

What stories do young people tell about
their past experience of social
withdrawal?

Peter Fintan McCullagh

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Abstract

This study took as its subject the stories that young people, aged 16 and over, tell about their experience of social withdrawal. It is argued that social withdrawal highlights some of the tensions between paternalistic and enabling modes of supporting young people, particularly in the 'intermediate period' of late adolescence and early adulthood. Social interaction is increasingly seen as a necessary element in the development of a full range of capacities in adulthood. At the same time, a critique of this tendency can be identified which appeals to diversity and autonomy, including in relation to social motivation. A review of the literature revealed a sophisticated model of the development of social withdrawal and its associated difficulties, as well as subtypes with distinctive pathways. However, there was a dearth of qualitative analysis of young people's subjective experience of social withdrawal.

A narrative methodology was adopted to answer research questions centred on stories told and explanations offered about the experience of withdrawal. This was informed by an Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) and related epistemology. Interviews with four participants were followed up with the co-construction of timelines. Their narratives revealed the importance of specific incidents over longer term tendencies. They also revealed the interaction of power and resistance with feelings of shame and humiliation. Finally, they discussed the changing nature of their selves, discussed in the study in terms of 'symbiosis'. It is suggested that further research locating withdrawn young people in their social context would be beneficial.

Student Declaration

University of East London

School of Psychology

Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

Declaration

I declare that while registered as a research student at this university, I have not been a registered or enrolled student for another award at this university or of any other academic or professional institution.

I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.

I declare that my research required ethical approval from the University Ethics Committee (UREC) and confirmation of approval is embedded within the thesis.

Fintan McCullagh

27.04.2020

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List of Abbreviations

ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder

BAME: Black and Minority Ethnic

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation

CoP: Code of Practice

DSM-IV: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition

EEG: Electroencephalography

EP: Educational Psychologist

fMRI: Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging

GTA: Grand Theft Auto

OOO: Object-Oriented Ontology

SEMH: Social, Emotional and Mental Health

UCLA: University of California, Los Angeles

UEL: University of East London

UK: United Kingdom

UN: United Nations

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, an outline of the research area – social withdrawal and young people aged 16 and over – is given. This is placed in the context of increasing interest in the relationship between social interaction and Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) for this age group. Recent trends in the interpretation of young people's interests and rights is related to the specific area of young people and their social development. A tension is found between the increasing clarity with which social development is acknowledged as a fundamental aspect of well-being and the increasing emphasis on autonomy, self-definition and self-advocacy for young people. A question emerges concerning the degree to which young people's views concerning their experience of social development are present in the discourse through which it is related to their well-being. Some cautious speculation is offered concerning the impact of the recent radical interruptions to young people's experience of social interaction due to the Covid-19 crisis.

1.2 Social withdrawal and young people

This study sought to gather and interpret stories (or 'narratives', a technical term which will be used in line with a methodological approach) that young people, aged 16 and over, tell about social withdrawal, understood as purposeful getting away and staying away from other people. It was inspired at the outset by the tension between developmentalist and autonomy-promoting tendencies within the profession of Educational Psychology: social withdrawal leads to missed opportunities for development from the first perspective, or, as the second tendency has it, is an expression of personal preference, temperament and identity (Coplan & Bowker, 2014).

The period of late adolescence and early adulthood has featured in developmental psychology as an 'intermediate period' between the dependency

of childhood and the full autonomy of mature adulthood. For Erik Erikson, the period between the ages of 12 and 18 was marked by 'identity versus role confusion' as its characteristic psychosocial crisis (Erikson, 1993). While the notion of neatly sequential stages of development has come under forceful critique (Pelaez, Gewirtz, & Wong, 2008), the 'confusion' attached to this age has not dissipated. In the UK, the legal status of young people changes at a number of stages between the ages of 10 (the age of criminal responsibility) and 25 (the age at which one is entitled to the National Living Wage), confirming the impression of this time as an 'intermediate period'. As a result, those in late adolescence and early adulthood themselves must repeatedly revisit their position between the security of childhood dependence and the freedom of adult responsibility, unsure which role serves them best in each situation (Erikson, 1993). This confusion extends to social, legal and political institutions in the accommodations made for young people, which can at once impose paternalistic controls and exacting standards of individual responsibility.

From the extant research, a short definition of social withdrawal as it relates to children and young people can be taken from the literature: "social withdrawal" refers to the child isolating himself/herself from the peer group' (Kenneth H. Rubin, Coplan, & Bowker, 2009). The way in which social withdrawal is construed as an issue among young people makes this confusion plainly visible. The political responsibility of the state towards children in terms of providing an education, subsidising basic needs and services and protecting them from harm and exploitation dates back to the 1833 Factory Act (prohibiting employment of children under the age of 9) and was further developed in legislation such as the 1945 Family Allowances Act (which established a direct subsidy to cover the basic needs of each child in a family except the eldest). The nature of that responsibility has been the subject of political debate and redefinition in the period since (Vandenhoe, 2019).

A powerful argument for consideration of children's interests beyond their basic physical needs or the future demands of the workplace became more influential in the post-1945 era. The full development of an integral personality would require, firstly, consideration of the impact of social and emotional development

on educational attainment and, secondly and more radically, a reconsideration of the prioritisation of educational attainment over social and emotional development (Verhellen, 2017). Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a powerful statement of this tendency through its articulation of a right of the child to 'rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts' (UN, 1989).

Social withdrawal becomes intelligible in this context as a threat to the interest of the developing young person. The moral philosopher Margaret Nussbaum gave an influential statement of this idea when she critiqued the idea of rights as empty if not conceived rather as 'capabilities'. These can be understood in terms of the capacity one has to practically exercise – through access to resources and appropriate socialisation – an abstract right deriving from an aspect of one's well-being. Her list of capabilities include life and health, as well as play, affiliation with others and access to other species and the environment (Nussbaum, 2013). If someone chooses not to exercise a right which serves their well-being, is this an authentic choice or does it mean they do not have the resources and socialisation to allow them to exercise a capability? For Nussbaum, the final decision rested with the individual, so long as they had the means to genuinely exercise their capability as they pleased. In the case of social withdrawal, the tension emerges between the social interaction necessary for the child to acquire capabilities that can serve their well-being and the tendency to withdraw from such interaction as an expression of their temperament and orientation to others.

As children move into the intermediate period of adolescence and early adulthood, the choice to withdraw from interaction from others becomes entangled with the question of identity. The relation between solitude and the cultivation of individual identity has deep roots in Western culture, as exemplified by the writer Henry Thoreau's account from of his period of solitude in a cabin in the forest near Walden Pond in the mid 19th Century United States (Thoreau, [1854] 2012). Recent studies affirm the importance of a volitional solitude in identity formation in the period of adolescence (Larson, 1997; Thomas &

Azmitia, 2019). Introversion, a trait associated in personality theory with a focus on an interior mental world over an external social world, has recently been defended in the media as an aspect of ‘neurodiversity’, a term seeking to defend the different ways that people with different neural profiles conceive of and interact with the world (Bright, 2019). If introversion is increasingly experienced as an identity, the antecedents in earlier life can come to be seen as an embryonic expression of this identity. Is the concern to provide the social basis of personal and educational development in earlier childhood an imposition on those whose potential difficulty with this can be considered a core feature of their identity?

1.3 Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)

In recent years, a greater awareness of the SEMH needs of young people has been followed up with more targeted policies coming from the government. The ‘Green Paper’ on Children and Young People’s Mental Health Provision cites a measure of 1 in 10 young people having a diagnosable mental health condition (Department of Health and Social Care/Department for Education, 2018).

Referring to the responses received from a consultation, the report states that:

educational attainment should not be the only way to measure success but to consider outcomes such as *social interaction*, self-esteem, mental health and wellbeing change over time, school attendance and school staff wellbeing (Department of Health and Social Care/Department for Education, 2018: 14. Emphasis added).

Social withdrawal (understood in relation to ‘social interaction’) thus features in public policy as relevant to the mental health and well-being indicators for children and young people.

As well as using the frame of ‘mental health’ to understand well-being – which through reference to the term ‘health’ inevitably involves a medical conceptualisation – the ‘Green Paper’ also refers to involving young people to ‘help co-design solutions’ (Department of Health and Social Care/Department for Education, 2018: 13). The concern to capture the voice of young people and

place it at the centre of their plans of support was also a point of emphasis in the Children and Families Act (2014) and its attendant Code of Practice (CoP). The balance between a medicalised perspective on mental health and a concern to gain the voice of young people is threatened in cases which feature social withdrawal due to a potential reluctance on the part of the affected young people to engage with such processes. Without the contribution of their voice, there is a danger that assumptions can be made about their experiences which then informs the support offered to them.

Educational Psychologists (EPs) are well-placed to make use of the kind of insight offered by the present study. In their work with young people, families and other professionals, they are able to relate individual-centred interpretations of a child's well-being and development to the systems that operate around them (Kelly, 2016). As such, they are best placed to use any insights from this study to inform their practice.

1.4 Local context

This study was undertaken with young people, aged between 16 and 19, attending a Further Education College in an inner London local authority. It is an ethnically and culturally diverse area, with a relatively young population and a high population density. Average property prices are high in this borough, but it has a high child poverty rate, indicating a high degree of inequality, which has an increased association with mental health difficulties (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2018).

1.5 Position of the researcher

Young people, as the above discussion indicates, are subject to paternalistic forms of support as well as efforts to encourage their autonomy and capacity to advocate for themselves. The 'intermediate age' for young people is one in which these tensions become even more acute due to the uncertainty of their position between the poles of 'child' and 'adult'. Those undergoing social withdrawal at this age will be less likely (almost by definition) than most to offer

their own perspectives on how to negotiate such tensions and, as such, will be subject to the current dominant conceptualisations of their position.

The purpose of this study, as a result, is to engage in an exploratory investigation of young people's experiences of social withdrawal in the past. This derives from an ethical commitment on the part of the researcher to a critical form of psychology, which tests dominant conceptualisations within the field against the perspectives of those whose lives are affected by them. In this sense, the commitment of the researcher is to redress an imbalance of power between the existing consensus on the well-being of young people and their own perspectives. Those who find it difficult to articulate their interests and perspectives in the current authoritative forms of discourse – peer-reviewed papers, government policy documents and so on – will need platforms in which they can become visible and audible participants in debates that deeply affect them. As well as engaging in an exploration of the experience of social withdrawal, this study also seeks to reconstruct the understanding that young people have of their own experiences as a way of determining its causes and effects. Their perspective on the origins and consequences of withdrawal will be an invaluable aid to anyone seeking to help them.

1.6 Structure of the study

The structure of this study will take the following form:

Chapter 2: Literature Review. This will examine the research on the area of social withdrawal and present research questions based on an assessment of the current literature and areas which could be further investigated. The research questions are:

1. What stories do young people tell about their experience of social withdrawal?
2. How do young people explain their experience of social withdrawal?

Chapter 3: Methodology. This will present the justification for a qualitative approach to the research and, specifically, a narrative methodology. Further, it will outline the Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) which will provide the ontological and epistemological framework through which this study is conducted. The practical steps taken in order to collect and analyse data are also outlined, as well as participant recruitment and ethical considerations surrounding the involvement of participants.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis. This will report the narratives that the participants co-constructed with the researcher and use a narrative analysis to identify important aspects of experience and explanation that featured in the narratives.

Chapter 5: Discussion. This will relate the findings and analysis to the broader literature as well as consider future areas in which research may fruitfully be directed.

Chapter 6: Personal Reflections/Narrative Form. This will examine the personal prejudices and assumptions of the researcher as they relate to the subject of social withdrawal in in this 'intermediate age' group. Further, it will relate the aesthetic techniques used by the participants in their narratives and the way in which they involved the personal perspective of the researcher as their primary audience in order to be effective.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review for this project informs its work in several ways. Firstly, it clarifies the ways in which social withdrawal among young people has been explained in psychological research. Secondly, it situates social withdrawal within a field of related conditions which recur in the literature, as well as identifying the terms used to describe social withdrawal and relate it to other cognate conditions. Thirdly, it builds a picture of the methods that have been used to investigate social withdrawal among young people. Finally, it discloses a recent history of how the construct of 'social withdrawal' has been formulated. Each of these areas contribute to building a picture of the recent conceptualisation and investigation of social withdrawal among young people, revealing tendencies which can be critically evaluated as well as gaps that can be areas of worthwhile investigation.

2.2. Approach to the literature review

2.2.1 Search strategies

Scoping searches on the Scopus database showed that there has been a steady increase in the prevalence of the term 'social withdrawal' in research literature over the past few decades (1978: 4 articles returned for this search term; 1988: 17; 1998: 37 2008: 59; 2018: 163). Of course, more papers are produced now than several decades ago, so, everything else being equal, a natural increase should be anticipated. However, there has been a significant increase in research even from the earlier part this decade (2011: 84; 2012: 113), suggesting there is growing interest in this research area. Scoping searches also revealed that 'social withdrawal' as a search term is associated with the emerging research on *hikikomori*, a form of severe and prolonged social withdrawal, lasting for at least six months, with considerable prevalence in Japan (Ministry of Health, 2003; Saito, 2013). For reasons of space, this expanding field of research was not included in the current review, unless it was

included in broader inquiries into social withdrawal. As *hikikomori* are defined as having experienced social withdrawal for at least six months, it was considered that this would be too narrow a subset of the population to consider specifically.

2.2.1.1 Inclusion criteria

The following figure shows the databases which were searched and the keywords which were used in various combinations to identify papers.

Figure 1

Databases and search terms used in the literature search, December 2019

Database	Search terms
EBSCO <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Development and Adolescent Studies • PsycINFO Scopus	“Social withdrawal” “Young People” OR “Adolescen*” OR “Teenage*” OR “Child*” “Narrat*” OR “Story*” OR “Stories”

It can be seen that most of the search terms used derive directly from the research interest in young people’s experience of social withdrawal. The search term string identifying the relevant population (“young people”..) included synonyms for ‘young people’ as well as “child*” because, although the participants for this project are in adolescence and early adulthood, the relevant period of withdrawal may have begun in childhood, while the antecedents to this withdrawal may have been investigated in relevant literature.

An ‘article title’ search for ““Social Withdrawal” AND “Young People” OR “Adolescen*” OR “Teenage*” OR “Child*”” on the Scopus database returned 22 results, when the term was restricted to the years from 2015 and 2019 and the subject area of Psychology (a significant review of social withdrawal in the context of peer groups was published in 2015 (K. H. Rubin, Bukowski, & Bowker, 2015)). An ‘article title, abstract or keyword’ search for ““Social

Withdrawal" and "Narrat*" OR "Story*" OR "Stories" in Scopus returned 6 results for the years 2015 to 2019 in the subject area of Psychology. An 'article title, abstract or keyword' search for "Social Withdrawal" and "Qualitative" returned 8 results within the subject area of Psychology from the years 2015 to 2019. Within the EBSCO database host, Child Development and Adolescent Studies and PsycINFO were the databases selected for searching. An article title search for the string "Social Withdrawal" AND ("Young People" OR "Adolescen*" OR "Teenage*" OR "Child*")' from 2015 to 2019 produced 25 results. An 'article title' search for the string "Social Withdrawal" AND ("Narrat*" OR "Story*" OR "Stories")' for all years returned 2 results. An 'all text' search for the string "Social Withdrawal" and "Qualitative" for the years 2015 to 2019 returned 28 results. When these results were converged, and doubles removed, there were 63 papers in total.

2.2.1.2 Exclusion criteria

The following exclusion criteria were used for the 63 papers that remained:

- No papers were retained which considered social withdrawal as it occurs within a population who have received a clinical diagnosis (eg. schizophrenia).
- No papers were retained which did not focus on children and young people.
- No papers were retained which took parents or other adults as their primary group of participants (not including parental or adult reports on children).
- No papers were retained which took social withdrawal as an independent variable to account for other dependent variables (eg academic attainment), where this was not an attempt to develop understanding of social withdrawal.
- No papers were retained which attempted to generalise findings to a subset of children or young people (eg 'institutionalised children').
- No papers were retained which measured interventions which sought to reduce social withdrawal.

- No papers were retained which related exclusively to *hikikomori*, a form of severe and prolonged social withdrawal first studied in Japan but forming a distinct research field in a widening range of countries.
- No papers were retained that were not published in peer-reviewed journals.

Once these criteria were used, 19 papers remained (Appendix 1; see Appendix 3 for information relating to sample sizes and methodology). When the papers were read and their reference lists inspected, a process of ‘snowballing’ led to an attempt to find the contours, historical development and conceptual focus of the research fields that could be identified in this area.

A further 71 papers, books, newspaper articles and official reports were reviewed in order to deepen an understanding of the subject area (Appendix 2, which includes the works in Appendix 1. Appendix 4 groups works into those with historical, conceptual and theoretical interest and others according to the age range of the sample included). In this broader search, some work relating to adults was included as it became clear that some of the concepts within the field were explored in relation to adults in a way that contributed to understanding social withdrawal among children and young people (in relation to attachment, for example).

2.2.2 Purpose and type of literature of review

A hermeneutic literature review rather than a systematic literature review was undertaken for this research project. Greenhalgh, Thorne and Malterud challenge the superiority imputed to systematic over narrative and hermeneutic literature reviews (Greenhalgh, Thorne, & Malterud, 2018). While systematic literature reviews are useful for aggregating data in relation to a narrowly focussed research question, the other approaches are better suited to research which requires an iterative process of deepening understanding, as exploration of the literature helps to refine the initial question. Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic explain how this process tracks against the ‘hermeneutic circle’, a dynamic interpretative process in which understanding develops in the encounter with a

text. They describe how two hermeneutic circles interact as a researcher moves through a review of literature:

Figure 2

A hermeneutic framework for the literature review process consisting of two major hermeneutic circles (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014)

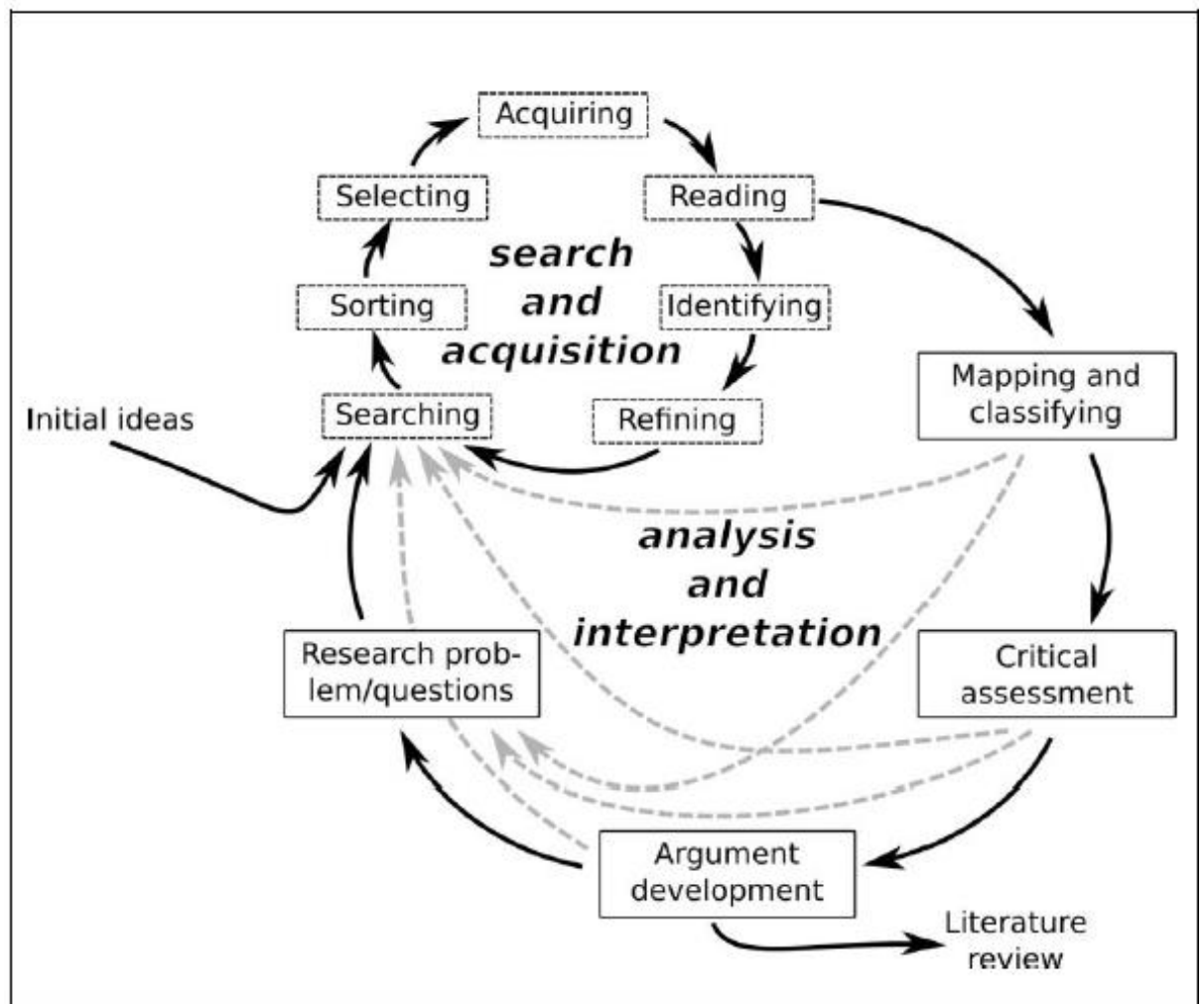


Figure 2 represents the approach taken in this review, in which ‘snowballing’ of papers and books took place at the same time as a deepening understanding of the area of social withdrawal took place.

