

Inner speech

The subjective experience of internal dialogue

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Abstract

This research project aims to investigate the voice inside our heads. Centrally concerned with how the individual experiences their inner speech and uncovering the ways in which one might be able to guide it to become a compassionate voice. We consider this relevant, as having a compassionate internal dialogue has a pivotal role in the mental wellbeing of the individual. Further research interests include investigating the affect of the environment, as well as questioning the extent of individual agency in one's internal dialogue. The research is conducted through a phenomenological approach. As per our theoretical understanding of inner speech, we draw primarily on the work of Lev Vygotsky. With the help of an overview of the theoretical background of inner speech, we analyse the findings of our empirical observations collected through qualitative semi structured interviews.

Key words: inner speech, internal dialogue, self-compassion, language, constructive, agency.

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Introduction

In this research project, we want to make sense of how an individual's inner dialogue shapes their everyday life experience, and to understand how it shapes their subjective view of themselves and their place in the world. We think the topic of inner speech is important and interesting to research because the person's inner voice is constantly participating in one's everyday life experiences, it has an influential part in decision-making processes, has a significant role in regulating the individual's mood, and self-perception and their overall attitude towards events in the outside world. However, there is relatively little knowledge about the overall concept, development, and role of inner speech and the importance of self-talk in a person's life. In this research project, we want to explore what is inner dialogue, how psychologists in the past have thought about it, how the unique and subjective inner voice forms in the individual, how its nature influences people's everyday lives, and how one might be able to take ownership of our inner voice to practise self-compassion.

Problem formulation

Research questions

In this research project, we were primarily interested in finding out how one can deliberately choose an inner speech that is using a more supportive and constructive voice, instead of having a destructive inner critic in our internal dialogues. As we see, having a friendly inner speech is extremely important in a healthy and balanced inner mental life. Through studying and making sense of different psychological theories and conducting interviews for empirical data about people's inner speech we aim to find some ideas that can help us form an understanding of the ways in which the inner dialogue works and how others deal with these issues. Therefore, we formulated a research question focusing exactly on that problem.

How is internal dialogue experienced, and in what ways can people guide it toward a more supportive and compassionate voice?

Further research questions

Having a primary research question helps us to focus on the overall topic of inner speech, however, we as researchers found it important to have some more specific questions as well. This helped us to gain a more nuanced understanding of the topic, while at the same time

giving us structure and direction while conducting our research. In order to wrap our heads around the complex workings of inner speech, we must first gain an understanding of how it comes to being in the first place. We will seek help to be able to do this by building on the works of psychologists that have taken interest in the topic of inner speech before us.

What is inner speech, how does it develop and how is it understood in psychology?

We are also interested in finding out how and in what ways our inner voices connect us to the world around us, and how others' voices might shape the way we talk to ourselves. To gain a better understanding of these issues we will investigate multiple theoretical perspectives as well as ask people about how they experience this connection in their inner speech.

What is the relation between internal speech and external/discursive speech?

Additionally, we want to further go into the question of agency over the way one speaks to themselves in their head. We want to investigate the possibility of consciously guiding the internal dialogue to become a supportive voice when it seems to go against our best interest. To find out more about using deliberate self-compassion in our inner speech we will be talking to people about their experience of taking ownership of their inner voice.

How much agency does one have over their inner speech? Is it an autonomous process or are people able to actively guide their inner speech?

Finally, as we all are international students, we were interested in how multilingualism plays a part in one's inner speech. We noticed that after a few weeks of living everyday life in a foreign country, within a new culture, using English to manage our jobs and studies makes our inner dialogue adapt and switch to English as well. We wanted to see how others experience it as well, so we asked our interviewees about it. However, this is not a central concern of the research paper, more like a curious lookout.

What is the relationship between multilingualism and the nature of one's inner speech?

As we have mentioned above, we think that understanding one's inner speech is an important research area in the psychology of everyday life. Every person has their inner narrative of their lives, a sort of an ongoing dialogue with themselves. It is part of the human condition (Kross, 2021). We want to explore the phenomenon of inner speech because we think that it is

a crucial aspect of understanding the ways in which humans conduct their everyday life, and think about themselves and others. A person's internal dialogue has an important role in metacognition, self-awareness, and self-understanding (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015).

What raised our interest in conducting a research project about this topic initially is that it seems that some people tend to experience their inner voice as a more negative and destructive inner critic, while others are able to rely on their internal dialogue for support and self-compassion. We are interested in finding out why someone might develop a more destructive inner voice, and what one can do to change it and consciously move towards using a more supportive and compassionate inner voice to talk to themselves. Based on diverse theoretical research (Moreira & Cristina Canavarro, 2019; Burnett, 1996; Geva & Fernyhough, 2019) we understand that self-talk starts early in the development of children. Given the importance that it has on our future self, we think it's essential to also focus on how inner speech develops. As the basis of our later inner speech is established when we are young we want to understand how, perhaps, it could possibly be modified or influenced by our surroundings and the people around us. Through exploring different methods and research, we want to analyse how our use of internal dialogue (if we use it more compassionately or more destructively) can affect how we act. Several studies have examined how and why people have an internal dialogue, it is proposed that it has a self-regulatory role and that the cognitive processes that play a part in this, have a variety of functions to facilitate this. Our inner speech also has an important part in supporting our working memory functions, our decision-making processes, and our social skills (Baumeister & Masicampo, 2010).

Here, we will provide some additional reasons why we consider negative inner speech to be a problem worth studying. Studies suggest that destructive self-talk may hinder athlete performance and even lead to psychological conditions such as anxiety, anorexia, compulsive gambling, low self-esteem, or depression (Morin, 2009). It is also thought that inner speech plays an important role in self-regulation and there are implications for inner speech dysfunctions leading to developmental disorders (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015). Vygotsky (2012) also considered inner speech to be a significant aspect of task performance. Thus, we consider it relevant to study whether it is possible to positively affect one's inner speech and whether employing certain psychological methods and interventions can lead to more positive and compassionate self-talk, as it has an enormous part in people's mental well-being and the ability to cope with life's challenges.

As mentioned before, one of the primary matters of inquiry in this paper is the concept of agency and the possibility to take control over one's inner speech. We seek to explore and discuss whether people have the ability to influence the nature of their internal dialogue. Are we the drivers, or are we merely passengers of our self's verbal thoughts? Is it possible to actively shape the nature in which we view ourselves? How do the external environment and verbal speech affect one's internal voice? In a broader sense, the concept of free will has lingered in the minds of numerous thinkers for centuries. The aim of this project is to theoretically analyse existing literature and theories related to the understanding of inner speech, the interrelations between thought and language, as well as the notion of agency and ownership over one's internal dialogue in (primarily) the field of social psychology and later use these theoretical perspectives to make sense of and discuss the findings of our empirical observation.

In order to find out more about these issues, we want to understand the process of the development of one's inner speech, the dialogical process of interiorization, and see what role one's environment has in the formation of one's unique and subjective inner speech. In connection to that we will include developmental psychologist approaches that help us see how the inner voice appears in childhood, as well as theories about the functions of the internal dialogue in humans. We also think that in order to better grasp how the internal dialogue works we must talk to people about their personal experiences of their inner speech. The way how they describe their inner voice and explain how they deal with negative episodes can provide us a valuable insight into the nature of inner speech.

As we have formerly mentioned we have found the topic of inner speech to be somewhat theoretically understudied. Larrain & Have (2012) consider that despite the importance of inner speech being recognized within the field of psychology, it remains theoretically underdeveloped. They claim that the phenomenon of inner speech is something that we are all familiar with. When we are reading a piece of text, we not only "listen" to the meaning in the words, but also to our own thoughts as we interpret the text. This intermingling of two separate sources of meaning is characteristic of our experience of consciousness - both in terms of our relationships with others, and our own personal responses. Although the concept of inner speech is widely acknowledged for its psychological importance, it is still relatively underdeveloped when it comes to the theoretical aspects. The inner workings and connection with language are still being debated, and further research is needed in order to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon. As they argue, "*in spite of this, the concept of inner*

speech remains theoretically underdeveloped. The explanation of its inner nature and its relation to language are still a matter of debate” (Larrain & Have, 2012, p. 3-4).

Now, a theoretical clarification of the terms that will be used in this research project is in order. As there is no unified consensus regarding the notions of inner speech, internal dialogue, or self-talk within the field of psychology. Many scholars have had differing definitions of these terms, as well as descriptions of the distinctions between them. Fundamental definitions of the nature of inner speech and its relations to language are still a matter of debate (Larrain & Have, 2012). As Alderson-Day and Fernyhough (2015) write: *“much of what we know of inner speech could illustrate its significance as an exaptation: as a motor-based linguistic tool that has by chance created an inner life”* (p. 957). Therefore, in order to avoid academic confusion, it appears that it is crucial for us to provide an explanation of the theoretical background upon which such terms shall be understood all through the paper. The terms “inner speech”, “internal dialogue” “self-talk” and “verbal thought” will all be used interchangeably. We do not recognize a distinction between them.

Our understanding of inner speech stems primarily from that of Lev Vygotsky (2012), who distinguished two types of social speech among individuals in the early stages of development – egocentric (speech-for-oneself) and communicative (speech-for-others). Here, egocentric speech is seen as the dawn of the child’s transfer of social and collaborative forms of behaviour to the sphere of intrapersonal psychic functions. The activity patterns which have formerly been social are now being embedded into the child's inner processes. Vygotsky (2012) sees egocentric speech as a link in the transition from vocal to inner speech. It is a stage of development that eventually fully evolves into what we deem as inner speech. He further claims there is an interplay between two pivotal processes - the transition from external communication to inner dialogue and the expression of intimate thoughts in linguistic form.

Inner speech is then viewed as the psychological interface between culturally affected symbolic systems and individual language and imagery (Vygotsky, 2012). In other words, the primary conclusions Vygotsky offers on the notion of inner speech is that firstly it develops through a steady accumulation of functional and structural changes, secondly, it branches from the child's external speech along with the differentiation of social and egocentric speech functions, and finally that the speech structures mastered by the child become the basic structures of their thinking (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 100). It is important to note that Vygotsky

often uses the term “verbal thought” when referring to inner speech, but uses both interchangeably.

We will also be centrally drawing upon Vygotsky's theories of inner speech and its formation in childhood in order to understand how this personal internal voice comes to being (Vygotsky, 2012). As well as grasping how the outside world and its events interact with our inner voices later in life, and figuring out if there is a way of taking ownership of our personal narrative and directing it to support our view on ourselves and navigating our everyday life events. In his words *“No matter how we approach the controversial problem of the relation between thought and speech, we shall have to deal extensively with inner speech. Its importance in all our thinking is so great that many psychologists, Watson among others, even identify it with thought”* (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 89). One of the reasons for choosing Vygotsky’s theoretical work as a base for our understanding is that he was among the first psychologists who worked with the concept of inner speech. His theories remain influential today, Vygotsky's understanding of the development of inner speech in the individual is still used as a point of departure for theorists today, people who write about inner speech after him all refer back to his works. As we have mentioned above, the topic of one's internal dialogue is quite understudied in the research field, so we thought it is best if we go back to the roots and make sense of the development of inner speech from the works of Vygotsky.

However, we do not wish to stop at understanding the development of inner speech. We as researchers want to investigate how one might be able to take ownership over their destructive inner voice and guide it toward a more compassionate voice. According to Viou & Georgaca (2021), research over the past few years demonstrates the importance of self-compassion for mental health. In their understanding, self-compassion involves kindness, acceptance, empathy, and motivation to act in a compassionate way towards the self. Researchers argue that it can be viewed as an emotional regulation strategy (Viou & Georgaca, 2021). Gilbert (2010) also proposed a model called “Compassion Focused Therapy” building upon the hypothesis that compassion could be principal in relieving feelings of self-criticism. Within this model, specific techniques to foster self-compassion are proposed, such as the practice of mindfulness, mental imagery, and breathing exercises. Here, self-compassion is seen as a skill obtainable through practice, which can lead to a more accepting view of the self.

We want to study whether it is possible for people to change their inner speech and guide it to be more compassionate towards themselves. Here, we are exploring the hypothesis that

people have agency over the nature of their own inner speech and that change is achievable through practice. Perhaps not all psychological researchers would agree with such a claim. However, in social psychological research, it has been increasingly demonstrated that positive psychological interventions can have lasting benefits on the self (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). It is suggested that a relevant intervention is capable of setting in motion accumulating consequences and channelling people into a “cycle of adaptive potential”, which is a feedback loop between the self and the social system (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). The authors also suggest that this loop results in adaptive outcomes, even long after the intervention occurred. An example of such is a series of 10-minute self-affirming exercises where students wrote about core personal values which raised minority student achievements in public schools, as it affirmed their identity as people who belong in schools (Cohen & Sherman, 2014).

Additionally, Viou & Georgaca (2021) built upon Dialogical Self Theory (DST), which views the self to be consisting of different I-positions (different parts of the self). These different I-positions are in a dialogical conversation with each other using different voices, some of which are more dominant than others. The self then consists of the constellations of I-positions. On top of that, there are also meta-positions, which are capable of “creating distance” from I-positions, allowing them to be observed (Viou & Georgaca, 2021). Such meta-positions can be both compassionate and critical towards other I-positions. Thus, the aim of therapy should be to encourage the emergence and development of compassionate meta-positions (Viou & Georgaca, 2021). The Dialogical Self Theory and its relevance for this project will be further explained in the theoretical section.

We also thought it would be interesting to see how using multiple languages in one's everyday life affects their internal dialogue. We as the researchers are all international students in Denmark, and as we were discussing our personal experiences of inner speech, we talked about the way some of us notice that after a few weeks the internal dialogue changes to English automatically, while also sometimes using our mother tongue. So, we decided we are also going to ask our interviewees whether they are using multiple languages in their inner speech, and if they do, does it make any difference to the nature of their internal dialogue. There has not been extensive research on the consequences of a second language on one's internal dialogue.

However, Jean-Marc Dewaele (2015) agrees that *"systematic research on language choice for inner speech is warranted because it allows researchers to tackle questions of multilingual*

identities, as it seems that the language of a person's inner dialogues has a special status". In his research paper, he discusses that it is not entirely clear to what extent one is able to deliberately choose the language of their inner speech (Dewaele, 2015). He establishes that the age and the context of how one learns an additional language have an important role in later inner language use (Dewaele, 2015). People who learn a language early in their life are more likely to use that language in their internal dialogue, additionally, it seems clear that people who learn the new language in a strictly institutional educational way without informal personal learning activities are less likely to use that language in their inner speech later in life. He also found that even when a person predominantly uses an additional language in their inner speech some domains remain to be dominated by one's first language such as swearing, expression of anger, and mental calculations (Dewaele, 2015).

As this research project is based on a social psychological tradition, we view people as active agents with intentions, who construct their own views and experiences in their everyday life. We recognize our interviewees as active subjects with personal agency, who are willing to share their situated knowledge about their internal dialogue with us. We want to understand how inner speech assists people with their everyday meaning-making processes, both in connection to their external surroundings, as well as themselves and their self-reflection and process of identity formation. We will conduct our research with a qualitative and phenomenological approach, looking to understand the internal dialogue with on the one hand the help of different theoretical perspectives, and on the other hand also through personal accounts of first-hand experience, building on how our interviewees describe the way they live with and use their inner speech.

