

TRANSCRIPT WITH COMMENTARY

A Case of Face Blindness

Sadie Interview 5:

Fifth day of DES sampling

Below in black is a word-for-word transcript of the March 24 interview with Sadie that is available on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/lxVmdPr4Cuc>. In green are comments about and explanations of the Descriptive Experience Sampling process. If you have corrections, suggestions, or questions, please post them as YouTube comments.

RTH = Russ Hurlburt

AK = Alek Krumm

Sadie = Sadie Dingfelder

0:00 Sadie: So I'm so sorry. I've only got three. Uh, I was hiking around this morning and I had my headphones in and then all of a sudden I was like, why haven't I gotten any beeps? And then it was too late. Well, it wasn't too late.

0:14 RTH: Well, it's too bad. It would have been interesting to get the hiking beeps, probably.

0:19 Sadie: I know! I was looking forward to it.

0:20 AK: No worries.

0:24 RTH: No worries. That's right.

0:28 Sadie: So, okay. So my first beep was at 1:03 and I was staring at my head, cell phone, and I was *thinking*, um, but I have no idea what I was thinking about and I wasn't really taking in... Oh! Wait! That wasn't the first one. I'm sorry.

SAMPLE 5.1 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

0:46 [continues] The first one was 12:50. When I ate a straw, I was eating a strawberry and I felt a cool squish of strawberry between my back right side of my mouth. And I felt it on my tongue, mostly, and a little bit on my molars. And I had also crunched the leaf on the strawberry ('cause I didn't take off the top). [chuckles]

1:10 RTH: So this is an entirely, a sensory experience? Or a series, a bunch of multiple sensory experiences? Is that right?

1:17 Sadie: It was just one. I think it was just one experience, I would say. It's just like, it was cold and I was feeling the squish of the strawberry and the sort of grindy or squish of the leaf.

- 1:31 RTH: And that was all sort of simultaneous, and simultaneously on my tongue and on my teeth? [Sadie: Yeah.] So it's not like I feel coolness on my tongue and crunchiness on my teeth or whatever, but the whole thing is...
- 1:49 Sadie: I guess, yeah, the crunchiness was probably just on my teeth, but I know the coolness was also on my teeth.
- 1:55 RTH: So I don't want us to *speculate* about what [Sadie: Yeah.] *must've been* on my teeth. So,
- 2:01 Sadie: I mean, well, I, I felt I, what I wrote down is I felt both on both.
- 2:06 RTH: Okay. So I have a tooth / tongue sensation that includes coolness and squishiness and crunchiness. [Sadie: Yup.] And that does not include taste. Is that...?
- 2:23 Sadie: Yeah, no taste. It was kind of a tasteless strawberry. [they laugh]
- 2:28 RTH: Okay. And is anything else going on in your experience at this particular moment? [Sadie: No!] Okay, then I'm good.
- 2:39 AK: Okay. Me too. Number 2.

SAMPLE 5.2 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

- 2:42 Sadie: Um, okay. That was, I was staring at my cell phone and um, that wasn't really looking at it. It wasn't in focus. And I had this sense that I was *thinking* about something, but I don't know what. [laughs] I could *guess*, but I didn't have the sense of it at the beep.
- 3:06 AK: And so I'm gathering there's kind of a low engagement overall in this experience. I'm not really into any of the things?
- 3:18 Sadie: Y'know, I think I was thinking kind of hard, actually.
- 3:24 AK: And *thinking*, that means there's some, there's some directly present to me something? It's not just,
- 3:31 Sadie: No, it was just like an amorphous, like I just *know* that I'm thinking.
- 3:31 Comment: An emergent characteristic of Sadie's is that she often discovers (upon retrospect) that she was thinking—sometimes deeply—but has very little or no direct experience of thinking at the moment of the beep. Her various iterations of phrases such as “I just know that I'm thinking” have become a signal of that kind of not-or-barely- experienced-but-still-ongoing thinking. We have struggled to define the boundaries of this not-or-barely-experienced-but-still-ongoing thinking perhaps because of the difficulty of distinguishing between *nothing* in experience and *some very little thing* in experience. In the transcript that follows, we will continue that struggle.