In the process of this literature review it became clear that there were two major research fields with a core of researchers and key studies in each: one relating to social withdrawal and the other to *hikikomori*. The first was the focus of this review and it required a historical framing extending beyond four decades. This

historical dimension was felt necessary in order to delineate how social withdrawal was conceptualised and emerged out of background approaches and to show how that influence has a bearing on current developments within each field. While many of the studies are empirical in their methodology, the purpose of this review is to deepen understanding of the historical and conceptual frame within which social withdrawal has been studied.

2.3 Definitions

In seeking to elicit the stories that young people tell about their experience of social withdrawal, this project requires an exploration of the stories that are already told in the relevant research. This begins with the construct of 'social withdrawal' itself and how it is distinguished and related to other constructs, such as 'social isolation', 'solitude', '*hikikomori*' and so on. In other words, how have researchers defined social withdrawal and what effect has this had on their interpretation of young people's experience of social withdrawal? What kinds of subordinate distinctions and definitions have been used to give the construct of 'social withdrawal' its substantive meaning?

The research provides an objective description of social withdrawal: participants have not been included in any study due to their self-description as socially withdrawn. An objective description is achieved through several different methods: the judgement of adults with existing relationships with the children or young people; factor analysis of children's descriptions of shy children; the completion of a questionnaire used by the researcher to measure their position on a scale; or behavioural indicators, such as time spent without social contact. Peer observations and occasionally direct interviewing of the children is used, but typically according to structured questionnaires and observational schedules, or to explore constructs within social withdrawal. The use of an objective description of social withdrawal is designed to control for the different ways in which young people and children might be able to reflect and articulate their feelings about their experiences. This approach also allows for comparison of young people who may interpret a similar experience in different ways; for

example as a negative experience of loneliness on the one hand, or a positive opportunity for self-reflection on the other.

One result of this is that the concept of 'social withdrawal' has not been informed by the descriptions of those who have experienced it. This is significant when considered in the context of the history of the research in this area, which emerged in response to normative expectations of typical and healthy social development in children. Although not included in this review, some qualitative work on *hikikomori* is exploring the worldview of those who have gone through prolonged social withdrawal (Tajan, 2015). A further tendency in the reviewed literature concerns the possible benefits that may come from social withdrawal. This strand of the literature does not explore the self-descriptions of young people and children but rather correlates social withdrawal with other outcomes and traits. One result has been to more carefully distinguish social withdrawal from social isolation, loneliness and solitude.

2.3.1 Social withdrawal as maladapted development

2.3.1.1 Historical and theoretical trajectories

A characteristic definition of social withdrawal given by prominent researchers in the field focusses on observable behaviour: 'the consistent display of all forms of solitary behavior when encountering familiar and/or unfamiliar peers across situations and over time' (Oh et al., 2008; Kenneth H. Rubin & Asendorpf, 1993; Kenneth H. Rubin & Coplan, 2005). One study provides a historical overview of the development of the concept of social withdrawal that features in recent research (Bukowski & Véronneau, 2014). This historically-informed exercise makes an explicit commitment to record the way in which the concept reflects changing ideas about the relations between the individual and the group, the broader intellectual climate in which it evolved and the available research techniques that were available to study the construct. Locating Kurt Lewin's work in the post-war preoccupation with the fragility of individual liberty against totalitarian group projects, Bukowski and Véronneau also see his

attribution of the individual's adaptation to social settings beyond the family as a corrective response to the intra-individual focus of psychoanalysis. Lewin, in this account, explained maladapted adjustment to new social groups as the individual develops to maturity as accounted for by 'group dynamics' rather than the internal psychic condition of the individual. Bukowski and Véronneau piece together this interpretation from Lewin's ideas about social development and social belonging as he does not explicitly refer to 'social withdrawal'.

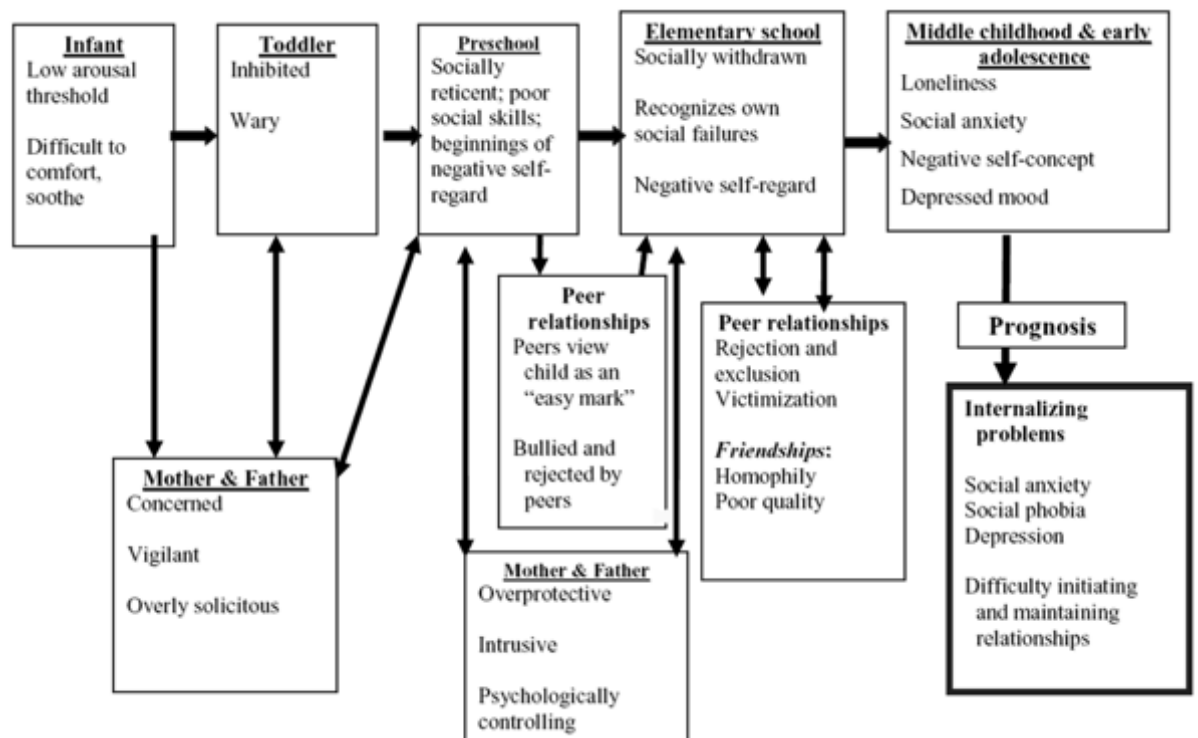
While Lewin and his contemporaries implicitly understood difficulties in adapting to new groups as a negative trajectory of development, J.V. Mitchell in 1956 used peer assessment (by children) of 19 forms of social behaviour, which factor analysis reduced to three: social acceptability, aggressive maladjustment and social isolation (Mitchell, 1956). Bukowski and Véronneau credit this as 'the first empirical demonstration of withdrawal as a basic dimension of social functioning with peers that was not the mere opposite of sociability' and 'the first procedure that identified and assessed withdrawal as a basic aspect of functioning among peers' (Bukowski & Véronneau, 2014). This occurred in the context of a broader movement in developmental child psychology which sought to look at the whole child rather than narrow aspects of behaviour in particular circumstances. This can be seen in a similar light to Eysenck's contemporary contribution to personality trait theory and its use of factor analysis. In common with the work of Chess, Thomas and Birch on withdrawal as a trait-like feature of developing social behaviour (Chess, Thomas, & Birch, 1959), withdrawal for Mitchell was still understood in negative terms due to its interference with a normative pattern of development.

Bukowski and Véronneau further show how this research field overlapped with that of another in the discipline of epidemiology which sought antecedents for adult mental health disorders in childhood development. At this point, Bukowski and Véronneau's historical account overlaps with the conceptual frameworks and forms of measurement that are features of the contemporary research. In a frequently cited article, Rubin, Coplan and Bowker give a description of social withdrawal which captures its multifarious nature, as a 'fuzzy construct' and an 'umbrella term describing a given behavioral prototype (solitude in one form or

another) derived from a variety of underlying causes' (Kenneth H. Rubin et al., 2009). However, Rubin has mostly associated social withdrawal with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties and missed opportunities for development, as can be seen in his 'transactional model' (involving dynamic interactions and feedbacks between the different elements) of social withdrawal developed with his co-authors Coplan and Bowker:

Figure 3

Rubin, Coplan and Bowker's 'transactional model' of social withdrawal (Kenneth H. Rubin et al., 2009)



As can be seen from this model, Rubin, Coplan and Bowker see social withdrawal as negatively skewed development. In an earlier influential paper, Rubin made a distinction between 'active isolation' and 'social withdrawal' to give definitional sense to the latter. Whereas the first refers to the condition of being isolated and rejected by one's peers, social withdrawal refers to a child themselves withdrawing from contact with a peer group (Kenneth H. Rubin, 1982). Rubin found, in this study of 4 year-olds (N=122), a negative correlation

between preference for solitary play and measures of social, social-cognitive and cognitive skill. This study was an empirical response to the theoretical position that social withdrawal may affect development positively, a position on which Rubin has expressed his scepticism (Kenneth H. Rubin, 2014).

Elsewhere, Rubin and Asendorpf have accounted for social withdrawal as the product of anxiety, negative self-esteem and other self-reported problems in the area of social competency (Kenneth H. Rubin & Asendorpf, 1993). Rubin has recognised that subsequent research has established an interactive relationship between active isolation and social withdrawal, as one can precipitate the other, rather than being entirely distinct pathways (Coplan & Rubin, 2010). Oh et al. also showed in a large longitudinal study, with measures given during fifth grade (median age 10.23 years, N=556), sixth grade (N=446), and eighth grade (N=392) that peer exclusion and friendship instability predicted increasing social withdrawal (Oh et al., 2008). In a large study among Korean adolescents (N=2,031), an association between both negative child-rearing attitudes (as reported by children) and quality of peer relationships was found with social withdrawal, suggesting that quality of such relationships can predict social withdrawal (Choi, Choi, & Kim, 2019).

An important strand of research in this area examines the neural correlates of inhibited or shy behaviour at children from the age of 6 months, combined with parental and observational reports. It has been found that there is increased right frontal electroencephalographic (EEG) activity in children who show wariness in the presence of strangers, significantly different from those who show less inhibition. Activity in this region is associated with negative emotions such as fear, sadness and disgust. Such studies have also found association with increased heart-rate at rest and in new social situations for inhibited children as well as increased cortisol levels, a hormone associated with stress (Buss et al., 2003; Calkins, Fox, & Marshall, 1996; Fox, Henderson, Marshall, Nichols, & Ghera, 2004; Henderson, Marshall, Fox, & Rubin, 2004; McManis, Kagan, Snidman, & Woodward, 2002; Schmidt, 1999).

In a review of this literature, Schmidt and Miskovic conclude that 'we do not know whether frontal brain activity is a cause of shyness and social withdrawal

or a result of it' (Schmidt & Miskovic, 2014). This underplays how impressive some of the research is: Calkins, Fox and Marshall found associations between behavioural inhibition, taken as a predictor of shyness, and increased frontal right EEG activity, at the age of 9 months (Calkins et al., 1996), while another study found increased frontal right EEG activity was associated in the same children with temperamental inhibition at 9 months and social wariness at 4 years old (Henderson, Fox, & Rubin, 2001). A small study examining associations between attention bias to threat, negative affect, effortful control and social withdrawal among 5 to 7 year olds (N= 53) found a positive relationship between attention bias to threat and social withdrawal, and between effortful control (hypothesised as perhaps moderating the relationship between attention bias to threat and social withdrawal) and social withdrawal. There was a negative relationship between effortful control and social withdrawal, suggesting that the ability to regulate negative emotions that may underlie social withdrawal can have an effect on children at this developmental stage, although the size of the sample suggests caution about this study's findings. Another study with 13 to 15 year olds (N= 103) found that the personality trait of conscientiousness, which, like effortful control relates to self-regulation, moderates the effect of social withdrawal on depression, but not anxiety (K. A. Smith, Barstead, & Rubin, 2017). A longitudinal study of males between from the ages of 5 to 20 (N=129) found that there was an association between social withdrawal and fearfulness and altered responses to reward, suggesting that those whose withdrawal is motivated by fear are more reward-sensitive, according to Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) of reward pathways at age 20 (Morgan, Shaw, & Forbes, 2015). This effect was not found among those whose withdrawal could be classified as 'unsociable', not experiencing fear in social situations and deriving pleasure from solitary activities. While this branch of the literature is mostly focussed on infants, important associations with affect and behaviour have been established throughout the developmental pathway to adulthood.

Rubin and Coplan's own historical overview on the research on social withdrawal (and social isolation), begins with Piaget's ideas (Buss et al., 2003; McManis et al., 2002) about developmental learning through 'discussion,

negotiation, and the expression and resolution of differences of opinion with age-mates' (Kenneth H. Rubin & Coplan, 2005). They then suggest that there was a drift towards thinking about developmental social interaction only in terms of the mother-child dyad, while intra-individual cognition and learning absorbed much of the attention of psychologists in the few decades after 1945. In the 1970s, the social context in which children develop as learners, including peer interactions, became a more salient research area. When the influence of social context on child behaviour and emotional development was considered, it addressed externalizing rather than internalizing behaviours (such as social withdrawal). Such behaviours are more clearly noticed in early infancy and coded as disruptive, while the evidence base for such behaviours as antecedents as emotional and mental health disorders in adulthood was more substantial at this point (Kenneth H. Rubin & Coplan, 2005).

Rubin describes his own entry into this research area through his early career critique of Piaget's notion of 'egocentrism' in young children (4-5 years old), showing that a more sensitive awareness of the role of gesture in language allowed for the apparent egocentrism of young children's utterances to involve more perspective-taking in their communication than Piaget had allowed. In describing mechanisms that might account for individual differences in the ability of young children to make themselves understood, Rubin described the pivotal role that peer interaction plays, leading to an interest in the causes and effects of social withdrawal at this age, with a particular interest in its association with internalizing disorders. In this regard, it is important to note that Oh et al. found that social withdrawal was a stable construct; if evident in middle childhood it was likely to be present in early adolescence in a longitudinal study of 392 children (Oh et al., 2008). Rubin found that between the ages of 5 and 11, most socially withdrawn children in a longitudinal study maintained this behaviour when measured in two year intervals (Kenneth H. Rubin, 1993). Booth-LaForce and Oxford cite figures between 34-74% stability between measurements of social withdrawal between the ages of 6 and 12 (Booth-LaForce & Oxford, 2008).

Social withdrawal can be seen as a subtype of a more general category of 'solitude', of which there is a positive version identified by Rubinstein and Shaver, which they distinguish from 'loneliness' (C. Rubinstein & Shaver, 1982; Weiss, 1973). They interpret loneliness in terms of an attachment-focussed definition, stemming from unmet needs for intimacy in relation to an early attachment figure, generating secondary attachment strategies that are maladapted to fulfil such needs in later life (such as 'demand' and withdrawal'). Positive solitude, by this reckoning, is associated with secure attachment styles. Mikulincer and Shaver identify several components in their definition of loneliness: a) negative psychological experience; b) deficiencies – perceived or actual, and in terms of either quantity or quality – in one's social world; c) unmet needs for emotional intimacy, which may occur in the context of existing relationships with others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2014). Rubin's distinction between externally imposed 'active isolation' and 'social withdrawal' as motivated by internal states, at least as a proximal cause, provides a guiding thread in the literature.

2.3.1.2 Asendorpf's four-part matrix: social approach and social avoidance

Figure 4

Asendorpf's four-part matrix (Asendorpf, 1990)

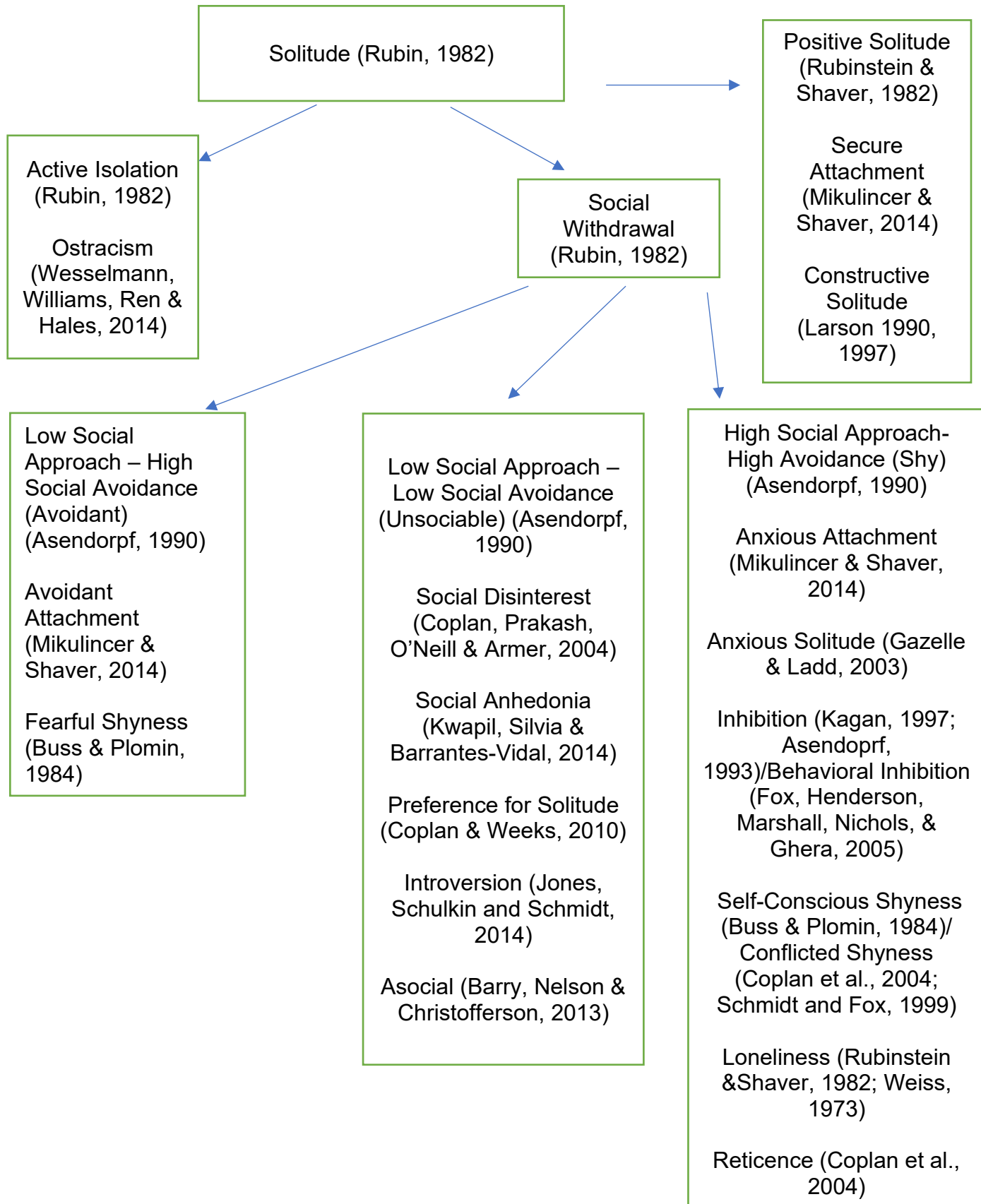
		Social Approach	
		High	Low
Social Avoidance	High	Shy	Avoidant
	Low	Sociable	Unsociable

Within the category of social withdrawal itself, Asendorpf's distinction between shy, unsociable and avoidant children provides a useful division of the research within social the category of social withdrawal itself (Asendorpf, 1990).