As for the methodological approach of collecting the empirical data for our research, we have elected to conduct individual qualitative semi-structured interviews with international students. In short, we plan to use these interviews to discuss the students' views of their own internal dialogue. Here, we wish to explore whether they feel they are critical towards themselves in their inner speech, if they are actively trying to change the way they view themselves in their internal dialogue, if they feel that the nature of their internal dialogue somehow affects their everyday experience, or if they generally consider themselves to be in the driving seats over their thoughts. Additionally, we plan to explore the relationship between bilingualism and inner speech by choosing people who speak at least two languages. We consider that bilingualism to be an important aspect because there is a strong connection between language and thought formation. Using another language than one's native tongue

requires adaptation which is relevant for this project as we want to understand how one can consciously take a compassionate voice towards themselves. Also, we will explore whether they speak to themselves in different languages and whether the nature of their internal dialogue changes as they interchange between them.

Finally, for our method of analysis of our empirical data, we will be drawing on a situated generalisation approach proposed by Busch-Jensen & Schraube (2019) applying a zooming in/zooming out approach. We will zoom in from zooming out, going from the overarching question of the agency and control over one's inner speech to the findings of the interviews conducted with our participants about their subjective experience of their internal dialogue. This will grant us a detailed description of the first-person experience of one's inner speech. Then we will zoom out from zooming in, by analysing the interviews to look for connections and contradictions between the different interviews and draw conclusions from our findings that will help us answer our research questions.

Theoretical Perspectives

The chapter consists of four distinct sections. Firstly, we delineate theoretical perspectives about the development of inner speech within an individual. The focal points relate to the progressions in which internal dialogue comes to be, the age at which it develops, and the functions it serves for the development of the self. Here, we primarily draw on Lev Vygotsky and his activity theory, as Vygotsky is widely considered to be one of the most influential figures in studying inner speech. Following that, the second part relates to the work of Klaus Holzkamp. The rationale for including his work is that we think it helps us create a more diversified resume of understanding inner speech theoretically. The third section is closely tied to the previous two but offers further perspective on the functions of inner speech. Why do we need it? What role does it fulfil in everyday life? These three sections primarily serve to give us a theoretical understanding of inner speech, thus providing background to our first research question - "*What is inner speech, how does it develop and how is it understood in psychology?*" The last part of the chapter relates to the notion of change and agency. It describes specific methods which are proposed to alter the nature of one's inner speech. The purpose of this section is to add some theoretical background for further discussions related to our problem formulation, which aims to investigate the possibility of guiding one's inner speech to be more positive towards the self. On top of that, it is also useful for the sake of investigating people's individual agency over their internal dialogue, which is one of our research questions. The plan is to be able to discuss these theoretical ideas in connection to the outcomes of our empirical investigation further in the project.

Understanding inner speech and its development - Vygotsky

Opposing the ideas of Piaget, who saw inherent autism as the original form of thought and claimed that socialised speech appears later in the development, Vygotsky (2012) insisted that the earliest form of speech in a child is already social in its essence. He claimed that in the early stages of development, this social speech is divided into two types – egocentric (speech-for-oneself) and communicative (speech-for-others). Here, egocentric speech is seen as the dawn of the child's transfer of social and collaborative forms of behaviour to the sphere of intrapersonal psychic functions. The behaviour patterns which have formerly been social are now being embedded into the child's inner processes. It is viewed as an integral component of child's activity, which according to Vygotsky (2012) "*becomes gradually*

intellectualised and starts serving as a mediator in purposive activity and in planning complex actions” (p. 41).

In its function, egocentric speech acts similarly to inner speech – serving mental orientation, conscious understanding, and helps the child to overcome the difficulties of everyday life. Vygotsky sees egocentric speech as a link in the transition from vocal to inner speech. In simple terms, the schema of development goes as follows - 1. social speech → 2. egocentric speech → 3. inner speech (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 37). Thus, egocentric speech is a stage of development that eventually fully evolves into what we deem as inner speech. Vygotsky saw great importance in the concept of egocentric speech as a developmental step leading to inner speech, as he claimed that understanding egocentric speech becomes the key to studying inner speech (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 240). One methodological advantage of this notion is that egocentric speech is still vocal - thus observable - but fulfils the same function as inner speech. One could view it as an empirically observable form of inner speech in its early development.

In inner speech, Vygotsky claims, there is an interplay between two pivotal processes – the transition from external communication to internal dialogue and the expression of intimate thoughts in linguistic form. It is viewed as the psychological interface between cultural systems and individual language and imagery (Vygotsky, 2012). Vygotsky offered a hypothesis that the processes related to inner speech develop and start to get stabilised at the early school age, which would explain the observed decrease of egocentric speech around that age. It is exactly this decrease that is central to Piaget's thesis. According to Piaget, the quantitative drop of a child's egocentric speech means an overall decrease in that form of speech. Vygotsky, however, claims that such decrease simply proves that the vocalisation of a child's egocentric speech diminishes (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 243). This relates to what Vygotsky calls an “undeniable, experimentally established fact” – that the structural and functional qualities of egocentric speech become progressively clearer throughout the process of development. As he puts it:

“At three, the difference between egocentric speech and social speech equals zero; at seven, we have speech that in structure and function is totally unlike social speech. A differentiation of the two speech functions has taken place. This is a fact — and facts are notoriously hard to refute” (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 243).

In other words, Vygotsky sees the idea that egocentric speech completely dies out during the process of development to be an illusion. Yes, there is an observable decrease in a child's quantity of vocal egocentric speech. This decrease, however, is due to the egocentric speech taking a non-vocal form – a form which we refer to as inner speech. To say egocentric speech dies out is akin to saying that children stop performing mental calculations as soon as they stop visibly using their fingers to perform them (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 244).

In terms of referring to other literature and theories related to inner speech – Vygotsky mentions that it has firstly been understood by some authors as merely verbal memory, and secondly as speech-minus-sound, or subvocal speech. He considers both of these interpretations to be vastly inadequate. According to him, to understand inner speech, a researcher must work from the hypothesis of it having complex relations and clear distinctions from other forms of speech. Put simply, since inner speech is speech-for-oneself and external speech refers to speech-for-others, they differ in both their function and structure. An inherent disparity that is overlooked by both of the afore-mentioned understandings (Vygotsky, 2012, p.).

The primary conclusions Vygotsky offers on the notion of inner speech is that it 1. “*develops through a steady accumulation of functional and structural changes*”, 2. “*branches from the child's external speech along with the differentiation of social and egocentric speech functions*”, and 3. “*the speech structures mastered by the child become the basic structures of their thinking*” (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 100). Here, Vygotsky arrives at what he considers to be an indisputable fact – language determines thought development. In other words, a child's intellectual development relies on them “*mastering the social means of thought, that is, language*” (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 100). He further concludes that the relation between thought and language “*extends beyond the limits of natural science and becomes the focal problem of historical human psychology, i.e. of social psychology*” (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 101). The reason he concludes that is due to his view of inner speech being determined by a historical-cultural process. This process, according to Vygotsky, has properties which can not be found in the natural form of thought, or speech. Thus, inner speech is essentially governed “*by the general laws of the historical development of human society*” (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 101).

In this section, we have established our theoretical understanding of inner speech and its development by drawing on Vygotsky and his activity theory. This is directly related to our research question - *What is inner speech, how does it develop and how is it understood in*

psychology? The hope is that we will further use these theoretical ideas in discussing the findings of our empirical observations.

Understanding inner speech - Holzkamp

We are including Holzkamp's ideas, hoping that they will expand our overall understanding of inner speech and its functions, giving us further perspective by a scholar who partly draws on Vygotsky, but does not fully agree with him in every aspect of understanding inner speech. Unlike Vygotsky, Holzkamp does not weigh much importance upon the development of inner speech. He considers the question of whether external speech precedes inner speech to be rather pointless and misleading. According to him, inner and outer speaking are forming a "polar unity" of a sort. When separated, one is not feasible or conceivable without the other (Holzkamp, 2013).

He is much more intrigued by its function, considering internal dialogue to be closely tied to the *"intersubjectivity of deliberating, planning and negotiation that, in the absence of others, the individual virtually enters into a "dialogue" with her/himself"* (Holzkamp, 2013, p. 291). Holzkamp also uses the word "doubling" when relating to the processes of inner dialogue. Here, doubling can simply be understood as a term relating to the form of the aforementioned "dialogue with her/himself". The functions of such doubling find their expression in demands, instructions, comments, and questions for the self. On top of that, it may also be used for mere listening to oneself and dwelling on one's thoughts (Holzkamp, 2013, p.291). Holzkamp also sees a possible misconception regarding his notion of doubling – it does not merely refer to multiple "inner persons" interacting with each other. Instead, he claims that:

"I would rather tend to view this "doubling" as a genuine characteristic of the existential form of human subjectivity, as it were, its "implicit intersubjectivity" which, in its expansion, constitutes the manifold social-factual world relations in which the various forms of human agency can develop" (Holzkamp, 2013, p. 291).

For the problem area of this project specifically, it is important to note that Holzkamp uses the word "agency" when referring to the function of internal dialogue. He claims that inner speaking is an omnipresent medium forming the background and the context for all activities of the self (Holzkamp, 2013).

We consider Holzkamp's theoretical standpoint on inner speech, its function and importance, to reinforce the overarching concern and motivation of this project. If he is correct in viewing internal dialogue as "an omnipresent medium forming the background and the context for all activities of the self" then it appears critical to study it extensively. If there are ways that can make the omnipresent voice in one's mind to be more compassionate and supportive, we feel such ways ought to be subject to intensive academic exploration.

Why do we need our inner speech?

In this section, we will explain the importance of inner speech to provide an understanding of how it developed to be part of the human condition, how our inner dialogue functions, and how we use it in our everyday life. Inner speech is also understood as verbal thinking, the way one arranges and understands the subjective experience of existence and creates a coherent narrative of their life events.

As mentioned in the introduction, in this research project we will be primarily using the term inner speech, even though it is also often referred to as inner speaking, internal -dialogue, or -monologue. There is a shared belief among scholars and thinkers of psychology that there is a strong connection between language and thinking, and it has a significant role in assisting social and cultural coordination by communication, as well as identity formation (Baumeister & Masicampo, 2010; Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015; Vygotsky, 2012; Werani, 2014). Inner speech allows people to translate their inner processes for others that coexist with them in the world outside so that there can be a degree of mutual understanding. It has a significant role in self-regulation, working memory functions, learning processes, and social coordination. Inner speech assists people in planning by envisioning future events and predicting different outcomes of actions, as well as reflecting on past experiences in order to gain an understanding of possible mistakes and thus allowing personal improvement and making better decisions next time when a similar scenario might arise.

The formation of one's inner speech is shaped by events and interactions in the outside world. Vygotsky argued that speech cannot exist in isolation, therefore the study of inner speech cannot be studied separated from its social and cultural context (Vygotsky, 2012; Werani, 2014). From the very beginning, as the child learns to speak from their caregivers, the way they speak shapes their vocabulary and their way of thinking. This learning leads to a process of interiorization. Werani (2014) writes:

“It needs to be pointed out that interiorization is not to be regarded as an internal copy of the external world. Interiorization is a process which forms the inner level of consciousness. This process is a dynamic one and is subject to social and interactional influences” (p. 275).

The child incorporates the way people in their environment speak about things (Vygotsky, 2012). However, this remains true all through our lives, we adapt to our social and cultural environment and take up habits and expressions from the people who are around us. Kross (2021) writes:

“The voices of culture influence our parents’ inner voices, which in turn influence our own, and so on through the many cultures and generations that combine to tune our minds. We are like Russian nesting dolls of mental conversations” (p. 13).

Language is one of the most important and amazing skills that humans possess. The ability to construct sentences, with more complex meanings and more detailed explanations of their intentions with more information allows us to develop our understanding of the world and one another (Baumeister & Masicampo, 2010). These improvements in human communication resulted in improved understanding of each other's ideas, feelings, and inner states. Also being able to discuss plans together to find the best course of action was valuable for living together and improving the quality of life. However, it seemed to be important to rehearse what one had to say before sharing it with others aloud. In her research paper, Werani (2014) writes:

“In my view, an important aspect of interiorization is that not all thoughts which contribute to awareness need to be uttered, but can remain in the intimate, inner manifestation. Inner speech allows the reflection of thoughts before they are uttered. This is the function of judgement and, should the occasion arise, censoring ascribed to inner speech. That is, inner speech regulates the quantity and quality of the utterances” (p. 286).

Our inner speech has kind of developed to be a safety function, as social acceptance has become an increasingly important aspect in the chances for survival.

Inner speech has a significant role in managing working memory functions (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015). Working memory allows people to remember relevant information temporarily, for example, a phone number that one soon has to dial or being able to recall the directions to one's destination (Kross, 2021). This function allows individuals to solve complex problems and deal with the challenges of everyday life. Inner speech is connected to

this process so that it helps remember the information through verbal rehearsal and guides thought processes by which one chooses the appropriate course of action (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015). Vygotsky proposed that children instruct themselves through tasks by talking and that later this form of self-guidance becomes their inner speech (Vygotsky, 2012). Inner speech in adults is primarily used to assess emotional states, provide reminders, and plan future actions (Kross, 2021; Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015).

Another key feature of inner speech is speculating about events far from the present moment. It allows people to plan ahead by envisioning future events and reflecting on the past by recalling memories of events that have happened to them. Baumeister and Masicampo (2010) write:

“(...) remembering the past is not itself of any use, and its adaptive value can only be found in flexible application to present and future events. The fact that memories are constructed and changing, rather than exact replays of what originally happened, is thus converted from a weakness to a strength: The reconstruction of the past event can be altered to suit present and future concerns” (p. 95).

Being able to imagine a future scenario also allows people to hypothetically test different decisions without the consequences of choosing the wrong one, by simulating a possible outcome of each course of action. Reflecting on past events helps one to cope with situations with the help of memories of similar events that have already happened to them.

The ability to mentally travel in time is unique to humans, having the skill of detaching from the present moment has also allowed immense development for the species, and it is a vital function to be able to live in a society that is shaped by cultural practices (Kross, 2021; Baumeister & Masicampo, 2010). In order to navigate through the culturally prescribed norms, living in societies organised by rules that humans created for themselves, one must be able to transcend their egocentric interests and animalistic instincts to avoid exclusion (Baumeister & Masicampo, 2010). Our ability to understand others and feel empathy has helped us to live together, understanding others' feelings and motivations makes it easier to coexist peacefully, while language has helped to resolve arising interpersonal conflicts through discussion instead of solving them through violence. Our inner voice also helps us to be able to prioritise our long-term goals over short-term pleasures (Kross, 2021; Baumeister & Masicampo, 2010). Kross (2021) writes: *“the inner voice helps us control ourselves (...) by*

evaluating us as we strive toward goals” (p. 13). Having the skill of envisioning future success makes it possible to grin and bear through tough times for a brighter future.

Our inner speech also helps us to make sense of the things that have happened to us. It helps us to organise our experience into a coherent and meaningful story (Baumeister & Masicampo, 2010). Schiff (2017) writes “*Narrative stands in for the notion that human beings are meaning makers who configure their life experience using the forms that their social and cultural world have passed down in order to describe and show their lives*”. (p.75.) These narratives help individuals to construct their identities through meaningful storyline, and interpret their everyday life experiences (Schiff, 2017). Instead of having memories of events as scattered pieces of information people tend to organise their past experiences into stories about themselves that can be fitted into their narrative and to be able to make sense of what has happened to them (Schiff, 2017; Baumeister & Masicampo, 2010). Creating a narrative helps the one experiencing make sense of the events that happened to them, as well as the ones hearing about them to better understand the importance and relevance of the information, it assists the meaning-making process on both sides.

