

The head-chatter narratives: mindful observations for stress reduction

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There are two outcomes that we need from the Mindful observations of our head-chatter. Firstly, we need to name the threat and secondly, we need the chatter's silence.

Undoubtedly, it is paradoxical that you would need to listen to the chatter to silence it. At the same time this is exactly what is needed.

We will silence the chatter by addressing the threat. We will find these threats in the themes and narratives of the chatter. The information is not found directly in the chatter's content. No, there's a nuance here. The information is in symbolic meaning of what the content represents.

To access the information that we need from our chatter, we can view it as a story or as a collection of stories. These stories project a narrative. Each narrative carries a theme. Each theme represents a threat. Our task is to discover and acknowledge these threats.

Name the threat to address it. Address the threat to silence the chatter. Silence the chatter to change the way you feel.

Chatter threats

To address our threats, we need the words to talk about them. On the other hand, we would have less trouble talking about our values. Values are nice and threats are nasty. So, we don't know about the threats yet we suffer from their influence.

Our chatter threats are different to actual threats. They are by nature more apparent than actual. Most importantly, they are threats because they get your adrenaline and cortisol

pumping. (See the articles *Anxiety as the Felt Experience* and *The Head-Chatter Honey Trap*.)

Table 1 shows a list of suggested labels for chatter threats. There are more details about these threats and their naming (labelling) in the articles mentioned above and, in the article, *Name the head-chatter threats*.

Table 1: List of names for chatter threats

Abuse	Harm will come one way or other
Imperfection	The rights and wrongs
Abandonment	I'll end up on my own
Subjugation	I have no say
Shame	They judge me
Failure	I'll never get it
Catastrophe	Something really bad will happen
Deprivation	I always miss-out
Self-sacrifice	They take advantage of me
Invalidation	I don't seem to matter

Replicated from article: *Name the head-chatter threats*

The question is, which threats apply to you. We need to take the time to find out. We need Mindful observations of the chatter to learn from it.

Mindful observation

The requirement is Mindful observation as opposed to other types of less helpful observation. We do it this way because this is what our nervous system requires (see the articles *Anxiety as the Felt Experience* and *The Head-Chatter Honey Trap*, *Name the head-chatter threats*.)

To make your observations Mindful you take-on a non-judging and accepting attitude. **This**

simply means that you face your chatter with curiosity and interest. In other words, you really need to know about it, but you don't want to get caught up in the content of the stories. Really, all you need is a name.

Mindful observation is done in real-time. It is not a theoretical exercise or a ritual. It is a process that happens in your presence.

Mindful observations are not made in a vacuum. In relation to changing the way you feel, we have mind and body observations. Think of *body observations* and *mind observations* then think about *mind-body observations*.

Body observations

We start in your body. One of the main issues here is finding the words to talk about feelings. There are three important questions to answer...

1. How do you feel?
2. Where do you feel it?
3. What does it feel like?

The answers to these questions can be straight forward. For example, "I feel anxious". "I feel it in my gut". "It feels like my guts could explode".

Or there are people who will say, "I feel anxious", "I feel it in my head", and "It feels like my head will explode".

It is interesting to note that some people prefer to locate their feelings in their head. We all have our physiological quirks and differences and preferences. In the end it will make no difference if you can notice the subtle shifts in how you feel.

For example, when you're triggered, do you notice the presence of the adrenaline? If you experience it in your body, you would take note of your *solar plexus* area. This is located just below your ribs in your gut. Put your hand on your tummy between your ribs and your bellybutton and you will cover the area where you will experience the adrenaline most noticeably.

If you don't feel it that way, then turn your

attention to your behaviours for clues. You will behave how you feel. For example, you might look panicky, agitated, flushed, loud, rushed, flustered, angry, irritable, etc. These are all good signs of elevated adrenaline.

Our human issue here is to find the words to talk about how you feel. What we need are resources. For this purpose, there are two lists of adjectives in the appendix. *Appendix A: feeling words* is a list of words that will help you to describe the feelings in your body. *Appendix B: happening words* is a list of adjectives that you can use to describes the feelings in terms of what's happening – behaviours.

The point is, do you notice the subtle changes to how you feel, in real-time, as it happens? When your body changes and you feel it, this is valuable information for you to act on.

The recommendation is for you to make good use of both lists to build up a vocabulary on how you feel. We are after all changing the way you feel. The point is, do you notice the shifts in the way you feel? How long after it's happened do you notice it?

If you notice it at all then you're on the right track. The feelings in your body (or the way you behave in relation to triggers) are clues and information. We move on from how you feel to discover and observe the chatter.

Mind observations

The second point for Mindful observation is to identify the chatter in real-time. In other words, on your feet you note that certain thoughts help you to solve and resolve, whereas other thoughts seem to go around and around in your head getting you nowhere. We can call this unhelpful type of thinking – *the chatter*.

