



The Power of Your Subconscious

Your Subconscious at Work

When we apply the term subconscious to discussions on sleep learning, we actually refer to two of the three portions of the mind identified by Sigmund Freud. According to Freud, the human mind resembles a great iceberg in that only the tip, a minute part of the bulk is visible. He divided the mind into three parts:

1. the conscious, that small portion of the iceberg that's always above the waterline;
2. the pre-conscious, the part that is sometimes above and sometimes below the waterline, depending on the motion of the sea in which the iceberg floats; and
3. the unconscious, that largest of all three parts that remains hidden beneath the water.

Freud's definition of the function of the pre-conscious is that it is the portion of the mind which stores information not necessarily in a person's conscious thought at any given moment, but which can be readily retrieved. For example, suppose someone asked you what clothing you wore last Sunday. Unless you were thinking of those clothes at that precise time, you would need a moment to reflect and think back to remember what you wore. In Freud's view, the memory of that clothing was not in the conscious part of your mind, but in the pre-conscious portion. He saw the unconscious as the largest and most influential of the three. Freud believed the unconscious is the centre of influence that determines behaviours such as drives, conflicts, and experience. As this chapter unfolds, we will see that modern scientific consensus not only agrees with Freud but attributes even greater influence to this portion of the mind.

To simplify our review of sleep learning, we'll combine Freud's pre-conscious and unconscious parts into one all-encompassing section which we will call the subconscious.

In his book **Invention, Discovery, and Creativity**, Professor A. D. Moore called the subconscious "the central mystery of the creative process." While Freud thought of the subconscious as wild and uncontrollable, Morton Prince viewed it "as a great mental mechanism which takes part in an orderly, logical way in all the processes of daily life...." Prince believed this mechanism functions in part as a purveyor of options from which we select the one best suited to a given situation. In other words, the credit for solving problems belongs not to the conscious mind, but the subconscious.

Any serious discussion of sleep learning requires an understanding of the major role that the subconscious plays in both behaviour and perception. To gain this understanding we must examine how the subconscious operates. A more detailed understanding of the "surfacing" of the subconscious than that offered by Freud's analogy of the iceberg.

To gain a clear picture of how the subconscious and conscious interact, imagine the subconscious at the end 'of a long roadway leading into the very centre of our being. We can see the conscious mind controlling, or at least occupying, the beginning of the road, serving as a series of roadblocks that partially hinder the flow of information either to or from the subconscious. Under certain circumstances, the roadblock is removed, allowing a free flow of thoughts and ideas. This condition is most prevalent when we're asleep, anesthetized, or during various periods of the day when we're conscious but not directly focused. This last is a state of consciousness we might describe by saying, "My mind was wandering," or "His thoughts are a million miles away."

The transition from a conscious to a subconscious state can be an exciting adventure. Locked away in the subconscious are the accumulated experiences of a lifetime. Our subconscious is a storehouse of memories, ideas, thoughts, sights, and sounds.

Although we are not always aware of it, we all make use of the extraordinary creative abilities of our subconscious. Some unusually perceptive people understand this, and find they are most creative when they can slip into a reverie that reduces the conscious mind's roadblock function. **A decline in conscious thought produces a corresponding increase in the subconscious activity of our thought processes.**

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Most of us have at one time or another slipped into a reverie. This is most common when we are riding in a car, train, bus, or airplane. For a few minutes you sit quietly, staring out the window, looking at the passing scene. Before long, the scenes begin to blur into a stream of unidentifiable objects and colours. Boredom begins to set in as your thoughts become occupied elsewhere. Your mind begins reviewing problems related to your job or home. Soon you are completely oblivious to the scenery speeding past your window. Then someone speaks your name. Suddenly you snap out of your preoccupation and return to conscious thought, momentarily stunned by the radical change. This abrupt intrusion on your period of private thoughts could make you feel as if you've just been rudely aroused from a sound sleep.

