An Exploration of how Socially Anxious Individuals Experience Interpersonal Relationships

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AN EXPLORATION OF HOW INDIVIDUALS AFFECTED BY SOCIAL ANXIETY EXPERIENCE RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

ABSTRACT

Social anxiety causes disruption to relational functioning leading some researchers to describe it as an interpersonal problem (Alden & Taylor, 2004, 2010). However, research exploring interpersonal aspects of social anxiety is strikingly limited. Furthermore the research that has been conducted is predominantly informed by a positivist and quantitative framework. The way in which socially anxious individuals 'experience' interpersonal relationships with others is therefore poorly understood. The present study addresses this gap in the literature by adopting a phenomenological approach. The aim of this research is to uncover the understandings, explanations and perceptions socially anxious individuals have of interpersonal relationships. Six socially anxious individuals were recruited from UK based social anxiety support groups and interviewed about important relationships in their lives. The data generated was subjected to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis leading to four superordinate themes: 'The Desire for Intimacy', 'Interpersonal Barriers', 'Interpersonal Adaptations' and 'Intimacy'. These superordinate themes, along with their corresponding subordinate themes, capture the rich phenomenological world of the participants and provide insight into the way socially anxious individuals experience interpersonal relationships with others. These findings are discussed in the context of the existing literature. Implications for clinical practice and further research are suggested.

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Social anxiety describes a fear of a range of social situations such as meeting new people, talking in groups and public speaking. Lifetime prevalence rates are as high as 12.1% in western nations (Kessler, Chiu, Demler & Walters, 2005) making it one of the most common mental health problems. In the 1980's social anxiety was described as 'the neglected anxiety disorder' due to lack of research exploring factors which contributed to its development and maintenance (Liebowitz, Gorman, Fyer, & Klein, 1985). Fortunately this is no longer the case as the Cognitive Model of Social Phobia (Clark & Wells, 1995) and the Cognitive-Behavioural Model of Anxiety in Social Phobia Disorder (Rapee & Heimberg 1997) have made vast contributions to the way in which social anxiety is understood and treated. The prominence of these models has meant that most of the existing research has focused on intrapersonal factors such as anxiety related symptoms and behaviours. However, much less is known about interpersonal aspects of social anxiety disorder. This is despite the fact that Alden and Taylor (2004, 2010) argue that social anxiety is fundamentally an interpersonal disorder. They define it this way because socially anxious individuals experience anxiety when contemplating interacting with other people. This causes them to behave in a manner that impairs their ability to form satisfying interpersonal relationships. While recent research has begun to explore interpersonal aspects of social anxiety there remain many gaps in our knowledge. Furthermore the research that has been conducted has almost without exception been informed by a quantitative and positivist framework. As a result there is limited understanding of how socially anxious individuals experience interpersonal interactions. To address this shortcoming the present study will take a phenomenological approach.

This chapter begins with a literature review. First, it will trace the evolution of the construct of social anxiety and explore its epidemiology. It will then outline cognitive-behavioural models and consider how these have contributed to the way in which social anxiety is understood and treated. Finally, it will examine the empirical literature to determine what is known and what is not known about the interpersonal aspects of social anxiety.

1.1 Literature Review

The literature review was carried out in two stages which are outlined below.

1.1.1 Narrative Review

The first stage was a narrative review and comprised of reading key articles on social anxiety which included matters of definition, epidemiology, symptomatology, key models and treatment. This is summarised in sections 1.2 to 1.6

1.1.2 Systematic Review

The second stage was more systematic and focused on reviewing studies which explored interpersonal aspects of social anxiety. It is summarised in section 1.7. The stages followed in this search are outlined in appendix A.

1.2 The Construct of Social Anxiety

The problem of social anxiety has been described in a myriad of ways using both everyday and scientific language. Commonly used terms which fall under the umbrella of social anxiety include: shyness, performance anxiety, social phobia, avoidant personality disorder, public speaking anxiety, speech anxiety, communication apprehension, dating anxiety, stage fright, fear of strangers, embarrassment, social inhibition, social timidity (Leitenberg, 1990). In addition, there exist a number of similar anxiety-related syndromes, such as selective mutism and body dysmorphic disorder, which contain a strong social component (McNeil & Randall, 2014). Unfortunately the existence of such a vast array of terminology used to describe a number of somewhat overlapping constructs serves to obfuscate the already quite complex task of defining social anxiety (McNeil & Randall, 2014).

Another problem is that many of the most commonly used terms (e.g. shyness, stage fright, embarrassment) have their origins in everyday language. This can lead to the practice of 'psychological imperialism' in which professional definitions are superimposed onto constructs which have been defined by the lay person

(Harris, 1984). This can lead to all sorts of conceptual confusions and distortions. Another layer of complexity is added by the fact that some level of social anxiety can be adaptive to the extent that it helps people to stay in line with what is socially acceptable and avoid social exclusion. Moreover, some socially anxious behaviours can lead to positive outcomes. For instance, a distant and detached person may come to be regarded by others as 'interesting', 'enigmatic' and 'mysterious' (McNeil & Randall, 2014).

So while defining social anxiety is a necessary first step in this thesis, it is one that is fraught with difficultly. This chapter will approach the task by tracing the evolution of constructs related to social anxiety in order to shed light on how we arrived at our current understanding.

1.3 Tracing the Evolution of the Construct of Social Anxiety

1.3.1 Early Conceptualisations

The pattern of behaviour exhibited by those who today would be thought of as socially anxious is likely to be as old as humanity. Literary descriptions of individuals afflicted with social fears can be found as far back as 400BC when Hippocrates described the case of a man who:

> …through bashfulness, suspicion, and timorousness, will not be seen abroad; loves darkness as life, and cannot endure the light, or to sit in lightsome places; his hat in his eyes, he will neither see nor be seen by his good will. He dare not come in company for fear he should be misused, disgraced, overshoot himself in gesture or speech, or be sick; he thinks every man observes him (as cited in Stravynski, 2007, p.18).

However, it wasn't until the French psychiatrist Paul Hartenberg published Les Timides et la Timidite in 1901 that there was medical interest in the phenomena. Hartenberg emphasised the situational nature of social anxiety which he argued was evoked when an individual experienced a fear of falling short of the expectations of others (Stravynski, 2007). He regarded social anxiety as a dimensional construct which ranged from mild shyness to severe social fears

(Fairbrother, 2002). A few years later in 1903, the French psychologist Pierre Janet first coined the term 'social phobia' (*phobie des situations sociales)* to describe the fear of being observed while speaking, writing or playing the piano (Heckelman & Schneier, 1995). Janet emphasised that the fear experienced by those afflicted with social phobia was only present when they were required to perform in public. When these individuals were alone they could perform such tasks without any difficulty (Stravynski, 2007). These conceptualisations are strikingly similar to modern understandings of social anxiety. However in the succeeding years interest in the construct of social anxiety waned and the term 'social phobia' fell into disuse (Stravynski, 2007).

1.3.2 Renewed Interest and Introduction to DSM-III

It was not until the 1960's that the term 'social phobia' was resurrected by Marks and Gelder (1966) who used it to describe patients who experienced "phobias of social situations, expressed variably as shyness, fears of blushing in public, of eating in meals in restaurants, of meeting men or women, of going to dances or parties, or of shaking when the centre of attention" (p. 218). A few years later, Marks (1970) further elucidated the classification of social phobia by distinguishing it from other phobias such as animal phobias and agoraphobias. Gradually this conceptualisation of social phobia came to prominence and in 1980 the Third Edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III, American Psychiatric Association, 1980) formally introduced the diagnosis of 'Social Phobia' to describe individuals who suffered from a "persistent, irrational fear of, and compelling desire to avoid, a situation in which the individual is exposed to possible scrutiny by others and fears that he or she may act in a way that will be humiliating or embarrassing" (DSM-III, American Psychiatric Association, 1980, p. 228) and experienced "significant distress because of the disturbance" (DSM-III, American Psychiatric Association, 1980, p. 228).

This conceptualisation of Social Phobia focused on fears related to performance situations, such as speaking, eating, writing or urinating in the presence of others and overlooked those who experienced excessive anxiety in numerous social situations such as informal conversational interactions (Rapee, 1995). Individuals

who experienced these difficulties were more likely to be given the diagnosis of 'Avoidant Personality Disorder' which was also a new diagnosis introduced to DSM-III and included the following criteria: hypersensitivity to rejection; unwillingness to enter into relationships; social withdrawal; desire for affection and acceptance; and low self-esteem (DSM-III, American Psychiatric Association, 1980). While these new diagnoses shared a number of similarities comorbidity was not permitted. Avoidant Personality Disorder was the predominant categorisation and was an exclusionary criteria for Social Phobia. This meant that individuals who met the criteria for both disorders would only be diagnosed with Avoidant Personality Disorder.

Despite the fact that Social Phobia now existed as a discrete diagnosis with a clear set of defining criteria over the following years it remained relatively unstudied. As a result major uncertainties existed concerning its classification, prevalence, severity, etiology, assessment and treatment. At the time this led to some to refer to it as 'the neglected anxiety disorder' (Liebowitz et al., 1985).

1.3.3 DSM-III-R and Substantial Revisions

The introduction of the revised edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III-R, American Psychiatric Association, 1987) saw substantial changes to the defining criteria of Social Phobia. Firstly, "significant distress" became "interference or marked distress". This meant that individuals who avoided feared situations and therefore did not experience significant distress could be diagnosed on the basis of the impairment to their social functioning. Secondly, it now became possible to diagnose Social Phobia and Avoidant Personality Disorder in the same person. Finally, in an attempt to broaden the definition which had previously been limited to performance situations, a generalised subtype of social phobia was introduced which required that "the phobic situation includes *most* social situations [emphasis added]" (DSM-III-R, American Psychiatric Association, 1987, p.243).

Unfortunately, these changes lead to confusion and ambiguity with how social anxiety was understood. Firstly, it was unclear how "most social situations" should be understood. One interpretation was that "most social situations"

referred to the quantity of social situations feared and the diagnosis should be given to people who experienced social anxiety in a high number of social situations. However, it was unclear how many social situations would warrant a diagnosis (Turner, Beidel, & Townsley, 1992). Another interpretation was that "most social situations" referred to a subtype distinction between those who had fears which occurred during social situations, such as conversational interactions or parties, and those who had fears which occurred during performance situations, such as public speaking or eating in the presence of others (Turner et al., 1992).

Perhaps in an attempt to address these ambiguities the following years saw an increase in the number of research studies which examined social anxiety. In an effort to reconcile both interpretations of "most social situations" Heimberg, Holt, Schneier, Spitzer and Liebowitz (1993) proposed that social anxiety should be broken down into three subtypes consisting of (1) a performance subtype which described individuals whose fears involved the public performance of activities that could be comfortably carried out alone, (2) a limited interactional subtype which described individuals whose fears were restricted to one or two socially interactive situations such as going on a date or meeting with someone in authority and (3) a generalised subtype which described individuals whose fears included most social situations. While a cluster analysis carried out by Furmark, Tillfors, Stattin, Ekselius and Fredrikson (2000) found support for these three subtypes, a subsequent cluster analysis carried out by Iwase et al. (2000) found evidence for different subtypes, including one characterised by offensive fears. Adding to the confusion, a cluster analysis by Perugi et al. (2001) found evidence for the existence of five subtypes including: interpersonal contact, formal speech, stranger-authority contact, eating and drinking while being observed and public performance.

Additional uncertainty arose from the considerable conceptual similarities between the supposedly distinct diagnoses of Social Phobia and Avoidant Personality Disorder were now even stronger than in the previous editions of DSM (Reich, 2009). For example, a key criteria of social anxiety was "fears that he or she may do something or act in a way that will be humiliating or

embarrassing" (DSM-III-R, American Psychiatric Association, 1987, p. 241). This was very similar to one of the key criteria for Avoidant Personality Disorder which stated that the individual "fears being embarrassed" (DSM-III-R, American Psychiatric Association, 1987, p.353). As a result, many psychologists and researchers remained unsure whether Social Phobia and Avoidant Personality were in fact distinct entities.

1.3.4 DSM-4

Despite these ambiguities the concepts of Social Phobia and Avoidant Personality Disorder remained relatively untouched in the Fourth Edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV, American Psychiatric Association, 1994). However, one notable change was the introduction of the term 'Social Anxiety Disorder' which was placed in parentheses following 'Social Phobia'. This term had been had become increasingly popular with a number of researchers at the time who felt that it better conveyed the level of impairment (Liebowitz, Heimberg, Fresco, Travers, & Stein, 2000). When the Text Revision of Fourth Edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR, American Psychiatric Association, 2000) was published a few years later it retained the defining criteria used in DSM-IV with only minor additions. For instance it was noted that in some cases social anxiety disorder may be associated with suicidal ideation.

1.3.5 DSM-5

With the publication of the Fifth Edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V, American Psychiatric Association, 2013) the term 'Social Anxiety Disorder' officially superseded the term 'Social Phobia'. Other notable changes were that the generalised sub-type was dropped and replaced with a performance only sub-type which was assigned "if the fear is restricted to speaking or performing in public" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This was despite the fact that a number of studies had highlighted the difficulty of accurately identifying social anxiety sub-types. In addition, the judgement of whether the social anxious response was excessive or responsible was now to be made by the clinician. Previously it was required for the socially anxious individual to recognise that their anxious response was excessive. Other changes

were minor, for instance it was now specified that the symptoms must be present for six months in order for the diagnosis to be given to adults. Previously this was only a requirement for children. One issue not resolved by the Fifth Edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V, American Psychiatric Association, 2013) was the relationship between Social Anxiety Disorder and Avoidant Personality Disorder. Despite continuing conceptual overlap these constructs were left relatively untouched. Clearly, clarifying the conceptualisation of these constructs is a necessary next step for researchers.

1.3.6 Categorical and Dimensional Conceptualisations

The categorical approach to conceptualising social anxiety used in the DSM system dominates the field in Western nations. This is not without good reason. Diagnoses such as 'Social Anxiety Disorder' and 'Avoidant Personality Disorder' are clinically useful categories that provide a way of rapidly communicating the main features of a clinical case. Indeed, many socially anxious individuals use these diagnostic categories when talking about their social anxiety. However, like any method of definition the approach of the DSM has its limitations. For instance, the comorbidity between the various disorders in DSM suggests that the boundaries between different diagnostic categories are somewhat artificial. Furthermore, as Stein (2012) points out, social anxiety does not have an underlying reality in the same way as a physical object. Despite this, categorical conceptualisations can encourage the practice of 'essentialism' in which the diagnosis of social anxiety is reified. This can have negative consequences in clinical and research contexts. For instance, clinicians may focus their assessment primarily on the operational criteria outlined in the DSM rather than exploring the unique experiences of each individual. Similarly, researchers may fail to appreciate the complexity of the socially anxious experience and overlook other important factors not listed in the defining criteria. As a result there can be an under appreciation of the importance of variations in experience of social anxiety from individual to individual (Stein, 2012).

An alternative approach favoured by some recent researchers is to conceptualise social anxiety as existing on a continuum of intensity across the population ranging from minor fears that are helpful and adaptive to extreme fears which are

disabling and impairing (McNeil & Randall, 2014). This conceptualisation is similar to the dimensional definition originally offered by Paul Hartenberg in 1901. Support for this understanding comes from studies which have found that social anxiety disorder is on a continuum with milder phenomena such as shyness (Ruscio, 2010). Such a conceptualisation may also help to clarify the nature of the relationship between the Social Anxiety Disorder and Avoidant Personality Disorder. For instance, one possibility is that rather than being separate constructs they differ only in terms of severity (Schneier, Blanco, Antia, & Liebowitz, 2002). However, while this conceptualisation allows for a more fine-grained approach it is not without its limitations. For instance, Stein (2012) points out that dimensional approaches do not necessary avoid the problem of essentialism. Instead of there being reification of a single entity, social anxiety, there is potentially reification of the multiple symptoms of social anxiety (Stein, 2012).

Whether or not social anxiety is best understood as a diagnostic category or as existing on a dimension of intensity it seems clear that there are a significant number of people who experience high levels of distress and impairment as a consequence of interpersonal interaction. Stein (2012) argued that categorical and dimensional approaches to conceptualising psychiatric symptoms could be seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Therefore for the purposes of this research I will employ categorical and dimensional approaches in tandem. Throughout the thesis I will use the term 'socially anxious individuals' as a shorthand way to refer to those who experience social anxiety. However, I acknowledge that social anxiety exists across a dimension of intensity ranging from mild fears to extreme anxiety. Furthermore, I acknowledge that there will be both commonalities and differences in the experiences of those who I describe as socially anxious.

1.4 The Epidemiology and Impact of Social Anxiety

1.4.1 Prevalence
Following the above, epidemiological studies should be interpreted in light of the shifting definitions and conceptual confusions. Such factors are likely to have

influenced the prevalence and comorbidity rates. Nevertheless, there is agreement among researchers and clinicians that social anxiety is one of the most common psychological problems. Liebowitz et al. (2000) reported that social anxiety was the fourth most common psychological disorder behind major depressive disorder, alcohol abuse and specific phobias. Kessler, Chiu, Demler and Walters (2005) reported that it has a 6.8% 12-month and a 12.1% lifetime prevalence rate in adults. However, it should be noted that many people affected by problematic levels of social anxiety do not show up in the clinic and do not receive a diagnosis. Furthermore it is estimated that 50% of people who have this problem never receive professional help (NICE, 2013).

1.4.2 Comorbidity

Those who meet the criteria for Social Anxiety Disorder have also been found to meet the criteria for a range of others disorders including: depression, generalised anxiety disorder, specific phobias, panic disorder and agoraphobia (Kessler et al., 2005; Ohayon & Schatzberg, 2010). In addition, social anxiety is associated with high rates of alcohol and drug misuse (Morris, Stewart, & Ham, 2005). This comorbidity can make formulation difficult and complicate treatment plans.

1.4.3 Gender Differences

Most studies indicate that Social Anxiety Disorder is more common in women than men (Davidson, Hughes, George, & Blazer, 1993; Fehm, Beesdo, Jacobi, & Fiedler, 2008; Weinstock, 1999). However, in clinical samples gender differences are usually absent, which has led some to suggest that social anxiety more strongly interferes with daily functioning for men than for women (Turk et al., 1998).

1.4.4 Life Course

Problematic levels of social anxiety typically begin to emerge in late childhood or adolescence and for many persists into adulthood (Beidel & Turner, 2007). Several studies have followed-up adults diagnosed with Social Anxiety Disorder for extended periods of time (Bruce et al., 2005; Reich, Goldenberg, Goisman, Vasile, & Keller, 1994; Reich, Goldenberg, Vasile, Goisman, & Keller, 1994).

These studies have generally found that it remains chronic and unremitting condition in the absence of treatment.

1.4.5 Cultural Considerations

While social anxiety does appear to exist across cultures the way in which it is conceived, experienced and expressed appears to differently across nations (Caballo et al., 2008). For instance, high levels of social anxiety are more frequently indicated in self-report scales in East Asia relative to western nations (Okazaki, Liu, Longworth, & Minn, 2002). However, this social anxiety would appear to be non-pathological and the result of collectivist cultural orientations which promotes sensitivity to others. Conversely, the rate of Social Anxiety Disorder in eastern cultures is markedly lower than in the west (Hofmann, Anu Asnaani, & Hinton, 2010). There also appear to be unique culturally specific manifestations that go beyond western conceptualisations (Hofmann et al., 2010). For instance the *Māori* people of New Zealand have the concept of *whakamā* which involves shyness, embarrassment and feelings of inadequacy but also feelings of shame and being unsettled (Sachdev, 1990). Those afflicted by this condition sometimes display a behaviour termed *whakapekem* which involves running away and hiding (Metge & Kinloch, 1978).

1.4.6 Impact

Given the social nature of human beings social anxiety impacts on interpersonal relationships in a number of ways. Firstly, socially anxious individuals have been shown to have less social relationships than people who do not experience social anxiety. This includes smaller social networks (Falk Dahl & Dahl, 2010), fewer close friends (Whisman, Tess, & Goering, 2000), fewer online friends (Fernandez, Levinson, & Rodebaugh, 2012), fewer dating and sexual relationships (Leary & Dobbins, 1983). They are also less likely to be married (Hart, Turk, Heimberg, & Liebowitz, 1999). Secondly, it would appear that socially anxious individuals are less satisfied with the quality of the interpersonal relationships that they do have (Cramer, Torgersen, & Kringlen, 2005) and those who are married are more likely to experience significant martial distress (Whisman, 2007). Thirdly, these relationship deficiencies would appear to have many implications including: greater loneliness (Falk Dahl & Dahl, 2010),

perceived absence of social support (Cramer et al., 2005), lower quality of life (Eng, Coles, Heimberg, & Safren, 2005), greater use of health care resources (Stein, McQuiad, Laffaye, & McCahill, 1999) and greater rates of alcohol and drug dependence (Morris et al., 2005).

1.5 Cognitive-Behavioural Models of Social Anxiety

Given the prominence that cognitive-behavioural models have had on the way in which social anxiety is understood and treated these will now be reviewed. The most widely cited and applied of these models has been the Cognitive Model of Social Phobia (Clark & Wells, 1995) and the Cognitive-Behavioural Model of Anxiety in Social Phobia Disorder (Rapee & Heimberg 1997). These are outlined below.

1.5.1 Cognitive Model of Social Phobia

According to Clark and Wells (1995) social anxiety is the result of several dysfunctional processes. First, when socially anxious individuals enter a social situation they worry others will judge their social performance negatively. In response to this fear they turn their attention inwards and rely on interoceptive information as the main source of feedback about their performance. This information often confirms the person's fears about their social abilities (e.g. I feel nervous so everyone must realise I am nervous). At the same time the processing of external information is greatly reduced and any ambiguous external cues that the socially anxious individual does pick up on are likely to be processed in a negative manner. Furthermore, socially anxious individuals visualise themselves as they think others see them. Unfortunately, this image is influenced by cognitive distortions and is therefore likely to be negative. Clark and Wells (1995) referred to the inward attentional bias and the negative self-image as the *processing of the self as a social object.*

Second, socially anxious individuals employ *safety behaviours* which are defined as overt or covert acts intended to reduce or avoid a perceived threat while increasing a person's sense of safety (Salkovskis, 1991). For instance, a socially anxious individual may avoid eye contact in an attempt to escape the scrutiny of

others. Unfortunately, while this may serve to reduce anxiety in the short-term, it impedes threat disconfirmation, thus maintaining anxiety in the long-term. Furthermore, safety behaviours can have the paradoxical effect of increasing the likelihood of negative evaluation. For example, if a socially anxious individual avoids eye contact others may come to view them as unfriendly.

Third, socially anxious individuals overestimate the how negatively others judge their social performance and view the consequences of a negative social performance to be much worse than they are. Consequently they are hypervigilant in monitoring their own social performance. Unfortunately, this hypervigilance can impair their ability to fully engage in a social interaction. This can lead to real performance deficits that serve to confirm the person's negative beliefs about their social abilities.

Fourth, socially anxious individuals engage in pre- and post-event processing. Prior to entering a social interaction they experience anticipatory anxiety and recall previous negative social interactions. Following the social interaction, they review their social performance in detail. This 'post-mortem' is coloured by cognitive distortions and can be quite distressing. Both serve to maintain negative self-schemas and increase the likelihood of avoidance.

The Cognitive Model of Social Phobia (Clark & Wells, 1995) is supported by numerous studies which have found evidence of information-processing biases in socially anxious individuals (see Hirsch & Clark, 2004, for a review). Research also supports the effectiveness of CBT techniques such as cognitive restructuring, exposure, applied relaxation and social skills training (see Rodebaugh, Holaway, & Heimberg, 2004, for a review). However, it is not clear which specific treatment techniques works best for whom and there remain a large group of non-responders (Liebowitz et al., 1999).

1.5.2 Cognitive-Behavioural Model of Anxiety in Social Phobia Disorder
Rapee and Heimberg's (1997) Cognitive-Behavioural Model of Anxiety in Social Phobia Disorder, updated by (Heimberg, Brozovich, & Rapee, 2010), also outlines a number of key dysfunctional processes. First, when a socially anxious

individual enters a social situation they form a distorted mental representation of how they imagine others perceives them. This may take the form of an image or a vague sense of themselves. It is influenced by a number of sources including actual images of the self (e.g. reflections) and memories of previous social interactions that were difficult. These inputs constitute a *baseline image* which may then be modified by (over)interpretation of internal and external inputs during the social interaction. For instance, if the person feels hot they may believe that they are sweating noticeably, or if a member of the audience yawns during the social interaction the person may think they are coming across as boring. This mental representation is further maintained by the tendency for socially anxious individuals to generate negative images of themselves performing poorly in feared social situations (Chiupka, Moscovitch, & Bielak, 2012).

Second, socially anxious individuals simultaneously allocate attentional resources to their internal mental representation and to the task of monitoring the external world for signs of negative evaluation. The effort required to do this makes it difficult for the socially anxious individual to be fully present in the social interaction and as a result their social performance becomes impaired. This impaired social performance is then seen as evidence which confirms their negative mental representation.

Third, socially anxious individuals believe that other people hold extremely high standards of social performance and fear that failure to live up to this unrealistic standard will lead to negative judgement. Interestingly, the model also posits that socially anxious individuals fear positive evaluation. This is rooted in the fear that a successful social interaction will mean others will raise the standards by which they will judge future performances. Thus socially anxious individuals fear *any* evaluation, regardless of valence.

Fourth, socially anxious individuals judge the probability and cost of evaluation by others to be high. This activates behavioural, physical and cognitive symptoms of anxiety which feed back into the mental representation in the form of a positive feedback loop. This vicious cycle continues until the social interaction comes to a natural end or the person leaves the situation.

Fifth, after the socially anxious individual leaves the social situation they continue to ruminate about their social performance. These thoughts are likely to be distorted, negative and highly distressing. Similarly, they may experience anticipatory anxiety before entering a social situation. This can include recalling previous negative experiences, worrying about the consequences of poor social performance and over-preparation for the interaction. These thought processes are thought to contribute towards avoidance.

Since the publication of The Cognitive-Behavioural Model of Anxiety in Social Phobia Disorder (Rapee and Heimberg, 1997) there have been a number of reviews of the literature which have supported the different aspects of it (see Roth & Heimberg, 2001; Turk, Lerner, Heimberg, & Rapee, 2001 and Heimberg et al., 2010). As with the previous model, support also comes from the effectiveness of CBT techniques such as cognitive restructuring, exposure, applied relaxation and social skills training (see Rodebaugh, Holaway, & Heimberg, 2004, for a review). However, it remains unclear which specific treatment techniques works best for whom (Liebowitz et al., 1999).

1.5.3 Comparison of the Models

Both models share substantial common ground and have more similarities than differences. They both highlight the role of dysfunctional processes including the extensive application of attentional resources to identifying threat cues; maladaptive avoidance behaviours; and dysfunctional cognitions such as distorted mental representations and excessively high standards for social performance. There are however a number of subtle differences. For instance, Clark and Wells (1995) assert that a person's attention shifts inwards to monitoring internal cues and that this prevents them from attending to the reactions of others. In contrast, Rapee and Heimberg (1997) argue that although there is an increase in self-focused attention, the person also engages in scanning the external environment for the presence of threat cues. Another difference relates to the significance attributed to safety behaviours. Clark and Wells (1995) regard safety behaviours as one of the core processes by which social anxiety is maintained. In contrast, Rapee and Heimberg (1997) recognise

that socially anxious individuals are likely to engage in safety behaviours but do not see these as more problematic than overt avoidance.

<u>1.5.4 Impact of Models</u>

These two cognitive-behavioural models have served as the foundation for how social anxiety is understood. They have spurred a large body of research and have made vast contributions to how social anxiety is treated. However, the prominence of these models has meant that the majority of this research has focused on the anxiety related symptoms and behaviours of socially anxious individuals. Much less attention has been paid to how interpersonal processes contribute to the development and maintenance of social anxiety or to the consequences of social anxiety on a person's interpersonal relationships. This is despite the fact that social anxiety disrupts an individual's ability to form satisfying personal relationships and could therefore be argued to be fundamentally an interpersonal problem (Alden & Taylor, 2004, 2010). It is to the interpersonal perspectives of social anxiety that we now turn.

1.6 Interpersonal Perspectives

Alden and Taylor (2004, 2010) have advocated the use of constructs and empirical findings from the discipline of interpersonal psychology to enrich the general understanding of social anxiety. This approach is compatible with the cognitive-behavioural approach but differs in terms of emphasis. While cognitive-behavioural models stress the role of intrapersonal factors such as dysfunctional beliefs, the interpersonal approach focuses on how social anxiety disrupts interpersonal relationships and how interpersonal processes can shape and perpetuate social anxiety (Alden & Taylor, 2004, 2010).

The research literature in interpersonal psychology is extensive and a number of different models, theories and approaches have been developed. Despite some differences, interpersonal models share the common assumption that people are inherently social beings and the ability to form relationships with others is necessary for psychological health. Alden, Regambal and Plasencia (2014) highlighted three areas that are particularly relevant to understanding the

processes involved in adaptive relational functioning: the interpersonal circumplex, models of friendship development and risk-regulation models.