In conclusion, inner speech helps people navigate through their everyday life. Our inner speech develops as we learn to speak, language is the median through which we can experience our internal dialogue. Developing an inner speech is an inherently social and dialogical process, as we interiorize the way our caretaker is speaking to us we start constructing the voice that we will be using toward ourselves later in life. The inner dialogue also helps us envision possible scenarios, thereby allowing us to make plans for our future by predicting outcomes of different actions based on judging our past experiences. As our inner speech assists us in making sense of the things that happen to us, by constructing a coherent narrative from which we can draw conclusions and learn how to deal with a particular issue in the future. Having a narrative of our experiences is also useful when we need to socialise with other humans, by delivering a meaningful story about what has happened to us is easily comprehensible for others, as it saves time for them by making sense of the experience before sharing it with them.

Change & Agency

Our problem formulation aims to explore the ways in which one can adjust their internal dialogue to be more supportive towards the self. Here, we are working from a position of

belief in individual agency and the possibility of active interference with one's thought processes, self-perception, and internal dialogue. Hence, we want to provide some theoretical support for such a position in the following sections. Some of these studies and theories have already been touched upon in our introduction, but here they will be explained in much further detail along with their relevance to our subject matter.

Self-affirmation theory

Firstly, we will work with a study written by Cohen & Sherman (2014), which has a dual focus. It talks about self-affirmations as a legitimate self-improvement strategy that can yield long lasting results. Secondly, it discusses the overall narrative about the concept of change within the field of social psychology. We think both of these focal points are relevant to our project. More specifically, we believe they are relevant to our research question which deals with the agency of the individual. By showing examples of how self-affirmations can affect the self, it opens up space for discussion about how change can be achieved in everyday life. It further strengthens the point of viewing the self to be in position of agency over its internal processes, at least to an extent. Despite the study not being directly related to internal dialogue, for the reasons mentioned above, we thought it was relevant to include it in our theoretical section, giving us the possibility of returning to it in further chapters when relating to our “agency” research question.

Self-affirmation theory works from the central idea that the self has an overarching need to maintain self-integrity. Self-integrity is seen as the view of oneself being in control of moral and adaptive outcomes of one's life. Cohen & Sherman (2014) claim that there are three crucial points to keep in mind here.

1. The self is all about maintaining a narrative of oneself as a moral and adaptive actor. Put simply, people aim to maintain the idea of being “a good person”. Here, the self can draw on various roles to keep up with this image. Cohen and Sherman (2014) claim: “*Such flexibility can be adaptive. People can flexibly define success in a way that puts their idiosyncratic strengths in a positive light, establishing a reliable but realistic basis for self-integrity*” (p. 336).
2. The primary motive is not to be excellent, but to be “good enough”, or “adequate”.

3. The goal for self-integrity is not to simply praise oneself. Rather, it is to act in a way that is worthy of being praised. If one just proceeds to praise oneself (e.g. “I am lovable”) it often does not yield results among low self-esteem individuals, as such affirmations lack credibility.

The authors have theirs to say about the overall concept of change in psychology. They claim that social psychological research increasingly demonstrates small interventions to have long lasting benefits for the self, saying that: “*Outcomes that seem set in stone may in fact be the repeating output of dynamic processes. At timely moments the processes can be redirected to prompt lasting adaptive change*” (Cohen & Sherman, 2014, p. 362). An example of a self-affirming act mentioned in the study is having students write about their core personal values. Here, Cohen & Sherman refer to three studies conducted in American schools which yielded positive outcomes for minority students. After completing the given self-affirmation exercise related to their values, minority students’ grades have been tracked for the next one to three years. The authors state:

“The values affirmation intervention significantly improved the grade point average (GPA) of the identity-threatened groups, African American students in one school (Cohen et al. 2006, 2009) and Latino American students in two others (Sherman et al. 2013), in their core courses” (Cohen & Sherman, 2014, p. 344).

The main theory about how the positive results of self-affirmation exercises come to place is what Cohen & Sherman call the “cycle of adaptive potential”. It works in a simple manner. After conducting such exercise, the “affirmed self” may perform better than their average on the next test. Due to their better performance, the student now feels even more affirmed – causing a slightly further increase in the quality of their study outcomes. The self-affirming exercise thus simply set in motion a “*recursive process that lifts the student’s trajectory and eventually becomes a continual source of self-affirmation*” (Cohen & Sherman, 2014, p. 346). It could be seen as a positive feedback loop between the “self system” and the “social system”. The crucial thing here is that such affirmations impact the perception of the self. Self-affirmed individuals change the way in which they narrate adversity – in a way which helps them to maintain adequacy of the self and to adaptively engage with threats (Cohen & Sherman, 2014).

Overall, we consider the inclusion of the self-affirmation theory enhances the theoretical section of our project, as it shows a concrete example of how certain psychological

interventions can spark a change in individuals. Thus, it provides some theoretical background to the idea that the same is possible to do with the nature of one's internal dialogue.

Compassionate voices

To further strengthen this point, we will now discuss a study conducted by Viou & Georgaca (2021), called "Enriching our Inner Dialogue". This study is mostly connected to self-compassion. In more detail, it is about how people are able to interiorize and strengthen their "compassionate voices" after hearing a compassionate message from others – creating a more positive view of themselves. We deem it relevant, as this directly provides support for the standpoint taken in our problem formulation – it is possible to impact one's internal dialogue to be more compassionate.

Firstly, let us elaborate on what is meant by the notion of "self-compassion", as it may cause confusion. From the understanding of Viou & Georgaca (2021), self-compassion involves these components - self-kindness (a warm and kind treatment of the self), understanding (the fact that difficulties and hardships are parts of a universal human experience), awareness and mindfulness of thoughts and feelings without getting immersed in them, and lastly the motivation and willingness to act in a compassionate way towards the self and the ability to accept responsibility for one's actions. Furthermore, they see self-compassion as a skill one is capable of developing overtime. They also bring forth an illustration of a therapy activity called "Enriching our Inner Dialogue", which is used to "explore and strengthen the subjects' compassionate self" (Viou & Georgaca, 2021). Here, they include a case study as an illustration of the ways in which the therapy can enhance self-acceptance and interiorization of the different voices of the self.

In order to better understand their proposed therapeutic technique to enhance self-compassion, we must firstly explain the theory they drew on – Dialogical Self Theory (DST). DST views the self as an agent consisting of various "I-positions" – different parts of the self. It is dialogical, as the theory claims that all these different parts of the self have unique voices, some more dominant, with differing relations among each other. Viou and Georgaca (2021) state: "*According to DST, these different I-positions and the complex relationships between them are constitutive components of the self. These constellations of I-positions constitute the self as a "society of mind"*" (p. 208). Other than the aforementioned specific I-positions, DST

argues for the existence of meta-positions. These are positions of the self, capable of creating a distance from the I-positions. In other words, meta-positions are less specific. They observe I-positions and are used for self-reflection. The authors say: *“The development of meta-positions that embraces other I-positions contributes to the integration of the self as a whole”* (Viou & Georgaca, 2021, p. 209). They also claim that these meta-positions can be compassionate, or judgemental towards the self. Thus, they think the aim of therapeutic activities is to encourage the emergence of compassionate meta-positions.

One way to achieve such emergence of compassionate meta-positions, they consider is in their proposed therapeutic activity called “Enriching our Inner Dialogue”. It is based on mindfulness and narrative techniques, and the purpose is to explore and strengthen subjects’ compassionate voices (Viou & Georgaca, 2021). The first part of the activity is where the mindfulness-related aspect takes place. The authors claim that the use of mindfulness is consistent with DST as it helps the subject acknowledge parts of the self that may potentially be overlooked (Viou & Georgaca, 2021). The way they include mindfulness in the activity is by performing guided mindful meditation which. The subjects are first asked to think of something which makes them regretful to begin the meditation. The researchers share: *“We focused on the issue of regrets, as research has shown the importance of self-compassion when one feels regrets”* (Zhang & Chen, 2016, as cited in Viou & Georgaca, 2021, p. 211). Afterwards, they are guided through meditation into a “safe place” chosen by them previously. The researchers deem that the use of a safe place allows them to explore more difficult issues with the subjects, as it adds a level of security to the exercise (Viou & Georgaca, 2021).

The second part of the activity is all about encouraging subjects to speak about their concerns and insecurities, which may be negatively impacting the compassionate “level” of their inner voice. After the participants present these concerns, they are discussed in the group setting. Later in the activity, the participants write letters to each other’s concerns using a “compassionate voice”, read the letter they received and lastly write a letter to self. The reason they first write letters to each other is that:

“In our experience and according to our findings (Viou & Georgaca, 2019), clients find it easier to respond compassionately to others than to themselves. This has been taken into account in the exercise, and it has been designed so that clients mobilise compassionate

voices first toward other group members before applying them to themselves.” (Viou & Georgaca, 2021, p. 215).

To put it differently, the goal of this activity is to interiorize the compassionate answers that you receive from others to help to cope with your problems.

To sum up this section of our theory chapter, we aimed to provide some theoretical background for the position taken in our problem formulation, which refers to individual agency over one’s internal dialogue. We have specifically used two differing papers which both support such a position in various ways. In the latter one, it is important to note that both the “Enriching our Inner Dialogue” activity and the Dialogical Self Theory are useful for the study of our problem area, as they both relate to the overarching concept of agency in different ways.

Method

Conversations

This chapter describes the method that we will be using to collect our empirical data for this research project. We will start by presenting what we want to inquire about with this project. Furthermore, we introduce the method and discuss the reasons for our choice of using semi-structured interviews in this research project - drawing the rationale for the method from Brinkmann's (2012) book on *Qualitative Inquiry of Everyday Life*. And finally, we will touch on how we will proceed with the investigation. Here we present how we conducted the interviews as well as the analytical approach we have drawn upon in order to gain some understanding into the common, and yet invisible, phenomenon of internal dialogue.

What do we want to find out?

For us, the question of how to understand 'inner dialogue/speech' opened a whole world of possibilities and limitations. Inner speech as a concept is inherently almost impossible to study, as any form of expression of it takes the essential meaning of it. For the purpose of this project, we have narrowed our focus on the aspect of language, and more precisely on inner dialogue as an interiorized world of language, in relation to the outer world of language, or discourse. In light of this theme, the aim of this investigation is to look into the process of how the inner dialogue is experienced and to what extent people have agency over it. With this investigation we intend to enrich the understanding of the internal dialogue as a world of language and to determine the significance it has on everyday life and to what extent is it possible to deliberately influence it. In doing so, we draw a few lines of questions, such as: to what extent is an autonomous or a conscious process; how does it connect with the outside world of language, of discourse; how does it influence our everyday life; and whether one can have agency over- and/or to what extent?

This section describes the way in which we are thinking about our research interviews, drawing the rationale for the method from Brinkmann's book on *Qualitative Inquiry of Everyday Life* (Brinkmann, 2012). In order to explore the invisible world of inner dialogue, this paper will base its empirical data/findings on interview conversations with some of our own friends, young individuals, from various backgrounds, who use more than one language in their everyday life. The main rationale for choosing to talk with friends was the degree of openness towards sharing their personal internal experience, as we assumed that talking with

people that do not know us might respond with a certain reservation to our inquiry. Moreover, for the purpose of this investigation we do not consider a strictly narrowed target group for our subjects relevant, as our intention with this project is to inquire about the phenomenon of internal dialogue as it is experienced by young people from various backgrounds. However, our interviewees' range of ages vary between nineteen and thirty six years old.

To do so we find it important to distinguish between the different types of research conversations that we considered. On the one hand, between standardised ways of questioning, aimed for comparison and possible quantification, similar to surveys, that can be achieved by using structured interviews. These are described by Brinkmann as “passive recordings of people’s opinions and attitudes” (Brinkmann, 2012, p. 84) and often, the responses recorded are reflective of the expected answers to predetermined questions, and not indicative of the social life generated through conversation. Yet, structured interviews can be useful for certain purposes; however, they do not maximise the potential for “dialogical potentials” (Brinkmann, 2012, p. 84) and, therefore, the knowledge production that can be achieved through human conversations. On the other hand, through semi-structured interviews, researchers can gain an insightful glimpse into the specific experiences of their interviewees. These interviews are planned, yet still allow the interviewer to follow up on any topics the interviewee deems important. This approach gives the interviewer a chance to contribute to the knowledge production process, rather than merely using a predetermined interview guide. It also provides a greater opportunity for the interviewer to engage in dialogue, and for the interviewee to contribute their opinions and interpretations. According to Brinkmann, all psychological phenomena are conversational doings, also inner dialogue (Brinkmann, 2012, p. 84). That is so, for the purpose of this project, in order to gain some understanding of the phenomenon of internal dialogue, we consider it relevant to adopt an approach to interviews that is not fixed, and seek knowledge about the subject. Instead we consider a rather “dialogical” approach is fitting, with the aim of gaining knowledge with the subject. We can only do so by being granted the opportunity to observe the tangible and intangible ways that three-dimensional individuals go about their daily lives and the emotions, thought processes, and accomplishments that accompany them, we can gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon as it is experienced.

In this research project we are interested in finding out about our interviewees' subjective experience of their inner speech, thus our inquiry does not require a method that would help

us see cultural understanding or a tool that helps us compare and quantify our findings. Our intention is to have a conversation with our interview participants in which they feel comfortable to share their personal relationship with their inner dialogue. We think that a structured interview would perhaps break the natural flow of the discussions and constrain the interviewee to only answer all the questions in the right order that we have prepared, instead of allowing the participants to lead the conversations in directions that we might not have expected, but reveals some interesting aspect that we haven't thought of before planning the interviews. Therefore we deem that a semi structured interview will serve our project best. As such, these conversations manifested in the form of semi-structured interviews with six individuals, interested in self-reflecting and sharing their personal experiences and mental activities regarding their personal experience of their Inner Dialogue.

Why conversations?

According to Svend Brinkmann, as humans, we live our lives in a dialogical and conversational manner, therefore people are being “conversational creatures” (Brinkmann, 2012, p. 84). Even from a very early age, before even developing their own sense of self, to some extent children already have the ability to engage in “proto-conversations” with their parents in ways that require to take subtle turns and in forms of “emotional resonance” (Brinkmann, 2012, p 84). Therefore, before humans become “monological”, they are “intersubjective and conversational creatures” (Brinkmann, 2012, p. 84). As Brinkmann argues, monological utterances are in fact dialogical elements. The simple fact of learning to talk privately to oneself and withhold unpleasant or private emotional experiences from others comes from previously engaging with others in a conversational dance of intersubjective communication (Brinkmann, 2012).

It is important to mention here that these conversations are conducted for research purposes. In doing so, we are drawing on Brinkmann’s understanding of interviews as dialogical and conversational, in which both the interviewee and the interviewer attend and participate in the role of knowledge production, in order to do that we have decided to conduct a series of Semi-Structured interviews. Regardless of some of the questions being planned, these conversations/interviews are flexible rather than fixed, in the sense that following certain lines of the question, the interviewee has the freedom to expand or follow up on any angle that they consider to be relevant. While the interviewer is granted the opportunity to be visible, and actively engage in the knowledge-production process, rather than veiling under the stiff

interview guide and keeping a distance from the topic. Nonetheless, the purpose of using semi-structured interviews is to obtain descriptions of certain experiences of inner dialogue/speech/world of language of the interviewees, aiming for the theoretical interpretations of the phenomenon that has been described (Brinkmann, 2012).

However, considering the futility of sufficiency of the conditions determining the conditions for 'knowing', Brinkmann pointed out a normativity as an important aspect that seems essential in the activities and processes that are considered knowledge production. Moreover, he argued that, in his words, "*a basic interpersonal attitude in human encounters is one of meeting others as accountable agents that can give reasons for their actions, feelings, and beliefs*" (Brinkmann, 2012, p. 101).

