent understanding of the other person's mental state. External focus on self may occur - we recognize how anxious we are feeling when we notice how much we are fidgeting. Excessive focus on internal states can lead to unwarranted inferences and complicated suppositions about another's state of mind without a sufficient anchor in external reality - linked to **pretend mode**

i-mode: defined by philosophy of mind (James) as the source of identity—the sum total of agentic self-experience; experiencing sameness that continues from infant behavior through childhood, and remains a core aspect of the human mind across the lifespan: a sense of coherence and stability of self, gifted to us by mentalization. As James (1890) wrote, “The mind can always intend, and know when it intends, to think of the Same. This sense of sameness is the very keel and backbone of our thinking” a component of social mentalizing.

Intentionality: the distinguishing feature of mental states, namely, that these states are representational or about something and are motivational

intergenerational transmission: the interactive process whereby patterns of behavior are learned and reenacted across generations; for example, as the

intergenerational transmission of trauma is perpetuated by mentalizing vulnerabilities that cascade across generations

joint attention: occurs in interactions in which infant and caregiver jointly attend to a third object which could later be them as a pair; early development of joint attention occurs in physical world (pointing) and then it becomes a mental process of shared mental states about a third; a significant contributor to the development of mentalizing in cultivating the sense of multiple perspectives, including another's perspective on the self when the infant is the object of attention. See also **We-mode**.

marked emotion/mental state: a characterization of emotional mirroring that denotes the caregiver's modified expression of the infant's emotion back to the infant, for example, alloying the reflection of the infant's distress with an expression of concern; promotes the infant's capacity to develop self-representations of emotional states and managing mental states through others recognition of their mental states. The process carefully distinguishes between whose mental state is whose.

me-mode: a self-representational structure based on the experience of the self in the social context; the self as an object that is described or narrated, rather than an entity like i-mode that is validated by its coherence across time and action - in me-mode 'I consider myself' as ideographic, dynamic, and contextual, an object of scrutiny. Me-mode belongs to a developmentally later stage than i-mode and is related to the emergence of capacity to construct an identity based on self-narrative. Me mode becomes **personalised me-mode** in social context - how others see me; level of confidence in this is important - over or under confident impacts on social interaction. More malleable to change in psychotherapy than i-mode.

mentalizing: imaginatively perceiving and interpreting behavior of oneself and others as conjoined with intentional mental states, shorthand for which is holding mind in mind

mentalizing emotion: includes identifying emotional states and their meaning in present and past, modulating the intensity of emotion, and expressing emotion outwardly and inwardly; crucial for emotion-regulation, mentalizing emotion includes mentalizing while remaining in the emotional state sometimes called ‘feeling felt’ when with another

mentalizing region: an area in the medial prefrontal cortex overlapping the anterior cingulate that consistently shows activation in neuroimaging studies when participants are engaged in mentalizing tasks

mentalizing stance: an exploratory attitude of authentic inquisitiveness and curiosity about mental states that mentalizing interventions aspire to promote. Commonly known as **not knowing stance**.

metacognition: a facet of mentalizing, namely, thinking about thinking; serves the function of monitoring and regulating cognitive processes. Tends to refer to knowledge components of thinking although now has wider scope

mindblindness: Simon Baron-Cohen’s term for the absence of mentalizing in autism, which can be extended to more transient and dynamic mentalizing problems as evident, for example, when experiencing threats to attachment relationships

mindfulness: a Buddhist concept referring to attentiveness to the present and an ability to remain in the present and achieve wise mind; mentalizing entails

mindfulness of mind in particular; good mentalizing is akin to wise mind. A central skill promoted in DBT to manage emotional states.

mind-mindedness: a term employed by Elizabeth Meins and colleagues to refer to caregivers' recognition of their children as mental agents and their proclivity to refer to their children's mental states in their speech

mindreading: a term widely employed in the theory-of-mind literature to refer to interpreting others' mental states; sometimes used synonymously with mentalizing even though it suggests 'knowing' other minds rather than imagining them with some uncertainty.

mirror neuron:s neurons activated by observing an action or emotion as well as when performing an action or experiencing an emotion; a potential neurobiological substrate of empathy

moments of meeting: as characterized by Daniel Stern and colleagues, poignant moments of intersubjective contact in psychotherapy that have a potentially powerful therapeutic impact; in their spontaneity, moments of meeting exemplify the artful nature of mentalizing achieving we-mode.

not-knowing stance: an aspect of the mentalizing stance that respects the opaqueness of the patient's mental states, accepts uncertainty in interpersonal interaction, as contrasted with making unwarranted assumptions and interpretations with certainty.

parental meta-emotion philosophy: a term employed by John Gottman and colleagues to refer to parents' awareness of their children's emotional states and an interest in cultivating children's emotional awareness; consistent with a parental mentalizing stance

pedagogy: a term employed by George Gergely and colleagues to refer to the uniquely human capacity to teach and learn cultural information, including information about mental states; a foundation for mentalizing and, through **marked emotion**, a means of learning about one's own emotional states in particular

polarities of mentalizing: four paired polarities that are activated together in effective mentalizing - self and other, cognitive and affective, automatic (implicit) and controlled (explicit), external and internal. Other polarities activated together may include fantasy and reality.