Asendorpf's tripartite schema is organised around social approach and social avoidance motivations, delivering a four-part matrix based on whether an individual is judged high or low on each dimension. Asendorpf considers social approach and social avoidance as independent of each other, allowing for the matrix to combine high and low scores on both dimensions. A recent study of 5 to 7 year old Chinese children (N=133) in which they were asked to respond to vignettes about hypothetical children's social preferences (eg. '*Avoidant*: This is (name). He does not like playing with other kids. He plays by himself even when

Figure 5

A schematic summary of the structure of research areas within the social withdrawal literature (works included in each section are illustrative not exhaustive).



other kids ask him to play with them') indicated that children of this age could distinguish between shy, unsociable, avoidant and socially competent children. They preferred the company of, in order, socially competent, shy, unsociable and avoidant children (Cheah & Xu, 2015; Ding et al., 2015b; Watling, 2015). In another study using semi-structured interviews among Turkish 10 year olds (N=15), supplemented by interviews with parents and teachers, a subtype of 'regulated withdrawal', involving controlled and passive participation in social interaction, was found instead of 'avoidance', in addition to shyness and unsociability (Özdemir, Cheah, & Coplan, 2015). This suggests that the influence of culture as well as methodology will be important to consider in relation to the three subtypes.

The high approach-high avoidance combination produces a behaviour Asendorpf calls 'ambivalent compromise', for which he describes a typical sequence for seven-year olds in the presence of strangers in a potential peer group, from onlooking ('waiting-and-hovering') to parallel play, to interaction. He also describes how 'coy' behaviour predominates at younger ages in the typical pattern of development and the move towards interaction becomes more fluent as children mature. However, there are individual differences within the 'ambivalent compromise' position and those who remain with conflicting social approach and social avoidance tendencies in later childhood are, in Asendorpf's schema, 'shy'. While a high approach-low avoidance disposition led to 'approach' behaviours, low approach-low avoidance led to 'ignore' behaviours (classed as 'unsociable') and low approach-high avoidance led to 'avoid' behaviours (classed as 'avoidant').

Mikulincer and Shaver, whose work focusses on adults, analysed 'avoidant' and 'shy' behaviours in terms of attachment styles, adapting the classic attachment typology to describe 'avoidant' and 'anxious' attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2014). Following attachment theory, they attribute the experience and practice of social interaction to 'internal working models' developed in a formative stage of infancy in relation to significant caregiving figures (Bowlby, 1982). Avoidant and anxious forms of attachment are defensive strategies against the painful

anticipation of unresponsiveness developed in relation to attachment figures (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

2.3.1.3 'Avoidant'

The avoidant orientation has been associated with a 'fearful shyness' subtype – in contrast with a 'self-conscious shyness' subtype – both of which have been described as discrete categories in subsequent research and factor analysis (Cheek & Buss, 1981; Jones, Schulkin, & Schmidt, 2014; Kenneth H. Rubin, Coplan, Bowker, & Menzer, 2011). Avoidant forms of social withdrawal in Asendorpf's longitudinal study of 3-4 year olds over three years (N=126) were related to aggressiveness. Although there was a negative correlation between aggressiveness and 'self-conscious shyness', as defined above, avoidant children displayed high aggression and relatively high shyness, showing a significant mediating effect for avoidance. A recent study with a large sample using a new subscale administered to parents and teachers of 5 year old children (N=564) was able to distinguish between avoidance, shyness and unsociability at this age (Coplan, Ooi, Xiao, & Rose-Krasnor, 2018). Avoidance was associated at this age with increased levels of emotional dysregulation (such as lack of soothability).

Mikulincer and Shaver see avoidant attachment as a deactivating strategy developed in early childhood in relation with attachment figures who reject or punish attempts at closeness, adaptive in early childhood, but proving maladaptive in the long run. They associate avoidant attachment with self-reported difficulties in interpersonal relationships, related to being overly competitive, cold and introverted. Avoidant attachment was more stable and durable in adulthood while anxious attachment scores tended to diminish, a result supported by a longitudinal study (Klohnen & Bera, 1998; Mickelson, Kessler, & Shaver, 1997). They also cite a study of adolescents aged 16 to 17 (N=62) in a short-term longitudinal study of their adjustment to college, finding that there was an association of social withdrawal with 'dismissive' (which may be interpreted as analogous to 'avoidant') students but not 'preoccupied' (analogous to anxious) students (Larose & Bernier, 2001).

In studies including young adult populations, avoidant participants are more likely than anxious participants to report that they will be lonely in the future, that they have not felt close or connected to others in the past and, interestingly, are less prone to nostalgia (Wildschut, Sedikides, Routledge, Arndt, & Cordaro, 2010). While there is evidence that anxious people have higher ratings of loneliness on, for example, the UCLA loneliness scale, than avoidant people, some studies report no difference and are consistent in showing that both groups have higher loneliness scores. Mikulincer & Shaver suggest that 'avoidant strategies divert attention away from self-relevant sources of distress and encourage the adoption of a self-reliant attitude, which requires exaggeration of strengths and competences' (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2014: 43). However, the higher rating of self-reported loneliness among avoidant than securely attached people suggests that 'deactivating' strategies of avoidance coexist with a sense that needs in relation to social contact are not being met in some way.

2.3.1.4 'Unsociable'

Asendorpf identified those with low social approach-low avoidance motivations as 'unsociable' (Asendorpf, 1990), while Jones, Schulkin and Schmidt used a term derived from the field of personality trait psychology for the same group: 'introverted' (Jones et al., 2014). A further study identified an 'unsociable' subtype among teacher ratings of pre-school children using cluster analysis, who differed from other children only in their low social interaction (Harrist, Zaia, Bates, Dodge, & Pettit, 1997). Mikulincer and Shaver's attachment focus distinguishes only between those with secure attachment and those with insecure attachment using 'deactivation' or 'hyperactivation' strategies, drawing the terms from work by Cassidy and Kobak (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988). Asendorpf's category of 'unsociability' may be absorbed within the avoidant attachment strategy, but at the cost of missing the difference between those who are defensively avoiding social contact as a strategy to manage expected rejection, supported by the evidence of increased loneliness within the avoidant category, and those who take less pleasure from social contact.

Equivalent categories found in the work of others would be 'social disinterest' (Coplan, Prakash, O'Neil, & Armer, 2004), 'social anhedonia' (Goosens, 2014; Kwapil, Thomas, Silvia, & Barrantes-Vidal, 2014) and 'preference for solitude' (Coplan & Weeks, 2010). In such studies, using the Child's Social Preference Questionnaire with parents for pre-school children (3 to 5 years old) (Coplan et al., 2004) and directly for self-report with those in early adolescence (Bowker & Raja, 2011), a lack of initiation of social contact with peers in the same space and the practice of solitary play were used to distinguish a category of children from those who exhibited fearful-shyness. They were also distinguished from avoidant children in study of grade 2 children (7 to 8 years old, N=41) in that they had the same level of verbal participation in conversations as other children, albeit with less social interaction overall (Asendorpf & Meier, 1993).

Some research in this area has revealed that social disinterest may be a benign form of social withdrawal. Parent reports on shy and socially disinterested children showed that the latter have lower levels of internalising problems than shy children and similar levels to non-withdrawn children (Coplan & Weeks, 2010), although the evidence on this question is mixed, with one study (N=493) using parental report showing that between the ages of 6 and 9, social disinterest predicted a rise in anxiety symptoms, with an additional rise in depressive symptoms among boys (Kopala-Sibley & Klein, 2017). In addition, socially disinterested children of all ages who have difficulties with emotional regulation have more elevated levels of internalising problems than the general population, showing that it is not a protective factor against this negative outcome (Kenneth H. Rubin & Coplan, 2005). Further work with pre-schoolers (N=68), as rated by teachers, showed no association between unsociability and anxiety or negative ratings of one's self or one's abilities, but a negative relationship was found with prosocial behaviour and a positive relationship with peer exclusion. In keeping with the developmental model of social withdrawal, this was interpreted as incurring a cost in terms of peer relationships and the benefits they can bring (Coplan et al., 2018; Kenneth H. Rubin, Coplan, Fox, & Calkins, 1995). A large recent study of 10-12 year olds in China (N=1344) using child self-report as well as peer-, parent- and teacher reports found an

association between unsociability and internalising difficulties, in contrast to research involving western participants (Coplan et al., 2016). A study among 3 to 5 year olds in China (N=479) also found an association between unsociability and internalising problems (Li et al., 2016). Contributing to this body of research, a short-term longitudinal study found negative internalising emotions among all three sub-types in China and in addition found that depressive symptoms at 9-10 years old predicted increased social avoidance at 12-13 years old (Ding et al., 2019).

2.3.1.5 'Ambivalent compromise: shy'

Asendorpf's last category describes those with high social approach-high avoidance as 'shy' or 'socially reticent' (Asendorpf, 1990). Building on Asendorpf's work, others have foregrounded the tension that exists between the approach and avoidance dimensions as better described as 'conflicted shyness' (Coplan et al., 2004; Schmidt & Fox, 1999). Mikulincer and Shaver classified this as 'anxious attachment' (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2014). One study (N=147) found significantly higher measures of fearful temperament in socially reticent (shy) compared to solitary passive (avoidant) 4 year old children (Henderson et al., 2004). An association has been found between anxious attachment and higher levels of interpersonal problems in self-reports with adults, who judge themselves to be sub-assertive, exploitable and overly expressive/demanding (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2014). It should be noted that some studies have found a distinction between high levels of anxiety and withdrawn behaviour among pre-school children (N=106), with anxious children increasing their approach towards teachers in contrast to withdrawn children (Zhang, 2015).

However, poor quality interpersonal relationships are not equivalent to social withdrawal. Mikulincer and Shaver cite evidence among adult populations that those with anxious attachment express higher levels of nostalgia (implying social connectedness) and hope for the success in relationships in the future than those with avoidant attachment (see Shaver & Hazan, 1987; Wildschut et al., 2010). Anxious attachment is associated with the development of

'interpersonal goals' of achieving closeness and intimacy with others that guide behaviour over the long term (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Maternal and teacher rating of pre-school children's shyness had no relationship with the children's self-reported preference for playing with others or alone, providing evidence that there is a conflict between approach and avoidance as suggested by Asendorpf (Coplan et al., 2004).

The question of the influence of culture as well as the precise relationship between attachment style and shyness has been a feature of recent studies. One recent study (N=142) of Chinese children between the ages of 6 and 10 using self-reports of attachment style and, 18 months later, self- and peer-reports identified two subtypes of social withdrawal (shyness and avoidance, excluding unsociability) (Chen & Santo, 2016). This study also included a test at both times of self-reported attachment style among the children. It found an association between ambivalent attachment at Time 1 and shyness at Time 2, but interestingly not between ambivalent attachment at Time 2 and shyness at Time 2. This led the authors to speculate that there may be an early critical window in which attachment style influences shyness in earlier childhood.

The question of the degree of influence cultural context may have on the positive or negative valence given to subtypes of social withdrawal has been discussed in the literature; a blanket reference to 'culture' has been criticised in favour of an understanding of mechanisms relating to expectations of participation in collectivist versus individualistic cultures (X. Chen, 2015). Aside from drawing attention to cultural context, this also emphasises how important it is to investigate the role that environmental factors, such as relationships with peers and adults and how social withdrawal is construed, can play in the development of various sub-types of social withdrawal. This is the chief recommendation of a study using open-ended questionnaires about social withdrawal (N=219) with Ugandan children between 11 and 17 years old, the responses to which were coded and themed (Eggum-Wilkens, Zhang, & An, 2018). Different responses to intentionality between those who were avoidant (drawing negative responses) compared to those who were shy (drawing sympathetic responses) confirmed understanding of subtypes of social

withdrawal found elsewhere. It perhaps also confirmed a background cultural judgement in China favouring co-operative interaction. However, themes identified in this study relating to poverty, orphanhood and health, which perhaps reflect the circumstances and challenges of Ugandan children, illustrate how social withdrawal is a concept which draws upon the particular lived experience of the people among whom it is being investigated.

There is a dearth of qualitative research of this kind relating to social withdrawal. A recent study of 'school-refusers' in Tower Hamlets, London (N=47, mean age 16) used quantitative analysis to confirm other research suggesting elevated levels of anxiety and depression among withdrawn adolescents, but without accounting entirely for the phenomenon (Kljakovic & Kelly, 2019). Qualitative data was then collected through group interviews with adults who worked with these young people. Themes identified related to individual mental health needs as well as environmental factors (inflexibility of school systems and parental capacity, for instance). However, the focus on school refusal and potential barriers to re-entering the school system meant that the specificity of social withdrawal was not investigated directly, while the absence of the voice of young people themselves meant that the data itself was a step removed from their experience.

Some research has found an association between shyness and social withdrawal mediated by emotional difficulties and lower quality social interaction. Coplan et al. (2004) suggested a potential developmental path between conflicted shyness in early childhood and later social withdrawal. More reticent behaviour (waiting and hovering, parallel play) was found among this group in general, leading to reduced opportunities for the development of typical social-cognitive skills. Furthermore, teacher perceptions of lower prosocial behaviour and peer exclusion were higher, particularly among boys in the shy group. A possible reason for this is that shy behaviour is negatively interpreted according to prevailing gender norms, leading to poor quality social interaction for those who display this behaviour. Coplan et al.'s recent study of a 5 year old population (N=564) associated shyness, compared with avoidance and unsociability, as most strongly associated with reduced peer interactions

outside of school and anxiety (Coplan et al., 2016). Another recent large longitudinal study (N=493) using parental report found an association between conflicted shyness as measured among 3 year olds and symptoms of anxiety (with an additional association with depression for boys) at age 6. Conflicted shyness among boys at age 6 further predicted externalising problems at age 9 (Kopala-Sibley & Klein, 2017).

Other longitudinal studies ranging from childhood into adulthood show that shyness in boys is more strongly associated with increased internalising problems at the age of 4 as well as more difficulties with relationships and work in later life (Caspi, Elder, & Bem, 1988; Stevenson-Hinde & Glover, 1996), although there is evidence that changing gender norms has reduced differences observed in this older research (Barry, Nelson, & Christofferson, 2013). A large longitudinal study following a cohort of participants from middle childhood (10 to 12 years old) to early adulthood (24 to 26 years old) (N=1917) found a group, with significantly more males than females, who were more withdrawn at around the age of 16 and exhibited more externalising behaviours. Their withdrawnness and externalisation reduced between the ages of 19 and 22, but while the externalisation did not return, they became more withdrawn towards 25. The most withdrawn group in this study, however, showed the highest levels of shyness and lack of social affiliation in adolescence and later adulthood, with a slight decrease from a very elevated level as they grew older (Barzeva, Meeus, & Oldehinkel, 2018). It is impossible to map these results precisely on to Asendorpf's schema as they did not seek to distinguish shyness from unsociability or avoidance. However, other evidence suggests that the avoidant group is the most withdrawn. This would suggest that the shy group displays higher levels of withdrawal at 16 before converging with the majority of the population between 19 and 22 on measures of withdrawal before increasing after 22. Interestingly, there was also an increase in withdrawal after the age of 22 for the 'low-stable group' which was made up of almost 72% of the participants. This indicates that there is a general tendency to become more withdrawn at about 22 years old, but that this tendency is stronger among those who were more withdrawn in adolescence.

Among younger children, solitary-passive play and reticent social behaviour – characteristic of the conflicted-shy group – was associated with peer exclusion and rejection among 8 to 9 year olds in one study and 10 to 13 year olds in another (Coplan et al., 2013; Gazelle, 2008). The effect of repeated social failure among those with reticent social behaviour – due to limited social-cognitive skills, negative peer judgements and increasing negative self-worth – can lead to social withdrawal (Kenneth H. Rubin et al., 2011). Social withdrawal is more associated with unsociable or avoidant rather than conflicted-shy individuals and there is some longitudinal research which shows that conflicted-shy children have diminishing social withdrawal, from a high starting point, as they move through the primary school age category (Booth-LaForce & Oxford, 2008). This study also showed that there was little noticeable effect for gender.

In this study, following 1092 American children from Grades 1 to 6 (ages 6-12), 9% showed increasing social withdrawal and 5 % decreasing withdrawal. The first group was characterised by ambivalent attachment, insensitive parenting, low inhibitory control, dysregulated infant temperament as well as increasing peer rejection. The second (decreasing) group showed the same characteristics, but also temperamental shyness, consistent with the conflicted high approach-high avoidance type considered above. Despite their decreasing withdrawal they were still significantly more withdrawn than the mean for the entire sample, as well as high levels of loneliness, although they suffered less from peer exclusion.

This does not provide a comparison with the unsociable type, but it does suggest that different combinations of factors can manifest as social withdrawal at different times in pre-adolescent childhood. In early adulthood, Nelson identified the three subtypes of social withdrawal among a sample of undergraduates (N=791). However, negative outcomes – suicidal ideation, emotional dysregulation, low self-worth – were associated with both the avoidant and shy but not the unsociable subtypes (Nelson, 2013).

2.3.1.6 *Hikikomori* in the social withdrawal literature

Interestingly, there are few references to the form of severe and prolonged social withdrawal, first identified and studied in Japan, known as *hikikomori*. There has been one large-scale cross-cultural study of *hikikomori* in relation to the subtypes of social withdrawal identified above (Bowker et al., 2019). This examined cross-cultural variations in a sample drawn from psychology students from the United States (N=301), Singapore (N=147) and Nigeria (N=151), who were asked to reflect on past experiences of withdrawal using questions drawn from a previous retrospective lifetime study (Koyama et al., 2010). They also sought correlations for traits drawn from the social withdrawal field, such as comorbidity with depression and anxiety, as well as distinctions between social anhedonia and anxiety in avoidant behaviour. Gender differences were further examined given the evidence that they may be diminishing over time in this area. They found no significant differences in prevalence between genders, with the highest *hikikomori* rates overall in Nigeria, then Singapore ahead of the United States. The rates are significantly higher than the 1-2% prevalence reported in Japanese society: the Nigerian sample had 31 out of 137 reporting *hikikomori* experiences (21%); Singapore had 14 out of 147 (10%) and the United States had 8 out of 301 (2.5%). However these were not randomised samples, selected instead from psychology students in each country, perhaps suggesting a higher prevalence within this cohort. There are no reliable figures for prevalence outside of Japan.

They found a higher rate of social anhedonia (similar to the unsociable category discussed above) among males than females in Singapore. Furthermore, they found that Americans with a *hikikomori*-type presentation had higher rates of anxiety and worse relationships with their mothers. The authors speculate that differences in culture may make *hikikomori* less acceptable in American circumstances and expose young people in that category to more negative outcomes. There is evidence elsewhere that young people in the United States and the United Kingdom are more likely to leave home and become homeless

than, for instance, in Japan (Okamoto, 2007; Saito, 2013). This may also explain why there appear to be lower rates of *hikikomori* in the United States than other countries where a family-culture infrastructure, favouring multiple generations of adults cohabiting, is in place to support it. They also found that *hikikomori* was in general associated with higher levels of loneliness and depression even after recovery from the experience of withdrawal. In terms of examining the differences between different types of motivation for withdrawn behaviour – avoidant, unsociable, conflicted-shy – only the measure of social anhedonia, with elevated levels of Singaporean males, afforded a direct report. Elevated anxiety levels among American participants, contrasted with increased loneliness levels among their Nigerian equivalents, suggests that there may be different motivations in different cultural circumstances for *hikikomori*-like behaviour.