Observe how the chatter is not like normal thinking. Don't be lazy. Go to the trouble of noticing the difference. This little bit of effort will pay off. It will be worth your while.

Separate the sheep from the goats. As the sheep and goats come running through the race, you operate that gate that sends the

goats one way and the sheep the other way. As your thoughts flow through your mind, can you separate or at least identify the chatter?

With your curiosity and interest, your non-judging mind, you ask what's my mind up to? Straight up, you might come to your defence and say, "I'm problem solving", or "I'm working it out". With Mindful consideration you might then conclude that what you are **actually doing** is looping and getting nowhere. You can then conclude with confidence that this is the chatter. So, what's the threat?

Mind-Body observations

This is where you put it together as the mind-body connection.

The reason for starting with body observations is because you are most likely to notice how you feel first. This is not a hard and fast rule. Not everyone does it this way. But in most cases people notice how they feel before they notice the head-chatter.

It doesn't matter if you are someone who notices the head-chatter first. The order in which you notice it is not the issue. The main point is that you notice the changes in your mind and in your body.

This is where you can change your language in a useful and self-supportive way. This change in language will reflect what is actually happening. In other words, you feel the adrenaline and now you need to know the threat. Don't say, "I have anxiety and I'm about to explode". No, don't use the word anxiety. Say to yourself, "**I feel the adrenaline and now I need to find the threat**".

The narrative approach

Finding the threat will become natural to you once you get the knack and you learn your threats. The narrative approach is all about finding your threats. Once you have firmed up your list of favourites then there is less emphasis on learning and more emphasis on changing how you feel.

The narrative approach means that you Mindfully observe your chatter to understand

it as a story. In other words, we take a close look at the theme, the characters, the plot, the drama, the voice, etc.

To get out of the chatter you need to get the chatter out of your head. You need to get it out in the open where you can see it. You don't need it secretly lurking subconsciously banging away on your emergency button.

Use these following five questions as your structure to work with...

1. What am I telling myself?
2. What's happening?
3. Who is doing what?
4. What is the voice?
5. Who am I?

Print the pro-forma in Appendix C to use the headings out in the open. Don't try to do it in your head during the learning phase. Get it out of your head this way.

Start in the shallow end. As an example, lets apply this analysis to the commonly known children's bedtime story, *The Three Little Pigs*. It's not my chatter as such, but I did choose it as a story. So, let's just assume that it is my chatter.

Table 2: Three Little Pigs as my chatter

What am I telling myself?

I believe that children need to know about the virtues of hard work, preparation and planning.

What's happening?

Different pigs make different choices. The pig who puts in the most effort is safe from the wolf. The other two pigs risk their lives with laziness.

Who is doing what?

The wolf is trying to eat the pigs. He arrives at their homes, one at a time, and tries to blow their house down to expose them for capture.

What is the voice?

The voice is one of cautionary wisdom.

Who am I?

For this story, I am the teacher who values caution and thoughtfulness.

From this analysis of my interest in *The Three Little Pigs* story I reveal that I value *caution and thoughtfulness*. Even though this is not from my actual chatter, my interest in the story

nevertheless is a clue about my values.

You can think of your chatter threats as the inverse of your values. In other words, if what you need is not available then this is a threat.

If I think about the list of threat-names in Table 1, I can see that I express the threats of *catastrophe* (something really bad will happen) and *abuse* (harm will come one way or other). If this was a revelation from my actual chatter then this is something about me that I need to know.

Now we can wade to the deep end. These three following examples do not depict actual threats. Try not to get caught up in the drama. Your work in the shallow end should help you out here.

We are after all taking a narrative approach where drama is a key feature. If you do get caught up in the drama then take note, that will be your chatter happening. Duly note the pull of the drama. Note the temptation to fight, defend, deny and rationalise the chatter. This is the pull of the confirmation bias and outrage for being triggered in the first place.

Table 3 applies the narrative approach to a sample of actual chatter.

Table 3: Example of chatter narrative analysis

What am I telling myself?

My boss wants to get rid of me.

What's happening?

I'm being reassigned to jobs with less importance.
I'm blocked from progressing and developing toward my career goals.

Who is doing what?

My boss has demoted me in the team. He is holding information from me. He's out to get me.

What is the voice?

The voice in my head is angry and frustrated.

Who am I?

I am left hurt and alone.

Notice how the analysis does not contain any of the chatter. Ultimately, we need to silence the chatter, so we don't need to develop it further. We don't need the chatter infiltrating our analysis.

Note how the analysis reveals the adrenaline and the threat. The *angry voice* is the reference to adrenaline. *I am hurt and alone* reveals the threat, or in this case, the threats. From Table 1 we recognise the threats of *abuse* (harm will come one way or other) and *abandonment* (I'll end up on my own).