3:40 AK: And so we've had a whole continuum of kind of Sadie's thinkings [Sadie laughs] and they can be, y'know, my mind is blank to no, I, I have this kind of presentiment of thinking, to maybe something else. I don't really know that we have totally nailed it down. Does...

3:40 Comment: AK is referring to *Sadie interview 4 transcript with commentary* at 8:36, where we noted two relevant sets of overlapping distinctions:

Between (a) and (b), where (a) is experiencing myself (inchoately) as *thinking* and (b) is experiencing myself as *blank* (but on retrospection knowing *that* I had been thinking).

Between (c) and (d), where (c) is experiencing myself inchoately as *thinking* but not knowing at all, at the moment of the beep, the content of that thinking; and (d) is experiencing myself inchoately as *thinking* and having a faint recognition / presentiment, at the moment of the beep, of the content of that thinking.

3:58 Sadie: Yeah. I think, I mean, this one was really just like, I don't know, like, I feel like if you had a mind reader or something, it would just be like, kind of like white noise. Like I was just staring at my cell phone and it was like [makes a white noise kind of sound], but I know I was *thinking about something*, but it just wasn't in my conscious awareness at all.

3:58 Comment: How to understand Sadie here depends on understanding the referent of *it* in "but *it* just wasn't in my conscious awareness at all." If *it* refers to the previously mentioned *thinking*, then Sadie seems to be addressing (b) *nothing* in experience, an extension of her analogy to "white noise." But if *it* refers to the previously mentioned *something*, then Sadie seems to be addressing (c), the inchoate apprehension of *some* thinking in experience but the *content* of that thinking is entirely absent. Or perhaps both. Or perhaps those distinctions are just too difficult or impossible for Sadie to grasp.

4:23 AK: And does that mean that really in my *conscious awareness*, which is what we're interested in, [Sadie: Yeah.] there's *nothing* going on, but somewhere subconscious, somewhere not directly experienced, I *am thinking* and maybe something's gonna pop up.

4:23 Comment: AK then tries to reflect Sadie's assertion but perhaps muddies the water by coming down on the (a) side. The good news is that there are very few eternal sins in DES; to the extent that AK is operating in good faith, the co-investigator environment allows for nearly any misstep to be forgiven—the good faith to be recognized over the perhaps-inartful characterization—down the road. AK's "Something's gonna pop up" is a reference to Sadie's previous comments, such as at interview 3 transcript with commentary (30:55): "In fact, I'm always impressing myself. I'll write like an essay and I'll be like, 'Whoa, those were such good ideas! Who knew (!) that I had those in my head?!'"

4:38 Sadie: Yeah. I think I was... Like in a conscious way, I think I was waiting. I was waiting to find out what my brain was gonna come up with.

4:38 Comment: Sadie continues to be ambiguous. Is Sadie describing *I was waiting*, in which case she is describing nothing going on, that is, giving an (a) description? Or is she

describing *waiting to find out*, in which case she is describing the inchoate experience of thinking, that is, giving a (c) description?

4:50 AK: So is that, so do you mean to say what I *experience* is sort of the, the *void* of thinking. Like maybe it's gonna be filled, maybe something's coming.

5:01 Sadie: It's like, I think that... Well, I, I just know I'm just, yeah. It's like, sort of like if you put, um, a question to a computer and it's like lags and you get the little time, the little time thing? Like there's not much, it's not *telling* you anything. You're just waiting for it to finish the work.

5:01 Comment: To our ears, Sadie continues to be ambiguous about whether she is distinguishing between (a) and (b) or between (c) and (d).

5:28 AK: Okay, good. So I think I'm, I think I'm with you there. And now I guess the distinction that I would like to understand is: is that waiting / lagging / the wheels spinning thing, is that directly present to me? Is that a before-the-footlights-of-consciousness thing? Or is there *nothing* there and maybe something will appear out of this thinking?

5:53 Sadie: Yeah, I, I, I don't, I wasn't, I didn't have the sense of waiting. That's just me inferring what I was doing, staring blankly at my cell phone.

