

UNIVERSITÄT LEIPZIG

Medizinische Fakultät



# Mother-child attachment of children born of rape in Post-WWII Germany

Sophie Roupetz

*Department for Medical Psychology and Medical Sociology, University of Leipzig*

# Outline

1. Sexual Violence in Post-WWII Germany
2. Children born of War Rape
3. Mother-Child Attachment
4. Preliminary results
5. Conclusion & Recommendation

# Sexual Violence in Post-WWII Germany

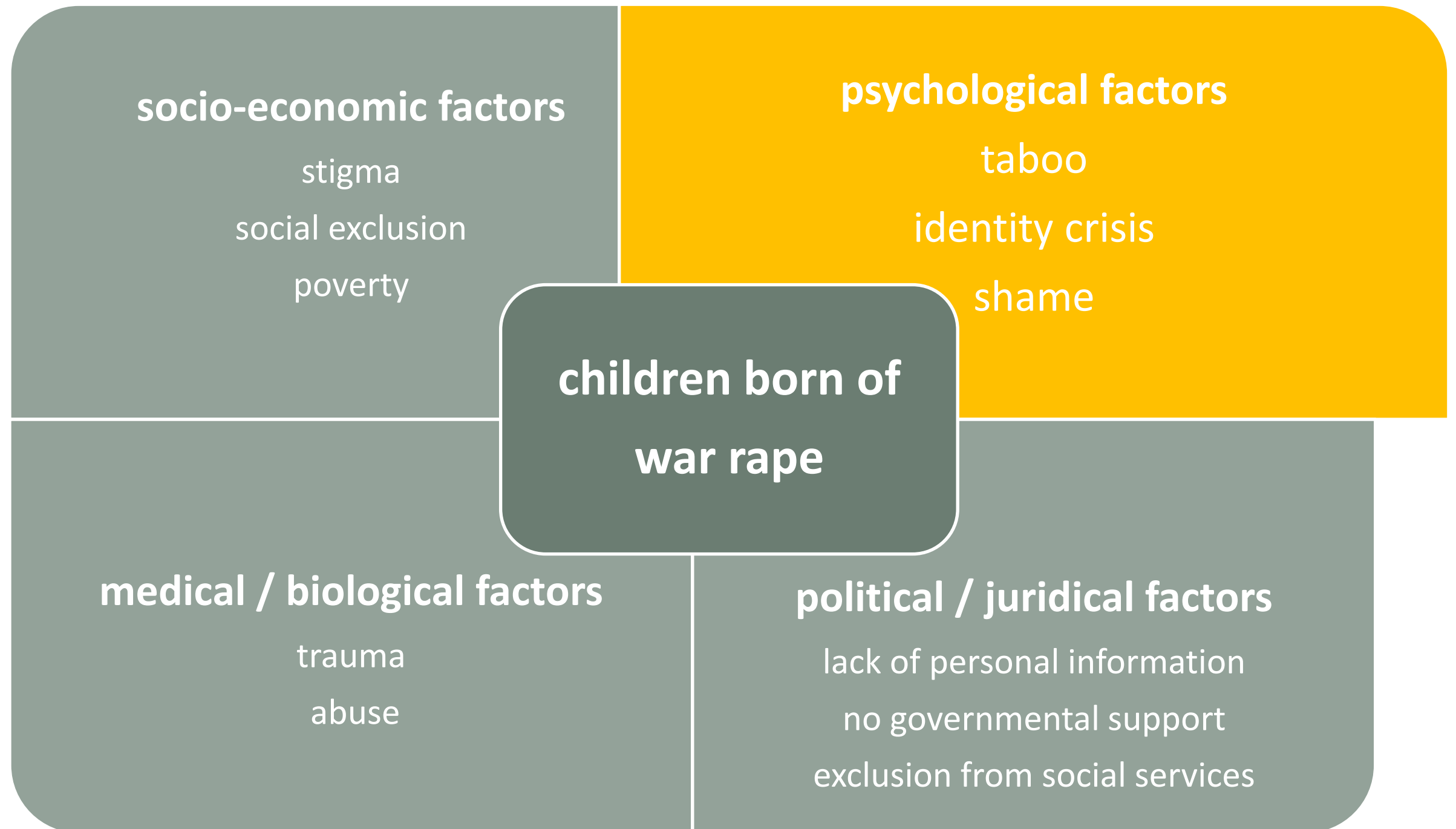
- At the end of WWII 900,000 up to 1,9 million German women experienced sexual violence perpetrated by the Red Army (e.g. Gebhardt, 2015)
- Western allies were responsible for thousands of rapes
- In March 1945: decree to allow abortion of pregnancy after rape (Satjukow, 2015)
- Wartime rape is associated with a higher prevalence of mental and somatic disorders, severe symptoms of post-traumatic stress (Lueger-Schuster et al., 2012)
- Numbers on how many children were born as a consequence of sexual violence between soldiers of occupation forces and German women remain mostly unknown

# Children Born of War Rape

- at risk of being neglected, **stigmatised**, ostracised or abandoned (WHO, 2000)
- growing up without biological father
- “illegitimate child” of the “enemy”
- may serve as a **living reminder for the mother of the rape** (Smith, 2000)
- may also feel responsible for their fathers’ actions, **living in guilt** and embarrassment (Watson, 2007)
- children conceived of rape are more likely to suffer from **severe mental disorders**, like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety (Kaiser et al., 2015; Solomon, 2012)