This study provides a much needed cross-cultural perspective, finding a higher rate in an African country (the first study of *hikikomori* in Africa) than two others that have been investigated before. However, the lack of control for socio-economic variables means that it is difficult to tell the degree to which the socio-economic background of the sample contributed to the manifestation of *hikikomori*. Similarly, they did not collect data on family structure, which Saito indicates is important, or examine aspects of the cultural context. Finally, they acknowledge that they did not follow up their questions with interviews about the students' experience of *hikikomori*, something of which there is a dearth in the literature in this area.

A study which examined *hikikomori* and its associations with temperamental shyness and attachment styles had findings which corresponded to those of Booth-LaForce and Oxford, discussed above (Krieg & Dickie, 2013). 24 Japanese *hikikomori* were compared to 60 comparison group participants (ranging in age from 14 to 32) and were found to have higher rates of ambivalent attachment, poor relationships with parents, experience of peer rejection and high rates of temperamental shyness. Where Booth LaForce and Oxford found that temperamental shyness actually contributed to a decrease in social withdrawal in pre-adolescent childhood, they still found an elevated level

of social withdrawal among this group. It could be that as those in this category enter the challenges of adolescence – when *hikikomori* tends to emerge – they are more likely to experience this acute form of social withdrawal.

2.3.1.7 Relationship between Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and social withdrawal

The relationship between ‘social disinterest’ and the display of ASD-type traits is, maybe surprisingly, not examined in much depth in this area of the literature, with one notable exception being a chapter in a book edited by leading researchers in the field (Kasari & Sterling, 2014). This is perhaps because the capacity to engage in sustained contact with peers (or the possession of ‘social skills’) as well as the lack of avoidance of others are perhaps the criteria which are used to distinguish these children from those exhibiting ASD-type traits.

It is worth noting that Leo Kanner’s original description of autistic children as a distinctive group was prompted by his observation of children happily playing by themselves (Kanner, 1943). Research has shown that children with ASD have a delay in the age at which they are able to follow gaze (Mundy & Newell, 2013), and that they do not exhibit the motivation or ability to emotionally engage with others through joint attention (Hobson, 2002), suggesting an overlap with ‘social disinterest’. A study among adolescents with ASD found that there was no difference in their number of interests, compared to a neurotypical control group, but that they differed in that they tended to be non-social in nature and they preferred to engage in them by themselves, rather than socially (Unruh et al., 2016).

Some past research suggested that the non-social forms of ‘solitary-passive play’ – constructive and explorative rather than motor or dramatic activities in solitude – was more prevalent among pre-school unsociable children (Coplan et al., 1994; Kenneth H. Rubin, 1982; Kenneth H. Rubin & Asendorpf, 1993), although this has been challenged in more recent findings (Coplan et al., 2004; Harrist et al., 1997). Research into ‘object-orientation’ (not related to OOO as used in this study) versus ‘people-orientation’ in pre-school children, which

found that boys cluster at either extreme of each orientation, has been used to suggest an association between object-orientation and unsociability (Asendorpf, 1990; Coplan, 2000; Coplan et al., 2004; Jennings, 1975).

Findings supporting the Social Motivation Theory of Autism, that ASD adolescents were more motivated by the display of objects within their range of interests than by faces, in turn supports an association between object-orientation and ASD (Unruh et al., 2016). As 'social disinterest' is characterised by a lack of motivation to interact, as opposed to the shy or avoidant strategies of managing failure in social interaction, the overlap with the ASD population would merit some further investigation. The absence of difficulties for socially disinterested children in the context of social interaction when it is underway suggests that there may well be a distinction between those children and others with ASD traits. Jennings's original findings on pre-school children with object-orientation suggested that there were no indications of deficits in social cognition amongst this group (Jennings, 1975).

2.3.2 Solitude as adaptive development

It has been already mentioned that unsociability is less associated with negative outcomes than the avoidant or conflicted-shy/anxious orientations. However, a more positive account of solitude in childhood exists in the literature beyond the absence of negative outcomes. Winnicott's discussion of 'the capacity to be alone' is a central starting point for many (Winnicott, 1958). Reinterpreting silence in a therapeutic context as an achievement rather than resistance, Winnicott discussed at length the development of the capacity to be alone in the presence of another as part of a child's development of a secure identity. The child is negotiating an understanding of the separation of their ego from the world and the objects it contains. In understanding that they can receive back objects which escape their grasp, the child is able to develop an identity within the boundaries of their self, secure in the knowledge that the world, in which they recognise the co-existence of a separate identity, will remain available to them. A subsequent stage is attained when the child is able to maintain a secure and separate self from caregivers (in Winnicott's context, a primary

caregiving mother), secure in the knowledge that their separated self can maintain a relation with others who remain available to them. Adapting Winnicott's idea to the attachment-influenced discussion mentioned above, the child does not anxiously seek closeness with a withholding caregiver, or avoidantly anticipate rejection through withdrawal. The development of an integrated self with a secure relation to others allows for the next stage: the capacity to be alone while not in the presence of another or 'the capacity actually to be alone'.

This raises the possibility that children who withdraw from contact with others, by engaging in solitary play for instance, may actually have achieved an important maturational stage in their development. As Rubin and Coplan observed in their review of the history of social withdrawal research, the lack of attention given to children who did not seek peer interaction, as opposed to those who showed externalising difficulties in the context of social interaction, was encouraged by contemporary assumptions that solitary play was developmentally appropriate as well as reflecting cultural norms of 'good behaviour' (Kenneth H. Rubin & Coplan, 2005). Research has subsequently shown that many negative outcomes are associated with social withdrawal and reduced peer interaction, but some elements of the older positive bias have been supported by the evidence. Solitary-passive play – involving sustained attention in constructive activities such as building blocks or drawing a picture – in early childhood was associated with the unsociable subtype, although Coplan et al. have shown that the unsociable subtype had no association with this type of play in their study (Coplan et al., 2004). Nonetheless, this type of play has been associated in pre-school populations with increased capacity for attention as well as physical skills, with no discernible impact on social cognition skills (Asendorpf, 1990).

Rubin and Mills have suggested that while in early childhood solitary-passive play may not be associated with negative outcomes, as children mature, such forms of play are perceived negatively, lead to peer rejection and missed opportunities for development of social cognition and are associated with negative emotional and mental health outcomes in later childhood (Kenneth H.

Rubin & Mills, 1988). However, this should be set against other evidence that suggests that social withdrawal in adolescence can have beneficial effects. To be clear, the best effects in terms of emotional and mental health are seen for those adolescents and emerging adults who spend some time alone, as opposed to little or a lot (Larson, 1990, 1997). This has been accounted for in terms of the opportunity this gives for young people to develop a secure and integrated identity of their own, which recalls Winnicott's description above of the developing 'capacity to be alone'.

2.4 Summary and statement of research questions

The above discussion has shown that the bulk of the literature on social withdrawal has drawn attention to its disruptive effect on the development in children, leading to negative outcomes, exacerbated by the negative reaction of peers to these forms of behaviour. While some benefits have been identified for solitude, this has been in terms of developing a secure identity in order to be able to engage in social interaction in a way that avoids the extremes of anxious demand on others on the one hand and anticipatory withdrawal on the other. There is considerable evidence of stability of forms of social withdrawal from early childhood through adolescence to emerging adulthood, with negative outcomes discovered in longitudinal studies for adults. Different subtypes of social withdrawal have been delineated – avoidant, unsociable and shy – of which the unsociable subtype seems to have markedly fewer negative outcomes.

The identification of different subtypes of social withdrawal, longitudinal proof of its stability through maturational stages of development and some benign or beneficial effects are testimony to the sophistication of this research field. It has proved useful in alerting caregivers to the potential effects of solitary behaviour in early childhood. One interesting avenue that might be explored in more detail is the degree to which social relations are understood in terms of a wider relation to the world and objects within it. This is particularly relevant to the ASD population, whose view of social relations may be influenced by the balance of their object-orientation in relation to their social orientation.

A further question relates to the 'unsociable' subtype. There is conflicting evidence on whether this subtype faces challenges in relation to their social, emotional and mental health needs and more general well-being. Recent evidence from China suggests that they do face such challenges and a question arises concerning the impact of the influence of factors particular to the circumstances of the Chinese populations who were studied.

While this field of research has shown that withdrawn children encounter a negative bias from others when interpreting their performance in social interactions, it has not really examined what it is like to experience different forms of withdrawal. This is particularly important given that it has been shown that withdrawn children are more prone to peer rejection and victimization, which suggests that their predicament cannot be entirely attributed to their negative framing of their interactions. The research has shown that parent relationships and contact with at least one peer can be a protective factor for these children. However, given the importance given to their mental representations of their relations with others, in light of the attachment theory influence in the literature, more work could be done to examine the decisive events or experiences which contribute to young people's view of themselves in relation to others.

Similarly, the degree to which the course of their development appears to them to have been inevitable, or attributable to events or social influences, could be investigated in more depth. The variation of the degree of withdrawal over time could also allow for greater sensitivity to the experiences that may make someone with a tendency to withdrawal remove themselves almost completely from social contact, as well as the factors that could contribute to an emergence from such an intense form of withdrawal. Finally, despite the acknowledgement of environmental influences in Rubin's transactional model, social withdrawal has largely been examined as reflecting a tendency or trait in this literature. In the *hikikomori* literature, more attention has been given to understanding the view of the world held by such people exhibiting withdrawn behaviour and

relating that to the immediate social, historical and cultural context in which they find themselves (E. Rubinstein, 2016; Tajan, 2015; Vellut, 2015).

In light of this review, the following research questions are designed to fill the gap in the literature concerning the perspectives of young people on their experience of social withdrawal and their explanations for its emergence in their lives:

1. What stories do young people tell about their experience of social withdrawal?
2. How do young people explain their experience of social withdrawal?

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

A methodology chapter should specify the practical steps that were undertaken in the course of a research project, helping the reader to understand the process of data collection and analysis. Further, for the project to contribute to the wider field, the methods adopted should be reproducible and comparable to the methods that other researchers adopt. This chapter also presents the research questions in light of the review of the literature conducted in the previous chapter. This is an important step as it makes clear the unique and original contribution made by the research. Discussion of method is incomplete without discussion of the purposes they are to serve. As such, this chapter explains the rationale behind the formulation of the research questions before outlining the steps taken to gather and analyse data under the guidance of the research questions. The ontological and epistemological commitments of this research project are explicitly discussed as a means of justifying its overall orientation in relation to existing work.

3.2 Locating the research project in the context of existing work

As discussed in the previous chapter, there is a dearth of qualitative work on the experience of social withdrawal outside of Japan. There are some first-person accounts of the experience of *hikikomori* which provide extended personal testimony, but which lack any systematic analysis that might inform other research, by providing new categories or distinctions for instance (Saada, 2018). The existing qualitative research in the Japanese context is confronted with the question of the particularity of the Japanese experience (Itoh, 2012). There have been some qualitative studies of Chinese *hikikomori* with multiple participants, but outside of China and Japan, such studies have involved individual case studies (T. M. H. Li & Wong, 2015b).

It is worth reflecting on the possible reasons for the bias towards quantitative studies of social withdrawal. The term originated as denoting a symptom in the DSM-IV, leading to the Japanese translation as '*hikikomori*'. From the publication of Tamaki Saito's book in 1998 (Saito, 2013), it has subsequently been understood in terms of public health in Japan, leading to studies which concentrate on the aetiology of the condition and co-morbidity with other 'disorders'. The field of study in the United States framed 'social withdrawal' as 'maladapted development' in light of the increased understanding of the role of social interaction in structuring the development of children and young people in a range of areas. Personality trait theory also exerted an influence, leading to studies which sought correlations between measures of development and traits with periods of social withdrawal.

3.3 Qualitative research

Consequently, this research project has sought to address a lesser-examined area in the study of social withdrawal in order to redress the balance between quantitative and qualitative studies. Qualitative studies can serve as useful complements to quantitative studies for a number of reasons. Firstly, the categories and distinctions used in quantitative studies can be tested empirically for robustness through the use of measures and factor analysis. However, they originate from the decisions taken by researchers in assigning a particular term to a hypothesised trait, such as sociability for instance. If a stable correlation is found with another trait, then this may appear to vindicate the term used to describe the trait, which could in fact have been assigned another term. Qualitative studies at least can provide terms which originate in the descriptions given by the participants in the study themselves.

It is a mistake to think that some of the compromises imposed upon quantitative researchers are entirely absent from qualitative research. The issue of variance in participants' abilities to present their experiences in the context of qualitative data collection remains and techniques are often used to help stimulate the discourse of the participant. Interviews, often semi-structured, provide an active role for the researcher in shaping the data that emerges. Researchers bring

their own prejudices and biases, conscious and unconscious, to this process, but are also affected by their motivations concerning the use to which they wish to put the data. They may further be primed by their reading around the area of the research. Through experience and training, they may have the skills that would allow them to push the interview into certain directions. While reflection, bracketing and transparency are also important elements of any training undertaken by qualitative researchers, it would be a distortion to hold that qualitative research entirely removes the imposition of the researcher's frame on the experience of the participant. Nonetheless, where a case can be made that participants' voices in a research field need to be heard on their own terms, at length and without the imposition of the existing hypotheses of the research field, then qualitative research is the appropriate methodology to adopt.

3.4 Narrative research

Narrative research is a sub-category of qualitative research, which seeks data in the form of stories (the term 'narrative' will be used in this study). Within the field of psychology, the justification for recording the narratives that participants tell is that such narratives have some special relation to the thoughts, beliefs, values, emotions, experiences and behaviours of people.

It could be objected that narratives impose a distorting structure on experience and that it implies a false unity to events which are independent of one another. There are two responses to these related objections. Firstly, an instrumental case can be made for the use of narratives as a way of organising past experiences to improve the richness of the record that can be made without distortion or dilution of particularity. Narratives allow for events and experiences to be presented with their particularities intact, separate from the participant's judgement about those experiences.

The second response to the objections raised to the recording of narratives concerns their necessary relation to experience. The importance of narratives to basic human needs has a well-known place in the history of psychology thanks to the work of Sigmund Freud in his analysis of dreams and narratives such as

Oedipus Rex (Freud, 1997, 2002). A parallel could be drawn between Freud's ideas of 'manifest content' and 'latent content' on the one hand the narratological terms of *fabula* and *syuzhet* used by 1930s Russian formalist school to interpret narratives (Jameson, 1975). *Fabula* refers to the basic material of a story and *syuzhet* to the way in which these are arranged. The field of narratology itself is becoming more interested in psychological experience: 'narrative not only represents what it is like for experiencing minds to live through events in storyworlds, but also constitutes a basis for having—for knowing—a mind at all, whether it is one's own or another's' (Herman, 2009). This shows that those who specialize in analysing stories in their own right are making the case that some sort of psychological dimension should be present in such analyses.

If narratives allow for a more reflective and fine-grained account of experience from multiple perspectives in time, then that can only add to the richness of the data that is sought in a qualitative research project. Furthermore, if we already think about some of the most significant aspects of our experience in terms of narratives, then only a narrative approach will be able to capture that dimension of our experience.

3.5 Ontology and epistemology

The previous sections narrowed down the research approach that would match the concern to record the experience of young people who have undergone a period of social withdrawal, in light of the imbalance towards empirical studies in this area. More generally, a case needs to be made for the nature of the reality on which the research is predicated and the means by which knowledge about it can be obtained.

3.5.1 Critical Realism and Object-Oriented Ontology

Ontological and epistemological positions such as social constructionism and discourse theory were rejected for reasons which cannot be examined fully due to restrictions of space. While aspects of their positions are endorsed, such as the claim that reality is framed through epistemological frameworks that are

historically contingent and that such formations are conditioned by power, the position favoured in this project is critical realism, and specifically Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO).

Critical realism essentially holds that reality does not emerge out of the relationships between people, nor that knowledge of it is reducible to such relationships. It holds that any ontology or epistemology necessarily entail certain principles of what must be true in order for them to make sense. Roy Bhaskar, as the chief exponent of critical realism, termed critical realism's argument for the structural necessity of ontological and epistemological claims as 'transcendental' and investigated what must be true for science, or any knowledge of the world, to be possible at all (Bhaskar, 1975). Beyond a social theory of a series of knowledge-generating cultures, Bhaskar favoured 'transcendental realism', that reality is constituted by certain structures, processes and mechanisms that generate the phenomena that we perceive.

A school which has emerged recently within critical realism – loosely aligned around terms such as 'speculative realism' and 'object-oriented ontology' (OOO) – proposes expanding an interpretation of objective reality to include a wider range of 'objects' than typically recognised. Moving beyond an anthropocentric measure for the existence of things, Timothy Morton gives a definition of what counts as an object according to OOO: 'When OOO says object it means any entity whatsoever: symphonies, grass, poems, wind, nebulae, wind harps, plays, humans, spools of thread, porpoises... [a] crowd is an object; so is a loner' (Morton, 2012: 205-206, 209).

Such objects are not reducible to particular manifestations or empirical events, much as Bhaskar describes transcendent reality against empirical reality. Graham Harman claims there is something ultimately 'withdrawn' about objects through the inability of any empirical demonstration to capture the fullness of their existence. This leads to a distinction between the 'real object' and the sensual properties and qualities which belong to an object and which may be empirically demonstrated. It is in this withdrawnness that the reality of the object

consists, as it cannot be reduced to property that might be shared with other objects.

Harman describes empirical science as 'justified untrue belief', as it satisfies procedural standards for verification of the properties of an object, but still cannot fully encompass the uniqueness of the object, as any properties used to describe the object (colour, weight, texture) are universal and not particular to that object, even if collected in highly particular sequences. Art, by contrast, allows for 'unjustified true belief'; unjustified because there are no procedural norms which have been followed to establish the truth, the purpose of which are to compel others to adopt the same belief. However, the belief is true, when art works, because it is able to place someone in relation to an object in a way which reveals aspects of the object that would otherwise have remained hidden.

From this follows an important epistemological consideration. If the reality of objects cannot be fully known through empirical investigation of their sensual qualities, Harman argues that aesthetic devices, such as metaphor, can work to reveal hidden aspects of the object's reality. He suggests that the reader (or listener) is compelled to join the properties of two objects associated in a metaphor in their own experience (Harman, 2017: 61-89). This suggests that the aesthetic form of the narrative can call upon others to perform a role in relation to the devices which are thereby used (such as metaphor) to reveal something of the essences of the objects which feature in the narrative. In relation to narrative and psychoanalysis, Donald Spence has made a similar epistemological argument:

Narrative truth can be defined as the criterion we use to decide when a certain experience has been captured to our satisfaction; it depends on continuity and closure and the extent to which the fit of the pieces takes on an aesthetic finality (Spence, 1982: 31)

Harman elsewhere gives an exposition of OOO through elaborating on the importance of 'symbioses' in the construction of new objects from pre-existing objects. This is especially important in his account of how social change occurs, in his narrative accounts of the American Civil War and the Dutch East India

Company as 'objects' (Harman, 2016, 2017). These are narrative accounts, driven by substantial symbiotic changes, which cannot be reduced to static and abstract descriptions outside of the course of historical temporality. In sum, reality is composed of an endless series of mysterious entities, known as objects, that cannot be fully known, because of their withdrawn nature. However, aspects of their surface properties can be elucidated through empirical science. Their true nature can be accessed more fully through aesthetic engagement; and the course of their existence described through a narrative description which gives emphasis to change, development, maturity and dissipation.

OOO extends the attention of the researcher to the way in which narrative can describe change, as people adjust their relation to the world, forming 'objects' in common with other elements in the world. This coming-into- and passing-out-of-being is well suited to the way that narrative moves through phases, and captures the changes in experience and explanation of events that are required by the research questions. OOO lends itself to an epistemology appropriate for narratives: 'objects' exist as a result of being described in a narrative and, ultimately, aesthetic forms of access to these objects can be achieved through story-telling.