6:03 AK: Hmm. So is it, is it fair to say there's actually really *nothing* in my experience? Though, on retrospect I can tell you I *was thinking*, and...

6:17 Sadie: Yeah, exactly. Though, and I do know that like, I wasn't engaged with it, but I definitely did have the visual of staring at my cell phone. But like, it was just like, I wasn't really processing it at all. I wasn't taking it in very much.

6:17 Comment: The last two turns sound like Sadie coming down on the (a)-(b) continuum, but it's impossible to know whether she has been encouraged in that direction by AK's overlooking of the (c)-(d) continuum in this exchange. Balancing, refining, or even potentially discarding our emphases on the (a)-(b) and (c)-(d) dimensions is a work-in-progress.

However, there is evidence that we are in the ballpark of fidelity when Sadie, too seems comfortable enough with this interview's discussion of thinking to powerfully steer the conversation back to the visual experience of her phone ("I definitely did have the visual...")

6:35 AK: Okay. But I'm taking it in a little bit. It's not like my eyes are aimed at it and I don't even see it. I do see it, [Sadie: Yeah.] but not with much oomph or something.

6:45 Sadie: Yeah. Like it's, yeah. Like it would probably, it was almost probably, it was like kind of like a blur, a cell-phone blur.

6:54 AK: And do you mean that literally? As in "I see a blurry cell phone"? Or do you mean that kind of metaphorically, like I see the cell phone, but not,

- 7:03 Sadie: Yeah! I think I... I did, well, I guess it, I didn't see any details. So it didn't look, I didn't feel like I was having an eye problem all of a sudden. But I, I, when the little beep beeped at me, I was like, Whoa, I don't see any details. Some,
- 7:22 AK: So I'm seeing my phone, but not, not registering the details of it. Just.. [Sadie: Yeah.] Not super clear, not super detailed, but I, but I recognize it as a phone? [Sadie: Yes. Yeah.] It's not like, I just see a [Sadie: And I also saw like...] silver, I see a phone, but just not very well differentiated.
- 7:43 Sadie: Yeah. And it was the whiteness of the screen (or part of, whatever part of the screen I was looking at) the whiteness was particularly in my consciousness.
- 7:54 AK: Okay. In like a sensory kind of way? I'm, I'm drawn to this whiteness.
- 8:01 Sadie: No, it's just like what I was seeing, I guess. I wasn't. Yeah. Yeah. I didn't feel like I was drawn to it. [AK: Okay.] It was just sort of like a default or something.
- 8:13 AK: So the distinction there would be something like, *I see my phone and it happens to have a white screen or I see the whiteness of the screen, which happens to be of my phone.* [Sadie: Um, the latter.] So it's more about the whiteness than the phone-ness? [Sadie: Yeah.] Okay. So I've got... So let me, so let me see if I can gather what we've got here. [They laugh] [Sadie: Sure.] Um, I'm looking at my phone [Sadie: Uh huh.] and I'm seeing mostly the whiteness of the screen. [Sadie: Uh huh.] Is there more to say about the whiteness? Is like the whole screen white? Or there's a little patch? Or...?
- 8:56 Sadie: In real life there's, it's not particularly, I was like a Facebook page. Um, so it wasn't really all that white.
- 9:09 AK: Okay. But in my experience, I'm picking out the whiteness, even though there's probably texts and other little things.
- 9:13 Sadie: Yeah. I wasn't reading the text. I was just like taking in that it was sort of bright and white.
- 9:20 AK: Okay. And then really, otherwise there's not much going on, y'know, mentally or cognitively. It seems on reflection that I am thinking hard, but really I don't experience myself thinking hard.[Sadie: Yeah.] I don't experience any of the content of what I'm thinking about. [Sadie: Yeah.] Okay. Do you have questions, Dr. Hurlburt?
- 9:46 RTH: Yeah, I do. I, so I'm, I'm understanding that I'm seeing the whiteness of the phone, [Sadie: Uh huh.] but I'm not really, I'm not really into it. [Sadie: Yeah.] And does, is, is there a way to quantify, the not really into it? Like, am I just sort of 5% idly seeing it? Or am I 50% idly seeing it? Or, or doesn't that make sense? Just barely idly seeing it or...
- 10:12 Sadie: Yeah. Like I was sort of not quite, a little more than barely.
- 10:18 RTH: So 10 or 20% or something like that, [Sadie: Yeah.] seeing the whiteness, seeing some whiteness. [Sadie: Yeah.] And then later on, I can say that's the phone. [Sadie: Yeah.]

