ClinicSearch

Clinical Reviews and Case Reports

Alexander J. Shadikhan *

Open Access

Commentary

Unveiling the role of the Unconscious: A brief overview

Alexander J. Shadikhan

Northwestern Medicine Behavioral Health United States of America

***Correspondence Author:** Alexander J. Shadikhan, Northwestern Medicine Behavioral Health United States of America.

Received Date: August 21, 2024 | Accepted Date: August 30, 2024 | Published Date: September 06, 2024

Citation: Alexander J. Shadikhan, (2024), Unveiling the role of the Unconscious: A brief overview, *Clinical Reviews and Case Reports*, *3*(5); **DOI:**10.31579/2835-7957/103

The unconscious mind can be described as a multilayered and multidimensional construct encompassing everything from our beliefs to our potential within its confines. From the very beginning, the unconscious mind has been an enigma, compelling many speculations, and discussions about its existence and the role it plays in human behavior. In cognitive-behavior theory and research, there is a tendency to minimize its role or ignore its contribution to information processing and behavior (De Benedittis, 2023). It Ignores the possibility of the unconscious sharing information between itself and the conscious in the mid-DLC (Lau & Passingham, 2007), and unconscious processing in the frontal temporal and insular cortices (Elman, Epadhyay, Lowan, Kurunakaran, Albanese & Borsook, 2020). The unconscious mind is considered more flexible and creates a facade in that the conscious exerts control over the decision-making process even though it does not (Budson, Richmann & Kensinger, 2022). This not only gives us a sense of agency over any given situation but also motivates change when inclined (Lumer 2017). Yet despite research and the numerous theoretical models, not much is known about its mechanisms and how it functions.

The unconscious mind can be described as a multilayered and multidimensional construct encompassing everything from our beliefs and experiences to our hidden potential. From the beginning, the unconscious mind has been an enigma, compelling many speculations, and discussions about its existence and role in human behavior. Operationally defining the unconscious has been problematic due to the variations in thoughts and perspectives. No matter how it is eventually defined one thing remains certain there are many unknowns about its mechanisms related to its specific function. A popular theory among many cognitive behaviorists underscores their understanding that the unconscious plays only a secondary role to the conscious and works under its guidance (De Benedittis, 2023). This argument stands in stark contrast to other psychoanalytic and neuropsychological perspectives that believe in its dominance. Notably that the unconscious is far more diverse and flexible, playing a more dynamic role in decision-making, than previously acknowledged (Budson, Richman, & Kesinger, 2022). Most researchers point to a few areas of contention between the two views centering on whether the unconscious functions independently or interacts deliberately with the conscious in the decision-making process (Frasico & Evers, 2017). Understandably, the complexity of the decision-making process is affected by many factors such as previous experiences, emotions aroused by the specific stimulus, and history of underlying predispositions. The present understanding of the unconscious has been influenced by the popularity of the cognitive-behavioral perspective and its perception of both the conscious and unconscious.

Historically, our present understanding of the role of the conscious and unconscious, as noted by Ruggerio, Spada, Caselli & Sassaroli (2018), has been greatly influenced by Beck's research and Ellis' insight into REBT. Both sought to combine behavioral research with aspects of the psychodynamic theory. Their efforts were partially responsible for the role of a mediator between triggers and behavior. The role of a mediator in cognitive-behavioral theory is consistently associated with the conscious mind. Conversely, the unconscious mind is more difficult to explain due to its complex and numerous unknown variables.

Consequently, this led to an increased emphasis on the conscious as it played a dominant role in information processing and the resulting behavior. As time passed, the original theory underwent several modifications to account for various factors. This included incorporating elements of the Self, expressed as self-schemata, self-beliefs, and self-knowledge (Ruggerio et al. 2018). As time progressed there have been many attempts to conceptualize and define the true nature of the unconscious, but fell short as the theoretical assumptions did not fully explain the neurological mechanisms or its physiological underpinnings. Influenced by many cognitive behavioral insights about the unconscious, most literature tried to explain these intricacies of information processing. Starting with an environmental stimulus or trigger being perceived by the conscious and then communicated to the unconscious. Depending on the quality and type of information provided by the environment, the processing of this information is handled by the conscious or the unconscious. The unconscious, it is believed, could handle more complex tasks involved in long-term memory and goal achievement, rather than short-term processing accomplished by the conscious (Hassin, Ulman & Bargh, 2005). A stimulus or trigger then activates a behavioral impulse, but only after this stimulus is compared to existing stimuli and past experiences with similar base stimuli will there be a response (Barg & Morsella, 2008). This response has to be of specific intensity to motivate a conscious behavioral response (Koulder & Dehouse, 2007). To account for emotions and other factors, a significant review of the theory was conducted, resulting in numerous modifications to the original framework. However, the researchers failed to acknowledge the influential role of the unconscious mind, instead of maintaining the status quo that gives primacy to the conscious mind. Contrary to this belief, recent research has shown that this assumption might not be all that accurate.