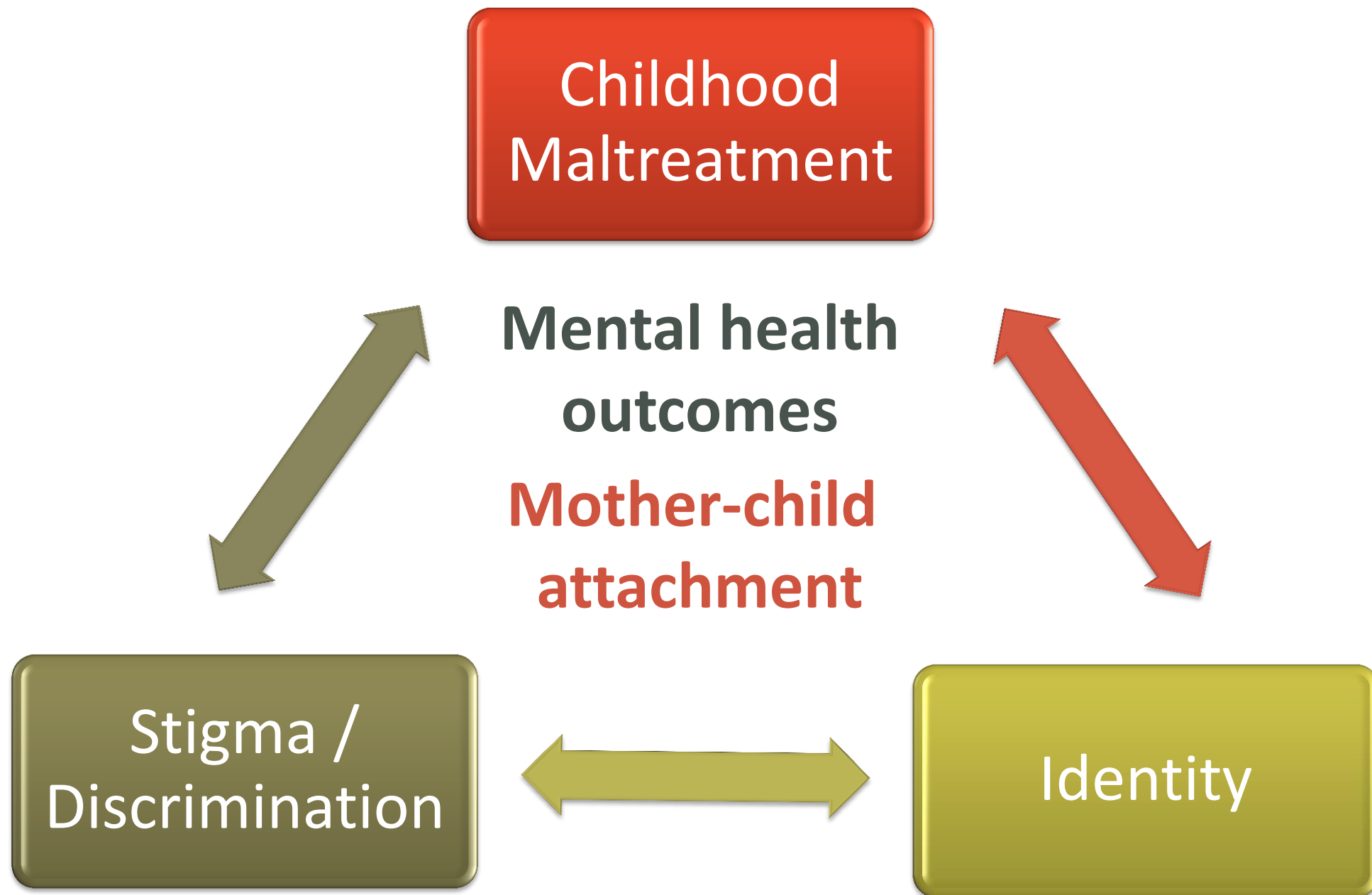
# Factors relevant to the life course of children born of war rape

(Mochmann, 2009)



# Psychosocial consequences of growing up as a “children born of rape” in Post-WWII Germany

(Glaesmer et al., 2012)



# Attachment Theory

(Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1973; Crowell, Fraley & Shaver, 2008)

- mother-child interactions are translated into **internal working models** depending on availability and responsiveness of the mother
- **attachment patterns** are subject to change across development in the life course, but their relative stability is ensured by processes of habitual and automatized interaction patterns

Attachment style	Parental style	Resulting adult characteristics
secure	in tune with the child's emotions	able to set boundaries
insecure-avoidant	unavailable or rejecting	avoids closeness or emotional connection, distant
insecure-ambivalent	inconsistent	anxious and insecure, controlling, unpredictable
insecure-disorganized	unable to meet child's needs	chaotic, insensitive, untrusting even while craving security

# Mother-child attachment of children born of rape

- abused women might be at risk for mistreating their own offspring
- rape can affect maternal capacity to care for the child and to form a loving bond, thus these children often develop poor **mother-child attachment**  
(Sezibera, 2008)
- studies show a strong **association** between **child maltreatment** and **attachment insecurity** (Beatson & Taryan, 2003)
- study on **long-term effects on adult attachment** in German Occupation Children born after WW II show that insecure attachment is more frequent  
(Kaiser et al., 2016)  
  
they are less open to closeness and intimacy and show a lowered ability to depend on others in close relationships
- a mother with other biological children may distribute her love unequally  
(Torgovnik, 2009)



# Transgenerational perspective

## MOTHERS

Victims of Sexual  
Violence

Family / other  
caregivers

Parenting / rearing

**ATTACHMENT**

Emotional availability

**CHILDREN  
BORN OF  
RAPE**

Mental health  
attachment

**Perpetrator**

Absent biological father

## Research Question

How do Children born of Rape in Post-WII Germany perceive and describe mother-child attachment across the lifespan?