prementalizing modes: ways of thinking and interacting that are normal developmental precursors to mentalizing, including the *psychic equivalence*, *pretend*, and *teleological* modes - also known as **non-mentalizing modes** and **ineffective mentalizing modes** when used in adulthood excessively or out of context.

pretend mode: one of the *prementalizing/ineffective modes* of thinking in which, unlike *psychic equivalence*, mental states are decoupled from reality yet, unlike mentalizing, not flexibly linked to reality; imagination is unrestrained and anything is possible; in psychotherapy, evident in **hypermentalizing** in which there is over-recruitment of the cognitive system and excessive elaboration of motives of self and others without a link to reality (common in adolescence), **pseudo-mentalizing**, intellectualizing, or—to use philosopher Harry Frankfurt's term of art—bullshitting

psychic equivalence mode: one of the *prementalizing/ineffective modes* of thinking in which reality is equated with mental states and the sense of representingness of mental states is absent; examples are dreams, posttraumatic

flashbacks, and paranoid delusions. Also known as ‘**Inside-Out**’ thinking or Boom Brain in which ‘I know what I know’.

psychological unavailability: a term for emotional neglect referring to a lack of attunement to the child’s mental states; exemplifies a critical mentalizing failure

reenactment: unwittingly repeating past traumatic relationship patterns in current relationships; a mentalizing problem that entails retraumatization and puts patients at risk for posttraumatic symptoms; earlier mentalizing vulnerabilities created through attachment trauma create on-going vulnerabilities e.g. inappropriate trust in untrustworthy people

reflective functioning: operationalization of mentalizing capacity as exemplified by the reflective functioning scale employed in research; used synonymously with mentalizing in some research and clinical literature

representingness: a term employed by Radu Bogdan to capture the sense one has of mental states as representing something in a particular way; the sense of representingness of mental states is lost in the psychic equivalence mode, for example, when the depressed patient cannot appreciate that self-condemnation is a reflection of depressed mood rather than indicative of objective reality

secure base: a facet of secure attachment described by John Bowlby in which the attachment relationship serves as a platform for exploration; a secure base in attachment promotes exploration of mental reality as well as external reality and thus is conducive to mentalizing

self and other poles of mentalizing: mentalizing self requires us to make a representation of our inner states of mind from information about our own states - our physical sensations, our internal narrative voice, an understanding of what the

limits of our knowledge are; awareness that we are still vulnerable to substantial biases and significant errors when making judgments about the reasons for our actions. Mentalizing others involves being aware of someone else's mental states as being distinct from one's own; mentalizing of self and other often interfere with each other: for example, the mere awareness of the presence of another perspective slows down thinking. Stuck at the "other" pole of the self/other dimension might be more vulnerable to being overwhelmed by the emotions of others, to be swept up by another's perspective; this can leave them vulnerable to contagious emotional storms and open to exploitation, as they allow the mental states of another person to dominate them. Individuals who have a strong capacity to **mentalize others** but who lack emotional **empathy** can have a tendency to misuse or exploit others. An excessive focus on **self-mentalizing**, meanwhile, can deprive an individual of access to the regulating effects of other people's perspectives and reduces their social connectedness

social cognition: an extensive domain of research pertaining to mental processes that mediate social relationships and, accordingly, a large body of knowledge pertinent to mentalizing

systemizing: as defined by Simon Baron-Cohen, the antithesis of empathizing, namely, a rule-based way of understanding and predicting the behavior of a system; some persons with autism exemplify exceptional systemizing ability coupled with profoundly impaired empathizing

teleological mode: one of the *prementalizing/ineffective modes* in which mental states are expressed in goal-directed actions instead of explicit mental representations such as words; for example, when self-cutting is employed as a way of communicating extreme emotional pain. Understanding of mental states and motivation are defined by what happens in physical reality - you are late so you don't want to see me. Also known as '**Outside-In**' understanding of the world - 'you are what you do'; 'actions not words'; 'it is not what you say but what you do that matters'.

theory of mind: a domain of extensive research bearing on the cognitive development of an understanding of the representational nature of mind, as exemplified explicitly in the ability to interpret behavior as stemming from false beliefs; prominent theories to explain theory-of-mind development include the theory-theory, simulation theory, and modularity theory

we-mode: component of social mentalizing along with i-mode and me-mode; about joint attention and shared perspectives. Sharing mentalizing with others leads to more confidence about our own mentalizing. When we take into account the inferred inner states of others, a shared reality is achieved building social bonds. Taking the perspective of others whom we respect, and adjusting the communication between people toward a mutual understanding or “shared reality,”; maintains friendships and triggers cohesion in relationships as a particular subjective experience of social cognition is generated. Sometimes known as co-mentalizing and described as relational mentalizing in MBT practice.