

Interview with a Person who Hears Voices

Sandra Escher and
Professor Marius Romme

To be used in conjunction with
Making Sense of Voices.
*A guide for mental health professionals working with
voice-hearers* (Mind Publications 2000)

Interview with a Person who Hears Voices

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To be used in conjunction with
Listening Sense of Voices
A guide for mental health professionals working with
voice-hearers (First Publications 2000)

Interview with a person who hears voices

Name of the voice hearer:

Address:

Telephone number:

Background information:

Date of birth/age:

Gender: M/F

Marital status:

Number of children:

Housing condition:

Employment status:

Nationality/Ethnic origin:

Information concerning the interview:

Name of the interviewer:

Date of the first interview:

Date of follow-up:

File number:

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1. THE NATURE OF THE EXPERIENCE

This questionnaire has been designed for people who hear voices. It is intended to help you gain greater insight into your experience of hearing voices. It is also designed to encourage a dialogue between us about your experience and the way you cope with the voices. This will enable us together to work out the best way of dealing with them.

- 1.1 I would like you to tell me about your experience of hearing voices. How many voices do you hear? Do you hear sounds as well? Do you see visions?

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- 1.2 Can the sounds/voices you hear also be heard by other people?
Can you explain why?

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- 1.3 Where do the sounds/voice(s) come from (where are they located)? Your head, your ears (left/right/both), or somewhere else within your body?

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- 1.4 Concerning the voices you hear, are these voices coming from your own person or are they from somebody else? (We are trying to establish how you perceive the voices when you experience them.) Are the voices coming from within yourself (ego-syntonic/me) or are the voices coming from someone else or something outside yourself (ego-dystonic/not-me). Can you explain why?

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- 1.5 Are you able to carry on a dialogue with the voices or communicate in any way with them? Can you give an example?

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To be concluded by the interviewer: does the voice-hearing possess the same or similar characteristics as an auditory hallucination (as it is understood within psychiatry):

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| 1. The respondent can hear voices that others cannot hear | yes/no |
| 2. The respondent hears voices through his/her ears | yes/no |
| 3. The respondent hears voices in his/her head | yes/no |
| 4. The respondent is able to maintain a dialogue or other method of communication | yes/no |
| 5. The voices are experienced as 'me'(1) or 'not-me'(2) | 1 / 2 |

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE VOICES

- 2.1 Do you hear one or more voices? How many? Has it always been like this? Has the number of voices ever changed? Have the voices always been the same voices?

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- 2.2 Are you able to indicate who the voices belong to and/or the names you have given them? What do they tell you, in which kind of tone and how frequently do you hear them?

| No | Name | Age | Gender | Content/tone | Frequency |
|----|------|-----|--------|--------------|-----------|
| 1 | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | |
| 5 | | | | | |
| 6 | | | | | |

- 2.3 Does the manner or tone of the voices or one of the voices remind you of someone you know or used to know? If yes, who?

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3. PERSONAL HISTORY OF HEARING VOICES

- 3.1 Let us return to the time when you first started to hear voices. How old were you when you first heard voices? Can you remember at what age you started to hear each voice (see 2.2)? During which further periods in your life did you hear voices?

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- 3.2 Can you describe for each voice the circumstances when you first heard them?

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- 3.3 We have put together a list of the kind of circumstances and situations that people might experience in their lives. Which of these life events have happened to you? At what age did you experience them?

| Circumstances | yes/no | Age and year |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------------|
| Stressful changes | | |
| Living on your own for the first time | | |
| Moving to a new residence, school / town or village | | |
| Starting studies / a course | | |
| Failing an exam | | |
| Being unemployed / fired / out of business | | |
| Changes in employment / status / job | | |
| Retirement / inability to work | | |
| Child/ren leaving home | | |
| Financial debt / financial problems | | |
| Illness and death | | |
| Serious physical injury or illness | | |
| Admission to a general hospital or being given an anaesthetic | | |
| Death of a close family member or an intimate friend | | |
| Death of a cherished pet | | |
| Serious illness of a loved one | | |
| Admission to a psychiatric hospital | | |
| Being confronted with a suicide or an attempted suicide | | |
| Love and sexuality | | |
| Divorce / break up of an intimate relationship | | |
| Problematic menstruation, (unwanted) pregnancy | | |
| Falling in love and having been rejected | | |
| Severe tension in your home or within your relationship | | |
| Confrontation with socially less acceptable forms of sexuality like homosexuality | | |
| Unexpected changes in your relationship such as your own unfaithfulness or an unfaithful partner | | |
| Religion, spirituality, mystic or cosmic experiences | | |
| Attending a séance, satanic ritual, spiritual event | | |
| Problems within a religious community / sect | | |
| Other | | |

- 3.4 Are one or more of these circumstances related to the fact you began to hear voices or changed their nature? If so, could you describe how?