3.6. Research design

3.6.1 Criteria for participant inclusion

This study concerns the experience that young people have of social withdrawal. In Chapter 1, the reason for the focus on the intermediate age of adolescence and early adulthood was given. In terms of participant inclusion, it was decided that participants aged 16 and over would be sought. This was for the reason that at this age they would be more likely to be able to give informed consent. In addition, having experienced at the very least the physical changes in the course of adolescence that they would be able to think of their past life in terms of continuity and change, allowing for a narrative frame for past experience to take shape.

The participants were not screened according to a structured questionnaire to ensure that they had passed a threshold on the dimension of 'withdrawal'. Instead, participants were asked if they identified themselves as being withdrawn:

Have you spent time getting away and staying away from people?
(Appendix 6)

Despite the decision not to use a screening questionnaire, it was felt that there would be qualitative value in putting direct questions to the participants concerning aspects of their social withdrawal, of the kind that feature in such questionnaires. This was designed to provide some context for the experiences that they relate in their narratives. Research on *hikikomori* is the most recent in the literature to address the phenomenon in general, whereas in the broader social withdrawal literature, more focus tends to be placed on specialised aspects. As such, research on *hikikomori* still features the development of measures which look at a wide range of aspects of social withdrawal. For this reason, an adapted version of a recent *hikikomori* questionnaire was used. Participants who answered the question concerning 'getting away and staying away from people' question positively were asked to complete an 11-item adaptation of the 25-item Hikikomori questionnaire in order to give a measure of the range of responses across the sample (Appendix 6) (Teo et al., 2018).

Most of the questionnaire's variance was accounted for by the first 11 items of this scale, allowing for a briefer scale to be used, as Teo et al. suggest. Its sensitivity and positive predictive value is similar to that at the cut-off for the Patient Health Questionnaire used to screen for major depression. The question of its use to diagnose *hikikomori* relates to clinical needs which are not relevant to this study.

Participants were asked to give information relating to their age, ethnicity, gender and any diagnoses which they have received (eg. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (Appendix

6). The setting at which the research took place has a higher than average Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis rate. It was felt that it was important for the purposes of analysis that an ASD diagnosis would be important to keep in mind when interpreting how social withdrawal was understood. However, it was not felt to be important to include consideration of the diagnosis in defining the research question by, for example, rewording the question as ‘What stories do young people with an ASD diagnosis tell about their experience of social withdrawal?’.

Still further, it was considered unethical to exclude those with ASD diagnoses from participation. This study was motivated by the research which shows that social withdrawal cannot be fully accounted for by diagnoses of ASD or, as has been investigated in the past, schizophrenia or indeed any other clinical diagnosis. Similarly, social withdrawal is not part of the diagnostic criteria for ASD in the UK. As such, there are ethical and epistemological justifications for treating the experiences of social withdrawal by young people as, in the first instance, an undifferentiated category at the level of the research question, while taking into account the way in which ASD might interact with that experience when interpreting individual narratives.

3.6.2 Sample design

For the reasons given above, this study did not seek out static commonalities between participants in order to generalise to wider populations, as with an empirical realist research design. A purposive sampling approach was used to find participants who would likely have experienced social withdrawal. In the course of working in a training placement, contact was made with staff in a setting in which young people, typically in their late teens, who often had found it difficult to adapt to mainstream settings receive education and training. Many of the young people at this setting had diagnoses of ASD. Initial conversations with a contact on the staff at the setting suggested that many of the young people would fit the criteria for inclusion in the study.

The qualitative data collected in this study meant that it was not necessary to try and increase validity, power, confidence and precision through maximizing the number of participants in the sample. Seeking to maximise the size of the participant dataset follows from the idea that the distribution of variables measured in the study, and the relationships between them, will more precisely match those of the wider population. As has been argued above, this study has sought instead to examine in depth and with close attention the understanding that individuals have of the past in terms of narrative.

Some narrative approaches seek to generalise aspects of the narratives that are collected as data through quantitative analysis of terms, phrases and words used. This recalls developments in literary criticism, pioneered by Franco Moretti, in which close reading of narratives is eschewed in favour of quantitative studies of the use of certain words, topics and relationships between characters to reveal historical developments over time (Moretti & Sobchuk, 2019). This approach is motivated by the hypothesis that general materialist and cultural historical developments lie beyond the narratives that people consume in culture and analysis of this background can explain the origin and purpose of narratives. It assumes therefore that narratives are projections of more significant developments outside of their scope and, as such, that narratives cannot be understood in their own terms as meaningful and coherent units with their own integrity. The OOO perspective criticises this approach as an example of 'overmining': explaining objects in terms of greater processes which account for their visibility as apparently meaningful units at particular moments ('undermining' is when objects are explained in terms of the components of which they are composed e.g. a human being in terms of their genes, DNA or molecular structure) (Harman, 2017).

Instead, this research project has attempted to preserve the idiographic integrity of the stories told by each participant. A case could have been made for simply presenting a case-study through the story of a single participant. However, a single voice was considered problematic as it may, as much as the quantitative approach, suggest that social withdrawal could be experienced in one way. It

was important, therefore, that a multiplicity of voices could be given space to tell different stories in detail. The final number of participants was four.

3.6.3 Recruitment

An introductory presentation was made to three classes, two in Personal and Social Development and one in English, in the setting of 10, 8 and 10 students respectively (see Appendix 7). The researcher's role and interests were introduced in the presentation along with invitation letters to participate in the research. The presentation discussed features of stories in general, inviting the potential participants to discuss their thoughts on what made a story work.

The researcher met one-to-one with students who expressed an interest in participation. As a first step, they were asked if they had ever kept away and stayed away from other people. If they answered yes to this, they were considered eligible for the study and given an invitation letter and consent form (Appendix 8) to share with their family to fill in and return before further participation. If they replied no, then the nature of the project and the reason why their participation was not appropriate was explained to them. For those who suggested they had experience of social withdrawal, an informal conversation followed concerning the nature of the project and what their involvement would involve, based loosely around the invitation letter and consent form. They were then able to take the form and discuss it with others, before returning the completed form at a subsequent meeting. At this meeting, they completed the forms asking for demographic information, diagnoses, and the 11-item *hikikomori* questionnaire.

3.6.4 Data collection

Data was collected in the form of interviews in which the researcher and participant discussed the participant's past experiences in order to co-construct a narrative. During a one hour session, participants were asked to tell their

story. The phases for narrative interviewing recommended by Jovchelovitch and Bauer were examined as a possible model for a semi-structured interview:

Figure 6

Basic phases of the narrative interview (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2007)

Phases	Rules
Preparation	Exploring the field Formulating exmanent questions
1 Initiation	Formulating initial topic for narration Using visual aids
2 Main narration	No interruptions Only non-verbal encouragement to continue story-telling Wait for the coda
3 Questioning phase	Only 'What happend then?' No opinion and attitude questions No arguing on contradictions No why-questions Exmanent into immanent questions
4 Concluding talk	Stop recording Why-questions allowed Memory protocol immediately after interview

After this model, 'exmanent' questions were prepared beforehand.

Jovchelovitch and Bauer describe this as a process of preparing areas which the researcher feels are relevant to the area of research from prior reading ('examanent' questions) which are put in to the terms that have been used by the participant in their initial story-telling with minimal prompting ('immanent' questions) (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2007). However, a more informal interaction with a looser, conversational structure was favoured in order to develop the rapport needed for the participants to share their experiences. The suggestion of using a memory protocol was considered unreliable given the researcher's capacity to recall significant amounts of material. In addition, even with the participant's consent, the recording of data after recording has stopped seemed to pose ethical problems. The purpose of stopping the recording would be to

move to a more informal tone, while the memory protocol would attempt to capture as much of the data from this phase as possible.

A series of questions derived from the technique of episodic interviewing were adopted to follow up on the initial narratives if the participants were having trouble in generating elements of the narrative. Episodic interviewing seeks experience presented in narrative form but allows for the use of questions to semi-structure the interview where participants may need help with generating ideas (Flick, 2007). An example of some of the questions which were brought in to these interviews for possible use can be seen in Appendix 10.

The interviews were recorded on a password protected device belonging to the Hackney Learning Trust Educational Psychology Service. At this point they were then transcribed by the researcher and prepared for analysis.

3.6.5 Data analysis

As Jovchelovitch and Bauer state, narrative analysis in general involves a distinction between chronological and non-chronological elements in the narrative, between those elements which are bound up in time and sequence and those which relate to feelings, judgements, values and explanations. Fritz Schütze (whose work in German remains untranslated) is an influential figure in the field of narrative inquiry and analysis and his method, as presented by Jovchelovich and Bauer, was considered as the starting point for analysis (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2007). After transcription (Step 1), Schütze recommended distinguishing indexical ('who did what, when, where and why) and non-indexical (expressing thoughts, feelings and judgements) statements (Step 2). Non-indexical statements are broken down into two further categories. Descriptive statements provide an account of the feelings, values and opinions that relate to the events that occur in the narrative. Argumentative statements provide justifications and explanations for positions that underlie the sequence of events in the narrative. Schütze then recommends an ordering of events as they relate to characters in the story, which he refers to as 'trajectories' (Step 3).

‘Knowledge Analysis’ of non-indexical material involves a reconstruction of ‘operative theories’ that underpin the understanding of characters in relation to the non-indexical material which emerges in the narrative (Step 4). The final steps involve clustering and comparing trajectories across the sample to find commonalities (Step 5), and then composing ‘collective trajectories’ from ‘individual trajectories’.

In this study, an adaptation of analysis appropriate to Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) was adopted. Transcription of the interviews included non-verbal and paralinguistic information such as laughing, sighing and whispering. Emphasis was also noted, along with moments when they interjected or re-initiated their utterances. Underlining and highlighting was used to capture chronological and non-chronological features of the transcript. The following transcription annotation was adapted from Gee (1991), Hiles and Čermák (2007), Emerson and Frosh (2009) and Newton (2014):

(...)	Pause
/	Interjection or re-initiation of utterance
[Laughs]	Word in [] non-verbal or paralinguistic information
[<i>inaudible</i>]	The words spoken were not audible or intelligible to the researcher
<i>Italics</i>	Words emphasized by the speaker are italicised
<u>Chronology</u>	Utterances relating to chronology are underlined
Values	Evaluative and explanatory utterances are highlighted

An adaptation of Schütze’s method was made according to considerations informed by OOO. The chronological events were analysed according to their contribution to change, in light of the research question concerning the participants’ explanation of their social withdrawal. According to OOO, change in terms of relation to and engagement with the world is considered in terms of the coming- and passing-out-of-being of objects. Incidents in which this was said to be occurring were classified as ‘Catalytic Events’, following from an understanding of ‘catalysis’ as a period of acceleration in the rate of change in the relations between elements.

The term 'Symbiosis' has been used in OOO to describe the creation and duration of new objects (Harman, 2017). Utterances which suggested the presence of new 'objects' such as the onset of withdrawal, as well as the experience particular to that object, were classified as relating to 'Symbiosis'. Particular aspects of experience were noted alongside this. For example, the sense that the participant had control or a lack of control in this experience was noted where relevant. Similarly, in their relation to others, attempts to understand the thoughts of others were noted.

'Epiphanies' were also noted as a means of gaining insight in to important thoughts of the participants in the context of the narrative. An epiphany is a moment in a narrative when a character becomes aware of an aspect of their world which transforms their understanding of their relation to it. It is a shift in consciousness in relation to their environment, where they become self-conscious of their role in relation to the story unfolding around them. It is often associated with the work of the modernist writer James Joyce, who interestingly in an early work defined an epiphany in ontological terms that could be translated into the language of OOO:

This is the moment which I call epiphany. First we recognise that the object is one integral thing, then we recognize that it is an organized composite structure, a thing in fact: finally, when the relation of the parts is exquisite, when the parts are adjusted to the special point, we recognize that it is that thing which it is. The soul of the commonest object seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany (Joyce, 1944: 191).

Joyce's short stories featured climactic moments in which the central protagonists achieve a transcendent view of the world and their place in it in the context of the story. The character achieves a heightened consciousness of themselves and the 'objects' (in OOO terms) that form their world. In *A Little Cloud*, a young man meets an old school friend who has become a successful journalist. When he returns home to the indifference of his wife and young child, he has an overwhelming sense of having failed in his professional and family life (Joyce, 2004: 284-297). In relation to the narratives of the participants in this study, epiphanies will be understood as moments of reflection in the context of

their story, where they make deliberate judgements about their relation to their world.

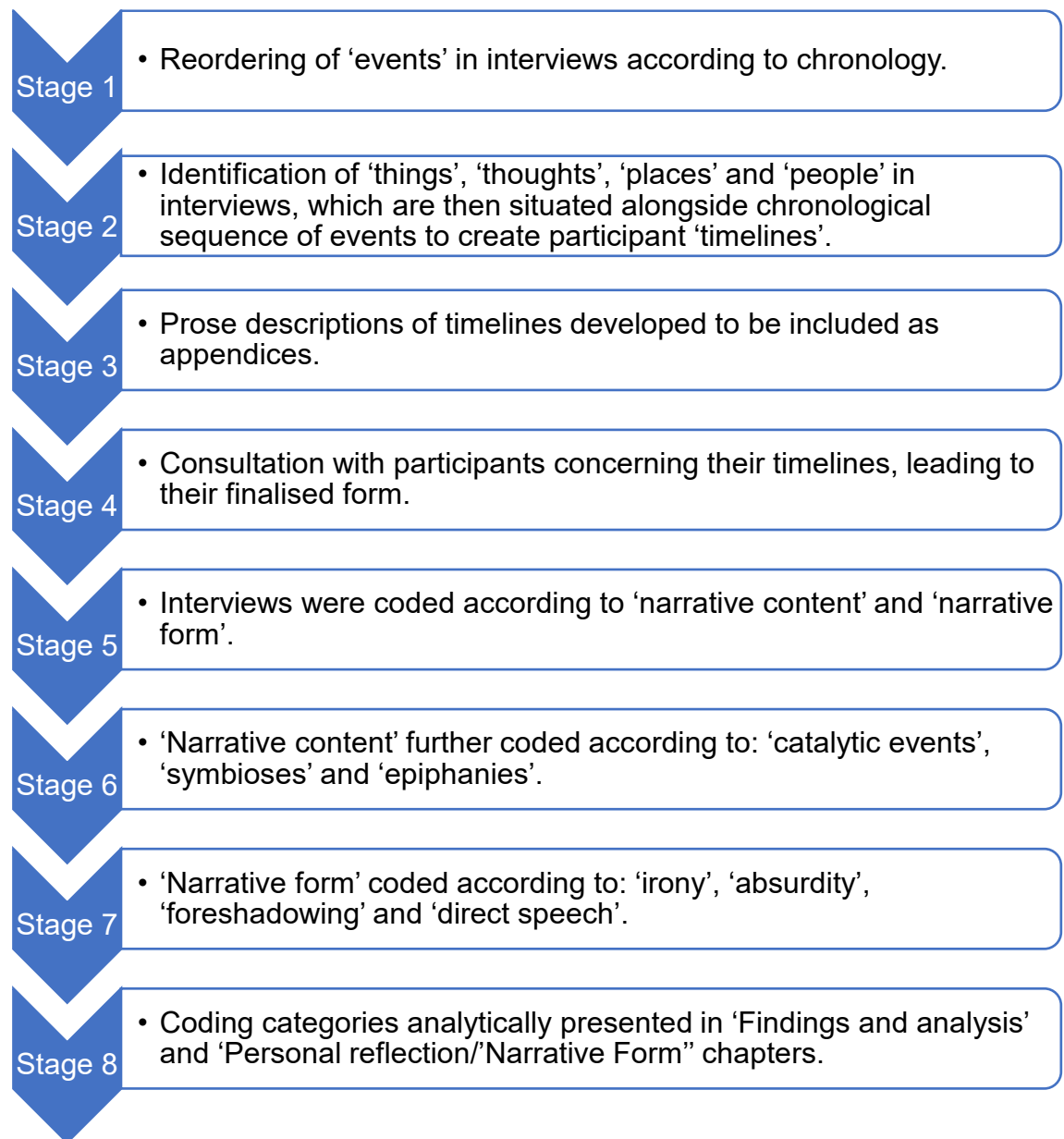
In addition to the above, a distinction was made between the 'Narrative Content' analysed through the categories described above and 'Narrative Form' considered as the techniques used to shape the reception of their narratives. Examples of these are irony, absurdity, foreshadowing and direct speech, as discussed below. Moments of resistance to the process of narrating experience were also noted but did not feature as part of the analysis for reasons of space.

Finally, the participants initial understanding of social withdrawal was clarified. This was necessary firstly to establish clarity about the nature of the project but also, secondly, in order to gain insight in to the particular frame through which they understood social withdrawal. An example of an analysed transcript is given for Participant 1 in Appendix 9. Extracts from the transcripts are used in Chapter 4 in the course of the analysis. They are referenced according to the participant (eg P1) and the line number on the transcript which locates their utterance (eg P1: 543-9).

Subsequent to the interviews, timelines categorising things, thoughts, events, people and places were constructed by the researcher and shown to participants (see Figure 7 for an outline of the data analysis process). Participants were asked to add or amend the timelines. This was a means of both deepening and providing some organisation to the data in collaboration with the participants. It also served as a monitoring process of informed consent, as the participants could check how their narratives were being received and used. It gave them time to reflect on their participation in the interviews. Participant 1, for example, expressed some unease about talking about certain aspects of her past. She was reminded that her participation was voluntary and that she could stop or talk only about what she felt comfortable about. When she saw her timeline, she was very happy and proud of her narrative. This indicates that it was a useful tool in terms of checking consent and reassuring participants about how the data would be used.

Figure 7

Data analysis process



In a final stage of analysis, narrative techniques were noted: irony, absurdity, foreshadowing and direct speech. OOO emphasises that objects can be engaged aesthetically to produce ‘unjustified true belief’ and narratives present experience in aesthetic form, a reflective stage of analysis was conducted to reflect on how the reader is asked to ‘perform’ in adopting qualities which are used in the course of an aesthetic exploration of the withdrawn reality of the objects which emerge in the narrative. This follows from Harman’s argument concerning the theatrical nature of metaphor and how it at least appears to give access to the reality of an object apart from its surface, sensual qualities.

‘Irony’ is understood here in terms of the orientation of the participant to the narrative that they are relating. It suggests that they place a distance between themselves in the present and the narrative in the past. Where they place a distance between themselves and their past self in order to create an effect on the audience, this is termed simply ‘irony’. Where they continue to identify with their past self, yet create a distance between themselves and the situation that they were in, this is termed ‘absurdity’, which is further discussed in Chapter 6. ‘Foreshadowing’ is understood as the relation of an event or experience that anticipates interpretation in light of a future event or experience. ‘Direct speech’ indicates that the participant directly reports comments made during the events described in the narrative.

In conclusion, then, elements of Schütze’s structure for approaching analysis was adapted with an OOO inflection.

3.6.6 Trustworthiness and transparency

Approaches to transcription and analysis were discussed on an ongoing basis with a group of fellow narrative researchers, including pooling of examples of our work.

Transparency was ensured through the supply of an extract of a transcript as an appendix and preservation of audio recordings and transcripts. Consent forms

were also preserved to evidence the informed consent of participants to take part in the research.

3.6.7 Ethical considerations and research integrity

A risk assessment and application for ethical approval was conducted for this research (Appendix 11) and given approval by the University of East London (UEL) School of Psychology (Appendix 12). The research was also registered with the University Quality and Standards Committee of UEL (Appendix 13). A Research Integrity module was completed as a requirement for research registration and approval was given after completion of a quiz (Appendix 14).

Outside of institutionally required research and ethical approval, recruitment of potential participants was taken very seriously. Efforts were made to establish informed consent through multiple meetings. Informal conversations and rapports helped establish a relationship with the researcher so that questions could be asked at a time and in a manner which suited potential participants. The researcher also attended social events organized by potential participants to establish familiarity prior to the interviews. Although this took considerable time, it was felt that the personal nature of the information that would be shared justified taking every effort to reassure participants about the nature of the project and how the data would be used, anonymised and stored. At the conclusion of interviews, a debriefing session took place in which participants were asked if they would like to ask the researcher questions about his experiences. The interviews took place in the educational setting which the participants were familiar with and with familiar adults nearby and available for them to talk to if they felt it was necessary. The contact details of those who could offer professional support were also made known to participants.

