

PSYCHOANALYTIC PSYCHOTHERAPY  
IN EVERYDAY TERMS

LECTURE #1, OCT. 6, 2021

THE NATURE OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

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# INDICATIONS OF UNCONSCIOUS ACTIVITY

- Dreams
- Slips of the tongue, mispronunciations, using the wrong word
- "Subliminal Psychodynamic Action": The 'Mommy and I Are One' experiments (Silverman & Weinberger, 1985)
- Simple forgetting
- Disparity between verbal content and emotional content
- Dissociative events (fugue states)
- Major omissions from a narrative
- Transference - the return of the repressed
- Psychogenic amnesia – linked to traumatic events

## THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE UNCONSCIOUS (THE INFINITE)

- The unconscious informs us of both ourselves and others, once we learn how to listen
- It operates everywhere, but subtly. Because of this, it is difficult to see. It's like those optical illusions from which a different image emerges when you have looked at it for an extended time.
- Psychoanalysis examines the unconscious aspects of the mind, and emphasizes the value of symbolic thinking – of listening for multiple layers of meaning
- Treat events, thoughts, statements, etc. as dream images, and you will start to see the unconscious

# FIVE FORMS OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

- **Primary unconscious** - Present at birth
- **Prereflective unconscious** - Experiential content that was never conscious
- **Automatic (or Adaptive) unconscious** - Lets you make decisions and perform actions quickly, based in past experience
- **Dynamic, repressed unconscious** - Content moved into the unconscious because awareness is too difficult
- **Bion's "edited" unconscious** - Content is unconscious because it is impossible to be aware of everything

## WHAT ARE WE BORN WITH? THE PRIMARY UNCONSCIOUS

- Inborn, inherent
- The source of fantasy: thoughts, emotions and images that emerge into the mind from the body  
(Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983; Klein, 1952)
- Example: Instinctual behavior; the breast crawl; Jungian archetypes

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT? THE PREREFLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

- Example: The mother who held her infant at arm's length (Mitchell)
- Contains organizing principles that shape a person's experience – “without this shaping becoming the focus of awareness and reflection” (Atwood & Stolorow, 1984)
- Not the product of defenses

## THE PREREFLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS, CONT'D

- Example: The boy who believed he would be stabbed
- Implicit procedural knowing: “Much of our relational experience is represented in an implicit procedural or enactive form that is unconscious, though not necessarily dynamically unconscious.” (Lyons-Ruth, 1999)

## AND THEN? THE AUTOMATIC (ADAPTIVE) UNCONSCIOUS

- Unconscious mechanisms that help us make everyday decisions and perform everyday actions – a quick sizing up of the world
- Example: You're driving. Suddenly you are at your destination and you realize you didn't pay attention to driving at all, and you don't remember making a single turn. But still you got there.
- Example: You meet a stranger, and you immediately feel something is off about this person. You don't know why you feel this way, but you've learned to trust your intuitions.

Bargh & Morsella, 2008

## THEN WHAT? THE DYNAMIC UNCONSCIOUS

- Example: Repressed childhood trauma – the woman whose hand was growing from her stomach
- Mechanisms involved in the creation of the dynamic unconscious: splitting and repression (Klein, 1946):
  - **Splitting** occurs when some part of the mind – an emotion, a memory, a desire – is too frightening or threatening. It becomes **split off** from the rest of the mind
  - **Repression** rids the mind of these frightening elements by banishing them to the unconscious
- The dynamic unconscious is most often responsible for transference responses in our patients

## BION (1962): THE EDITED UNCONSCIOUS

- Any event is caused by such a large number of variables that we simply can't be conscious of them all.
- The fact that I am currently talking, for example, is determined in part by my ability to continue breathing. I am not usually conscious of my breathing. It simply happens, and in my telling of most events, it is one of the causes that is edited out.
- The story of what is happening now, in other words, can only be told if we edit out a lot of extraneous variables.
- Borges character: *Funes the Memorious* – see Ogden, 2003