1.6.1 The Interpersonal Circumplex Model

The interpersonal circumplex model (see Figure 1), used to understand interpersonal interactions, was first proposed by Leary (1957) and later adapted and developed by other researchers (e.g. Foa, 1961; Kemper & Collins, 1990). While the terms used to describe the constructs involved have varied over the years, modern interpretations align with Leary's original model. The circumplex consists of a two-dimensional array organised around a vertical axis of agency, which ranges from dominant (top) to submissive (bottom), and a horizontal axis of communion, which ranges from hostile (left) to friendliness (right). These axes create a circle that can be divided in to segments to represent various combinations of agency and communion. While Leary (1957) originally divided the circle into sixteen segments, more recent versions of the model (e.g. Wiggins, 1991) typically divide the circle into octants theorised to represent different interpersonal styles.
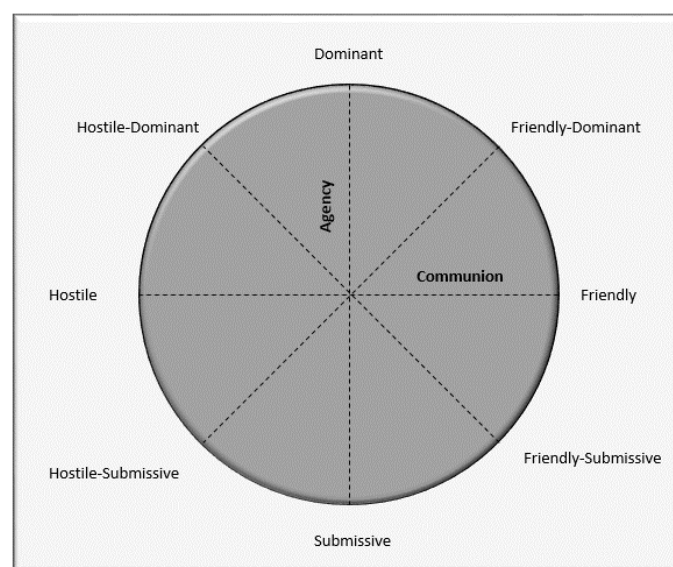
Figure 1: The Interpersonal Circumplex (adapted from Wiggins, 1991)

Interpersonal researchers have used the circumplex to outline a number of principles relevant to understanding interpersonal interactions. The first principle is *complementarity,* which describes how "a person's interpersonal actions tend

(with a probability significantly greater than chance) to initiate, invite, or evoke from an interactant complementary responses" (Kiesler, 1996, p200-201). According to this principle, two people who are complementarity will occupy similar positions on the horizontal dimension of communion (friendliness will be met with friendliness and hostility will be met with hostility) but opposite positions on the vertical dimension of agency (dominance will be met with submissiveness and submissiveness will be met with dominance). Studies have shown that interpersonal interactions which follow the complementarity principal tend to be more satisfying (Tracey, 2004) and evoke more positive feelings in the interactants (Tiedens & Fragale, 2003). In contrast, interactions that do not follow this principle have been shown to produce negative feelings and lead to an increase in blood pressure and heart rate (Smith & Ruiz, 2007).

The second principle is *mutual influence,* which describes how interactional partners adjust their individual behaviour to move towards more complementary behaviours, either during the course of a single interaction or over multiple interactions. For example, Markey and Kurtz (2006) assessed the behavioural styles of college roommates after they had been living together for two weeks and again after they had been living together for fifteen weeks. They found that while the roommates did not show complementary behaviour at two weeks they showed strong complementary behaviour at fifteen weeks (Markey & Kurtz, 2006)

The third principal is the concept of the *impact message,* which describes how all social behaviour (even doing nothing) sends an interpersonal message which invites a complementary response from others (Kiesler, 1996). Importantly, an individual's social perception and expectations about someone can influence their initial interpersonal behaviour towards that person and evoke a response that confirms their expectations in a self-fulfilling prophecy. Thus if an individual expects someone they meet for the first time to be warm and friendly they are more like to act toward them in a way that invites a warm and friendly response. This pattern could be described as a positive interpersonal transaction cycle (Kiesler, 1996). Conversely, if an individual expects someone they meet for the first time to be cold and distant they are more like to act in a way that invites a cold and distant response. This pattern could be described as a negative

interpersonal transaction cycle (Kiesler, 1996). The interpersonal transaction cycle is represented diagrammatically in Figure 2.
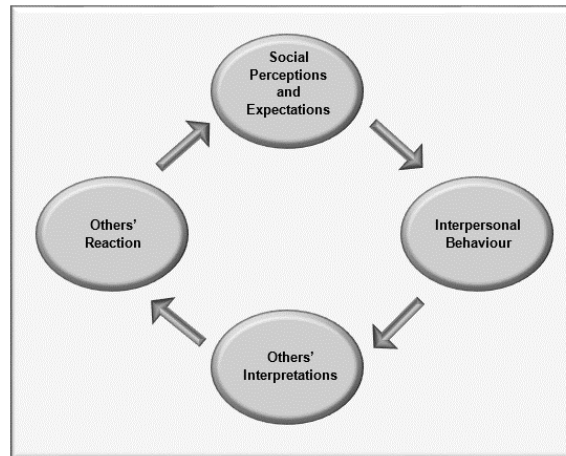
Figure 2: Interpersonal Transaction Cycle (adapted from Alden, 2005)

1.6.2 Friendship Development Models

The development of friendship between two individuals is characterised by the movement of the relationship from an emotionally superficial one to one that is more intimate. This experience of intimacy involves "feeling understood, validated, cared for, and closely connected to the other person" (Reis & Shaver, 1988, p.385). In order to understand how the development of intimacy affects socially anxious individuals it is helpful to consider models that outline how intimacy develops between those who are not affected by social anxiety.

Altman and Taylor's (1973) seminal Social Penetration Theory proposes the concept that at the start of a potential relationship two individuals store a mental picture of each other which is based on their current experiences with one another as well as the value of the other in comparison to previous relationship experiences. If this picture is favourable then the person is likely to respond to the other by increasing their level of self-disclosure and the relationship develops. However, if this picture is unfavourable then the person is likely to respond to the other by decreasing their level of self-disclosure. This can lead to the development of the relationship slowing down or stopping (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

Reis and Shaver (1998) drew on Social Penetration Theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) to develop their Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy. According to the model there are two essential elements in the development of intimacy between individuals. The first element is the *self-disclosure* of information to the other person. This may involve voluntary self-disclosure (e.g. sharing thoughts, opinions and emotions) but it may also include any involuntary and/ or unconscious behaviour that reveals information about a person (e.g. frowning or smiling). Generally, self-disclosure is positively related to likability (Collins & Miller, 1994) provided that the self-disclosure does not exceed social norms (e.g. revealing too much too soon) or is not overly negative (e.g. persistent complaining).

The second element is *partner responsiveness* to self-disclosure, which Reis and Patrick (1996) suggest is even more important to the development of intimacy than self-disclosure. If a conversational partner is responsive and shows interest in a self-disclosure then the person who made the self-disclosure is likely to experience *felt understanding* – the sense that they are accurately perceived, understood, appreciated and cared for (Reis, 2007). Furthermore, people who perceive their partners as responsive are more likely to become responsive to what their partner has to say, leading to a more satisfying interaction for both parties (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998). However, if a conversational partner responds to a self-disclosure with disinterest then the person who made the disclosure is unlikely to experience felt understanding. This can inhibit the development of the relationship. An important element in these theories of interpersonal relationships is the idea that a person's preconceptions, expectations, motives, goals and fears can influence how they interpret the responses of their partner, particularly if the response is ambiguous (Reis & Patrick, 1996).

In sum, emotional intimacy develops between individuals when they are open with and responsive to each other. However, should problems occur with self-disclosure (e.g. limiting self-disclosure, disclosing too much too soon or being overly negative) or with responsiveness (e.g. displaying disinterest or ambiguous

behaviour which can be interpreted as disinterest) then intimacy is unlikely to develop.

1.6.3 Risk-Regulation Model

The Risk Regulation Model describes the processes involved in the formation and maintenance of romantic relationships. Hendrick (1981, p. 1150) argued that "in no relationship is the other more significant, the commitment more profound, or the risk more intense". The model can also be applied to the development of close friendships in which a person becomes increasingly vulnerable as the friendship becomes closer (Cuming & Rapee, 2010). Such relationships for most individuals are tied to physical and mental health (Acevedo, Aron, Fisher, & Brown, 2012; Bodenmann & Randall, 2013), lower mortality (Rogers, 1995) and subjective well-being (Dush, 2005).

Murray, Holmes and Collins (2006) proposed the Risk-Regulation Model to explain how people in close relationships balance the competing needs to feel connected to the other and protect themselves from the pain of potential rejection. According to the model, when an individual in a close relationship believes the other person views them negatively they may employ risk regulation processes such as physically withdrawing, reducing self-disclosure, employing aggressive behaviour meant to persuade a partner to distance themselves, prioritising other relationships, and direct partner devaluation. These behaviours serve to diminish the other person's value as a source of connection and pre-emptively minimises the pain of rejection (Murray et al., 2006). However when an individual in a close relationship believes the other person views them positively they can more safely increase their dependence on the other by attaching greater value to their partner's qualities, entering into situations in which the partner has control over the immediate outcome and forgive transgressions (Murray et al., 2006).

The Risk Regulation model (Murray et al., 2006) also outlines two preconditions for the formation of satisfying romantic relationships. The first is based on the somewhat cynical idea that individuals in romantic relationships continue to compare the characteristics of their current partner against the characteristics of

other potential partners or past partners. Individuals are thought to be motivated to stay in a relationship when their current partner compares favourably against others (Murray et al., 2006). The second is confidence that one is positively regarded by their partner, which leads to a sense of *felt security* (Holmes & Murray, 2007). The development of this sense of security may be facilitated by a partner's behavioural cues. However, behavioural cues are not always clear so in order to develop positive romantic relationships it is necessary for individuals to go beyond their partner's behavioural cues and project positivity on to them. This is called *audacious trust* (Holmes & Murray, 2007) and has been linked with positive relationship functioning (Lemay & Clark, 2008). Unfortunately, the development of audacious trust is impaired by the presence of self-doubt. Individuals who hold negative views of themselves tend to assume that others see them the same way (Murray, Holmes, Griffin, Bellavia and Rose, 2001). Such individuals display *cautious trust* which has been found to lead to underestimation of how much their partners values them (Murray, Holmes, Griffin, Bellavia, & Rose, 2001). Thus, individuals who hold negative views about themselves are likely to have difficulty fulfilling their need for security.

1.7 Interpersonal Interactions in Socially Anxious Individuals

Having considered three models of interpersonal functioning we will now review the findings of empirical studies that address the interpersonal aspects of social anxiety.

1.7.1 Social Anxiety and Interpersonal Behaviour

The central fear of socially anxious individuals is that others will judge them negatively. Unfortunately, a number of studies suggest that this fear is not entirely misplaced. For instance, Creed and Funder (1998) found that conversational partners of socially anxious individuals showed less liking for them, engaged in less eye contact, dominated and controlled the interaction and showed more irritation towards them. Similarly, Heerey and Kring (2007) found that the conversational partners of socially anxious individuals failed to experience the increase in positive affect experienced by conversational partners of non-socially anxious individuals. Other studies show that socially anxious individuals are

perceived as less friendly, less attractive and as less effective as leaders (Purdon, Antony, Monteiro, & Swinson, 2001).

Interpersonal researchers are interested in exploring what it is that socially anxious individuals do to provoke this negative reaction from others. To date, most studies have focused on the interpersonal consequences of safety behaviours. These behaviours are defined as overt or covert acts employed by an individual to reduce or avoid a perceived threat while increasing a person's sense of safety (Salkovskis, 1991). While such behaviours may serve to reduce anxiety in the short-term, they interfere with the individual processing evidence that contradicts the feeling that the situation is dangerous, thus impeding threat disconfirmation and serving to maintaining anxiety in the long-term. Plasencia, Alden and Taylor (2011) asked socially anxious individuals to identify the safety behaviours they used. The two most common were *avoidance* and *impression management* strategies (Plasencia et al., 2011)*. Avoidance strategies include minimising talk, avoiding eye contact and disclosing very little. Impression management strategies include excessive self-monitoring (e.g. censoring behaviour and speech), over-preparation (e.g. relying on prepared scripts) and innocuous sociability (e.g. inauthentic displays of nodding and smiling). An important point here is that the latter behaviours (smiling and nodding) are similar to the adaptive social behaviours used by non-social anxious individual to favourably present themselves. However, in the case of the socially anxious individual such behaviours do not reflect that the person is genuinely engaged in the conversation. Rather they serve to present an 'artificial self'.

Models of interpersonal functioning predict that the use of such safety behaviours will have social consequences. Plasencia et al. (2011) found when socially anxious participants used *avoidance* strategies their conversational partners became less interested in having future interactions with them. Thus avoidance strategies led to the formation of a maladaptive transactional cycle in which the behaviour of the social anxious individual was evoking negative reactions from others which served to confirm their social fears. *Impression management* strategies on the other hand were not associated with partner response but those who used them worried they would be unable to maintain the façade they

presented in all future interactions (Plasencia et al., 2011). Finally, with both strategies socially anxious individuals experienced a subjective sense of inauthenticity during the interaction (Plasencia et al., 2011).

Interestingly researchers have found socially anxious individuals are able to identify their safety behaviours and drop them in subsequent interactions (Kim, 2005; Wells et al., 1995). In a study exploring the effect of safety behaviours on social outcomes, Taylor and Alden (2011) asked a group of socially anxious participants to have a conversation with a trained experimental confederate who rated the interaction. Participants were then randomly assigned to either a safety behaviour reduction and exposure condition, or an exposure only condition before having a second conversation. They found that those in the safety behaviour reduction condition were rated more positively by the confederate, who also became more interested in having future interactions with them. No changes were observed in those assigned to the exposure only condition (Taylor & Alden, 2011). Thus the safety behaviours employed by socially anxious individuals to prevent negative evaluation from others appears to provoke negative evaluation. However, the above studies did have a number of limitations. The interactions which were examined took place in artificial laboratory settings and so may not reflect the behaviour of socially anxious individuals in more natural interactions. Furthermore, they focused on the interpersonal consequences of safety behaviours which are only one type of behaviour show by socially anxious individuals.

Russell et al. (2011) carried out a study which addressed these shortcomings. They employed the Interpersonal Circumplex Framework to examine a range of behaviours including submissive, dominant, hostile and friendly behaviours. Importantly, the study made use of an event-contingent recording procedure, which permitted the examination of naturally occurring social interactions. They found that while socially anxious participants reported increased submissive behaviour in response to anxiety, they responded with an increase in complementary affiliative behaviours in situations where they experienced emotional security (Russell et al., 2011). This demonstrated that socially anxious

individuals can adjust their behaviour depending on their impressions of the social environment.

In summary, studies have found that the behaviour of socially anxious individuals has interpersonal consequences. These studies have focused primarily on the impact of safety behaviours. They have found that these strategies tend to provoke a negative reaction from others and lead to those who use them experiencing a subjective sense of inauthenticity. Only one identified study has looked at affiliative and submissive behaviour in naturally occurring interactions. It found that socially anxious individuals can recognise when they feel secure and adjust their behaviour accordingly. However, there remain many gaps in our knowledge. It is unclear what contexts can lead to socially anxious individuals feeling secure. It is also unclear what alternative behaviours or strategies may help socially anxious individuals establish more positive transaction cycles. Furthermore, all of the identified literature has been quantitative and focused on the measurement of observable phenomena such as behaviours. As a result there is a lack of insight into the internal world of the socially anxious individual during interpersonal interactions. It is therefore unclear how such individuals feel during interpersonal interactions or the meanings they attribute to them.

1.7.2 Social Anxiety and Friendship Development

Socially anxious individuals report global friendship impairment (Rodebaugh, 2009). This is important as a number of studies indicate that low quality friendships increase the risk of a range of undesirable outcomes, such as increased rate of mental health problems and mortality (Giles, Glonek, Luszcz, & Andrews, 2005). Unfortunately, little is known about the impact of social anxiety on the development of friendship. As outlined in section 1.4.2 reciprocal self-disclosure is key to the development of friendship between two individuals. However, only a small number of studies have examined the self-disclosure practiced by socially anxious individuals. These studies have found that socially anxious individuals tend not to disclose very much information about themselves (DePaulo, Epstein, & LeMay, 1990; Reno & Kenny, 1992). Furthermore, socially anxious individuals are less likely to reciprocate the level of disclosure displayed by a conversational partner (Meleshko & Alden, 1993).

One explanation for these findings is that socially anxious individuals lack the necessary social skills to communicate effectively with others (Curran, 1979; Segrin & Flora, 2000). However, some studies have found that when a socially anxious individual's appraisal of the situation is manipulated, so they do not anticipate negative evaluation, they are just as intimate in self-disclosures as non-socially anxious individuals (Alden & Bieling, 1998; DePaulo et al., 1990). These findings suggest that socially anxious individuals do have the social skills to express themselves but their ability to do so depends on their reading and impression of the situation. Socially anxious individuals tend to adopt a communication strategy that is low in self-disclosure as an attempt to protect themselves from negative social outcomes. Unfortunately, this strategy appears to be self-defeating as these protective behaviours cause their conversational partner to be less interested in having future interactions with them (Meleshko & Alden, 1993).

Voncken, Alden, Bögels and Roelofs (2008) made use of structural equation modelling to outline the sequence of events that link the behaviour of socially anxious individuals to social rejection. Participants diagnosed with Social Anxiety Disorder were asked to take part in a 'getting acquainted' conversation with a conversational partner. They found that these individuals evoked negative emotional reactions in both the conversational partner and an objective observer. This reaction led the conversational partner to perceive the socially anxious individual as dissimilar to themselves. The perception of dissimilarity combined with the negative emotional reaction led to the social rejection of the socially anxious individual (Voncken et al., 2008). Thus, the socially anxious individual's attempts to avoid disapproval by limiting what they disclose about themselves appears to lead to the very outcome they are trying to avoid. As a result those who interact with socially anxious individuals are less interested in having future interactions with them. This social disengagement prevents the formation of close relationships and serves to confirm the socially anxious individual's negative view of themselves.

Despite the contributions of these studies, many gaps remain in our understanding of how social anxiety impacts the development of friendship. The

existing research has focused on self-disclosure which is only one aspect of the Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy proposed by Reid and Shaver (2008). No identified studies have explored how social anxiety impacts on experiences such as felt understanding. It is therefore unclear if socially anxious individuals ever experience the sense that they are accurately perceived, understood and cared for by others. Perhaps their reluctance to disclose personal information leads them to feel perpetually misunderstood. Alternatively, it may simply take socially anxious individuals longer to develop friendships and over time they may be able to match their partner's level of disclosure. It is also unclear what socially anxious individuals want from their relationships with others. They may want to keep a certain distance to protect themselves from rejection or they may desire to overcome their fears to achieve closeness. Finally, the existing literature has been conducted from quantitative framework and involved examining interpersonal interactions in artificial laboratory settings. Perhaps qualitative studies which asked participants to reflect on relationships that were formed naturally would help to find answers to these questions. Such studies would also help to develop more of a understanding of what socially anxious individuals 'feel' and 'think' about relationship development.

1.7.3 Social Anxiety and Close Relationships

It is also important to consider how socially anxious individuals function in close relationships such as established friendships and romantic relationships. Unlike interactions with strangers, which cause the socially anxious individual to seek out protection from negative social evaluation, interactions within closer relationships may be motivated by a desire for intimacy. As such, it is possible that the self-protective communication style adopted by socially anxious individuals in interactions with strangers may be absent in closer relationships. However, such relationships are the ones were the stakes are the highest (Hendrick, 1981). This may lead socially anxious individuals to employ greater use of self-protective communication styles.

Davila and Beck (2002) carried out a study in which they used structured interviews to assess university student's relationships with acquaintances, friends, family members and romantic partners. They found that students with

high levels of social anxiety were associated with an interpersonal style characterised by avoidance of expressing strong emotions, avoidance of conflict and less assertion. Notably, these participants also reported a greater level of interpersonal dependency, suggesting that socially anxious individuals become overly dependent on the relationships they do establish (Davila & Beck, 2002). This pattern of avoidance and dependence was also found in a later study by Darcy, Davila and Beck (2005) which used questionnaires to measure the attachment styles of university students. They found that avoidant and dependent attachment styles in romantic relationships, but not other relationships, were uniquely associated with social anxiety (Darcy et al., 2005).

The tendency to avoid expression also extends to clinical samples. Sparrevohn and Rapee (2009) found that individuals diagnosed with Social Anxiety Disorder scored lower on measures of intimacy, self-disclosure, and emotional expression within the context of their romantic relationships compared to non-anxious controls (Sparrevohn & Rapee, 2009). Importantly, these scores remained consistent after controlling for the effect of low mood (Sparrevohn & Rapee, 2009). A later study found that this pattern was stronger in females than males and for negative than for positive emotions (Cuming & Rapee, 2010).

Other studies investigating social anxiety and close relationships have taken an observational approach. Wenzel, Graff-Dolezal, Macho and Brendle (2005) asked participants with high and low levels of social anxiety to discuss neutral, positive and negative topics with their romantic partners. They found that when discussing negative topics participants with high levels of social anxiety displayed more negative behaviours (e.g. less eye contact, put-downs and blaming) compared those with low levels of social anxiety (Wenzel et al., 2005). Furthermore, they showed fewer positive behaviours (e.g. giving compliments, using positive non-verbal behaviour and displaying empathy) across all topics (Wenzel et al., 2005). In another study, Beck, Davila, Farrow and Grant (2006) observed romantic couples while they completed a social-evaluative threat task (preparing a presentation). Unexpectedly, they found no difference between the support seeking behaviour of socially anxious and non-socially anxious participants. However, relationship satisfaction moderated the behaviour of socially anxious

participants in that those with higher levels of relationship satisfaction were more likely to display negative support seeking behaviours (e.g. criticising, blaming and demanding) than non-socially anxious controls (Beck et al., 2006). The authors concluded that for socially anxious individuals, satisfying relationships might function as a secure base where they feel comfortable expressing negative thoughts and feelings without fear of rejection (Beck et al., 2006). Viewed in terms of the risk regulation model, such individuals could be said to possess a sense of audacious trust (Holmes & Murray, 2007) that their partner held them in positive regard and this allowed them to overcome their fears that would have otherwise interfered with their expression of negative emotions.

A study by Kashdan, Volkmann, Breen and Han (2007) suggests that the tendency for socially anxious individuals in satisfying relationships to express negative emotions to their partner may lead to negative outcomes. They found that although the uninhibited expression of negative emotions enhanced the closeness of romantic relationships among people with low levels of social anxiety it prospectively predicted deteriorating closeness for those with high levels of social anxiety (Kashdan et al., 2007). This suggests the presence of a sad irony: once socially anxious individuals are able to overcome their fears of rejection and establish a romantic relationship they may come to rely on their partner as an outlet for their negative emotions. Overtime this may become burdensome for the partner and provoke rejection, ultimately confirming the socially anxious individual's fear that others will reject them (Kashdan et al., 2007).

Afram and Kashdan (2015) drew on the Risk Regulation Model (Murray et al., 2006) in order to explore how context affects the way socially anxious individuals relate to their romantic partners. They found that when socially anxious individuals were led to believe their romantic partner was being critical of them they responded by devaluing their partner. However, in the absence of such criticism from their partner they responded by having an overly positive perception of their romantic partner. This finding may explain why social anxiety is associated with both avoidant and dependent behaviour in romantic relationships (Darcy et al., 2005; Davila & Beck, 2002). Socially anxious

individuals may engage with strategic avoidance when they perceive there is a threat of rejection and strategic dependence when threat cues are absent. Thus social anxiety may serve to amplify the risk regulation process.

Of the limited number of studies that have explored social anxiety from an interpersonal perspective only one has taken a qualitative approach. Nielsen and Cairns (2009) asked individuals seeking treatment for social anxiety to provide written responses to questions about their single closest relationship and subjected their answers to a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis. The themes revealed positive and negative aspects of the participants' experience of interpersonal relationships. Participants reported experiencing a high degree of intimacy, trust and security. However, they also reported difficulties such as becoming over dependent on others, worrying about others' expectations and feeling like they were a burden (Nielsen & Cairns, 2009). The authors concluded that the findings were consistent with existing research which found evidence of relational deficiencies but elaborated on existing research by revealing positive aspects. While this study provides a useful starting point for further phenomenological investigations it had a number of limitations. For instance, participants were asked to report on one close relationship only. This may have meant that the study failed to capture important differences in the way participants experienced interpersonal relationships with other people in their lives. Furthermore, the data was collected by asking participants to give written responses to questions. This may have meant that the data lacked the complexity and richness that it is possible to collect with semi-structured interviews.

In summary, a number of studies suggest that the close relationships of socially anxious individuals are characterised by impairment such as low emotional expression, lack of disclosure, avoidance of conflict and interpersonal dependency. However, the research is sparse and has largely been conducted from a quantitative and positivist framework. The one study to take a phenomenological approach found that in addition to relational deficiencies there was evidence of positive aspects to the interpersonal relationships of socially anxious individuals. However, there remain many gaps in the understanding of

how socially anxious individuals experience close interpersonal relationships and more research is needed.

1.7.4 Section Summary

The existing literature on the interpersonal aspects of social anxiety points towards the presence of dysfunction. This research has largely been conducted from a quantitative standpoint and predominantly yields understandings relating to models of interpersonal behaviour (Plasencia et al., 2011; Russell et al., 2011; Taylor & Alden, 2011), interpersonal skills (Alden & Bieling, 1998; DePaulo et al., 1990), factors leading to social rejection (Voncken et al., 2008), interpersonal styles and attachments (Beck et al., 2006; Cuming & Rapee, 2010; Darcy et al., 2005; Davila & Beck, 2002; Sparrevohn & Rapee, 2009; Wenzel et al., 2005), consequences of negative emotional expression (Kashdan et al., 2007) and patterns of relating (Afram & Kashdan, 2015). Despite the contributions of these studies to understanding the interpersonal aspects of social anxiety an abundance of intriguing and unanswered questions remain. For instance, are there certain there certain strategies or techniques which may help socially anxious individuals to relate more successfully? Given their difficulties disclosing information to others do socially anxious individuals ever develop a sense of felt understanding? Are socially anxious individuals able to develop a sense of audacious trust in others? Perhaps most importantly, it is unclear what socially anxious individual want from interpersonal relationships with others. Do they want to keep a certain distance to protect themselves from rejection or do they desire to overcome their fears to achieve closeness? It seems that those who are affected by social anxiety are best placed to provide answers to these and other questions, but given the lack of qualitative studies their voices remain unheard.

Another important limitation of the research literature is that the research has been conducted from a predominately positivist and quantitative framework. This has meant there has been a focus on identifying behaviours and cognitions rather than exploring the phenomenological world of the socially anxious individual. It is therefore not clear how socially anxious individuals 'experience' and 'perceive' different aspects of interpersonal relationships. Phenomenological approaches are underutilised in clinical psychology research, partly because the field has

historically favoured a positivist approach to understanding human behaviour (Young, 2010). However, phenomenological investigation has a long history of making substantive contributions to the field as can be seen in the works of Karl Jaspers, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Viktor Frankl and R.D. Laing (Wertz, 2005). It is therefore encouraging that recent years have seen a growth in the number of phenomenological investigations within clinical psychology (Smith, 2011). In fact, it has been argued that "for anyone seeking to make discoveries about the ways in which personal and social worlds are constructed, it is necessary to adopt a phenomenological stance" (McLeod, 2000, p.40). Such work aims to faithfully reflect the distinctive characteristics of a person's first-hand experience. It ensures that subjective experience is taken into account and has the potential to elaborate on existing knowledge by providing an account of experience that models have not anticipated (Wertz, 2005).

1.8 Current Research

1.8.1 Rationale

Phenomenological research exploring the interpersonal aspects of social anxiety is limited. Therefore the present study will adopt a phenomenological approach with the aim of uncovering socially anxious individuals' understandings, explanations and perceptions relating to interpersonal relationships. It is hoped that this will help to expand the knowledge base and address the many unanswered questions within the field. The rationale for the approach is explored in greater detail in the methodology.

1.8.2 Research Questions

The main research questions are:

- How do socially anxious individuals experience interpersonal interactions?
- How do socially anxious individuals experience the development of interpersonal relationships?
- How do socially anxious individuals experience close interpersonal relationships?

2. METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

This chapter outlines the research methodology including the: philosophical underpinnings of the research; rationale for undertaking a qualitative approach; rationale for undertaking Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; reflexive statement by the researcher; and other qualitative methodologies which were considered. This is followed by details of the methods employed including recruitment, data collection and analysis.

2.1 Philosophical Underpinnings of the Research

Researchers need to clarify their assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology) and their views about how one may come to know this reality (epistemology) because such factors determine the directions, practices and findings of their research (Carter & Little, 2007). Matters of ontology and epistemology are deeply intertwined and as such it is difficult to discuss them separately (Crotty, 1998). There are several positions one can take when approaching such matters. These can be understood to exist on a continuum, moving from realism, were the data collected is understood to directly mirror reality, to relativism, were the data collected is not seen to directly mirror reality and multiple valid interpretations are possible (Harper, 2012). Lying between these two extremes is the position of critical realism which assumes that the data collected can tell us about reality but does not directly mirror it (Harper, 2012). This position also takes into account the social, historical and situational context in which the data is collected (Pilgrim & Rogers, 1997).