The very possibility of understanding ourselves and others comes from the fact that we as humans have the ability to use language, and the ability to speak, which implies the ability to converse, therefore "human reality is a conversational reality" (Brinkmann, 2012, p. 83). As Brinkmann draws on philosopher Stephen Mulhall's statement, saying that, "*[human existence] is not just the locus and the precondition for the conversation of humankind; it is itself, because humankind is, a kind of enacted conversation*" (Brinkmann, 2012, p. 83). One should note here that, conversations are constituting not only one's "interpersonal social reality", but also one's self. In his words, a person is being him or herself "*only in relation to certain interlocutors with whom we are in conversation and from whom we acquire a language of self-understanding*" (Brinkmann, 2012, p. 83).

The everyday life experiences of human beings as a phenomenon are understood here as dialogical and conversational responses to other people, various situations, and a multitude of events. For Brinkmann (2012), conversations are more than particular empirical methods to be found in research interviews, as they also involve reflection of the self and of the outside world. As he argues:

"When people are talking, e.g. in research interviews, they are not simply putting preconceived ideas into words, but are dialogically responding to each other's expressions and trying to make sense by using the narratives and discourses that are available" (Brinkmann, 2012, p. 83).

However, in his view there is a need for common ground in terms of meaning, a prerequisite for communication, a sort of “playing together” that is necessary in order to maintain a “conversational flow” (Brinkmann, 2012, p. 83).

In addition to the receptive interview conversation that we conducted, this project engages in scientific analysis of the material obtained, adhering to what Brinkmann calls “epistemic ambition” (Brinkmann, 2012, p. 88). As such, we anchored our method in “empirical phenomenology”, aiming to address our research questions and reach some practical and empirical answers in an “epistemic” manner (Brinkmann, 2012, p. 89).

How do we want to proceed on finding out?

Stages of interview inquiry

For proceeding with our process of an interview inquiry, as proposed by Kvale & Brinkmann (2008, p. 102), is broken down into a series of distinct steps. The first of these was *thematizing*, which involves formulating the purpose of the investigation and the concept of the subject matter to be explored before any interviews take place. As we attempted to study it, it was important to have a sound understanding of Inner Speech, before deciding on how to do so. The second step was *designing*, where the entire inquiry was planned and all stages must be taken into consideration. This was followed by *the interviewing stage*, where the interviews are conducted according to a thematic interview guide. The fourth step was *transcribing*, where the oral interview material is prepared for analysis in written form. The fifth step was *analysing*, where a suitable mode of analysis is chosen that is appropriate for the interviews and the knowledge to be gained from them, which will be further described in the next section. The sixth step was *verifying*, where the validity, reliability and generalisability of the interview findings must be ascertained. Finally, the seventh step was *reporting*, where the findings from the study and the methods used are communicated in a readable manner.

Finally, our analysis draws on a phenographic approach, as inspired from Busch-Jensen & Schraube (2019). The authors recognize a fundamental twofold analytical approach pertinent to the overall activity of psychological investigation, which they refer to as “Zooming in to zoom out and zooming out to zoom in” (Busch-Jensen & Schraube, 2019, p. 227). Basically, by magnifying to obtain a wider perspective and broadening to obtain a closer look, this approach to investigation involves taking into consideration two essential aspects of the

exploration process: the methodological aspect and the visual representation of the findings. To elaborate, on the one hand, a comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon at hand is required in order to be able to fully understand it, and this is what is known as a phenographic dimension. On the other hand, a phenoconstructive dimension is included in the analysis, consisting of a scrutiny that is both critical and creative, and crossing the boundaries of description. The use of imagery does not delineate distinct entities with independent existences, but rather expresses an analytical process that is dependent on the understanding of both the unique and the general (such as the relationship between subjectivity and circumstance, the power of an individual and the predetermined framework). This is done in a manner that implies that these two concepts are intertwined. Rather than simply changing the direction of the zoom, the contrast between zooming out to zoom in and zooming in to zoom out lies in which elements are emphasised or set aside for purposes of analysis. Exploring the details of a phenomenon while also taking into account its broader context is what zooming in and zooming out strives to accomplish, with the goal of transcending the traditional methods of scientific research that focus on analysing individual components in isolation. This approach seeks to gain a better understanding of psychological phenomena by acknowledging their relatedness and relevance to one another. This imagery encourages us to take the acquired knowledge as authentic and dependable, yet never as all-encompassing or final, as it is only valid to a certain degree (Busch-Jensen & Schraube, 2019, p. 227-228).

Interviews

As we have mentioned before, the interviews were conducted with young students who use multiple languages in their everyday lives, it was not a criterion but all the interviewees have different national backgrounds as well. The interviews were conducted in English, and in person. We have chosen our interview participants from our friends and acquaintances. We consider it is important to have a high degree of trust between the interviewee and the interviewer when the topic of the interview is such a personal, vulnerable issue as one's inner speech. For the same reasons we decided to keep the participants anonymous, so that they do not have to stress about anyone recognizing them and they have the security to share anything they want with us. To ensure anonymity, we changed their names to fictitious ones. We also told them that their answers will only be used for the sake of this research project. We explained that there are no wrong answers, the only thing we ask is to be as open and honest with their responses as they can. Most of them have heard about the project before the

interviews, but we thought it was important to give them a short introduction, or description about what they should expect from this interview, so that they feel comfortable and secure during the process.

We are doing a project in which we want to find out about people's inner speech, how they talk to themselves inside their head, and how you experience your inner speech. Is it a supportive friend or a nagging hater? Our group found it an interesting topic to research, it is through the inner voice individuals experience their lives, it is the voice that helps us to make sense of the world around us, to construct a coherent narrative about the events that have happened to us, and allows us to reflect on the past and make plans for the future. So our inner voice is an important ever present aspect of our lives, however often we are not aware of it at the moment. We think we have all collectively experienced being our own enemies, when failing or making a mistake and the inner voice offers the simple explanation that it is just because you are the worst. This is not a constructive state of mind, and we want to find out how one can take ownership of their inner voice, ways to guide the inner speech into a more compassionate and supportive way of being.

We have tried to put together a few lines of questions that can help us find out about others' experiences of their inner speech. However this is a semi-structured interview, meaning that it is intended to be more like an open conversation. The goal is to be descriptive about your experience of your inner speech, your awareness of it, how you use it or it manifest in your everyday life and if you have experienced some form of change in it throughout your life. As we said, our goal is to have an open and honest conversation about your experience, there are no expectations of you and your answers. You will remain anonymous and we will only use the findings to better understand the topic of our project. Feel free to share and ask questions when you are uncertain about anything.

Interview questions

To come up with appropriate questions that would allow us to have a conversation with our interviewees to address our concerns about their subjective experience of internal dialogue, we drew on our research questions and the information we found while trying to answer them. To begin with, we decided to begin with a research question that introduces the topic of inner speech, so we tried to find out: *What is inner speech, how does it develop and how is it understood in psychology?* In this manner, we got a first approach to the topic, and what we

found out helped us to guide the direction of the paper. Just as we tried to make a first approach to the general subject, we started our interview conversation in the same way. We decided to ask some general questions about their own experience with their internal dialogue, the use of it... In this way, we obtained a general idea about how they described their internal dialogue and about the awareness they had about it. We consider that these questions were fundamental in guiding the track of the conversation, as they helped us to situate the subject's knowledge of the topic based on their own perception.

- *How does your inner voice talk to you? How do you experience your inner voice?*
- *How would you describe your inner voice? (What are the main themes? Is it constructive or destructive?)*
- *What do you use it for? (planning, reflecting, remembering)*

As we have already mentioned, the subject's own experience with his or her inner dialogue is the most important part of our conversations. Therefore, we considered it necessary to explore more deeply into the way our interviewees talked to themselves. In this manner, we can infer the degree to which people are harsh or compassionate in their internal dialogue, to conclude whether it is a problem and whether it should be changed. Depending on the predominant nature of their internal dialogue (constructive or destructive), we can discuss the influences of their context and their role in the awareness and change process, which are factors that relate to some of our main research questions. In addition, we believe that your self-image can be influenced or shaped by the way you talk to yourself in your internal dialogue, so knowing how satisfied our interviewees are with their self-perception is also important.

- *Do you sometimes talk to yourself unkindly, in a harsh/angry manner?*
- *Are you satisfied with the way you view yourself in your inner speech?*

One of the central concerns of the project is to investigate the control that each person has over his or her internal voice. The interest in its level of autonomy and its possible change, has been one of the recurring topics throughout the work. It has functioned as a connecting thread. Therefore, the following research question could not be missing: *How much agency does one have over their inner speech? Is it an autonomous process or are people able to actively guide their inner speech?* That is why approaching this issue in conversations with our interviewees was fundamental. We asked about the autonomy of their inner voice to also know the level of awareness of it. In the same way, we wanted to discuss the possibility of consciously guiding their inner voice towards a more compassionate one (if they were aware

that they were not talking to themselves in that way). Thereby, we were able to talk about their experiences practising self-compassion.

- *Do you feel like you can intervene or change the tone and direction of your inner voice? Can you stop yourself when it becomes too negative and judgemental? (If yes, how?)*
- *Do you sometimes experience that your inner dialogues just go on and it feels autonomous/unconscious? Are you sometimes unaware? When do you become aware?*

Human beings are social. We have constant conversations with each other as well as with ourselves. Looking for a point of connection or a certain type of relationship between our inner voice and our outer voice was another of our interests. For this purpose, we raised the following research question, with the intention of obtaining information about the way in which our internal voice connects us with the world: *What is the relation between internal speech and external/discursive speech?* Likewise, in this section, we pretend to have an open conversation about how the internal voice of our interviewees relates to the context, and also how the context influences it. We are not only interested in their experiences with their current environment and its impact on their everyday life, but also in whether their childhood environment might have an influence on their ongoing internal voice.

- *How do you think your environment affects your inner speech?*
- *Do you think that your childhood environment has had an impact in your present inner dialogue? // Do you think that the experiences that you had in your childhood have affected your present inner dialogue?*
- *In what ways do you think your inner voice affects your everyday life?*

One topic that we were curious about, because of our condition of international students, was multilingualism. Hence our last research question: *What is the relationship between multilingualism and the nature of one's inner speech?* In this case, we were interested in whether the interviewees, who are also multilingual, felt that their inner voice could change depending on the language they used.

- *Do you have your inner voice in multiple languages? If yes, do you feel like the nature in which you view yourself in your inner speech changes when you switch languages?*

As this topic became somewhat disconnected from the central thread of the project: *In what ways can one guide the experience of their internal dialogue toward a supportive and*

compassionate voice? We decided to leave this conversation for the end, to see if we could find out any extra interesting information.

Analysis

In order to make sense of our empirical data collected from the interviews we will be using the technique of situated generalisation (Busch-Jensen & Schraube, 2019). This approach celebrates the situated knowledge of the subject, and highlights the importance of the representational dimension of research and knowledge production. Traditional scientific generalisation is concerned with measuring frequencies, however with this research project we will not be able to use quantitative research, as our data consists of individuals' accounts of their experience.

How is it possible to generalise in psychology? Busch-Jensen and Schraube (2019) argues that “*Situated psychological generalisation attains scientific objectivity not by disarticulating the subjective dimension of human life, but rather through the generalisation of the subjective*” (p. 227). This approach is focusing on the individual's lived experience, and trying to find “the likeness in the otherness” in order to relate the particular to the general,

“to understand likeness in the otherness, it is important to contextualise people’s actual sayings, doings, and relations in their worldly lived reality since doing so enables us to relate human subjectivity in even its most particular forms to more general dimensions of recognizably human concerns ” (Busch-Jensen & Schraube, 2019, p. 230).

We find this analytical understanding of connectedness of likeness and otherness particularly fitting for this project because we consider that the struggle with one's inner voice is a shared human struggle/condition that affects everybody.

The reason for our choice of the situated generalisation approach is the difficulty of studying inner dialogue that is an extremely personal and subjective experience. We needed an approach that can support us in forming a comprehensive understanding of the unique and individual processes of one relating to their own internal dialogue. We build on Busch-Jensen and Schraube (2019) understanding of situated generalisation in psychological research. They proposed the technique of zooming in to zoom out and zooming out to zoom in, meaning that the researcher takes departure from the individual experience and then goes on to relate it to overarching problems and patterns. “*Taking point of departure in specific problems, questions, and dilemmas in everyday experience, situated generalization is a world-oriented way of reflection.*” (Busch-Jensen & Schraube, 2019, p. 227).

Phenography aims to describe lived experience accurately, it appreciates dialogue as a tool for knowledge production, as we conducted our interviews with a semi structured conversational approach we consider that this analytical approach fits our research project best. The first step of the analytical process is a detailed description of the phenomena (phenographic dimension), and the second step is a critical analysis of the findings (phenoconstructive dimension) in which we will focus on the similarities and the contradictions of our findings. *“While the emphasis of the phenographic dimension is on gathering and describing everyday experience, thought, and action, the emphasis of the phenoconstructive dimension is on reflexivity and on expanding and deepening the analysis and process of generalisation.”* (Busch-Jensen & Schraube, 2019, p. 232). To begin, we transcribe all the interviews word to word, as researchers we aim for accurately representing the interviewees' situated knowledge. As for the phenoconstructive dimension, we will reflect on the interview's findings by analysing the empirical data in detail. The theory section will be able to assist the analysis of the empirical data.

When one is using the situated generalisation approach, one must look for connections, *“the building blocks of psychological generalisation are not information or categorization but understanding and connectivity”*(Busch-Jensen & Schraube, 2019, p 232). No understanding stands alone by itself, the interviewees experience that they have shared with us are not to be treated as an independent subjective account of their inner speech, rather a place of departure from which we can start to understand their individual struggles, and start seeing how they relate to themselves, the world around them, and also the other interviewees. Busch-Jensen and Schraube (2019) writes:

“We need to uncover and examine this hanging- togetherness in and between people and social practices to understand better how the trans-contextual elements, relevant for our study, come into being, gain meaning, are kept in place and/or are being transformed” (p. 235).

We will go back to each interview transcript and describe what we thought was surprising or interesting, what were the main points of their account of their internal dialogue. Then we will discuss how the different interviews relate to each other, where they share some of their experiences or techniques or where they might disagree with each other. As our interviewees come from different backgrounds, all of them having different nationalities it will be interesting to see in what ways their experience of their internal dialogues might be similar.

We will try to find similarities, reemerging patterns or sharp contradictions and overall look for connections.

Zooming in

The individual experience of internal dialogue

In this section we will briefly discuss each of the interviews individually. Here we zoom in on our participants' account of their subjective experience of their inner speech. We will describe the main themes and the highlights of each interview, in order to make the reader familiar with each account before we go on to analyse our findings on a larger scale. We think it is important to do, because in the larger analysis the individual experience might lose some details that are nonetheless useful for our knowledge production process. Additionally, the situated generalisation approach has an emphasis on the phenographic dimension of the analysis, therefore we want to describe each interview in detail to make sure all the participants receive an accurate representation of their experience. We consider this part to be the zooming in dimension of the analysis, where the attention is on the individual, and later on we will zoom out to see connection on the bigger scale.

Martha

Martha is a 21-year-old Spanish student that has studied in several English-speaking countries. She is currently studying psychology. The interview took place at Martha's apartment to create an atmosphere of trust and comfort. She was familiar with the concept of internal voice because of her education and visits to therapy. Even so, to put the interviewee in context, a brief description of the project was given.

