



Major Research Project

Title:

Young Peoples' Experiences of Hearing Voices: A Phenomenological Study of Self and Sense-Making in First-Episode Psychosis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the qualification of Doctorate in Clinical Psychology from School of Psychology, University of Exeter

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¹ See Appendix 6.1 for Dissemination Plan

² See Appendix 6.2 for Author Guidelines

Abstract

The experience of hearing voices has been theoretically construed in a number of ways. The current dominant approach is psychiatric in nature; often criticised for pathologising the experience and neglecting to explore the subjective meaning the experience holds for people who hear voices. The limited literature, which has explored voice-hearers' experiences, predominately reflects the experiences of adults, largely neglecting to represent younger peoples' experiences (i.e. 16 to 25 year olds), when psychosis is most likely to occur and when identity formation and self-development are fundamental. This study aims to explore the impact of hearing voices within first-episode psychosis on young peoples' sense of self and how they make sense of this experience. This study utilises interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to reflect on experiences of eight young people who hear voices. Three themes were identified: 1). "I'm losing my mind": The shattered self; 2). "I can't say it in words": More than words; 3). "It just makes a lot of sense like, that I was a bit crazy": Trying to make sense of voices. The transitional process the experience appeared to embody for these young people is outlined in a model. Key components of the model attend to the importance of others and how crucial their response is in helping the young people make sense, but also in their perceptions of themselves and their identity.

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