Some of the participants expressed some reservations about how a psychologist would interpret the experiences that they would share. It was communicated to them that there was no intention to interpret their stories through a medical lens, or to assign diagnoses of disorders of various kinds.

They were assured that the purpose was to listen carefully to how they chose to present their experience in order to inform others who may otherwise carry certain assumptions and make rash judgements about them. The time invested in building such relationships was ethically justified and meant that the interviews could take place in an atmosphere of openness and trust. Most importantly, they felt that they had the capacity to use the interviews and story-telling process to communicate their considered views about their own experience.

Chapter 4: Findings and analysis

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the stories told by the participants will be analysed through a series of categories derived from the Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) which provides the ontological and epistemological orientation of this project. Overlaps and contrasts will be identified in a comparative analysis of the utterances of the participants in each interview. The analysis turns directly to the transcripts of the researcher and the participants co-constructing a discussion of the participants' past experience.

A series of 'Catalytic Events' will be drawn from the narratives of each participant, along with a timeline, in which various aspects of their experience are recorded. 'Catalytic Events' are understood as those which are identified as important turning points by the participants, in which they describe a causal relationship between this event and future events. There will also be an analysis of their definitions of social withdrawal, epiphanies and symbioses, which will be summarised at the outset.

In the analysis, the stories will be understood in terms of 'Narrative Content' and 'Narrative Form', with the priority given in this chapter to analysing 'Narrative Content'. 'Narrative Content' refers to the substance of the utterances of the participants, moving across their definitions of social withdrawal, epiphanies, identification of 'Catalytic Events' and different aspects of 'Symbiosis' (an important dimension of OOO). 'Narrative Form' refers to the techniques used by the participants in shaping the narrative they tell; in particular: irony, absurdity, direct speech and foreshadowing. 'Narrative Form' will be discussed in Chapter 6 along with a personal reflection. This personal reflection is considered necessary to explain the way in which such techniques are able to work.

4.2 Summary of findings

The research questions concern the stories that young people tell about their experience of withdrawal and the explanations that they give for their withdrawal. The specific additions made to the definition of social withdrawal given by the researcher involved the following elements, drawn directly from the words of the participants:

- 'The outside world'
- 'Just anxiety'
- 'People don't want to interact with other people'

The key 'Catalytic Events' identified by the participants were as follows:

- Moving home
- Starting at new educational settings
- Social confrontations in the classroom context: (1) with teachers, (2) with peers
- Attempting to develop the self away from others
- Using an understanding of past experiences to take control in the future
- Attempting to develop the self in the presence of others

Epiphanies, or sudden realisations of characters in the context of a narrative related firstly to the interaction between the following categories:

- Humiliation and shame
- Power and resistance

More particularly, these categories interacted to produce epiphanies in the following contexts:

- Resistance in the classroom
- Peer interactions
- Shame in the classroom

Finally symbioses were recorded across the following phases:

- Early selves
- Continuing selves
- Withdrawn selves
- Future selves

4.3 Background information, timelines and ‘Catalytic Events’

4.3.1 Participant 1

4.3.1.1 Background information

Participant 1 was a 16 year old female from an Algerian background, who reported having no diagnoses (eg. ADHD, ASD). She agreed that she had experienced social withdrawal defined as ‘wanting to get away and stay away from people’. Her responses to the questionnaire showed that she somewhat agreed that ‘people bother me’; ‘I do not like to be seen by others’; ‘I enjoy being in social situations’; and ‘I much prefer to be alone than with others’. She further answered that she neither agreed nor disagreed that ‘I stay away from other people’; ‘I love meeting new people’; ‘I feel uncomfortable around other people’; ‘it is hard for to join in on groups’; and ‘I strongly prefer to be around other people’. She somewhat disagreed that ‘I avoid talking to other people’; and ‘I do not enjoy social interactions’. These responses will be discussed further in Chapter 5, which discusses the findings of this study in relation to the literature.

4.3.1.2 ‘Catalytic Events’ (Timeline: Figure 6)

For Participant 1, the following were identified as ‘Catalytic Events’:

- Moving between London, France and Algeria

Figure 8: Participant 1 timeline

THINGS

Cassette player and Katy Perry tapes

Smell of petrol in Father's car and boats

Looking at wall

Tissues, shavers

Curtains around hospital bed

THOUGHTS

Complicated feelings: good and bad

'Brutal'

Teachers making me feel bad, praising other students but not me

I would still be there if police did not come

Teachers were nicer to me

I see mistakes in the art that I make

I feel stronger. I learned not to care what people think

EVENTS

Moving back and forth between London and Algeria via France

I start Secondary school

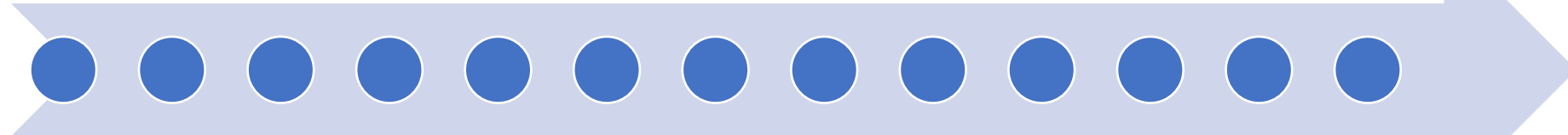
Art and Maths are my most difficult subjects

Foster Care

Withdrawn at home: self-destructive behaviours

Back to school

Future: Make money, not doing much work. Visit Algeria again.



Learning to read and write at home

I am enjoying art as a hobby

Two weeks off school, in my bedroom: Police come

Mock GCSEs

Hospital

Doing art as a hobby, going to college

PLACES

London, Algeria, France. Boats. Father's car

London, school

Home

School

Hospital

School

College

Algeria

PEOPLE

Father, Mother, Aunt, Brother, Algerian family

Other students, teachers

No more contact with Algerian family

Carers

Other students, teachers

Mother, brother, other people in hospital

Other students, teachers

Algerian family

- Being educated at home by her Aunt
- The 'brutal' experience of starting Secondary school
- Deteriorating relationship with her Art and Maths teachers
- Giving up Art as a hobby
- Low school attendance culminating in first period of withdrawal
- Police officers end first period of withdrawal with threat of parental fine
- Period of foster care
- Second period of withdrawal leading to hospitalisation
- Going back to school and gaining more confidence

A prose version of her narrative is available in Appendix 15.

4.3.2 Participant 2

4.3.2.1 Background information

Participant 2 was a 17 year old male who preferred not to disclose his ethnicity. He stated that he had been given a diagnosis of 'mild' ASD when he was 8 years old, agreeing that he had experienced social withdrawal defined as 'wanting to get away and stay away from people'. In his responses to the questionnaire, he stated that he neither agreed or disagreed with the following statements: 'I stay away from people'; 'It is hard for me to join groups'; 'I enjoy being in social situations'; 'I avoid talking with other people'; 'I much prefer to be alone than with others'; and 'I do not enjoy social interactions'. He somewhat agreed with the statements: 'I love meeting new people' and 'I strongly prefer to be around other people'. He somewhat disagreed with these statements : 'People bother me'; 'I feel uncomfortable around other people'; and 'I do not like to be seen by others'. The significance of these answers in relation to the literature will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

4.3.2.2 'Catalytic Events' (Timeline: Figure 7)

For Participant 2, the following were identified as 'Catalytic Events':

- Playing with local friends
- Moving home: distance between new home and school

Figure 9: Participant 2 timeline.

THINGS

Teddy Bear
(I protected it
from the dog)

GTA San
Andreas, Call
of Duty
(games)

Skyrim is my
main focus
(game)

Start playing
Destiny
(game)

THOUGHTS

Feel
extroverted,
enjoy playing
'run-outs'
with friends

Carefree

Can't talk
about the
same things
as others in
school

'Screw this'

Anxiety,
depression,
'alienated'

'I'm the only
kid like this in
the whole
school'

Bored of
games, regret
not studying

Nervous
about
socialising

Good to get
social
exposure.
Think I am an
'ambivert'

EVENTS

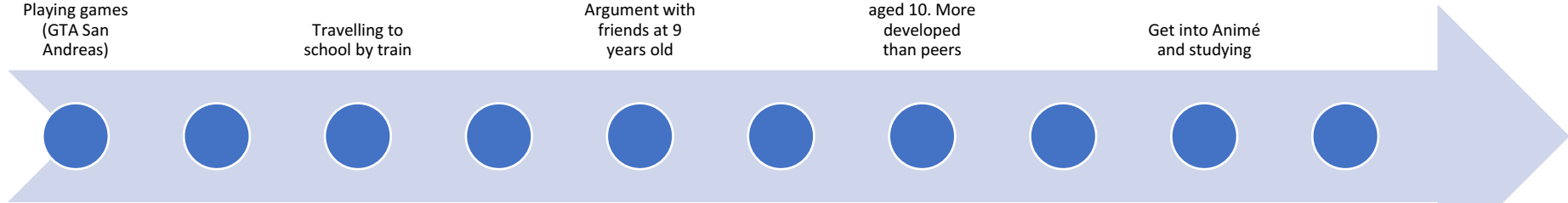
Playing games
(GTA San
Andreas)

Travelling to
school by train

Argument with
friends at 9
years old

Have a
moustache
aged 10. More
developed
than peers

Get into Animé
and studying



Moving home
at 6 years old

Treated
unfairly by
teacher for
throwing paper
airplane

Isolated at
home and
school. Playing
Skyrim with
people online.
Not sleepign
well. Low
school
attendance

Stopped
playing games
(as much) at 15
years old

Volunteer for
social
activities.
More studying

PLACES

Old home

New home/
Home vs
School

Bedroom,
Home,
School

Social club,
New college

PEOPLE

Mother,
Children at School,
Children in local
area

Teachers,
Children at School,
Children in local
area

Online people,
Mother

High turnover of
teachers and students.
Teachers 'OK', students
'act gangster'

Reddit *animé*
threads... but I
delete the app

- Feeling left out by school friends: ‘alienated’
- Difficulties with teachers
- ‘Screw this’: deciding to spend more time playing *Skyrim* than with friends
- After 5 years, a more intense engagement with games such as *Destiny*
- Secondary school is ‘sick’ because teachers swear, but other students ‘act gangster’
- Interest in games disappears
- Studying more
- Trying social exposure as a way of getting used to interacting with people again
- Getting interested in *animé*

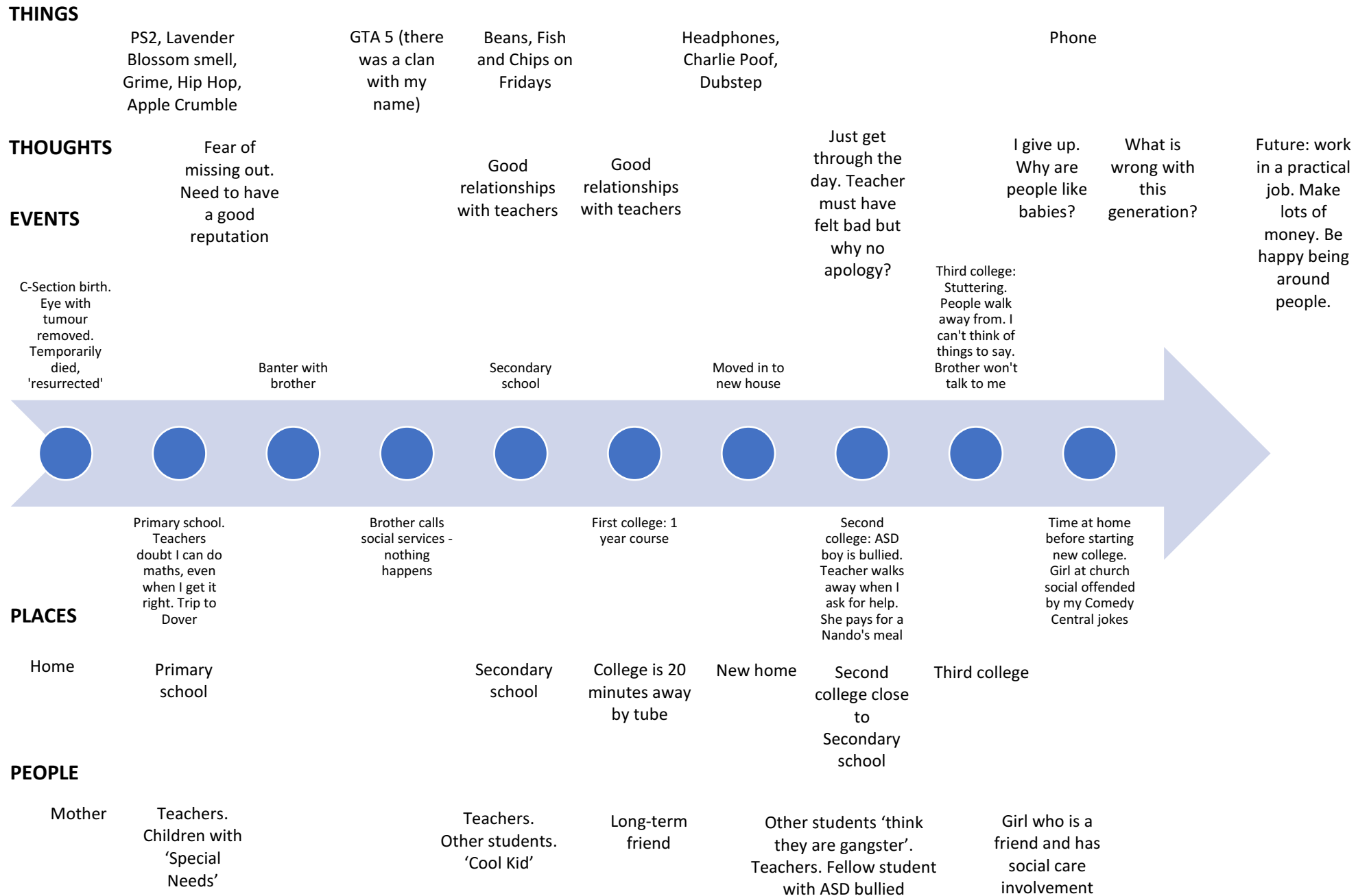
A prose version of his narrative is available in Appendix 16.

4.3.3 Participant 3

4.3.3.1 Background information

Participant 3 was a 19 year old male from a Black British background. He did not report having any diagnoses (eg. ADHD or ASD) and agreed that he had experienced social withdrawal defined as ‘wanting to get away and stay away from people’. In his responses to the questionnaire, he somewhat agreed with the statement: ‘I stay away from other people’; ‘People bother me’; and ‘I feel uncomfortable around other people’. He neither agreed nor disagreed with the following statements: ‘I much prefer to be alone than with others’; ‘I do not like to be seen by others’; ‘I do not enjoy social interactions’; ‘It is hard for me to join in on groups’; and ‘I avoid talking to other people’. He strongly agreed with the following statements: ‘I love meeting new people’; ‘I enjoy being in social situations’; and ‘I strongly prefer to be around other people’. While some of these answers were to some degree consistent with aspects of social withdrawal, other responses suggests a complexity to his social orientation. This will be discussed further in relation to the literature in Chapter 5

Figure 10: Participant 3 timeline.



4.3.3.2 'Catalytic Events' (Timeline: Figure 8)

For Participant 3, the following were identified as 'Catalytic Events':

- Caesarean birth, temporary death and 'resurrection', eye replaced
- Misrecognition at Primary school: peers and teachers doubt his ability. He is placed with children with 'special needs'
- Finds a way to interact with others at Secondary school, but annoyed by peers and unsupported by teachers
- Difficulties with teachers and peers in three different further education colleges.
- Beginning of stuttering and problems talking to people
- Difficulties with brother
- Present reflection on difficulties with his generation

A prose version of his narrative is available in Appendix 17.

4.3.4 Participant 4

4.3.4.1 Background information

Participant 4 was a 19 year old male from a Black British background. He did not report having any diagnoses (ag. ASD or ADHD) and agreed that he had experienced social withdrawal defined as 'wanting to get away and stay away from people'. In his responses to the questionnaire, he neither agreed nor disagreed with the following statements: 'I stay away from people'; 'I love meeting new people'; 'People bother me'; 'I enjoy being in social situations'; 'I much prefer to be alone than with others'; and 'I strongly prefer to be around other people'. He somewhat agreed with the following statements: 'I feel uncomfortable around other people'; and 'I do not like to be seen by others'. He somewhat disagreed with the statements: 'It is hard for me to join in on groups'; and 'I avoid talking to other people'. He strongly disagreed with the statement: 'I do not enjoy social interactions'. The implications of these answers will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Figure 11: Participant 4 timeline.

THINGS

Soundtracks to games I play when staying at home sick

THOUGHTS

I feel close to long-term friends

I feel relaxed and chilled at home

I feel I am 'part of a different thing' to my older and younger siblings

EVENTS

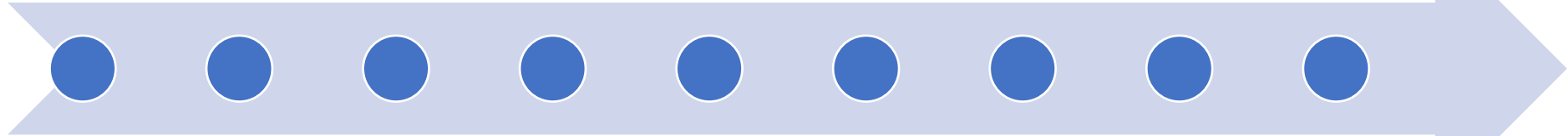
Mother, brother and sister live in a different place before I was born

Playing with my long-term friends near my family home

In Year 7 I feel anxious and sick. My attendance is down to 40%

In Year 10, I don't like being told what to do by teachers, for example doing detentions for not doing some homework. I see some lessons as pointless. I start breathing exercises for anxiety

Still having days where I stay at home feeling ill, tired and anxious. Feeling of anxiety when on a trip to the BBC, even though I had been before.



Everyone is happy playing as one big group at Primary School

Feel sick a lot at Primary School

in Year 9, I find exams and performing in front of people in Drama difficult.

I sleep through a detention in Year 10

PLACES

Old family home

New family home

Primary School

Secondary School

Family home

New college

PEOPLE

My family, my local friends, other children at Primary School

Teachers, other students

Some students who are annoying, others who give me energy

4.3.4.2 'Catalytic Events' (Timeline: Figure 9)

For Participant 4, the following were identified as 'Catalytic Events':

- Stability of place and people from the beginning
- Primary school as a place of togetherness and play
- Drama and exams are difficult in Secondary school
- Increasing absences from school: bad stomach, low energy and anxiety
- Struggles with teachers over the purpose of work and increasing detentions
- Continuing issues with stomach, low energy and anxiety.

A prose version of his narrative is available in Appendix 18.

4.4 Definitions of social withdrawal

Each participant had been given an introduction to the area of the researcher's interest, including a definition of social withdrawal, defined as 'wanting to get away and stay away from people'. As a result, it was not possible to elicit their unprompted understanding of the term. The understanding of each participant was checked at the start of each interview and often reflected the language chosen by the researcher. However, some of the participants made additional comments. From the perspective of OOO, withdrawal can be seen as an 'object' composed of the participant and aspects of their world, reflecting a mode of relation and engagement with this world and the other people in it. In terms of narrative analysis, withdrawal is the dominant theme of the narrative that they were invited to tell, so it is important to analyse closely their understanding of the term. This provides the psychological framework through which their primary understanding of their narratives is framed.

Participant 4 gave a definition which most reflected the initial definition by the researcher: 'I think it's when (...) you kind of (...) distance yourself from others (..) so you kind of stay to yourself' (P4: 9-10). The addition of the word 'distance' expands on the spatial relationships that are implied in the researcher's

definition. Replacing 'get away' and 'stay away' with 'distance' also suggests a more neutral understanding of withdrawal. The researcher's definition suggests an impulsion away from others, while Participant 4 suggests that the person engaging in withdrawal manages a separation from others. '[S]tay to yourself' also suggests an active strategy of preferring one's own company rather than avoiding contact with others.