The person who has brought you back to conscious thought probably felt you were "deep in thought" or perhaps "had a faraway look" in your eyes. What actually occurred was that your conscious mind entered a state of relaxation or reduced vigilance and your subconscious took control of your thought process. The roadblocks established by the conscious mind were pushed aside.

One writer likened this change from conscious to subconscious thought to changing gears in an automobile with a standard transmission. He said it was slipping the clutch. You disengage the motor and get into a mood of no thought. You are relaxed or detached. You turn off your conscious mind and just coast, allowing the subconscious to do the work.

There are several ways to experience this change. Some people say they simply "lie down and relax, letting my mind wander," while others occupy their conscious mind with simple tasks that permit their subconscious to "surface." Others remove themselves physically from their environment by taking a walk with no real destination planned. Many runners report a surge of creative or problem-solving thoughts while they run.

Fashion designer Bonnie Cashin developed a unique way of calling on her subconscious to help overcome difficult problems with her work. Ms. Cashin "prowls" around sections of New York City with no particular goal, or she'll visit the United Nations, sit in the visitor's gallery and listen to the speakers, even though she doesn't understand their languages.

During sleep, the conscious mind is diminished to its lowest natural level, while the subconscious mind continues to function normally, taking in any sounds that are going on around us. At this time, the subconscious has the greatest control over thought because there is little or no interference from the conscious mind.

By these terms we can better understand the reasoning behind the expression, "I want to sleep on it." What we're really saying is that we want to give our subconscious an opportunity to evaluate the situation and offer available options before we select a course of action.

Dr. Herman Baruch, a psychologist, said his famous brother, financial wizard and Presidential advisor Bernard Baruch, had an exceptionally well-developed subconscious. "He goes to sleep at night thinking about a problem and wakes up with the right answer."

These examples do not necessarily mean that the subconscious is active only during periods of drowsiness, boredom, or sleep. Actually, it never stops working. During these states, we are better able to draw on the subconscious' ability to clarify our thoughts, and on its creative powers. This is because they create a condition in which our conscious mind is also in relaxation and isn't performing its roadblock function.

There is a simple explanation why the subconscious acts as a storehouse of our entire life's experiences. It absorbs everything that it witnesses, without the discrimination exercised by the conscious mind. In many ways it is similar to a sponge that literally "soaks up" everything to which the senses are subjected.

The mind has the power to discriminate among the many things that attempt to enter our conscious thought, and turn away those that do not interest us. Our subconscious enjoys no such advantage. It cannot be commanded to ignore. It retains everything. Because it absorbs information continuously and we are unable to regulate its intake, the subconscious is susceptible to external suggestion. Incorrect suggestions can lead to erroneous conclusions when making decisions

The dividing line between the conscious mind, which we theoretically control through our ability to discriminate, and the subconscious is called the "threshold of awareness." The ability of another person or other outside force to cross that threshold with a suggestion was first identified in 1917 by an Austrian neurologist named Poetzl. In the intervening years, this power, called "suggestion below the threshold," has had tremendous impact on our lives and society.

Making a suggestion that's intended to bypass the natural restraint of the conscious mind is known by three names: subconscious perception, strobic injection, and subliminal perception. These methods have been widely used to convey a message we might otherwise choose to ignore. The most common application of these types of suggestions is in commercial advertising

Although many of us are unaware, we see this type of advertising constantly. We see it in the movie star, famous athlete, or other personality who tries to sell us a car, a can of foot deodorant, or a soft drink. Consciously we are

aware such testimonials are bought and paid for by advertising agencies. The aim of this advertising is to implant in our subconscious a suggestion of association. When we are shopping and see that brand of foot deodorant or soft drink on a shelf, the advertiser hopes we'll associate that brand with the personality. If we like the personality, we like the brand. Seeing the brand stimulates the good feelings we might have for the personality. The advertising goal is to get us to transfer those good feelings to the deodorant, even if we have never used it.