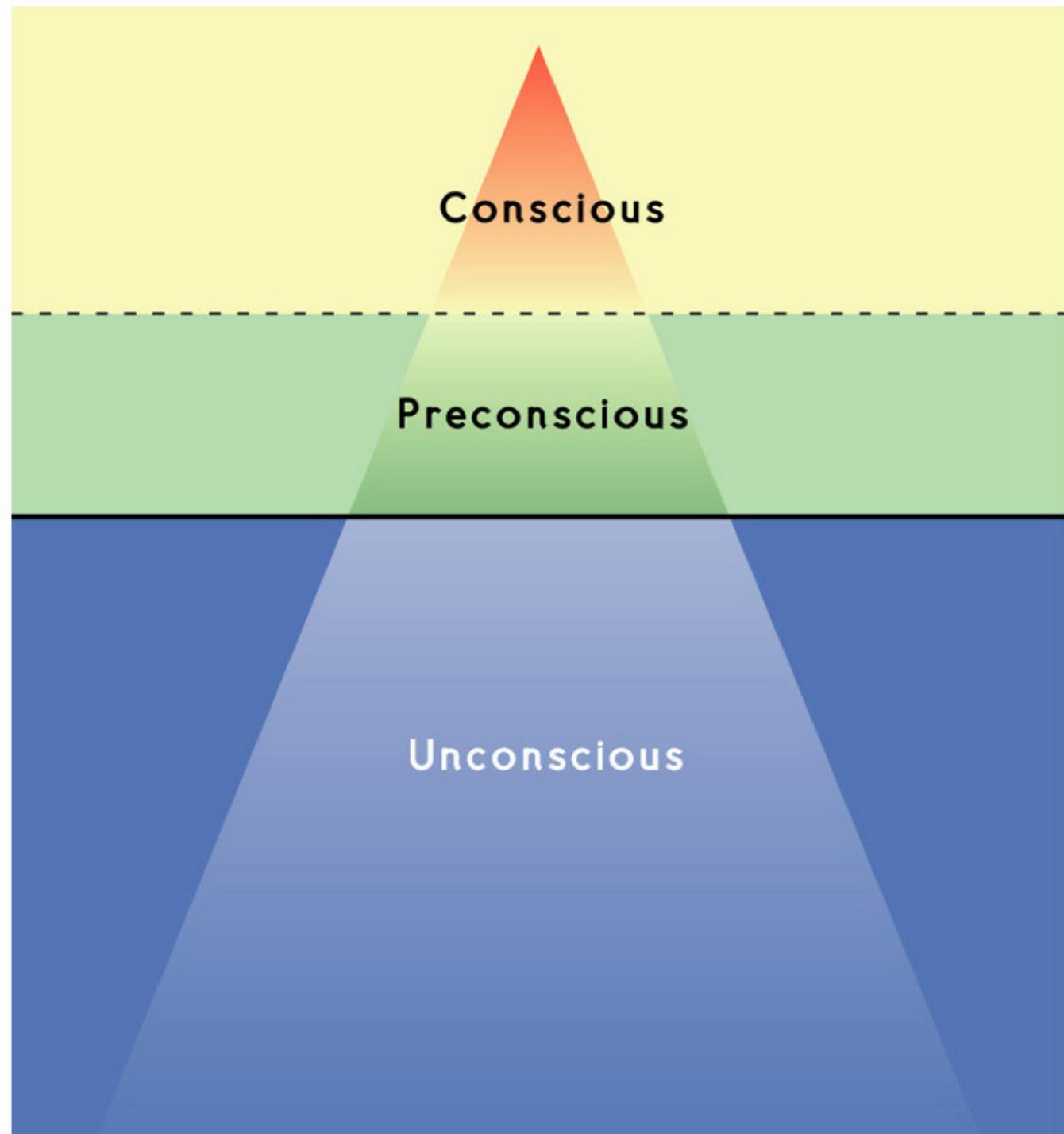
## THE EDITED UNCONSCIOUS OVERLAPS OTHER FORMS OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

- We edit out parts of the full story because:
  - They are extraneous
  - We are afraid of calling other people's attention to them
  - We can't remember them – this is either the prereflective or the automatic unconscious
  - We are afraid of calling our own attention to them – this is the dynamic, repressed unconscious

# LISTENING TO THE UNCONSCIOUS

- Listen to your body
  - Subtle moods, body states, where stress or muscle tension is located – all can indicate the unconscious experience of your patient (either present or past)
- Look for subtle contents of your mind
  - Fleeting images, lyrics or melodies of songs, memories, etc.
  - Example: Two plates on the side table
- Reverie
- Negative Capability
- Listen with the Magic Filter
- Dream analysis

