

AMHERST STUDIES

ELLEN SOLOWAY

on conscious, unconscious, subconscious ...

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ELLEN

-- Thesaurus or dictionary definitions - so we have a basic starting point:

Conscious is aware, mindful, sentient, sensible, deliberate, premeditated, considered on purpose.

Unconscious is oblivious, ignorant, unwitting, automatic, mechanical, instinctive and involuntarily insentient.

Subconscious is considered subliminal, intuitive, unintentional and involuntary.

Webster's says "Consciousness is being aware of something within oneself, a quality of state of being.

Now, Moshe had the idea that he wanted people to become conscious of what they are doing. So, a lot of what we tried to do in either teaching Awareness Through Movement® or Functional Integration® is to bring under people's voluntary control that which they are doing. Or, if they decide to change what they are doing to make those (changes) feasible and possible for them to consider.

One way that Feldenkrais® work is different is that it's totally client-centered and client-driven. A friend of mine, *Therese Stogner*, a practitioner and former PT in Atlanta, describes it this way: When she worked as a PT, she decided what that client ought to do and ought to be like, and directed that client to do that which she (Therese) predetermined was in the best interest for her patient. When she switched her thinking over to the Feldenkrais Method's way of thinking, Therese gave the client, her patient, the tools to achieve what that patient would like to be better at in their life, and it was their decision to use the tools or not.

I think that is fundamental if you are going to think of how these three words – conscious, unconscious and subconscious – can be used within the Feldenkrais Method®.

Now, what I'd like you to do is write on your piece of paper three different clients of yours that you know have very different, distinct, personalities. Leave room to write under each name.

Then, once you've decided on your clients, I'd like you first to think of what does that client dream for themselves, what would that client like to do better? What would that client like to be in his or her own world?

While you're thinking, I'll tell you a story that was told by **Dennis Leary¹**. **The location was Boulder, Colorado at an interview given by Moshe**. It was at an interview arranged for him as publicity for one of his public workshops:

Dennis saw the woman walk in and she looked frumpy, her clothing was not stylish, it didn't fit well, it had spots and stains on it and her hair was not well-groomed. She came into the interview and started to ask Moshe standard interview questions. You know (the kind). "Where were you born? "What was your name? What was your family like? "How did you start the Feldenkrais Method?"

Moshe, in his inimitable self, was irritated by her questions. Finally, he said, "What about you? When you were a young girl did you think you would grow up to be a third rate reporter on a second rate regional newspaper? Or, did that girl growing up have different dreams? I have time tomorrow - I want you to think about that and come back tomorrow when I'll give you another interview."

And, with that, he harrumphed and walked out of the room.

The woman did come back the next day for the interview, and this time, her hair was styled, groomed and her hem wasn't coming down. And, she asked a different level of question of Moshe and he engaged her in a conversation.

I never forgot Dennis telling that story because, to me, it's the epitome of why people come to us in the long run. Initially, I freely admit, most of us get our clients because they have an aching pain that drives them in our door. But, what keeps them coming back is a practitioner's belief that this person is capable of learning something.

So, under the level of "dreams", you've marked what your client would like to do better or be better or achieve in his/her life. Put that under 'consciousness'. Then think of all the motor little habits they have that help them get there.

The reason I ask you to list three clients is so you have both a variety and a contrast for perceiving how different people make solutions for their own lives, because in many ways all we do as practitioners is offer different levels of solutions to a person.

ELLEN

I am asking you to write down what this person actively does, consciously, that helps them achieve their goal. Whatever their dream.... Moshe's word for it was "unavowed dream". The most obvious dream that everybody likes to talk about is the two years it took Moshe to teach Ben Gurion to stand on his head. Okay? That's a big dream.

Next, I'd like you to think of all the unconscious thing the person does that helps them get to their goal.

