

Do Spirits Account for the Voices that Schizophrenic Patients Hear?

A consideration of the psychiatric research findings.

by Robert Hartley

Abstract

This paper discusses the spirits model, concerning the nature of auditory hallucination (AH) in schizophrenia. The model incorporates the views, methods and findings of practitioners using Spirit Release Therapy (SRT). The author also describes his own experience of mediumistic training undertaken to gain insight into the experience of individuals who hallucinate. This experience is incorporated when interpreting research findings. Theories, research findings and treatments related to auditory hallucinations, including models referring to socio-psychological factors, the misattribution of self-generated items and inner speech are interpreted applying the spirits model, along with internal and external voices and hallucinations in other modalities. Suggestions are made with regard to improved ways to judge and identify voices and consideration is given to the omnipotence function of the voices. Identical verbal and nonverbal characteristics to AH in schizophrenics are found in Instrumental Transcommunication (ITC) research, suggesting the voices may have an external reality, come from same source and a technology may be available to objectively explore voice phenomena with voice hearers. The spirits model accounted for both the major and anomalous AH research findings and suggests several new lines of research, with particular regard to prelingual deaf patients, the role of the nerve plexi associated with purported chakra points, the use of mediumship control methods, ear plugs, neuro-imaging research, ITC, the role of background noise and electrical appliances, SRT and the use of religious and spiritual items and practices including spiritual healing. Approaches consistent with the spirits model in treating AH are compared with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT) mindfulness methods, and Voice Dialogue procedures adopting the dissociative model. Strengths and shortcoming of these methods are discussed in the light of research findings and the spirits model; and suggestions are made for improved clinical practice and research. Triggers, various coping strategies, and experiences labelled delusional are also interpreted in the light of the spirits model. The implications of refusing to allow scientific investigation of the voices patients hear using the voice dialogue techniques developed by SRT practitioners are discussed. A call is made to apply tests consistent with validating patients experience, the implementation of research into the efficacy of Spirit Release Therapy (and compared with other voice dialogue techniques), and for the testing of hypotheses arising from the spirits model that considers that some voices may represent a separate intruding consciousness that influences the mind of the voice hearer in distinctive ways, and which can be countered using appropriate measures.

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Robert Hartley worked as a research child psychologist in London's East End and was awarded a doctorate in psychology at the Institute of Education, London University. He then trained as a documentary film director and made films for television. He trained at the National Film & Television School and he won the British Film Institute Award as Outstanding Newcomer to British Film & Television and other international film awards. He has combined these disciplines in making films about children, psychiatry and psychology. He has published research as a child psychologist and he has also taught documentary film production at London Metropolitan University. In the course of researching a documentary film about mediums in the 1990s, he became interested in spirit phenomena (writing 'Helen Duncan The Mystery Show Trial'), and whether some practises in this field could help people suffering from psychiatric and psychological problems. He has spent many years exploring this area and related treatments, and is interested in carrying out research to learn more about the source of the distressing voices heard by people and develop effective treatments.