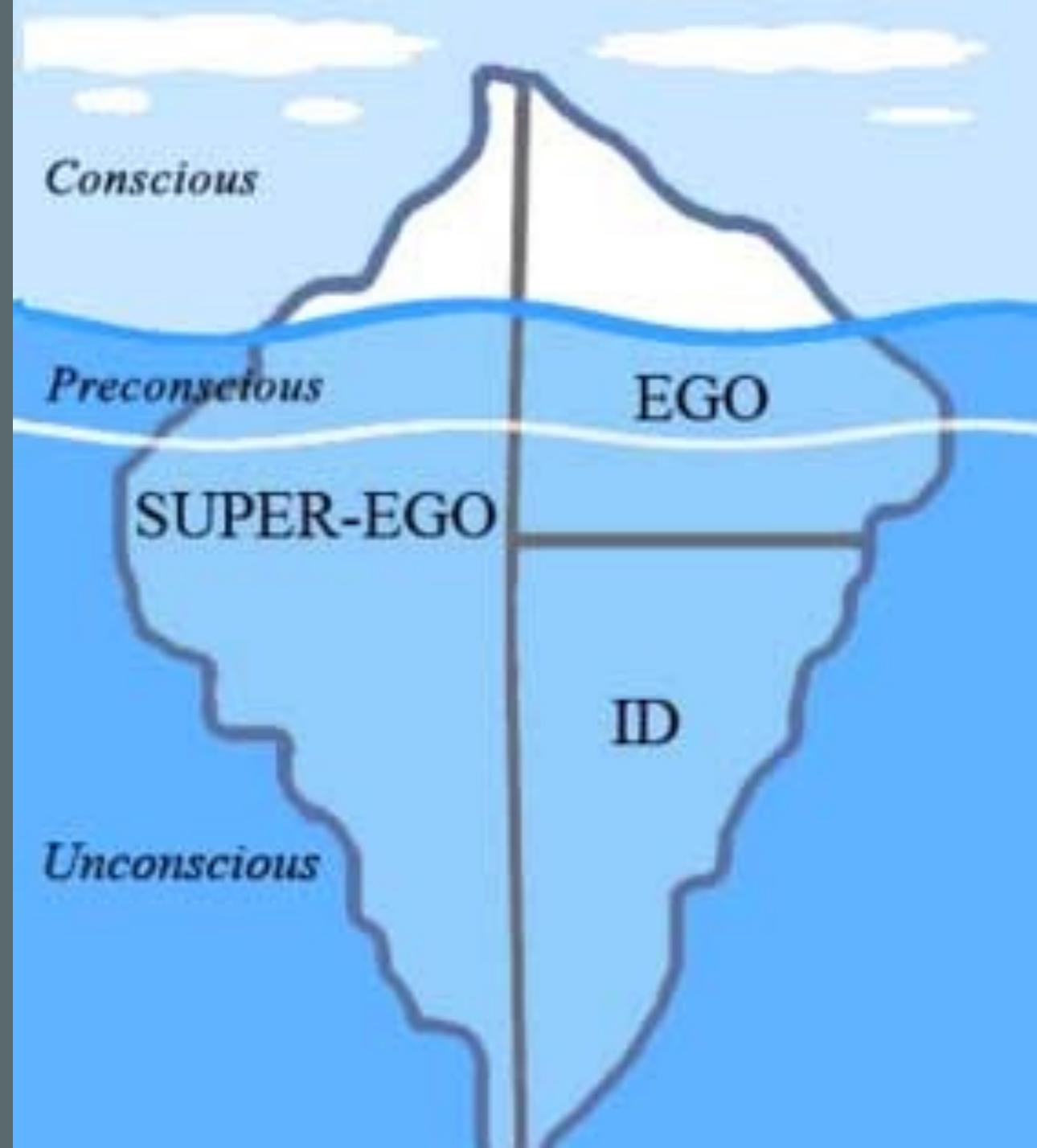
FREUD'S TOPOGRAPHICAL  
MODEL



## TOPOGRAPHY OF THE MIND (FREUD)

- Conscious mind: contains thoughts, emotions, perceptions of which we are aware
- Preconscious mind: not aware, but awareness is possible
- Unconscious mind: non aware, and awareness is difficult/impossible

FREUD'S STRUCTURAL  
MODEL



## STRUCTURE OF THE MIND (FREUD)

- Id - Home of instincts – linked to the body - Aggressive (Death Instinct); Erotic (Life Instinct)
- Ego - Mediates between the unrealistic id and the external real world
- Superego - Moral authority: Dictates how one should be (ego ideal), and what one should not do (conscience)
- All three have large components that are unconscious. The Id, for Freud, is completely unconscious

## FIVE TAKEAWAYS

1. There are different forms of the unconscious
2. Some forms help us in daily life; some hinder us
3. Those forms that hinder us do so because they alter our behavior, feelings, perceptions, etc. – without our knowing why
4. Psychoanalytic psychotherapy focuses on the unconscious origins of psychological distress
5. Psychoanalytic psychotherapy believes that healing *begins* with making conscious what has been unconscious

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