If you question the validity of this approach to advertising, ask yourself three questions: Why do advertisers pay huge fees to celebrities to give testimonials for their products? When was the last time you saw a product testimonial by a personality who was widely disliked, or was known to have unpopular political or social views? How many of these testimonials refer only to superficial aspects of the product and never tell us anything about its true worth

The tennis star whose name and testimonial is attached to a brand of tennis clothes rarely tells us how good the material is or how strong the stitching is. He or she may not even know. The appeal is purely superficial. It aims to establish a subconscious association between a champion tennis player and the clothing, as if clothes were a major factor in winning a match.

A more insidious method used to gain access to our subconscious, one more powerful than suggestion by association, is subliminal projection. Here a message of which we may not even be aware enters directly into our subconscious.

In 1956, a projector for delivering such messages was installed in a New Jersey movie theatre, in what is coo- ceded to be the first commercial use of subliminal projection. During a six-week run of the movie **Picnic**, two messages aimed below the threshold of awareness were flashed on the theatre's screen for one three-thousandths of a second. The messages read, "Hungry? Eat popcorn," and "Drink Coca-Cola."

The people behind this advertising, Subliminal Projection Co., refused to release information on the effectiveness of their campaign. They did acknowledge an increase in Coca-Cola and popcorn sales during the six weeks. One can only wonder if they concealed a tremendously successful method for selling products for fear of arousing public anger.

The Federal Communications Commission claims similar subliminal projection commercials were tried at several television stations around the country. When this practice became known, the FCC received an avalanche of complaints as well as expressions of grave concern from members of Congress. In an effort to forego the publicity that would accompany FCC or Congressional action, the National Association of Broadcasters banned the use of subliminal projection advertising on television. In the months preceding this ban, several members of the House of Representatives introduced a bill "to make unlawful the use of subliminal advertising on television."

The TV Code of the NAB now prohibits the use of "any technique whereby an attempt is made to convey information to the viewer by transmitting messages below the threshold of normal awareness...." Despite this, the NAB and the FCC became aware of a television commercial used during the 1973 Christmas selling season that contained a subliminal message. It commanded:

"Get it!"; referring to the product. When this was discovered, the advertising agency responsible for the ad immediately notified all television stations that a new print was being sent. The new print omitted the "Get it!" message aimed at the viewers' subconscious.

Everyone is susceptible to this type of suggestion. It is impossible to turn off our subconscious and, as we've seen, there are many who would seek to profit from this.

A slightly different use of subliminal projection was used not to sell a product but to increase a theatre audience's reaction to a horror movie. Interspersed throughout the film were individual frames of a particularly gruesome sight unrelated to the story. Pictured in these frames was a human skull with threatening snakes crawling around and through the eye and mouth openings. When the movie was shown, this scene was not visible to the viewer's eyes, for it was aimed below the threshold of awareness. Successful contact with the audience's subconscious would increase the fright aspect of the movie, which would help sell more tickets. This is probably one reason the movie was such a success.

The techniques used by advertisers and promoters are aimed primarily at our subconscious while we are awake and still influenced by the discriminatory powers of our conscious mind.

Access to our subconscious increases when our conscious mind is relaxed. Aldous Huxley described this when he wrote, "In a word, the lower the level of a person's psychological resistance, the greater will be the effectiveness of (these) suggestions.

In relation to sleep learning, we will want to know when that "psychological resistance" is lowest. This occurs when we're in a state of deep relaxation or sleep. Our subconscious is most receptive to suggestions during this period of reduced resistance. This is especially true if we're prepared ourselves to accept the suggestions. As we've seen in previous examples, others are attempting to influence our subconscious for profit. We as individuals can turn similar techniques to our own benefit and self-enrichment. Sleep learning offers the opportunity to do just that.

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Using sleep learning techniques, we can harness the powers of our subconscious more fully and avail ourselves more effectively of our subconscious memories.