The accuracy of this belief and the interaction between the conscious and unconscious mind have been challenged by recent findings indicating that both share information. Information is integrated into a more coherent impulse having originated from various physiological and psychological sources (Hirschhorn, Kahane, Gur-Arie, Faivre & Mudrik, 2021). It has been proposed by studies conducted by Zust, Collela, Reber, Vuilleumier, Hauf, Ruch, and Henke (2015) that the integration of stimuli occurs at the level of the hippocampus and other associated structures, depending on the source of the information. There are indications that the unconscious mind, as noted in adaptive and mind-wandering tasks (Steindorf, Rummel & Boywitt, 2021), fills in information gaps even when it is not readily available from past experiences with similar stimuli. However, the accuracy of the decision might be

hindered if faced with a very complex decision. Distraction has been noticed to produce a more accurate discussion than dealing with the problem directly (Abadie and Waroquier, 2019). It falls to reason that the complexity of the unconscious seems to extend beyond the role of a secondary player to a more dominant conscious as perceived by most cognitive-behaviorist researchers.

Most researchers claim that the unconscious seems more flexible and aware than previously thought. Recent studies indicate that the mid-DLPC (dorsolateral prefrontal cortex), once considered a seat of logic and dominated by conscious activity can be influenced by the unconscious priming (Lau & Passingham, 2007). Elman, Epadhyay, Lowan, Kurunakaran, Albanese & Borsook (2020) suggested that the frontal, temporal lobe and most of the insular cortices were involved in unconscious processing and consistently showed extensive overlapping and usage by both the conscious and unconscious. Budson, Richman & Kensinger (2022) suggest that most actions are under unconscious control and are therefore automatic. They also speculate that unconsciously, an analysis and decision is made about a given stimulus while a conscious response becomes evident. Flexibility is the crucial factor through which conscious thoughts can impact the unconscious. Changes in the unconscious mind occur when there is an openness to change. The implication for therapy is nominal since most therapies align with these findings.

The significance of the unconscious mind cannot be overstated. It not only influences decision-making, thoughts, and behaviors but also shapes our understanding of the world around us. Contrary to popular belief, the unconscious often controls our behaviors, tricking us into believing that our conscious mind is in control Budson, et al.(2022). This creates a false sense of agency over our thoughts and actions (Lumer, 2017). Recent research suggests that the unconscious is more aware and capable of intentional action than previously believed, making cognitive behavioral techniques just as important as the psychoanalytic approach. Combining and restructuring components of existing methods and treatment regimens may lead to more successful outcomes, depending on the individual's receptiveness. When approached holistically, the unconscious may be the primary driver, with the conscious mind serving as a filter for incoming stimuli and contributing to a sense of control over decisions. This interplay between the conscious and unconscious may influence changes in beliefs, emotions, and thoughts, resulting in fluctuations in both agency and self-esteem. The complexity of the role played by the unconscious mind is a fascinating subject as we strive to gain a better understanding of the involved mechanisms.

References

1. Abadie, M., & Waroquier, L. (2019). Evaluating the Benefits of Conscious and Unconscious Thought in Complex Decision Making. Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 6(1), 72-78.
2. Budson A.E., Richman K.A., Kensinger E.A. Consciousness as a Memory System. Cogn Behav Neurol. 2022 Dec 1;35(4):263-297.
3. De Benedittis G.D (2023) The (Re)Discovery of the Unconscious: What We Have Learned from Neuroscience. *Int J Cogn Behav* 6:017.
4. Elman, I., Upadhyay, J., Lowen, S.B., Karunakaran, K.D., Albanese, M.J., & Borsook, D. (2020). Mechanisms Underlying Unconscious Processing and Their Alterations in Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: Neuroimaging of Zero Monetary Outcomes Contextually Framed as "No Losses" vs. "No Gains". Frontiers in Neuroscience, 14.
5. Farisco, M., Evers, K. The ethical relevance of the unconscious. *Philos Ethics Humanit Med* **12**, 11 (2017).
6. Hassin, Ran & Uleman, James & Bargh, John. (2005). The New Unconscious. Social cognition and social neuroscience.
7. Hirschhorn, R., Kahane, O., Gur-Arie, I., Faivre, N., & Mudrik, L. (2021). Windows of integration hypothesis revisited. Frontiers in Human Neuroscience, 14, Article 617187
8. Lau, H.C., Passingham, R.E. Journal of Neuroscience. 2007 May 23, 27 (21) 5805-5811;
9. Lumer, C. (2017). Automatic actions: Agency, intentionality, and responsibility. *Philosophical Psychology, 30*, 616 - 644.
10. Steindorf, L., Rummel, J., & Boywitt, D. 2021 A fresh look at the Unconscious Thought Effect: Using Mind-Wandering Measures to Investigate Thought Processes in Decision Problems with High Information Load. (12):545928

Zust, M.A., Collela, P., Reber T.P., Vuilleumier, P., Haul, M., RuchS., Henke, K. (2015) Hippocampus is Place of Interaction between Unconscious and Conscious Memories. PLoS ONE 10(3): e0122459.