

# WHAT IS SHADOW WORK?

## Unpacking the Unconscious Mind



by Marijoseph Bradford, MBA

*This article was written by one of our Clinical Interns.*

The early 20th century Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist Carl Jung is known for developing the framework for many of the psychological personality tests used in the mental health field. Jung created personality labels and terms such as “introvert” and “extravert/extrovert”, “archetypes”, and the “collective unconscious”, sometimes referred to as the “objective psyche”.

The collective unconscious/objective psyche is the part of the unconscious mind that holds our deep-seated beliefs and instincts, like spirituality, and life and death (Dinan, Stilling, Stanton 2015). According to Jung, “everyone carries a shadow.” When discussing shadows and shadow work in this article, it will be from a psychoanalysis perspective, which focuses on the importance of what is hidden in the unconscious mind.

### What Is the Shadow?

Have you ever gotten really mad at a person but couldn't figure out why? Or does someone's presence just rub you the wrong way? Or have you ever lost control and lashed out at someone without a reasonable explanation? These events could be tied to your shadow side coming out.

The shadow is the area of our identity that is suppressed in the unconscious mind. The shadow self is the part of us that we do not consciously acknowledge to ourselves or to others. The shadow is the place where self-destructive behaviors and painful emotions are stored away from our consciousness, such as psychological and emotional trauma, lust, greed, addictions, fears, jealousy, and insecurities. Based on Jung's studies, the less a shadow is incorporated in the individual's conscious, the bigger and more problematic it may be in a person's life (Aziz, 1990).

These unexposed areas can often prevent us from fully experiencing God's divine love. Suppressing your shadow can often be manifested in the form of diseases, feelings of low self-worth, addictions, and other mind/body health issues that can affect the overall quality of life, all of which are rooted in fear. We tend to project onto others anything that we bury within ourselves (Richo, 1991). Discovering and exposing these parts of ourselves is part of the journey of recovery and following Jesus Christ.

- Continued on Page 2 -

Article taken from the May 2021 issue of *PRESSING ON*, a Publication of Chicago Christian Counseling Center  
Chicago Christian Counseling Center has locations throughout Chicagoland and Northwest Indiana

[www.chicagochristiancounseling.org](http://www.chicagochristiancounseling.org)

708.845.5500 | [info@chicagochristiancounseling.org](mailto:info@chicagochristiancounseling.org)

[facebook.com/ChicagoChristianCounseling](https://facebook.com/ChicagoChristianCounseling) | Text CCCC to 22828 to join our email list

*Promoting health and wholeness through professional counseling, consultation and education from a Christian perspective.*

# WHAT IS SHADOW WORK?

## Unpacking the Unconscious Mind

- Continued from Page 1 -

■ by Marijosephe Bradford, MBA

### What Is Shadow Work?

To better understand the concept of shadow work, there needs to be a basic understanding of Sigmund Freud's theories about the parts of the mind – the conscious, subconscious, and unconscious.

- Conscious Mind - The everyday mind that has awareness of thoughts, actions, and feelings.
- Subconscious Mind - The reactions and actions we automatically play out based on frameworks designed in our unconscious mind.
- Unconscious Mind - Our past's deep recesses and memories — including psychological trauma — that formulate the automatic mental process, or frameworks.

Shadow work is the process of going into the unconscious and revealing repressed (buried deep in the unconscious) thoughts and feelings that make up misguided beliefs and judgments. These beliefs are the building blocks of our coping mechanisms. Coping mechanisms are our conscious efforts to solve personal and interpersonal problems, to try and master, minimize, or tolerate stress and conflict. An example of a coping mechanism is taking a deep and slow breath. This would be considered an adaptive coping mechanism, while a maladaptive coping mechanism would be consumption of excessive amounts of alcohol. This coping mechanism can add more harm to a person.

Shadow work is analyzing and understanding the root of repressed misguided beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and/or traumatic experiences. For example, you sit by a family each week at church. You notice that they never put any offerings in the collection plate when it's passed. You may have a negative view and judge them to be non-tithers, when in fact they tithe weekly online. By bringing these unconscious repressed feelings and ideas out of the "shadows" and into the light, we can self-reflect and understand why we unconsciously think, interpret, and judge situations and events from a misguided view. The "shadows" are the "planks" that Jesus advised us to take out of our eyes in Matthew 7:1-5.

Doing this work has been known to help in a variety of ways, like psychological integration (bringing unconscious beliefs to conscious awareness), loosening the grip of fear-based thoughts and behaviors, and improving relationships and perceptions about life (Dinan, Stilling, Stanton 2015).

The goal of shadow work is to make the unconscious conscious. This work is not for the faint-hearted. But it is beneficial to us to help us fully embrace the love of God and know that Jesus Christ – the Anointed One – has already freed us from any shadows. ■



*Marijosephe Bradford, MBA, is a Clinical Intern and sees clients in our Orland Park and South Holland, IL, locations.*

Article taken from the May 2021 issue of *PRESSING ON*, a Publication of Chicago Christian Counseling Center  
Chicago Christian Counseling Center has locations throughout Chicagoland and Northwest Indiana

[www.chicagochristiancounseling.org](http://www.chicagochristiancounseling.org)

708.845.5500 | [info@chicagochristiancounseling.org](mailto:info@chicagochristiancounseling.org)

[facebook.com/ChicagoChristianCounseling](https://facebook.com/ChicagoChristianCounseling) | Text CCCC to 22828 to join our email list

*Promoting health and wholeness through professional counseling, consultation and education from a Christian perspective.*