Martha shared that she has a constructive voice because she has worked on it with her therapist. Her internal voice was the one that took control before, as in some kind of dictatorship, but she doesn't feel like this anymore. As she mentioned: "*my therapist used to call it 'Martha's dictatorship' and now my inner voice it's not 'Marta's dictatorship' anymore, and that's super cool...*". Nowadays, her inner voice relaxes her when she does something wrong, saying things like: "*it's ok, no one is going to hate you for that... you can chill out for 10 seconds*". However, she still finds it hard to congratulate herself when she does things right. We think that young people are under a lot of pressure, especially regarding their studies. This is also what Martha will tell us later on, talking about her environment. That's

why, sometimes, they don't allow themselves to do things in a bad way. Also, we can see that self-congratulation is something that takes a lot of effort for them, even more than self-sabotage. According to Kross (2021), our inner voice evaluates us while we try to reach our goals. However, we can see how Martha puts a lot of effort and awareness into not being so hard on herself throughout the interview. And also she tries to transform her voice into a more compassionate one. As she says: *"It doesn't talk to me when I do something right... I don't say to myself 'great job, you are the best...' but at least I don't say to myself like 'you are the last piece of sh*t in the world'".* Although she still angrily talks to herself sometimes.

With this in mind, she uses her inner voice to reflect, since she doesn't realise herself using it for other things. This results from the fact that, in adults, inner speech is mainly used to remember, plan or anticipate actions and evaluate emotional conditions (Kross, 2021; Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015).

One thing that catches our attention is that all the time she refers to her internal voice in the third person, as if it was a different identity. Perhaps this is because, as Viou and Georgaca report in their findings in 2021, it is more difficult to be compassionate to yourself than to others. For example, in some cases, when she is having destructive thoughts about herself, Martha tells her internal voice: *"don't talk like that to my friend"*. We find this a curious way of referring to herself, but it is quite consistent with the way Martha tries to guide her inner voice making self-compassionate statements that clearly have a positive impact on her self-perception, as Cohen & Sherman (2014) state. Thus, Martha has been able to guide her voice in a more compassionate direction over time.

She explained that she is very happy with her internal voice at the moment, since, as mentioned above, she has worked on it. Mindfulness is a practice that has helped her a lot. As Viou and Georgaca (2021) mentioned, this practice helps oneself to explore and build up their compassionate voices. She explained that, for her, the constructive inner voice is an anchor that she returns to when she realises that she is not being nice to herself. Then, she tries to clarify this concept:

"If I find myself saying something wrong, I try to come back to the good line... It's like an anchor. I did this thing in mindfulness... you have your anchor, so you find yourself going somewhere else and you pull yourself back".

Consequently, she can intervene or change the tone and direction of her inner voice. This relates well to the “Enriching our Inner Dialogue” activity we mention in our theoretical section. There, the researchers Viou & Georgaca (2021) also use mindfulness to guide the subjects into a “safe place”, which is akin to the anchor mentioned by Martha.

Martha thought that internal dialogue always begins unconsciously, mostly the bad thoughts. Nevertheless, at times, she can take control over it. On the one hand, when she is doing a lot of things, she doesn't realise that she may have been talking bad to herself all day long because she is not in the present, her mind is somewhere else. As she mentioned: *“When I am aware of what I am doing, it's when I can take control over it... If I'm on 'autopilot', doing a lot of things, and I am not in the present, that's when I don't realise”*. But, on the other hand, thanks to therapy and mindfulness, she is now more aware of what she is doing, which is one of the main purposes of this practice. Thereby, she can take control of her inner voice. According to her, she may be more aware of what she is thinking than most people, thanks to these practices. As we can see, once again, Martha is very self-aware and gives a lot of importance to this fact, saying:

“I went to therapy and I also practise mindfulness, so I'm more aware of what I am thinking than, I guess, most of the people. But sometimes... you can't always be perfect... so sometimes I find myself chewing over for an hour about bad things... so sometimes it's completely out of my... sometimes I can't just realise it. But once I realise it, it's under my control”.

Regarding her environment, she commented that her friends make it easier for her to maintain a constructive inner voice. They don't let her talk to herself in a harsh manner, so she thinks *“why am I the only one doing this to myself?”*. According to the study of Viou and Georgaca (2021) that we mentioned before, people can interiorize and reinforce their compassionate voice after hearing it from others. In this way, they see themselves in a more positive shape. However, this has not always been the case. The people she used to surround herself with were harder on her, which caused her to be harder on herself as well. In addition, she had a lot of pressure from her parents in her studies: *“my previous inner speech wasn't good and I've grown up in a... My parents were really strict about academic stuff... And that's where I am most hard on myself now...”*. That is why she thinks that her inner voice was more destructive before than it is now.

She shared that, currently, everything she says to herself is going to affect what she does next, especially in the short term. So talking to herself in a compassionate or a destructive way

affects her day-to-day decisions and actions. Cohen & Sherman also give examples in their study (2014) about how self-affirmations can influence the individual and make changes in everyday life. She explained it by giving an example:

“I did an exam, and I didn't do as well as I thought I was going to. If I talk to myself well, maybe I will take a break that night. But if I talk to myself badly, like “you should have done more, you are the worst...”, maybe instead of resting and letting go, I am going to keep doing things, because I feel bad and guilty”.

In relation to bilingualism, she does not feel that she uses different languages to refer to herself. She simply uses her native language.

We believe that, thanks to her education in psychology, Martha places great value on her mental health. You can tell she is very aware and puts a lot of effort into working on herself. In addition, by practising mindfulness, she has been able to stay more consciously in the present, enhance her self-acceptance and strengthen her compassionate self.

Victor

Victor, moved to Denmark from Romania about ten years ago, is thirty years old, and is currently an events video producer preparing to become a web developer.

He describes his inner speech as being ‘*like a partner in crime*’, offering constructive guidance to his actions and decisions. He experiences his inner voice as a two-way street and is mostly aware of it. In Victor’s words:

“I think sometimes you have conversations with yourself in your head about whether you should do things or not. Or how you should do things, whether those things would be good to do. Also, how you describe how you’re feeling, sometimes, when you’re just having a good moment, the inner voice kind of disappears, kind of lets go of the conversation, and you're just in it, in the moment”.

It speaks to him in multiple languages, and he has found that his childhood environment has had an impact on the way he talks to himself in the present. He is generally satisfied with his inner voice, though it can be harsh to him if he fails to meet the expectations he sets for himself. He explains: *“But my inner voice can sometimes be harsh to me (...) if I am expecting more from myself, and fail to deliver on certain things. Or if I am disappointed in*

certain things". Victor intervenes in his inner voice by using endorphins, talking to people, and eating to change the chemical balance in his body when needed. He finds his inner voice helpful in bouncing ideas off, and it makes his everyday life less lonely. In his words:

"I think It affects my everyday life because you have somebody to bound the ideas off, so it is not such a lonely journey, at the end of the day. Even though you're with yourself, you're always in constant conversation with yourself on different topics, or different things that you are thinking of".

As he explained, Victor's internal voice serves a variety of mental activities, such as reflective thought, planning, as well as analysing and questioning his decisions. He thinks that *"it differs in each situation of how your trail of thought is"*. However, he also acknowledges that sometimes his inner voice can become harsh, especially when he is disappointed in himself or when he fails to deliver on certain expectations. In these moments, Bogdan's inner voice can become a bit more critical and judgmental, speaking to him in a harsher tone. For him, this reflects the influence of his childhood on his environment and the way he learned to interact with people and understand the world.

Ultimately, Bogdan seems to be relating to his internal dialogue as to a mental activity in which he reflects, analyses, and questions his decisions and actions, while also providing a source of comfort and support. He shares: *"kind of one of your buddies that tries to make you a bit more happy, looking at the different aspects of life"*.

Moreover, Victor's inner voice is reflective of his childhood environment, which is characterised by having a supportive family and not being exposed to negative experiences. As a result, his inner voice is usually constructive and supportive, encouraging him to do things and explore different aspects of life. In his words:

"I think I had a happy childhood, I didn't encounter too many of life's bad sides. Like you know, people dying, when I was young, or my parents were still together, like these kinds of main things (...) Like, not seeing the bad side of things all the time, because I was not exposed to them early in my life".

He also experiences his inner voice in multiple languages, mainly Romanian and English, and it changes depending on the situation. It is evident that his environment has also shaped his inner voice in terms of how he views himself.

He experiences his inner voice as a friend who is supportive and encourages him, but it can also be harsh when he is not meeting his own expectations. He acknowledges that he can intervene to change the tone, attitude, and direction of his inner voice by using the inner chemicals in his body, such as by going for a run or talking to people. He explains this by giving an example: *“when you’re grumpy because you haven’t eaten something, then your voice would be in a different way. So, if you get something to eat, then you can change...”*.

Overall, it is clear that for him, early age development plays an important role in shaping his inner voice. It influences the language that is used, the tone, and the attitude. According to Victor, *‘the first seven years from home’*, as he put it, are reflective of the way he speaks to himself. As such, he believes that it is important to recognize the impact of one’s childhood environment in order to be mindful of how one speaks to oneself and how to manage one’s inner dialogue.

Bogdan

Bogdan, as well as Victor, moved to Denmark from Romania about thirteen years ago. He is thirty years old. Regarding the theme of our investigation, he had some previous reflections and discussions on inner speech, prior to the interview. Additionally, he has a bachelor’s in psychology and a master’s in neurosciences; hence the interest and curiosity of the interviewee have been offered in terms of being open to a detailed descriptive conversation of his inner speech. Moreover, the interview took place in the comfort of the subject’s home, after the subject was introduced to the theme and the lines of questions prior to the interview.

Bogdan describes his inner speech generally as a problem-solving part of the brain that has an essential role in mediating and managing his emotions. Nonetheless, he describes the nature of his inner voice as a complex process that is experienced as nomological as well as dialogical. On the one hand, it manifests in an instrumental manner, as a somehow aware process of running past or future conversations with others from everyday life. On the other hand, it manifests in a reflective manner, where his dialog is with himself. As Bogdan described, *‘other times, is a monologue’*, that functions as a reward, or reinforcement mechanism. Similar to the dialogical inner speech, his monological speech function is in a somehow aware state, especially when the tone and the attitude of the inner voice reinforce positive emotions. However, when his inner voice takes an unconstructive turn in terms of tone and attitude, that, as he described, is happening without his control or intention. As he said it, *‘I become aware of a conversation with myself in the middle of a conversation’*. He

compared the phenomena with the experience of coming back in his own body, after getting lost in his mind while driving - prior to the moment of self-awareness, the action of driving becomes automatic. Similarly, when he refers to his nomological inner critic, he becomes aware of the experience after it is already in motion, as an automatic process. In his words, *“that feeling I also sometimes get when I... and is mainly on the negative side, in my view... It's like I find myself in the middle of it, scolding myself.”*

For Bogdan, the highly-critical aspect of his internal dialogue that he often becomes aware of, it is as he put it, *“something nah, not so cool about my inner voice.”* For him, the inner critic takes the form of “scolding,” and he deems it developed as such due to the sociocultural experiences he encountered in his early childhood environment, by *“being brought in a cultural frame that is not known to be the most supportive.”* However unpleasant, this automatic process in which the subject becomes aware of his self-scolding as it is unfolding is also the very moment when conscious awareness intervenes as a mediator. Therefore, he has some agency over the tone and attitude of what is referred to as a “doubling” voice (reference). As he shared in the interview conversation, due to the context of his everyday life, Bogdan has recently learned to love himself, or as he put it, *“trying to get there, right?”*. In light of this, as well as through becoming aware of the highly-critical stance of his internal dialogue, Bogdan is constantly negotiating in a sense, consciously unconsciously, the agency over the way he talks to himself. As he shared in the interview: *“I started to scold myself already. And then I find myself aware of that, and then I stop, like, ‘hey, that is not cool!’”*

Flavia

Flavia is an international student from Germany studying at Roskilde university, living in Denmark for two years now. The interview was taking place at the interviewees apartment, so she would feel safe and cosy. After a brief discussion about how the interview is going to go we began our conversation about her experience of her internal dialogue.

She said that her inner voice most of the time is acting as a sort of director that tells her what to do next, what would make sense to do, sort of an internalised parenting voice. It assists her in managing everyday life tasks, like deciding to go to bed or to eat, taking care of herself. In her words her inner voice *“sometimes it can be more norms and what I have learned when I was growing up. Like when I should go to bed or something. But sometimes it is just nonsense.”* This makes sense as our inner speech has a significant role in self regulation, it

reminds and guides us to look after ourselves. As the formation of the inner speech is a social interaction with the caregivers, the way that the parents speak to the child shapes their way of talking to themselves (Vygotsky, 2012).

She also often uses her inner speech for reflecting on her feelings and behaviours. She appreciates that because she feels that it helps her to argue different viewpoints, she said *“it can also help a lot to overcome initial negative feelings about something for example”* so that she can be more open and try new things. Self reflection is an ongoing task for our inner speech, it helps us to see ourselves in a different light, question our assumptions and keep us on track about achieving our goals (Kross, 2021). The internal monologue can turn into a dialogue where we can sort of debate ourselves on our stances and opinions and come to a new conclusion. Flavia thinks that her inner voice sometimes motivates her to step out of her comfort zone and also helps her to gain courage to do so.

She mentioned that there is a strong connection between how she is feeling at the moment and how her inner voice talks to her *“I think it is usually more like when I'm happy it is positive and when I'm sad... but it definitely works the other way around too, like it can change my mood or make it worse.”* As we went into detail about that utterance she revealed that her internal monologue usually strengthens the emotions that she is feeling. When she is feeling happy her inner voice tends to heighten her emotions, on the other hand when she feels down her inner voice pushes it further into a negative feeling. She added that sometimes she experiences a shift, as an example she talked about that often after hanging out with her friends her internal dialogue leads her to overanalyze the situation and it is difficult for her to get out of that way of thinking when it happens. She said: *“when you are in a social setting and you are in a good mood, but then afterwards you overthink something, and then you can get into that.”* Later she came back to the point that social interactions, new groups of people or an unfamiliar setting. This indicates that Flavia experiences a lot of stress from unfamiliar social situations, and her inner voice sometimes makes matters worse by looking for mistakes where there is none. As it has been mentioned in the paper before, our inner voice makes sure that we act socially acceptable for us to avoid social exclusion (Baumeister & Masicampo, 2010).

She mentioned that she has recognized some patterns in her own inner speech that she does not like and want to consciously change, sometimes she is able to steer into a more favourable direction. We went more into detail about her abilities to take ownership of her inner speech,

she explained that when she recognizes a negative talk she stops herself and tries to remind herself that the things that she is thinking at the moment are rationally impossible, that is highly unlikely that everyone thinks badly of her or she did everything wrong. However, she added that this does not always work *“sometimes, also when you focus on something that your inner voice should do a thing, but then it is just doing the opposite, I feel like.”* When she is unable to stop her negative inner speech, she said that she tries to distract herself by doing something that she enjoys, for example switching to a physical activity from mental work or doing something that doesn't require much thinking.

She handles falling into a self destructive negative spiral either by trying to rationalise the situation, again debating herself, questioning the likelihood and the reality of her negative visions. As she put it *“sometimes I just tell myself that this is not rational right now, or uhh if I think everyone hates me (haha) then I will just tell myself that like rationally it doesn't make any sense”*. Stopping oneself to objectively and rationally reflect on whether the things our inner speech is telling us is real is a good technique to stop a self destructive episode, however as Flavia mentioned too, it doesn't always work. Distraction can be a useful way to snap out of a negative spiral, if we can not talk ourselves out of it we can simply shift its focus away from ourselves (Kross, 2021).

We also discussed how she feels her environment might influence her internal dialogue. She explained that she feels that a lot of it is coming from her past, her bringing up. The way that she is talking to herself, the things she says and the values that guide her she feels that she got that from her family and friends from her childhood. She also added that lately she recognized that the different friend groups that she is in can also change her inner speech. She said that her surroundings can shift her views on what she prescribes importance to, she appreciates the new input from others but she also said that sometimes it pushes her into a more judgmental direction, where she tends to compare herself to others. She describes it as follows:

“So there is development, and that's how I can reflect on past things and notice that there are patterns that I want to get rid of or identify the patterns when I am in a new environment, when I get new input from other people. So then I can notice things that were not evident for me, that were normal, and then I can umm maybe reflect on them a little bit more”.