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4. WHAT TRIGGERS THE VOICES

- 4.1 Have you noticed whether the voices tend to be present when you take part in particular activities or that they arise in certain kinds of circumstances? Can you describe what these are? (For example shopping, watching TV, cooking, alone in your room etc.)

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- 4.2 How do you feel when you are confronted with the type of situation, as mentioned before, which triggers the voices?

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- 4.3 Are there particular times (day, night, weekend, particular hours) when the voices are present or not present? Do you have any idea why?

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- 4.4 Have you noticed whether the voices come from certain objects like the TV for example? From which objects?

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- 4.5 Have you noticed whether the voices are present when you feel certain emotions? Check the following list. Do they occur when you experience emotions such as:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> insecurity | <input type="checkbox"/> jealousy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fear | <input type="checkbox"/> grief |
| <input type="checkbox"/> doubt | <input type="checkbox"/> tiredness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> in love | <input type="checkbox"/> sadness/depression |
| <input type="checkbox"/> anger or aggression | <input type="checkbox"/> happiness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> your own sexual feelings | <input type="checkbox"/> loneliness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> the sexual feelings of others | |

Can you describe how the voices react? (For instance are they confronting, helpful or frightening and unhelpful?) Do they have an effect on the emotion you are feeling, for instance making you more or less depressed, or more or less happy?

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5. WHAT DO THE VOICES SAY?

5.1 Do you hear positive (friendly) voices? What do they say? Please give an example of the exact words they use.

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5.2 Do you hear negative (unfriendly) voices? What do they say? Please give an example of the exact words they use.

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5.3 Do the voices talk about specific subjects/persons? Can you describe them? What do the voices say? Do these subjects concern you as well?

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6. HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THE ORIGIN OF THE VOICES?

6.1 As a voice hearer you have probably wanted to find an explanation for why you hear voices. You may already have developed your own interpretation of the meaning of the voices as do professionals and as we all do. However we might not have the same ideas, because we are trained to consider the meaning of the voices from a different frame of reference (often a medical or biological perspective). Here we are concerned with what you might think causes the voices and how you identify them.

The voices are from a living person:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------|--------|
| 1. someone who is part of your daily life | yes/no |
| 2. your parents or another family member | yes/no |
| 3. someone who is unknown to you | yes/no |

The voices are from a deceased person:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------|
| 4. who was very well known to you | yes/no |
| 5. who was unknown to you | yes/no |

The voices are:

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| 6. symptoms of an illness | yes/no |
| 7. one or more parts of your personality (from your unconscious) | yes/no |

The voices are:

- | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| 8. a good guide | yes/no |
| 9. a ghost or belonging to someone from the past (reincarnation) | yes/no |
| 10. gods, ghosts or angels | yes/no |
| 11. a good god | yes/no |
| 12. a bad spirit or the devil | yes/no |
| 13. entities (a spiritual person or power that you cannot see but is there; you feel or hear a presence) | yes/no |
| 14. extraordinary perceptions (telepathy, medium) | yes/no |
| 15. come from the pain of others or from something else around you | yes/no |

Further definition by interviewer

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6.2 I would like to discuss your interpretation of the origin of these voices.

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7. WHAT IMPACT DO THE VOICES HAVE ON YOUR WAY OF LIFE?

We would like to ask what kind of impact the voices have on your way of life.

7.1 How are the voices trying to influence you? Please give an example.

1. They offer a solution to a problem
2. They offer you advice and help you
3. They describe what you do or think
4. They comment on what you do/think or comment about the people you are dealing with
5. They take over your thinking so you cannot distinguish your own from the voice's
6. They swear at you or are very critical about what you are doing
7. They forbid you to do the things you like to do
8. They strengthen the feelings you have
9. They strengthen the thoughts you are busy with
10. They interrupt things that you enjoy doing
11. They interfere when you are talking to someone else
12. They command you to do things

How does the influence of the voices affect you and/or others? How do they accomplish this (by their presence or by the way they say things)?

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7.2 Are you happy with some of the voices? Why? Has this always been so?

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7.3 Are you afraid of some of the voices? Why? Have they always scared you? Please give an example.

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7.4 Do the voices disturb your daily activities? How do they do this? With what consequences? How powerless do the voices make you? Please give an example.

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|-----|----------------------------------|--------|
| 7.5 | Do you experience the voices as: | |
| | predominately positive | yes/no |
| | predominately negative | yes/no |
| | predominately neutral | yes/no |
| | positive as well as negative | yes/no |

8. BALANCE OF THE RELATIONSHIP

We would like to ask you what kind of relationship you have with the voices.

8.1 Are you able to influence the voices in any way? Do you do this? Please give an example.

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8.2 Are you in control of the voices? Has this always been so? Please give an example. Describe how you control them.

