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Personal Fact or Opinion

One of my favorite quotes from the movie *Second Hand Lions* was between the uncles of a young boy abandoned by his mother who had just lost his pet lions. One of the uncles says, “Sometimes things that may or may not be true, are the things that a man needs to believe in the most.” While the boy does not know if what he hears about his mother is fact or not, in his opinion she would not provide as well for him as his uncles have, so in his opinion his uncles are better guardians. While most opinions are not quite as deeply engrained it often takes a lot of facts, pressure, and most importantly a willingness to accept a different view to change an opinion.

If someone undeniably thought that chocolate ice cream was the best ice cream flavor, but had never tasted cookies and cream, it could just take a new experience to change their mind. Other opinions are based on what is perceived to be factual information such as statistics, polls and trends. These opinions are typically changed by the presentation of further evidence contradicting what was previously believed to be true. The most difficult opinions to change are those rooted in abstract evidence such as emotions, value systems, and foundational beliefs about life. Most children would be expected to believe that their mother is the best of all mothers and this is expected given that the mother is typically the one who most intimately cares for a child especially at a young age. Therefore, it would be safe to assume that one’s own mother would clearly appear to be the best. These sorts of opinions cannot be changed by the presentation of facts or one simple event; typically changes on opinions so deeply rooted in personal beliefs take major, sometimes traumatic, life experience to change.

As people grow older and have new experiences they often change their opinions as they mature and are presented with a wider world view. Therefore many people shift on their opinions as they have more material available to form an opinion on. A person who has never left their hometown has no reason to believe anywhere else might be better, but someone that has traveled the world has a lot more options based on personal experience alone. When people shift their ideals, it typically indicates growth as an individual who can take new experiences, reflect upon them, and adapt according to the combination of new and old information.

Traditionally, the first opinions people form are similar if not exactly identical to those of their family especially their parents. Although these first preferences are not unique to the individual they are the first way that they view the world which makes sense since most of what one would know at five years old has been taught by the main caregivers. As a person develops and branches out from their family into friendships, romantic relationships and professional connections they are exposed to new views and ideas that may or may not alter formerly formed conceptions of the world. If someone were to change their opinion, it would suggest that they were receptive, reflective, and becoming more independent as they now have original views that are not solely dependent on other people’s influence. However, the reverse cannot be said. Occasionally, parents’ views and advice will match what others present in which case the stagnant nature of the opinion is not necessarily because the person is a stubborn close-minded person. Their opinions were simply validated by their new experiences.

Everyone has a personal view of the world that does not exactly match any other. Some ideals are more easily changed than other, but they all have one thing in common. They are what individuals choose to believe in despite what may be real or fake and what many people are willing to act upon making these seemingly unsupported statements more powerful than facts and what makes each one of us unique.