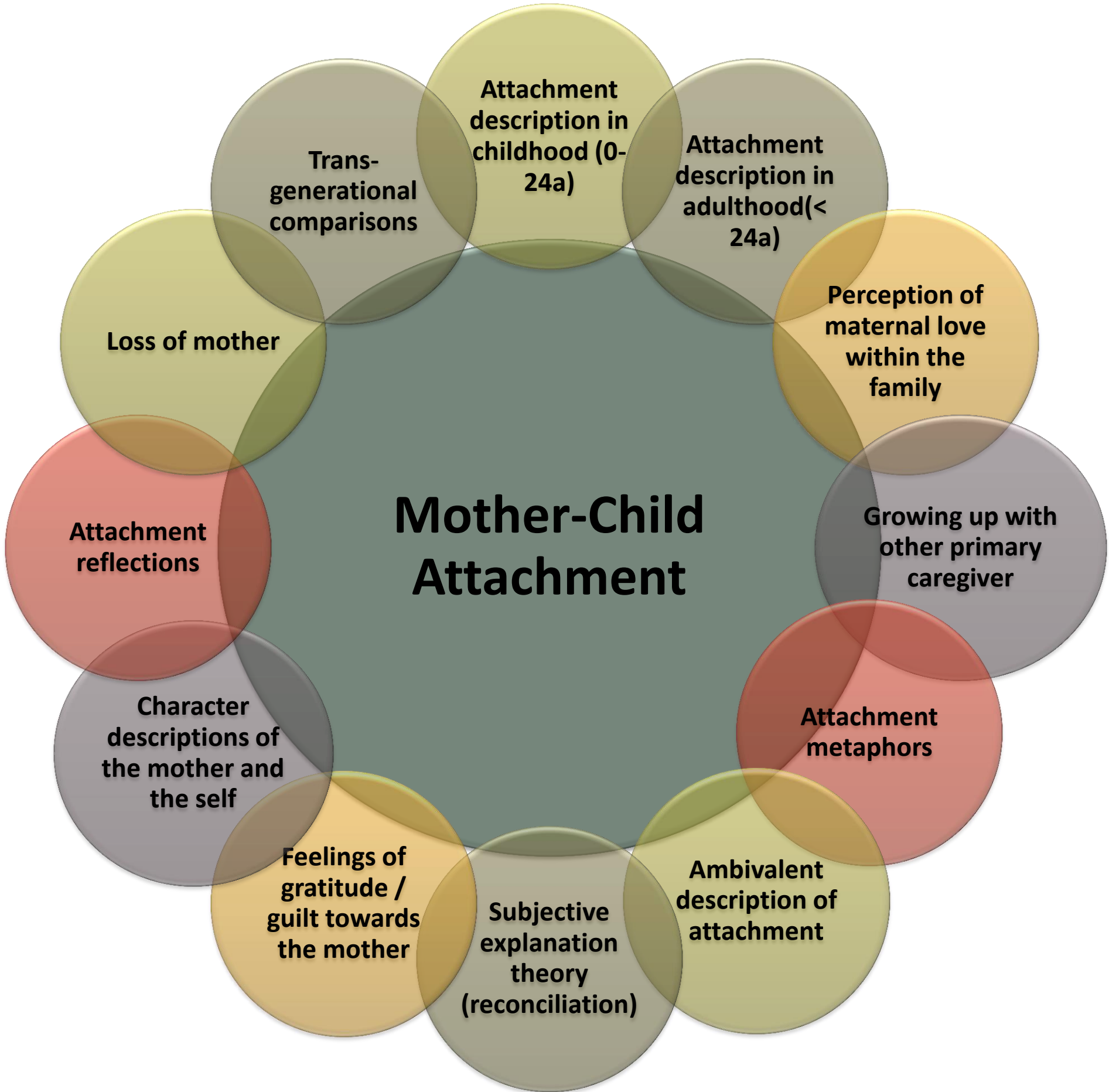
# Research Methodology

- **Cross-sectional study**, using a **qualitative approach**
- **Narrative interviews** conducted with 9 children born of war rape
- Interviews are filmed in order to gain an **overall understanding** of the individual person
- **Sample** selected from participants previously involved in the project *“Occupation children: identity development, stigma experience, and psychosocial consequences growing up as a German occupation child”* from the University of Leipzig in 2013 (Kaiser et al., 2016)
- **Transcription**
- Using thematic analysis

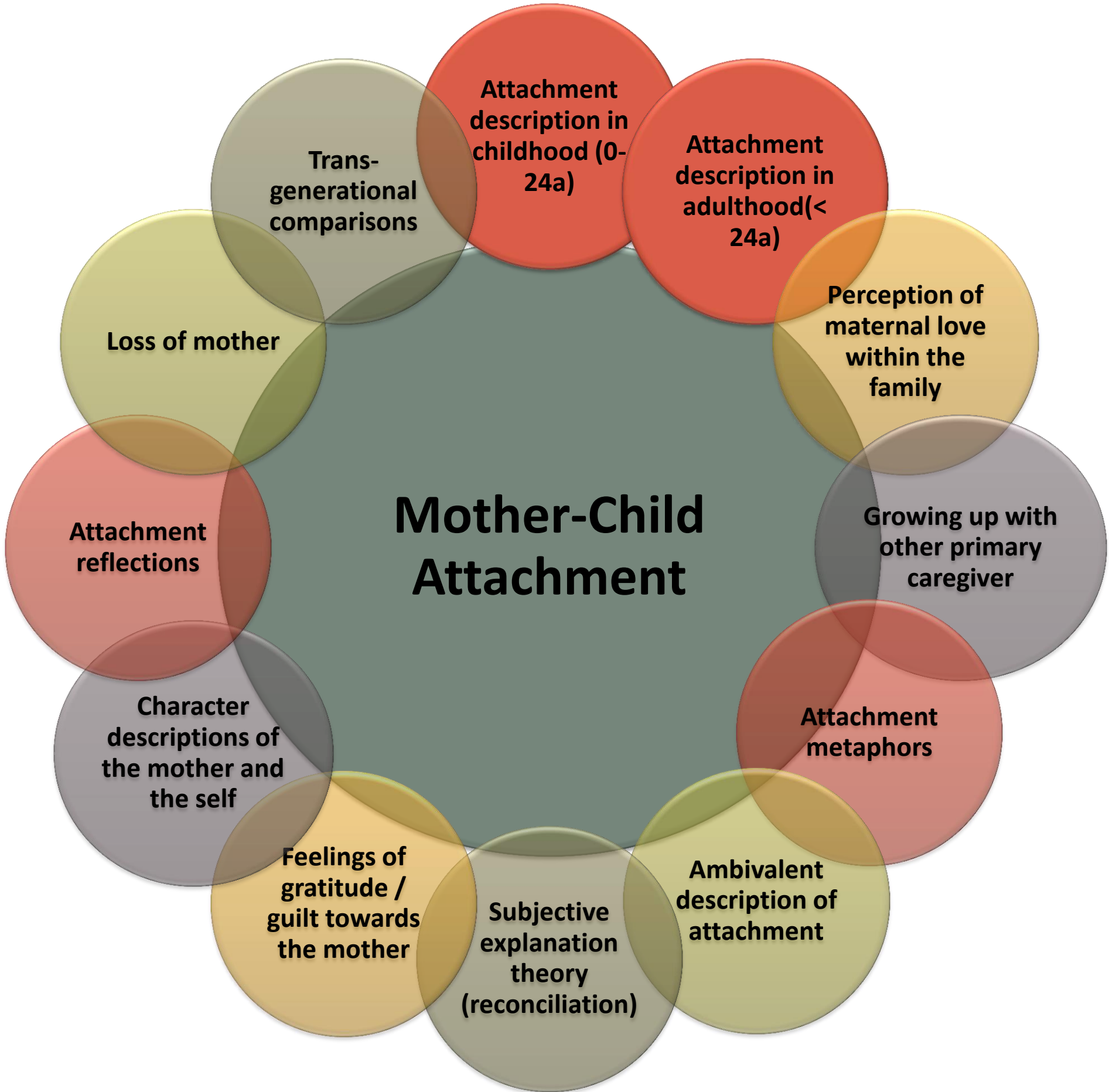
## Demographic Data of Children born of Rape in Post-WWII Germany