And then about the *thinking* part, the fact of the matter, the fact of my neurons, is that I'm thinking hard about something. [Sadie: Yeah.] But at the moment of the beep I have little or no recognition of that thinking process going on. [Sadie: Yeah.] And is that a little or no smaller than the phone-ness that we just said it was 20, 10 or 20%? [Sadie: Yeah. It's less.] So do I .. Even less, [Sadie: Yeah.] even less thinking-ness going on. Experientially, [Sadie: Yeah.] directly in my experience, I have *even less* of the *thinking* going on than I have of the phone. [Sadie: Yes!] So somewhere between 10 or 20% and 0% maybe, in there, there somewhere. [Sadie: Yeah.] Okay. And, and that's, even though if I had to say what was actually happening in my neurons, my neurons were pretty much into the *thinking*, they were [Sadie: Yes.] grinding away on this thought process, whatever it is, but that's happening outside of my awareness. [Sadie: Yeah.] Then I'm happy with that, I think.

10:16 Comment: Sadie has confidently characterized the relative degree of experiential presence (whatever that is): She sees the brightness, but mindlessly; much less prominent, she sees the phone; and much less prominent than that she apprehends her thinking process. Thus, for this 5.2 struggle at least, it seems pretty likely that, experientially, there is little or no apprehension of the thinking experience itself, and if it is a *little* apprehension, is a *very* small. And the at-the-moment-of-the-beep apprehension of the *content* of thinking is even smaller than that. There can be little doubt about the magnitudes that Sadie is conveying. This is not at all a matter of the definition of terms.

11:45 AK: Yeah, me too.

SAMPLE 5.3 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

11:48 Sadie: I feel like I'm so boring today. Um, okay. That was at 1:40. Um, I was looking at the deck. It was just an amorphous brown surface. So I was just really taking in the brown-ness, not the deck-ness. And also I could tell you that I was thinking about something, um, and I can *infer* what I was thinking about, but my experience of thinking was *very* small. And the looking at the deck part was probably like not very present either, but a little, but more than thinking, more than the thinking.

12:27 RTH: So this sounds pretty much like the previous beep. That, that there's a visual experience that's more about color than the thing (although I'm aimed at a thing). [Sadie: Yeah.] One's white and a phone, the other is brown and a deck. Yeah. And I'm *thinking* about something, but I don't know what I'm thinking about. And, and is the amount of thinking that's in my *experience* the same from, from sample 2 sample 3?

12:55 Sadie: I think u,... it was *more* in the second one. I was, I was, the thinking was a little more present when I was looking at the deck.

12:55 Comment: The upcoming makes it clear that by "the second one," Sadie means sample 3.

13:03 RTH: Okay. But still very little. [Sadie: Yeah.] So we've gone from zero or 1% up to five or six or 10 or something percent, or something like that. [Sadie: Yeah.] . Is that what we're

trying to convey here? [Sadie: (laughs) Yes.] So there is, so there is a continuum, I guess we're saying, there's a *range* of the experience of thinking, ranging from pretty close to zero (I don't know that we have to distinguish between zero and 1% or something, but pretty close to zero) to, to real, moderately close to zero, to at the other end (not today, but on some other days) where I've pretty much experienced myself as thinking. [Sadie: Yeah.] [AK: Okay.] And is the, the brownness of the deck the same kind of an experience as the whiteness of the phone?

13:03 Comment: These samples illustrate why the iterative triangulation across multiple different experiences is so important for understanding the characteristics of inner experience. A dive into any one of those samples, by itself, and no matter how deep a dive, would not be able to reveal experience with the level of precision that is available to us now.

