



**Thank you for taking the time to complete the feature questions below.**

**1. Have you always been with Macquarie University in Sydney? If not, from which University did you graduate? What led to your ending up in Macquarie?**

I spent most of my time as a student studying at Durham University in the UK. Durham is a small, beautiful University town with a stunning cathedral dating back to 1093. I'd highly recommend a visit. In addition to psychology, I also studied maths and physics there. I can still remember seeing Saturn's rings through a telescope on the roof of the physics building. But I digress. I'd already been to Macquarie University during my PhD for a month's visit to work on a study looking at inner speech in people who hear voices. The Department of Cognitive Science is an excellent research centre, and in 2011 they awarded me a research fellowship, so I headed 'down under'.



**He has successfully been publishing various journal papers on psychosis with research collaborations from the likes of Yale University in New York since 2007.**

**2. Are there any 'coping strategies' that you engage in as a writer, e.g. when you wrote the book or the papers?**

Just as peer-support is important in voice-hearing, it is the same when writing or researching. In relation to writing, you might think something is finished, but talking to someone else will inevitably show you problems with what you thought and suggest ways to make it better.

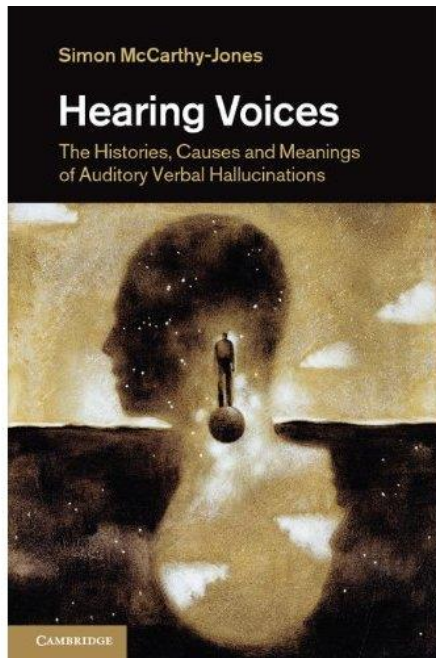
**3. Do you have any 'coping strategies' that you engage in in daily life? Despite not being a voice hearer?**

I sometimes find that what I think are coping strategies turning out to be forms of avoidance. They may be a short-term help but, in the end, one has to get to the root of the problem, acknowledge it and address it if possible - often easier said than done, of course. As an aside, I don't know if you would call Test Match Special's cricket coverage and Bob Dylan's music 'coping strategies', but they certainly help things along.

**2012 sees the publication of his first book, 'The Histories, Causes and Meanings of Auditory Hallucinations' available in hardback cover – [click this link](#).**



**4. Interesting book, please, could you say a bit more about it? When was it published, the journey it took you to write it? What got you interested in 'hearing voices'/auditory hallucinations specifically?**



I was originally interested in the topic of free will. Do 'I' choose to do things, or has my brain already made its mind up what to do before 'I' find out? Dan Wegner and Benjamin Libet have done some very interesting work in this area. Anyway, I then became interested in voice-hearing as the brain is producing the voice, but the person does not experience the voice as being produced by themselves. This started me down the route of trying to understand the brain-basis of voice-hearing. However, I then met Peter Bullimore, who really opened up my eyes to the role of life-events in helping us to understand the cause and meaning of many instances of voice-hearing. I then became involved in volunteering with the English Hearing Voices Network, and people like Jacqui Dillon continued to inspire me to work in this area.

My book was the result of me trying to combine a range of perspectives on voice-hearing. I've always been intrigued by history so it was fascinating doing the research for the first part of the book which is on the history of voice-hearing. This involved looking at what factors have shaped our understanding of voices, and looking at examples of voice-hearing throughout history. The second part of the book is on the Phenomenology of voice-hearing and I hope it gives a good account of what voices and voice-hearing is like and how it is understood by a range of cultures. Having only heard voices myself just before falling asleep (so-called hypnagogic hallucinations), I only have limited personal experience of what it is like to hear a voice, and no lived experience of the very hostile and critical voices which many people are tormented by. I then went on to look at what we know about the brain-basis of hearing-voices, what psychological theories can tell us, and what we know about the relation between voices and life events. The final part of the book then looks at the meanings we give to voices, and the intense debate in this area.

**5. On this journey, was any part harder than another part? Was there an easy part?**

Research is generally a pleasure for me, and I think myself very lucky to have this job. However, yes, some parts are harder than others. Emotionally, it's hard listening to people's stories of trauma preceding their voices, but obviously no comparison to what people have experienced themselves and it's important that these stories are heard, no matter how hard it may be to hear them. It's also hard trying to find a balance between biological approaches to voice-hearing, and the meaning-based approach, but in my opinion they can be combined.



## **6. What has been the highlight of your career to date?**

I was very honoured that my book received special recognition from the INTERVOICE board at this year's annual conference. That meant a lot to me.

I was also really pleased with the hearing voices conference I organised at Macquarie University in July of this year. It was free of charge for people to attend, and we had nearly 400 people come to it. There was wonderful range of speakers including experts by experience, carers, researchers and mental health professionals. I'd like to thank them all again for coming to speak at the conference. It was great to see everyone come together, recognising that each of us had expertise in a certain aspect of the experience of hearing voices, and to see that it was only by working together could we best help people who are distressed by their voices.

It is also a privilege every time someone lets you into their life and shares their life-story and the origin of their voices.

Durham University: Hearing the Voice – Congratulations on the funding award and being able to go ahead and conduct more research, launching this October 2012. Exciting times...

## **7. What can we anticipate to come from 'Hearing the Voice'? (link to website)**

The Hearing the Voice project is really exciting. The project has a number of clear goals, but what will be most exciting is what it produces that we can't predict. Scholars from philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, theology, English studies (old and new), and the medical humanities will be working together with experts by experience and clinicians, and this should help improve our understanding of voice-hearing (its causes and meanings) and develop ways to better support people who are distressed by voices.

With a comprehensive list of 'further suggested reading', the man is well informed and certainly, indeed, has done his research! The website creates an informative easily accessible approach to knowledge, alluring with the curious call to dig in deeper to the intelligent mind of Dr McCarthy-Jones and read the pages of his book.

## **8. Upcoming events or what does the future entail for you? Where people can see you next?**

Marius Romme and Sandra Escher are coming out to Sydney at the start of December, and it will be great to see them again. We will be hosting them at Macquarie University for an event on Children Hearing Voices (organised in conjunction with Hearing Voices Network New South Wales and Insideout Associates) which should be really helpful to young people, families, and mental health professionals. I've been doing a lot of travelling and talks this year, so am having a break from talks until 2013, to focus on writing, research and other things. I am constantly awed by the energy and commitment of people like Ron Coleman, Eleanor Longden and Jacqui Dillon who are so often travelling around the world offering training on voice-hearing. Every month I do a blog on the voice-hearing research that has been published, and I will keep



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Dr. Simon McCarthy-Jones

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that going (<http://thismonthinvoices.wordpress.com>). I am also seeking funding from research bodies for trials of new ways to help people who are distressed by their voices.

**Favourite Quote:**

I like what St Paul wrote in 1Corinthians 14:11, which seems somewhat apt.

*“...if I know not the meaning of the voice,  
I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian,  
and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me...”*

You can catch all this and more of Dr Simon McCarthy-Jones at: <http://www.simonmccarthyjones.com/>