ID	Year of Birth	Occupation Zone	Growing Up	Length of Interview	Location of Interview
Ms Do	1946	USA	Biological Mother	01:42	At home
Ms K	1946	Soviet Union	Adoptive Parents, contact with biological mother from the age of 24a	02:23	At home
Ms Da	1947	Soviet Union	until 7a with grandparents, until 19a with mother	02:05	At home
Mr U	1946	Soviet Union	Biological mother	01:57	At home
Mr H	1946	USA	Biological mother	01:58	Institute
Mr Z	1946	France	Biological mother	01:56	At home
Mr F	1946	USA	until 4a with mother, after with grandparents/aunt	02:02	Institute
Mr N	1946	Soviet Union	Biological mother	02:48	At home
Mr W	1946	Soviet Union	With grandparents, also in contact with mother	02:40	At home

# Categorisation of mother-child attachment of children born of rape in Post-WWII Germany



# Categorisation of mother-child attachment of children born of rape in Post-WWII Germany



# Quotes of attachment descriptions in childhood



Feelings of  
being a  
burden

*“She turned on the gas tap inside, when I was playing in front the house. By chance a colleague from work passed by and saved her life. It must have been a difficult life that my mother lived with me.”*

experiences  
of violence

*“My mother was very strict with me, I tried to behave to get away without any damage (laughing). She used to beat me with the truncheon when she came home.”*

No  
expression  
of love

*“Her experiences might have impacted her deeply with her four children, it must have been a burden to her. She was not able to express much love.”*

strict  
upbringing /  
prohibitions

*“I had bad grades in high school. I was 18 years old. I started with my studies in Berlin in autumn. So, who cares about the grades? Yet, my mother did not allow me to go to graduation ball.”*



# Quotes of attachment descriptions in childhood

strict  
upbringing /  
prohibitions

*"It was very difficult with my mum. I remember, once I went to the Netherlands where I met a nice guy from Spain. He came to see me in Germany. When my mum found it she was so mad. She called me "slut"! It was really bad when I met with a foreigner."*

Adjectives  
being used

*"I was a peculiar child."*

*"I achieved everything from my own drive. I never needed my mother."*

Tensions /  
conflict

*"Actually, I don't know the reasons but we argued a lot. Very much."*

Positive  
feelings  
towards  
childhood

*"I felt that my mother accepted me. I never experienced rejection by her or something like that. So you can conclude that it was love maybe."*

*"I actually had a nice childhood."*



# Quotes of attachment description in adulthood

distanced  
relation

*“Actually my mother was a stranger to me.”*  
*“There was never physical closeness. It was different.”*

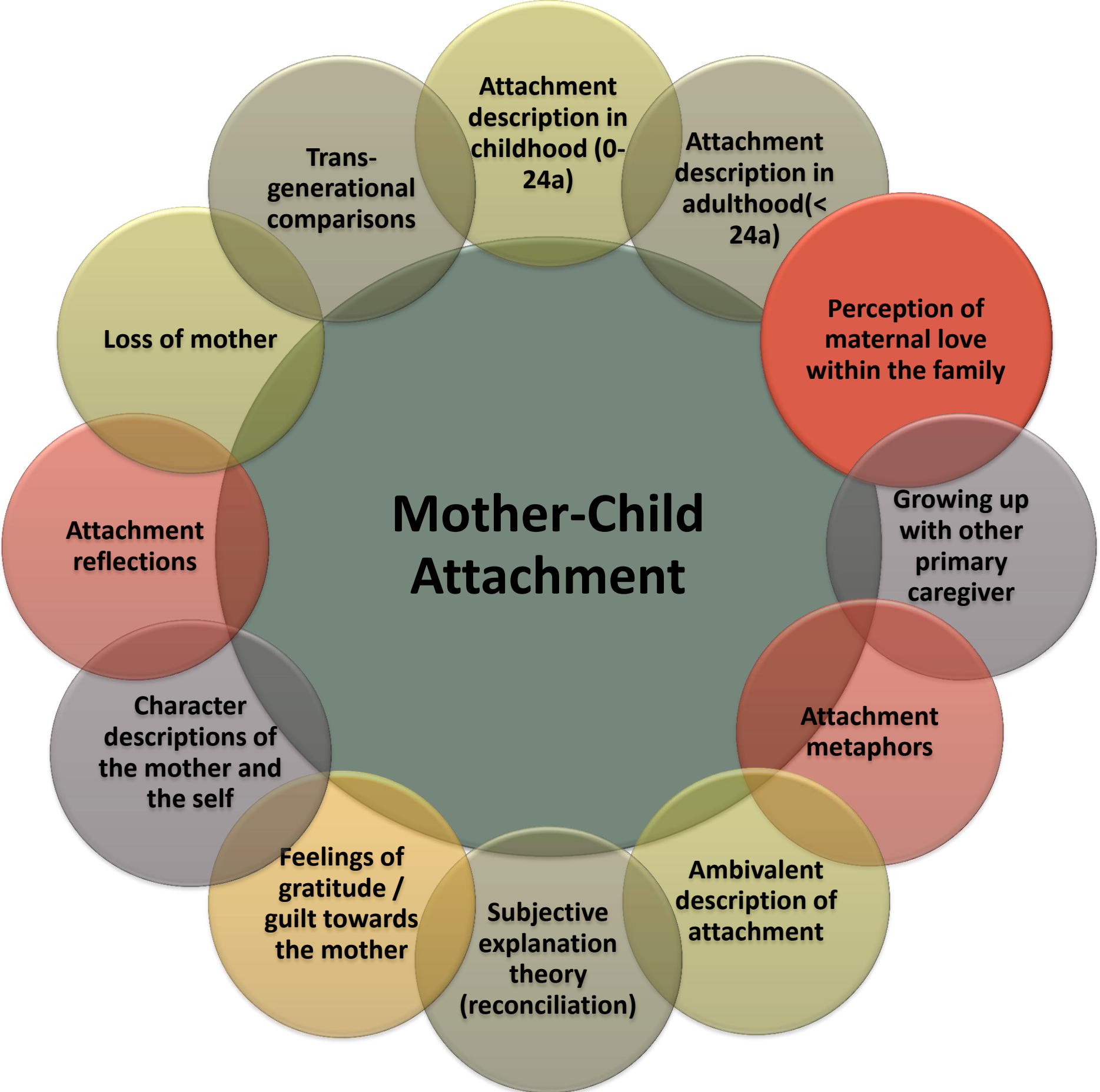
Increased  
descriptions  
of care and  
joint  
activities

