Conceptual Self-awareness vs. Embodied Self-awareness

When folks talk about self-awareness, what do they actually mean? Often times it's a response of "Oh, that's just how I am," or "Oh, that's just me." On the contrary, self-awareness is the ability to understand oneself in the current moment, *just as you are* and not how you think you should be!

Conceptual self-awareness is an *idea* of who you are; kind of like seeing yourself on a screen of a movie, or from the outside-in. It's often metaphoric- something that you can compare yourself with: "I'm like a wave; I just come and go with the flow…" or "I'm generally a happy/shy/angry person." Unfortunately, using metaphor can also allow judgments to arise, and often does not quite allow you to describe the things about you that make you unique (because you are likening yourself with something that is not you!)

Embodied self-awareness, on the other hand is not so vague. Bringing attention to your sensorial experience in the present moment, you might discover something different, rather than "like" and find that there is more to you than a comparison to something else… something that is more true to who you are.

For instance, meeting with a client who always entered the room with a bright and cheerful disposition, I was curious if she was aware of the way that she caved her chest in while she smiled. One day she sat down and, I felt my own smile "sticking" on my face. I asked her how she was doing, and with her big open grin, said, "Great!" while continuing to talk about the events of the week.

Something didn't feel right to me, and I noticed that there was a smile that was stuck to my own face. I asked her to check in with her cheeks. Touching her cheeks, she said that she noticed that her face hurt right at the "apples" of them. I asked her to stay with the feeling of the pain for a moment, and within seconds, she began to weep. This was followed by anger. She said that she remembered how her mother always expected her to be a "nice girl" and smile for everyone in her family. She said that she felt angry about this, and a whole flood of emotions emitted from her- including fear. She realized that she had been living her life as a "happy person" to the outside world, while feeling sadness, anger and fear that she did not allow herself to experience until that session.

By checking in with her embodied experience, she was able to understand a deeper level of her experience; as she talked about her week, something very important was going on in her body that informed her of how she relates to people in the world.

Self awareness is also different from self consciousness.

We all know what self-consciousness is like. We contract, either emotionally or physically, and try to hide. Shameful feelings are at the surface, and those we are in contact with do not get to see who we are. Self awareness, on the other hand, is what happens when you allow yourself to celebrate who you are; live fully embodied and present in each moment. You become kinder, both to yourself and to others. You reach out, rather than contract, and, well…laugh a whole lot more.

"It's like I don't care so much about things that used to bother me!" Another client recently said to me. "I've stopped fighting with my fiancé. I don't feel victimized anymore, because I feel like I really know myself now and can trust my own intuitions and judgments. Oh, and I'm not judging myself so much!"

Self awareness, through embodied practice can change the way you live in your skin, and the way that you live in the world with others. For more information about how to feel better inside yourself, make an appointment for somatic psychotherapy! It's not what you think!