PSYCHOANALYTIC PSYCHOTHERAPY IN EVERYDAY TERMS

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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 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
• 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
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
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
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
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
References