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8.3 Are you able to hold a conversation with the voices? Do you do this? Do you speak out loud or in your mind when you talk to them (or both)? How do the voices react? Have they always acted in this way? If not, why? Please give an example.

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8.4 Do you ever call the voices names? If yes, how do you do this, within your mind or by speaking out loud?

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8.5 Are you able to refuse orders? If yes, which orders can you refuse and which ones cannot be refused? What happens if you refuse to do what the voices order you to do?

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8.6 Are you able to cut yourself off from the voices and open up to them again?

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8.7 Can you concentrate on the voices when they are present so that you know exactly what they are saying? Does this differ with each voice and each time? If so why? Give an example.

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8.8 When you hear voices do you mainly concentrate on them or on what you are doing? Does this differ with each voice and each time?

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9. COPING STRATEGIES

We have just discussed your relationship with the voices. I would like to know what exactly you do when you hear the voices. If the answer to any of the following questions is yes, please tell me how many times you have tried this and what the effect has been.

Cognitive strategies

| | Strategy | yes/no | If yes, does it work? |
|-----|-----------------------------|--------|-----------------------|
| 9.1 | Send the voices away | | |
| 9.2 | Ignore the voices | | |
| 9.3 | Concentrate on listening | | |
| 9.4 | Listen selectively | | |
| 9.5 | Think about something else | | |
| 9.6 | Make a deal with the voices | | |
| 9.7 | Create boundaries | | |

Behavioural strategies

| | Strategy | yes/no | If yes, does it work? |
|------|----------------------------|--------|-----------------------|
| 9.8 | Start to do something | | |
| 9.9 | Try to escape the voices | | |
| 9.10 | Telephone or visit someone | | |
| 9.11 | Distract yourself | | |
| 9.12 | Write down what they say | | |
| 9.13 | Carry out certain rituals | | |

Physical strategies

| | Strategy | yes/no | If yes, does it work? |
|------|--------------------------------|--------|-----------------------|
| 9.14 | Relaxation exercises like yoga | | |
| 9.15 | Medication | | |
| 9.16 | Alcohol or drugs | | |
| 9.17 | Food | | |

Conclusion

9.18 Which coping strategies do you use mostly? How often do you use them? Do you use them systematically? If not, why not?

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9.19 What is the effect of the strategies you use most?

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9.20 When you know the voices will be present in certain situations, do you consider different ways of coping with the situation, i.e. looking for an alternative, avoiding the situation, or not allowing yourself to be influenced?

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9.21 Did you, in the past, try out things that seemed to help? Why don't you use this strategy anymore?

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10. CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Childhood can be a very different experience for each of us, some people like to look back to their childhood, whilst others prefer to put it behind them as soon as possible. What is your perception of your childhood?

10.1 Was your childhood pleasant or stressful? Can you describe what your childhood was like?

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10.2 Did you feel safe at school, in the street and/or at home? If not, please explain why.

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10.3 As a child, have you ever been mistreated? How?

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10.4 As a child, did you ever receive strange punishments? For example, being locked in a toilet or being tied up?

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10.5 Have you ever, as a child or a teenager, been yelled at or belittled? Did you ever experience the feeling of not being wanted, or did you feel that you were never able to do anything right?

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10.6 Have you ever witnessed the maltreatment of another family member? Who?

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10.7 Have you ever witnessed sexual abuse in the family or elsewhere? Whom?

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10.8 Have you ever had sex against your will, i.e. where it was forced upon you and from which you could not escape? Please describe the situation.

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11. TREATMENT HISTORY

11.1 We would like to know something about your medical history. For instance have you ever used psychiatric services or seen a psychologist, therapist or counsellor? If so what kind of assistance did you get and for how long?

| Year | Hospital/ community care | Kind of therapy | Length | Reason for treatment (voices or/and other) |
|------|-----------------------------|-----------------|--------|-----------------------------------------------|
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| | | | | |
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11.2 Did you talk to any of these therapists/service providers about your voices?

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11.3 What did they do about the voices, i.e. prescribe medication: if yes which; psychotherapy or other therapy?

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11.4 Have you ever sought assistance from alternative or complementary health practitioners, such as acupuncture, herbal medicine, bio-energetics, homeopathy, paranormal healing, reincarnation therapy etc? Was it useful?

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12. SOCIAL NETWORK

Contact with others is an important part of life. Therefore I would like to ask you to tell me about the people with whom you have a personal relationship and also about anyone else who is important to you. The order is not important and you are not required to give names. Initials or a description like 'my son' is sufficient. We would also like to know whether they know about the voices and whether you can talk to them about the voices.

| No | Name | Knows about the voices yes/no | Can talk to them about the voices yes/no |
|----|------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| 1 | | | |
| 2 | | | |
| 3 | | | |
| 4 | | | |
| 5 | | | |
| 6 | | | |
| 7 | | | |
| 8 | | | |
| 9 | | | |
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