Then ... unconscious and conscious ... I consider the subconscious to sort of be that middle ground between them. If you have ever seen colored spotlights, there is an arc of color gel here, then there is an arc of color gel over there. Then ... a lighting technician can blend the colors on those big spotlights so this area where my fingers are crossing is where the color blends.

Next, start to write in these columns lists of behaviors -- whether personality, social or actual motor habits -- that prevent the person from achieving their goals. Again, divide them into the ones the person knows about and the ones that are unconscious, that they don't understand or realize their contribution.

Then, another list you can make ... Go inside yourselves and think what skills you have as a person? What interests you, as a person, that can help your client get closer to their dreams? Not your Feldenkrais skills -- that is another category.

Then, as you continue, go to what parts of your knowledge of the Feldenkrais Method are right at your fingertips, that you know cold. They are your assets, your easily drawn-upon assets as a practitioner, that are useful for these clients.

Next, stand up and walk around for a couple of seconds. Come back while you are walking. Pay attention to how your feet make contact with the ground, and just doing that simple habitual instruction from the Feldenkrais Method may help you think of another one of your skills.

Remember how it felt to walk around the room after one of your favorite lessons, one where you stood up and felt glorious. Can you evoke that feeling again inside your mind, inside yourself? Because we are all prejudiced. Feldenkrais practitioners are junkies. We think that this state of mind is a better part of our existence. So, after you've re-evoked that quality inside yourself, come up with one or two states of being or descriptive words and add that to one of your assets.

We'll label this an example of a subconscious state of being, where it is just below the surface. You think you are being intuitive. Where you can just do something that is beyond your conscious mind and you will bring that with you, into your lessons with these three different clients.

Now, just re-route to the shadow side of ourselves, which can be a very important teaching tool for us. Think of whatever is on your shadow side, whatever it may be - your technical skill, your manual dexterity, maybe a thought that runs through your mind. Whatever it is, think of what you place on yourself as a limitation.

Okay, pick one of these clients... Actually I strongly suggest that it probably be the one you have the hardest time with. In the foreground, contemplate how that client has personal skills, personal wishes for themselves, and match that to what are your best skills.

So, in the foreground, you have the better parts of your client, whatever they are, and the better parts of yourself, meshing.

Now, throw into the background either your best wishes for this client or their best goals for themselves. Into the background, place your own sense of limitation, the

things you know you are “less than wonderful” with, that could use more learning, more alternatives.

Then, just listen, while you are contemplating, how you can combine these aspects with one of your other clients.

ELLEN

From a paper that Mark Reese wrote on similarities between Milton Erickson (who was a brilliant hypnotherapist) and Moshe:

“Dr. Feldenkrais admired Erickson a great deal. They both believed that the unconscious is not a reservoir of difficult-to-manage instinctual impulses as depicted by Freud. Instead, it is a life sustaining activity that supports our thinking, feeling, sensing and acting. Many of their similar techniques are designed to reduce the interference of overly conscious direction and will.”²

So what do you know that can help your client be more involved in a life sustaining activity? I like to say, “What is it that attaches them, gives them a passion for living?”

The other thing is that in a few lectures Moshe seldom used the term 'unconscious'. Instead, most of the time, he directed his language to a biologically specific entity that is capable of a great deal of change. Moshe would say “the nervous system.” The current term for the nervous system's ability to change is “neuroplasticity.”

Here's one of Moshe's quotes:

"You do not decide how to do the nervous system. Let your nervous system decide for you. It has thousands of years of experience and therefore it knows more than you." (M. Feldenkrais San Francisco Professional Training Program June 1975)

So, think of your clients again. Think of your own skills and stature and make a few notes about how you can use this information in your actual practice, because in my mind, the work sheet I led you through is a practical application of

conscious, unconscious, and subconscious, and then, foreground and background within the context of Feldenkrais.

So, make those notes. And now, if anybody has any questions or comments, it's thrown open.

BETH

In Virginia. I'm requesting a clarification: When you set up the work sheet you asked us to put down the person's dream. Then, later I wrote down that you were equating that with consciousness. Is that correct?

