**How Do You Separate Fact from Opinion?**

According to Webster's Dictionary a fact is "anything that is done or happens; anything actually existent; any statement strictly true; truth; reality."

Three examples of facts that are concrete and that could be documented include:

1. The house was painted on November 18, 1999.
2. Today is Saturday.
3. My son had a temperature of one hundred and two degrees this morning.

Whereas an opinion is defined as "indicating a belief, view, sentiment, conception."

Obvious indicators of opinion are when sentences include words such as:

"Generally, it is thought", "I believe that", "It is a sad day when."

For example, how the three facts above can be changed to opinions would be to add a belief or view. For example:

1. The house was painted recently on November 18, 1999, so it looks as good as new.
2. Today is Saturday and Mark always sleeps in on Saturdays, so that is why he is late for the game.
3. There was no way for me to go to school because my son had a temperature of one hundred and two degrees this morning.

Sometimes it is challenging to tell the facts and opinions apart. For example, is the following a fact or an opinion?

"Abraham Lincoln was the most eloquent writer of all the U.S. Presidents."

This is an \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, but you have to know that eloquent is a descriptive word to for this to become clear. Descriptive words are subjective, or state someone's opinion. It can become unclear how to separate fact and opinion when many people hold the same opinion. This is when it becomes important to understand what the word *bias* means.

A bias is an opinion or an attitude we have for or against something. A bias usually stems from our feelings rather than from rational thought. What is very important to realize is that ALL of us are biased. We are biased for or against certain people, activities, and ideas. We become biased because certain people, activities, or ideas do not appeal to us at some level. Of equal importance to realize is that we have "good biases" as well, that is we favor certain people, activities, or ideas. In these cases, our biases are still irrational, just like our negative ones.

Most of the time we keep our biases inside and use them to decide who to vote for, what to study in school, and how we want to appear in public. Other times, however, people can let their bias or opinions guide them to do dangerous acts. Issues such as racism, gun control, abortion, and patriotism provoke many people to act on their biases and do things that harm others. As long as biases are peacefully shared, there is little harm. But, when they are uncontrolled, strong biases can bring out anger and create hatred toward those who disagree. That is when facts and opinions become very challenging to separate.

Many of our biases are not based on fact or reasoned judgement but on opinions handed down to us by parents, teachers, and friends. Unfortunately, we don't always take the time to examine the source of our biases, and many of us carry unhealthy opinions and prejudices because of it.

Below is a list of incomplete sentences. Complete each one with the first word that comes to mind. Don't stop to evaluate what you write or change your first response. If you can't think of a word or phrase, skip it and go on to the next sentence.

* Teachers are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* Mothers are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* Democrats are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* Babies are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* Elderly people are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* My neighbors are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* Republicans are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* Lawyers are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* Girl Scouts are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* Football players are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Reread what your answers. How many are based on facts and which are based on opinions? Can you tell? Do you ever wonder where you formed your biases?