4.4.2 'The outside world'

Participant 1 defined withdrawal in this way: 'I think it's isolating yourself from other people, like even the outside world.' (P1: 6-7) There is an overlap here with the language used by the researcher. However, the addition of the phrase 'even the outside world' at the end suggests an equivalence between 'people' and 'the outside world', but also that the 'outside world' is somehow an 'even' more fundamental relation that one might withdraw from. The move from 'people' to world' is intriguing, given the OOO framework of this study. In the language of OOO, Tristan Garcia has argued that this tendency is a way of *reordering* one's relationship with the world, but that this means that the goal of being outside the world will always result inevitably in a renewed relation to the world, frustrating the bid for withdrawal:

To want to be in itself is like another way of being in the world. One is neither less in the world nor more in the world when hiding away in a serpentine, compact ball of timidity. In the last analysis, one is equally in the world. We cannot say that those who want to be in themselves are less in the world, nor that they are more in the world (Garcia, 2014: 74).

Garcia continues that this is not a criticism of the naivety of the person who seeks this kind of withdrawal, or an attempt to insist that 'that it is impossible to be in itself, nor that it is *useless, bad, or false* to be in itself' (Garcia, 2014: 75). As such, the attempt to withdraw from the world is an attempt to solve a problem concerning an existing relation to 'other people.. even the outside world', by imagining oneself to be a self-complete world. Withdrawal in OOO terms is another way of being in the world. The realism of this framework ultimately insists, as Garcia puts it: 'Things are in the world' (Garcia, 2014: 75).

4.4.3 'Just anxiety'

Participant 2 had more to add to the definition of withdrawal given by the researcher: 'I guess just anxiety. Not wanting to talk to people. Feeling like a bad experience, not wanting to talk to people anymore. That's what I think' (P2: 6-7) Participant 2 added anxiety, not wanting to talk to people and 'feeling a bad experience' to the idea of 'wanting to get away and stay away from people'. While he retained the idea of a relation to people as part of his understanding, the initial part of his definition is that it is 'just anxiety' (we will see the use of the word 'just' was a consistent strategy to modify the meaning of his utterances throughout the interview). As he continued, he seemed to give sense to anxiety as 'not wanting to talk to people' and 'feeling a bad experience', although this could be seen as an elaboration on his statement about anxiety rather than an exhaustive definition of it. As such, Participant 2 both described the experience of withdrawal and outlines a motivation and cause for it. Where Participant 1 suggested an active strategy of 'isolating yourself', Participant 2 described it in negative terms ('bad') and inaction ('not wanting to talk'). While Participant 1 sought the self-completeness of isolation, Participant 2 described an existing relation to others and the world that had become negatively ordered.

Participant 2 returned to the association between social withdrawal and anxiety in his story, having discussed a particular experience. This concerned his uneasiness in talking to other people which he felt had become worse the longer he was out of the company of others. He sought to address this through 'exposure' by volunteering at a youth club. He said that he felt the association between anxiety and social withdrawal was 'strong' (P2: 1324) and talked in more general terms about how this functioned for other people: 'I would say it's about a lot of people having anxiety about talking to other people' (P2: 1329). He also that it was difficult to provide support for people in moving beyond their anxiety, reflecting his own self-designed 'exposure' strategy: 'You can.. only really help yourself really. Obviously, if they're, like, self-harming and stuff, you need to step in. But other than that, you can't really do anything' (P2: 1333-1334).

4.4.4 'People don't want to interact with other people'

Participant 3 gave a similar definition to Participant 2: 'Social withdrawal means probably like, (...) kind of withdrawing yourself from other people. Avoid talking to them. Just don't.. you.. just people don't want to interact with other people' (P3: 7-9). Like Participant 2, he referenced 'talking' as part of his understanding, although his use of the word 'avoid' could be placed between the active strategy of Participant 1 and the inaction of Participant 2. The behaviour of avoidance is implicitly caused by not wanting 'to interact with other people', in a similar mode to the definition of Participant 2.

Interestingly, Participant 3 shifted between using a second-person mode of description ('withdrawing yourself') to a third-person mode ('people don't want to interact..'). Participants 1 and 4 used the second-person mode, while Participant 2 did not use any pronouns or other indicators identifying the agent of withdrawal. The second-person mode of address gives the impression that the speaker is seeking to describe a personal experience that could be shared by other people, including their interlocutor. The absence of such indicators in Participant 2's definition suggests a more ambiguous description that does not necessarily involve personal experience. Participant 3's explicit move from second- to third-person ('you.. just people don't want to interact..'), suggests an attempt to move from a personal experience which may be shared with others to a generic experience separate from personal experience.

4.5 Epiphanies

Epiphanies were defined in the methodology as moments at which a character in a story undergoes a sudden realisation. The narratives feature moments in which the participants reflected in the context of the ongoing events of the narrative.

4.5.1 Humiliation/Shame and Power/Resistance

Each of the participants related epiphanies that concerned an awareness of situations in which their standing in relation to others and their accompanying feeling were important elements. *Humiliation* and *shame* are considered as distinctive categories here. *Power* and *resistance* signify modes in which they negotiated the relation between *humiliation* and *shame*. Most of the epiphanies related by the participants fit within this broad category.

4.5.1.1. The distinction between humiliation and shame

The relation of humiliation to shame has been the subject of a debate in the last few decades that has crossed disciplinary fields between philosophy, political theory and psychology (Burton, 2020; Lukes, 1997; Margalit, 1998; Taylor, 2018). A common thread concerns the relation of internal emotional experience to the positioning within a social scale of prestige. In the present study, *humiliation* will be understood as an objective positioning of a person on a lower standing to others on a measure of social prestige. In an egalitarian society, humiliation involves lowering someone beneath the equal standard of dignity and respect to which each individual is due. In the UK in 2020, someone forced to expose their naked body in public could justly be said to have been humiliated, given the culturally specific standards regarding the presentation of the body and personal choice in this society.

It might be possible that it is something that one does to oneself; one could humiliate oneself through violating or failing to meet a standard of conduct that is based on a commonly held social norm. However, one could not do this to oneself if this was a personally held standard not shared by others. For instance, if an amateur runner fails to complete a marathon in under three hours, this may affect their standing among a community of runners, but it would be a misperception to suppose that members of a wider public with whom

they have no relation would place them in a position of low social prestige as a result of not meeting such a high athletic standard. Their feeling of personal disappointment may result in low self-esteem, perhaps even shame as they suppose that others should think less of them, but their objective positioning on a scale of prestige has not been changed by this fact so that any given member of the public would treat them without dignity and respect.

Conversely, one may be shifted to a low position on a scale of social prestige as a result of a violation of commonly held social norms, yet not feel the emotional experience of *shame*. For instance, historically the experience of gay people in the UK has been one of legal penalties, social exclusion and increased risk of assault. While this is objectively humiliating, placing people on a low position on a scale of social prestige, it does not necessarily follow that those who suffer this harm will feel the emotion of shame. Indeed, pride (which could be considered as the opposite of shame) has been mobilised by activists as an important resource against the objective structure of humiliation which harms them. Yet few would argue that a feeling of pride means that the harms that accompany the objective structure of humiliation do not exist. Pride may mean that the humiliated person has not acquiesced in the wider public's judgement, yet the harms may remain as conclusive evidence that a claim for just treatment can still be made. Broader legal reforms, as well as transformations of social norms, would be needed in order to achieve that. Specifically, while feeling pride in themselves, people can still demand that such reforms accord them equal dignity to other members of society.

4.5.1.2 Power and resistance

Humiliation and shame, then, can be understood as distinct. However, shame can be understood, at least in this specific context, as the internalisation of an objectively humiliating positioning in society. As such, the internalisation of humiliation as shame is the effect of power, while humiliation without shame indicates resistance. Shame without humiliation suggests a deep investment in a world which does not correspond to the one in which objective positioning, and social evaluation between members, takes place.

4.5.2 'I don't want to feel like I'm a pushover': resistance in the classroom.

In the narrative of each of the participants, epiphanies concerning humiliation and shame were present but more explicit in some than others. Participant 4 did not communicate any epiphanies that conveyed a sense of shame. However, in common with others, he described feeling positioned in a way which did not accord with his dignity. He responded to this with resistance. This primarily related to demands made by teachers. In drama class, he was asked to perform in front of people who he did not know. He did not feel that he would be received by them in a way which felt comfortable to him:

And then we had to like do performances.. it's like, I'm alright, I'm okay, with, like, the class, I'm not okay with performing in front of certain people. I feel like if I was in a class with people I was more familiar with then I'd be alright. But I guess at the time I didn't really feel comfortable, so I didn't actually perform I guess.. I wouldn't mind being in a group, but if it is by myself, I find that if there's certain people there, I don't want to do it (P4: 246-53)

Participant 4 does not contain his epiphany within the context of his story but suggested that it is continuous with his current beliefs (a recurrent feature of his narrative). Nonetheless, becoming aware of not feeling 'comfortable' and then refusing to perform relates an awareness that affects events in the context of the story. He resisted the pressure to place himself before others in a way which, he believed, affected his standing. He does not mention shame here and, because he did not perform, it cannot be said that he felt shame. However, he perceived a threat to his standing before others, which could be described as a threat of humiliation.

He shared another reflection concerning how he is positioned and viewed by others in the context of power struggles in the classroom:

I don't want to be seen.. I don't want to feel like I'm a pushover, like they say (...) like, I'll say.. it will go back and forth (...) and I'll feel like, 'okay, well I guess I have to do it.' I don't want anything like that, so I'll say, 'I'm

not going to do it because of this reason and I feel this way because of this..' so it's like that. (P4: 300-305)

He specified incidents concerning work to be done for certain classes:

And it was the English teacher, she gave me.. she didn't just give me, to say, but she gave us as a class, like homework to do and I was thinking, all of the other classes were revising, going through the books, and going through the worksheets and everything, and just you doing homework for this one class. Because I'm not trying to focus on that one class, I'm trying to focus on everything... I just didn't feel like doing it, because I didn't see no point in me doing that (P4: 845-55).

The other participants related similar epiphanies concerning treatment by teachers, but also peers, in a social context in which their standing was at stake. Participant 1 was the most explicit in narrating such epiphanies:

My art teacher, he did this one thing that *really* got under my skin. He would walk around complimenting all the students. And as soon as he gets to me, he would skip me and compliment the next student, and then comes back to me and tells me 'this is rubbish, you need to start again'... Yeah, I found it weird that, like (...) 'I'm there'. (Laughs) (P1: 406-13)

Of course the class would laugh at me. Then, depending what day it was, the teacher might display other people's work and display mine and say 'This is an example of the work you should have been doing.' And that was very embarrassing because then people would come to me after the class and say, 'Why did you pick this subject? You're so bad'.. 'I can't change it'. (P1: 418-22).

In both these extracts, Participant 1 is placed in a position, primarily by the teacher, in a way which lowers her standing before others. The emotional effect on her is made clear in the second extract ('that was very embarrassing'), connected directly to negative judgements from her peers. Her lack of power is evident in how the teacher and her peers contrive a context in which her standing is only worthy of negative comments or laughter. However, resistance to this context of humiliation is also evident. '[H]e did this one thing that really got under my skin', and 'like (...) 'I'm there'' both suggest that she felt that she was not being accorded the treatment to which she was due. She felt indignance rather than shame, while suffering the harm of humiliation.

Participant 3 made the most explicit distinction between feelings of being placed in an objectively humiliating position yet resisting the effect of this harm on his self-esteem. Describing being teased by peers and unfairly treated by teachers, he said: 'I didn't really want to deal with those same people [as] in secondary school' (P3: 142-3), continuing: 'obviously, I was just like angry... because the reason I moved to a college far away from my house was to get away from these people. Yeah. Maybe, like, make myself like, not miserable anymore' (P3: 146-8). In describing himself as 'miserable', he registered the effect of the harm of not being treated with due respect, while in describing himself as 'angry' he showed resistance to accepting such treatment as an accurate reflection of his worth.

This can also be seen in the following extracts:

In secondary school, I was just sort of tolerating that behaviour. 'God, I'll just get through this and go somewhere else.' But after I left the college far away, I end up going back to the same situation (P3: 268-70)

So yeah, I mean, there was a lot of times where I ended up flipping out in college and all that. Even like.. I don't know, like.. even people in college thought I had an anger problem because of that, and I don't, it's just all of these things are happening to me and, I'm like, 'somebody do something' (P3: 274-7).

In the second extract, he resists the attribution to him of an 'anger problem', locating the problem instead in the context of his unjust treatment in which he is receiving no support from people who could change the situation.

Participant 2 also identified epiphanies in the context of classroom confrontations with teachers. In common with all of the other participants to some extent, but particularly Participants 3 and 4, he resisted this as placing him beneath others:

So there was this one time that I still remember (...) where like, everyone in the class was messing around. And obviously I made a paper aeroplane. I wasn't the only person to make a paper aeroplane. And then the deputy head walks in and it goes past her and she goes mad at me (P2: 843-6).

His thoughts when this happened were: 'I don't like this woman' (P2: 850). When asked why, he responded: 'Because she shouted at me and it wasn't the first time she shouted at me, either' (P2: 854). When asked why he thought she shouted at him, he responded: 'Well, I was nine, I have no idea. Didn't like me, I guess' (P2: 858). Continuing he said: 'That was just one thing that I remember. I wouldn't really say it's that deep. But, yeah.' (P2: 863).

He identified an injustice in being treated differently to his classmates ('I wasn't the only person to make a paper aeroplane') and attributed this to the Deputy Head's personal dislike of him. His response was to reciprocate this 'dislike'. He also conveyed a sense of indifference to the situation ('I have no idea..'; 'I wouldn't really say it's that deep'), which suggests that, while the situation placed him beneath his classmates and was thus a harm, he did not feel that his self-esteem was undermined by this incident.

4.5.3 'I was alienated a bit, I guess you could say': peer interactions

For Participant 3, epiphanies outside of the direct context of the classroom, where a figure holding power can be held responsible for maintaining a context in which all are respected equally, had a different quality. While he was attending a second further education college, he developed a stutter and felt that people would not listen to him in conversations and walk away. However, he identified incidents before his stutter when this had also happened. The following epiphany is related in the present tense, but emerged in the context of incidents in which he speculated that his peers 'maybe.. just get bored with the whole.. put off by the whole stuttering thing' (P3: 1009-10):

I think I just keep away from *some* people, not because they are bad or anything. It's because.. (...) It's just that I can't.. I just.. Basically, yeah, I just don't know how to interact with other people any more, like I used to (P3: 819-21).

When invited to reflect on whether he felt he or his peers were the cause of this difficulty, he responded: 'I think it's.. I think it's me' (P3: 875). In other places, he

expressed a view more aligned with his treatment in the classroom: 'when people do that, I get really angry about it, because it's kind of rude, innit, like. So I just get really frustrated, I will just walk off to calm myself down' (P3: 1033-36). However, elsewhere he is explicit about how, at least in the context of the story, this form of social exclusion affected his self-esteem:

[P]eople will just walk away when I am talking to them. Thinking that.. I'm thinking that they're just not interested in what I have to say, innit.. Yeah, it kind of like, kind of knocked my confidence a little bit (P3: 364-70).

Participant 3, in common with Participant 1, showed that at times being treated as if he lacked value led to self-blaming and low self-esteem.

Outside of the context of a classroom presided over by a figure of authority, Participant 2 shared epiphanies relating more directly to negative emotions than those above. He described how he felt excluded from social interaction with his classmates due to living far away from the school: '[He felt] [a] bit lonely at times. They were talking about stuff and I can't really get involved' (P2: 248). Later, he elaborated on this:

I mean, actually, I got along with everyone there. But they obviously knew each other outside of school. So I had that like (...) I was alienated a bit, I guess you could say (P2: 287-8).

Feeling 'lonely' and 'alienated' do not directly express feelings of low self-esteem or shame. Nonetheless, they give a negative valence to being alone and suggest at least that he is experiencing harm from exclusion from social contact.

A further epiphany related to his sense of himself in comparison with his peers at the end of Primary school. He showed signs of entering puberty before any of his peers:

It was like, 'wow' (P2: 195).

I was the only kid with, like, hair in the whole school. And a moustache. It was in Primary, wasn't it? So it's kind of hard to get (P2: 199-200).

In these extracts, a comparison is made with his peers, with physical changes marking him out as different. His remarks about this are ambiguous ('wow', 'it's kind of hard to get'), but suggest that the difference is difficult for him to assimilate. It is difficult to speculate on how this situated him in relation to others, as well as his precise emotional reaction to it, but it is significant that he identified this as worthy of an albeit ambiguous reflection.

4.5.4 'It kind of stays with you for a long time': shame in the classroom

In the above discussion of humiliation and shame, it was argued that shame might be felt if a person did not meet a personal standard, though there would be no reason to suppose that this would accord the person a low position on a scale of social prestige among a wider public.

Participant 1 related a sense of personal disappointment as she returned to a previous hobby of drawing, which she had discontinued when she was at Secondary school. When asked how important drawing was to her, she replied: 'A score out of 10? I would say it is a seven' (P1: 1204) Although she also said that 'it's very calming' (P1: 1237), she also said that her feelings afterwards were 'not very positive' (P1: 1241) because '[w]ell, this could be better, this could be better' (P1: 1245). Participant 1 clearly valued drawing as a form of self-expression and it is significant that she found Art class to be humiliating, and had given up drawing at the time of her difficulty there. Her self-critical attitude ('this could be better') reflects a sense that she is not meeting a personal standard which she has set for herself in this valued activity.

Participant 3 also reflected on how his performance in school made him feel:

when I first started primary school, people kind of like doubted me. Like, every time I answer a maths question, try to answer a maths question, one of the other kids are kind of like, 'oh, you can't do it, you can't do it' (P3: 1148-51).

He reflected:

I even, I even answered the question correctly, but they still, like, doubted me. They kind of, like, gave me that thought that maybe I can't do it. And it just.. (P3: 1164-5).

They kind of.. it kind of impacts my future, innit? Because those things, yeah, it kind of stays with you for a long time (P3: 1175-6).

This suggests a direct link between being brought to a lower position on a scale of social prestige and negative sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Participant 3 internalises his negative standing without the resistance he shows elsewhere in his narrative.

4.5.5 Strengths within and without: self-awareness and 'enchantment'

Epiphanies of a more positive kind also featured in the participants' narratives.

Participant 1 reflected on the strengths that she had developed as a result of her difficult experiences:

I know this sounds, like, really weird but it made me a bit more, like, confident. Confident in speaking. Because if you'd asked me to do this kind of thing when I was at that school, I wouldn't have! (Laughs) (P1: 1069-71).

Explaining further, she said:

Because I had to do a lot of it. I had to do a lot of *explaining*. Start really looking out for myself (Laughs) (P1: 1075-6).

I learned how not to care what people think (Whispers) (Laughs) (P1: 1096).

And that's, like, I have to thank this Art teacher. (Laughs) The whole reason this all started was because I cared too much about his opinion of me. (P1: 1104-5).

In these extracts, Participant 1 realises the power that her experiences have given her, both through gaining confidence in talking about herself to others, and through a greater degree of self-knowledge that allows her to free herself from worry about other people's opinions. The ironic credit she gives to her Art

teacher shows her awareness of how negative experiences can now be understood more positively.

While Participant 1 was awakening to the possibilities afforded to her through self-understanding, each of the other participants referred to moments of 'enchantment', often related to technology. Participant 4 gave an insight into some of his happiest memories:

Like, when I was Year 7 and I would be home, I would relax and play games and that was like my thing (P4: 929-30).

Yeah, I remember when I was younger I didn't really listen to (...) artists, I would listen to say (...) soundtracks from games. That was kind of my thing. Even now, I listen to some, but not as much as I used to then. So every time I listen to a soundtrack from a game that I used to play back then and I listen to it now, it kind of reminds me of then (P4: 940-43).

Participant 4 describes his interaction with games and their soundtracks as 'his thing' in the absence of any mention of other people. For Participant 3, the connection with other people was a crucial component of his epiphany in relation to technology:

when you play online on GTA 5 there's this.. you make a clan yeah.. And, basically, in this clan, yeah, you name your clan. It has to be four letters innit. (P3: 1339-40)

My name has four letters in there and.. so they *named the clan 'me'*. (Laughs) (P3: 1344)

Really good, that was really good, I started laughing. They said.. I even made fun of the other people's clans saying that our clan was better than yours because it's my name. (Laughs) (P3: 1348-50)

In contrast to other incidents which he recounted, Participant 3 is here enjoying the value and standing which he holds within the group as they play the game. The symbolic endorsement from others allows him to playfully compete with others, confident in his place within the group.