*“We have, of course, when she got older, I also organized a lot of things... If someone of us celebrated birthday, I organized the whole thing.”*

supportive  
relation

*“Although she never expressed it to me, she did it in front of others. She was proud of me when she realized I became an official in high position despite struggling at the beginning.”*

Categorisation of mother-child attachment of children born of rape in Post-WWII Germany



# Perception of maternal love within the family

Feelings of  
exclusion

*"I always had another family name. When my mother got married, I was the only one who had to keep her given name."*

Devaluation  
of the self

*"Of course, there are always those that are out of the ordinary. But, a saying is 'yes, where there is crap is even more crap.' And that's just how it is."*

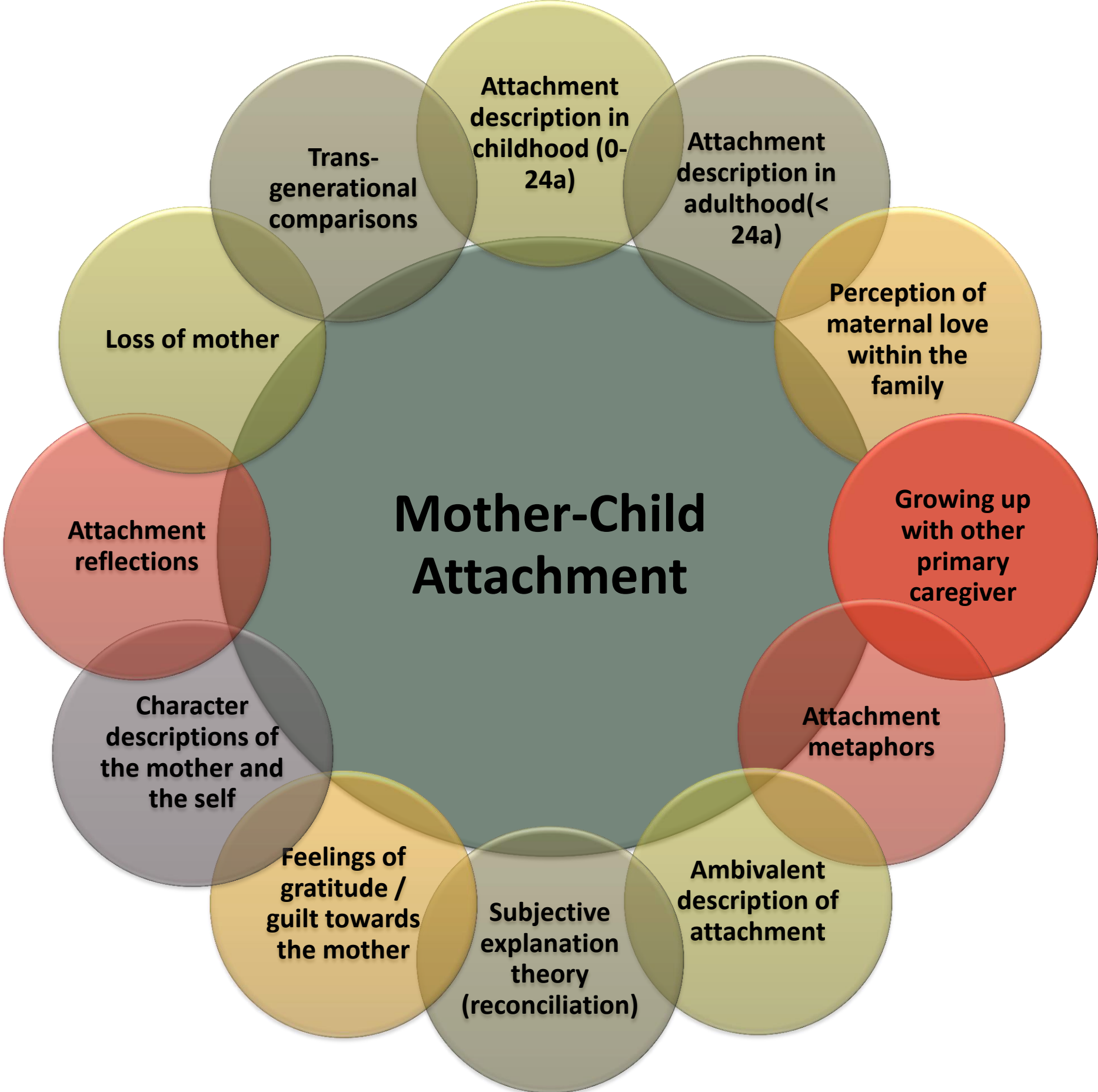
Feelings of  
dis-  
advantage

*"I have always felt that my mother preferred my brother. She was more available to him than for me. That's what I said to her after a glass, two wines, in tears. I remember it like today."*

Feelings of  
belonging

*"I feel integrated as a third child. I think I managed my life and she proud of me."*

# Categorisation of mother-child attachment of children born of rape in Post-WWII Germany



# Growing up with other primary caregivers

(4 out of 9 participants)

*"We never developed a "real" mother-child relationship. How could we? She put me up for adoption."*

*"Despite all this, you are always looking for closeness. Although I do not know how she really stood up to me."*

Feelings of rejection

*"At the beginning of her marriage, my biological mother was thinking to take me with her, a child born of rape, but then both said: "I think it's not good". And I think so too, I'm so grateful to God that that's not how it is."*

