

Auditory Hallucinations vs. Negative Thinking

For Staff

Auditory hallucinations can be differentiated from negative thoughts by considering several factors. Negative thinking is a thought process in which people tend to be self-critical or outwardly critical, find the worst in everything, or generate the worst possible scenarios. Negative thoughts can be associated with depression, irritability, anxiety, or fear. However, the thoughts are silent. Negative thinking is recognized as one's own thoughts often generated by personal experiences. Someone might think "I am not a good dancer so I am not even going to try" or "Whenever I tell a joke no one laughs so why should I bother."

In contrast, auditory hallucinations involve a sensory experience in which a person can hear sounds or a person talking without external auditory stimulation, e.g., hear a person's voice when there is no one present. Auditory hallucinations can also be experienced as coming from non-human entities such as ghosts, demons, or even inanimate objects, and yet be accompanied by a powerful sense that the false perception is real. These voices can be upsetting and disruptive. The individual may respond to the voice or have a hard time concentrating on anything other than the voice. They may look around for where the voice is coming from.

One way to differentiate auditory hallucinations from one's own thoughts is that the hallucination has a voice quality and sounds like a person is talking. A common type of auditory hallucination involves hearing one or more voices talking directly to the person and making comments which can be critical such as "You are stupid" or "Why are you here, you are just a drain on society" or giving commands such as "Go ahead, eat that rotten food." A rarer experience involves hearing two or more voices commenting on one's behavior, talking about someone in the third person, or conversing with one another. Examples might be "Look at that, now he is eating a sandwich" or "He is driving around in a car, but he's a bad driver" or "Did you see that dumb thing he just did?" "Yes, I did, what an idiot." Although auditory hallucinations are false perceptions that do not involve a real sound originating in the outside world, the experience is often described as real, intense, and frightening and perceived to be separate from the person's own mental processes.