Mentalization-Based Treatment 4th International Conference – Advances in MBT

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UCL

Mentalizing the modern world

Mentalizing as an evolutionary adaptation enabling high levels of cooperation and promoting social relatedness probably first appeared about 40,000 years ago, as part of the emergence of recognisable ‘behavioural modernity’. Mentalizing, therefore, evolved in a context in which humans lived and worked in small social groups where there was little differentiation between public and domestic spheres in terms of the levels of mentalizing that were normatively expected. The agricultural and then industrial revolutions drove increasing differentiation between two different levels of mentalizing. The personal, domestic sphere – of attachment relationships, close friendships, family bonds and romantic ties – is the one in which we normally think of mentalization processes operating. But we also all operate in much wider systems – the workplace, institutions and organizations and even national and international structures – whose function is made possible by our capacity to mentalize. This paper seeks to explore the implications of this split between domestic and institutional mentalizing, exploring how thinking about the wider systems of mentalizing around us might help us to think beyond the dyad which has traditionally preoccupied developmental psychopathology.
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