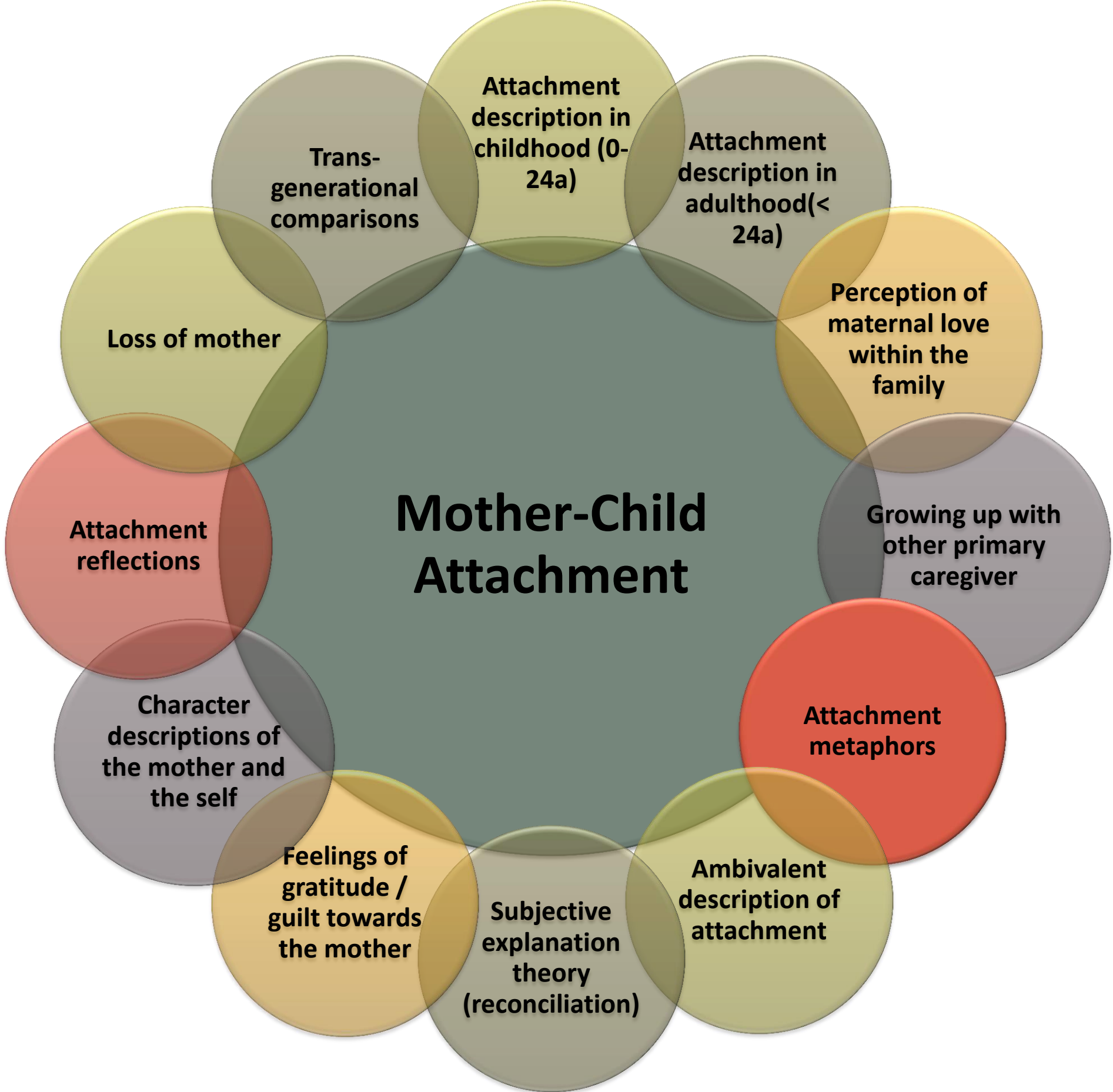
*"My family decided that I will grow up with my grandparents. Yes, and that's the way it stayed all the time."*

Positive feelings towards primary caregivers

*"My grandmother was ... I would say, what I got from my grandma, I should have gotten from my mother."*



# Categorisation of mother-child attachment of children born of rape in Post-WWII Germany



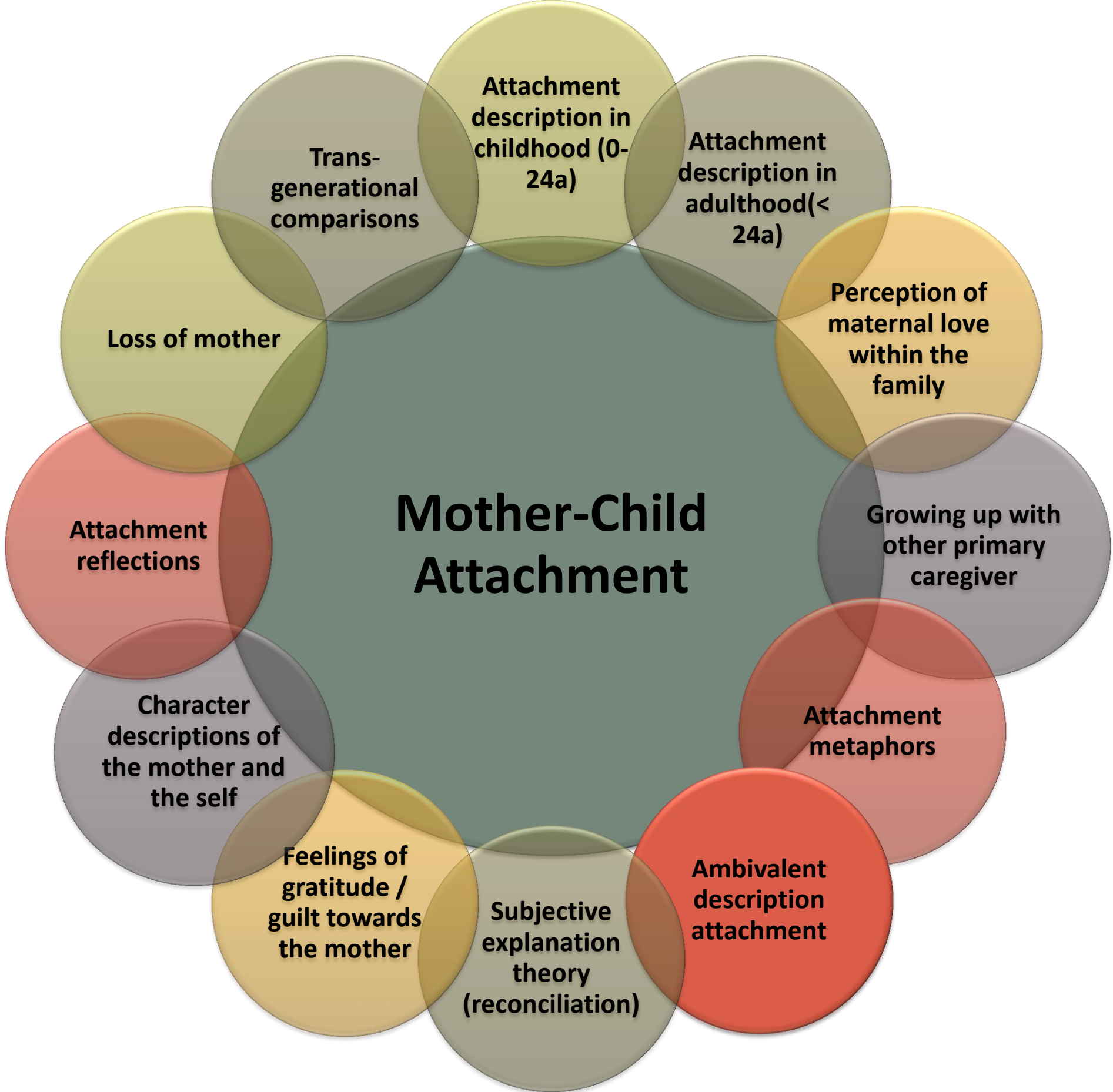
## Metaphors describing mother-child attachment

