

What do you think is the importance of the unconscious in everyday life?

Introduction

The unconscious means events and thoughts that have been repressed to a place beyond awareness. I will be arguing that the unconscious is important in everyday life, although raising and rebutting objections to that view. Following arguments will mention psychoanalytic terminology which will be defined later on such as defence mechanisms, transference, countertransference, projection and the pleasure principle. Objections raised will cover alleged unverifiability, infrequent instances of certain unconscious phenomena and conscious supremacy.

Main body

The unconscious is important in influencing everyday life through defence mechanisms. Defence mechanisms are ways of rejecting an unacceptable or bad feeling through unconscious barriers. For example, Freud (1937) argues that defence mechanisms are a reaction to protect ourselves from feelings such as anxiety. This means that when confronted with difficult situations in everyday life the unconscious works in ways to protect us, by for example denying that an event has taken place or rationalizing a bad decision. This is because harmful or unacceptable thoughts can negatively impact our state of mind which is why defence mechanisms occur and do so unconsciously in everyday life. Therefore, the unconscious is important in everyday life as defence mechanisms are something that every human has dealt with as it protects us from a variety of negative thoughts.

One argument against the view that the unconscious is important in everyday life is because the conscious has more control. For example, when verbally interacting with others, the conscious mind must process what the other person has said and what the reply should be. This means that the conscious mind has more control and is of more importance than the unconscious as meaningful decisions in everyday life are in the end thought about and decided by the conscious mind. But this argument is not as strong because it ignores that the conscious mind is impacted by the unconscious, so although these conscious choices seem free, many are impacted by past life experiences that were not chosen.

The unconscious is also important in everyday life through projection. Freud (1950) talks about projection as essentially the act of ascribing traits that apply more to us than to someone else. For instance, how people view themselves will often generalize to others such as the notion that if 'I can do it others can' or if someone feels insecure about themselves, they might be the first to point out how they think someone else is insecure. This means that at least some thoughts that people have about themselves or others are the product of projection as it is done unconsciously and seems intuitive at first, for example if someone had an argument and afterwards felt annoyed, they might have projected the assumption that the other person is also annoyed leading to a breakdown of communication and friendship. Because it is hard for an individual to find out if they are projecting, it increases its significance in everyday life as almost any thought had about others could reflect a trait that applies more to us than the other person. Therefore, the unconscious is important in everyday life through projection as it occurs intuitively and is difficult to counter.

An argument against the view that the unconscious is important in everyday life is that its importance cannot be measured. To demonstrate this point, it is difficult if not impossible to measure the importance of something immaterial which the unconscious is, with immaterial meaning not made up of matter. This means that whether actions in everyday life have a large unconscious aspect to it is difficult to establish as tools used to reach that conclusion cannot investigate immaterial processes which is why justifications typically arise from case studies, from which the unconscious is speculated. But this argument is not as strong as the unconscious is inductively justified and recognized in psychology as an existing thing which shapes and impacts behaviour. This is done so inductively comparable the theory of evolution which can also be viewed as immaterial as it is not made up of matter. Inductively means that multiple statements are taken as supplying some truth from which a conclusion is inferred.

Another way the unconscious has importance in everyday life is through the common use of transference. Transference means transferring an emotion that you feel towards your caregivers onto your therapist, or in everyday life another person. For example, Rosenbluth (1970) gives the example of a little girl without even having met the therapist picking a toy chicken and lion out of a drawer with the therapist representing the lion and her being the chicken. This means that the way people view others can be severely impacted in everyday life by resembling a caregiver,

as people will resemble some traits of a caregiver, transference is important to acknowledge as unconsciously the mind will attach other qualities to that person which has to be consciously dealt with. This is because our mind strives to recognize and create patterns to improve our chance of survival, this has a significant impact in everyday life as someone seeming too much like their father or mother can positively or negatively impact various forms of relationships ranging from the workplace to a romantic setting as a Teacher who resembles an Authoritarian father could lead to greater subordination or resistance in class as the unconscious link is made to the father. Therefore, the unconscious has importance in everyday life as transference appears in various forms of relationships.

Other ways the unconscious demonstrates importance in everyday life is through countertransference. Heimann (1950) views countertransference as the therapist transferring their feelings towards the patient. For example, the boss of a company giving someone who is unqualified the job due to them invoking emotions once felt by the boss when he was younger, as someone gave him a job when he was unqualified, so he transfers his feelings onto the applicant and decides to employ him. This means that in everyday life our relationships are subtly being unconsciously moulded by counter transferring emotions onto others. This has the impact of being able to connect with others easier whilst with some it is harder. This is because unconsciously we already ascribe good or bad traits to people another example of this is unconscious bias. This is significant to everyday life as the unconscious mind aims to determine if the object, meaning a person or thing that receives emotional investment, is deserving of our emotional energy. Without consciously being aware, we are inclined to lean towards one side. Therefore, the unconscious is important in everyday life as countertransference primes our engagement with other humans before they even begin.

However, to counter the previous points, transference and counter transference do not add to the importance of the unconscious in everyday life as they are small scale experiences that generally occur in a psychotherapeutic setting. This is shown by everyday interactions typically not being impacted by feelings from past caregivers and the discourse surrounding transference and countertransference generally being confined within a therapist and patient context. This means that rather than observing some regular occurrences in everyday life and ascribing it to the unconscious, it seems like the opposite, where instances of transference and counter transference

that take place in a therapeutic setting are extrapolated to everyday life. But this argument is not as strong because it ignores the applicability of transference and countertransference as the mechanism of identifying behaviours from past caregivers and extrapolating that the other person must in some way also be like them has an evolutionary and unconscious basis that can be seen in many attitudes and situations in everyday life.

The fifth and most important way the unconscious is important in everyday life is through the pleasure principle. Freud (1950) views the pleasure principle as the avoidance of 'unpleasure'. An example would be excessive use of social media as the constant need of wanting more pleasure may lead to addictive behaviour. This means that what drives everyday interactions is the wish to gain pleasure and avoid harm. Although it is important to acknowledge that the pleasure principle contends in the unconscious with the reality principle which is the principle that allows us to delay the need to gain pleasure. This is because our mind instinctively aims to further our survival where childhood and other factors decides whether the reality or pleasure principle reigns supreme. This raises the importance of the unconscious in everyday life as most actions can be traced back to the need to gain pleasure. For instance, people work to gain pleasure and make money, money is only valuable to the person insofar it gives them more pleasure having it. This can be seen with most actions and especially the marketing industry where the goal is to identify the most efficient ways to convey the pleasure gained or displeasure avoided using their product or service. Therefore, the most elucidating reason why the unconscious is important in everyday life is the pleasure principle due to its omnipresence in everyday interactions.

Conclusion

To conclude, the unconscious is important in everyday life because of various mental processes that impact and shape everyday experiences in some way or another. Although you could argue that the unconscious is not an important influence in everyday life because of argued rare occurrences, conscious supremacy and methodological issues. These arguments are not as strong due to the wide applicability of the unconscious, the illusion of conscious supremacy as it is unconsciously decided what becomes conscious and that methodological issues do not hinder psychological investigations into the impact of the unconscious in everyday life.

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