This study is phenomenological, in that it is interested in exploring the experiences and inner worlds of participants. Chamberlain (2015) argued that such an approach was not an epistemological stance in itself and that it is better to understandd phenomenology as a set of theoretical framings and methodological approaches for conducting research. For this study I have adopted a realist ontological position combined with a critical realist epistemological position. The research framework is summarised in Table 1.

Willig (2016) argued that ontological realism is a precondition for conducting research, as any investigation which had a genuine commitment to ontological relativism would not be able to provide insight about very much at all. Therefore by taking a realist ontological position I am accepting the reality of the participants' experiences of interpersonal relationships. In other words, these experiences would exist even if I did not ask participants to give an account of them. However, by taking a critical realist epistemological position I am acknowledging that my attempts to describe the reality of the participants' experience will only ever be partial. Specifically, the meanings I ascribe to them will be negotiated within particular social, historical and situational contexts (Pilgrim & Rogers, 1997).

Table 1: The Research Framework

Epistemological Position:	Critical Realist
Ontological Position:	Realist
Theoretical Perspectives:	Phenomenology, hermeneutics, idiography
Methodology:	Qualitative, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
Data collection:	Semi-structured interviews
Participants:	Six socially anxious individuals

2.2 Rationale for Undertaking a Qualitative Approach

In recent years there has been a growing recognition of the utility of qualitative approaches for understanding the experiences of people affected by psychological distress (Hodgetts & Wright, 2007). Such methodologies aim to gain an understanding of the lived experience of individuals and are particularly

suited to exploratory research. As little is currently known about how socially anxious individuals experience interpersonal relationships I felt that a qualitative approach would have the potential to illuminate the topic in a way that would not have been possible with a quantitative approach focused on the measurement of variables (Henwood & Pigeon, 1992). Furthermore, Willig (2008) argued that qualitative approaches are particularly useful for 'giving voice' to those who are marginalised. Given that socially anxious individuals are affected by social fears which can prevent them from 'telling their story' I felt that a qualitative approach would help give them a voice.

2.3 Rationale for Undertaking Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA, Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) is a relatively recent qualitative research methodology which emerged from the work of Jonathan Smith in the 1990s. It is an approach which is concerned with exploring individuals' personal experiences, the significance of these experiences for them, and how they make sense of these experiences (Smith et al., 2009). I felt it was the most appropriate methodology for this study for the following reasons:

1. IPA is phenomenological in that it is concerned with exploring an individual's personal perception of an experience rather than attempting to produce an objective statement about an experience (Smith, Jarman & Osborne, 1999). Husserl, a key phenomenological philosopher, famously argued that we needed to go "back to the things themselves" (cited in Smith et al., 2009, p.12). This requires a 'reflexive move' in which the researchers gaze is directed inwards to avoid the tendency that human beings have to fit things in to pre-existing categorised systems (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, IPA was the methodology that was most consistent with my research aim of exploring the personal experiences of socially anxious individuals.

2. Willig (2016) argues that IPA is an approach which combines realist aspirations (informed by ontological realism) and epistemological modesty

(informed by epistemological relativism). For instance, Smith et al. (2009) points out that the task of the researcher is to provide a clear and full account of what they have learned about the participant which is supported by evidence from the participant's transcript. At the same time, IPA is underpinned by hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation. There is an acknowledgement that making sense of the lived experience of the participant involves interpretation on the part of the researcher, who will be subject to preconceptions, biases and personal interests. In fact, making sense of the participant's experience involves a 'double hermeneutic' in which the researcher is making sense of the participant who is making sense of their world (Smith et al., 2009). IPA was therefore a good fit with the realist ontological position and critical realist epistemological position I adopted for this study.

3. IPA is an idiographic approach in that it is concerned with the detailed analysis of how particular phenomena have been understood and experienced from the perspective of particular individuals in particular contexts (Smith et al., 2009). I felt that this commitment to idiography would do justice to the unique experience of each individual research participant. I also felt that it would highlight the personal stories of socially anxious individuals which are currently absent from the research literature.

4. A key strength of IPA is that the flexible and opened-ended methods involved in the collection of data allow the research participants to share aspects of their experience which had not been anticipated by the researcher. Thus, it has the potential to uncover unanticipated phenomena (Shaw, 2001).

5. Recent years have seen a growth in the number of IPA research studies within clinical psychology, which have demonstrated the value of the approach to the field (Smith, 2011).

6. The increase in popularity of this approach has seen the publication of a number of detailed guidelines for undertaking IPA (e.g. Smith et al., 2009).

> This appealed to me as a researcher who was new to the methodology and reassured me that I would be able to carry out a rigorous high quality analysis.

2.4 Other Qualitative Methodologies That Were Considered

In deciding which methodology to use for the study I considered a number of other approaches, including thematic analysis, grounded theory and narrative analysis.

I felt that Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was less suited to this study than IPA as it did not have the same commitment to exploring the phenomenological world of the participant. Furthermore, thematic analysis does not explicitly acknowledge the role of the researcher's preconceptions in the process of interpretation. Given my critical realist epistemological position I felt it was important to use a methodology which took this into account.

Grounded Theory (e.g. Glaser & Strauss, 1967) has some similarities with IPA but it requires a very particular approach to sampling and high numbers of participants in order to reach saturation point. This presented logistical difficulties. Furthermore this approach is primarily used for developing explanatory models of processes and phenomena. While such a study would have merit I was more interested in exploring how socially anxious individuals experience interpersonal relationships than developing an explanation of why people with social anxiety experience impaired interpersonal relationships.

Narrative Analysis (e.g. Riessman, 1993) is a methodology which has significant overlap with IPA (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Both approaches are interested in the stories people tell. However, narrative psychology explores 'the ways in which people make and use stories to interrupt the world (Lawler, 2002, p.242) while IPA is more focused on the subjective experience of the participant. It was therefore a better fit with my aim of exploring the phenomenological world of socially anxious individuals.

2.5 Reflexive Statement

Reflexivity is the extent which the researcher's beliefs, values and experiences influences the research (Willig, 2013). As discussed above, IPA acknowledges that the interpretations of the researcher will be subject to preconceptions, biases and personal interests. Therefore, in undertaking this study it was important for me to consider the different identities I held as a:

- Male
- White Irish person
- Trainee Clinical Psychologist at the University of East London
- Person who can relate to experiences of social anxiety.

I acknowledge that these identities may have influenced the process of interpretation. However it was my aim to be aware of this possibility and to 'bracket off' my preconceptions as much as possible. This helped me to ensure that my interpretations were grounded in the data. I evaluated my success at doing this in the Discussion section.

2.6 Methods

2.6.1 Participant Recruitment

The objective in recruiting participants was to obtain a sample of socially anxious adults who would have enough experience of interpersonal relationships to be able to answer the questions outlined in the interview schedule. I did not feel it was necessary for participants to have been diagnosed with Social Anxiety Disorder as many individuals who experience social anxiety never receive a diagnosis (NICE, 2013). Instead I felt it would be sufficient for participants to self-identify as socially anxious and be enrolled in a social anxiety support group. It is acknowledged that the participants' experience of social anxiety will exist across a continuum of intensity. Some may only experience social anxiety in certain situations, such as public speaking, while others may have multiple social fears in a wide range of contexts. It is recognised that there will be both commonalities

and variations in the experiences of the socially anxious individuals taking part in this study. The inclusion criteria were for participants to:

- Self-identity as socially anxious
- Have sought the help of a social anxiety support group
- Be over 18 years old
- Be able to speak English
- Be living in the United Kingdom

2.6.2 Recruitment Sources

I identified a number of social anxiety support groups using the internet and made contact with their organisers via email. Two support groups responded to my requests to meet and talk about the study. These were Leading Light, a London based support group and Social Anxiety Support, a Belfast based support group. After meeting and outlining the aims of my study, the facilitator of Leading Light passed my details on to support group members and three individuals contacted me via email to request more information about the study. The facilitator of Social Anxiety Support invited me to speak about my research at a group session and afterwards four individuals approached me and asked for information about the study.

2.6.3 Participant Characteristics

Of the seven people who asked for information about the study, six decided to take part. This number of participants is in line with the recommendations of Smith et al. (2009) who recommended that doctoral research projects include between four to ten interviews. Participants were given pseudonyms and these will be used when referring to them in the write up. Demographic information was collected using a questionnaire (see appendix B) which was administered at the beginning of the interview. Participants ranged in age from 23 years to 59 years, with a mean age of 36 years. Only one participant opted to be interviewed face-to-face, the rest preferred to be interviewed over the telephone. For further information see Table 2.

Table 2: Participant Demographics

No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Diagnosis (SAD)?	Participation Method	Interview Length (m:s)	Source
1	Sammy	M	30	Asian-British	No	Face-to-face	60:04	Leading Light (London)
2	Claudia	F	23	White-Italian	Yes	Telephone	40:58	Leading Light (London)
3	Ravi	M	28	Asian-British	Yes	Telephone	46:28	Leading Light (London)
4	Patrick	M	59	White-Irish	No	Telephone	77:40	Social Anxiety Support (Belfast)
5	Elliott	M	46	White-British	No	Telephone	55:11	Social Anxiety Support (Belfast)
6	William	M	28	White-British	No	Telephone	42:40	Social Anxiety Support (Belfast)

2.6.4 Data Collection

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews, which is considered to be the optimum way of collecting data for IPA studies (Smith et al., 2009). This is a type of interview which is guided by an interview schedule (see appendix C) but allows flexibility so that questions can be reordered, altered, omitted or added at the interviewer's discretion. Smith and Osborne (2003) highlighted a number of advantages of this approach including: greater facilitation of rapport, participants are able to direct the interview, and the interviewer is able to probe particular interests or concerns of participants. The interview schedule was designed by the researcher and modified following feedback from peers and the project supervisor. A pilot interview was carried out which confirmed the adequacy of the questions. This interview was included in the analysis (Sammy).

My aim in collecting data was to allow the participants the opportunity to tell their story in as much detail as possible. Generally face-to-face interviews are considered to be the most effective way of collecting data for IPA studies (Smith et al., 2009). However, face-to-face interviews are exactly the sort of interaction that many socially anxious individuals find anxiety provoking. Therefore the interview process required careful consideration (see appendix D). Participants were offered a choice of taking part via a face-to-face interview, Skype video call or a telephone interview. One participant chose to be interviewed face-to-face while the others chose to be interviewed over the telephone. It should be noted that previous studies employing the methodology of IPA have successfully used telephone interviews (e.g. Turner, Barlow, & Ilbery, 2002). Interviews lasted between 41 and 78 minutes, with a mean length of 54 minutes.

2.6.5 Apparatus/Resources

All interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder. The computer files were then transferred on to an encrypted hard drive and accessed with a password-protected computer.

2.6.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of East London ethics board (see appendix E and F for relevant documentation). The ethical considerations for the study are discussed below:

2.6.6.1 Consent

Before deciding whether or not to take part in the study potential participants were given an information sheet (see appendix G) and a consent from (see appendix H). Those who agreed to take part signed the consent form. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw consent at any time, including after the interviews have been completed. Participants were also given a debrief sheet (see appendix I).

2.6.6.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Participants were informed that all information would be kept confidential. Anonymity was assured through giving each participant a pseudonym, which was

stored alongside their consent form and demographic information in a locked cabinet which was kept separate to the digital recordings of the interviews and interview transcripts. Digital recordings were transferred from the audio recorder onto a password protected and encrypted hard drive on the day of the interview, and then deleted from the audio recorder. All names and identifying information were altered in the transcripts. All individual electronic files were password protected. When not in use, all paper documents were stored in a locked cabinet. Once the study has been published all recordings will be erased. The written transcripts will be kept as a computer file for a maximum of three years as it may be useful for additional articles or publications based on the research.

2.6.6.3 Remuneration

Participants received a £10 Amazon voucher for taking part in the study as I felt it was important to acknowledge their contribution. I was aware of ethical implications of paying participants to take part in research studies (e.g. Head, 2009) and have considered the implications of this in the discussion section.

2.6.7 Analysis

The procedure for data analysis was adapted from the guidance offered by Smith et al. (2009) and is outlined below:

2.6.7.1 Data Transcription

I transcribed the interview recordings verbatim and removed all personal identifiable information. Wide margins were left on the transcripts to make space for notes.

2.6.7.2 Reading and Re-reading

I read each transcript multiple times in order to develop familiarity with the content. Key phrases and points of interest were underlined.

2.6.7.3 Generating Exploratory Codes

Before conducting the coding I read the reflexive diary I kept following each interview (see Appendix J). This helped me to 'enter the world' of the participant.

The transcripts were coded at three levels. The first level was descriptive and focused on the ways in which participant described their experience. The second level was linguistic and focused on the participant's use of metaphors, pauses, repetitions, laughter and hesitation. The third level focused on engaging with the transcript at a more interrogative and conceptual level. I made notes for each level in the right-hand margin using different colours of pen (see appendix K for a sample of this).

2.6.7.4 Developing Emergent Themes

The next stage was to use my exploratory notes to identify emergent themes, which were noted in the left-hand margin of the transcript. This step involved a move away from the participant's interpretations to more of my own personal analytical interpretations. Once all emergent themes in the transcript were identified they were typed up in a list (see appendix L for the emergent themes for one participant).

2.6.7.5 Clustering Emergent Themes

The next stage was to print out a list of the emergent themes and to cut them out. This allowed me to lay them out spatially and sort them into loose clusters based on shared meaning. Each cluster was given a working title. I then created a table summarising the clustered themes with supporting quotes (Appendix M for an example) and a 'mind map' to show how the emergent themes were clustered together (appendix N).

2.6.7.6 Moving to the Next Case

I then moved to the next case and completed the previous steps for each participant. At the end of this stage I had table of clustered themes and a mind map for each participant.

2.6.7.7 Cross Case Analysis

This stage involved laying out each participant's mind-map and table of themes on the floor and making interpretations. This very visual approach enabled me to search for connections and patterns across the cases. Often this required me go back to the data to do more thinking and coding. For instance, looking across the

cases it became clear that conceptualisations of the self were important to participants. However it was evident that in my initial efforts at coding were not sufficiently focused to provide insight into how participants experienced this. I therefore went back to work with the data and the themes 'hidden self' and 'vulnerable self' began to take shape. Once I felt the themes accurately reflected participants' experiences I resumed looking for connections across the cases, noting similarities and differences. A cyclical process of collapsing and reforming themes lead to a final list of superordinate and subordinate themes. Themes that were found to be insufficiently evidenced or peripheral to the research were discarded (see appendix O for an early draft of theme formation and appendix P for supporting data for the final list of themes).

2.6.7.7 Developing a Narrative Account

The final stage of the analysis was to produce a written narrative of the way in which the data was sorted. Each theme was explained and illustrated by verbatim extracts from the transcripts. This is presented in the following chapter.

3. RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of the interpretive phenomenological analysis of the six semi-structured interviews. Each theme will be discussed individually, highlighting areas of convergence and divergence between and within participants. The themes are illustrated with quotes from the transcripts which are referenced in the form: *(participant name, transcript line number).* Although the analysis presents the superordinate themes, and their corresponding subordinate themes separately, it is important to note that I view them as being interrelated. In order to make these links more explicit I have produced a graphic representation of interconnection between the superordinate and subordinate themes (see Figure 3). The reoccurrence of these themes across the sample is represented in Table 4.
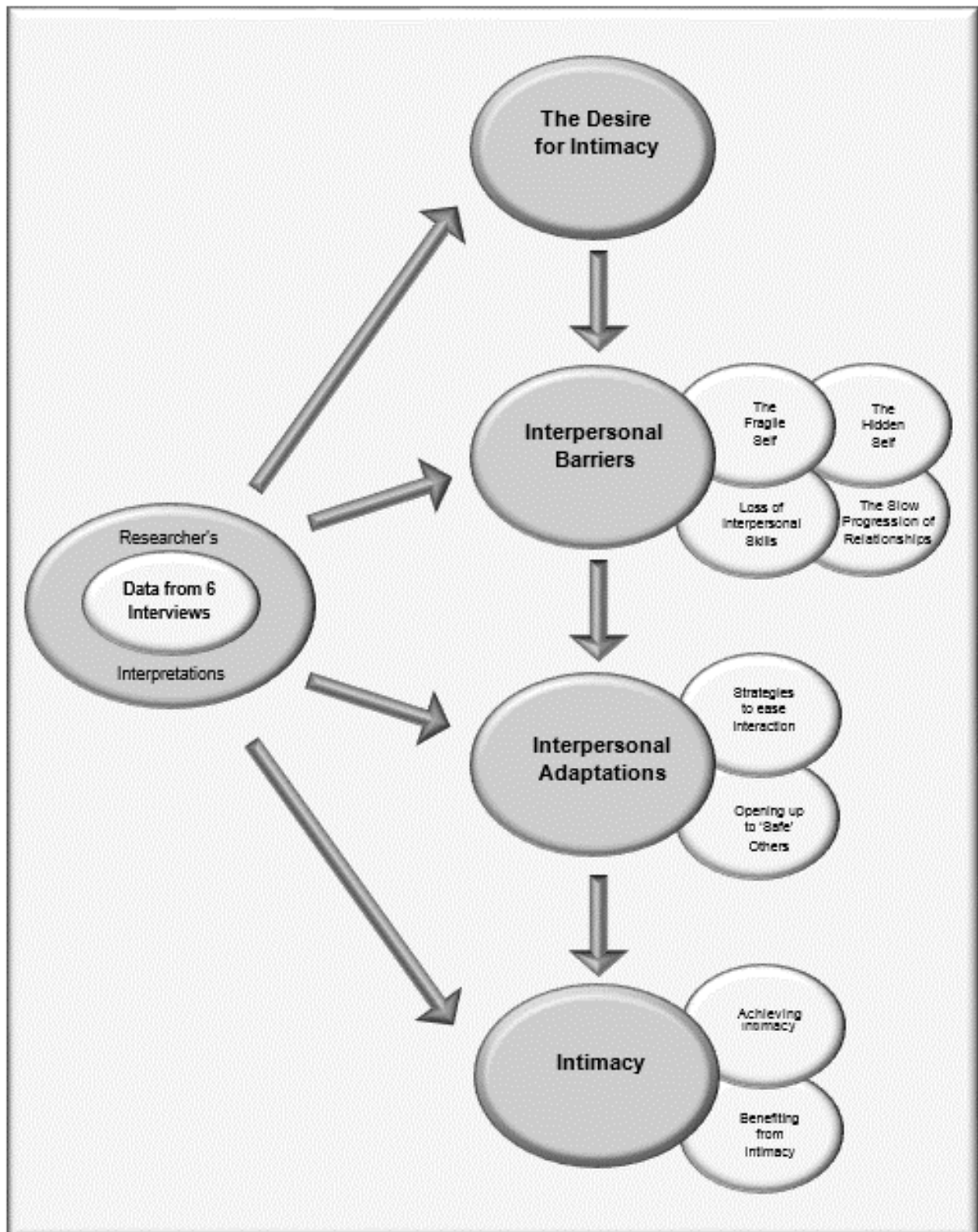
Figure 3: Superordinate and Subordinate Theme Configuration

Figure 4: Reoccurrence of Themes across the Sample

Superordinate theme	Subordinate theme	Sammy	Claudia	Ravi	Patrick	Elliott	William	Frequency
The Desire for Intimacy	The Desire for Intimacy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6/6
Interpersonal Barriers	The Fragile Self		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5/6
	The Hidden Self	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	5/6
	Loss of Interpersonal Skills	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	5/6
	The Slow Development of Relationships	✓	✓	✓	✓			4/6
Interpersonal Adaptations	Strategies to Ease Interaction	✓	✓	✓	✓			4/6
	Opening up to Safe People	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6/6
Intimacy	Achieving Intimacy	✓	✓		✓		✓	4/6
	Benefiting from Intimacy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6/6

3.1 The Desire for Intimacy

The superordinate theme 'The Desire for Intimacy' reflects the participants' desire to make meaningful connections with others.

3.1.1 The Desire for Intimacy

A strong desire to connect to other people is a theme present in all of the participants' accounts, as illustrated by the following quotes:

"connection I think is vital, more than anything else" (Ravi, 281).

[friendship is about] people that you can just share and have fun with, share experience with and have fun essentially, connect with. Because that's what life is about really (Sammy, 290-291).

To me, if a real friend was to come along, it would be pretty special. Actually, it would be pretty amazing to be honest (Elliott, 219-221).

These extracts all serve to convey the significance participants attribute to interpersonal connection through their use of language. The words convey that they view friendship and connection as essential to having a full life experience and that forming these kinds of connections will bring something significant to their lives. These views are expressed through Ravi's description of friendship as "vital" and Sammy's view that connecting to others is "what life is about really". The strong desire to connect to others is perhaps most evident in Elliott's excerpt where he uses the words "special" and "amazing" when envisioning what it would actually be like to have a "real friend" in his life. I was struck by how deeply rooted in emotion the desire for connection is for these individuals.

Because of the significance of connection expressed by the participants it is unfortunate that much of their desire for intimacy is unfulfilled. This deficiency has been the cause of pain and suffering. For instance, Patrick says, *"I think it is important to emphasise the loneliness of social anxiety. I think that [the loneliness] is the saddest part of it" (Patrick, 621-622).* Similarly, Elliott in simple

but powerful language states, *"I feel very sad when I am not around people"* *(Elliott, 37).* In his interview Elliott shared that he went to coffee shops just to be around others, as he lacked significant relationships in his life.

For Elliott, the lack of meaningful connections in his life has had the effect of fuelling his desire for intimacy:

> *I am not sure whether having social anxiety actually encourages you to engage with people more whenever you get the opportunity. It might be that because of anxiety or social anxiety that you might be encouraged to develop meaningful relationships more than if you were in a setup where you had all your family and friends around you and you didn't have social anxiety (Elliott, 353-359).*

Elliott's failure to connect with others does not seem to discourage him from wanting to connect. Rather, the lack of intimacy seems to fuel his drive to form "meaningful relationships" and he expresses a determination to make the most of any opportunity to engage with others. For Elliott this longing for intimacy is so strong that he reflected on times in his life when he continued to maintain relationships that were damaging to him in order to feel connected. In the following extract he describes how he gave but did not receive, an experience which left him feeling depleted and lonely:

> *I guess in the past, maybe financially or emotionally… or I have given too much of my time to a certain person who really didn't deserve it. He really didn't deserve the friendship because I wasn't getting it back. I was giving too much of myself and not getting much back (Elliott, 251-254).*

Claudia's desire for intimacy has manifested through her tendency to ruminate about the relationships in her life she has been unsatisfied with. In the following excerpt she speaks about the quality of her relationship with old school friends:

I've kind of lost touch with them a lot, and I feel like, especially like the people that know me from a long, long time since I was in nursery and been growing up together till high school, I just feel, I don't know, that I'm not that satisfied in like, I don't know, because I've always been very nice to them. I don't know, just sometimes it kind of pops into my mind and I start thinking, you know, why isn't the relationship like this between me and them (Claudia, 433-439).

We can see here that Claudia is unhappy with the state of her relationship with her old friends. She expresses that she has known them a long time "since I was in nursery" and that she has "always been very nice to them". It is therefore confusing to her why they do not have a closer relationship and she wonders "why isn't the relationship like this between me and them?" Claudia's repetition of the words "I don't know" throughout the passage suggests that her thinking about the issue has not lead to any clarity. Instead she appears to be caught in a cycle of rumination were the issue will "pop into her head" causing her to fixate on the 'why' behind her lack of connection with these people. This fixation on the question of why there she does not have a deeper connection with people she has known for a significant period of time demonstrates Claudia's strong desire to have more intimacy in her life.

Patrick's desire for intimacy has been challenged by his experience of feeling compelled to avoid people. In this way he has been pulled in two different directions. This was something he struggled to make sense of and as a result he spent many years wondering if he was on the autistic spectrum:

right up until very recently I even dismissed the idea that it was social anxiety and decided that I was on the autistic spectrum and that was why I was avoiding people, that I was a-social rather than socially anxious (Patrick, 164-167).

However, after spending a period of time avoiding contact with people an insight came to him:

And that is when the insight came to me, if I was on the autistic spectrum I would be content on my own. But purely because I am missing people there is something else going on. It is not autistic spectrum, I actually missed being with people, there is something else (Patrick, 176-180).

In his reflection Patrick identifies that despite his tendency to avoid others his experience of missing people is meaningful. He repeats the phrase "there is something else" as if to reiterate the significance of his realisation that he is not on the autistic spectrum. It becomes clear to him that the something else must be social anxiety, as he makes clear when he goes on to say *"If I am missing people then it must be social anxiety" (Patrick, 183).* This insight comes as a relief to Patrick. He finally has an explanation for the apparent contradiction between wanting to be close with others and at the same time wanting to avoid them. From this experience of missing people Patrick could now see that he did want to connect to others. Similar to the other participants he had a strong desire for intimacy.

3.2 Interpersonal Barriers

The superordinate theme 'Interpersonal Barriers' reflects the difficulties participants experienced when trying to achieve intimacy with others and includes the subordinate themes: 'The Fragile Self', 'The Hidden Self', 'Loss of Interpersonal Skills' and 'The Slow Development of Relationships'.

3.2.1 The Fragile Self
Present in this subordinate theme is the sense that the self is something that is fragile. It is striking how many participants use the words "vulnerable" and "hurt" to describe how they feel when interacting with others. For instance, when reflecting on why she had become was cautious around people, Claudia said that:

I was exposing myself too much and then I don't know, I prefer like being cautious. Like, erm, I don't want to like get hurt or anything (Claudia, 141-143).

Her use of the word "exposed" is significant. It suggests that for Claudia interpersonal interaction is a dangerous activity. This is why she developed a cautious approach to relationships. Later in the interview Claudia wondered if her social anxiety served a protective function:

…I didn't really feel comfortable going out with this bunch of people because I felt that they were kind of bitching about me behind my, like behind my back. My boyfriend would just say to me "oh you should speak to people, blah, blah, blah". And then I actually found out that they were bitching about me behind my back and so, I mean, my social anxiety, I don't know whether it was some sort of protection (Claudia, 367-372).

Claudia talks about her suspicion that other people were "bitching" about her behind her back. It seems that her boyfriend was dismissive about her concerns and told her that she just needed to interact with people more. I got the sense this was a response that Claudia had become tired of hearing, so much so that his words lost all meaning and became "blah, blah, blah". When Claudia's suspicions were confirmed she felt vindicated and reasoned that her social anxiety, unlike her boyfriend, was keeping her safe.

Elliott also spoke about the dangers of opening up to others. I highlighted in section 3.1.1 how Elliott's desire to connect to others was so strong it had led to continue to maintain relationships even after he realised they were harmful for him. In the following extract he explains how this experience affected him:

INTERVIEWER: What affect did that have on you?
ELLIOTT: Basically my self-esteem and self-confidence just drifted away and I felt bad about myself. I felt vulnerable as well. Opening myself up to these people who are not really people that you can trust,

you know, so feeling quite vulnerable. And feeling hurt because
sometimes I've been hurt in the past with friendships, people have
used what I have said to hurt me, passed information on about me and
stuff like that (Elliott, 256-263).

Similarly to Claudia's experience, when Elliott makes an effort to connect he feels vulnerable and exposed. He finds that once he opens up his self-esteem and self-confidence "drift away" leaving him feeling depleted. He was hoping to form a connection with another person but instead he found that his attempts to connect, in this case his words, were used as a weapon to hurt him. Similarly to the other participants, Elliott's social anxiety may therefore be understood as a strategy for keeping himself safe from rejection and harm.

Patrick felt vulnerable in a similar way. He spoke about being *"overly sensitive to an abrasive person" (Patrick, 59).* This is illustrated in the following extract in which he speaks about a relationship with his friend and his friend's wife:

So he can be quite abrupt and direct. In fact, he can be very abrupt
and maybe that is another reason why I haven't gone so much to him
because, you know, when he stresses he gets quite abrupt. And I have
built up a relationship of trust with him, even though that hurts me and
I am sensitive to it, it is not enough to break the relationship. It would
be enough for me to reduce the amount of contact up until now. And
his wife is the same. She would get stressed out and be a bit… they
are not attacking but they tend to be short and abrasive, not realising
the effect. They are not particularly psychologically minded, maybe
that would be the better way, a bit more… rough and ready with what
they say and what they do (Patrick, 255-265).

Patricks acknowledges that his friend and his friend's wife do not mean to "hurt" him. They are simply unaware of the impact that their "abrupt" way of relating to the world has on him. Patrick's consistent use the word "abrasive" gives the sense that he comes away from his interactions with these people a little more damaged and withdrawn than before. Despite their best intentions the couple

seem to lack the ability to handle Patrick with the care his fragile self requires. One positive aspect to this relationship is that that Patrick has built up a relationship of trust with his friend, if not his friend's wife. Through this trust, some of the harshness and hurt Patrick experiences is diminished.

For William the self is so fragile that even a glance can be damaging. In the following extract he describes an interaction with his work colleagues:

> *…in my old job there was, the guy who I was referring to, they were my age but they went to a grammar school and they were from a better area than I am from. And when we were sort of chatting and I was saying the stuff that I would have got up to when I was a teenager and whatever else they sort of looked at me as if I had two heads, judging me and stuff. And I can remember one day where they were sort of like away in the corner chatting and they kept looking over but they didn't know that I could see them looking over. And I just had a panic attack in front of them, in the middle of work (William, 130-138).*

William identifies his work colleagues as similar to him in the sense that they were the same age and worked at the same place, but different to him in the sense they "went to a grammar school" and were from "a better area". By recounting stories about his teenage years William was attempting to form a connection with to his colleagues. However, William did not experience a positive response. He says that they looked at him like he "had two heads". William's words convey just how powerfully he experiences their critical gaze. He is left to feel like a (two-headed) monster in their eyes and the impact of this is so severe that it causes him to have a panic attack.

