

Mindfulness and the Power of Detection by Patricia Morin

Irene Adler: “Why are you always so suspicious?”

Sherlock Holmes: “Should I answer chronologically or alphabetically?”

Ortega y Gasset: “Tell me to what you pay attention, and I will tell you who you are.”

Deep in the great minds of homicide detectives and mystery writers are characteristics that enhance the creative powers of detection. I believe one of the most important characteristics that helps answers who, why, where, and how questions is mindfulness.

There is a big difference between seeing and observing. Holmes often points out his “powers of observation” and what others merely “see.” He asked Watson how many steps were in his house, and Watson, who had traveled them countless times, didn’t know. Watson had seen them, but made no observations about them.

In psychology (and philosophy and spiritualism), this kind of observation is called mindfulness. What is mindfulness? Mindfulness is, according to Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program in Massachusetts: “Maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment. Mindfulness also involves acceptance, meaning that we pay attention to our thoughts and feelings without judging them—without believing, for instance, that there’s a ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way to think or feel in a given moment. When we practice mindfulness, our thoughts tune into what we’re sensing in the present moment rather than rehashing the past or imagining the future.”

No daydreaming or fantasies allowed.

No obsessing over what should have been done, or what to do.

My friend once called me annoyed. She had told herself to go



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to the liquor store to get wine for our dinner. She even wrote herself a note during work. But what did she do? Drove right by the store, to her home, into her garage, and then cursed herself out loud for driving right past the store—then asked me to pick up a bottle up on my way to her house. (Yes, I remembered!) So this is *not* an example of mindfulness, but it is an example of what most of us do everyday, probably more than we would like to admit. We give in to the routine we have established, without even a thought.

However, while waiting in my car for a light, I observed a man going into a store. As he spoke to the retail person, his hands flew into the air, the retailer stepped back, and another female retailer came over to the man, who continued to point to something on, what I thought must be, the counter. I said to myself, “God, he must be really pissed off.” I had to move on with the traffic from that observation.

Once I stepped back and reflected on the situation, still in observation mode (and another characteristic of a good detective), I asked myself (and I bet you know what I’m going to say), “Hey, can I create a mystery short story around this?”

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Besides writing short stories, novels, and plays, Patricia Morin is a psychotherapist with master’s degrees in counseling psychology and clinical social work. Her first two short story collections, *Mystery Montage* (2010) and *Crime Montage* (2012) were released by Top Publications Ltd. Pat just completed *Confetti*, her third collection of short stories, as well as a novel titled *Seniors Inc.* Her short story *Homeless* was a Derringer and Anthony Award finalist, while *Pa and the Pigeon Man* was nominated for a Pushcart. Visit

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Mindfulness and the Power of Detection, continued

Part of the roadblock to mindfulness in this day and age is the use of computers, smartphones, and digital media. These decrease mindfulness, and also decrease the use of attention on the whole.

How often do you notice anything around you and the environment as you multitask? It steals much of our creative powers. We don't notice our own thoughts and thought patterns anymore. But don't get me started on how our minds are deteriorating.

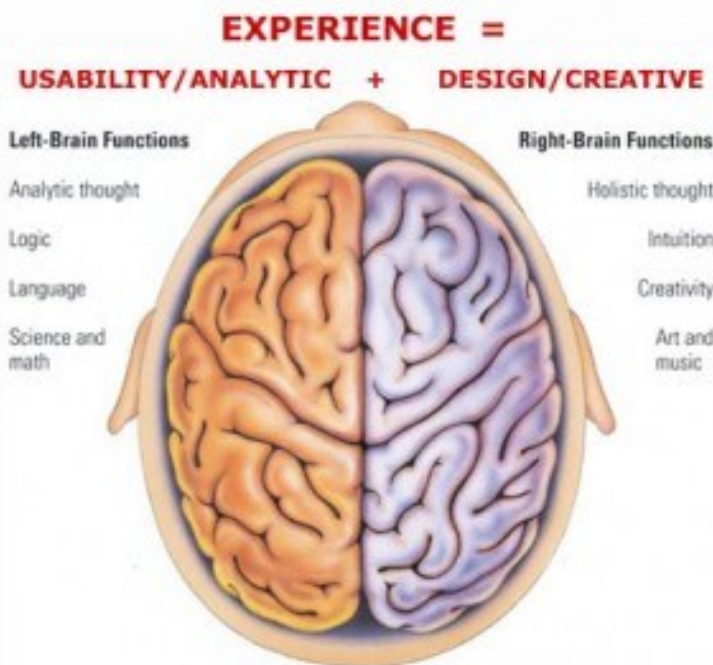
Thank goodness for that extra sensitivity we have to mindfulness and the true powers of observation.

Now you are mindful, paying attention, and in the moment. You feel centered, know yourself, and trust that you can continue to learn how to be a better detective.

Detection is not an art. It is a learned behavior, a compilation of training your awareness not to take anything at face value (be skeptical), drawing from memory (now where in my memory did I place that?), assimilating facts remembered into a logical wholeness (wholeness, like putting it all together?) ... oh, and let's not forget ... imagination, creativity, and motivation. Whew!

John Medina, in *The Brain Rules* (Pear Press, 2008), discusses "attention" at length. He says that you have about 15 minutes to make an impact, whether as a teacher, lecturer, or book author. Keep the most important facts short.

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As you know, the brain is divided into two hemispheres. Keeping them in balance is a feat. They share what we attend to, how we attend to it, and what we do with what we attended to. We hear something nearby, our mind and ears tune into it, we turn toward it or away from it, we decide what to do about it. All the time our two hemispheres are working their neurons, asking all systems on both sides to help. Attention multitaskers.

Back to Sherlock Holmes before I lose you. My 15 minutes must be up soon. In *Mastermind: How to Think like Sherlock Holmes*, by Maria Konnikova (Viking, 2013), she addresses the attention of a poor policeman in *A Study in Scarlet*: "And the criminal

was right in front of his eyes. Only he didn't know how to look. Instead of a suspect, he saw a drunk man—and failed to notice anything that would have told him otherwise, so busy was he trying to focus on his 'real' job of looking at the crime scene."

His interest, awareness, and attention were focused on the crime scene. In detection, we can take no observation at face value. Here, the facts about the drunk were not assimilated or logged for further use. The policeman had "attentional blindness" where a focus on one element of the scene causes the other elements to disappear.

I have that with my wine. I see it, take it, sip it, and everything else in the room disappears. I named it "attentional sightedness."

Next issue of *First Draft*: **Mindfulness, Logic and Emotions.**