

Parts of mental life

Freud employed a model of personality organization. According to this model, mental life can be represented by three levels of consciousness — the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious.

Conscious level:

The conscious level consists of whatever sensations and experiences you are aware of at a given moment in time. Freud insisted that only a small part of mental life (thoughts, perception, feelings, and memories) is contained in the realm of consciousness. Whatever the content of conscious experience may be for a given person at a given time, it is the result of a selective screening process largely regulated by external cues.

Preconscious level:

The preconscious domain, sometimes called "available memory" encompasses all experiences that are not conscious at the moment but which can easily be retrieved into awareness either spontaneously or with a minimum of effort. In Freud's view the preconscious bridges the conscious and unconscious regions of the mind. For instance, under the influence of certain therapeutic techniques, unconscious material may submerge into the preconscious and from there become conscious.

Unconscious level:

The deepest and major stratum of the human mind is the unconscious. It is the storehouse for primitive instinctual drives plus emotions and memories that are so threatening to the conscious mind that they have been repressed, or unconsciously pushed into the unconscious mind. Examples of material that might be found in your unconscious include a forgotten trauma in childhood, hidden feelings of hostility toward a parent and repressed sexual desires of which you are unaware. For Freud, such unconscious material is responsible for much of your everyday behaviour.