3.2.2 The Hidden Self

Participants in the study experienced a discrepancy between how they see themselves and how they believed that other people see them. For instance, Ravi sees himself as someone who is *"quite talkative, you know enjoys conversations and so on" (Ravi, 197)* and feels he can *"talk a lot more than the average person" (Ravi, 121)*. However, when he is around people he feels unable to be this

talkative person. In fact Ravi says that "*I can't think of anyone at this moment in time that I can see face to face and be myself*" *(Ravi, 190).* From his viewpoint the talkative person is hidden from view and instead people see:

> *…someone that's quite reserved, someone that seems quiet, doesn't say much. Of course I can't really pinpoint what they see but they don't see me. So I think to some degree that possibly bothers me, that I cannot be me in front of others, even friends and family (Ravi, 194-199).*

Ravi's description of how he believes others see him, as someone who "seems quiet" and "doesn't say much", contrasts with his earlier description of how he see himself, someone who talks "more than the average person". Ravi's experience "they don't see me" comes through very powerfully here. The words he uses give a sense of just how invisible and misunderstood he feels, even by his friends and family. This duality of self Ravi experiences limits him from being able to connect with others. He does not feel that they get to experience his real self, which Ravi acknowledges that "to some degree that possibly bothers me". It appears that this experience of having the self hidden from others serves to isolate the individual.

Sammy also sees himself as someone who was "*quite sociable" (Sammy, 174)* and who likes to *"go deep into things, talk about theories" (Sammy, 144).* However, like Ravi, Sammy has found it difficult to be this sociable person. One place he particularly struggles is his workplace:

> *I seem to have a kind of, almost like a split personality I guess. At work I'm very different to how I am outside (Sammy, 181-182).*

For Sammy, the discrepancy between the person he is at work and the person he is outside work is so extreme that he uses the phrase "split personality" to describe it. This dualism of self is a frustrating experience for him. In the following extract he describes how he felt when he overheard his supervisor, who he had disclosed his social anxiety to, describe him as 'quiet':

…and he was like no, he's fine over there, he likes to be quiet. And I thought ok, so that triggered something within me. I just thought well actually no, you've kind of pigeon-holed me because I've told you about my anxiety. But in actual fact that's not who I am, I do like to talk (Sammy, 169-173).

Hearing his supervisor describe him as 'quiet' activated a strong reaction in Sammy. His use of the term "pigeon-holed" suggests that he feels his supervisor's description is restrictive and unfair. The words "that's not who I am" serve as a defiant proclamation against this characterisation. Sammy says he cannot always express himself as a talkative person in every environment. At work he feels he is one kind of person, someone his supervisor identified as "quiet". However, Sammy feels at his core that he is a talkative and sociable person, which he is able to express when outside of the work setting. Thus he appears to hide aspects of himself in certain environments which can prevent him from feeling connected to other people.

Contrary to Sammy, Patrick experienced little trouble interacting with others in the workplace. He describes how *"as long as I am confident in my professional skills, whatever that might be, I manage very well" (Patrick, 16-18).* However, Patrick experienced a dualism of self in a different sense. In the following extract he describes how he learned to become an "actor" in order to interact with others:

I was an actor. I became a very proficient social actor. Eventually I learned how to interact when I had to. But they never saw the real me (Patrick, 218-220).

This actor may have been "socially proficient" but it was not Patrick's genuine self. It was a role he had learned how to play out of necessity and not one he particularly enjoyed. Elsewhere in his interview Patricks refers to this actor character as a *"false front" (224 & 609).* Meanwhile, his real self, which he describes as *"this frightened little child who was afraid of his own shadow" (Patrick, 229),* remains veiled. While the "actor" or the "false front" enables him to

interact with others, the falseness of this façade prevents Patrick's real self from being seen. This does not make it easy for him to connect with others.

Similar to other participants, William feels many people in his life do not know the real him. However, unlike the other participants William denied feeling frustrated by this:

> WILLIAM: So they know me differently to how I am now. People in work I think, they probably think I am quite reserved.
> INTERVIEWER: Do you think they know you well?
> WILLIAM: To a certain extent… I don't know… probably not, no.
> INTERVIEWER: And what is that like?
> WILLIAM: I don't really care to be honest.
> INTERVIEWER: That doesn't worry you so much?
> WILLIAM: No (William, 191-199).

William's response to my question "do you think they know you well?" is interesting. Without interjections from me he moved from saying "to a certain extent" to "I don't know" to "probably not" to a more definite "no". It was as if the more he thought about it the more he changed his mind and at the same time, the more confident he became that they did not know him well. When I asked him what this was like for him he said "I don't really care to be honest". At the time I was struck by how short and direct this response was, particularly in comparison to the more verbose responses he gave to my other questions. I checked my understanding of his answer by paraphrasing him before moving on. In response he gave me an even more definite "no". However, I wondered if William was being honest with himself about whether or not he cared that others do not see him for who he is. Elsewhere in his interview William describes how not being able to connect to others was "the worst thing" (William, 391) about social anxiety. It is possible that William cares so much about not being able to show his real self to others that to admit this to himself would be extremely upsetting. His denial may therefore be understood as a defence mechanism against this realisation.

Considering the participants' desire for intimacy, it is interesting to reflect that the way in which they kept their real self hidden from others makes the development of intimate relationships more difficult to achieve. It seems that the presentation of a false self leads to the development of superficial or false relationships. This strikes me as one of the major barriers to the formation of close interpersonal relationships.

3.2.3 The Loss of Interpersonal Skills

Despite possessing the desire to connect, when participants are in the presence of others they experience losing the interpersonal skills necessary to forming interpersonal relationships. For instance, Patrick describes his tendency to *"clam up and not be able to talk about myself"* (Patrick, 31). He goes on to say:

> *If the focus is on me as a person then it is kind of like if you put the spotlight on me I get dazzled, like a rabbit in the headlights. Then I get so anxious that I can't think rationally and calmly. So I lose that capacity just to think (Patrick 35-38).*

As highlighted in section 3.2.2 Patrick is able to interact without any problems when the focus is on him as a professional. However, here Patrick describes how when the focus is on him as a person interaction becomes more difficult. Perhaps Patrick does not fear the way his professional self is evaluated because these evaluations can be written-off as a judgement of a false self. However, evaluations of the real self are much more threatening, as indicated by the powerful metaphors he uses. His use of "spotlight" evokes the feeling of stage fright. His use of the word "dazzled" and the phrase "rabbit in the headlights" gives the impression of feeling frozen as well as stunned in the gaze of others. The extract also coveys a subtle loss agency, Patrick wants to connect, but he feels has lost the ability to do so.

Elliott reports experiencing similar difficulties when in large crowds:

> *If I am travelling or going to an airport where there is an awful lot of people, this is where I get confused. If I am in a big crowd of people in*

a confined space or it is an environment like that I can feel very… I become a different person. I become very panicky and tend to shut down, shut off. I don't really understand what is happening but I tend to shut down (Elliott, 180-186).

For me, Elliott's words evoke an image of a machine being put under great strain and finally "shutting down" and "shutting off" when it can no longer cope. The effect of this on Elliott is so pronounced that he feels he becomes "a different person". His mystification at how this process happens highlights his lack of control or ownership of the experience. He does not understand what his happening to him, or why he is responding in this way and he feels powerless to stop it.

The impairment of William's interpersonal skills is less extreme but nevertheless present. In the following extract he describes what happens when he attempts to connect with colleagues at work:

It gets to a certain point and then it like just stops. I can't form proper friendships and continue them how they should go. It is only like on first level sort of basis if you know what I mean? …like if somebody new starts at work it is sort of like small talk but I can't relax enough to like form a proper friendship with them. I feel like I've always got my guard up (William, 69-74).

William does not experience "freezing" or "shutting down" but he feels unable to drop his guard. The effect of this is that he becomes unable to take relationships beyond the "first level". He uses the pronoun "it" when referring to the way in which the relationship stopped developing. This suggests that he does not feel that he is the one who actively stops it. Instead he is a passive observer or participant in the process. Thus, similar to the other participants he lacks volition. William revisits this theme again at the end of his interview:

> *INTERVIEWER: is there anything to do with social anxiety and*
> *relationships with other people that I've not asked about and you think*
> *would be important to share?*
> *WILLIAM: The main thing for me is it just doesn't allow you to form or*
> *to take a relationship to the level that you want it to. You go so far and*
> *then there is this wire that you just can't just push yourself past and*
> *that's the worst thing I think (William, 385-391).*

For William the worst thing about social anxiety is not being able to take relationships to the level he wants to. In this extract he explains how he is thwarted by the presence of a "wire", which he feels unable to push past. The use of the word 'push' gives the sense that William is expending effort and energy in his attempts to overcome this barrier. However, it seems that he is making little progress. The wire is also something intangible which he does not control. Similar to other participants William is not actively preventing the relationship from developing but feels the process just stops.

Other accounts echo the experience that relationships fail to develop past a superficial interaction. For example, Patrick describes how there was a possibility for him to develop a relationship with someone but that it never progressed. For him most relationships to not continue developing, they stop:

> *And he is one of the few relationships that could have developed just*
> *from social friendship but hasn't. And school friends and stuff, none of*
> *those relationships are ongoing (Patrick, 443-446).*

Ravi appeared to experience a more extreme interruption of his interpersonal skills. He describes how, when confronted with a social situation "*that fight or flight response kicks in and I just want to go as soon as possible" (Ravi, 74-75).* As outlined in section 3.1.1 Ravi's conscious thought processes lead him to conclude that connection *"is vital, more than anything else" (Ravi, 281)*. However, the more primitive fight or flight response in him usurps his desire to connect and compels him to seek an escape, thus depriving him of the opportunity to bond with others.

The way in which participants experienced losing control of their interpersonal skills made me reflect on how disorientating this experience must be for them. Their descriptions of social interactions had a slight dissociative feel to them. They were left feeling "dazzled", "unable to think" and "shut down". They did not always appear to be in full control of their bodies or responses. Instead, they watched on passively unable to exert control.

3.2.4 The Slow Progression of Relationships

Some of the participants describe that forming close relationships with others was a prolonged process. For instance, Claudia describes how in the early stages of her relationship with her partner *"it took me time before I could actually be myself"* (Claudia, 324). She elaborates:

> *at the start I was very, I wouldn't say like cold, but I was a bit more detached. Like he was very clingy and you know trying to hug me a lot and everything, cuddle me and I wasn't that close in that sense. I was more detached so I kind of, erm, like even when he would say to me like I love you and everything, I would reply like I love you too but in a friends kind of way. Like I wouldn't like jump into like a romantic like I love you like kind of thing (Claudia, 330-336).*

Claudia did not feel particularly close to her partner at the beginning of their relationship. Her repetition of the word "detached" in the first half of the extract serves to emphasise the extent to which she experiences a distance between herself and her partner. When her partner attempts to shows physical affection towards her, perhaps in efforts to close this gap between them, Claudia experiences this as "very clingy". Similarly, when her partner expresses his love verbally Claudia replies "I love you too" but this does not seem to reflect an authentic emotional experience. Rather, she means it in "a friends kind of way". Unlike her partner, she does not yet feel that intimacy has developed.

Patrick described a similar experience with a romantic partner:

She was quite desperate to have a relationship. She was desperate that the relationship would be quite intimate. When we were in public she would be holding hands. If we were watching TV we would sit together and hold hands and be physically intimate and that. She wanted that from quite an early stage. To my mind before the relationship had developed (Patrick, 544-549).

Patrick use of the term "desperate" parallels Claudia's use of "clingy". They both convey a sense of aversion and rejection of the physical affection expressed by their partners. It seems that even though they desire intimacy, Patrick and Claudia are tentative in taking steps towards it. They want the relationship to develop but at a slow pace.

For Patrick, the slow pace of relationship development also applied to friendships. He described how it took him such a long time to become close to others that few people have developed friendships with him:

PATRICK: The one or two friendships I developed through work, through long-time exposure colleagues became close friends. When I really get to know someone well and trust them then I can enjoy their company. That takes a long, long time and in my lifetime I only know two or three people that have got to that level.
INTERVIEWER: And what does it take to get to that point?
PATRICK: Constant exposure (Patrick, 130-136).

In order to develop trust in others and become close to them, Patrick needs "long-time exposure". He repeats the word "long" to emphasise just how protracted this process is. Nevertheless, with "constant exposure" he feels he can come to enjoy the company of others. He sums up the effect of constant exposure on social anxiety succinctly later in the interview when he said that "*exposure is the Achilles heel" (Patrick, 430).* Through exposure to others over a long period of time Patrick feels he is able to connect to others and reveal his real self. However, as expressed above, not many people have "got to that level".

Ravi also speaks about the need for repeated exposure to become close to others. When talking about a former girlfriend he describes how:

I was seeing her every day pretty much, and initially when I first met her I did have to drink alcohol but then I kind of got used to seeing her and I thought I didn't have to rely on alcohol and I could be myself around her (Ravi, 92-95).

Ravi's lack of trust in the early stages of the relationship is evidence by his need to drink alcohol whenever he is around his partner. However, through exposure "he becomes used to seeing her" and does not have to rely on alcohol. He begins to trust her, which enables him to make tentative steps towards opening up and sharing his real self.

An important difference between the superordinate themes 'The Slow Progression of Relationships' and the 'Loss of Interpersonal Skills' is the sense of control and agency participants have over the process. When participants lose their interpersonal skills it happens against their will almost as an unconscious reaction. However, with the slow progression of relationships, it seems that the participants allow the relationships to unfold at the pace at which they are most comfortable. It seems that opening up is such a risk that they are only prepared to do it gradually.

3.3 Interpersonal Adaptations

The superordinate theme 'Interpersonal Adaptations' explores the participants' efforts to circumnavigate the barriers they encounter when trying to connect to others and includes the subordinate themes: 'Strategies to ease Interaction' and 'Opening up to Safe Others'.

3.3.1 Strategies to ease Interaction

This subordinate theme reflects the strategies participants use to ease social interaction. The exact strategies used by participants varied. Sammy,

who when describing his social anxiety said *"the environment is key for me"* (Sammy, 87) was careful to consider the environment when meeting a friend or planning a date: *"if I'm planning something I will think of the environment, like is it going to be busy, noisy, those things" (Sammy, 513-515).* If he meets up with them in a quiet environment then he is able to interact without much difficulty *"in a relaxed environment, I'm very good and I can get to know the person very well" (Sammy, 61-62).*

Ravi's main strategy was to drink alcohol. As he explained: *"when I do drink a bit of alcohol, I can be myself (Ravi, 119-120).* What struck me in Ravi's descriptions of drinking was just how careful and exact he was with the amount of alcohol he felt he had to drink to socialise:

> *I'm careful with the exact amount I drink, so I measure the exact amount I'm going to have. So currently it's 15, sorry erm, 150mls, it sounds like a lot, it is a lot, but I guess I've built up a tolerance, but with that amount I'm not drunk but I am slightly tipsy, but I don't think people can tell. So that's like, you could say me self-medicating (Ravi, 55-59).*

It is almost as of Ravi is administering alcohol like a medicine, carefully measuring out a precise amount, which he adjusts in relation to his tolerance level. He does not seem to be interested in getting intoxicated, rather he is taking a therapeutic drug which at the right dose will allow him to interact with others. In this way, the alcohol serves as an antidote to his social anxiety. Patrick also found that alcohol aided his social interaction, but unlike Ravi, Patrick was cautious about becoming too dependent:

> *when I've had a few drinks I can do it. It is interesting how liberating a couple of drinks is but obviously there are inherent dangers there and I didn't go down that road of alcohol dependency (Patrick, 637-670).*

Patrick's use of 'liberating' to describe how alcohol affects him suggests it frees him from a state of psychological oppression. However, as Patrick is

wary of becoming dependant on alcohol his preference is to use a different strategy. He finds he can become close to people by helping them in some way. As he puts it: "*that helping capacity is the lubricating oil for me to develop the friendship" (Patrick, 316).* The analogy of helping being a lubricating oil conjures up the adage that alcohol is a social lubricant. For Patrick, helping others serves the same function as alcohol. It makes it so his social interactions run much more smoothly. This is made clear in the following extract when Patrick talks about two close relationships:

> *This guy Gary, at the minute he is building an aeroplane so every now and again he needs an extra pair of hands and I can very easily go to meet him to help with his plane. But struggle just to go and sit in the house and chat to him and his wife, general chats, you know? So what we are talking about, and the same with other friend who is a child psychiatrist and is having personal difficulties with her daughter. So once again, the things that I am most comfortable talking about to date are helping, either psychological helping or practical helping and that is what my relationships have thrived on. It is where I am needed. And I think that relationships where I am not needed they just don't work at all for me (Patrick, 402-411).*

Here, Patrick describes how he can interact "very easily" when his friend Gary needs practical help. He is able to offer a "pair of hands". Similarly, when his friend needs to talk about the relational difficulties she is having with her daughter he is able to offer a listening ear. However, when the pair of hands or listening ear is no longer needed the interaction becomes a "struggle". It seems Patrick finds it difficult to interact with others unless he has defined role or is somehow "needed". This relates back to what Patrick said in section 3.1.1 about how he is able to manage interactions very well in professional contexts.

Participants also spoke about how they find it easier to interact with people indirectly via text communication. Just as drinking enables Ravi to 'be himself' so does texting: "*I can get away with typing, I can be myself, a lot more, I can type what's on my mind" (Ravi, 214-215).* Once again, the effect of this strategy has a

dramatic effect on Ravi's ability to interact. Texting makes Ravi feel he can be himself and share what is on his mind. He no longer needs to keep his real self hidden. Sammy also found it helpful to communicate via text message. In the following excerpt he describes a disagreement he had with a friend about how to split the profits from a business venture:

> *And I had some, I guess frustration came up when he said that because it was almost like he didn't consult me about the percentage split and I just kind of let it go, didn't say anything, I was like ok. And he was like the money is not important, we'll discuss it later. But part of me didn't like that, but I didn't mention it to him (Sammy, 330-334).*

Sammy was frustrated that he was not consulted about percentage spilt and did not think that the amount of money his friend was asking for was fair. Yet he was unable to address the matter in person. He "just kind of let it go, didn't say anything". However, it seems that he was not happy about his outcome and later he sends his friend a text message:

> *But then I sent him a message, was it the following night or the next day, saying, basically that we need to be very honest about this, like it's not about you and me, our friendship, we have to put that to one side. If we're going to do this it has to be professional, basically we've got to put our friendship to one side, if this is going to work there has to be a level of transparency. I think I shared with him my concerns basically. (Sammy, 335-341).*

By using a more indirect method of communication Sammy feels able to share his concerns. Communicating in this way allowed him to be "honest" in a way that was not possible for him when he was interacting face-to-face. Sammy also finds that adopting a "professional" stance helps him achieve "transparency". By putting the "friendship to one side" he is able to be open. This compares to Patrick's experience of being able to interact successfully in professional contexts but struggling in social contexts.

In summary, considering the environment of the social situation, consuming alcohol, adapting certain roles and communicating via text message all play a part in helping the participants feel more able to interact with others. In contrast to the social interactions described in section 3.2.2, which were characterised by the sense that the self was hidden, these adaptations appear to make it easier for the self to emerge.

3.3.2 Opening up to Safe People

Present in this subordinate theme is the sense that it is easier for participants to be their real selves around people they perceive as 'safe'. This contrasted to the feelings of vulnerability and hurt they usually experienced during social interactions. Interestingly, for four of the participants 'safe people' were others who experience social anxiety:

> *If it's someone I'm speaking to that has social anxiety then I feel I can be myself a bit more, if that makes sense (Ravi, 145-146).*

> *And at the support group I felt more comfortable… you know, I didn't feel anxious at all and I think that was because I felt comfortable with people that I identified with (Patrick, 88-90).*

> *Whereas if I am around more quiet people I feel I can relax a bit more around them because I can maybe read a bit of anxiety from them which makes me a bit more comfortable (William, 28-30).*

> *because she wasn't like too extrovert, she was kind of like me. In a like a social sense (Claudia, 93-94).*

Wood (1989) found that social comparison is a ubiquitous feature of social relating. One possible reason why participants describe feeling more comfortable around other socially anxious individuals is because social comparisons to this group does result in feelings of inferiority. The fact that both parties are affected by similar social fears and reactions means the participant experiences an affinity

with the other. This makes the other "safe" and allows the participant to show more of their real self.

For Patrick, this feeling of safety extends to people with other "interpersonal difficulties" as he describes in the following extract:

> *because of his background one might presume that he might have had his own interpersonal difficulties which drew him into psychiatric nursing. So his personality then was easier for me to engage safely with. It didn't threaten me in anyway (Patrick, 52-56).*

It seems that Patrick is engaging in a process of social comparison here. However, as he suspects this person has "interpersonal difficulties" the comparison does not result in him feeling inferior. He is not threatened so the person becomes "safe" to engage with.

Additionally, it seems that a person can be labelled as safe for reasons other than having interpersonal difficulties. Participants use a range of traits as a source of comparison, as shown in the following extracts from William in which he speaks about a work colleague he was able to interact with succesfully:

> *In my old job I met a guy. He went to the same school as me. He was a couple of years below me in school. And we just seemed to get on really well from when we met. He was a real…it was strange because he was a real lively confident character, always up for messing about and whatever else and that is sort of the way I used to be. I don't know, I just found it really easy to get on with him. I think it was because he was so easy going and so… he wasn't judgemental. He got on with everybody and I just found that easy (William, 97-104).*

> *He is from the same-, what I find as well, I am like from a working class background and a lot of people that I work with are middle class and have had a good upbringing and have gone to grammar schools*

and stuff. And I find it hard to get along with those types. Just because
we can't relate to a lot of the same things (William, 116-120).

Here, William expresses his surprise at how "easy" it was to get along with someone who, unlike him, was a "real lively confident character". However, unlike most of his other colleagues, this person had a number of similarities to William. He attended the "same school" and came from the same "working class background". As such, William's comparisons to this person did not result in him feeling inferior. Thus, despite the colleague's confidence and liveliness, he becomes a safe person for William to interact with.

Sammy also engaged in the process of social comparison. However, he was the only person who described being engaged in the process of downward social comparison (Wills, 1981). When talking about a relationship with an ex-girlfriend he said "*I saw myself higher than this person, as in intellectually, everything, spiritually" (Sammy, 458).* Placing his girlfriend below him like this made her a safe person to share his thoughts with because he did not fear her judgement. As he describes:

I was able to share my opinions really without the fear of thinking what
the other person was thinking, worrying what the other person was
thinking (Sammy, 526-528).

In contrast, he describes a relationship with a friend who had *"become used to me looking up to him in a way" (Sammy, 367).* The impact of Sammy placing this person above him is that Sammy became more hesitant in sharing his opinions. This is shown in the following extract:

I guess frustration came up when he said that because it was almost
like he didn't consult me about the percentage split and I just kind of let
it go, didn't say anything (Sammy, 330-332).

When Sammy positioned someone "below" him, he did not fear their judgement or worry about what they might think about him. This freed him

up to share his thoughts. However, when someone was "above" him, by his own definition, Sammy did not feel able to speak freely, or challenge a decision he disagreed with.

Kindness is another character trait that enabled participants to feel safe around others. For instance, when asked what type of people Elliott liked to spend time he answered:

> *People who would be kind towards others and kind towards themselves as well. I guess my background has been… I have had emotional, verbal and sometimes physical abuse growing up. I think kindness and compassion is important (Elliott, 93-96).*

Elliott's repetition of the word "kind" conveys just how important this characteristic is for him. It is notable that without being prompted, Elliott discloses he was subject to emotional, verbal and physical abuse while growing up. This suggests that the reason Elliott values kindness so much is because he has experienced a lack of it in his past. Whenever he encounters people who are kind Elliott feels safe and is able to show more of his real self. Similarly, Patrick used the term "psychologically minded" to describe people who are safe to connect to:

> *She is very psychologically minded and she is having difficulties with her husband and she has two young children, so she has no parenting difficulties. So she is very open to talking to me and listening to me, taking advice and taking insights and stuff. We are very close because that is the nature of the relationship.*
> *INTERVIEWER: She shares her difficulties with you?*
> *PATRICK: Yeah. Now I could just as easily talk about mine with her now but up till now I haven't been able to do that very much. It was very one sided (Patrick, 394-401).*

The fact that this person is "psychologically minded" makes her a safe person for Patrick to engage with and enables them to become close. However, Patrick acknowledges there was a time when the relationship was "very one sided" and

becoming close took time. This example contrasts with the interpersonal difficulties Patrick experienced with the friends he described as *"not particularly psychologically minded" (Patrick, 263)*.

Finding characteristics in others they can relate to or that they value has helped participants feel that they can open up and share their real self with them. Although in some cases they still experienced a prolonged period of becoming close to these people, it appears that social comparison and personal alignment with others helps the participants to develop close relationships.

3.4 Intimacy

The superordinate theme 'Intimacy' explores what happens when participants overcome the barriers they face in achieving intimacy with others and includes the subordinate themes 'Achieving Intimacy' and 'Benefiting from Intimacy'.

3.4.1 Achieving Intimacy

Despite the difficulties they face when trying to connect with others, participants were able to achieve closeness and intimacy with a small number of people. These relationships appear to provide an arena where they can be their real selves and share their thoughts. For instance, William describes how in the presence of a close friend he is:

> *able to be myself fully within my friendship. I don't have to hide anything. I can speak about my issues. Just the feeling of freedom (William, 266-267).*

William feels able to be himself "fully" within this friendship. His use of the word "freedom" gives the sense that this friendship gives him the power to think, act or speak in any way he wants or needs. This is evident in the following extract in which he elaborates on the nature of this friendship:

> *INTERVIEWER: What do you generally talk about with this person?*

> *WILLIAM: About everything. We talk about each other's jobs, we talk about each other's relationships, what is going on with his family, what is going on with my family… just everything. If we are planning on going on any holidays or trips, just basically everything (William, 274-278).*

We can see how open William is with his friend. He uses the word "everything" three times to emphasise just how much he shares with them. There are no barriers between them and William feels able to reveal his real self without fear of being hurt. This desire to share is present in other accounts. Sammy speaks to the best thing about his closest friendship:

> *INTERVIEWER: What is the best thing about it?*
> *SAMMY: Best thing about it…the fact that we can be very vulnerable with each other. So I can literally share the most vulnerable thing (Sammy, 307-309).*

Sammy uses of the word "vulnerable" highlights just how exposed he feels when he opens himself up in this way to another person. Nevertheless, Sammy seems to feel that making himself vulnerable is safe in this context and worth it in order to experience intimacy.

Claudia also makes reference to experiencing intimacy with others. For instance, she says "*I've got a really close relationship with my parents so they often do like give me advice" (Claudia, 412-413)* and describes herself as being more experienced in romantic relationships than her partner *"I have more experience in relationships, like romantic relationships than him" (Claudia, 394-395).* Similarly, Patrick speaks about having "one or two friendships" *(Patrick, 130).* He shared how with one particular friend he had recently told him about the programme of therapy he was getting to help him with his social anxiety *"he is aware that I am doing this fear cycle program*" *(Patrick, 415).* It seems for all participants, the act of sharing personal thoughts is a both conduit for developing intimacy and a sign that intimacy has developed.

3.4.2 Benefiting from Intimacy

Once participants manage to achieve intimacy with others they benefit from the relationship in a number of ways, as highlighted in the following quote from Sammy:

> *So it's very important, friends, because they also, they get you out of your head sometimes and make you realise it isn't as bad as you think it is, things aren't as bad as you think it is (Sammy, 294-296).*

Through friendship Sammy is able to connect with something outside himself. It seems this connection allows Sammy to transcend his own thoughts and get "out of his head". The effect of this is that Sammy begins to have a more positive outlook on life and he experiences the realisation that "things aren't as bad as you think". This lift in mood was also experienced by other participants:

> *when I'm feeling a bit down and he's able to make me smile like quite quickly and make me laugh (Claudia, 309-310).*

> *I think that your happiness can and often is very much impacted by the quality of the people that you have in your life (Elliott, 112-114).*

Patrick took this experience even further:

> *I think the real me will get some kind of sustenance and pleasure from their company, you know, positive feedback, we need that kind of positive kind of feedback to live (Patrick, 332-334)*

For Patrick intimacy is essential in life, it gives the "real him" the sustenance and nourishment it needs in order to survive. This experience of vitality is echoed by other participants in the following extracts:

> *There is that feeling of security and safety and that is basically it then (William, 347- 348).*

when I am in a relationship it just gives me this boost of confidence, again. As I call it, psychological security (Ravi, 368-370).

The word 'security' comes out powerfully in these extracts. Socially anxious individuals have difficulty obtaining security and safety in their lives. They usually feel scrutinised and judged in the presence of other people. However, when participants feel fully accepted and seen by others they are rooted in a sense of security and safety. However, for Ravi, there was a caveat:

Erm, I guess it gives me this sense of security perhaps, which isn't actual security but when I dig deeper into it (Ravi, 389-390).