ELLEN

I would.

BETH

Okay, and the second thing I wrote down was 'What are their motor habits?' Is that conscious or subconscious...

ELLEN

It can be both. It can be anything. A person will come in the door and say "My back hurts. Get rid of my back pain. Fix me." That is their current dream -- to get out of pain. However, if you start talking to people, you find out that what they would really like to do is ... I'm in New Orleans. (Right now, people want to) raise their hand and catch beads without throwing their back out. That's their dream because they got a house full of company coming.

You know, I am working with a fifteen-year-old going into college advanced placement. She has cerebral palsy. Her real dream is to be able to walk across campus and not fall. So, in the background, every time I work with her, I am thinking, "She can walk. She can walk, she just doesn't know how yet." This is how I think about it.

And, it changes. In the beginning, a successful series of lessons for her had, in the background, the belief that she could uncurl her foot because she walked on the inside edge of her foot. That was short term. Now, when I work with her, I actually think of her dancing hip hop because she is fifteen years old. That's what kids her

age do. Now, when she went to her prom, she could dance. Not for long, but before, she never got out of her chair to dance.

Do you understand how it becomes incremental? What skills can I build? One of the things that people here in America I think are short-changed... but Daniella is in Israel. The original Israeli phrase/title for the book *Awareness Through Movement* was *Developing Abilities*. Do I have that right, Daniella? Because I usually mess it up.

DANIELLA
Improving Abilities

ELLEN
And here, it became *Awareness Through Movement*, because it was the culture of the 60's and they wanted to sell copies. But, if you think of what ability you have that allows you to help this person achieve (his or her personal dream or goal), and you keep it in the background of your mind, somehow people sense that you think of them differently. Does that answer your question?

BETH
Okay. Yes, mostly. I was just trying to make sure I had at least a basic sense of how you interpret the conscious, then the unconscious and subconscious. And, I can see how motor habits are both.

Then, what I wrote down was the question about what unconscious things do they do that help them get back to their goal or dream.

Right now I am thinking of unconscious things that do not help the particular person I chose. So, if you could give an example.

ELLEN
To me, that is the perfect trick. There is something magical when you start to think what is within the person's reach. If you only think of the person's limitations, then as far as I am concerned, they might as well go to a physical therapist.

BETH

And, I am a PT.

ELLEN

Okay. This is the hard part of your training. That is why I told Therese Stogner's story, gave her credit for it. Because, by definition, the medical model defines people by their limitations. It is a legal set-up because that justifies the billing to the insurance companies...

You can be a fabulous Feldenkrais person and a PT. You just have to start thinking about what works. Personally, I use the stage lights where they cross, where they overlap. But if you know Venn diagrams from math, there is an area where circles overlay each other. You can shade that overlay in. If you think more about where there is a crossing, where there is a shading, it is a tremendous place for people to learn, because then you are working from where they are pliable.

Am I making sense or should I sketch it out?

BETH

It does make sense. It is obviously a shift in thinking, and I have gone through a big shift in the last two years because I went from the traditional physical therapy ... You know sort of time-unit model, to an independent cash-based practice so I could do more of this and more of what I think really helps people for the long haul.

So, helping me with your analogies was very helpful, thank you.

ELLEN

Marci wants a sketch. Okay, can you see it. This area in here is where there is an overlap where skills overlap. And, here's the limitation -- in this area here. If, when you are formulating your lessons, you operate in this place (where the two circles overlap), you are very potent. Is that understandable?

MARCI

Definitely

BETH

I have another question. Somebody else asked for a clarification on background vs foreground. You've already partially explained the background point you made

about what the best wishes are for them, both on their part and your part, but you also said something about our sense of limitation. I didn't know how you would apply that to background as something helpful, short of recognizing our limitations.