It seems clear that the environment that one is placed into has significant consequences on one's internal monologue. The external speech events get interiorized into the conversations with ourselves (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015). The way people surrounding us talk

about themselves and others shapes how we think about ourselves too. We adapt to the way they might be seeing us, shape our values on what's accepted and appreciated.

When she was asked about whether she uses multiple languages in her internal monologue, she replied that she does but it is dominantly her native language, German. She explained that it is more harsh than her English inner voice, she said jokingly *“with my English inner voice I can't take myself that seriously”*. She added that it makes sense for her, and we can also see the connection that as she mentioned earlier she feels that a big part of her internal dialogue is borrowing themes and patterns from her past, the behaviours of her parents and friends, who of course use the German language to talk to her.

Lucia

During the interview, Lucia, who is a 21-year-old Spanish medicine student, in most questions (at least in a lot of them) would bring up the topic of school or studying whenever she thought about her inner voice being destructive. It is an example of their experience that she repeated a few times while being interviewed. This makes us think about how much importance there is to this person's interactions with their environment and their inner voice. Lucia explains that her mother always gave much importance to the school grades since she was a child. Maybe this constant reminder to work hard to get better grades is something that affected her inner voice to be more destructive whenever it comes to that specific situation of school and exams. As she says:

“Even though nowadays I have periods of times where I talk to myself in a more destructive voice, like for example when I am stressed in exam periods I get angry if I do not study enough and then I talk to myself saying stuff like: I am so stupid.”

She also talks about her body image, and how it can also be destructive sometimes, especially when she is around people and starts comparing herself to them. She mentions that this might be because when she was younger, she never “stood out” in her friend group. The interviewee did not get the same attention as her friends and she associated that with their body image. She explains:

“I also think my relationship with my sister has affected the way I view myself because of the competitive nature and the insecurities our relationship has (comparing ourselves or thinking that other people do). I also think that not standing out during my puberty as much as my friends also affected me in some ways. Especially with my insecurities”.

As we can observe, Lucia is very aware of her inner voice, and has thought a lot about why she talks to herself the way she does by making associations with what she experienced around her environment when she was younger. She also states that when she talks to herself in a destructive voice she tries to be aware of it and try to stop it: *“I will become aware til it reaches the point of limit when I am feeling really bad about myself and I have to go like: What am I doing? Let me stop for a second and think what I am thinking”*. This shows that most of the time she is conscious and knows that her inner voice should not put her down, but rather motivate her or help her plan, remember or organise.

When we asked her the questions about how she tries to intervene and change the tone of her inner speech, she told us a technique that she uses whenever she feels “trapped” in her self-destructive voice. She says she tries to concentrate on the things that are positive or that she likes about herself. She starts explaining to herself that what she is thinking is not real, just the perception of her image that day, which changes constantly. She uses a positive self talk which is shown to have persisting benefits on the self (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). She explains: *“I try to explain to myself that I look the same as I did the other day and that is just my mind playing tricks on me and making me perceive myself differently even though I look the same”*. This means that she uses their inner voice to try to change that same thing, her inner voice. She talks to herself to try to change her tone to a more logical, constructive one.

Another interesting thing regarding this interview was that, when Lucia was asked about in what language she thinks, she had it very clear and knew immediately without doubt in what language she talked, compared with other people who had to think about it and some said that they spoke to themselves in multiple languages (including their native one), but Lucia said that she had very clear that she spoke to herself in Spanish, and that if in some occasions she switches it might be in English, but not in her parents language, which is Dutch. This is interesting taking into account that she has spoken Dutch in her house since she was born and still she does not speak to herself in that language.

She also states that sometimes she was scared of changing her destructive voice to a dialogue where she would be justifying her laziness (in this case regarding her studies and grades).

“I feel like I want to change it but it scares me that if I start talking to myself in a more compassionate way, I will act lazier because I would be justifying attitudes that make me work less or slower”.

This is an interesting fear that no one that we have interviewed has mentioned. This might be because of the pressure her mother put on her during her childhood with this matter, because in other situations where she might talk to herself in a harmful way, she does not have this fear.

Lastly, it is important to also note how her inner speech affected her actions. Lucia states that whenever she talks to herself in a damaging way and feels like she can not stop it, she starts feeling uncomfortable and starts to believe what she is telling herself. She says she even might change what she is doing just because her inner speech does not let her do what she was trying to do. So for instance, if she is cooking something unhealthy and her inner speech turns into a destructive speech (telling her that she should eat healthy because she is gaining weight and does not like how she looks) she will change what she is cooking just to stop her voice from putting her down. She also gave another example: *“if I am feeling really insecure and my inner voice is just telling me how bad I look that day, sometimes I change my plans to stay inside”*. This is important because it means that if we are able to control what we think and how we do it, this could lead to also changing what we do and how we do it.

In conclusion, Lucia is pretty self aware of her inner speech and it shows whenever we ask her these questions. And even if she already has a technique for trying to stop herself from having a negative speech, she would like to know if there are some more methods that she can practise to take more control of her tone or the direction of her inner voice.

Markus

Markus is a young Danish student who studies psychology and communication as his main subjects. He does not have much pre-existing information about this project, therefore the interview starts with a brief description of our problem area. When asked about the nature of his inner speech, he claims to have experienced “tough inner voice” during earlier stages of his life, back when he played football on a high youth level. He explains:

“It was very tough, but you know, you would justify it because there was a greater goal with it. so it was like I had to go running. I have to do this and that or else you don't achieve your goal, or else you fail yourself.”

He recalls negative thoughts that were triggered by his injury which caused him to get stuck in a spiral, perceiving the situation as “failure”. He thinks that it might have reduced his level

of future performance. Such belief does have some theoretical support. As mentioned in the introduction chapter of this project, one of the ways in which negative internal dialogue affects people is by hindering athlete performance (Morin, 2009).

Right now, however, Markus claims that his inner speech is more positive. He considers that one can manifest a more positive inner voice and that he managed to do it through repeated verbal affirmation (such as saying “nice” things about yourself. This goes hand-in-hand with the text about self-affirmation by Cohen & Sherman (2014) we reference in our theory chapter, which claims that small interventions can have lasting benefits for the self and that affirmations impact self-perception. The only difference being that Markus is talking about verbal affirmation and the study mostly referenced self-affirmations in written form. He states:

“I think it is definitely possible to change your inner voice and not just how you talk to yourself but also how you experience yourself, or how you perceive yourself. I think that can definitely be changed. At least that is what happened to me. I did some research when I felt bad when I was a bit younger and I actually tried to do it (the verbal affirmations) and it felt so silly at the time but I believe that it worked for me.”

This also shows that our interviewee deems individual agency when it comes to affecting one’s inner speech. However, he further claims that it is only possible when a person is actively aware of the fact that it is possible to change their inner speech, saying: *“If you don't know the ways in which you can change your inner voice, how would you?”* On top of that, he thinks that the methods of changing one's inner speech vary from person to person and it is about finding a way which works for a specific person.

When asked whether his inner speech sometimes feels like it just goes on and on and is almost autonomous, he said it does not happen in social situations, but maybe when he is sitting on a train for a long time or when he is drunk, it may feel that way. Later, he also gave an example of when he is performing tasks which are largely specific, such as the process of writing music:

“It happens to me that I forget what I've written or sometimes I just haven't written anything so I am just staring at a blank piece of paper. Having had all these thoughts going through. So I think it may be when I'm doing something very specific.”

As per the perceived impact his environment has upon his inner speech, the interviewee thinks that he talks to himself differently in different social settings, or in different friend groups. This relates to what has been said by previous participants and is also theoretically supported by the paper of Alderson-Day & Fernyhough (2015), who are talking about the external environment having a large impact on internal dialogue. When it comes to the childhood environment, Markus considers that it has a large influence, distinguishing between positive and negative pressure applied by parents and talking about how that may impact a child's internal dialogue.

We also talked about his inner speech in relation to his bilingualism, to which he replied that he speaks to himself both in Danish and English, depending on the environment/social situation. He interestingly voiced a belief that he is more positive towards himself when his inner speech is in English. Initially, our interviewee was not quite sure why that might be, but later formed a hypothesis that it may be due to a positive emotion stemming from the fact that he can speak a non-native language on a level that allows him to think in it. He shares: *“Like it comes with a bit of pride every time I talk to myself in English, if you know what I mean.”*

Zooming out

Comprehensive analysis of the interviews

In this section we will try to form an understanding about our interviewees experience by zooming out from the individual level and go on to try to find ways in which the different interviews connect and relate to each other. All interviews were very personal and unique, however having an inner speech and an internal dialogue is a shared human experience, so we were able to see some similarities and commonalities between the different interviews that we will be able to analyse. We will also discuss ways in which they might oppose each other. This will be the zooming out part of the analysis, where we take a step back from the individual interviews and see them from a new perspective that will allow us to see how these experiences can be understood on a larger scale, how they might connect to something greater than an individual first person experience.

Experience of inner speech

The first question that we have asked from the interview participants was a general question about how they experience their inner speech and how their inner speech talks to them. This question was aimed to start the discussion about inner speech and get our interviewees to think about the subject. Moreover, the way people experience their inner speech is one of the primary concerns in this project, as well as the first part of our problem formulation. Furthermore, we understand that the experience of inner speech is a broad concern. Asking this question first allowed us to gain an insight into the thoughts of our subjects in a broader sense, before branching out into the various facets of experiencing inner speech - such as their perceived agency, or the impact of environment - later in the interview.

All the people that we interviewed claim to have a somewhat constructive or positive voice, although this has not always been the case. An interesting common aspect in all the interviews was that all the interviewees told us that even if they are not one hundred percent satisfied with the nature of their inner speech, they all celebrated some kind of a development from their past habits. Martha shared:

“So right now, at the moment, I would say I have a really constructive inner voice, cause I’ve worked on it, like, it was not constructive... my therapist used to call it “Martha’s dictatorship” and now my inner voice it’s not “Martha’s dictatorship” anymore, and that’s super cool”.

Markus shared that achieving a kind inner voice has been a difficult process for him:

“It’s taken a lot of work and even though I was not always happy with the way I was talking to myself, I’m glad I did because there were goals to it and everything is a learning process and I think if you haven’t been at the lows you can’t appreciate the highs”.

This indicates that these young people are all aware of the importance of taking care of one's mental health, and they also recognize the importance of internal dialogue in their psychological well-being. This shows that they are willing to put work and effort into understanding patterns that might cause them to have a more destructive inner voice. Martha is said to have worked on her internal dialogue with the help of a professional psychologist, and also mentioned that she practises mindfulness to calm her inner voice when it starts to spiral out of control. Some of the interviewees were really aware of their inner speech to the point where one of them (Lucia) said: *“Sometimes during exam period I have to be more*

aware of my inner voice since I have anxiety and I know how important it is to know how to talk with myself to be productive.” This shows awareness and responsibility with their actions and thoughts.

The next question is related to the participants’ use of their inner speech. Most of the people interviewed shared that they use their inner voice in their daily life situations, but above all for reflecting. It is a way to express their thoughts without the need to say them out loud. According to Werani (2014), the function of judgement is the one in charge of reflecting on thoughts before emitting them and it decides whether to censure them or not. This is performed by the inner speech. Therefore, it regulates the quality and quantity of expressions. Lucia claims that she uses it all the time.

They say to have conversations with themselves (monologues), discussions in their minds, as if they were talking to another person, about doing things or not, or whether it is a good idea to do them. We can observe that the inner dialogue helps people to reflect on past experiences in order to make better decisions the next time a similar scenario arises. Therefore, it helps us to choose the suitable procedure of action (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015). Our interviewees also use their internal dialogue to congratulate or crush themselves, like two of them state:

“‘Yeah, well that was very well done’, ‘it was following the structure precisely’, or ‘it arrived at the purpose beautifully’, and I say stuff like that to myself when I have a monologue to reward myself for something that happened, that I am happy about. Or it can also be nagging, it can also be annoying” (Bogdan).

“It was like I have to go running, I have to do this and that or else you don't achieve your goal, or else you fail yourself” (Markus). Also to get prepared because they are anxious about a conversation that they are going to have or about fake scenarios created in their heads, as interviewee Bogdan reports. In this way, the inner voice makes it possible to anticipate the consequences of present situations or behaviours. It also allows imagining hypothetical scenarios with their respective decisions, to test their consequences without choosing the wrong one (Baumeister and Masicampo, 2010). According to interviewee Flavia it is a kind of internalised paternal voice that reminds her of the things that she should or should not do in each situation (rules, patterns...), conditioning their decisions and actions. This example shows how our inner voice serves a sort of function of safety, which attempts to make us

comply with the social norms to guarantee our acceptance (Werani, 2014). Conversely, Victor reports that he sees his internal voice as a support buddy or a partner in crime, saying:

“If you like going to the gym or working out, it’s like a support buddy who’s like: ‘you can do it, you just need to do a few more reps!’ Or when you’re sad, it is like... kind of one of your buddies that tries to make you a bit more happy, looking at the different aspects of life”.

It also helps them to clarify and describe their feelings. As Baumeister and Masicampo (2010) say, human communication (both with other people and with ourselves), helps us to understand thoughts, feelings and internal conditions.

However, as may be seen due to the answers, recognizing that they are using their inner voice to do certain things could be confusing sometimes. Although the function of reflecting is the easiest for them to identify. We can see that in the answers of some of our interviewees: *“I would say that only for reflecting... or at least I don’t realise myself doing other stuff”* (Martha), and *“reflecting a lot too, I don’t know of the day or my behaviour as well. I think that’s it, I can’t think of anything else”* (Flavia).

Self-image in inner speech

This section closely ties to the previous one, but is concerned with one specific aspect of our subjects’ experience of inner speech - their self-image. As we aim to find out whether people can guide their inner speech to be more compassionate, knowing how our participants speak to themselves helped us to guide further questions in order to gain some empirical data for our problem formulation. In case they are happy with the level of compassion in their inner speech, we were able to ask whether they actively worked on that. In case they mentioned being harsh, or destructive, it allowed us to ask about the context for such self-image in their inner speech, whether they actively think about the way they view themselves, and whether they ever considered the possibility of being able to affect this self-image. On top of that, we believe self-image within your inner speech is part of one's experience of inner speech. Thus, the question also relates to the first part of our problem formulation.

Here, we received a relatively mixed pool of answers. There were two participants (Martha & Markus), who confidently say they are now satisfied with how they view themselves in their inner speech. Interestingly, both of them claimed to have actively worked on it using specific techniques – mindfulness (Martha) and verbal affirmations (Markus). There is theoretical

support for the plausibility of both of these approaches in our theory section and we were positively surprised that our participants mentioned having a positive experience using them. We deem it is important to note that the only two people who have attempted a certain intervention to their inner speech are the only two people who claim to be fully satisfied with the way they view themselves in it.

On another note, two of the interviewees agree that it is their environment that defines the nature in which they view themselves in their internal dialogue. They claim: *“The way that I talk to myself relies a lot on how I am viewing myself at the moment, and also in the moment or environment I am in”* (Lucía) and *“It depends, Sometimes. It changes a lot. Depends on the situation, on my mood and everything. Umm, I can't say that I am satisfied with it all the time”* (Flavia). There will be an entire section of the analysis related to the perceived consequences of the environment on our participants' inner speech, so we will not try to go deeper into it here.