The *Sadie interview 4* comment on the distinction between (a) and (b) has been especially relevant for these *Sadie interview 5* samples. That is, here the aspect of Sadie's experience that has emerged as important is the degree to which there is an experience of thinking; we have seen that she was at the (a) end of that continuum (little or no experience of thinking) in sample 5.2, and close to the (a) end but a little in the direction of (b) (somewhat more experience of thinking but still very little) in sample 5.3. The (c) vs. (d) dimension is not salient here: Sadie is at the (c) end (no experience of the *content* of thinking) in both 5.2 and 5.3.

13:56 Sadie: You know, it was really just the, I think that, I don't think that I said it quite right. I think that I am added that it was brown later. I, at the time it was really just the *shininess* of the deck.

14:15 RTH: So is the *shininess* of the deck of the same kind of experience as the whiteness of the phone?

14:25 Sadie: Um, yeah, pretty much,

14:27 RTH: So I'm into the shininess, which happens to be of the deck, but I'm not really into the deck. I'm into. I see. I I'm, I'm seeing something that's shiny. [Sadie: Yeah.] But what that something is in reality is the deck. In my experience, it doesn't matter. [Sadie: Yeah!] And, and when we talked about the *phone*, we said at sometimes it was whiteness and at sometimes it was brightness. [Sadie: Ummm.] Was...

14:57 Sadie: It was probably the brightness more than the whiteness.

15:01 RTH: So just as it was the shininess, rather than the brownness, it's the brightness [laughs] rather than the whiteness.

15:09 Sadie: Yeah! Yeah. And I realized that when you... Wait! What did you guys ask? I can't remember. Anyway,.. Oh! When you said *color*, when you said your, your experience is color, my brain was like, *no, it wasn't color*, [RTH: It wasn't color.] *it was just the brightness*. Yeah.

15:09 Comment: It is of course possible that Sadie has now transformed her recollection of the sample-5.2 phone from whiteness to brightness because of some urge to be consistent or some other (probably outside of awareness) motive. That is water over the dam, unresolvable. What we *have* done is to raise a distinction between color and brightness / shininess that may be useful *in future sampling*.

15:24 RTH: And that's, and that's true of the phone as well. [Sadie: Yeah.] You would have the same reaction if I said something about the color of the phone.

15:35 Sadie: Yeah. That was just me describing it, like aft , post-hoc. [AK: Interesting.]

15:40 RTH: Okay. Then I think I'm good about that. [AK: Yeah.] And we have three beeps today.

15:50 Sadie: [sounds pained, exaggeratedly so] Ooh we only have three! Oh, I'm so sorry. [AK laughs]

15:53 RTH: Well, the world, the world is a complicated place here. [Sadie laughs] We can deal with three beeps. And I, and I think this was actually a pretty useful exercise, because I don't know whether you've read the transcript from yesterday or last week or whenever, whenever it was, but Alek and I were trying to work through the little thinking or [AK: Um hmm.] thinking whatever. And I think this was, today's discussion was helpful in that ...

16:18 AK: I do too.

16:19 Sadie: Yeah! I'd never realized how many variations there were on thinking, the feeling of thinking, but not knowing what you're thinking.

16:27 RTH: Well, I don't think, I don't think the world knows that. [Sadie laughs] So we, we are trying to, to [AK: Right.] say something that's uh coherent [inaudible] or whatever, faithful to your experience. [AK: Um hmm.] [Sadie: Yeah.] So shall we do this again? [Sadie: Yeah.][AK: Yeah.] Yeah, it looks, it looks like, uh, it looks like the, the internet is fine. Your, what I can see is you've got a clear picture and clear sound. [Sadie: Right.] And, uh, so I think, I think we're, we're good. And I'll let you and Alek figure it out when we're gonna do it and let me know. [AK: Sounds good.].

17:06 Sadie: Thank you so much.

17:09 RTH: [AK inaudible] I still think this is an interesting, useful exercise. [Sadie: Yeah.] [AK: Likewise.].

17:15 Sadie: Thank you guys.

17:16 AK: Yeah. Nice seeing you both. [Sadie: Bye.] Talk to you soon.