

Mind Traps Recognizing and Confronting Our Innate Bias

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UNITED STATES, August 10, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In her inspiring book about abolitionists from Charleston in the 1800s, *The Invention of Wings*, author Sue Monk Kidd contrasts the lives of abolitionist Sarah Grimke, daughter of a wealthy plantation owner, with that of the owner's personal slave, Handful. Handful makes an incisive observation about the two of them. She notes that while as a slave she is physically trapped on the plantation, Sarah is trapped in limited judgements in her mind based on past programming. As the story unfolds, Sarah learns to use her voice against the cruelty of slavery. In the novel, Sarah uses self-reflection to break out of the prison of her ideas. She was locked into prevailing beliefs she had learned as a child.



Dr. Linda Miles

How easy is it to become biased as a child ? Apparently, quite easy. Studies have proven that bias can be evoked in young children by something as innocuous as a randomly colored shirt.

Psychology professor Rebecca Bigler performed multiple studies over the years to illustrate how bias can be created among grade school kids, using different colored t-shirts.[i] In one weeks-long experiment, the children were divided into two groups: one was given blue shirts, and the other was given yellow. Even without the teachers suggesting value differences between the groups, the kids still differentiated themselves. The children favored peers who wore the same-colored shirt and viewed peers who wore the other color more unfavorably. Those wearing blue shirts, for example, assigned more positive traits to other kids wearing blue, while diminishing

the students who wore yellow (and vice versa). Similar studies provided similar results. Comparisons start early and are often harmless. While they may help a group bond together (we are united by this color, therefore we are a team) they can also generate lasting (and unfair) prejudices. What's important—what we have control over—is how we confront this bias, first within ourselves and then with others.

To fight bias, here are two things we can all do immediately—and with long-lasting effect. Become conscious of your thoughts and learn to monitor what you believe. Practice relating to your judgements of self and others instead of brushing them off or ignoring them. Practice living your life by choice instead of automatic reactions. Develop the practice of labelling negative reactions as they arise. Often bias and prejudice arise as bodily reactions. Do you feel fear when communicating with someone who intimidates you? Do you feel judgmental when speaking with a certain person? Do you feel like you are “not enough” in comparison to other groups? Do you tend to villainize other groups without knowing them?

Being conscious in this way allows you to notice how you diminish yourself or others. With patient and compassionate self-reflection, you can begin to break free from the prison of old limiting beliefs and toxic ideas bred by past programming. Learn to monitor what you believe. [AP2] Look for opportunities to see yourself and others with greater clarity and compassion. Be a role model and educate your children.

Ask yourself:

- Am I willing to examine my own unconscious bias based on past programming?
- Do I tend to attribute positive information to my ingroup and negative information to the outgroup?
- Are my stories holding me back?
- Do my stories about the world make me bitter or better?
- Do I tend to think of others in terms of “always” or “never”?
- Do my stories support my best self?
- Do my relationships with others make my world larger or smaller?

Educate children about how easily they can become biased and favor those who appear like them. Take the time to point out destructive divisiveness among groups. Pinpoint examples of harmonious behaviors and illustrate how they benefit everyone. Lead by example. Human beings evolved because we could band together and cooperate. Let your better angels lead. As Martin Luther King Jr. observed: “Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.”

-Dr. Linda Miles

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