The same two participants also talked about being harsh with themselves in their inner speech. They mentioned how they feel it affects their self-image and that they would like to improve and work on it as follows: *“There are some things that I would want to work on, sh*t like the patterns, when it is kind of self-destructive or something”* (Flavia) and *“Regarding my self-image, I would like to be less destructive, even though that also depends on the day. I feel like I am constantly fighting my inner voice”* (Lucia). A similar degree of importance towards one's self-image in their inner speech is voiced by Bogdan as well: *“I think there is more to gain from loving yourself more. So, in a more structural approach, I should improve that”* (Bogdan).

Thus, we can conclude that half of our respondents have to some degree expressed a desire to be more compassionate in their inner speech. The other three were overall satisfied with their self-image in the context of their inner speech. Although, two of them spoke about having to actively try and get there using specific psychological interventions. Furthermore, multiple interviewees talked about how their view of the self is impacted by the environment.

Still on the subject of the self-image in the inner speech, all of our interviewees agree that, sometimes, they talk to themselves in a harsh manner. However, each one describes different situations. Lucia tells us that she does this especially when she is not being productive or when she thinks about her body image, saying this like: *“sometimes whenever I have a problem I tend to make myself feel guilty about it and talk to myself that way”*. By

comparison, Flavia relates it to the pressure of being “perfect” in certain social situations in which she may have done something wrong. As she states: *“when I feel like somebody might have done something wrong or could have thought of that about me or something like that... I over analyse that”*.

The common point that we can find in all of them is expectations. Both self-imposed and those of their environment. Some of our interviewees share:

“Having worked with different projects in the past, that wasn’t so successful, you always have like, maybe doubt if that was the right choice at the time, to pursue that project. Even though there was a slight chance that might be successful, and still being disappointed when it turned out to be a failure” (Victor).

“Just you know, reinforcing this idea that you’re not capable enough, not good enough, or something. And I find myself doing that with myself in my inner voice, it’s argh, fucking nagging” (Bogdan).

Thus, even if our respondents are satisfied with their level of compassion or intend to increase it, they all describe different situations in which they continue to talk destructively to themselves. As we have mentioned, we have inferred that the expectations that are created around them have a lot to do with their destructive dialogue. Pressures and self-judgments are one of the main obstacles that stop them from guiding their voice into a more compassionate one. Although it is clear that they are all aware of the impact this has on their lives and they are working to change it.

The significance of environment

We have asked all our participants about the perceived connection between their inner speech and the external environment, both childhood and present. This directly relates to our research question which deals with the relation between internal and external speech. Asking about the environment allowed us to see whether our subjects feel that the nature of their inner voice varies along with changes in their immediate environment. This is also relevant to our problem formulation, as it explores the importance of the environment in trying to guide one’s internal dialogue to be more compassionate. Furthermore, our problem formulation is concerned with how people experience their inner speech. This question helps us gain some understanding on the role the environment plays in their experience.

All our participants agree that the environment and their internal dialogue are related in some ways. As mentioned in the previous section, some of them even mentioned their immediate environment when asked about the nature of their inner speech – saying that their self-image changes along with their environment.

When it comes to the childhood environment, perhaps the most concrete examples were given by Lucia. Firstly, she remembers her mom being very strict to her when it came down to academic accomplishments. She shares: *“My mother has always been really hard on me on the matter of studying since I was little. Maybe that is the reason why it is hard for me to talk to myself in a more compassionate way whenever I am in exam periods”*. Furthermore, Lucia also mentions a competitive relationship with her sister that has affected her self-image. Following up on that, one of our interviewees deems to have a similar experience when it comes to the relation between their academic expectations and childhood *“My parents were really strict about academic stuff... And that's where I am most hard on myself now”* (Martha). Furthermore, she also thinks her childhood friend group was harder on herself than the friend groups she surrounds herself with now, suggesting that it may be part of the reason why her inner speech is at a better place now. Bogdan also recalls having grown up in an environment that has not always been too supportive, saying the following: *“just you know, reinforcing this idea that you're not capable enough, not good enough, or something. And I find myself doing that with myself in my inner voice”*. The other respondents also thought that the childhood environment has an impact on inner speech but did not provide specific examples from their own lives. One of them told us that it has been easy for him to see the positive side of things because he has not lived through difficult situations and grew up within a supportive environment. Therefore, having a happy childhood has made it easier for his internal voice to be more compassionate.

We can thus conclude that we have received various concrete examples in which three of our participants' childhood environment still affects their inner speech to this day. As previously mentioned in the paper, inner speech is developed throughout early stages of childhood (Vygotsky, 2012). Therefore, it makes sense that the manner in which our participants were spoken to by their parents still impacts their internal dialogue now.

In the question regarding in what ways does their inner voice affect their everyday life, some of our interviewees agreed that everything they say to themselves will affect what they are doing next, especially in the short term. Sometimes they change plans or do different things

depending on how constructive or destructive they feel their internal dialogue is. For example, one of them tells us that if she feels very insecure about her body, she may decide to stay home even though her initial plan was to go out with her friends. She shares: *“like the example I said before, if I am feeling really insecure and my inner voice is just telling me how bad I look that day, sometimes I change my plans to stay inside”* (Lucia). This relates to another participant's response. He shares that sometimes, even if you are simply doing an everyday task, childhood memories may come to your mind implying that you are not good or capable enough. In his words:

“Because sometimes it brings up some of my childhood moments in which, you know, not always being in a very – very supportive environment... there was still that ‘not good enough’, or they would do it instead of you with no words, just pushing you aside and doing it for you. Just you know, reinforcing this idea that you’re not capable enough, not good enough, or something” (Bogdan).

This is something that many of the participants have mentioned a lot and in which they agree on, how important their childhood memories have affected their current inner voice. Therefore, your childhood environment and what you have learned throughout your life also affects the way your everyday life activities.

But it is not all negative. Flavia, for example, says that it can also help to overcome initial negative feelings about something. She gives an example of this:

“But sometimes (using your inner voice) it can also lead in the direction that is like talking to a friend and then you make yourself do something that you don’t feel like doing and then it ends up being the better decision, so it can also help a lot to overcome initial negative feelings about something for example”.

Sometimes reflecting a lot on something and doing the opposite of what you felt, can lead to something great, making you overcome your initial negative feelings.

Again, some of them agree that they have continuous conversations with themselves, even for basic things, so they do not feel lonely during the “journey”. One of them has stated:

“Is like having another person to bounce ideas off in real-time. But sometimes it may be wrong, you know, you get wrong impressions, and you get to feel a bit bad for jumping to conclusions. But in that way, I think It affects my everyday life because you have somebody to

bounce off ideas with, so it is not such a lonely journey, at the end of the day. Even though you're with yourself, you're always in constant conversation with yourself on different topics, or different things that you are thinking of. Could be what to eat tonight, or why you should buy this tuna instead of that stake” (Victor).

It is a constant dialogue between oneself where they use it for everything. They agree that their internal dialogue and the consequences it entails, help them to reflect on their behaviour. One of them says:

“So there is development, and that's how I can reflect on past things and notice that there are patterns that I want to get rid of or identify the patterns when I am in a new environment, when I get new input from other people. So then I can notice things that were not evident for me, that were normal, and then I can umm maybe reflect on them a little bit more” (Flavia).

This means it is used as a tool in their everyday life to get long term goals, and also to learn how to adapt in new situations. It could be considered an adaptation trait that we have, talking to ourselves to reflect on our behaviour and make strategic decisions so we can grow and adapt in new environments.

Internal Dialogue as an autonomously initiated process and awareness

In order to address the research question, we have been interested in the interviewee's descriptions of their experience of awareness regarding their internal dialogue, or whether it is something autonomous, or unconscious. Additionally, we wanted to know if there are specific situations when the awareness arises. Here we present the formulated question together with the shared accounts of our respondents: do you sometimes experience that your inner dialogues just go on and it feels autonomous/unconscious? Are you sometimes unaware? When do you become aware?

In light of the above-mentioned accounts of experiencing internal dialogue as an autonomous process, we can learn/observe something about the fine line that constitutes the border between unawareness and awareness. This has been generally described by our subjects as a process that *“starts unconsciously somewhere, already automatic,”* as Bogdan puts it. There is a consensus among the persons we have talked to regarding the fact that it seems to be “automatic” in the sense of not being aware of it or intentional. However, our subjects tend to assign this particular phenomenon as occurring mostly in relation to their critical internal

dialogue, when they experience their inner voice in a harsh manner, as Martha, Bogdan, Flavia, and Lucia, as they described, they find themselves becoming aware of their internal dialogue, as an autonomous, already initiated process when they are experiencing an internal dialogue / "doubling" that is unsupportive, and often associated with early childhood and environmental factors. For instance, as Martha stated, *"In the beginning, I think it's always unconscious, mostly the bad thoughts"*. As well as Bogdan, for whom, as he put it, *"is mainly on the negative side, in my view. It's like I find myself in the middle of it, scolding myself."* Similarly, Flavia and Lucia are saying that they become aware of their inner dialogue when that experience has a negative emotional impact, as when being harsh with themselves. In Flavia's words, *"I think it is when it affects my feelings, and I feel like I can't like it is not just a thought that goes away... When my mood changes, I know it is time to stop."* Similarly, as Lucia depicts the phenomenon, *"I will become aware till it reaches the point of limit when I am feeling really bad about myself and I have to go like: What am I doing? Let me stop for a second and think about what I am thinking."*

From a developmental perspective, these instances belong to what Vygotsky referred to as "verbal thought," which functions, in his view, as the psychological mediator between cultural symbolic systems and individual language and imagery (Vygotsky, 2012) and which is developed at the stage of egocentric speech. Drawing on one of Vygotsky's key arguments says that at this early stage, the speech structures that the child mastered, essentially, "become the basic structures of their thinking" (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 100).

Furthermore, Holzkamp's focal point is its function, considering internal dialogue as *"intersubjectivity of deliberating, planning and negotiation that, in the absence of others, the individual virtually enters into a "dialogue" with her/himself"* (Holzkamp, 2013, p. 291). Moreover, Holzkamp uses the word "doubling" when referring to the processes of inner dialogue. In his words:

"I would rather tend to view this "doubling" as a genuine characteristic of the existential form of human subjectivity, as it were, its "implicit intersubjectivity" which, in its expansion, constitutes the manifold social-factual world relations in which the various forms of human agency can develop" (Holzkamp, 2013, p. 291).

This process functions as expressing demands, instructions, comments, and questions for the self. Nonetheless, it may also be used for mere listening to oneself and dwelling on one's

thoughts (Holzkamp, 2013). For him the process of “doubling” constitutes the essential mental process where one’s subjectivity and agency is created. Therefore it is important to note that Holzkamp uses the word “agency” when referring to the function of internal dialogue. As such, the following section of the analysis will address the matter of agency over one’s inner dialogue, based on our interviewee’s described experiences.

Another interesting learning from this particular inquiry, that we find relevant to point out, is regarding the transition from internal speech to thinking. As it appears in our descriptive data, most of our subjects refer to internal dialogue and thinking as the same matter. That is to say, considering how they refer to inner speech and thinking as highly interconnected. As Martha, and Markus, in particular, recount their experience of inner dialogue as thinking. For instance, in Martha’s view, “ *it’s always unconscious, mostly the bad thoughts.*” Similarly, subject Markus describes his inner speech taking over as “*trapped in [his] negative thoughts*” whereas Markus refers to his experience of lack of agency over the internal voice, at times when he tries to be creative, as “*having had all these thoughts going through.*”

On the same note, as Werani points out, Vygotsky explored the transformation of speech into thinking in depth and made the point clear with his famous words: “Inner speech involves the evaporation of speech into thought” (Werani 2014, p 279, quoting Vygotsky, 1987, p. 280). In doing so, he was interested in the connection between thought and language. As his work highlighted the fact that inner speech is characterized by both structural and functional characteristics and that it is the place where words are converted into thought. In his words:

“Inner speech is not the interior aspect of external speech — it is a function in itself. It still remains speech, i.e., thought connected with words. But while in external speech thought is embodied in words, in inner speech words die as they bring forth thought. Inner speech is to a large extent thinking in pure meaning” (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 264).

Agency over critical internal dialogue

This section will emphasise the phenographic dimension of the analysis, including detailed descriptions of the experiences and activities of our subjects in regard to the degree of agency over their critical internal dialogue. As such, relating to the previous interview question, addressing the process of inner speech as autonomous, the following question aimed to find whether our subjects feel like they can intervene or change the tone and direction of their inner voice, and whether they can stop themselves when it becomes too negative and

judgemental, and if yes, how? As a common aspect of this inquiry, our interviewees expressed that they have some agency. Moreover, the degree of agency, as well as their approach, differed among the six individuals we discussed with. However, we can observe two major categories of activities. On the one hand, when becoming aware of their negative and destructive internal dialogue, Victor and Flavia distract themselves with activities such as physical exercise or socialising in order to change their mood. For instance, for Victor, his doing to intervene and change his inner critic is by improving the well-being of the body, as he puts it:

“I think just by using... using the inner chemicals in our bodies, for example, you go work out, and you get a rush, or endorphins, or go for a sauna, or go talk to people. Do things that can influence the chemical balance in your body as well. Because, it is like when... for example when you’re grumpy because you haven’t eaten something, then your voice would be in a different way. So, if you get something to eat, then you can change...”

On the same note, Flavia stated as such:

“Uhh, sometimes I can, and I try, but sometimes I can’t. Then I’ll just try to distract myself, or like, when I notice that I can’t, I try to act against it in some ways, but it doesn’t always work (...) So, if it is, for example, negative self-talk, right, I would I think I would just do something that doesn’t require so much thinking so umm, so I wouldn’t focus on the inner voice that much or something that I just like to do I don’t know like reading or doing some physical activity. So yes, I would do that”.

On the other hand, Martha, and Victor stated that they adopt mental activities such as mindfulness and self-compassion with the intention to intervene and change the tone and direction of their inner voice. For instance, Martha uses mindfulness as an anchor, when she finds herself carried by her destructive critical inner voice. In her words:

“When I find myself saying something bad I’m like... “stop it”. If I find myself saying something wrong, I try to come back to the good line... It’s like an anchor. I did this thing in mindfulness... you have your anchor, so you find yourself going somewhere else and you pull yourself back... so yes, I can find myself and control my inner voice (...) It’s the mindfulness technique. I literally use mindfulness for finding myself not being nice to myself and then going back to a good inner dialogue, that’s the anchor that I mentioned”.

On a more detailed note, Bodgan's actions to intervene and change the tone and direction of his 'nagging' inner voice, are self-awareness - as a means of gaining agency, and self-compassion - as a way of consciously changing the attitude and language of the inner voice towards a compassionate voice, and towards an attitude of support, similar to being supporting towards a good friend who is going through hardship. In his words:

"You know, there is now a shift in societal attitudes towards whatever mental health means, and there are a lot of articles that go around everywhere on the internet, on how to take better care of yourself. And I find myself sometimes reading some of these articles and practising some of these methods that I also find very useful for me. I'm not a sports person, so you won't be seeing me taking on the advice of joining the gym now, I might wish dangerously to do that, and I'm not very good at meditating and keeping my mind in one place. But what I do, I use some, uh deep breathing methods at times or just trying to increase awareness and trying to use more compassionate language. I found out that some methods help me at least get more aware, and when I use negative speech towards myself, it does pop up more than in other moments, and in these moments, I get more aware of them more and more by using... hmm, self-compassion and more compassionate language to myself and I heard it a lot from a lot of people many times and the usage of this specific type of language, talking nicely to yourself, like you would have done to a good friend or is something that works in these moments. I try to become more self-aware and meditate or think to myself a bit or try to actively be more compassionate to myself, I tell myself that I should use and I do talk to myself in this nicer language. So I think this is something that I do actively but not necessarily my methods, whatever circulates now in the world of self-improvement and whatever people are doing. I mean, there are many ways there. And even if you try to research them online, you find out that many are backed up by people that say they brought results to them or you know, so it's really hard to wake up by myself. I don't like sports, so not in that direction, but otherwise, I like to try stuff".