ELLEN

For one thing it helps you to learn where you need to study, where you need to improve your competency. Then, you know either to seek out mentoring or study with a person whose interest matches your need to learn certain skills. For example, you get to hear the “voice.” There's a practitioner I know who has a very difficult time making short, concise sentences.

BETH

[Laughing] There's only one?

ELLEN

I'm being kind... Everything they say goes, "I'm curious. What about if the person stood on their feet and their head came forward. ... etc. ..." That's a lot of words and I have spent a lot of time with Anat and Mia. Both of whom ... Anat gets impatient (with the time it takes to listen to those long sentences) and Mia just likes concise statements. So, you quickly learned that if you wanted an answer, you go, "If a person stands up and their head goes forward, what do I do?" (You learned to) skip all the introductory things and just get to the meat of the question. If you are a person who meanders all over the place, it is a practice, an almost daily one, to edit yourself at least twice a day, and just have a simple direct conversation.

Now, the reverse is also true. If you are abrupt to the quality of being abrasive, learn the language that softens your talk. This is a limitation that you can work with daily with your clients, when they come in for a lesson. You do not have to do it constantly, just twice a day. And, after a while, there is a verbal dexterity that creeps into your interactions, where you can be terse and short when you need to or verbose when you need to.

Here is another one ... a limitation...” As a practitioner all my lessons are slow and languid. They are always at this very soft pace. And, my client falls asleep on me. How do I keep my client awake?”

Well, if you know that that is your limitation, for three minutes, just practice with every client you see in a day, speeding up your hands. Or, if you only give really quick fast lessons, practice slowing down.

This is how knowing what your limitation are is an important learning tool for bringing variety into your FI lessons. You know ... G____, can I publicly pick on you?

Okay, when I first met G____, she was in her training program, and she had the lightest hypnotic touch. She had a beginning practice but she had no variety (of touch). So, when she was working with this lovely special needs kid, she could not get the kid to feel his bone. This kid did not know the "aaack" that happens when a foot really is on the ground. You know, there's the move where you just let the feet drop? And, it was really hard for G____ to get the kid to feel this, or to push the floor with his hands.

Then, gradually over time, she developed a sense of variety in her touch and now she can shift from this light very soft, soothing, wafting lesson. When she wants to now, she can be firm. I have seen this. She can put her hands on somebody, hold the bone, and get movement to go through the system. That took her time and it was a huge learning process for her, but the upshot is that she is a lot better practitioner because she has both voices available to her now. Because she has those two choices available now, she has access to the graded shaded area in between (the two circles on the Venn diagram). She can be medium hard, very hard, moderately hard, softly hard... Does that answer part of it?

BETH

Yes.

ELLEN

Somewhere there's a list of what is called "The Competencies".³ I think you find them on an IFF worksheet. You go there and they tell you all the things you are

supposed to know. Some of them you will and some you won't. That is a limitation. Knowing makes the difference.
Anything else?

RESPONSE

I guess I would ask you to give an example of an unconscious thing that helps them reach a goal. So, you could use one of the examples you have already given, like your...

ELLEN

Okay, I will put that on a broader theoretical level. It has to do with the fact that about 90% of our brain is taken up with inhibition, so we can get repeatable orderly movement patterns. One way of defining cerebral palsy, Parkinson's and a bunch of other so-called diseases is that the brain is chaotic and does not have a reliable way of repeating motor patterns.

A lot of that is unconscious. Speaking of an unconscious one ... What hand do you use to brush your teeth? Almost always, you will use the same hand. Spend a week brushing your teeth with the other hand and you are on your way to break a habit, because a lot of what we do can be defined as breaking a habit on another level, on a thinking level, on a motoric level.

One of the reasons why ... Let's say, this business of being able to repeat patterns with trust and surety, that is what gets us through life. I mean, if you are driving a car, if you didn't have the habit of responding to situations ... Did that answer your question?

RESPONSE

That was very helpful, thank you. It is one of the things that I have actually addressed with this gentleman that I have been thinking about. He is challenging, so I am hoping to use some of this to address (him) differently. So, thank you.