He elaborated:

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so you have a sense of security but when you dig deep it's not a real sense of security?
RAVI: I don't think it is, no.
INTERVIEWER: Okay, and why is that?
RAVI: Because I'm looking for something outside of myself to make me feel content.
INTERVIEWER: Hmm, hmm, right and what would you need to get that real sense of security?
RAVI: I believe that can only come from within (Ravi, 394-402).

Ravi acknowledges that he experiences feeling secure from establishing meaningful connections to others. However, he goes on to question the validity of this security. When reflecting on it he came to the conclusion that it was a false security. His reasoning for this is that he was looking outside himself to feel secure and for Ravi, real security could only come from within. I found Ravi's answer to be surprising. It is important to note that Ravi appeared to be the most isolated of all the participants. I wonder if at a less conscious level Ravi is downplaying his need to feel connected to others in order to protect himself against the pain of rejection.

Regardless of Ravi's possible trepidation about relying too much on the safety and security provided by connecting with others, participants across the board did experience enhanced security in themselves and their lives from interpersonal relationships with others. It seems that despite their social fears achieving intimacy is a positive and fulfilling experience for participants. They are finally able to share their thoughts and be themselves.

4. DISCUSSION

This chapter summarises the results of the study; discusses the results in relation to the research questions and existing literature; considers the implications for clinical practice and future research; and critically evaluates the study. My personal reflections on the research process are offered throughout.

4.1 Summary of Results

The interpretive phenomenological analysis applied in this study provides insight into how socially anxious individuals experience interpersonal relationships with others. To summarise, the analysis reveals the strong desire that participants had to form deep and meaningful relationships with others. Many participants expressed they felt that establishing such connections was vital and gave meaning to their lives. It was therefore unfortunate that they experienced a number of barriers to the formation of such relationships. Relating to others was fraught with a sense of vulnerability and participants feared that opening up would lead to them being hurt in some way. Participants attempted to protect themselves by putting up a barrier. This resulted in them having the sense that others were not able to see the 'real' them. Furthermore, participants appeared to lose control of their interpersonal skills when they were anxious. They described how they clam up, shut down or are unable to drop their guard in social interactions. Formation of relationships thus became a slow and protracted process and served to further reinforce feelings of isolation. Importantly, it appeared to take participants longer to form close relationships than people who did not experience social anxiety.

Participants responded to these barriers by using strategies aimed at facilitating social interaction and developing relationships. The exact strategies used varied and included the evaluation of the environment, consumption of alcohol, adoption of certain social roles and the use of indirect forms of communication such as texting. Participants also found that when they were in the presence of someone they perceived as 'safe' it was easier for them to interact. Factors which lead to someone being perceived as safe included favourable social comparisons

between the participant and that individual and recognition that the person was kind.

Although forming deep and meaningful relationships with others was difficult for participants they were able to form them if given enough time and exposure. This was reflected in the experiences of closeness and intimacy with a small number of close friends. Such relationships appeared to provide participants with an arena in which they could be themselves and share their true thoughts. These relationships also brought with them a number of benefits including experiences of pleasure, improved mood and feelings of security.

4.2 Addressing the Research Questions

The aim of this research was to explore how socially anxious individuals experienced interpersonal relationships. The research questions are now addressed and discussed in the context of the wider literature. In order to help contextualise and make sense of the findings it was necessary to bring in additional research which was not discussed in the introduction. This is common practice in IPA studies.

4.2.1 How do social anxiety individuals experience interpersonal interactions?

Participants spoke about a number of factors that made interpersonal interactions difficult experiences for them. These included: experiencing a fragile sense of self, a tendency to keep the real self hidden, loss of interpersonal skills when interacting with others and the slow pace at which relationships developed. These difficulties appeared to contribute to participants feeling uncomfortable during interpersonal interactions and believing that other people were judging them negatively. Such perceptions may be indicative of a negative interpretation bias in which participants interpreted ambiguous signals in a negative manner (Clark & Wells, 1995; Rapee & Heimberg, 1997). This would fit with laboratory studies that found that socially anxious individuals interpreted standardised facial expressions more negatively than non-socially anxious individuals (Pozo, Carver, Weflens, & Scheier, 1991). Alternatively, such perceptions may be an accurate

reflection of the negative way other people responded to the participants. This interpretation would fit with the findings of a number of laboratory studies, which have found that in general people respond negatively to socially anxious individuals (Creed & Funder, 1998; Purdon et al., 2001; Heerey & Kring, 2007).

Regardless of the accuracy of the perception of negative judgement it caused participants to experience considerable unease and uncertainty. This appeared to influence their behaviour. For instance, many participants responded by saying very little during interpersonal interactions. Others presented a socially competent façade in certain contexts. These strategies could be classed as safety behaviours which are strategies used to reduced threat and increase sense of safety (Salkovskis, 1991). The fact that participants employed such behaviours is consistent the findings of Plasencia et al. (2011) who wrote that the two most common safety behaviours used by socially anxious individuals are avoidance strategies (such as minimising talk and eye contact) and impression management strategies (such as inauthentic displays of nodding and smiling).

Models of interpersonal functioning predict that the use of such safety behaviours will have social consequences. This study cannot speak to the impact they have on other people but can offer insights into the impact they have on those who used them. Many participants described experiencing a dualism of self in that the person they experienced becoming during interpersonal interactions was different to the person they were in other settings. This is consistent with the findings of Plasencia et al. (2011) who found that socially anxious individuals experienced a subjective sense of inauthenticity when they used safety behaviours during interactions in artificial laboratory settings. However, the present study extends these findings by presenting evidence of this reaction in naturally occurring social interactions.

With regards the dualism of self reported by participants it is also worth noting that many social anxiety researchers have proposed theories of multifaceted selves. For example, Schlenker and Leary (1982) postulated that people have both a public and a private self. According to their theory social anxiety arises when people feel their public self has failed to make the impression they desired.

Similarly, Higgins, Klein, and Strauman (1985) posited that social anxiety is triggered when people observe a discrepancy between their actual self and the self they believe they should be. Thus the dualism of self may be a contributing factor to the experience of social anxiety in this study. Further research evaluating the concept of multifaceted self and it role it plays in the precipitation and maintenance of social anxiety is therefore warranted.

Existing literature on the interpersonal interactions of socially anxious individuals has largely focused on exploring the consequence of safety behaviours. As a result little is known about other behaviours or strategies which socially anxious individuals may use to establish more positive transaction cycles. It is therefore interesting that this study found that some of the strategies used by participants during interpersonal interactions appear to be motivated by an attempt to relate to others rather than increase personal feelings of safety. For example, one participant expressed a tendency to adopt a helping role in his relationships with friends. Others found it easier to communicate using indirect methods such as text messaging. A number of researchers have suggested that interpersonal behaviour is motivated by a combination of acquisitive goals such as attention and approval, and self-protective goals such as the desire to avoid criticism and rejection. As socially anxious individuals anticipate negative outcomes they tend to direct their attention towards self-protective behaviour, at least initially (Arkin, Lake, & Baumgardner, 1986). The study suggests that socially anxious individuals continue to pursue both goals concurrently. This finding warrants further investigation. It would be helpful to determine if they are other strategies that may help ease interpersonal interaction for socially anxious individuals and if such strategies could be taught as part of therapy.

Participants in the study also reported that their interpersonal behaviour was flexible depending on who they were interacting with and their feelings about those people. When in the presence of someone they perceived to be 'safe' participants felt more comfortable, which enabled them to interact more easily. It seemed that the perception of 'safety' enabled participants to shift from self-protective behaviour to acquisitive goals (Arkin et al., 1986). This is consistent with previous research. Russell et al. (2011) found that when socially anxious

individuals experienced emotional security they responded with an increase in complementary affiliative behaviours. For participants in this study emotional security was facilitated by the presence of a person who they deemed to be 'safe'.

In summary, phenomenological investigation of the way in which socially anxious individuals experience interpersonal interactions suggests they face a number of interpersonal barriers. These challenges contribute to the socially anxious individual anticipating negative responses from others. In reaction to this fear socially anxious individuals use safety behaviours, which leads to them experiencing a subjective sense of inauthenticity and often prevents them from forming relationships with others. While the use of safety behaviours (avoidance, poor eye contact, saying little) can make it seem like socially anxiety individuals want to avoid relating to others they also appear to use strategies which have the aim of forming a connection to others. Finally, the interpersonal behaviour of socially anxious individuals is flexible and they are able to interact more successfully when they are in the company of someone they perceive as being 'safe'.

4.2.2 How do socially anxious individual experience the development of interpersonal relationships?

Existing literature has shed little light on how social anxiety impacts on the development of interpersonal relationships. Participants in this study described how relationship formation was a slow, careful and protracted process. At the early stages of relationships participants' experienced a lack of intimacy and closeness. According to The Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy (Reis & Shaver, 1998) reciprocal self-disclosure is a key process in the development of intimacy. Thus the lack of intimacy experienced by participants in these relationships could be explained by the absence of self-disclosure. In fact a number of studies have found that socially anxious individuals tend not to disclose very much information about themselves, at least not to strangers in laboratory settings (DePaulo, Epstein, & LeMay, 1990; Reno & Kenny, 1992).

Furthermore, they are less likely to reciprocate the level of disclosure displayed by their conversational partner (Meleshko & Alden, 1993).

However, participants in this study described having a number of close relationships in which they able to disclose information about themselves without much difficulty. This suggests that socially anxious individuals do not lack the ability to self-disclose, rather it appears they are cautious with their self-disclosure. At the early stages of relationship development they are careful not to reveal too much about themselves, perhaps in an attempt to protect against rejection. However, through repeated exposure they started to feel more comfortable with other people and were eventually able to reveal more information about themselves. This finding is consistent with Alden and Bieling (1998) and DePaulo et al. (1990) who found if the circumstances are favourable socially anxious individuals are capable of being just as intimate in their self-disclosures as non-socially anxious individuals.

It is unclear from previous research what socially anxious individuals want from their relationships with others. They may want to keep a certain distance to protect themselves from rejection or if they want to overcome their fears and achieve closeness. Participants in this study spoke about how establishing intimacy was vital and necessary. Thus while the use of safety behaviours (avoidance, poor eye contact, saying little) can make it seem like socially anxiety individuals want to avoid intimacy this appears to not be the case. Therefore the result of this study suggest that socially anxious individuals do desire to form deep and meaningful relationship with others.

In summary, phenomenological investigation suggests that socially anxious individuals tend not to disclose very much about themselves at the early stages of a relationship. The consequence of this is that these relationships lack intimacy and closeness in the beginning. However, socially anxious individuals do not appear to lack the skills or desire to self-disclosure. Given enough time and exposure to others they feel more comfortable and are able to self-disclose, which can lead to the development of intimacy. A final and important point is that socially anxious individuals do appear to desire intimacy from their interpersonal

relationships. The self-protective communication style they display at the early stages of a relationship is gradually dropped as they feel more comfortable and less threatened by others.

4.2.3 How do socially anxious individuals experience close interpersonal relationships?

Only a limited number of studies have explored how socially anxious individuals interact within established intimate relationships, such as close friendships and romantic relationships. However, the few studies that have addressed this topic have found a range of relational deficiencies within these relationships. These include low emotional expression, lack of disclosure, avoidance of conflict and interpersonal dependency (Cuming & Rapee, 2010; Sparrevohn and Rapee, 2009; Beck et al., 2006, Darcy et al., 2005, Wenzel et al., 2005, Davila & Beck, 2002). Contrary to these findings, participants in this study did not report interpersonal dysfunction in their established close relationships with others. Instead they described how they were able to be completely open and did not have to hide anything. This suggests that the participants experienced 'felt understanding' - the sense that they were accurately perceived, understood, appreciated and cared for (Reis, 2007). This may indicate that the close interpersonal relationships of socially anxious individuals are no more dysfunctional than the close relationships of non-socially anxious individuals. Alternatively, it may be that the socially anxious individuals in this study were unaware of the dysfunctional aspects of their relationships. Further investigation, particularly studies which include the views and experiences of significant others, is warranted to clarify this issue.

Another area that existing research has provided little insight into is whether or not socially anxious individuals are able to establish a sense of audacious trust (Holmes & Murray, 2007) with their friend or partner. According to The Risk Regulation Model (Murray et al., 2006) this is a prerequisite for developing feelings of security within close relationships. Murray et al. (2001) found that the development of audacious trust was impaired by the experience of self-doubt. However, it appeared that this was not the case for participants in this study. Despite worrying about negative judgement and doubting their ability to interact

socially, participants were able to establish close relationships with others. They spoke about how such relationships provided them with feeling of safety and security. This suggests that, at least in some cases, socially anxious individuals are capable of experiencing a sense of audacious trust. Perhaps this just takes longer for socially anxious individuals to develop compared to those who do not experience social anxiety. Further research exploring factors that contribute to the development of audacious trust in socially anxious individuals would be worthwhile.

Regardless of the presence of dysfunction, the intimate relationships that participants formed were experienced as satisfying and associated with a range of benefits such as positive feelings, improved mood and an increased sense of security. This fits with previous research which highlights the importance of intimacy for psychological well-being. For example, Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe and Ryan (2000) found that day-to-day variations in the feeling of closeness and relation with others predicted daily indicators of well-being, including positive affect and vitality. Similarly, Nezlek (2000) found that the quality of an interpersonal interaction was a stronger predictor of wellbeing that the frequency of an interpersonal interaction. Thus it appears that socially anxious individuals benefit from intimacy in much the same way as non-socially anxious individuals.

In summary, phenomenological investigation did not find evidence to suggest that the close interpersonal relationships of socially anxious individuals are characterised by dysfunction. The participants' descriptions of their close relationships conveyed the sense that they experienced felt understanding and audacious trust. This enabled them to feel accurately perceived and secure in their relationships. Additionally, it appeared that socially anxious individuals benefit from intimacy in much the same way as non-socially anxious individuals. In short, their sense of safety and emotional well-being are improved by these kinds of relationships.

4.3 Implications

This study has provided novel insights into how socially anxious individuals experience interpersonal relationships and has the following implications:

4.3.1 Implications for Practice

4.3.1.1 Conceptualisations of Social Anxiety and Assessment
In the introduction to this study I contextualised the research by tracing the evolution of the construct of social anxiety from early conceptualisations to the way it is currently defined in DSM-V. In doing so I highlighted the dominance of the categorical definitions. I also described the limitations of this approach such as the encouragement of 'essentialism' which can lead clinicians and researchers to focus on operational criteria rather than individual experience. I wanted to avoid this pitfall and so in my interviews with participants I asked open questions about their unique individualised experiences. As a result I was able to gain access to a range of rich and multifaceted stories about loneliness, friendship and intimacy. In talking about their struggles in these areas participants revealed aspects of their experience that clinicians and researchers often downplay or ignore. This led to the uncovering of useful information such as strategies which participants used to overcome interpersonal barriers and facilitate the formation of relationships with others. It seems unlikely this information would have come to light if I had enquired only about symptomology. Thus the findings of this research reveal that if clinicians focus their assessment of clients on the operational criteria listed in DSM and have a lack of curiosity about individual differences they are likely to miss out on a range of important information which is likely to be useful when planning interventions.

4.3.1.2 Therapeutic Alliance
Therapy involves an interpersonal interaction between the therapist and client. The difficulties socially anxious individuals experience during such situations could disrupt the therapeutic process. For instance, establishing a therapeutic alliance will in part require the client to be able to self-disclose information about their thoughts and feelings. This is something socially anxious individuals find

difficult at the beginning of relationships. Therapists should therefore consider interpersonal process in treatment and be aware that establishing a positive therapeutic alliance may take longer with socially anxious clients.

4.3.1.3 Interpersonal Process in Treatment

Cognitive-behavioural therapy is the most common treatment offered to socially anxious individuals (NICE, 2013). This approach is based on the assumption that a reduction in levels of social anxiety may be brought about by changing an individual's beliefs and behaviours. The findings of this study suggest that it may also be useful for therapists to consider interpersonal processes in treatment. While more research is needed to clarify the exact mechanisms involved, the following factors seem particularly pertinent.

Firstly, a key element of CBT for social anxiety is helping clients to drop the use of maladaptive safety behaviours. However this study found that socially anxious individual are motivated by more than just the pursuit of safety. They also make strategic use of behaviours aimed at developing closeness. Thus in addition to dropping safety behaviours, perhaps treatment could help clients to identify and use behaviours that help them establish more positive transaction cycles. This could benefit wellbeing by helping clients to develop better relationships.

Secondly, this study found that socially anxious individuals feel more comfortable and less anxious in the presence of people they perceived as 'safe'. In such situations socially anxious individuals drop their safety behaviours and shift to behaviour aimed at connecting to others. When they do this it appears that socially anxious individuals are capable of interacting quite effectively. Therapists could make use of this information to help illustrate to clients the role that social cues play in leading them to anticipate certain responses from others and to adopting certain social roles. This may help clients to transfer the effective social behaviours they experience in specific situations and with certain 'safe' people to multiple contexts.

4.3.2 Implications for Future Research

The study provides a foundation for further investigative work, potentially in the following areas:

4.3.2.1 Interpersonal Psychotherapy

Interpersonal Psychotherapy (Klerman, Weissman, Rounsaville, & Chevron, 1984) aims to reduce distress by targeting interpersonal difficulties. It was first developed as an intervention for depression but a number of studies have applied it to the treatment of social anxiety. While there is some evidence that it can serve to reduce levels of anxiety (Lipsitz, Markowitz, Cherry, & Fyer, 1999) it does not seem to be as effective as CBT (Borge et al., 2008; Stangier, Schramm, Heidenreich, Berger, & Clark, 2011). Nevertheless, given that this study has identified that social anxiety has a strong interpersonal competent, further research into the effectiveness of interpersonal psychotherapy is warranted. Such an approach may prove to be a useful supplement to CBT or an alternative approach that helps the high percentage of CBT non-responders.

4.3.2.2 The Nature of Close Relationships

Contrary to previous research, this study did not find evidence that the close interpersonal relationships of participants are characterised by dysfunction. Given the small sample size and the absence of voices of relational partners, this result could be an idiosyncrasy to this study. Alternatively, the fact that previous studies were largely conducted in artificial laboratory settings may have lead socially anxious individual to act in ways that differed to how they would act in natural settings. Before a firm conclusion can be made on this point further investigation is warranted.

4.3.2.3 Multiple Perspectives

This study only examined the perspective of socially anxious individuals. However, future studies may hope to explore multiple perspectives. For instance, it may be informative to seek the views and experiences of significant others who have relationships with socially anxious individuals. Such research may clarify how others experience interpersonal relationship with socially anxious individuals.

It may also serve to capture any dysfunctional interpersonal processes which socially anxious individuals are unaware of.

4.3.2.4 Cultural Differences

In line with the requirements of IPA, this study used a homogenous sample of English speaking individuals who lived in the United Kingdom and experienced social anxiety. However, the way in which social anxiety is conceived, experienced and expressed appears to differently across nations (Caballo et al., 2008). It would therefore be useful for future studies to explore how cultural differences impact on the social functioning of socially anxious individuals. Such research would contribute to the overall understanding and treatment of social anxiety in those from non-western cultures.

4.3.2.5 Social Anxiety and Neoliberalism

Smail (1984) argued that our subjective experience of the world tells us important truths about it. According to Smail, individuals who live in anxiety, fear and dread do so because this constitutes a proper response to very real dangers in their social environment. When reflecting on the stories that participants' shared with me I wondered what their experience of social anxiety revealed about the world they lived in. Hickinbottom-Brawn (2013) argued that rather than being the result of individual pathology, the experience of social anxiety owes much to contemporary culture, particularly neoliberal ideologies, which regards competition as the defining characteristic of interpersonal relationships. In such a world success is dependent on one's skill at impression management and networking. Those who fall behind are defined as losers. With so much at stake in every interaction it is easy to see why social anxiety is now the third most common psychological complaint in Western nations (Kessler et al., 2005). Perhaps then, rather than suffering from a disorder, socially anxious individuals are simply more aware of the threats we all face when interacting with others. Smail (1984) described such individuals as being afflicted with an 'intuitive sensitivity' which permits them to recognise a truth which their more confident counterparts have repressed. If this is the case then future research exploring the phenomenological experience of socially anxious individuals in spheres such as

the workplace could provide insights into the psychological consequences of our neoliberal times.

4.4 Critical Review

This section will critically review the study and is informed by Yardley's (2000) framework for evaluating qualitative research and Smith's (2011) more specific guidelines for evaluating IPA studies.

4.4.1 Commitment

Yardley (2000) states that commitment encompasses prolonged engagement with the topic of investigation, the development of competence in the methods employed and immersion in the data.

My engagement with the topic of social anxiety began out of a personal interest which arose from having experiences of feeling uncomfortable in situations such as delivering presentations. I wanted to conduct a piece of research on the topic but was unsure of the focus or the method. My initial literature search identified a number of key articles (e.g. Alden & Taylor, 2004, 2010) which highlighted the paucity of research exploring interpersonal aspects of social anxiety. This led me to become interested in this overlooked area of research. After reading the few studies which had explored this topic I was struck by the absence of qualitative studies. I therefore felt that a study exploring how socially anxious individuals experienced interpersonal relationships could help expand the knowledge base.

This was the first time I have used IPA and I acknowledge that at the beginning of the research process I was a novice researcher. Nevertheless, I feel I have demonstrated a commitment to this approach by seeking the supervision of an experienced IPA researcher, carrying out extensive reading about IPA and discussing the analytic process with colleagues more experienced in this approach to research. I enjoyed the experience of immersing myself in the data and appreciated the opportunity to get to share people stories. At the same time I found it a challenge. There were moments were I felt overwhelmed with the volume of data generated and needed to take a break from the analytic process.

Whenever I did so I felt I was able to return to the data feeling refreshed and the feelings of being lost would give way to moments of clarity.

I demonstrated immersion in the data by using the allocated research days allotted to me by the university to take a block of time to focus on conducting an in-depth reading and coding of each interview. This uninterrupted analysis allowed me to 'enter the world' of the participants. It also permitted me sufficient time to conduct an analysis which moved beyond the descriptive to be interpretative.

4.4.2 Sensitivity to Context

According to Yardley (2000) high quality qualitative research should show sensitivity to context. I attempted to do this in several ways. First, I summarising the research literature on social anxiety and highlighted gaps in how social anxiety is understood. Second, I discussed the theoretical underpinnings of IPA and outlined my own epistemological position. Third, I provided demographic information about the participants and details about the support groups I recruited from.

Smith et al. (2009) argues that sensitivity to context can also be shown through the way in which the researcher interacts with participants during the interview. I feel this was particularly important to the present study as the interview was a social interaction that may have been anxiety provoking for some participants. My efforts to show sensitivity to this context are outlined in appendix B. This shows how I considered how the environment, my behaviour and questions used could impact on the participants. During the interviews I was also aware of potential power imbalances that could result if I was positioned as an 'expert'. To counter this I stressed at the beginning of each interview that the participants were 'experts by experience' and that this was why I had sought them out.

4.4.3 The Quality of Data

Strong data necessitates the selection of a homogenous sample of participants (Smith et al., 2009). While the sample differed in terms of age and gender, it was homogenous in that all participants experienced social anxiety, had sought the

help of a social anxiety support group, and lived in the United Kingdom. Thus it is likely that the stories they shared will reflect the experiences of many others who suffer from social anxiety. However, some concerns may be raised regarding the use of a support group as the recruitment source. It could be argued that this may have resulted in sample that was biased, in that those who sought the help of a support group may experience interpersonal relationships in a different way to those who have never sought the help of a support group. In addition, the lack of diversity of the sample in terms of ethnicity and gender could be seen as a limitation.

Smith (2011) argues that strong data also requires the researcher to conduct good quality interviews. However, my experience of conducting this study suggests that the relationship between a good interview and good data is not a straightforward one. I observed that the same interview schedule and manner of questioning produced different results with each participant. Furthermore, the multiple identities which I outlined in the methodology and was open about with participants will have undoubtedly influenced what they chose to talk or not talk about. It is likely that participants would have revealed different elements of their experience to researchers holding different identities. Thus the stories that emerged from the interviews could be understood to be co-constructed by myself and the participants.

Collecting data through semi-structured interviews is standard practice in IPA studies (Smith et al., 2009). However, Harper (2013) points out that interviews can introduce the researcher's agenda into the collection of data. To guard against this I tried to be as open as possible in my questioning. This allowed the participants to tell their stories in their own way. At the end of the interview I also gave participants the opportunity to tell me about aspects of social anxiety and interpersonal relationship that I had not asked about and they felt was important. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that the fact that I am trainee clinical psychologist means that I will have to some extent have been socialised by the existing research literature and this may have influenced the questions I chose.

Potter and Hepburn (2005) outlined a number of criticisms of the way in which interviews are written up in qualitative research. These included the deletion of the interviews questions, the collapsing of different elements of responses together and lack of information about the interview set-up. I attempted to address these criticisms by including questions in extracts were space would permit, giving the line numbers of the quotes used and being transparent about how I recruited participants.

4.4.4 Remuneration

Payment of research participants raises a number of ethical issues. For instance, there is a danger that participants may feel coerced into taking part and unable to withdraw their consent. However, not paying participants could also be construed to be unethical (Head, 2009). After considering this issue I felt it was important for me to acknowledge participants' contribution to the larger body of research so I decided to recompense them with a £10 voucher. I was careful to stress that they were free to not answer any of my questions and could stop the interview if they felt uncomfortable. Furthermore I made it clear that they could withdraw consent even after the interview had been completed. It was my hope that payment would help to address the power imbalance between the research participants and myself as it meant I was not the only one benefitting from the exchange. Interestingly two of the participants did not want to accept payment as they said they were grateful for the opportunity to share their story and did not feel that payment was necessary.

The other concern about paying participants is that it may mean that rather than give an authentic account of their experience they may feel obliged to tell the researcher what they feel they want to hear (Head, 2009). I was very clear with participants that I was interested in hearing about their experiences of interpersonal relationships. Given that socially anxious individuals typically avoid others there is a possibility that some participants may have inferred that I wanted to hear about dysfunction. However, all participants shared stories about a wide range of relationships, some of which could be described as less functional but others in which there seemed to be a high level of intimacy and

trust. From this evidence I was not overly concerned that payment caused participants to share inauthentic stories.

4.4.5 Rigour

Rigor may refer to the quality and depth of interpretation. To ensure that I achieved this I used the guidelines outlined in Smith et al.'s (2009) which illustrated the multiple levels of interpretation which are possible in IPA. The interpretations I made were undoubtedly influenced by my theoretical and clinical knowledge. In many ways this process felt similar to the work I have done helping clients make sense of their experiences in therapy. The interpretative process was also guided by discussions I had with my supervisor who was more experienced in IPA. I also found it helpful to keep a reflexive diary (see appendix J). However, I acknowledge that qualitative research does not have a defined finishing point and further analysis could lead to additional insights. Nevertheless, I hope that my interpretation of the data provides meaningful insight into how socially anxious individuals experience interpersonal relationships with others. My aim in interpreting the data was to see the world as experienced by the participants. Prior to collecting the data I outlined factors which I felt could shape my interpretative framework. These were listed in the methodology and included the identities I hold as a male, white Irish person, trainee clinical psychologist and person who can relate to experiences of social anxiety. I acknowledge that these will have inevitably influenced what I attended to in the interview and fostered a tendency to prioritise certain themes over others. However, I feel that my awareness of this fact ensures this has been kept to a minimum and that my interpretations are grounded in the data. Given the centrality of researcher subjectivity in this approach Brocki and Wearden (2006) point out that credibility checks used in other qualitative research methods are not appropriate for IPA studies. An outsider cross-checking the researcher's interpretations would be incongruent with the epistemology of this approach (Smith et al., 2009).

According to Smith (2011) rigour also refers to the themes being well represented across the sample. There is no rule for how many times a theme needs to reoccur. However, in this study prevalence of themes across the sample ranged from 4/6 to 6/6 indicating a high level of prevalence (see Table 4).

4.4.6 Transparency

Yardley (2000) describes transparency as the clarity the researcher provides about how they carried out each stage of the research process. I endeavoured to achieve clarity by outlining my epistemological position and theoretical orientation. I then went on to describe participant recruitment, data collection and the procedures followed during analysis. I also provided a list of factors which many have influenced my interpretative framework. Finally, in appendices K to P I have included samples of the analysis. I feel this level of transparency ensures credibility and enables my analytic process to be scrutinised by others.

4.4.7 Summary of Strengths

- The findings generated result from a high level of commitment as demonstrated by a prolonged engagement with the topic of investigation, the development of competence in the use of IPA and immersion in the data.

- The study demonstrates sensitivity to the context in which it is situated by providing a summary of the existing research, discussing the theoretical underpinnings of IPA, outlining the researcher's epistemological position and providing demographic information about the participants.

- The data was collected from a sample that was homogenous in that all participants experienced social anxiety, had sought the help of a social anxiety support group, and lived in the United Kingdom. These participants were given an opportunity to tell their stories in their own words and thus share their story.

- The analysis was rigorous as demonstrated by following guidelines about interpretation outlined by a key text, seeking the support of an experienced IPA researcher and keeping a reflective diary. Factors which could have shaped the interpretative framework were acknowledged and the themes identified were well represented across the sample.

- Transparency was provided about the processes followed during participant recruitment, data collection and analysis. Relevant examples have been included in the appendices which enable the reader to scrutinise the analytic process.