Self-compassion is a process of being kind and understanding to oneself during difficult times. It is the ability to be non-judgmental and supportive of oneself, to recognize suffering, and to be accepting of it (Viou & Georgaca, 2021). As for Bogdan, he found inspiration on social media, being the 'go to place' when in need of a self-development guide. As in his case, social media can be used as a tool to promote self-compassion by providing a safe space for individuals to express their thoughts and feelings without fear of judgement or criticism.

For example, people can use social media to share stories about their struggles and how they overcame them. Sharing these stories can help to show others that they are not alone in their struggles and that it is possible to find comfort and support in difficult times. In addition, social media can be used to connect with like-minded people who share similar experiences and can offer advice and support. Furthermore, social media can be used to create a positive environment where people can share positive affirmations and messages of self-compassion. As Bogdan's account of agency over his scolding inner dialogue suggests, by doing this, it helped him to create a space of understanding and acceptance, where individuals can learn to view themselves in a more positive light and be kinder to themselves.

However, Markus does not provide a description of a concrete method that he adopts to intervene and change his critical inner dialogue, but rather he emphasises the importance of self-awareness in the sense of constructive critique, as essential in order to pursue agency over the critical inner dialogue. As he puts it:

“It is a mix. Because I don't think you can change it unless you are aware of and acknowledge the active effect of the passive processes in your life, if you know what I mean. Let's say you just got promoted to being a boss in your job. You don't really know what it all entails. Whereas, in this example, if you don't know the ways you can change your inner voice – how would you? ...But I think you can change it. Not without a part that's like realising that you can actually change it. Also, the methods for changing anything are different from person to person. So, it's about finding one's own way. I think”.

Bilinguality and inner speech

When the interview participants were asked if they use multiple languages in their inner speech, we received differing answers. Martha and Lucia both said that they only use their native language in their internal dialogue with themselves. The only exception is when they are in a particular setting or context that forces them to use English intensely throughout the day. While all the other participants said that they use multiple languages in their inner speech, even if it is primarily their native language. Flavia and Markus actually experienced that when they use English in their internal dialogue it is a more positive voice. Markus suspects it might be because he is subconsciously proud of being able to speak multiple languages, saying *“it comes with a bit of pride every time I talk to myself in English, if you know what I mean”*.

According to Dewaele it is more likely for people to use their native language in their inner speech but with time a learned language can also take the role of the native language in our internal dialogue (Dewaele, 2015). In his research paper he found that people who use their second or third language still prefer to use their native tongue for emotional inner speech. (Dewaele, 2015). He writes that *“it takes a while before an LX becomes internalized to the point of becoming a multilingual’s “language of the heart” and “LX can attain embodiment and take over -or share- the role of the L1 in inner (emotional) speech”* (p. 15). It seems that the majority of our interviewees use their native language in their inner speech, even though they use english in their everyday life it has not taken over the role of their internal dialogue.

Discussion

In this chapter we will discuss our findings in which we will focus on explaining what we have found out during the course of this paper. In addition, we will also argue the notion of self-compassion taking into consideration the importance that it has in our paper. Furthermore, we will go through the limitations that we encountered along the way and review ideas that we have had in mind during the making of our project, and that we would have liked to do if we had had more resources and time, as well as some suggestions for future research.

What have we found out

This section of the discussion aims to condense and discuss the findings of this research project. The previous chapters gave the reader an overview of our theoretical background, the methods we have employed to collect empirical data, and an overall resume of what the interviewees had to say and how that relates to our project. Here, we try to merge all of these together and critically discuss the conclusions that can potentially be drawn to the problem formulation we posed at the beginning. We will firstly provide the reader with a review of the analysis chapter, identifying the most relevant points gathered from our interviews. To avoid repetition with the content presented in our analysis, this part will be brief and just serve as a quick summary. Afterwards, we will discuss these findings, the method we used to achieve them and whether and to what extent they can be generalised, as we consider the act of generalisation as one of the major disputes in psychological research.

Our problem formulation explores whether it is possible to guide one's inner speech to become more supportive. It was interesting to hear two of our interviewees (Martha and Markus) talking about trying concrete ways of achieving that, which both relate to the concepts presented in our theory chapter. Moreover, both of them thought that it worked. This indicates that some people are able to successfully improve the nature in which they talk to themselves using different methods, at least when it comes to their perception of it. This also relates to the question of agency, suggesting that it is – at least to some extent – possible to take ownership of one's inner voice. To support that, there were moments in each of the interviews where our subjects hinted towards having some kind of control over their inner speech. For Martha, it was mindfulness. Bogdan mentioned that physical activity or talking to other people helps him. Victor talked about being able to interfere in cases where he is

“scolding” himself in his inner speech. Similarly, Flavia also talked about managing to steer her self-talk in a different direction when it gets destructive, although she claimed it does not always work. Lucia even said she *knows* she can interfere when she gets isolated in negative thoughts. For example, by forcing herself to focus on the personal characteristics she likes about herself. This ties very closely to the words of Markus, who claims that he has also used verbal affirmations to make his inner speech more supportive. Overall, the experience of our subjects indicates that they are capable of gaining control over their inner voice and actively affect its nature.

We consider that the method used to approach our project helped us a lot to obtain the information we were looking for to be able to approach the analysis mentioned before. The people interviewed that came from different backgrounds, brought different perspectives to their vision of themselves, the way of guiding their inner voice, and the influence of their environment. However, they all shared the same factor: using more than one language in their everyday lives. This has provided us with very diverse and enriching answers in terms of content. In addition, not following a structured interview has helped the conversation to go forward in a much more fluid way. In this manner, thanks to the semi-structured interviews, the interviewees felt free to talk to us openly about their personal experiences, point out relevant facts about their internal dialogue, and note distinctions that we had not taken into consideration. Thus, it was easier to establish a dialogue and create a climate of trust. Therefore, our interviewees were able to reach the expected objective: to openly express their thoughts, feelings, and emotions about their experience with their internal dialogue.

Now, we believe it is fitting to discuss the extent to which the findings of our interviews can be generalizable. Many scholars would perhaps claim that it is difficult to draw conclusions after talking to 6 people, building on the normative idea that the validity of research increases proportionally with sample size. However, we argue the notion of generalising is much more complex in psychological research. Humans are subjective beings. All are unique and complex. As Valsiner (2014) puts it: “*We need to come to terms with the uneasy recognition that it is the personally unique subjectivity that is objective in psychology.*” (p.6). Building upon that, some researchers argue that it is not feasible to access the subjective human experience through numbers and traditional forms of generalisation. Bush-Jensen and Schraube (2019) even claim that “*the epistemic strategies of measuring can reduce and even distort psychological phenomena beyond recognition and the possibility of grasping human*

subjectivity, experience, and action dissolves in thin air.” (p. 224). Therefore, they claim that it is *situated generalisation* that should serve as the standard strategy for psychological researchers. By situated generalisation, they mean a scientific research method that is rooted in its internal relationships to the outside world as well as the specific socio-historical settings, everyday routines, and subjectivities in which knowledge is really produced (Busch-Jensen & Schraube, 2019, p. 225). As we have mentioned previously, Busch-Jensen & Schraube (2019) proposed a method to achieve a way of generalisation of the subjective experience of acting subjects – “Zooming in to zoom out and zooming out to zoom in”. By building on this strategy and by keeping in mind the subjectivity of human experience, we think that the knowledge produced by our interviews is valid and helps us better understand the complexity of internal dialogue as experienced by our subjects, as well as in general.

Self-compassion

Now, we find it relevant to further discuss the notion of self-compassion, as it takes central part in our inquiry throughout the paper. The concept of self-compassion is relatively new to the West, though it has been part of Eastern philosophical thought for centuries. In the last decade, there has been a growing exchange of thought between Buddhism and Western psychology, particularly related to the link between mindfulness and mental health. A positive way of relating to oneself, which does not include self-judgement or social comparison, but compassion instead, has emerged from this interchange. For instance, as Singla (2011)’s article suggests, the increasing interest in meditation has been noticed among researchers in Danish institutions, who have conducted multiple scientific studies on the subject. These studies have revealed that practising mindfulness meditation can offer a 10-20% increase in mental capacity and reduce the risk of stress. Moreover, mindfulness meditation has been found to be effective in treating psychological problems like phobias and is often combined with existential psychotherapy to provide even more benefits. This trend is mirrored in the international context, with mindfulness-based stress reduction being implemented for patients and corporate managers, mindfulness seminars being provided for organisations and mindfulness being integrated into various aspects of human experience (Singla, 2011, p. 221).

Limitations

During the development of this project, we recognise that we have encountered some limitations along the way that have hindered in some way our job, one of them being the time

limitation and organisation between us. We are five members in the group from different environments and with different lifestyles overall, and it has been a challenging task working around our different schedules while having classes, work and exams. We had a lot of ideas at the beginning, some of which we could not carry out because of the time limitation.

Initially, we had the idea to conduct autobiographical research by us researchers writing diaries of our inner voices. It seemed like a great method to research internal dialogue, however we quickly realised that in order for us to see any patterns or changes in our inner voice we would have to write about our experiences for a longer period of time. Additionally, we also decided not to go with the autobiographical approach, because we agreed that the awareness that we would have to share and analyse our inner voice would inevitably influence the way we share our personal experience in our diaries.

We also wanted to share another challenge we had in connection with the variety of people we had in our group. Some of the members of this group are exchange students and something that really struck us was the working methodology. We have to acknowledge that learning a new way of working that we had never practised or heard about before, was a challenge that took us some time to get used to. We had some expectations about how it was, however getting adjusted to a new country, with new people and a new way of working took us more time than expected. Our home university does not have a semester research project and has a completely different focus on the working methodology, so us exchange students were confused about how to conduct this and how to do it on time, taking into consideration that it is complicated to start working completely different from what you are used to. Despite this, we tried to listen and take in all of the information we were provided by the rest of the group members, who were really understanding of the situation and were always up to explain whatever was needed and also from our supervisor, who guided us through the process.

Another limitation we had was the amount of data we recollected. We interviewed 6 people, which was enough for us to draw conclusions about most of the things we wanted to find out about. However, it would have been a great idea to interview more people so that we can take into account further variables like: context, environment, age, gender... And by doing this, seeing if there are any differences between these categories and seeing which variables might affect the person and their inner speech. We would have liked to do more interviews but taking into account our time limitation, the workload and the number of people we have to do this project, it was not possible, nevertheless it would be a great idea for further research.

Further suggestions

We have gotten a few examples from our interviewees, such as practising mindfulness, changing the body's chemistry by exercising, or simply stopping oneself by rationalising the issue and consciously saying kind sentences to themselves. However, we feel that it would be beneficial to further discuss ways in which one can change a destructive episode in their inner speech. As most of our interviewees suggested that they handle difficult episodes in their inner speech by consciously stopping their self-destructive dialogue and talking themselves out of it, we will discuss the effect of implementing a third-person narrative to stop a negative spiral.

Ethan Kross, one of the influential psychologists whose work we have been referring to throughout the paper, has been researching the connection between language and thought. He argues that *“subtle shifts in language can be harnessed to change how people cognitively represent the self”* (Gainsburg & Kross, 2020, p. 5). He conducted multiple psychological experiments on the use of a third-person narrative, referring to ourselves by our names or pronouns, which can help us to create a distance between ourselves and the negative feeling that the inner speech might generate within. Arguing that *“distanced self-talk (i.e., using one's own name and other non-first person pronouns to refer to the self) promotes self-control and wise reasoning”* (Gainsburg & Kross, 2020, p. 1).

He also suggests that the frequent use of a self-centred “I-talk” is connected to negative feelings about the self and depression (Kross, 2021). He explains the reason for that is that being immersed in the focus on us causes us to lose perspective on the situation. Exactly for this reason he suggests taking a “fly on the wall” position when we have to reflect on our issues and mistakes. He argues that *“self-distancing manipulations may be useful in helping people cope not only with depression and anger related to ruminating over the past but also social anxiety surrounding the future.”* (Kross et al., 2014). Using a third person narrative to create distance between us and the thing that is stressing us out is working in the way that it takes away the victim narrative, that the bad thing will happen to you personally.

Kross (2021) explains that *“there is a potent psychological comfort that comes from normalizing experiences, from knowing that what you're experiencing isn't unique to you, but rather something everyone experiences”* (p. 82). Having the ability to take a step back and look at your thought process from an objective perspective can help to tackle life's challenges

by reminding yourself that your inner voice might not be telling the truth about your behaviour and potential.

In conclusion, we can say that the language we use in our inner speech has a significant role in our mental well-being. The method of self distancing that we have described above can be implemented in one internal dialogue in order to get out of a negative spiral, by simply changing the way we refer to ourselves in our heads.

Another suggestion that we consider interesting for further research is on the links between inner speech, language, and thought. Although Vygotsky (2012) suggests that inner speech is closely linked to language and thought. However, further research is needed to explore the nature of these links and the implications for understanding language and thought. It is necessary to consider that a more thorough understanding of inner speech implies that language plays a role in thinking (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015; Vygotsky, 2012). Such an assertion would not necessarily be accurate. This definition of inner speech may be more accurately seen as a model that humans typically process complex ideas, and not as an indication that inner speech is indispensable for the high-level processes of cognition. Further scientific research is necessary to make these kinds of claims. Additionally, as Alderson-Day and Fernyhough pointed out, claiming that inner speech works as a “language of thought” can be confusing and difficult to test (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015, p. 956).

It has been suggested that inner speech is an integral element of mental health (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015). It has been linked to the development of self-discipline and executive functioning, which are both essential for controlling emotions and behaviour (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015, p. 945). Additionally, inner speech may be a mechanism for self-observation and teaching, helping to restrain negative feelings and improper conduct. Moreover, we argue that inner speech might be a potent tool for problem-solving and dealing with challenging scenarios, giving a chance for thoughtfulness and generating substitute plans for addressing stressful situations. In light of this, our second suggestion for further research is the relationship between inner speech and mental health. As Alderson-Day & Fernyhough (2015) argues that inner speech has an important role to play in mental health, therefore, further research is needed to explore the nature of this relationship and the implications for understanding mental health.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of inner speech is a paradox, it is an integral part of people's lives, yet it poses a challenge to those attempting to study it scientifically, as by definition it is an internal psychological process and any expression of it causes it to lose its essence. However, combining a range of methodologies and approaches has helped to illuminate the subjective experience of inner speech in everyday life. Research has shown an important role of inner speech in the development of children (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015). In adulthood, inner speech is involved in many cognitive processes, but it appears there is a high degree of variation between individuals in how inner speech is used, (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015, p. 957). The aim of this research is trying to form an understanding of the subjective experience of inner speech by relying on the situated knowledge of our interview participants and analyse the collected empirical data to gain a better knowledge about the topic. This helps us researchers to better understand how people experience their internal dialogue, and see how they are able to improve the quality of their mental health and everyday life by having a more compassionate inner voice. Having a self-compassionate inner voice is linked to higher levels of relational well being (Yarnell & Neff, 2013) and for this exact reason, we propose that internal dialogue should be more talked about and the concept that should be given more attention in the field of psychology. To gain better understanding of human beings' inner lives, it is necessary to further scientific knowledge of the various ways in which inner speech can be used, as this has implications not only for understanding development, and mental health, but also for gaining insight into the way human beings experience everyday life.

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