



## Voice-hearing can be positive for some young people

By Dr. Jessica Edwards

Researchers in Manchester have described the diverse forms and functions of voices heard by young people. Sarah Parry and Filippo Varese collected demographic, contextual and qualitative data from 68 adolescents (13-18 years old) from around the world who had direct experience of voice-hearing. They then performed what is known as a Foucauldian-informed narrative analysis to capture phenomenologically meaningful individual accounts and systemically informed narratives about voice-hearing. Using this approach, the researchers analysed the form and function of voices, including relational, protective, distressing and nuanced experiences.

Parry *et al.* found that, although most participants (56%) identified negative emotions about their voices, 23% reported only positive feelings, and 21% described mixed emotions. Moreover, some participants explained that some potentially distressing voices were somewhat valuable, for example by increasing their creativity. The researchers also found evidence for reciprocal relationships with pleasant voices, as some reported that the voices gave them someone to talk and listen to, and reduced feelings of loneliness. Thus, while most adolescents explained that voice-hearing reduced their control in their day-to-day activities and negatively influenced their wellbeing, positive effects of voice-hearing were also reported.

“For children and young people who experience friendly and comforting voices, it is important that we don’t unnecessarily medicalise their experience”, proposes Parry. “Voice-hearing in childhood is common and doesn’t need to be seen as problematic unless the voices are causing the child distress or difficulties.”

Children, young people and parents have been largely overlooked in terms of research about voice-hearing and other sensory experiences. Based on their findings, Parry et al. consider that it is now important that young people’s experiences inform recommendations to provide more effective support where necessary, and to recognise the possible value of these experiences without unnecessary pathologising.

“Many of the interventions delivered to children and young people who hear voices are based on evidence extrapolated from research with adult voice-hearers”, explains Parry. “We really hope our findings from young people will help inform policy and practice particularly for younger children, and will encourage more research with children, benefitting from their experiences and insights.”

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#### Referring to:

Parry, S. & Varese, F. (2020), *Whispers, echoes, friends and fears: forms and functions of voice-hearing in adolescence*. *Child Adolesc. Ment. Health*. doi: 10.1111/camh.12403

#### See also:

The authors of this paper have recorded a video abstract discussing this research which is available online:

<https://www.acamh.org/freeview/whispers-echoes-friends-and-fears-forms-and-functions-of-voice%E2%80%90hearing-in-adolescence/>

The authors of this paper have also created two short animations. The first video is suitable for health and social care professionals to raise awareness of voice-hearing; the second video is suitable for teachers to explain how they can support young people affected by voice-hearing:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMknuzMsPiM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYIWbZO6qZo>

#### Glossary:

**Foucauldian-informed Narrative Analysis:** a method of analysing in-depth qualitative responses, which recognizes that people use storytelling to develop understanding about their experiences and to portray themselves to others.