ELLEN

Misha asked would I speak further on identifying a client's subconscious activity since we are not always in our lives.

Good question. The truth is we do not have to be in their lives. We do have to be able to ask questions though. Or to be observant.

So, if I am giving a lesson, let's say ... I will take an extreme because there was a time in my life when I gave a lot of volunteer lessons to people who were survivors of Latin American jails. I was arrogant. I was a new practitioner. I could save the world and I had a lot of energy. You know, "newcomer's energy."

And, it was assumed that some or all the people that this organization gave me had been tortured. So, I didn't have to be in their lives and it was preferred that I didn't ask questions, and I couldn't speak Spanish anyway.

But, what I could do was look for certain responses. So that, if I was picking up a leg of the person lying on their back ... I am picking up the leg to bring it in the direction of a shoulder. That is a standard Feldenkrais move/technique, however you wish to see this. Correct? Yes. Okay.

If I was alert, I could move that knee in this trajectory and they were perfectly comfortable. If I changed the angle this much, though the knee was angled out, I could see suddenly a licking of the lips, maybe flushing of the face, maybe the breathing would change a little bit. That was a cue that whatever was going on was not right with this person. That was one of the things I had to be alert for. They are classic signs of anxiety. (Can you see what I am doing?) [*Note: Ellen is demonstrating some of these response.*]

So, I did not have to ask a question. I had to pick up these non-verbal cues about a person's comfort or discomfort. There was a generalized response that it was always safer if I took the leg, picked it up, and moved the knee across the groin towards the opposite shoulder. But, if I did the standard Feldenkrais habit ... we tend to pick up the leg and move it so the knee goes outward ... I was more likely to get a nervous reaction if the leg went outward than if I put it towards the opposite shoulder. That is just something I learned only by observing. Did that answer your question?

MISHA

Yes, that's fine. I was looking for those cues. I was expecting a much larger.... So this is very helpful, thank you.

ELLEN

Another good one for this topic is watching for the dilation of the pupils or the squinting of the eyes or the eyes getting rounder or more almond shape. These are all very important cues to the state of the parasympathetic nervous system.

CAROLE READS FROM THE CHAT

She says, 'I wonder if Moshe adapted any of Erickson's techniques for making verbal suggestions to clients?'

ELLEN

Yes. He uses a lot of future pacing. "You will find" is one of them that you can find in the AY or Amherst. It is a whole subject of picking out his phrases, but he definitely used a lot of hypnotic phrasing. Rather than talk about it off the top of my head, I would rather have exact quotes of his language, but definitely.

SUSINN

When you say "future pacing", is that a term specific to auto-suggestion or where does that come from?

ELLEN

I think it is actually an NLP term. In technical English -- Annie, who is an editor or Nancy-Laurel, who is a grammarian -- I think it is called 'future perfect' tense. In Latin, it was future pluperfect. Annie is nodding her head, "Yes."

So yeah, he definitely did, and if you can put your hands on it... One second, let's see if I can find some of them. *(Ellen is scanning her desk for notes on Moshe's hypnotic phrasing and cannot find them)*

You know, the biggest hypnotic technique that we use in Feldenkrais is we put everybody into a kinesthetic-based trance. That's the Elusive Obvious!

SUSINN

I guess I'm interested in asking the question is how we maximize our use of that. In other words, any guidance I could get. I mean, I am aware that a couple of trainers in our training [Feld... 4] ... where we had a lot of visiting trainers ... seem to really make maximum use of this. I would really love to know the resources for developing more consciousness about my speech and the things that I say.

ELLEN

The best I can tell you is actually start reading Milton Erickson. The easiest introductory book is called *Uncommon Therapy*. Then, almost anything by Jeffery Zeig or Ernest Rossi⁴. If you want shorthand, NLP - any book by a good NLP person will give you the grammar constraints.

