

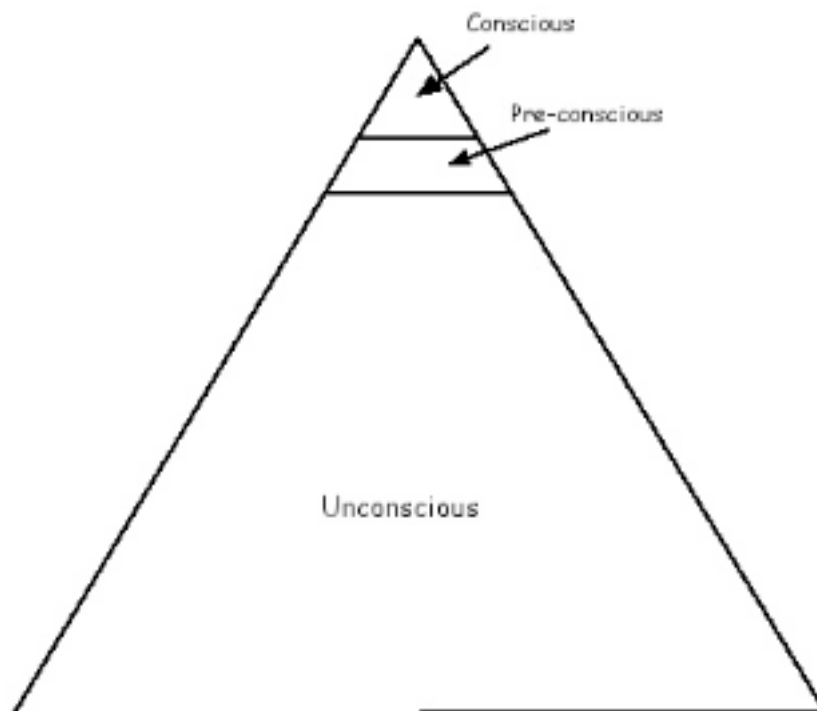
# Projection as a defence

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I was asked a question about projection recently. I have put some of my response here.

Projection is what is called a defence of defence mechanism. It allows the person to psychologically defend them self against something. One thing that I have learnt over 20 years of psychotherapy is that humans are very good at lying to themselves. They are good at hiding from themselves.

To really understand what a defence is in this sense it is advantageous to understand where the concept came from. Freud postulated 'projection' in the late 1800s when he lived in Vienna, Europe.



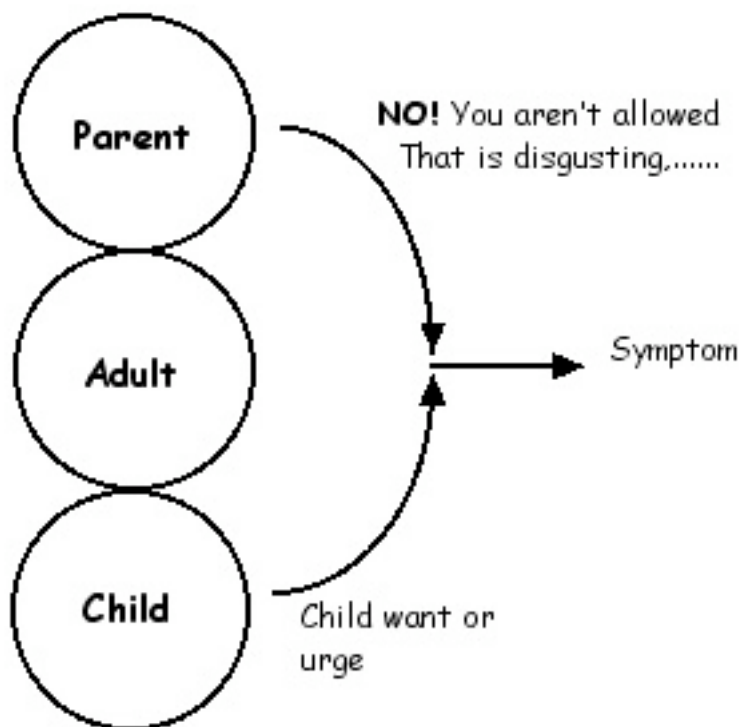
In this diagram he suggested that a person at any one time has 5% of material in their conscious, 5% in their preconscious and the other 90% resides in their unconscious. When a person felt or thought something that was not acceptable to him he would place that thought or urge in the unconscious. For instance the

married man who felt lust after his neighbour's wife may find this quite unacceptable so he 'places' such urges in his unconscious. Then he no longer has to worry about it (in the short term) because he is not consciously aware of them.

Remember that where Freud lived (Vienna) and when he lived (Late 1800s) sexual repression was at it highest perhaps in the history of modern mankind. Sex was completely taboo. So when people had sexual thoughts of some kind they could feel repulsed and disgusted as they had been trained since early childhood to not think such sexual thoughts. So the unconscious allowed people to cope with such things (in the short term).

The problem is that the urge does not just go away, It has just been placed into the "too hard basket", and in the longer term it keeps coming back. That is it will spontaneously arise from the unconscious into the conscious. This meant that in the longer term the person had to defend self against that urge and hence the development of the defence mechanism.

In Transactional Analysis we have the ego state explanation of the dynamics of a defence such as projection. This is shown below:



This is sometimes referred to as the hydraulic theory of personality. The Child ego state has an urge. For example a married man may feel sexual attraction to another man at work. But his Parent ego state believes this is totally immoral and disgusting. So the 'force' from the Child and the Parent collide. There is an

impasse as they say. This collision is like a wave hitting up against the rocks on the shoreline.



When two opposing forces collide there is always a result. In the human psyche it is a symptom of some kind.

The resultant collision provides the force or the energy for a symptom or defence mechanism to develop. For instance the symptom may be anxiety or depression or even something like homophobia. The man can also develop the defence of projection. In this instance instead of acknowledging the homosexual impulses in himself he will project them out onto others. So he will see other men as being homosexual or behaving in homosexual ways when in fact they are not.



Projection allows the man to trick himself or lie to himself. "I won't see my own Child homosexual desires, instead I will see others as being like that". This allows him to feel relief that he is not homosexual but he must continually guard against other homosexual men because they seem to be everywhere. He is in fact really guarding against his own unconscious (Child) homosexual impulses that keep arising into his own conscious. Thus his projection defends his positive view of himself.