

THOUGHTS ARE LIKE SUNGLASSES

That you forgot you were wearing.

Crystal Anzalone MS, PLMHP, NCC

Imagine your thoughts are like a pair of sunglasses that you forgot you were wearing. Sunglasses tint the color of our world and we are unaware it is being colored. However, this presents a problem; thoughts are then free to present us with a world structured through thought—a world seen only through this particular color (Hayes & Smith, 2005).

As a person becomes tightly imprisoned in the realm where thoughts and feelings are fused as one and the same, feelings become facts to be acted upon as the only truthful reality rather than emotional responses to be understood. The person's emotionally colored representation skews the full color pallet of life. In essence the "feeling interpretation" of an event and the "actual event" are treated as one and the same; this is where emotional fusing happens. But remember, thoughts and feelings are not the same thing. It is helpful to understand the distinction between cognition (thought: "I feel like cellophane, no one ever notices me even when I speak out") and metacognition (thinking about your thought, "I am a person who is often overlooked – and I am not sure why"). With a functioning capacity for metacognition (thinking about what we are thinking about), we may be able to think about our thoughts objectively rather than allowing our thoughts to control our feelings (Wallin, 2007). But first we must learn how to separate thought (cognitions) from feelings.

THE MANNEQUIN: Think about becoming terrified of department store mannequins because you feel that they are "living people." However, you know differently, so you do not have an emotional reaction to the many mannequins conspicuously standing around. However, if you thought that they were really live humans, you might *feel like* someone was watching every move you make as you walk through the store. You might even *feel like* you were in another country that did not afford the freedom we enjoy. You might even *feel like* you were living in an old episode of *The Twilight Zone*. That is an example of how powerful our thoughts can be. "Metacognitive knowledge involves the ability to grasp what cognitive scientists call the appearance-reality distinction, without which it is impossible to realize that our ideas and perceptions may be without validity, or that others may believe things that are not true. To the extent that [people] are unaware of the 'fallible nature of knowledge' their desire as well as their ability to reflect on their experience tends to be limited" (Quoted Mary Main in Wallin, 2007).

The parent who says, "Sara, don't *feel* that way" is diminishing the actual experience of what Sara *feels*. Sara's

feeling is not up for debate, the *feeling* is simply, the *feeling*. However, in the Sara's mind something

profound is happening emotionally by the way she interpreted (thought about) and experienced the event(s). Maybe Sara *thinks* what is horribly happening is her fault. Not only is she experiencing trauma of some sort, she may also be attaching faulty interpretations that she will carry forward in her life. If she is being told by a parent "not to feel" what she is feeling can create further soul wounds on top of the trauma she is experiencing.

In terms of "Intergenerational Transmission" Sara's parent could also be reflecting back through her emotional response, some fear that is triggered that she too, cannot handle. The parent who screams, "Shut the hell up, you don't know what you are talking about" when the child is providing actual and real emotional feedback in the moment is undermining the child's sense of reality and their ability to build upon a solid psychic platform. Think of the cultures that used to bind babies feet, this foot binding stunted or inhibited the bone growth. In the same way, when the parent shuts down (binds) the child's ability to process real life due to their own inability to cope with life, this stunts and inhibits emotional growth. In essence, unbeknownst, Sara's parent is now transferring their pain to her daughter. Sara has "taken on" her mom's issue (whatever it might be). These types of patterns in repetition allow for generations to pass on unresolved issues to their children and this has been coined as "Intergenerational Transmission." When the child shuts down emotionally, having never been allowed to consciously process overwhelming feelings or overwhelming experiences, these feelings lie dormant and are ripe for activation. So that, when triggered in particular emotionally arousing situations or confronted by cues that remind them of their "trauma or loss—including, for example, their children's distress, demands, or anger—unresolved parents were liable to be flooded by (formerly) dissociated experiences that too often triggered behavior that terrified their children. These children were then caught in a paralyzing contradiction—turning to their parents for safety while at the same moment their fear of their parents was provoking their desire to flee (Wallin, 2007).



For more information on family issues please contact Crystal Anzalone at Crystal@CrystalandAssociates.com.

Bibliography:

Hayes, S., & Smith, S. (2005). *Get out of your mind and into your life: the new acceptance and commitment therapy*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications Inc.

Wallin, D. J. (2007). *Attachment in psychotherapy*. New York: Guilford Press.