In his book, **Defective Memory, Absentmindedness and Their Treatment**, Doctor Arnold Lorand explained how information enters the subconscious memory. He said most of the information in our subconscious memory enters it through the subconscious mind, bypassing the control of logical understanding. He then went on to say that information enters the subconscious most easily when we are not fully conscious. In this state the subconscious is most receptive because there is no resistance from the conscious mind.

Sigmund Freud said the same thing in a different way.

"The state of sleep makes the formation of dreams possible because it reduces the power of the endopsychic censorship."

We have seen how the subconscious receives outside suggestions and affects our problem-solving and creative abilities. The next step is to determine how long information is stored in the subconscious memory.

A simple description of the difference between our conscious and subconscious memories is that the subconscious memory is almost a mechanical procedure. Our conscious memory operates on judgement, so we usually remember only those things we want to remember. Our conscious judgement is evident in all decisions we make. When someone suggests that we take a certain course of action, we weigh the suggestion in our conscious mind. What we decide depends on the judgement of our conscious mind using the information stored in our conscious memory, which supplies our reasoning power with its knowledge.

Accepting a suggestion will usually be based on the positive—or lack of negative—input from the conscious memory. It might also depend on a lack of stored knowledge.

The knowledge of right and wrong, legal and illegal, moral and immoral is stored in our conscious memory. This knowledge, combined with our experiences, is the root of our decisions. Of course they have little to do with character. Our conscious memory can't force us to do what's right. When we make a decision, the contribution of our conscious memory is affected by our character, our desires, and our ambitions.

The Centre of Creativity

Besides serving as a warehouse of memories, the subconscious provides a source of inspiration. Earlier we saw how some people are able to make use of their subconscious ability to solve problems or contribute to artistic creations. For example, Bonnie Cashin sits in the United Nations gallery listening to speakers whose language she doesn't understand. These creative individuals discovered methods to tap the latent talent of their subconscious mind.

They are not alone. Many of us have experienced this subconscious creativity, unaware of the process we have gone through.

We are actually speaking of two talents, separate yet related. They are creativity and problem solving. Dr. Erich Neumann described the creative person as one who is dependent on being receptive to his or her subconscious. He puts the creative person in a separate category from the average individual because the average person adapts to the community. Dr. Neumann believes the conventional person gives up some creativity in order to adapt, while the creative person develops away from the community as he relates more to his own subconscious. Perhaps this forms the basis for the generally held perception that the creative writer, artist, or scientist is "different" from the rest of us. "Oddball" is not an uncommon term used to describe a creative person.

Arthur Koestler called the creative powers of the subconscious mind a different level of thinking. He described his view of the creative process as descending from the conscious level to retrieve an idea from the subconscious.

Two psychologists explored the creative experiences of people from various professions. Based on interviews of twenty-three individuals in a wide range of occupations who had been judged to be especially creative, they concluded that intuition, unconscious promptings, and unexplainable insights play a significant role in the arts and sciences.

One professor divides the process into four phases:

1. preparation, done through the conscious mind;
2. incubation, in which the subconscious develops the correct solution or combination of solutions by searching the warehouse of information;
3. illumination, the transference of the solution from the subconscious to the conscious; and

4. verification, when the conscious mind applies its logic and discriminatory powers to analyze the information received and verify the correct problem has been solved.

Another professor of education at Columbia University described the creative process as pushing an unsolved problem out of the conscious mind and allowing the subconscious to work on it.

Mathematicians are usually thought of as individuals with calculating, logical minds who would probably consider a discussion of the creative subconscious as too subjective to concern them. Yet mathematicians often call on the same creative forces associated with artists and poets.

We cannot calculate the contributions of subconscious creativity to the arts and sciences. But, we can safely say that it is likely that more discoveries have been made by people in a relaxed state than by those slaving over a hot Bunsen burner. The work done in the laboratory or at the writing desk generally amounts to the preliminary portion of the preparation phase within the creative process. Before closing this chapter, we'll examine two examples of how relaxation and free association have provided the incubation phase for creative solutions and ideas.

