the Science behind your Thoughts

by Gregory Rodriguez, MA, LCPC



In that first session with a new patient, I ask about the reasons why they have sought counseling. A majority of the time they describe their struggles as emotional distress. Anxiety, fears, anger, depression, and shame seem to be the most common. Today's research shows that up to 80% of physical, emotional, and mental health issues can be a direct result of our thought life¹. The key is to understand the science that connects our thoughts and emotions.

I came across a story in Timothy Jennings book, The God-Shaped Brain, which reinforces the research. In the 1970's, a man named Sam Shoeman was diagnosed with liver cancer and told he only had a few months to live. Shortly after his death, the autopsy revealed that the

doctors were wrong. He had only one small tumor contained within the liver - not a life-threatening stage of cancer. He did not die from liver cancer; he died from believing he was dying from liver cancer. Incredibly, our thoughts and the emotions they invoke can change our physical brain structure, ultimately changing who we are and who we are becoming.

The Science that Connects our Thoughts and Emotions

The aspect of our brain with which we are most familiar is the thinking one. Consider how much time you spend in your head, focused on thoughts. We are far less acquainted with the feeling part of the brain, the prime influencer behind most of our behaviors. That part of the brain feels, reacts, creates, and remembers, but not in words. Instead, it focuses on sensations and feelings, many occurring outside of our conscious awareness. Virtually all our core feelings - anger, joy, love, grief - directly influence our behaviors. Although feelings are not always based on facts, they can override our ability to remain logical, affecting the choices we make and our ability to cope and deal with stress.

Emotions Taking Over

Here's how that happens - two things are always going on inside of our brain²:

- 1) Electrical in the form of our thoughts
- 2) Chemical in the form of our emotions.

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Picture your thoughts as a boat racing across your brain, while behind the boat picture your emotions as the wake created by the racing boat across the water. Each time you find yourself thinking those same old thoughts, for example, "I'm a failure" (thought), and then feel sad (emotion) because you believe that thought, your body secretes chemicals which change your brain structure. You are essentially creating a neurological pathway linking your thoughts to your emotions and storing them in parts of your brain and cells in your body via an electrical charge that are found in some of the molecules of those chemicals secreted by those emotions.

Don't Believe all Your Thoughts

"I'm not worthy" "I'm a failure" "I've been rejected so there must be something wrong with me and that's why I'm alone" "God can't use me unless I'm spiritually strong" "God can't love me because I'm a sinner"

I see many clients with unhealthy thoughts. In my work as a Christian therapist, I help my clients expose and change thoughts that are actually false. Unhealthy false thoughts do, in time, change our brain chemistry. The chemical changes can result in anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. Proverbs 23:7 states, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." Our thoughts about ourselves play a big role in who we are and our ability to deal with life's challenges and expectations.

Replace False Thoughts with God's Truth

Allow Jesus to renew your mind through the washing of the Word. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you take your thoughts captive to Christ, to think new thoughts about yourself, replacing those old thoughts that made you feel unloved, unworthy, and empty. Let Jesus replace them with His Love, His truth, His comfort, trusting in the healing process and begin to live by the power of His love!

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:2

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:5

¹ Leaf, Caroline, Who Switched Off My Brain, 2007 ² Clinton & Laaser, The Fight of Your Life, 2015



Greg Rodriguez is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and sees clients in our New Lenox, Orland Park, and Shorewood, IL Locations.

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