

Naïve Empiricism: What We Don't Know Does Hurt

Young Sandi sat waiting for the doctor to review her scans. Six months ago, she completed her chemotherapy and was in for a routine examination. As she nervously sat in the waiting room, the approaching doctor detected her anxiety, sat down next to her, and with intended comfort told Sandi not to worry because there was no evidence of cancer, “you are cured.” In medical terms, it’s often couched as NED or No Evidence of Disease.

When the Sandi’s mom questioned the doctor, he exclaimed that the scan was negative and that there was evidence of a cure because there was evidence of no cancer. Perhaps missing in this story was “Evidence of No Disease” (END).

Remember the 1960s when the medical community looked at mother’s milk as primitive, as if it could be replicated in a laboratory. What the experts missed was the absence of evidence surrounding the benefits of mother’s milk confusing it with the evidence of absence. They never suspected the benefits to escape their detection.

Naïve empiricism is a mental exercise to confirm our own narrative or perception of the world. We tend to only see what we are looking for. The oncologist was looking for no evidence, when actually determining there were no cancer cells was beyond the scope of the examination.

The same holds true for interpersonal relationships. Our behavior is a byproduct of our experiences, which form our beliefs. Without so much as a question, we are unsatisfied with our current mix of “friends” or family members observing how they don’t behave in a manner that fits our perception. There is evidence of no social skills on their part without examining the depth of no evidence of social skills on our part.

Naïve Empiricism

We only see what we want to see and despite the resemblance of our mother's behavior to her mother, we feel she should change without seeing that our behavior is similar to both. We fail to see any evidence of maladaptive behavior in ourselves because we've become conditioned to seeing fault in others before we questions our own assumptions.

It should be noted that we are not at fault for developing maladaptive behavior from our parents. However, we are responsible for it. Too often, we shrug off dysfunctional family traits such as sarcasm or continued uninvited criticism as normal because it's our uncomfortable comfort zone.

When we mirror such behavior, we fail to notice the evidence that we are maladaptive. Instead, we place blame on others for violating our immaculate perception of behavior. We are guilty of NED, No Evidence of Disease. We don't see what we are not looking for.

As humans we are hard wired to connect with others and in our efforts to develop relationships, we model harmful behavior from our parents and fail to achieve levels of satisfaction. We maintain a horizontal acceptance of surface relationships never learning what we don't know.

What we don't know is how to develop mutual trust and respect with people (emotional intimacy). This desire, feeling, or state of being transcends gender, race, and culture. Every human being longs for emotional intimacy and divorce, abuse, bullying, and maladaptive behaviors are manifestations of failing to know how.

Rogue bosses, helicopter parents, controlling administrators, and corporate cultures that treat employees like objects are symptoms of a society that has lost her ability to develop intimacy. As a result, we have allowed Hollywood and politicians with addictive personalities to violate our boundaries and set the course of temporary happiness, which is always followed by regret and misery.