# Psychoanalytic Theory

*by Sophia Tutorial*

### ☰ WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson will cover the topic of psychoanalytic theory. Our discussion breaks down as follows:

1. Freud and the Unconscious
2. Defense Mechanisms

# 1. Freud and the Unconscious

One of the major figures in psychoanalytic theory is Sigmund Freud. He was an Austrian doctor who, in the late 1800s, began studying neurology and practicing the treatment of different patients with brain and nervous disorders like hysteria.

Many of his theories are informed by his practice. This is the opposite of most psychological theories, which start with experiments and research and lead to practice; he started with practice which led to the theories.

Freud's main idea is that mental life is a bit like an iceberg. Only a small fraction of an iceberg sits above water. The majority of it is below the surface. Freud's theories say the same is true about our minds. The part that's sticking outside of the water is our conscious minds, but the majority of our mental experience is the **unconscious**. This can affect our conscious mind.

According to Freud, most of the unconscious was very negative or unwanted. Psychoanalytic theory tries to uncover how these unconscious forces and conflicts can affect our conscious mind and lead to any negative or unwanted behaviors.

### ⊘ DID YOU KNOW

A Freudian slip is an error in speaking that reveals some unconscious thought or wish.

Another symbol of the unconscious, according to Freud, were our dreams. Dreams are a form of language used by the unconscious. It speaks to us in symbols that we need to interpret to understand what's going on in our conscious lives.

### 🖹 TERM TO KNOW

**Unconscious**

Beyond awareness; things we aren't always aware of such as irrational wishes, unacceptable sexual desires, aggressive tendencies

# 2. Defense Mechanisms

Because a lot of this mental landscape, according to Freud, is very negative or unwanted, the brain develops certain kinds of protection or defense mechanisms. Defense mechanisms are an unconscious way that people protect their minds and deal with the anxiety that's going on as a result of their unconscious mind and the conflict there.

> ⤳ EXAMPLE  One type of defense mechanism is denial. Denial refers to when you're trying to ignore something bad that happens, or you don't want to think about it in any way.

Similar to denial is **repression**, which is a defense mechanism that plays a large part in Freud's theories. This is when certain kinds of bad memories or unwanted desires are blocked or pushed from our conscious thoughts.

> ⤳ EXAMPLE  Memories from a traumatic childhood may be something that an individual represses.

These kinds of repressed thoughts can affect our conscious thoughts in adverse ways. According to Freud, they can lead to dysfunctional thoughts, behaviors, or mental disorders. He stated that individuals need to bring these repressed thoughts to the surface so that they are not festering in the unconscious. Doing this would be a way to effectively treat mental disorders.

📄 **TERM TO KNOW**

**Repression**
Defense mechanism that pushes out thoughts or feelings into the unconscious, making ourselves "unaware"

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📋 **SUMMARY**

**Sigmund Freud** is an important figure in psychoanalytic theory. He described how the **unconscious** mind could harbor negative thoughts and emotions. He stated that people use **defense mechanisms**, like repression, to keep these negative thoughts in the unconscious. If left to build up and fester, this can lead to negative thoughts, behaviors, and mental disorders. Freud believed a person should bring these repressed emotions and memories to the conscious mind to treat mental disorders.

Good luck!

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Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Erick Taggart.

📄 **TERMS TO KNOW**

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"unaware".

**Unconscious**

Beyond awareness; things we aren't always aware of such as irrational wishes, unacceptable sexual desires, aggressive tendencies.