4.4.8 Summary of Limitations

- The participants in the study had all sought the help of a social anxiety support group. It is therefore possible that the findings do not reflect the experiences of socially anxious individuals who would not seek the help of a support group.

- The sample showed a lack of diversity in terms of ethnicity and gender. It is therefore possible the findings do not generalise to socially anxious individuals who do not live in the United Kingdom or those who are female.

- The personal identities of the researcher may have influenced what participants choose to share with them during the interview. Thus the experiences shared were filtered through the lens of the researcher and cannot understood to be an absolute truth.

- Despite efforts to be reflexive the preconceptions, biases and personal interests of the researcher will have influenced the analysis.

4.5 Impact

Perhaps the most decisive criterion by which any research is judged is its impact and utility. This study has provided novel insights into an under-researched and poorly understood aspect of social anxiety. It explored the way in which socially anxious individuals experienced interpersonal relationships and illuminated the topic in a way that would not have been possible with quantitative methods. It is my plan to disseminate the findings to researchers and clinicians by publishing a paper in an academic journal.

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6. APPENDICES

Appendix A: Literature Search Strategy

Appendix B: Demographic Information Form

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Appendix A: LITERATURE SEARCH *STRATEGY*

Stage 1: Pearl Growing

This involved reading key articles on social anxiety and interpersonal relationships (e.g. Alden, Regambal, & Plasencia, 2014; Alden & Taylor, 2004, 2010) and identifying key terms or 'pearls' (Booth, 2016) on which to base subsequent searches. The terms identified are listed in the Table 1.

Table 1: Search Terms Identified from Key Articles

Concept	Search Terms
Social Anxiety	"Social Anxiety"
	"Social Phobia"
Interpersonal Relationships	"Interpersonal"
	"Relationship"
	"Friendship"
	"Romance"

Stage 2: Search

The search was performed across three databases (PsychINFO, CINAHL plus and Scopus). The search process is represented diagrammatically in Figure 1.

PsychINFO Search

The search on PsychINFO involved both free-text and thesaurus searching of English language articles between 2004 and 2017. In order to reduce the results to a manageable amount studies which explored social anxiety in children were excluded. Search terms were combined used Boolean logic in the following way:

SU (("Social Anxiety") OR ("Social Phobia")) AND SU (AND ("Interpersonal" OR "Relationship" OR "Friendship" OR "Romance"))

This yielded 389 results which were screened by title to leave 30 articles.

For the thesaurus search the search terms were modified to fit with the PsychINFO thesaurus and combined used Boolean logic in the following way:

((DE "Social Anxiety") OR (DE "Social Phobia")) AND (DE "Interpersonal Relationships" OR DE "Interpersonal Processes" OR DE "Friendship" OR DE "Marital Relations" OR DE "Romance" OR DE "Interpersonal Interaction" OR DE "Relationship Quality" OR DE "Relationship Satisfaction")

The search identified 103 articles which were screened by title to leave 31 articles, 30 of which had already been identified in the free-text search.

Thus the total number of articles found using PsychINFO was 31.

CINAHL Plus Search

The search on CINAHL Plus involved both free-text and thesaurus searching of English language articles published between 2004 and 2017. Studies exploring social anxiety in children were excluded.

For the free-text search the search terms were combined used Boolean logic in the following way:

TX (("Social Anxiety") OR ("Social Phobia")) AND TX (AND (("Interpersonal" OR "Relationship" OR "Friendship" OR "Romance"))

This yielded 15 results which were screened by title to leave 1 article.

For the Thesaurus search the search terms were modified to for with CINAHL plus headings combined used Boolean logic in the following way:

(MH "Social Anxiety Disorders") AND (MH "Interpersonal Relations+")

This yielded 17 results which were screened by title to leave 1 article, which had been previously identified in the free-text search.

Thus the total number of articles found using CINAHL Plus was 1.

SCOPUS Search

In order to reduce the results to a manageable amount the search on SCOPUS was restricted to a keyword search of English language psychology articles published between 2004 and 2017. Studies exploring social anxiety in children were excluded. The search terms were combined using Boolean logic in the following way:

("Social Anxiety" OR "Social Phobia") AND ("Interpersonal" OR "Relationship" OR "Friendship" OR "Romance")

The search yielded 427 articles which were screened by title to leave 31 articles.

Further Refinements

The search across the three databases lead to a list of 63 articles. Duplicates were removed which left 49 articles. These articles were then reviewed by their abstract which left 14 articles.

Bibliographic Searching

To make sure no important studies were missed the bibliographies and reference lists of the 14 identified studies were examined. This identified 7 additional studies.

Thus the final number of studies inculded in the review was 21.
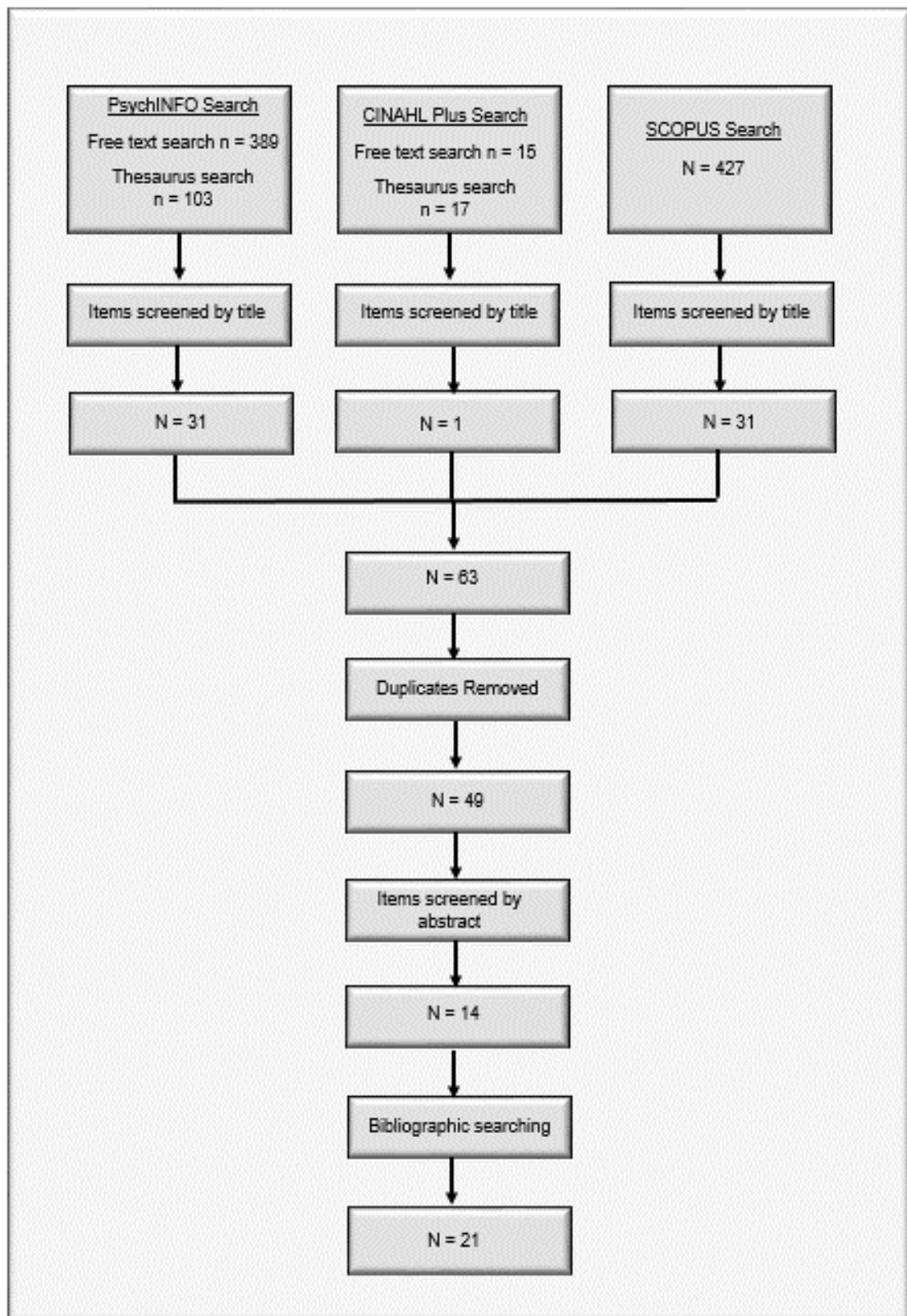
Figure 1: Diagram of Study Selection Procedure

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APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM

1. How old are you?

_____[Fill in the blank]

2. What is your gender?

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Trans

☐ _____ [Fill in the blank]

3. What is your current relationship status?

☐ Single

☐ In a relationship

☐ Married

☐ Married but separated

☐ Divorced

4. Approximately how long have you experienced social anxiety?

_____years [Fill in the blank]

5. Have you ever received a diagnosis of Social Anxiety Disorder or Social Phobia?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

6. Have you ever received treatment for your social anxiety?

☐ Yes   _____ [Please specify]

☐ No

7. Please choose the option that best describes your ethnic group or background:

White

☐ British

☐ Irish

☐ Gypsy or Irish Traveller

☐ Any other White background, please describe: _____

Mixed / Multiple Ethnic Groups

☐ White and Black Caribbean

☐ White and Black African

☐ White and Asian

☐ Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background, please describe: _____

Asian / Asian British

☐ Indian

☐ Pakistani

☐ Bangladeshi

☐ Chinese

☐ Any other Asian background, please describe: _____

Black/ African/Caribbean/Black British

☐ African

☐ Caribbean

☐ Any other Black/African/Caribbean background, please describe

Other Ethnic Group

☐ Arab

☐ Any other ethnic group, please describe: _____

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Can you tell about the last time you experienced social anxiety?

    Prompts: Where were you? Who were you with?

    What thoughts did you have? Did you experience any physical sensations? How did you respond to the social anxiety?

2. Can you tell me what it is like for you getting to know someone?

    Prompts: Tell me about a time it went well

    Tell me about a time it did not go so well

3. What type of people do you enjoy spending time with?

    Prompts: Personality. Interests. Behaviour.

    What activities do you like to do with them?

    What type of people do you 'not' enjoy spending time with?

4. How do you think other people generally perceive you?

    Prompts: Do people get you? Do people understand you?

    What is that like for you? How do you cope with that?

    People who have known you for a short time vs people you have known for a long time?

5. What does 'friendship' mean to you?

    Prompts: Is it important to you? What do you seek in a potential friend? What do you get out of friendships? What do you offer?

6. If you could take a moment to think about a your *closest* friendship

    What is the best thing about it? How did the friendship develop?

    Why would you define it as close?

    What activities do you like to do together?

7. If you could take a moment to think about your conversations with this person.

    What sort of things do you generally talk about?

    Is there anything you would never discuss with this person?

8. Do you think that your social anxiety has impacted on the friendship?

    Prompts: If so, how? Do you think the relationship would be different if you were not affected by social anxiety? If so, how? Has the friendship had any impact on your social anxiety? If so, in what way?

9. Are you currently or have you ever been in a romantic relationship?

    <u>If currently in a romantic relationship</u>

    Tell me about the relationship…what is the best thing about it?

    What do you get out of your relationship with this person?
    What do you think this person gets out of their relationship with you?

    What sort of things do you like to do together?
    What sort of things do you generally talk about?
    Is there anything you would never discuss with this person?

    Has your social anxiety impacted on the relationship? If so, in what way?
    Has the relationship impacted on your social anxiety? If so, in what way?

    <u>If was in a romantic relationship in the past</u>
    Tell me about the relationship… what was the best thing about it?

    What did you get out of the relationship with this person?

What do you think this this person got out of their relationship with you?

What sort of things did you like to do together?
What sort of things did you generally talk about?
Was there anything you would never discuss with this person?

Is there anything you would like to change about your relationship with this person?

Did your social anxiety impact on the relationship? If so, in what way?
Did the relationship impact on your social anxiety? If so, in what way?

If have never been in a romantic relationship
Do you choose not to be in a relationship? Why?
What are your thoughts on romantic relationships?
Advantage and disadvantages?

10. Can you tell me about a relationship that you are not satisfied with? (friendship, acquaintance, work colleague)
    Prompts: Why are you unsatisfied with it?
    How does it differ from a relationship you are satisfied with?
    What is the worst thing about it? How does it makes you feel?
    What would you like to be different?

11. Is there anything do with social anxiety and relationships with other people that I have not asked you about but you think it would be important to share?

APPENDIX D: CONSIDERATIONS WHEN INTERVIEWING SOCIALLY ANXIOUS INDIVIDUALS

The interviews I will be conducting in this study present an opportunity for those socially anxious individuals to share their thoughts about and experiences of interpersonal relationships. However, given that the interview is itself a social situation there are number of factors which should be taken into consideration. These are discussed below and are influenced by McNeil and Quentin's (2014) guidelines for clinicians conducting assessment interviews with socially anxious clients.

Anticipatory Anxiety

Firstly, it is likely that the thought of taking part in the study will evoke anxiety in potential participants. Some may find the interpersonal closeness of a face-to-face interview quite uncomfortable while for others this may be reassuring. For this reason, I have opted to give participants a number of ways of taking part. They may choose to be interviewed in-person, over Skype or over the telephone.

Interview Environment

For participants who choose to be interviewed in person I will need to give careful consideration to the physical environment of the interview room. Griest, Kobak, Jefferson, Katzelnic, and Chene (1995) recommend that interviews with people affected by social anxiety should take place in a room that allows the interviewer and the interviewee to sit as comfortably apart as necessary. They also recommend muted lighting to decrease levels of arousal. In order to allow transcription the interviews will be audio recorded. This is something that may evoke anxiety in participants. While participants will be made aware that the interview is being recorded it may be helpful in reducing anxiety levels to make sure the audio recorder is left out of sight.

If participants choose to be interviewed over Skype or the telephone I will ask them to sit in a room in which they feel comfortable and will not be subject to unnecessary interruptions. When carrying out such interviews I will be located in

a confidential room where it will not be possible for anyone to overhear my questions.

Manifestations of Social Anxiety during the Interview

Socially anxious individuals are generally considered to be reliant and accurate informants on their symptomatology (Herbert, Rheingold, & Brandsma, 2010). However, the social anxiety of participants in this study may manifest itself in a number of problematic ways during the interview. Marks' (1987) conceptualisation of the four types of fear behaviours (withdrawal, immobility, submission, aggression) may be helpful in considering how this anxiety may present. Firstly, participants may respond with *avoidance* and provide short minimal answers. Secondly, they may *freeze* and not be able to provide answers. Thirdly, they may respond with obsequiousness and be overly concerned with making a good impression. Fourthly, they may respond with rudeness at being asked questions that make them feel uncomfortable.

Research has shown that individuals with social anxiety are more likely to display such behaviours when faced with the threat of negative evaluation (Alden & Bieling, 1998). Therefore, it will be crucial for me to manage this fear by presenting a non-judgemental, accepting, warm and empathic stance. Building a good rapport and a sense of trust will be critical. Given the nature of social anxiety it is necessary to be mindful of how I go about developing this. While engaging in 'small talk' at the beginning of the interview may help to facilitate the development of rapport in some, for others this may be a demanding and anxiety provoking task. Such individuals may respond well to positive non-verbal behaviour such as the mimicry of posture, body language, gestures and mannerisms which has been found to facilitate the development of liking (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). Other strategies helpful for building rapport include the use of labelled praise to specifically note the positive behaviours of the interviewee (McNeil & Quentin, 2014). For example, if I observe that the participant is being open and honest with me during the interview it may be helpful for me to point this out.

The development of rapport may also be facilitated by outlining the rationale for the current study. As this will mostly be a one way conversation the demands on the participant will be limited and this will give them time to acclimatise to the interview environment. Furthermore, as socially anxious individuals often believe their reactions to social experiences are abnormal, calling attention to previous research will help normalise their experience (Herbert et al., 2010).

With regards the questions asked during the interview, it will be crucial to consider sequencing. Some researchers advocate the use of closed questions when interviewing someone affected by social anxiety as these place less demand on them and thus decrease arousal levels (McNeil & Quentin, 2014). For this reason it may be helpful to collect demographic information at the beginning of in interview. This should help them to settle into the interview before moving on to the open questions in the semi-structured interview.

As the questions asked are potentially anxiety provoking I must be mindful of how they are delivered. Bombarding the participant with question after question in quick succession is unlikely to be helpful. In order to take the pressure of the participant it may be helpful to incorporate a number of techniques used in Motivational Interviewing such as reflection, paraphrasing, summarisation and affirmation (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). Reflections during the interview can communicate empathy and understanding of the person's experiences. Paraphrasing can be used as a type of reflection to transmit understanding and to focus attention on a particular component of what the participant has shared. Summarising statements can be used prior to moving on to a new topic to highlight main themes and check understanding. Affirmations are a way of acknowledging positive behaviour to build confidence and rapport (McNeil & Quentin, 2014).

There may be times during the interview when the participant needs moments of silence to collect their thoughts, particularly if their arousal levels are high. Therefore, I should allow for periods of silence, particularly if I have asked a demanding question. Nevertheless, I should also be mindful that long periods of silence may put undue pressure on the participant. Finally, it may be helpful to

check in with the participant at regular intervals during the interview to see are they are doing and it they desire it offer them breaks.

<u>Conclusion</u>

In conclusion, the interviews with participants in this study presents both opportunities and challenges. Even if participants are able to overcome their initial fears to take part in the study their social anxiety may manifest in a number of problematic ways. In order to minimise this it will be necessary to give careful consideration to a number of factors inculding: the physical environment of the room (furniture, lighting, limiting interruptions); the facilitation of rapport through the thoughtful application of verbal (small talk, labelled praise, normalisation) and non-verbal (posture, body language, gestures, mannerisms) strategies; and the way in which the interview is conducted (closed vs. open questions, reflections, paraphrasing, summaries, affirmations, use of silences, checking in).

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Appendix E: RESEARCH REGISTRATION DOCUMENTATION

Date: 2 June 2016

Student Number: 1438335

Dear Ronan,

Registration as a Candidate for the University's Research Degree

I am pleased to inform you that the Research Degrees Subcommittee on behalf of the University Quality and Standards Committee, has registered you for the degree of Professional Doctorate.

Title of Professional Doctorate: Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology

Director of Studies: Poul Rohleder

Supervisor/s: Paula Magee

Expected completion: According to your actual date of registration, which is **1 October 2015**, the registration period is as follows:

Minimum 18 months maximum 48 months (4 years), according to a full time mode of study.

Your thesis is therefore due to be submitted between:

1st April 2017 – 1st October 2019

I wish you all the best with your intended research degree programme. Please contact me if you have any further queries regarding to this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Kenneth Gannon
School Research Degrees Leader
Direct line: 020 8223 4576
Email: k.n.gannon@uel.ac.uk

Cc: Poul Rohleder, Paula Magee

Appendix F: UEL ETHICS APPROVAL DOCUMENTATION

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

For research involving human participants
BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational
Psychology

REVIEWER: Libby Watson
SUPERVISOR: Poul Rohleder
COURSE:Professional Doctorate in clinical psychology
STUDENT: Ronan McSorley
TITLE OF PROPOSED STUDY: An exploration of how individuals affected by social anxiety
experience relationships with others

DECISION OPTIONS:

1. **APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.

2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED <u>BEFORE</u> THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is <u>not</u> required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made <u>before</u> the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.

3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

==**DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY**==
==(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)==

APPROVED

Minor amendments required *(for reviewer)*:

N/A

Major amendments required *(for reviewer):*

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEACHER *(for reviewer)*

If the proposed research could expose the <u>researcher</u> to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

☐	<mark>HIGH</mark>
☐	<mark>MEDIUM</mark>
x	<mark>LOW</mark>

Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any):

<mark>**Reviewer**</mark> *(Typed name to act as signature)*:   L. Watson

<mark>**Date**</mark>: 16/5/16

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, travel approval from UEL (not the School of Psychology) must be gained if a researcher intends to travel overseas to collect data, even if this involves the researcher travelling to his/her home country to conduct the research. Application details can be found here: http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/fieldwork/

APPENDIX G: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

<u>**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**</u>

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this study.

Project Title

An exploration of how individuals affected by social anxiety experience relationships with others

Project Description

The purpose of the study is to explore how people affected by social anxiety experience and think about relationships with others. At present this is something that is not very well understood and it is hoped that this study will help us to develop our knowledge. The finished research will be written up as an academic thesis and may also be submitted to academic journals.

What does taking part involve?

If you choose to take part in the study, you will be asked to share your thoughts about relationships in your life. There are a number of ways you may do this. You may be interviewed in-person face-to-face, in-person facing away, Skype or telephone. Interviews are expected to last thirty to forty-five minutes but you may speak for less than this if you wish. There are no risks or danger involved in taking part.

Confidentiality of the Data

Your responses will remain completely confidential. At no point will your name or any other forms that can potentially identify you be required other than signing the consent form (see below).

The interviews will be recorded on a digital recorder and only I will listen to them in order to type them into transcripts. To ensure confidentiality any names that are mentioned, including yours, and information that could be used to make you or anyone else identifiable will be changed in the transcript. This transcript may be read by my supervisor [Dr Poul Rohleder] at the University of East London or the examiners who assess my thesis. No one else will have access to the transcript. All recordings and other documents will be stored on a computer that is password protected.

After the examination the recordings of the interview will be deleted. The written transcript will be kept as a computer file for three years and might be useful for additional articles or publications based on the research.

Location
University of East London
School of Psychology
Stratford Campus
Water Lane
London E15 4LZ

University interview rooms will be booked out for UEL based interviews. Alternatively, participants may choose to be interviewed on the premises of a support group they attend; or via telephone or Skype.

Ethical Approval
The study has received ethical approval from the University of East London ethics committee.

Remuneration
Participants will be offered a £10 Amazon voucher as a small token of appreciation for their time.

Disclaimer
You are not obliged to take part in this study and are free to withdraw, without any obligation to give a reason or without disadvantage to yourself, at any time before it is written up. If you choose to do this you must be inform me via email (u1438335@uel.ac.uk) before February 2017. Should you choose to withdraw all your recordings and transcripts will be deleted. If you choose to withdraw after receiving your £10 voucher you will not be required to return it.

If you have any questions or concerns about how the study has been conducted, please contact the study's supervisor [Poul Rohleder, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water lane, London E15 4LZ. Email: p.a.rohleder@uel.ac.uk. Telephone: 020 8223 6674]

Thank you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely,

Ronan McSorley
Trainee Clinical Psychologist
(u1438335@uel.ac.uk)

APPENDIX H: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FOR

CONSENT FORM   Date:……………………………

An exploration of how individuals affected by social anxiety experience relationships with others

I have the read the information leaflet relating to the above study in which I have been asked to participate and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what it being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the study has been completed.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me and for the information obtained to be used in relevant research publications.

Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)   Investigator's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

…………………………….   …………………………….

Participant's Signature   Investigator's Signature

…………………………….   …………………………….

APPENDIX I: PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF FORM

PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF SHEET

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information about the study that you just participated in.

Project Title
An exploration of how individuals affected by social anxiety experience relationships with others.

Project Description
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The general purpose of this research was to explore how people affected by social anxiety experience and think about relationships with others. At present this is something that is not very well understood and it is hoped that this study will help us to develop our knowledge. The finished research will be written up as an academic thesis and may also be submitted to academic journals.

What Happens Next?
Now that you have finished your interview I no longer need to ask you questions. I am planning to interview a maximum of ten people who are affected by social anxiety. When I have finished this I will look for themes in people's stories. It is hoped that this will help researchers understand how people affected by social anxiety think about relationship with others and provide insights which may prove useful for future therapeutic interventions.

Confidentiality of the Data
Your responses will remain completely confidential. At no point will your name or any other forms that can potentially identify you be required other than signing the consent form (see below).

The interviews will be recorded on a digital recorder and only I will listen to them in order to type them into transcripts. To ensure confidentiality any names that are mentioned, including yours, and information that could be used to make you or anyone else identifiable will be changed in the transcript. This transcript may be read by my supervisor [Dr Poul Rohleder] at the University of East London or the examiners who assess my thesis. No one else will have access to the transcript. All recordings and other documents will be stored on a computer that is password protected.

After the examination the recordings of the interview will be deleted. The written transcript will be kept as a computer file for three years and might be useful for additional articles or publications based on the research.

What if I change my mind about taking part?
You are not obliged to take part in this study, and are free to withdraw without any obligation to give a reason or without disadvantage to yourself at any time before it is written up. If you choose to do this you must be inform me via email (u1438335@uel.ac.uk) before February 2017. Should you choose to withdraw all your recordings and transcripts would be deleted. If you choose to withdraw after receiving your £10 voucher you would not be required to return it.

Who do I contact if I have questions?
If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact me [Ronan McSorley School of Psychology, University of East London, Water lane, London E15 4LZ, Email: u1438335@uel.ac.uk]

If you have any questions or concerns about how the study has been conducted, please contact the study's supervisor [Dr Poul Rohleder, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water lane, London E15 4LZ, Email: p.a.rohleder@uel.ac.uk. Telephone: 020 8223 6674].

Thank you for your participation.

Yours sincerely,

Ronan McSorley
Trainee Clinical Psychologist
(u1438335@uel.ac.uk

APPENDIX J: EXTRACT FROM REFLEXIVE DIARY

Interview with Claudia

My interview with Claudia was the first one I conducted over the telephone and I remember feeling preoccupied with whether or not the recording device would be able to pick up her voice. I feel that at the start of the interview this may have prevented me from being as attentive as I would have liked. There were certainly a few things that I regret not asking her more about, such as her close relationship with her parents or her experiences of getting angry with her partner. I found it interesting that she felt more able to be herself when she was angry and I would like to have heard more about this.

Before the interview began, Claudia shared that she was worried that she would not be able to give me the 'right' answers. However I reassured her that there was no right and wrong and that I was interested in her experiences and viewpoints. I stressed that she was the expert which was why I was seeking her opinion on these matters.

Claudia seemed to be hesitant and tentative with a lot of her answers. She spoke about difficulties she had trusting people when meeting them for the first time and I wondered if she trusted me completely. At one point she responded to one my question by asking me "do I have to tell you?" I reassured her that she did not have share anything with me that made her feel uncomfortable. At another point in her interview she described how she found it easier to interact with females. This made me wonder what it was like for her to be interviewed by a male.

APPENDIX K: FIRST STAGE OF IPA ANALYSIS - ANALYSIS OF SAMMY'S TRANSCRIPT

Top handwritten note: Does this mean he does put pressure on himself in other situations? 1-1? pressure to do what?

Participant 01: Sammy. Page: 5

Right margin header: factors that make him uncomfortable

Left margin notes	Line	Transcript	Right margin notes
Restart of ... personal relationships? ... experiencing from others	86.	SAMMY: [laugh], Well I felt quite relaxed. I didn't put any pressure on	environment is key — he does not like — what is it about busy environments he does not like?
Impact of environment (category/class) Does not like the focus on him Impact of spatial relationship (-ve) environmental coping strategy / outdoor Impact of spatial relationships (+ve) to see	87.	myself, tried to let go of all expectations and the environment is key for me.	Does not like the focus on him
	88.	So like I don't like to be in busy places. Or I don't like to feel like you're being	describing settings that make him feel more comfortable
	89.	interviewed, so sitting opposite, particularly on the first date anyway. I like to	Why is it easier to walk around. to be out in open space? why is this less threatening?
	90.	maybe walk around, maybe sit in a park, which is what we did. So that was	
easing into self	91.	good. So I was kind of was able to ease into myself. But the first time we	Comparing a date to an interview
date feels like an interview	92.	met, we met for a drink. It was kind of like, we only had an hour together.	comparing date to interview (does not like the focus on him)
impact of spatial relationships (-ve) fear of judgement	93.	She was sitting opposite me, kind of like what I describe as an interview kind	comparing date to an interview - does he fear that, like an interview the person is judging him? evaluating him?
not grounded	94.	of scenario. And actually that was the last time I felt, thinking about it now,	
	95.	actual anxiety came on. Because I remember feeling really nervous and	Does not feel grounded
interference of anxiety symptoms attempts at coping w/ symptoms	96.	anxious. I wasn't able to really be grounded in myself. And I remember	anxiety symptoms, attempts to cope with symptoms - will ignore
	97.	feeling like, I had that thing called nervous sweating, that came on. So I could	
	98.	feel it like on my face, I remember trying to wipe it, I was trying to lull it, also	
Absent self during interview/in the... Inward focus not in the moment Absent self feels like someone else driving the ...	99.	trying to ignore it. I remember that kind of prevented me from being myself	anxiety preventing him from being 'fully present' on date if he is not himself, who is he? if he is not present who is he? where is his attention?
	100.	and from fully listening to her and being present. I wasn't really present, I	restricted
	101.	was more focused on the anxiety. So I think that was the last time I	
	102.	remember feeling restricted really by it. Because I wasn't fully present, I	not fully present Who is Sammy, when he is able to be himself?
Absent self was unable to be set-	103.	wasn't able to really be myself and didn't feel comfortable basically,	
	104.	essentially. So yeah, so that was the last time. So that, in a way, I guess that	not himself
	105.	stopped me from being myself. Yeah.	Repetition of 'not present' and 'not myself'
	106.	I: Ok, so next question is what type of people do you enjoy spending time	
	107.	with?	

Bottom notes:
fear of
if it is judgement that is stopping him being himself - then what is it about judgement that leads to this response?

in being someone else, what is he achieving. → what function does this serve?

