

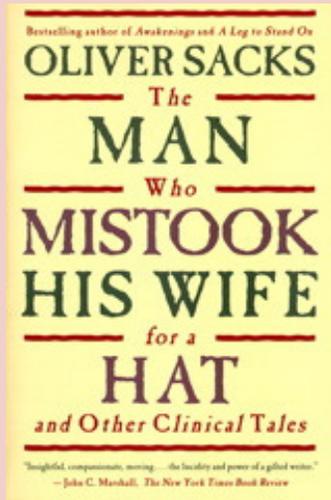
THE MAN WHO MISTOOK HIS WIFE FOR A HAT

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ISBN-10: 1416542787



In this short narrative of Sacks' we see how his patient Mr. P goes through life with a disorder which causes him to be unable to see faces—specifically a type of agnosia called prosopagnosia. Mr. P for the most part has not been bothered by the disorder, and goes through life quite normally, if a little eccentric. He is a renowned musician, and teaches at a highschool, where he is known for sometimes mistaking objects for people — a quirk which makes people(and himself) laugh endlessly.

However, this case of prosopagnosia is quite interesting, for Mr. P makes up for his inability to see faces with his astounding attention to detail. The narrative goes on to explain how the music teacher interacts with his pupils, how he identifies each based on some deciding factor (a large tooth or tone of voice). He adapts this approach throughout his life, relying on shapes and sounds in place of visuals, and is shown to by all means thrive in his environment.

However, sudden interruptions in his routine have the tendency to make him freeze, as indicated by his wife. Mr. P goes through all his routines humming or singing, and any sudden noises disrupt his rhythm and cause him to freeze for a few moments. Sacks' speaks about attempting to get the man to identify his glove, only for Mr. P to give a very sophisticated answer of 'a continuous surface...infolded on itself' but be unable to correctly answer his question. Here, Sacks' postulates that Mr. P's pathophysiology may be slightly different from the average person, allowing him advanced hyper awareness in place of his lost sight, and laments of the man's loss while viewing his paintings throughout the years. These paintings grow increasingly abstract, until they end off in blotches of colour which Sacks' views as a ' tragic pathology exhibit, which belonged to neurology, not art.'

In the Postscript, a similar case is mentioned by Macrae and Trolle, where the patient could not recognize any faces – his own included – save for three of his peers. And that was only because each had their own defining traits that helped him do so.

Sacks' offers us an amusing clinical study of prosopagnosia in this narrative, with future studies given in his postscript for the study. It offers us a useful insight into the mechanisms of the right side of the brain, and how such a disorder can impact an individual's life.

“If a man has lost a leg or an eye, he knows he has lost a leg or an eye; but if he has lost a self—himself—he cannot know it, because he is no longer there to know it.”

Sources:

- Sacks, O. (1985). The man who mistook his wife for a hat and other clinical tales. New York: Summit Books.