It is this double-edged thing. ... where at one time ... I spent a lot of time actually studying hypnosis, because I needed it. Now, I am just not as interested, so I do not have the (grammatical) constructions present in my mind. I have my own take on this. My personal opinion is it is good to know the stuff, but if that is only how you communicate with people, people sense the falseness. There is this subliminal, subconscious realization people have when people talk the truth.

SUSINN

Of course. I am not interested in manipulation. I am simply interested in the most effective editing.

ELLEN

So, what I am saying is that if your interest is genuine, I don't really think it matters that much what your grammar is and what the construct is. They are tools.

Without that, inner truth in your communication with your clients, something falls flat. At least it did for me. And, I was around some really excellent people and I could tell, not initially but after a while, who was just using the constructs and who had some interest in me as a being, as a human. That is who I remember.

I mean, to this day... It will sound funny, but if I go out and buy new luggage at the discount stores I know I am going through a change in my life, for the better. The next step/signal is when do I donate my old suitcases to the Goodwill. That's another marker for me. Why? Because of a long term induction that I had with one

particular psychotherapist who was Ericksonian. I could laugh (at myself). But when I find myself at the luggage counter in a discount stores and I just go, "Oh ... You know the words from West Side Story, "Something's coming, something good, don't know what but it is..." I can be standing there with that song going through my mind. I travel a lot anyway and need suitcases. Yet, I know whenever I buy new suitcases, something is going to happen for the better.

We all have that. That is a personal example of unconscious at work. I call them, in my slang irreverence, the poker tells. (*Note: Someone in the zoom screen looks puzzles so Ellen explains more.*) If you are a gambler and you play poker, when you become very good at it, you can figure out who has a good hand or not by their facial expression or their tick or how their hands hold their cards, etc. So, that is one of my poker tells (luggage). I don't always buy the luggage but the fact that I am looking at it, amuses me.

Did that help?

SUSINN

It very literally helps. I can't tell you the synchronicity of what you just said. Thank you so much.

CAROLE

Would the person who is named the Woman of the Celt please say your name for us?

DEBORAH

My name is Deborah Hughes and I'm from [Feld... 4], completed in 2016, but was exposed to Feldenkrais many years before that in what was called a synergy dance class in DC. Then, I lived in [Kripalu] for a year, and knew MISHA, who was participating in her training at that time and exposing me somewhat. But I didn't have the awareness how all these things came together until my own direct encounter with Feldenkrais named as Feldenkrais.

ELLEN

Irene put on a YouTube something about hypnotic future pacing. By the way, I hope you liked the way I structured this instead of a straight lecture.

RESPONSE

It was fabulous.

RESPONSE

It would be great to get a document that shows us how you would lay out on paper this whole process, because I'm not sure I got it in the way that's most useful so I could re-do it when other questions come up for me.

ELLEN

I was a designer for many years before Feldenkrais, and I think you can design a format visually that would be suitable for you.

RESPONSE

[Laughs] That would be my inferior function. Thank you though...

ELLEN

Then, push your inferior function. Enlarge it. You know, I can do that and post it but graphically what is suitable for me may not match your brain. Another thing -- There are people who need to do outlines: a, b, 1a, 2b, 3c. And then, there are people who can plan workshops and projects by mind-mapping, where they just scribble things on a piece of paper. And, I plan my workshops by cleaning house and filing papers. So, you have to figure out really what visually works for you.

CAROLE

I really like that Ellen. I really really appreciate that because it goes in the face of my wanting to figure it all out and get it right, and then I never understand anything deeply for myself. So, thank you.

ELLEN

And, you know CAROLE, the truth of the matter is we never get it all right. You know, Daniella likes anatomy. She will get that. That is the way her mind works. I mean, I know I talk anatomy in AY a Day but I learn it after the fact, backwards. Annie knows her anatomy cold, much better than I. But, the difference is to know how to apply what you know, not the form it takes. So learn something deeply.