Participant 01: Sammy. Page: 6

Left margin notes:
- finds certain people interesting
- interest in personal growth
- finds certain people boring
- interest in ideas and theories
- likes debates
- likes deep thinkers / likes people who can relate to him
- Import of S.A. / working on S.A.
- experiencing the other
- interested in personal growth
- friends are different
- contradiction? / best friends are extraverts / yet finds it difficult to be around

Central transcript:

108. SAMMY: What type of people, I like interesting people. People that are into
109. culture. So they like, particularly people that are into growth, personal
110. development, maybe spirituality. The quite philosophical people. Maybe not
111. as logical. Like if we're going to use stereotypes, accountants, computer
112. programmers aren't really my usual people I tend to associate with because
113. they tend to be more logical. And talking about things like emotions and
114. things and having philosophical debates. I like to go deep into things, talk
115. about theories. They tend to, often, find it hard to relate I suppose. They see
116. things more black and white, whereas I like to see the blurred lines kind of
117. thing. So creative people, also people that are just really empathetic and in
118. touch with their emotions. I like people that are sensitive, in touch with their
119. emotions, they can relate in a way to what I've been through. Not that I
120. make all my friends in that kind of category. But I like people that re
121. empathetic, deep thinkers, philosophers, not all of them, but just basically
122. intelligent, in to culture, have varied interests. Basically people that want to
123. grow as people, have varied interests.
124. I: What about personalities? Is there a certain type of personality that you're
125. attracted to?
126. SAMMY: Good question, I've never really seen it like that but they're
127. definitely not, I wouldn't categorise them all as introverts or extraverts
128. because if I look at my close friends they are, I suppose people would
129. consider them extroverts, two of my best friends. One of them is definitely a

Right margin notes:
- big!
- Qualities he likes in other people - thinkers!
- emotional + empathic + creative
- growth - what is it that appeals about these people? is it because that is what he is into?
- People he doesn't like - people who are not big thinkers - cold + logical
- Uses the stereotype of a computer programmer or accountant as an example of a logical, boring person who he find it hard to be interested in. Yet he likes this so much why can't he only do it under limited circumstances?
- Black + white V shades of grey 'blurred lines'
- more about the qualities he likes in others empathy, deep thinking, intelligent, culture
- What has he been through?
- growth - what does it mean to grow as a person? Why is this important to him? (life coaches / westerns)
- What need is served from relating to people with these qualities? What does he get?
- two of his best friends are extraverts
- two of his best friends are extraverts, yet he say that he finds extraverts difficult to be around! Contradiction?

APPENDIX L: SECOND PHASE OF ANALYSIS - EMERGENT THEMES FOR SAMMY

Getting better at coping over time (1:30)

Coping with social anxiety symptoms (1:34)

Coping with social anxiety symptoms (1:37)

Impact of social setting (1:45)

Limiting himself (1:48)

Distracted from interpersonal interaction (1:48)

Giving shorter responses (1:49)

Absent self (1:51)

Superficial connection (1.52)

Possessing good interpersonal skills (1.54)

Anxiety interfering with interpersonal skills (1.56)

Succinct responses (1.57)

Hiding the self (1.58)

Social-anxiety as a interpersonal barrier (1.60)

Good interpersonal skills (1.61)

Other people unable to recognise his anxiety (1.64)

Other people mirroring his discomfort (1.67)

Other people sensing his discomfort (1.71)

Social anxiety as "elephant in the room" (1.72)

Other people mirroring back his discomfort (1.73)

Social anxiety as barrier to dating (1.77)

Good interpersonal skills (1.81)

Expectations form others (1.87)

Negative impact of busy environment (1.88)

Negative impact of spatial positioning (1.89)

Positive impact of being in the outdoors (1.90)

Easing into self (1.91)

A date feels like an interview (1.93)

Unable to feel grounded (1.96)

Anxiety symptoms prevent him from being himself (1.98)

Absent self (1.100)

Inward focus (1.101)

Not fully present (1.02)

Anxiety stopped me from being myself (1.105)

Finds certain people interesting – philosophical people (1.108)

Interest in personal growth (1.109)

Finds certain people boring – accountants, computer programmers (1.111)

Interested in ideas and theories (1.114)

Likes people who can relate to what he has gone through (1.119)

Likes deep thinkers (1.121)

Considers friends to be extraverts (1.129)

Being around extraverts goes against his nature (1.136)

Uncomfortable drawing attention to self (1.141)

Being around extraverts is draining (1.143)

Other people have positive perceptions of him (1.150)

Other people see him as sociable but quiet (1.151)

Irritation that others see him as quiet (1.155)

Feels that work 'forces' him to be quiet (1.557)

Negative impact of seating plan (1.159)

Doesn't get much conversation from work colleague (1.61)

Irritation at being 'pigeon holed' as quiet (1.163)

Quiet is not who I am (1.172)

See himself as a social person (1.173)

Frustration at being seen as quiet (1.173)

Work environment makes it difficult for him to be sociable (1.175)

Has a 'split-personality' (1.181)

Different selves in different settings (1.182)

Being alone is mental draining (1.184)

Negative thinking (1.188)

Mentally draining to interact with people in work (1.190)

Negative impact of office layout (1.192)

Work interactions feel forced (1.194)

Does not get involved in office banter (1.196)

Negative impact of seating arrangement (1.197)

Catch-22- wants to be involved but doesn't want to be distracted (1.200)

Views work banter as childish (1.205)

Would rather not draw attention to self (1.207)

The office banter can be too personal sometimes (1.209)

Work colleagues only see elements of him (1.218)

Frustration that work colleagues don't see the real him (1.222)

Work environment makes him feel uncomfortable (1.224)

Sensitive to his environment (1.229)

Likes to have space (1.232)

Feels penned in like a chicken a work (1.233)

Find it frustrating and draining not talking to people at work (1.42)

Family don't see the real me (1.248)

Friends see the real him (1.249)

Working at showing himself to his family (1.251)

Difficult past with parents 'gets in the way' of being his real self (1.256)

Strict mother (1.259)

Mother is very dominant (1.262)

Being real self around family "does not come naturally" (1.267)

Past home and school environments "forced him into his shell (1.271)

Mother is very serious (1.273)

Shoes a different self to mother than friends (1.275)

Father more "jokey" so able to shoe more of himself (1.277)

Finds himself mirroring other people (1.279)

Responding to brother and sister (1.280)

Friendship = intimacy and support (1.286)

Opening up to others is important (1.190)

Life is about connection (1.290)

Friendship is important (1.293)

Has a few friends (1.294)

Friends provide a sense of balance (1.295)

His friends get him out of his head (1.297)

Has positive qualities to offer (1.303)

Openness as vulnerability (1.310)

Interpersonal difficulty (1.317)

Openness as vulnerability (1.321)

Openness as vulnerability (1.325)

Dominant friend (1.331)

Frustration towards friend (1.332)

Not addressing interpersonal difficulty (1.334)

Addressing inter-personal difficulty via text (1.339)

Friend not used to be challenged (1.334)

Interpersonal frustration (1.47)

Resolution of interpersonal frustration (1.348)

Sharing is vulnerable (1.351)

Vulnerable friendship (1.356)

Can't always connect to people (1.357)

Close friend knows everything about me (1.366)

Challenging friendship (1.368)

Looking up to friend (1.369)

Relationship evolving over time (1.372)

Friend as leader (1.377)

Relationship evolving over time (1.380)

Shares social anxiety with friend (1.394)

Critical friend (1.400)

Doesn't like friend criticisms but agrees (1.404)

Not spending enough time with the self (1.405)

Friend increasing social anxiety (in past) (1.411)

Open with friend (1.412)

Friend dominating interaction (1.413)

Struggle to find self (1.418)

Difficulty challenging friend (1.419)

Changes in nature of friendship over time (1.421)

Learning to accept self (1.423)

Unhealthy romantic relationship (1.445)

Romantic partner not a good fit (1.448)

Self-inflicted relationship strife (1.452)

Romantic relationship good for ego (1.456)

See himself as 'higher' than romantic partner (1.459)

Romantic relationship good for ego (1.462)

Romantic partner not a good match (1.466)

Unable to connect to romantic partner (1.466-472)

Negative evaluation of romantic partner (1.472-479)

Romantic relationship as hard work (1.479)

Sees self as different to romantic partner (1.480)

Teaching romantic partner about life (1.484)

Hiding social anxiety from romantic partner (1.491)

Views romantic partner as judgemental (1.493)

Views romantic partner as 'not a deep thinker' (1.497)

Early negative judgement about romantic partner (1.501)

Environmental impact on stress (1.508)

Did not care what romantic partner thought of him (1.527)

Progress in coping with social anxiety (1.529)

Relationship with mother is hard work (1.504)

Frustration at relationship with mother (1.542)

Difficulties getting in the way of relationship with mother (1.543)

Stressful environment at home (1.547)

Peoples personal issues getting in way of relationship (1.548)

Doing work on relationship with mother (1.549)

Does not share much with mother (1.553)

Past is barrier that stops him connecting with family (1.562)

A different person outside the family home (1.569)

Putting off seeing his friend 2 (1.572)

Challenging to be around extraverts (1.578)

Takes a while to ground self around extraverted friend 2 (1.582)

Avoidance of seeing friend 2 (1.583)

Friend 2 won't judge me but others might (1.5587)

Anxiety kicking in when friend 2 is silly in public (1.594)

APPENDIX M: THIRD PHASE OF ANALYSIS - INITIAL CLUSTERING FOR SAMMY

Cluster	Theme	Quote
Multiple Selves	Unable to be himself (1.96)	…. I remember that kind of prevented me from being myself and from fully listening to her and being present. I wasn't really present. I was more focused on the anxiety.
	Absent self (1:51)	So my full presence isn't there really to ask the right questions, to really listen to them, be fully present,
	Has a 'split-personality' (1.181)	I seem to have a kind of, almost like a split personality I guess. At work I'm very different to how I am outside.
	A different person outside the family home (1.569)	Whereas outside I'm very different, that barrier isn't present.
	Friends see the real him (1.249)	My friends and people outside do
	Those I support and coach probably see the real me (1.253)	people maybe I help with my groups. The work that I'm involved with, my coaching and things like that. The support group I run.
	My sister and brother see the real me (1.254)	my sister and my brother probably do, I'm more expressive with them.
	Work colleagues only see elements of him (1.218)	I definitely wouldn't say they see the real me, no. They see probably elements, elements of me.
	Is able to be real self with friends (1.275)	I'm not able to be myself like I am with my friends.
	Father more "jokey" so able to show more of himself (1.277)	My dad less so actually because my dad is quite jokey. So I am more expressive with my dad, with my mum it's not like that because she is more serious, my mum
	Family don't see the real me (1.248)	I'd say as well, in a weird way, my family probably don't see the real me, yeah.

	Being real self around family "does not come naturally" (1.267)	Again, it's kind of frustrating but it doesn't come naturally, that's just what I'll say, it doesn't come naturally.
	Not spending enough time with the self (1.405)	Because I'm not really spending time with myself, I'm not paying enough attention I guess, to those emotions. We had that chat recently actually, because that's my natural tendency, that's my kind of default setting which I do.
Sensitive to Environment	Sensitive to his environment (1.229)	Yeah, I don't know, I'm sensitive to my environment
	Negative impact of open plan office (1.182)	So I feel less comfortable at work because of the environment. Because it's open plan
	Feels that work 'forces' him to be quiet (1.156)	But I feel like I'm forced in to that at work. It's a weird one, try to get your head in
	Feels 'penned in like a chicken' at work (1.233)	Whereas at work I kind of feel penned in like a chicken in a way, in a pen [laugh]. Yeah, it's that kind of, so yeah, it's a psychological thing I know but it's weird what happens.
	Negative impact of spatial positioning (1.92)	… She was sitting opposite me, kind of like what I describe as an interview kind of scenario. And actually that was the last time I felt, thinking about it now, actual anxiety
	Positive impact of environment (1.89)	I like to maybe walk around, maybe sit in a park, which is what we did. So that was good. So I was kind of was able to ease into myself.
	Work environment makes it difficult for him to be sociable (1.175)	I like to talk but I feel not in that dynamic, like open plan office. That's, I feel my voice gets a bit drowned out, and I don't like to have open plan conversations with people
	Past home and school environments "forced him into his shell" (1.271)	Or the way that I've been made to feel anyway, in my home environment, school environment. So I've kind of gone into my shell a bit.
	Negative impact of office layout (1.192)	Cause I generally don't like that because of the environment, because it's open plan
	Work environment makes him feel uncomfortable (1.224)	…because of the environment, I don't feel totally comfortable…
	Likes to have space (1.232)	….I like to be out and about, be able to express myself freely, I like to feel fresh air.
	Negative impact of environment (1.87)	… So like I don't like to be in busy places. Or I don't like to feel like you're being interviewed, so sitting opposite, particularly on the first date anyway.
	Negative impact of seating plan (1.159)	Because I've now got my back turned to the, we've got the first row there and then they've, because we've had a new kind of seating plan

	Stressful environment at home (1.547)	It can be a bit of a stressful environment at times.
	Environmental impact on social anxiety (1.508)	I'm planning something I will think of the environment, like is it going to be busy, noisy, those things. Because I don't like those environments…
	Impact of social setting (1:45)	…it depends what kind of social setting for me, so if I have got severe like kind of social anxiety come up, or I'm nervous so maybe I'm in a group scenario and we're out and there's maybe lots of people in a group talking
Interpersonal Relationships are Draining	Mentally draining to interact with people in work (1.190)	well it's draining as well because you think well, you know, you can't really, you can have a bit of a conversation but it's, I find it draining, having that kind of open plan conversation with everyone
	Being around extraverts is draining (1.143)	But I think it's more to do with, maybe it's a bit draining I think, energetically? Cause they tend to require a lot of stimulation. They tend to need a lot of conversation, whereas sometimes I'm happy just sitting back, taking it all in sometimes [laugh].
	Being around extraverts goes against his nature (1.136)	I guess, yeah, more, I prefer probably more people that aren't as loud, aren't as attention seeking. So I guess not, maybe I wouldn't naturally hang around with extreme extroverts I guess? Probably, probably.
	Challenging to be around extraverts (1.578)	Yeah, and also because he is very extraverted [laugh], so he does challenge me as well with that. Because he can be very expressive
	Relationship with mother is hard work (1.540)	Yeah, just not a close relationship. I find it hard work.
	Takes a while to ground self around extraverted friend 2 (1.582)	I find that quite uncomfortable sometimes. It takes me a while to ground myself, settle in. He's very, kind of, you know, extraverted, expressive, you know, like that.
	Challenging friendship (1.380)	So it's been a challenging friendship as well.
	Challenging friendship (1.368)	So yeah, it's been a challenging friendship as well
	Romantic relationship as hard work (1.479)	It was just very hard work. So very challenging but I knew what I was getting myself in to.
Being alone is draining	Being alone is mental draining (1.184)	And also the work I'm doing is very, it's just me and a computer basically so there's a lot of room for your thoughts to come in. So I've noticed that, it can be quite mentally challenging and draining for me because of that
	Negative thinking when alone (1.188)	working alone] So maybe a lot of, sometimes negative thinking comes in, boredom creeps in and then the negative spiral takes over.

Interpersonal frustration	Frustration at not being able to be self around mother (1.276)	So I've noticed that and that can be a bit frustrating.
	Frustration at being seen as quiet (1.173)	So I think at work there was a bit of a frustration because I am actually quite sociable.
	Frustration towards friend (1.332)	And I had some, I guess frustration came up when he said that because it was almost like he didn't consult me about the percentage split
	Irritation that others see him as quiet (1.155)	So I thought it was interesting which kind of got on my nerves a little bit because I was like no [laugh], but actually in a way that is who I am.
	Feels he has been 'pigeon holed' as quiet (1.163)	But my manager knows about my anxiety and in a way I think he's pigeon holed me because the three loudest in the team sit behind there.
	Frustration at relationship with mother (1.542)	it's you know, for most of my life it can be a bit frustrating. Because I've got my own frustrations with things.
	Quiet is not who I am (1.172)	we'll have to get SAMMY to swap with another member of the team and he was like no, he's fine over there, he likes to be quiet. And I thought ok, so that triggered something within me. I just thought well actually no, you've kind of pigeon holed me because I've told you about my anxiety. But in actual fact that's not who I am, I do like to talk.
	Frustration at not addressing interpersonal difficulty (1.334)	split and I just kind of let it go, didn't say anything, I was like ok. And he was like the money is not important, we'll discuss it later. But part of me didn't like that, but I didn't mention it to him. So I think that underlining kind of frustration was there.
	Frustration that work colleagues don't see the real him (1.222)	It's hard work to be honest with you. It can be frustrating. Yeah, I find it frustrating because I know that, I know that they're not seeing the real me and I know that and they probably know that in a way.
	It's frustrating not talking to people at work (1.42)	But then it's very kind of, what's the word, it can be quite frustrating because often for large parts of the day you're not really talking to people. So it's frustrating really, it's very mentally draining I find.
Interpersonal skills	Possesses good interpersonal skills when not anxious (1.54)	Usually to be honest with you I'm not like that. I am very good, I get to know people quite well but if I'm feeling anxious in an uncomfortable situation, then I will kind of limit my answers and be very kind of [indrawn breath], you know, what's the word, succinct with my answers and not give much and just kind of like, I guess, hide myself, if I'm feeling like a bit panicky. So then, in those scenarios I guess it can be difficult to get to know the other person. But generally I would say, if I'm in a relaxed environment, I'm very good and I can get to know the person very well.

	Successful interpersonal interaction (1.86)	Well I felt quite relaxed. I didn't put any pressure on myself, tried to let go of all expectations.
	Resolution of interpersonal frustration (1.348)	…And then we had an open conversation about that. We managed to resolve any frustration that was there. So it's good because that doesn't get in the way of, you know it can be awkward sometimes but it doesn't get in the way of our friendship.
	Has positive qualities to offer (1.303)	I think a sense of light heartedness, deep insights, empathy, laughter, fun, playfulness, also loyalty. I think I'm a very loyal friend, trustworthy as well
	Addressing inter-personal difficulty via text (1.339)	But then I sent him a message, was it the following night or the next day, saying, basically that we need to be very honest about this, like it's not about you and me, our friendship, we have to put that to one side. If we're going to do this it has to be professional, basically we've got to put our friendship to one side, if this is going to work there has to be a level of transparency. I think I shared with him my concerns basically.
	Sharing opinions with romantic partner (1.527)	So I was able to, because we did often have heated arguments, so I was able to share my opinions really without the fear of thinking what the other person was thinking, worrying what the other person was thinking, controversial things.
	Other people see him as sociable but quiet (1.151)	Also sociable, sociable but maybe quiet, can be quiet I think? At work anyway, that's something that this week that was talked about. A manager was mentioning it to the head of the department.
	Teaching romantic partner about life (1.484)	Probably insights as well, I think I challenged her on many levels. I challenged her on many levels I think. To be honest with you [laugh], probably not much else from that. I'd say those main things, yeah.
	Other people have positive perceptions of him (1.150)	I think they probably perceive me as someone that's quite kind, generous, helpful, nice, that kind of thing. Affable, empathetic, sensitive, loving, maybe hard working?
	Shares social anxiety with friend (1.394)	I am able to share with him if I am feeling anxious, I am able to share that with him.
Vulnerability	Openness as vulnerability (1.310)	the fact that we can be very vulnerable with each other. So I can literally share the most vulnerable thing, and it can even be about him.
	Deep and vulnerable connection which is hard to have with others (1.356)	So yeah, it's interesting, we have that quite deep, vulnerable friendship which I like and which you can't always have with a lot of friends.
	Sharing is vulnerable (1.351)	We're able to share the most vulnerable things, even though it's about us and the other person

	Openness as vulnerability (1.321)	So he was very vulnerable and he was able to share that. And I said ok, cause I didn't really, maybe I sensed it but I didn't really look into it. So he said why don't you go into it and see what's coming up. So we went into it on the phone, I was like ok. And we just had a very vulnerable, open conversation.
Interpersonal barriers	Past is barrier that stops him connecting with family (1.562)	because I've got a past with my family, that comes up. So it's like as soon as you walk through the door I almost fall into that archetype, that personality. So any kind of emotions get, you know, come up, a barrier immediately comes up… It's basically like any kind of resentment, frustration, anger comes up and it's just like, you know, stops you connecting with that person on that level.
	Limiting himself (1:48)	Then maybe I will limit myself so I won't maybe be as focussed in getting to know the person. So I might give shorter kind of responses. Depending on how anxious I am.
	Interpersonal difficulty (1.317) ,	… so he said I sense there's something between you and me that's an underlining frustration? And he even said I've got some anger towards you and he said I know it's not about you, it's about me. It's always about me it's never about you
	Does not share much with mother (1.553)	…because we don't talk that much. So talking more, sharing more about how the day was, how are you, how are you feeling, those kinds of things.
	Difficulties getting in the way of relationship with mother (1.543)	You know, being that you want to move out but it's economically difficult, financially difficult. So that can get in the way…It can get in the way of your relationship because you kind of feel a bit resentful.
	Peoples personal issues getting in way of relationship (1.548)	Because my, everyone's got their own stuff and that can get in the way of a relationship when you're living at home I think.
	Unable to connect to romantic partner (1.466-472)	Because for me there are four elements, …I soon realised I wasn't able to connect with the person really.
	Hiding social anxiety from romantic partner (1.491)	I didn't discuss my anxiety with her
	Past difficult with parents 'get in the way' of being his real self (1.256)	I think, it's basically because I've got a past with them, because they're your parents, you've had a past with them, maybe traumas, resentment, things like that, and you're kind of guilt shame, things like that. I think that gets in the way, and particularly with my mum.
	Romantic partner not a good match (1.466)	And there was a physical attraction there of course, but I knew deep down the person wasn't right for me.
	Unhealthy romantic relationship (1.445)	Looking backwards it was a very unhealthy relationship and I knew that at the time

|	Superficial connection (1.52)	so I'm not really getting to know the person deeply. So it might just be quite surface, superficial level.
	Doesn't get much conversation from work colleague (1.61)	And the colleague that I'm sat next to is very quiet, often would just speak for five minutes in the morning and that's it, and the rest of the day it's literally no talking [laugh]. You don't get much out of him to be honest with you.
	Work interactions feel forced (1.194)	And yeah, I don't know, it feels a bit forced
	Does not get involved in office banter (1.196)	Everyone else seems to get on with it, have their kind of banter. But I don't usually get involved too much. Because I've also got my back turned to everyone.
	Romantic partner not a good fit (1.448)	we weren't right for each other so it was more based, from my point of view, I was only interested basically for the physical side
Other people's response to social anxiety	Other people unable to recognise his anxiety (1.64)	*How do you think other people respond to that, if you're anxious?* SAMMY: If I'm anxious, well I don't know, to respond to that, they probably can't tell to be honest with you. That's the feedback that I've had anyway.
	Social anxiety as "elephant in the room" (1.72)	Yeah well they probably think, they probably sense I'm uncomfortable and then they don't know what to do, it's like the pink elephant in the room, no one wants to talk about it. So yeah, I think that's kind of [laugh] what's going on.
	Other people mirroring back his discomfort (1.73)	So I think they probably mirror back what I'm showing, I think.
	Other people mirroring his discomfort (1.67)	But yeah, maybe, they probably would mirror that in a way. So they mirror my, because I'm uncomfortable, they mirror that back to me, I think, from my experience
	Responding to other people (1.279)	So yeah, it's not all me, I think, I know that, because it's also about the other person. Because in a way you mirror the other person as well.
Benefits of interpersonal connection	Friendship is important (1.293)	So yeah, friendship means a lot, means a lot
	Friends provide a sense of balance (1.299)	So they're very important because they provide me a balance between having to get on in life, find a job, work and having that downtime, so they're that kind of, they provide that balance.
	Friends provide a sense of balance (1.295) .	And they provide the balance really between having to work, work and also having fun, they provide that balance, it's good.

|		
	Friendship = intimacy and support (1.286)	I think friendship means kind of support to me, love, understanding, someone that can relate to you, be empathetic, that's there for you basically when the shit hits the fan
	His friends get him out of his head (1.297)	So it's very important, friends, because they also, they get you out of your head sometimes and make you realise it isn't as bad as you think it is, things aren't as bad as you think it is.
	Life is about connection (1.290)	Also people that you can just share and have fun with, share experience with and have fun essentially, connect with. Because that's what life is about really
	Opening up to others is important (1.288)	you want to be able to talk about something and you know you've got a couple of friends you can speak to, open up to. That's very important.
	Romantic relationship good for ego (1.456)	Initially it was, it was very like satisfying for my ego, I noticed looking back, my ego loved it. Because I'd be getting lots of compliments. Because, looking back, it was very ego, all ego driven
	Glad to have a few good friends (1.294)	even though I guess I don't have a massive circle of friends. I've got a few around me which is good
	Romantic relationship good for ego (1.462)	And yeah, because from the very beginning she was like paying me compliments and things like that. Because I approached her and things like that. And I saw a kind of very naivety to her and my ego took advantage of that. So I think it was very ego driven, the relationship.
	Looking up to friend (1.369)	because he has become used to me looking up to him in a way. And always seeking guidance from him, because he was my coach.
	Close friend knows everything about me (1.366)	he offered me private coaching for about six months and he was someone that was initially friends with my brother and we met about, maybe four years ago? And we ended up doing coaching together and we struck up a friendship after that. We got along with each other and it just started from there really. So naturally he knows, because he coached me he knew everything about me anyway. So we struck up a friendship through that and it's continued to this day
	friend calling him out (1.400)	he's called me out on things, because my tendency is to run around a lot, distract myself in a way which he says, to be busy I guess? Which is a form of distraction, which he calls running away really from your emotions. Which I know, that's my tendency, in my nature to do. So he calls me out on my stuff and even though I don't like it, I know deep down there's a truth to that
	Partly uncomfortable with drawing attention to self (1.141)	It's probably, why is that? Because I find it, I guess, I'm not sure if it's to do with the anxiety. Maybe in the past it would have been more about not drawing

Fear of Negative evaluation		attention to myself? Possibly, it might still be a little bit of that. But I think if there is it would maybe be say ten per cent?
	Would rather not draw attention to self (1.207)	So I just thought ok, rather not draw that kind of attention [laugh] to myself
	Friend 2 won't judge me but others might (1.5587)	Yeah, but I know in a way that I'm not going to be judged because he knows me anyway, we've [laugh] shared lots together. But yeah, I've noticed, maybe more in public settings, yeah. He likes to push the boundaries and stuff so [laugh], so yeah. . Just to give an example we were down on the South Bank and he likes to full around a lot. For me it's about, yeah, probably worrying what others think but he was just trying to dance with me in the middle of the frikken South Bank, on the ground floor, loads of people, he likes to be silly.
	Embarrassed about social anxiety (1.595)	And he was just trying to do a dance with me [laugh], and I just remember my anxiety kicked in and it was like no mate [laugh]. I felt embarrassed because I'm not, I am the one that's you know, taking it seriously but my anxiety kicked in. And I could see in his face that he felt embarrassed because he was just, but he, he's on the extreme scale. He pushes the boundaries socially. But yeah, he's just naturally very expressive, he likes to fool around a lot, things like that.
Dominant others	Strict mother (1.259)	Cause growing up I found her quite strict and whether she tried to, like my girlfriend was ringing, she'd like say oh he's studying and things like that. She can be quite aggressive I suppose.
	Friend dominating interaction (1.413) .	I think in the past actually, he would trigger me. And we talked about that. This is what I mean, we've had quite open and honest, because he's quite loud, he has a loud voice and a strong personality. So he can dominate a conversation sometimes and I shared that with him
	Friend not used to being challenged (1.334)	And I think that triggered something within him because maybe he's not used to that within me, you know, challenging him I guess?
	Difficulty challenging friend (1.419)	So in the beginning I often wouldn't maybe speak up, challenge him or just even in conversations you know, things like that?
	Mother is very serious (1.273)	Because there isn't, like for example if I go out with my mum, there isn't much joking going on. It's kind of quite serious. Just like very kind of typical oh how are you, typical boring questions.
	Dominant friend (1.331)	And we talked about, because he is also very money driven as well. So he talked to me and he's like yeah, I'll take this percentage. Because he can be quite dominant like that, he's a natural leader.