Harold Black wrestled with the problems of the early vacuum tube at Bell Laboratories. Although by 1927 the tube had found several uses, it was not a good amplifier because it distorted the signals transmitted through it. For several years, Black made no real progress with this problem, until one morning crossing the Hudson River on the Lackawanna Ferry. As Black gazed out at the morning mist covering the river, the solution suddenly flashed into his mind: negative feedback. By a stroke of fate, the morning newspaper he was reading had an entire page erroneously left blank. The page provided ample space on which to draw the circuit that led to the solution of the distortion problem.

The eminent early twentieth-century poet and scholar Alfred E. Housman provides an amusing and different approach to using subconscious creativity.

"Having drunk a pint of beer at luncheon - beer is a sedative to the brain and my afternoons are the least intellectual portion of my life - I would go for a walk of two or three miles. As I went along thinking of nothing in particular, only looking at things around me and following the progress of the seasons, there would flow into my mind, with sudden and unaccountable emotion, sometimes a line or two of verse, sometimes a whole stanza of verse, accompanied, not preceded, by a vague notion of the poem which they were destined to form part of."

Housman went on to say that an hour or so of a lull would follow. Occasionally this would be followed by another flow of verse. Being unfamiliar with subconscious creativity, the poet attributed the source of this "bubbling up" of ideas as the "pit of the stomach."

We've dealt with the creative centre that is the subconscious mind. We've seen that this creativity takes place primarily when an individual is relaxing, distracted, or free associating. Two phenomena on which we haven't touched, but in which the subconscious plays an important role, are sleep dreams and daydreams. The former, because they play an important role in sleep learning, will be treated separately. Daydreams generally occur during periods of relaxation and are likely connected in some way to the creative process. The internationally known author Isaac Bashevis Singer expressed his opinion of daydreams and creativity in one sentence, "Daydreaming and writing are very, very much connected."

Subconscious Learning

Now that we have some knowledge of the subconscious and its importance, let's see how it can help us. We want to know how sleep learning makes use of this wondrous "inner mind" and its memory.

There are two ways information is communicated to our subconscious. Both employ the two most dominant of the five physical senses. First is through visual messages, both those of which we are aware and the subliminal kind. Second is through verbal messages, again, those we are aware of hearing and those we aren't. Sleep learning is a proven method of communicating verbal messages to our subconscious.

One expert points out that a prerequisite to communicating with the subconscious is diminishing the resistance of the conscious mind. Under normal circumstances, subconscious learning is random. The sleep learner's goal is to harness that randomness and direct selected information into the subconscious.

The self-suggestion techniques used for subconscious learning are most productively applied while the conscious mind is relaxed. The best opportunity to do this is when we are in the drowsy state preceding sleep, and of course, during sleep itself. In both of these states the subconscious mind has "surfaced" and reduced the roadblocks set up by the conscious mind.

Once in pre-sleep, repeat the desired message aloud over and over again. This message could be anything from a mathematical formula to a suggestion for self-improvement aimed at weight reduction or breaking a smoking habit. This repetition, along with the diminished resistance that occurs when the conscious mind is drowsy, will help lower the conscious roadblocks. This method of subconscious learning brings two forces to bear on the

conscious mind; the drowsiness of pre-sleep, and the mental monotony produced by repetition. Each of these can reduce conscious resistance independently, but in combination they are especially effective. With relaxation and proper timing, the first five or ten repetitions will remain in the conscious mind and those following will bypass it and go directly to the subconscious.

This procedure is a variation of techniques used for centuries by yogis and mystics for disciplined meditation. A study conducted by Japanese scientists found that the brain waves of a Zen meditator, as he balances between instant alertness and deep relaxation, are identical to those of a person on the threshold of sleep. The meditator who is able to control or alter bodily functions is believed to be accomplishing these feats through a means of communication with his "inner mind."