In the example in Table 3 the drama is palpable. What if it's bullying? What if the boss is a psychopath? There are the elements of truth and there is the whole truth. The drama emphasises the dramatic elements of truth. Then there is the boring whole-truth that covers topics such as competence and capacity and verifiable third-party input.

Let's move on. Table 4 provides yet another example of the narrative approach to someone else's actual chatter.

Table 4: Second example of a narrative analysis

What am I telling myself?

This is not fair.

What's happening?

I'm stuck behind a bus on this winding road where there are no overtaking opportunities. The bus is blocking my progress.

Who is doing what?

The bus driver is obviously incompetent. He is obviously too slow or he's stupid. I'm sure that he is holding me up on purpose.

What is the voice?

The voice is outrage.

Who am I?

I am frustrated and angry because I'm missing out.

From Table 4 we can see the adrenaline and the threat. The *outrage* is the sign of adrenaline. From Table 1 we conclude that the threat is *deprivation* (I always miss out).

From suspects to favourites

We do this narrative analysis to discover our threats. In the beginning and as you learn, you will have your list of *likely suspects*. You will arrive at your list of favourites from your repeated and continuing Mindful observations.

As some Buddhists say, religion is like a raft to carry you across the sea of troubles. Once you get to the other side, you don't need to carry the raft around with you.

You will firm up your list of favourites from many observations of the same thing. When we say the *same thing*, we are not talking about the chatter's content. We're talking about the themes that re-occur across different stories. The themes will be the same. The threats are carried by the themes. When you say this is my *abandonment chatter*, or this is my *deprivation chatter*, or this is my [*insert threat here*] *chatter* then you are speaking thematically about the chatter's story.

We make our decisions about our threats from viewing the same repeated results. So, **print off about a dozen Appendix C pages and get to work**. Do the work in real-time, as it is

happening. You'll get there more quickly that way.

To achieve a list of favourites, do the narrative analysis on many samples of your chatter. You will notice that despite the diverse content in your chatter there will be only a handful of threats, or less.

Resources

Take up some *telehealth consultations* to get on track. There is nothing like the *orthogonal view* to help you out. Self-help is a mirror view. Someone looking at you side-on has the orthogonal view. Your efforts will be solid if you do it with your *mirror view* and the *orthogonal view*. Phone for an appointment.

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Appendix A: feeling words

Here is a list of adjectives that you can use to talk about feelings in your body.

Instructions

Do this in real-time whilst you are suffering. If you do it this way then you have a greater change of getting what you need. Choose words from the list that describe how you feel right now.

Where do you feel it? Put your hand on the part of your body where you feel the sensation. Avoid generalising to the whole of your body. In some cases, the sensation will apply to your whole body, but do not default to generalisations where the details are available. Take the extra effort to think about how you feel and where you feel it.

Write down the words that you choose to make your own list.

How do you feel and where do you feel it?

Aching	Excited	Shaky
Alone	Fatigued	Sick
Brittle	Flushed	Sore
bloated	Gassy	Stiff
Clammy	Headachy	Sweaty
Cold	Hurt	Tender
Comfortable	Itchy	Tense
Confused	Irritable	Thick
Cramped	Jittery	Tired
Dull	Lethargic	Uncomfortable
Dizzy	Lightheaded	Uneasy
Dry	Nauseous	Unmotivated
Energised	Panicky	Weak
Exhausted	Queasy	Weary
Edgy	Restless	

Eg., Brain fog = feeling dull and fatigued and thick or weak.

Appendix B: happening words

Here is a list of adjectives that you can use to describe behaviours that indicate how you feel. These are words that describe the doing.

Instructions

Do this in real-time whilst you are suffering. If you do it this way then you have a greater chance of getting what you need. Choose words from the list that describe what is happening to you right now.

Write down the words that you choose to make your own list.

What's happening now?

Agitation	Fidgeting	Outrage
Anger	Fearfulness	Paralysis
Apprehension	Frustration	Pessimism
Anxiousness	Heart rate up	Panick
Avoidance	Hiding	Restlessness
Breath holding	Hypervigilant	Rushing
Confusion	Hyperventilation	Running
Distracted	Irritability	Slowness
Distrusting	Indifference	Sinicism
Frantic	Lethargy	Withdrawn
Forgetfulness	Overwhelmed	Unsteady

Appendix C: Narrative analysis

Date:...../...../.....

1. What am I telling myself? In the story... I believe... I know... It is a fact... Everyone knows..., etc.

2. What's happening? The facts in the story. Bring your theories and paranoia out into the open.
No content and no argument allowed. Do not fight, do not defend, do not deny, do not rationalise the chatter.

3. Who is doing what? The drama. The action. The contention. The grievance. The injustice. The conflict.
No content and no argument allowed. Do not fight, do not defend, do not deny, do not rationalise the chatter.

4. What is the voice? Happening words in Appendix B will help. What do you sound like in the story?

5. Who am I? Feeling words in Appendix A will help. I am..., I feel..., etc.