*“We were like **Ying and Yang**. On the one hand she was really great and on the other hand she was really terrible.”*

*“I have **black and white memories**. The whole childhood was a black and white.”*

*“And when I became a bit older I was the “**family counsellor**”. Yes, I became someone, I knew something and as a result they respected me. I must say. Yes, I could give answers to almost any questions, I was then simply in many things counselor.”*

# Categorisation of mother-child attachment of children born of rape in Post-WWII Germany





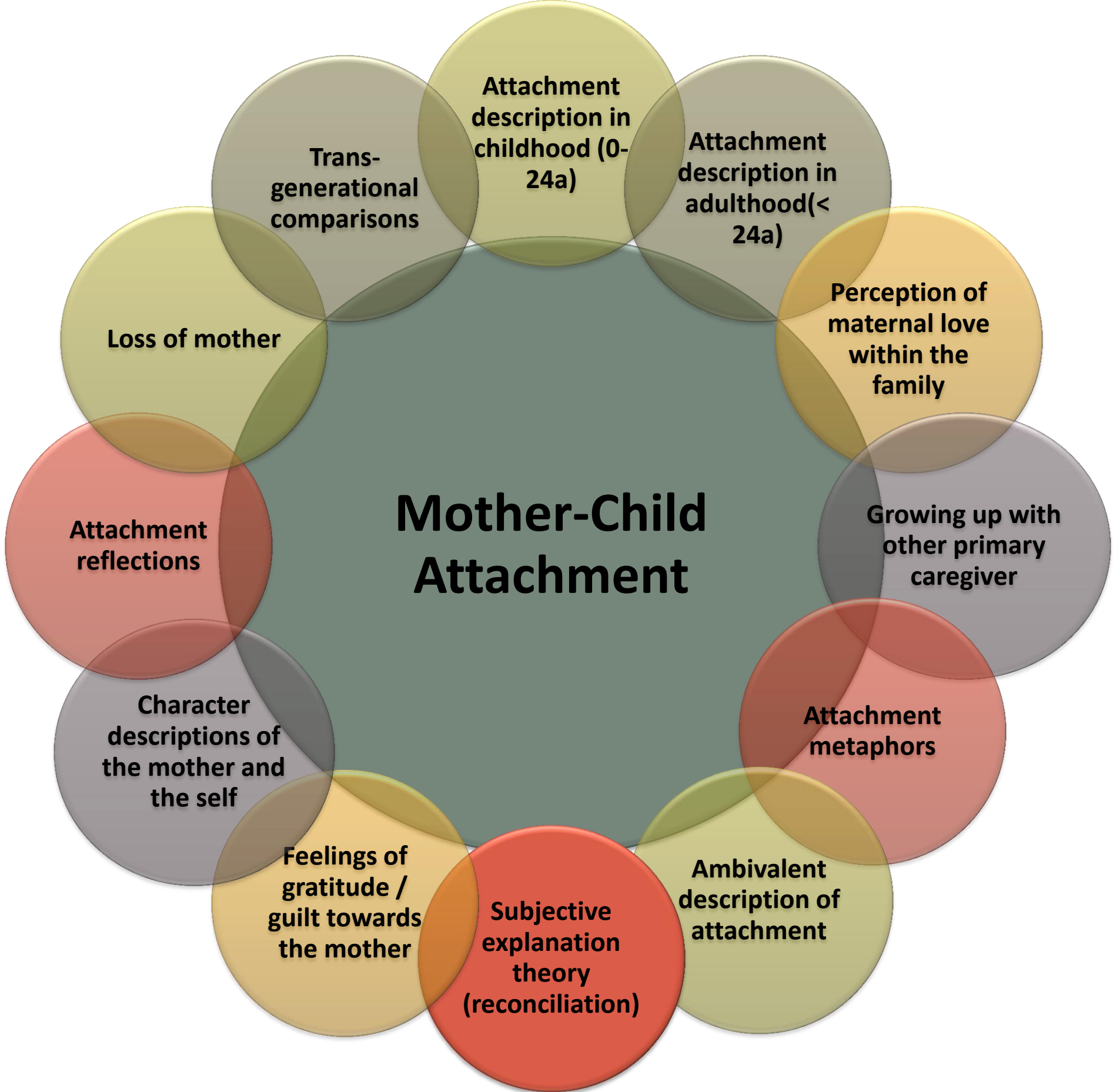
## Ambivalent description of mother-child attachment

*“She never did anything to me showing that she does not like me but she could not give me much love either.”*

*“She was a strict and ‘tough woman’, perhaps she would have preferred herself to be much softer, more female.”*

*“What I find a huge gift for me is in everything serious or heavy is also something good.”*