	Friend as leader (1.377)	because being a strong leader, when you are a coach you're used to, you know, what's the position I'm thinking of? In a way I suppose he's used to being up there, kind of like offering advice to others, and being the leader, being the teacher and you've got the student in front of you. So you're always kind of, I suppose you're ego can get in the way sometimes.
	Mother is very dominant (1.262)	My mum can be quite, she's more of the man I guess in the relationship. Masculine, she's probably more dominant than my dad.
Development of interpersonal skills	Relationship evolving over time (1.372)	And that's changed a lot really because it kind of like, in a way it was very much like that I suppose. But now it's very much equal because, which is interesting because we've talked about that as well because he had a lot of challenges himself, from that. And it's been interesting
	Relationship evolving over time (1.381)	But yeah, that's how it started, from him being a coach to me and then turning into friends after that.
	Progress in coping with social anxiety (1.529)	[have heated arguments] Maybe in the past I wouldn't have done that. So yeah, yeah.
	Changes in nature of friendship over time (1.421)	[friendship] But that's very different now, very different now.
	Working at showing himself to his family (1.251)	. But that's something also that I battled with, with my family, it's a weird thing.
	Doing work on relationship with mother (1.549)	Yeah, and even though I've done a lot of work to try and work on the relationship, I think recently I've kind of fallen back into bad habits which has been annoying.
	Learning to accept self (1.423)	What's changed, just me being more confident in myself? Much more accepting of myself, who I am, there's nothing to hide really and knowing that if I do share anything, I know that in a way he will respect my opinion, even though he may not agree with it, things like that.
	Struggle to find self (1.418)	Yeah because especially in the beginning when I was being coached by him because I was still very vulnerable myself. Very much still finding myself, confident in myself, confidence.
Negative evaluation of others	See himself as 'higher' than romantic partner (1.459)	I saw myself higher than this person, as in intellectually, everything, spiritually. And I knew that and my ego knew that so it took advantage of that and it very much looked down on that person
	Dismissive of office banter (1.209) .	They tend to talk about, they can be, you know what banters like at work sometimes. Well in this office anyway. I guess maybe it can be a bit childish. It can be quite personal sometimes. So they, they've got typical jokes, the might talk

		about all sorts, I can't think really. But yeah, that's kind of a weird one to describe, dynamic at work
	Views work banter as childish (1.205)	I guess it can go, well the banter, you know what banters like sometimes? It's that kind of, it can be a bit childish I guess, the things they talk about.
	Negative evaluation of romantic partner (1.472)	. Because she didn't read, for example, talked about nonsense, conversations, would just often bitch about her family and friends, this happened at work, this person said this to me. And if I tried to give her my psychological or analytical views, she was like oh you're not taking my side, you're taking the other persons side. I said it's not about taking sides. But she obviously couldn't see her own behaviour because she hasn't had the distinctions that I've had, the training that I've had to understand how it all works.
	Views romantic partner as judgemental (1.493)	I knew very early on that she was quite judgmental in a way.
	Sees self as different to romantic partner (1.480)	So we're very different.
	Early negative judgement about romantic partner (1.501)	So I just thought I'm not going to go there. I immediately decided very early on, not going to, she just wouldn't be able to relate to it. So I think I kind of knew what relationship I was getting into.
	Views romantic partner as 'not a deep thinker' (1.497)	As in she didn't, I remember talking about things like, you know, I talked about some psychological things, theories, spirituality, things like that. And the responses I was getting back, I was just thinking she was quite immature in a way, wasn't able to grasp the concepts, wasn't a deep thinker so there was just no point in discussing my anxiety because she wouldn't understand it.

APPENDIX N: FOURTH PHASE OF ANALYSIS - MIND MAP FOR SAMMY
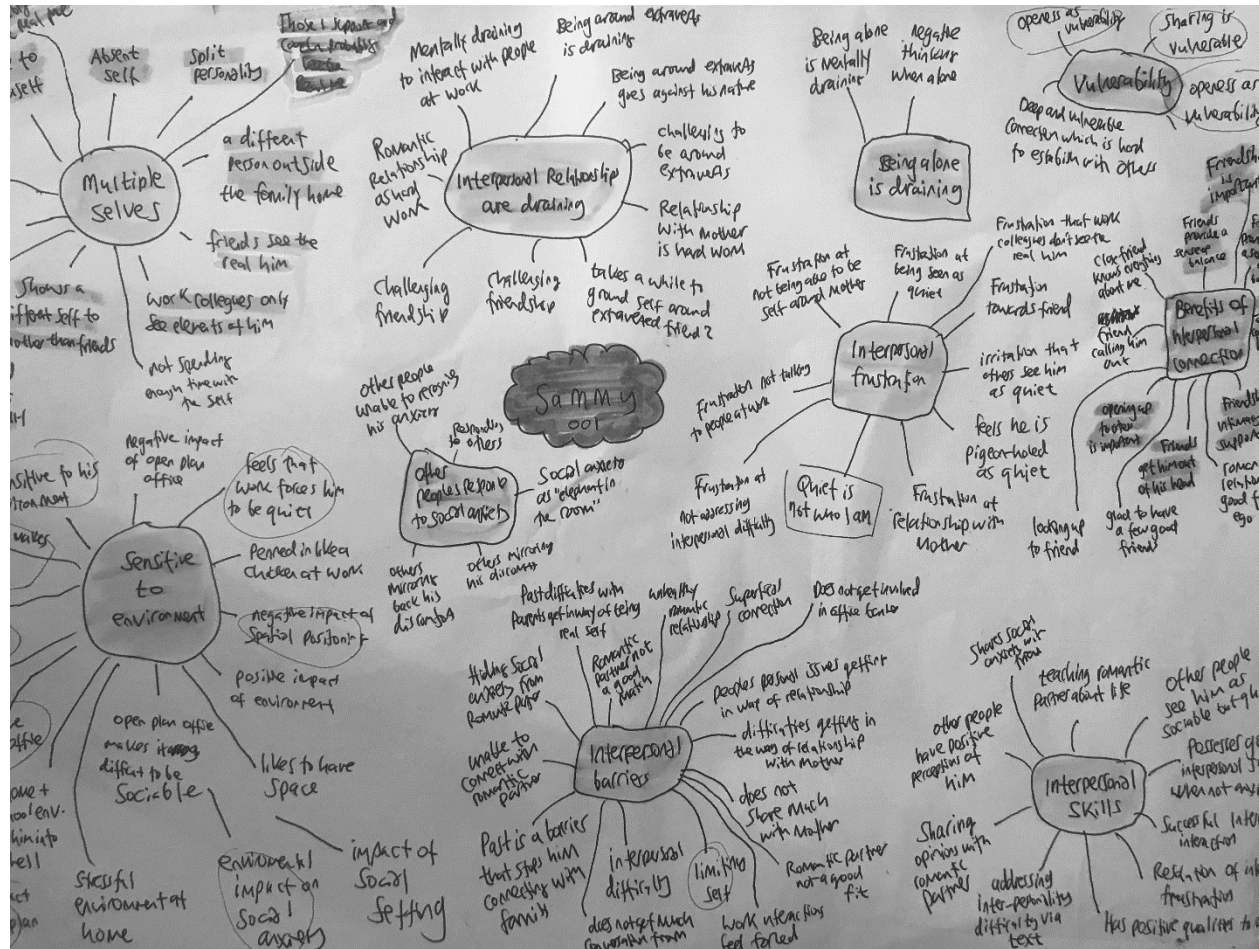
APPENDIX O: EARLY DRAFT OF THEME FORMATION
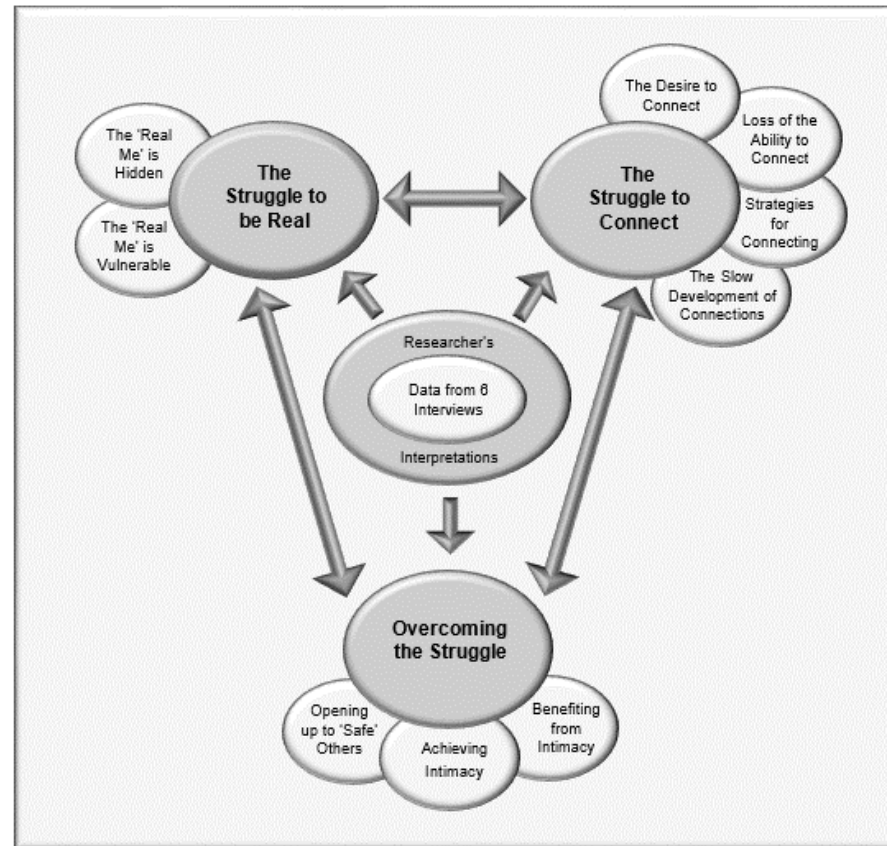
APPENDIX P: FINAL STAGE OF ANALYSIS - SUPPORTING DATA FROM REFINED THEMES

Superordinate	Subordinate	Name	Exemplary Themes
The Desire for Intimacy	The Desire for Intimacy	Sammy	**Life is about connection (290)** Also people that you can just share and have fun with, share experience with and have fun essentially, connect with. Because that's what life is about really **Opening up to others is important (288)** you want to be able to talk about something and you know you've got a couple of friends you can speak to, open up to. That's very important. **Friendship is important (293)** So yeah, friendship means a lot, means a lot
		Claudia	**Trying to find commonalities (291)** I was trying to talk to her, like we have something in common like she's a nanny and I was a nanny at the time, so I just started a conversation **Unhappy that has lost touch with school friends (434)** well I think my like old school mates. Like, I've kind of lost touch with them a lot, and I feel like, especially like the people that know me from a long, long time since I was in nursery and been growing up together till high school, I just feel, I don't know, that I'm not that satisfied in like, I don't know, because I've always been very nice to them. **Feels like her efforts to bond are not reciprocated (442)** but every time like I did kind of try and go out, and you know, how do you say, like I would take the initiative to ask them, you know shall we

				go out and do something together or, it would always be like, "oh yeah, yeah we should". And then it wouldn't actually go anywhere
			Ravi	**Wants to connect to others (234)** someone I can talk to, someone I've got common interests in, you know have got my sort of interests and of course the more we have in common we converse around and yeah, so I think it would help, if it's someone I'm comfortable enough to mention my social anxiety to as well, yeah. **Wants to connect to others (278)** Again, as I said, you know you want something in common, someone I can connect with, someone I can talk to and I think, yeah. **Connection is vital (281)** connection I think is vital more than anything else.
			Patrick	**Insight that he is not autistic because he wants to connect (177)** And that is when the insight came to me, if I was on the autistic spectrum I would be content on my own. But purely because I am missing people there is something else going on. It is not autistic spectrum, I actually missed being with people, there is something else. **Missing People (183)** If I am missing people then it must be social anxiety, **Loneliness (621)** I think it is important to emphasise the loneliness of social anxiety. I think that is the saddest part of it, that you isolate yourself from close relationships.
			Elliott	**It would be very special if a real friend came along (220)** To me, if a real friend was to come along, it would be pretty special. Actually, it would be pretty amazing to be honest.

			Gave too much time to someone who did not deserve it (252) I have given too much of my time to a certain person who really didn't deserve it. Really didn't deserve the friendship because I wasn't getting it back **Social anxiety encourages you to engage with others when you get the opportunity (355)** I am not sure whether having social anxiety actually encourages you to engage with people more whenever you get the opportunity.
		William	**Would like to be able to converse with people without feeling uncomfortable (211)** I would like it if I didn't have social anxiety and I could sit and converse with people without feeling uncomfortable, **Friendship is about sharing everything (216)** Friendship to me is somebody that you can tell absolutely everything about your life, the ups, the downs, **Would love to have a good relationship with sister (335)** I would love us to have a relationship and I would love to feel comfortable around her as what I do around my girlfriend and around my best mate or my mum.
Interpersonal Barriers	The Fragile Self	Claudia	**Showing the real self is dangerous (142)** I just felt like I was exposing myself too much and then I don't know, I prefer like being cautious. Like, erm, I don't want to like get hurt or anything **Showing the self is dangerous (341)** so I just felt that if I was myself with him then he would probably, I don't know, even change his mind about me or I don't know, kind of I would be more exposed to being hurt and everything **Social anxiety as protection (372)**

			so, I mean, my social anxiety, I don't know whether it was some sort of protection
		Ravi	**Being outside is terrifying (16)** I had to go to the shop, which is round the corner so I'd a reason to get, from when I left the house until I got home, I was in absolute dread. I was that frightened of just being outdoors. **Going out in public is hell (311)** I can't really, for me to go out anywhere, let's say cinema or central London, anything normal things couples do, go out, in the park, for me anything like that is hell. **Difficult going out in the world (431)** That's why it's hard for me to go, as I said to you earlier, to go to the corner shop and that's, yeah incredibly difficult just to go to the corner shop.
		Patrick	**Abrasive people hurt me (60)** I would be overly sensitive to an abrasive person **My ex-wife who lacked compassion was bad for me (86)** And then married someone who was actually not good for me because she wasn't compassionate and empathic. She was quite tough, cold and business-like. **Being hurt by insensitive others (262)** they are not attacking but they tend to be short and abrasive, not realising the effect. They are not particular psychologically minded, maybe that would be the better way, a bit more… rough and ready with what they say and what they do.
		Elliott	**Felt bad about himself when he gave but did not receive friendship (257)**

			Basically my self-esteem and self-confidence just drift away and I feel bad about myself. **Lost 'everything' after relationship break-up (457)** Over a series of months, I lost basically the relationship, I lost contact with her family which I really enjoyed, I lost contact… my own children went back to their natural mother. I lost the roof over my head so I was back with my parents which was extremely stressful. I was off on sick leave from work. **Low opinion of self after relationship break up (484)** You don't really have a good opinion about yourself.
		William	**Feels he is weak as a person (92)** that I am not… I see myself, because of my anxiety and stuff, it makes me feel like a weak person. **Felt that work colleague from "good area" was judging him (134**) And when we were sort of chatting and I was saying the stuff that I would have got up to when I was a teenager and whatever else they sort of looked at me as if I had two heads, judging me and stuff. **Can't seem to deal with criticism (360)** But I can't seem to like deal with it [criticism].
	The Hidden Self	Sammy	**Has a 'split-personality' (181)** I seem to have a kind of, almost like a split personality I guess. At work I'm very different to how I am outside. **Unable to be himself (96)** I remember that kind of prevented me from being myself and from fully listening to her and being present. I wasn't really present. I was more focused on the anxiety. **Quiet is not who I am (172)**

			he was like no, he's fine over there, he likes to be quiet. And I thought ok, so that triggered something within me. I just thought well actually no, you've kind of pigeon holed me because I've told you about my anxiety. But in actual fact that's not who I am, I do like to talk.
		Claudia	**Covering up the real her (31)** but other people that I don't know very well, like I tend to cover it up a little bit until I feel more like I can trust them. **Not being herself (75)** I didn't feel really like comfortable to be myself with him so I was very like stiff and I didn't really feel like I wanted to like, externalise my feelings towards like, with him. **Partner wondered why she could not be herself (337)** and everything he would often like ask me why I wouldn't be myself with him.
		Ravi	**Unable to be real self in presence of anyone (190)** So I can't think of anyone at this moment in time that I can see face to face and be myself. **He is not the reserved person people see (194)** Erm, they see someone that's quite reserved, someone that seems quiet, doesn't say much. Of course I can't really pinpoint what they see but they don't see me. **Anxiety caused the extravert to retreat (466)** just when the anxiety hits it toll then its, you know, then I do a U turn, as to what I just said to you now, but it's, I find it hard to even talk about anything
		Patrick	**A very proficient social actor (218)** I was an actor. I became a very proficient social actor.

			The real me was a frightened child (230) whereas the real me was this frightened little child who was afraid of his own shadow and feared to express and opinion, no confidence in my own opinions **Two false fronts together (609)** She had her front and so these two false fronts married each other and over time, like they do, the fronts broke down and the two core beings couldn't live together.
		William	**People perceive me as 'hard to get to know' (188)** I think when people think of me they feel that it is hard to get to know me properly. **People in work probably think I am reserved (191)** So they know me differently to how I am now. People in work I think, they probably think I am quite reserved. **There are a lot of people who don't know me on a deep level (238)** there is a lot of people there that don't know me on a deep level.
	Loss of Interpersonal Skills	Sammy	**Limiting himself (48)** Then maybe I will limit myself so I won't maybe be as focussed in getting to know the person. So I might give shorter kind of responses. Depending on how anxious I am. **Feels that work 'forces' him to be quiet (156)** But I feel like I'm forced in to that at work. It's a weird one to try to get your head in. **Work environment makes it difficult for him to be sociable (175)** I like to talk but I feel not in that dynamic, like open plan office. That's, I feel my voice gets a bit drowned out, and I don't like to have open plan conversations with people

			Ravi	**Losing control to fight or flight response (74)** once, you know that fight or flight response kicks in and I just want to go as soon as possible **Social anxiety is overpowering (115)** but for me it's just easier said than done because of course if I go out I wanna escape, I wanna go back home, go indoors. **Feels he is not in a position to be in a romantic relationship (372)** when I'm rational and I think about it then I realise okay I'm not in a position to be in a relationship, it's unfair on the other person because I'm lying to them, I'm barely able to see them
			Patrick	**Losing control to social anxiety (31)** but once they would ask about me then I would kind of clam up **"Rabbit in the headlights" (36)** if the focus is on me as a person then it is kind of like if you put the spotlight on me I get dazzled, like a rabbit in the headlights. **Social anxiety more powerful than his insight (191**) Yeah, whereas the first meeting I kind of knew in theory that I should go but I didn't have the skills to get me there.
			Elliott	**Gets confused in crowds (182)** For example, if I am travelling or going to an airport where there is an awful lot of people, this is where I get confused. **Becomes a different person in a crowded place (183)** If I am in a big crowd of people in a confined space or it is an environment like that I can feel very… I become a different person. **Fines it odd that he can be comfortable in one setting and socially anxious in another (195)**

			It seems odd that I can be comfortable talking to people over the phone or be texting or emailing and stuff like that but when it comes to face-to-face interactions in certain social situations seems to be problematic for me.
		William	**Can't relax enough to form a proper friendship (73)** but I can't relax enough to like form a proper friendship with them. **can't drop his guard (74)** I feel like I've always got my guard up. **A 'wire' that he can't push past (389)** The main thing for me is it just doesn't allow you to form or to take a relationship to the level that you want it to. You go so far and then there is this wire that you just can't just push yourself past and that's the worst thing I think.
	The Slow Development of Relationships	Sammy	**Relationship evolving over time (372)** And that's changed a lot really because it kind of like, in a way it was very much like that I suppose. But now it's very much equal because, which is interesting because we've talked about that as well because he had a lot of challenges himself, from that. And it's been interesting **Relationship evolving over time (381)** But yeah, that's how it started, from him being a coach to me and then turning into friends after that. **Changes in nature of friendship over time (421)** But that's very different now, very different now. INTERVIEWER: And what's changed? SAMMY: What's changed, just me being more confident in myself? Much more accepting of myself, who I am, there's nothing to hide really and knowing that if I do share anything, I know that in a way he will respect my opinion, even though he may not agree with it, things like that.

		Claudia	**Taking time to become herself in romantic relationship (323)** it took me time before I could actually be myself. **Detached at the beginning of a romantic relationship (330)** like at the start I was very, I wouldn't say like cold, but I was a bit more detached. Like he was very clingy and you know trying to hug me a lot and everything, cuddle me and I wasn't that close in that sense. I was more detached
		Ravi	**The real self emerging over time (94)** but then I kind of got used to seeing her and I thought I didn't have to rely on alcohol and I could be myself around her. **Real self slowly emerging from shell (174)** and slowly I'll start to come out of my shell
		Patrick	**Can become close through long term exposure (130)** The one or two friendships I developed through work, through long-time exposure colleagues became close friends. **Exposure is social anxieties Achilles heel (430)** Exposure is the Achilles heel, and to know that nobody is going to attack it. **Partner wanted intimacy sooner he did (545)** She was quite desperate to have a relationship. She was desperate that, that relationship would be quite intimate. When we were in public she would be holding hands. If we were watching TV we would sit together and hold hands and be physically intimate and that. She wanted that from quite an early stage. To my mind before the relationship had developed.
		Sammy	**Environmental impact on social anxiety (508)**

Interpersonal Adaptations	Strategies to Ease Interaction		I'm planning something I will think of the environment, like is it going to be busy, noisy, those things. Because I don't like those environments… **In a relaxed environment can get to know someone well (61)** But generally I would say, if I'm in a relaxed environment, I'm very good and I can get to know the person very well. **Addressing inter-personal difficulty via text (339)** But then I sent him a message, was it the following night or the next day, saying, basically that we need to be very honest about this, like it's not about you and me, our friendship, we have to put that to one side. If we're going to do this it has to be professional, basically we've got to put our friendship to one side, if this is going to work there has to be a level of transparency. I think I shared with him my concerns basically.
		Claudia	**Meeting someone online (52)** Erm, yeah it was like two months ago. I was, I met this girl on Facebook. **Commonality facilitates social interaction (97)** Like, I find I have more like, I can speak about more things with like people that have like my same interests. **Met romantic partner online (260)** Erm, well basically we met on Plenty of Fish
		Ravi	**Administering exact amounts of alcohol (55)** I'm careful with the exact amount I drink, so I measure the exact amount I'm going to have. So currently it's 15, sorry erm, 150mls. **Alcohol allows the real self to emerge (120)** That's why I end up relying on alcohol and when I do drink a bit of alcohol, I can be myself.

			The real self reaching out by texting (214) I can get away with typing, I can be myself, a lot more I can type what's on my mind
		Patrick	**Helping as the lubricating oil (317)** But for me that helping capacity is the lubricating oil for me to develop the friendship at the minute. **Building a relationship by helping someone (409)** So once again, the things that I am most comfortable talking about to date are helping, either psychological helping or practical helping and that is what my relationships have thrived on **Alcohol helps interaction (637)** when I've had a few drinks I can do it. It is interesting how liberating a couple of drinks is but obviously there are inherent dangers there and I didn't go down that road of alcohol dependency.
	Opening up to Safe People	Sammy	**Father more "jokey" so able to show more of himself (277)** My dad less so actually because my dad is quite jokey. So I am more expressive with my dad, with my mum it's not like that because she is more serious, my mum **Sharing opinions with romantic partner (527)** so I was able to share my opinions really without the fear of thinking what the other person was thinking.
		Claudia	**Easier to get along with someone who isn't too extraverted (61)** Erm, because she wasn't like too extrovert, she was kind of like me. In a like a social sense. **More in common with other females (93)** She was a girl, I was talking to a girl so maybe we have more things in common to speak about rather than with a guy.

			Shared experiences brought her close to friend (195) We were friends for three years at university and we were just like hanging out with the same group of friends and so in the end, like we were having like the same experiences. Like she was living with her boyfriend, I was living with my boyfriend …so we did have some like things in common in that.
		Ravi	**Close relationship with girlfriend who also had social anxiety (90)** One example would be my then girlfriend, who did have anxiety herself. **Bonding with other people over their social anxiety (128)** we struck a conversation and it turns out he has social anxiety himself. I mean this has happened more than once and even people I've dated in the past and it just turns out they have, or have had, some form of anxiety. **Can be himself more around socially anxious people (145)** it's someone I'm speaking to that has social anxiety then I feel I can be myself a bit more, if that makes sense.
		Patrick	**People who have had mental health problems are not threatening (54)** because of his background one might presume that he might have had his own interpersonal and difficulties which drew him into psychiatric nursing. So his personality then was easier for me to engage safely with. It didn't threaten me in anyway **Realisation he is more comfortable with others who are socially anxious (88)** And at the support group I felt more comfortable… you know, I didn't feel anxious at all and I think that was because I felt comfortable with people that I identified with.

			Close relationship with 'psychologically minded' sister (394) She is very psychologically minded and she is having difficulties with her husband and she has two young children, so she has no parenting difficulties. So she is very open to talking to me and listening to me, taking advise and taking insights and stuff. We are very close because that is the nature of the relationship.
		Elliott	**Able to chat to friendly and open people (50)** I think because the people can see, it is the individuals, they are quite… they… I think they are genuinely pretty open and very similar to myself in that they are friendly and they love to chat. **Easy to talk to people with a pleasant personality (52)** I don't really know them that well but the feeling I have is that it is a very pleasant personality **Likes kindness (93)** people who would be kind towards others and kind towards themselves as well
		William	**more comfortable around quiet and anxious people (29)** Whereas if I am around more quiet people I feel I can relax a bit more around them because I can maybe read a bit of anxiety from them which makes me a bit more comfortable. **easy to get along with someone who was easy going and non-judgemental (102)** I just found it really easy to get on with him. I think it was because he was so easy going and so… he wasn't judgemental. He got on with everybody and I just found that easy. **Had same socio-economic background as confident person he got on well with (117)** He is from the same-, what I find as well, I am like from a working class background

Intimacy	Achieving Intimacy	Sammy	**Openness as vulnerability (310)** the fact that we can be very vulnerable with each other. So I can literally share the most vulnerable thing, and it can even be about him. **Deep and vulnerable connection (356)** So yeah, it's interesting, we have that quite deep, vulnerable friendship which I like and which you can't always have with a lot of friends. **Is able to be real self with friends (275)** I'm not able to be myself like I am with my friends.
		Claudia	**More experienced in romantic relationship than partner (394)** Like, like I have more experience in relationships, like romantic relationships than him. **Discussing romantic relationship with friend (209)** Well, like our boyfriends initially because she has sometimes issue with her boyfriend, I have issues with my boyfriend so we tend to compare the two. **Close relationship with parents (412)** I've got a really close relationship with my parents so they often do like give me advice and everything
		Patrick	**Close relationship with 'psychologically minded' sister (394)** So she is very open to talking to me and listening to me, taking advise and taking insights and stuff. We are very close because that is the nature of the relationship. **Close relationship with friend who is a child psychiatrist (406)** So what we are talking about, and the same with this other child psychiatrist girl, when we talk and she's having her own personal difficulties and difficulties with her daughter.

			Disclosed social anxiety to friend (415) He is aware that I am doing this fear cycle program.
		William	**Has three close friends he can share anything with (159)** I've got maybe three close friends that I could tell absolutely anything to **Does not have to hide anything from close friend (266)** Able to be myself fully within my friendship. I don't have to hide anything. I can speak about my issues. **Talks about everything with close friend (276)** We talk about each other's jobs, we talk about each other's relationships, what is going on with his family, what is going on with my family… just everything. If we are planning on going on any holidays or trips, just basically everything.
	Benefiting from Intimacy	Sammy	**His friends get him out of his head (297)** So it's very important, friends, because they also, they get you out of your head sometimes and make you realise it isn't as bad as you think it is, things aren't as bad as you think it is. **friend calling him out (400)** he's called me out on things, because my tendency is to run around a lot, distract myself in a way which he says, to be busy I guess? Which is a form of distraction, which he calls running away really from your emotions. Which I know, that's my tendency, in my nature to do. So he calls me out on my stuff and even though I don't like it, I know deep down there's a truth to that. **Romantic relationship good for ego (456)** Initially it was, it was very like satisfying for my ego, I noticed looking back, my ego loved it. Because I'd be getting lots of compliments. Because, looking back, it was very ego, all ego driven

		Claudia	**" I find myself very well with her" (55)** But yeah I find myself very well with her **Can rely on her friend (188)** for me I feel that I can rely on her. **Interpersonal connection lifting her mood (310)** he's very like affectionate. So when I'm feeling a bit down and he's able to make me smile like quite quickly and make me laugh.
		Ravi	**Wants to receive security from others (260)** when I asked myself this question what do I want, and it is some form of psychological security and I think if you enquire, for me personally if you enquire into psychological security you see it's your security. **Being in a relationship give him a 'shot' of confidence/security (370)** So as I said, it goes back to me, when I am in a relationship it just gives me this boost of confidence, again. As I call it, psychological security. **Connecting with others gives him security (388)** That's a, hmm, the fact that you know, there's someone I can speak to, and erm, I'm thinking how to say it. Erm, I guess it gives me this sense of security perhaps.
		Patrick	**Finally opening up is liberating (42)** INTERVIEWER: And what is that like for you now that you have opened up a little bit more? PATRICK: It is very liberating actually. **When knows someone well will enjoy their company (132)** When I really get to know someone well and trust them then I can enjoy their company. **Real self getting sustenance from the company from others (332)**

			I think the real me will get some kind of sustenance and pleasure from their company, you know, positive feedback, we need that kind of positive kind of feedback to live
		Elliott	**Happiness is impacted by the quality of your relationships (112)** I think that your happiness can and often is very much impacted by the quality of the people that you have in your life who **Being in a romantic relationship was like being in a different world (424)** There was a family unit, I have two children and my partner at the time she had a child. It was a different world, that is the only way to describe it, it was just a completely different world **Feels you can do more in a relationship with a family (490**) But certainly when you are in it, when you are in that bubble you feel that you can do more things.
		William	**Friendships gives him a feeling of security (223)** INTERVIEWER: And what do you get out of friendship? WILLIAM: The feeling of security . **Close friend was there for him when he had difficult times (269)** I think it is because when I went through my hardest times he is the one that was there the most. He is the one that has shown that he genuinely cared. **Feels secure and safe (348)** There is that feeling of security and safety and that is basically it then