There is one major difficulty with this method of subconscious learning: the requirement that the subject remain relaxed while repeating the message. Repeating the information aloud interferes with the ability to relax, and vice versa. An effective remedy for this is to record the message on a device that will replay it over and over, automatically. Having done that, all the subconscious learner need do is switch on the device before falling asleep so it continues to broadcast the message while the learner slips into deep relaxation and, finally, sleep itself.

This method will supply the continuous repetitions needed to aid the transformation into diminished conscious resistance and learning. It also avoids the problem of repeating the message aloud while trying to avoid conscious awareness of it. The recorded message makes the entire process easy.

A further benefit of a recorded message is that it will continue broadcasting after the learner has fallen asleep. Without the recording, the message would stop before sleep was actually reached. Because it's during sleep that conscious resistance is least effective, it's important that the message continue to be transmitted to the subconscious while the learner is asleep.

A second approach to subconscious learning is the subliminal visual message. Earlier we saw how some people have attempted to profit by introducing this type of suggestion to the subconscious of others. As we'll now see, this approach can be put to more constructive use.

A New York City psychoanalyst experimented with subliminal projection and found that the subconscious mind is capable of seeing things of which we are consciously unaware. He used a projector that flashes a scene for one one-hundredth of a second, too fast for the human eye to see. Not one person he tested could see the scenes projected, yet the same scenes later appeared in their dreams. What their conscious minds had been unable to see visually, their subconscious minds had been able to perceive and then reproduce later while they slept.

Intrigued, the psychoanalyst tried the same test again. This time he used a different set of scenes someone else selected for him, and tried it on himself. The results were the same. He couldn't see what was projected before him, yet the same scenes became part of his sleeping dreams. Then he drew the scenes he remembered from his dreams. He describes how it feels to reproduce images introduced into his dreams through his subconscious:

"When one makes drawings of the scenes, they seem to come out of the pencil, almost like automatic writing—the pencil draws by itself. Along with the automatic quality there is a compulsive need to put in or omit certain items."

Two key phrases are, "they seem to come out of the pencil" and 'a compulsive need.'" Considering that these feelings were expressed by a man educated to analyze experiences and correctly describe them, there can be little doubt that the drawings were a product of his subconscious.

This experience proves that the subconscious can "see" what we cannot see, and that not only can it insert what it has seen into our dreams, it can also direct us to reproduce the image physically. The results of these experiments confirmed the discovery of Otto Poetzl, inventor of the projector used in these tests. During World War I, the Austrian used his invention to flash scenes before a group of people who reported they did not see them, but later described the same scenes when relating their dreams.

The basic difference in the delivery of visual and audio subliminal messages is the conditions existing when the processes takes place. As we've seen, we can be subconsciously aware of visual images while we are fully awake and in control of our senses, but the subliminal message must appear so quickly that it is just beyond our ability to see it. The audio message can be broadcast within what we consider our normal hearing range, but it is best used when we are asleep, or when we are in drowsy pre-sleep relaxation.

When we are properly motivated, sleep learning helps us take advantage of our reduced conscious resistance while we sleep, without having to reach beyond our normal hearing range. This is exactly what takes place when we learn while we sleep. Even if our conscious mind is asleep when we are, our subconscious can receive and process information. Many people do it every night without even knowing it. Sleep learning lets us manage this natural process by controlling the information we receive while we sleep.

In the next chapter, we will discuss learning and memory, two functions of receiving and processing information. How we process, or memorize, information is important to a thorough understanding of sleep learning.

Before going on, however, we should mention one other type of subconscious learning many people experience regularly. This takes the form of conditioning our subconscious to react in a certain way to an event occurring at a later time. An example of this is a person who is able to awaken at a specific time without the aid of an alarm clock. One way to do this is by force of habit. The person who awakens at the same time each day for a long period will usually awaken at that same time even if he forgets to set the alarm clock. A habit of awakening every day at 6 a.m. can train me subconscious to arouse us at that time. People who can awaken at a pre-arranged time without an alarm clock are said to have an "inner alarm clock." Actually they have made use of an ability we all have, subconscious learning.

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