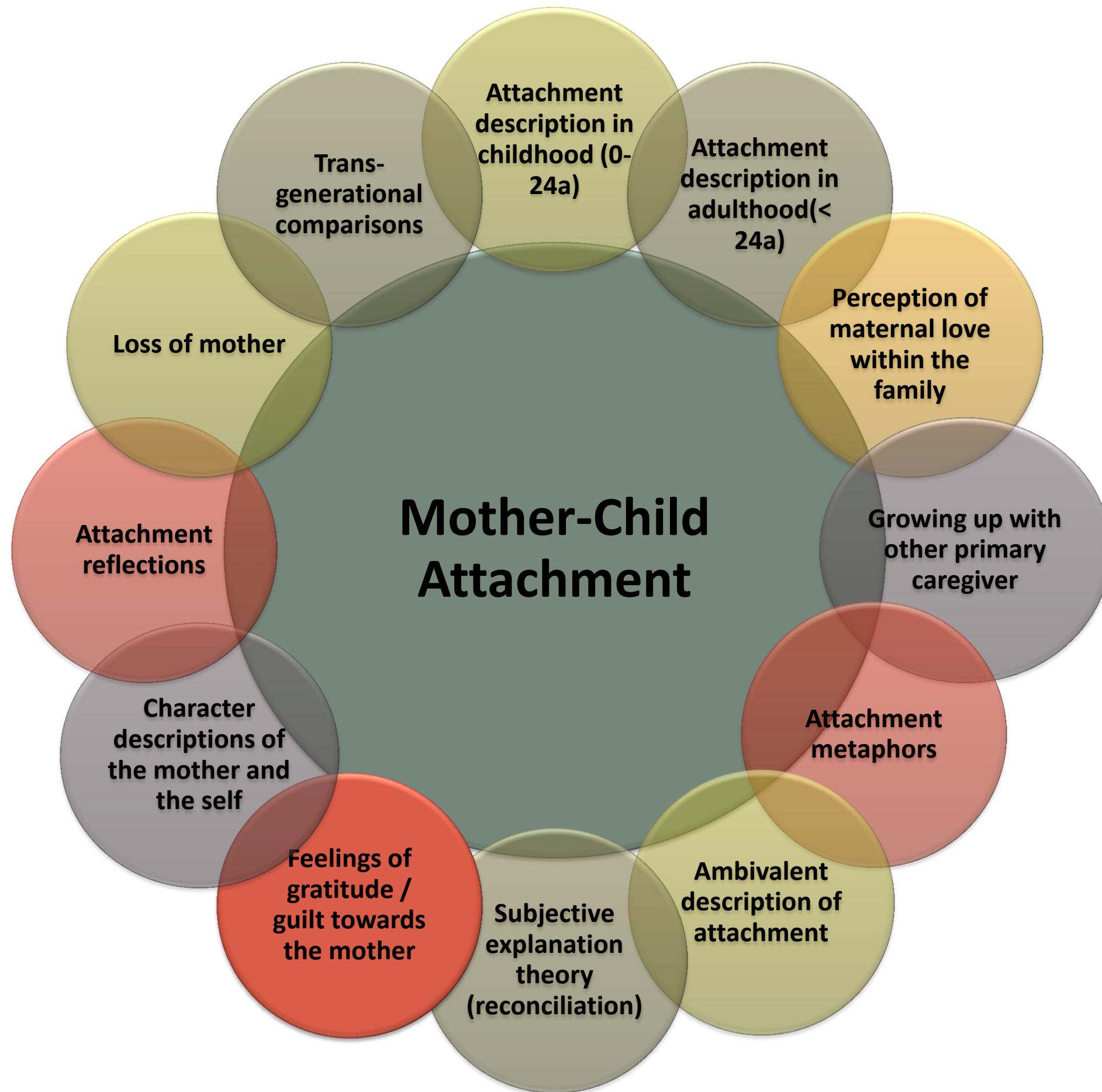
# Categorisation of mother-child attachment of children born of rape in Post-WWII Germany



# Subjective Explanation / Reconciliation

- *“Not only today do I see my mother in a different light, but also much earlier. I did not only perceive her as a violent mother, she also wanted to make something of me.”*
- *“I never could have had such maternal love from my biological mother, as I got from these adoptive parents.”*
- *“And I ask myself, if there is someone else who has the same fate with the mother as I do. Perhaps she simply got dementia because of her life story, to forget her traumatic experiences. And I hope that I will not get it because I have dealt with too much in my life.”*

# Categorisation of mother-child attachment of children born of rape in Post-WWII Germany



## Feelings of gratitude / guilt towards the mother

*“I never thought I would say that once but I feel grateful to her today. She did a great deal for me and that's why I'm more sorry that she had a very poor life.”*

*“Yeah, well, if I did anything, I was either put to bed, or I got beatings, or I did not get supper. And that was very often the case. And that took me a little bit away from my mother as a child. Today I see it differently. Today I can see more of what she did for me.”*

*“She had a poor life. I am very grateful to her that I am today what would have been impossible at that time. She did a great deal for me, so I'm sorry she had such a poor life.”*

# Results

Children born of rape in Post-WWII Germany describe mother-child attachment in their child- and adulthood

- strict and **distanced** with experiences of **violence** and conflicts
- feelings of being a burden were often described
- increased descriptions of care and joint activities in adulthood
- there is also **evidence of resilience** and positive feelings

Perception of **maternal love within the family** was determined with **exclusion, disadvantage** and **devaluation of the self**

4 out of 9 participants grew up with **other primary caregivers** at some point in their childhood reporting on **feelings of being rejected by the mother**

# Results

- Participants made **use of metaphors** for attachment descriptions
- Reports on attachment descriptions had a **tendency of being ambivalent**
- Narratives included **subjective explanations** with an identified main theme of **reconciliation** when developing across the lifespan
- Retrospectively participants expressed **feelings of guilt** and **gratitude** towards the mother



# Transgenerational perspective

socio-economic factors

## MOTHERS

Victims of Sexual  
Violence

Trauma  
shame  
poverty

Parenting / rearing

**ATTACHMENT**

Emotional availability

## CHILDREN BORN OF RAPE

Mental health  
Maltreatment  
Identity crisis  
Lack of personal  
information

stigma & discrimination  
taboo  
no governmental support  
Exclusion from social services



# Conclusion & Recommendation

- Results highlight a **tendency of poor mother-child attachment** representations of children born of conflict-related sexual violence
- Children born of conflict-related sexual violence find themselves in **serious challenging situations** being the most vulnerable when suffering the full impact of their fathers' and mothers' actions (Mcevoy-Levy, 2007)
- Children born of conflict-related sexual violence should be seen **as part of a community with equal rights**
- Their potential to **serve as bridges of reconciliation between divided ethnic backgrounds** should be recognized
- call for **interventions to minimise the negative impact** of how these children are growing up with a focus on **anti-stigma work**

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