

The Pacifier Effect



My mother and I were having a conversation when suddenly she glanced away toward the TV and became absorbed in a commercial about a product for “bladder leakage” (if you know what I mean). Figuring it wasn’t that important, I continued our chit chat with, “So...where would you like to go for lunch?” She turned her head away from the TV and toward me and calmly said, “Poise Pads.” The stunned look on her face upon hearing her senseless response was priceless and, of course, a golden opportunity for me to, yet again, poke fun at my mother’s foibles in another column. (Don’t worry. She reads everything I write and says it’s okay since it’s all for the price of humor).

What is it that causes our minds to start meandering off in other directions at any given moment? Psychologists have their theories, but I’m thinking in simple terms. It’s the pacifier’s fault. From infancy, our brains are trained to be distracted away from what our young minds find important, such as hunger or screaming our guts out just for the heck of it— makes sense to me.

It appears that humans are capable of receiving input from several avenues. If our circuits were open all the time, “brain brouhaha” would result. Therefore, our complex brains are equipped with a sensory gate to cut down on all the information, so that we can pay attention to the most important stimuli at hand. Could my mother have considered “Poise Pads” to be of more importance than where we would be dining? Perhaps. Or was she way over “pacified” as a child?

Sometimes, however, our sensory gates malfunction which results in a meandering mind. I enjoy becoming totally absorbed in the plot of a movie with twists and turns. But many a movie has been ruined from my loss of concentration. All it takes is a bedroom scene with a couple who is just waking up. Many times, much to my dismay, they will start kissing right away!?? My attention is distracted instantaneously because all I can think is, ‘Ooh, yuk. Don’t they need to brush their teeth first?’ It ruins the movie for me every time and it takes great will power and a sensory gate shutting to regain concentration. Directors should think that through a little better.

I think our sensory gates are wide-open at a cocktail party, but instead of chaos taking over, we find ourselves capable of having a conversation with one person, notice someone new walking in, make a mental note of what we need to ask them and know exactly what is on the buffet table all at the same time. Amazing. That blows my Pacifier Effect Theory to bits though. Through mind over matter, we ARE

capable of making ourselves focus, if necessary, even with wide-opened gates.

(Just don't let me see someone kissing with bad breath and I can stay focused for the duration of the party.)

Sometimes, however, we can be in the quiet sanctuary of our homes, and still lose concentration. The other day, I made a mental note that before I went for a walk with my friend, I needed to put a band-aid on a blister on my heel. I walked all the way downstairs to the bathroom and then stood there trying to remember why I was there. I remembered half-way back up the stairs. The only explanation, is that I do remember seeing a baby bird on the front porch on my way down the steps. I had thought, 'Oh, it's so cute.' That's all it took and any thought of a band-aid was temporarily banished. It doesn't even take a dire event to cause distraction... just a little bird.

In conclusion, we all know the human mind is fascinating. We can analyze forever and speak in terms of cognitive reasoning, selective hearing, sensory gates, blah, blah, blah... But actually, we are just "who" we are. Sometimes there's no explanation for why we act, or react the way we do or why we retain information or lose it. It's just how we are. Simple as that. We're human.

But the one concrete thing I know for certain that doesn't require a scientific theory is that **YOU SHOULD NEVER START KISSING FIRST THING IN THE MORNING WITHOUT BRUSHING YOUR TEETH!!**