Participant 2 referred to several epiphanies in relation to his engagement with technology. In relation to his first experience of gaming (at the age of 4 with the game GTA San Andreas):

I remember San Andreas because there was more features. And I thought 'woah, this is amazing' (P2: 328-9).

When he made a decisive break from his friends which led to him committing more to gaming:

I got in an argument and then I was like 'screw this' and then I stayed inside for like three years. Three or four years. Wasn't even really like a big argument I would say (...) but it was more like I just started playing Skyrim and I was like 'these people are basically annoying me.' I just want to play Skyrim. So I played Skyrim (P2: 5050-8).

When his interest in gaming began to abate:

Only sort of realised when I was 15. That's when it was like 'I want something different' (P2: 981-2)

I just couldn't do it. I got bored. I didn't want to play games at all (P2: 992).

That's pretty much it. I can't get into it. 'What do I do?' (P2: 1000).

It was a bad feeling. (Laughs) A bad feeling. I couldn't understand why I didn't like it anymore (Laughs) (P2: 1004-5).

When his interest in *animé* was kindled:

The one that really drew me in was called Sword Art Online. It was, like, about this guy, he got trapped in a game and he dies and I thought it was really cool (P2: 1034-5).

Participant 2 describes his interaction firstly with games and then with *animé* in terms of an 'enchantment' in which the connections to other areas of his life are loosened as his interest intensifies. This is most evident in the story he tells about choosing *Skyrim* over his friends. In this extract, he seems to weigh the relative value of his connection to his friends with his attachment to the world of gaming and *Skyrim* in particular. The argument precipitates this choice, but he

carefully qualifies this by saying that it '[w]asn't even really, like, a big argument', so that the choice reflects his power and control in the situation. He presents his withdrawal from others as deliberately chosen, although his awareness of this preference becomes apparent to him in a moment (the classic form of an epiphany). The description of his friends as 'just annoying' reduces the importance of his connection with them, both through the reductive qualifier 'just' and the implications of the word 'annoying': he is not part of a common group activity, but an individual who is disturbed by the effect of their interference.

The beginning and ending of his relationship with gaming also suggests a form of 'enchantment'. His reaction to his first experience of gaming – 'woah, this is amazing' – again focusses on a sudden transformation in the moment as he witnesses an epic coming-in-to-being of a world, which he then describes as having major implications for his future. Conversely, the ending seems to describe the disappearance of a world, which leaves him disorientated and without purpose: 'I just couldn't do it', "What do I do?", 'A bad feeling. I couldn't understand why I didn't like it anymore'. The power that he seemed to have when withdrawing from contact with his friends, when this world was available to him, is not present at either the beginning or ending as he witnesses it come in and out of being.

His attraction to his new interest, *animé*, continued with this same mode of engagement, a sudden transformation as he witnesses an event that occurs before him. He did not comment on the relevance of the story which 'enchanted' him with this genre, but the theme of being 'trapped in a game' has parallels with his own experience. His discussion of an intense focus on something that lies outside of him was also accompanied by a heightened awareness of his susceptibility to this mode of engagement. When describing how he energetically participated on *animé* discussion threads on the Reddit forum, he noticed his absorption with it and took a break from it:

'And I get really addicted to things sometimes. You know like obviously from the past, so I thought 'I'm going to delete this app'.' (P2: 1098-9).

The nature of Participant 2's engagement can be contrasted with that of Participant 4 who, as discussed above, described gaming as an important part of his happiness. Participant 4 describes a more harmonious relationship with gaming as part of a relaxing atmosphere. Technology is an external resource at his service, supporting a self-contained form of peacefulness:

[D]uring the first part of the Friday, I was just chilling (P4: 791-2).

I would just (...) / I would just watch TV and play games and just... (P4: 796).

I don't know (Laughs) it's like... it's like when they say (...) same stuff, different day, that's kind of like how I see it (P4: 802-3).

4.6 Symbioses

Symbiosis in OOO is the process of the coming-in-to-being of objects from diverse elements. In the context of this project, the narratives describe processes in which the protagonists move through a succession of selves through changing relationships with the people and the world around them, sometimes limiting and sometimes expanding the range of possibilities that lie before them.

4.6.1 Early selves

Participants 1, 2 and 4 described the experience of their early selves in largely positive terms, in a harmonious relationship with the people and world around them. Participant 1 described the taste of hot chocolate (P1: 1571-1589) and the music of Katy Perry played on a tape recorder (P1: 1513-64) in connection with time spent with her mother, as well as the smell of petrol as she went on her frequent journeys to Algeria and back with her father (P1: 1486; timeline). Participant 2 described playing with friends near his home, albeit in ominous tones that suggests darker experiences that have not yet become manifest:

I didn't really think about, you know, things. Haven't really.. what's the word I'm looking for? (...) You weren't really worried about anything. You were kind of like carefree (P2: 171-3).

Participant 4's narrative featured the most continuity in the self that was described. Although he mentioned that there was a previous home that his older siblings and mother had known without him, he described firm friendships that he made near his childhood home which he had maintained into the present (P4: 455-64). His relationships with his fellow students at Primary school are also depicted in harmonious terms (P4: 568-70).

Participant 3 described some warm memories of childhood. He described recently walking past his Primary school 'to give me that.. nostalgic feeling, you know what I mean?' (P3: 1281-2), mentioning a 'lavender or blossom smell' (P3: 1303). He continues:

Yeah, it was a good feeling. And I even started laughing to myself. I just thought I'd often see myself in there. Yeah, I remember we used to play like 'it', 'tag, you're it', a lot. Or we used to run away from this person, innit. That was for fun, innit (P3: 1292-4).

However, Participant 3 also described his relationship with other people and the world as antagonistic from the outset. Extreme medical complications surrounding his birth led to a Caesarean section, temporary death and 'resurrection', as well as the removal of an eye which contained a tumour, which 'they really messed up' (P3: 38-50). In Primary school, he felt misrecognised when he was placed with children that had 'special needs' (P4: 56). He mentions at this point also that he 'found it hard to, like, interact with other people' (P4: 60-1).

4.6.2. Perspective of future self on early self – continuing selves

There were considerable overlaps between Participants 1, 2 and 3 in their perspective on their earlier selves and the degree of continuity with their current self, although there were ambiguities in this area as well. Participant 4

described an experience of his self that was largely continuous with his earlier experiences.

Participant 1 described herself before arriving at Secondary school:

I think when I was younger, I was just like really stupid. And I don't know what the word is.. I was definitely like more sociable than I am now (Laughs) (P1: 1344-5).

When she started Secondary school, she, 'went from being like very friendly to be, like, 'leave me alone' (Laughs)' (P1: 1354).

Participant 2 was ambivalent at times in how he described his early self, at one point saying, 'I was very social' (P2: 97) and '[v]ery extroverted' (P1: 101). Later, he qualified this description when reminded of it:

Well, maybe that's pushing it a bit. Maybe like not *really* extroverted or social (P2: 456).

By the end of the interview, he gave a more nuanced description of himself that brought together aspects of his early and current selves:

There's times when I like talking to people, and then there's times when I, like, don't want to talk to anybody for a few days. Play games (P2: 1375-6).

Yeah, cos I'm, I'm an ambivert, I should say (P2: 1380).

It's like a mix between an introvert and an extrovert. I don't really fall into any of them (P2: 1388)

I just fall between the middle (P2: 1392).

Participant 2 showed an awareness of terms derived from personality trait theory, which holds that individuals have durable traits that constrains the range of their engagement with and behaviour in the world. He challenged its application to him and created a space within it that he felt more comfortable with, at the same time implying that 'ambivert' is not just another category that could be added to this framework, but a space for people who don't fit, who 'fall

between the middle'. Instead of a single trait, he sought a description that accommodates a more dynamic and mutable personality, sometimes talking to people and at other times not.

As mentioned above, Participant 2 gave a perspective on his early self as naive: 'I didn't really think about, you know, things' (P2: 171) He made repeated references associating studying with maturity: 'I should have studied more' (P2: 181); 'I'm mainly studying' (P2: 1074); 'I studied more. Went to bed at a reasonable time' (P2: 1174); 'I only started studying when I was, like, 16 though' (P2: 1187).

Participant 3 described being relieved from sitting SATs at Primary school:

Well, I just didn't think anything of it cos I was just (...) if anything I was just kind of relieved of doing it. (Laughs) (P3: 1233-4).

Cos back then I, you know, back then I was just kind of delusional. So.. (P3: 1238).

[L]ike, back then I didn't like doing tests, innit (P3: 1242).

You know, like, I didn't, cos I didn't know what life was like back then. Like doing tests would do for my life (P3: 1246-7).

I was like a little kid. (Laughs) (P3: 1251).

Participants 1, 2 and 3 reflected on their early selves as 'stupid' and 'delusional' but also 'happy' and 'carefree'. Participants 1 and 2 also suggest that their early selves were more sociable. There is a suggestion implicit in this that their experience of withdrawal came in a sense from an increased knowledge of a new world and that their isolation and associated negative emotions were the price of this knowledge. Participant 2 is ambivalent on this point, as has been seen, because his withdrawal, although modulated by anxiety and depression, also involved a sense of power and control in choosing the world of gaming over social interaction. Participants 2 and 3 also suggested that their early selves had less awareness of engaging with education as a means of empowering themselves than their current selves. Their commitment to

education as they matured is portrayed as reflecting their deepening understanding of the world.

4.6.3 Withdrawn selves

Each of the participants had quite different experiences of withdrawal. For Participants 3 and 4, there was never a complete and enduring physical separation from their family or people outside the family home.

For Participant 4, this manifested as recurrent and frequent absences from school. His experience of this withdrawal was not accompanied by a conscious awareness of keeping away from people, although he understood his participation in this study as involving withdrawal understood in this way (see discussion of his definition of social withdrawal above). Instead, his withdrawal had concurrent emotional and physical states – anxiety, stomach ache and tiredness – along with an antagonistic mode of social interaction, particularly with teachers, concerning the work he should do and the rules he should follow. The exact relationship between the emotional, physical and social dimensions of his experience was not explicitly articulated as part of a single complex. At times, he addressed the physical aspects of his experience, through medication and breathing exercises, while at other times he noted the unpredictable timing of his feelings of anxiety. He cited an anxious recent visit to the BBC, which he had visited without any problems before.

Participant 4's narrative is different from the others in that there are no moments in which a decisive shift occurs. Implicit in his story is a tension between the harmonious relationship he enjoys with his home, family and friends and the demands of an external world which he regards as lacking legitimacy in directing his life or concern for his interests. While the other participants went through traumatic adjustments, Participant 4 managed to retain aspects of a world in which he has felt at home throughout his life.

Participant 2 shared some aspects of Participant 4's experiences. They both made explicit references to anxiety and shared that they had life-long problems

with getting to sleep. Both described how their peers would note their lack of 'energy'. When asked if people noticed his experience of anxiety and depression, Participant 2 responded:

So there would have been.. some people would say really low energy, but after.. yeah. But only after I got all my energy, as you could say, only were.. 'Oh, you used to be like, yeah, low energy' and stuff like that (P2: 1269-71).

Participant 4 was asked for his thoughts about enjoying the company of others:

It's like an energy I guess. The people that I see usually have like a pretty high energy. I have that as well but it's not always going to be there. It's kind of like [*inaudible*] sometimes. When I need energy, sometimes I have energy (...) It's kind of like energy, most people are happy, so to say, just chill, yeah (P4: 120-3).

In both extracts, 'energy' is understood as having a relationship with social interaction with peers. It is a measure on which both participants regard themselves as varying from high to low at different times. Participant 2 discusses 'low energy' in relation to anxiety, whereas for Participant 4 'high energy' draws him to others and is mentioned alongside words such as 'happy' and 'chill', suggesting positive emotional states.

The narratives of Participants 1 and 2 featured the most deliberate withdrawal from the outside world. For Participant 1, Garcia's remark that, '[t]hings are in the world' (Garcia, 2014: 75) described a significant feature of her experience. As can be seen in her narrative as described in Figure 8 and Appendix 15, her family, police officers, medical professionals and other patients on her ward all loomed behind front doors, walls and ward curtains as she sought refuge from an outside world she could never completely flee. Reflecting in general on her withdrawal at the end of the interview, she remarked:

Well, we can say that if the police hadn't come I wouldn't ever have gone back to school. (Laughs) (P1: 1277-8)

However, she continued:

Yeah, but I think a lot of it had to come from me because I could have just [*inaudible*]. (Whispers) (P1: 1287-8).

Unfortunately, her last remark was not clearly intelligible on the recording. Nonetheless, it is clear that she saw outside forces both as threatening her solitude and rescuing her. Ultimately, this cycle was broken by a change within herself that would no longer rely on outside forces.

Participant 1 described important changes that accompanied her shift towards a withdrawn self. Firstly, the 'brutal' experience of entering Secondary school marked a shift from the happy and sociable self she identified in her early experiences. Secondly, as mentioned above, she directly attributes the judgement of her Art teacher as a reason for her becoming withdrawn:

And that's, like, I have to thank this Art teacher. (Laughs) The whole reason this all started was because I cared too much about his opinion of me (P1: 1104-5).

Beyond the judgement of the Art teacher, she considered the opinions of others as powerful negative features of the external world. Returning to school from her first period of withdrawal, she remarked:

I remember I was like, upset about it. And I *really* didn't want to go in the next day, because I felt everyone was *looking at me* and everyone was *judging me* (P1: 173-4).

While in hospital, she worried about how she would present herself to the judgement of the other patients:

I thought they would think 'what is she doing here? (...) She should be... she should be at school' or 'this is a kid's ward' (P1: 820-1).

I really hate people thinking that I'm rude. So if I had to come out, then I would just be happy. (Laughs) (P1: 832-3).

During her periods of most intense withdrawal, she remembered looking at her wall, remembering painting it light green with her cousin and wondering why she

hadn't painted it pink (P1: 1390-408). She also mentioned 'shavers' and 'tissues' in relation to her 'self-destructive behaviours', though she did not want to discuss these further.

As Garcia argued, Participant 1 was not able, and in a sense did not really seek, a withdrawal from a world which she was experiencing negatively. Instead, she was seeking to be in the world in a new way. Ultimately, she was not able to escape her concern about how other people thought about her. While outside agents, such as the police, could change her physical and spatial condition of withdrawal, only she would be able to address the way that she experienced the world through other people's judgements of her.

Participant 2's withdrawal, as described above, involved an aspect of 'enchantment' not present in Participant 1's narrative. He seemed to have escaped the world, gone outside of it *contra* Garcia, in a way that Participant 1 was not able to achieve. The availability of this exit gave his withdrawal a gloss of control and power not present for Participant 1, who always awaited the interruption of the external world. This perhaps accounts for the longer duration of Participant 2's withdrawal, as he was able to sustain his presence in this world in the absence of a crisis equivalent to that of Participant 1, as well as maintain (for the most part) his participation in the routines of the outside world such as school attendance. Participant 2 showed a sense of control over this world in being able to correct misconceptions of the researcher concerning the age range of the community of people who engage in gaming (P2: 725). This related to a period in which his gaming intensified, at the age of 13 turning to the multi-player game *Destiny*, which allowed for online collaboration with other gamers. His sense of place within this community again suggested his feeling of control and value within this world. He described how they would joke, calling them 'friends' (P2: 754), as well as the ebb and flow of groups that form around missions within the game (P2: 758-91).

However, at other times the turn towards *Destiny* at the age of 13 was described negatively as 'worse' (P2: 898):

13 is, like, when I really got into gaming.. so it was like a job, like, I played games 10 to 12, but it wasn't like when I was 13. So like when I was 13 I would basically stay up all night. So that I literally could not play anymore. So like, yeah, and I changed games to Destiny as well (P2: 634-7).

The intensity of his engagement with this world did not lead to interventions from others, as in the case of Participant 1. However, the sense of exhaustion conveyed in the phrase 'I literally could not play any more' suggests that a critical point was approaching. When he finally passes out of the world of gaming, he describes himself as having become 'bored' of it:

I just couldn't do it. I got bored. I didn't want to play games at all (P2: 992).

The alternative world of gaming which had allowed him to go 'outside of the world', which had given him the power to remove himself from 'annoying' friends, was no longer there, leading to disorientation: 'What do I do?' (P2: 1000). As this world receded and the greater, external world came back in to focus, Participant 2's sense of power in relation to this world seemed greatly diminished. He described feeling powerless to escape the cycle of withdrawal he had embraced, as the longer he had gone without social interaction, the harder it was to recommence:

You talk too little for a few years and that makes it hard to talk to other people. You just forget to talk to people (P2: 1305-6).

Participant 1 expressed a similar feeling of powerlessness in entering a negative cycle after a period of withdrawal:

[T]he longer I didn't go out for the more terrified I became of going out (P1: 77).

Participant 3, like Participant 4, always maintained some contact with outside friends throughout his narrative. However, his experience of withdrawal was located more in his feeling of misrecognition from others (teachers and peers),

an inability to connect with and understand them, and finally an inability to make his voice heard to them.

In his earlier experiences, he describes his attempts to understand the thinking of others, often posed as questions that he asked of others in the story, or rhetorically asks as a commentary on the story as a means of illustrating his exasperation. Referring to his frustration with his treatment by others, he remarks:

And yeah, and while.. while all of these things are going on, I'm just like, 'so *why* is this happening to me?' (P3: 262-3).

He would ask others to explain themselves when he felt that he was not being treated fairly:

Yeah, I'm asking the teacher, 'Can you please stop them', and the teacher's like, 'Why?' And I'm like, 'What do you mean? *Why?* Like.. *you're the teacher, you're supposed to..* like, you're supposed to, like, *tell them off for, like,* making fun of another student' (P3: 188-191).

He also found it hard to get answers from his brother, with whom his relationship deteriorated. Referring to his family's move to a new home in 2015, he said:

Yeah, and before that.. I mean, me and my brother were actually cool. We used to talk to each other and everything (P3: 694-5)

It's just that until.. until I started to move. Until I moved into my new house, I noticed that there was a shift between us (P2: 699-700).

Like, I was thinking to myself, 'Why is he not talk..? Why is he really giving me, like, one word answers and all that. And being so shady to me.' And, and (sighs) (...) I'm, I'm thinking, it's because he hasn't gotten over the things I did when I was a kid and all that. Like, I never used to bully him, It was just banter and all that. And whenever he does things wrong, I just say 'come on'. (...) I just, I just I correct him, but he will just get really angry and all that (P2: 415-20).

But he's *still* continuing to like, give me the silent treatment and, like, give me *the cold shoulder*. I'm like, 'You know, *I give up*, like.. *I don't know what to do. I don't know what else to do. Because I've tried to talk to you.* I tried to.. tried to, like, get you, like, to be, like, all *social* and that, but you

still want to, like, you still.. you still want to, like, you still (...) you still want to.. *behave* like this.'

Even with his long-term friend, he described moments of frustration as he tries to understand his thinking:

Now, even when you're.. when he's *angry* with someone, he doesn't like to say to you, he just gives you the quiet, the *silent* treatment (P3: 569-70)

Well.. well, my thought of that is that.. that he can't be doing that, because otherwise. Other people.. just, I mean.. it won't be resolved innit like.. like you end up having a leaving.. you end up having like a fallout with.. without with this other person.. which *actually happened* by the way (P3: 575-8).

Frustration with such incidents led Participant 3 to express broader judgements which gave sense and meaning to them:

Like you said, when you.. when you.. when you asked me what was life to you in general? Yeah. I mean, yeah, we also talk about that as well. Like, really people need to, like, grow up and stop making stupid decisions. And they need to like.. cos, cos, I'm not gonna lie to you. Like, our generation is kind of like a bit screwed up (P3: 545-8).

Because people just (...) not like, they're not taking responsibility for their actions. They keep, they haven't grown up yet (P3: 552-3).

Participant 3 described a positive change as he found a way to interact with people as he moved from Primary school to Secondary school (P2: 69-70). However, he explicitly refers to his changing self as he reflects on people becoming less interested in what he has to say and the emergence of his stutter:

Basically, yeah, I just don't know how to interact with other people, any more like I used to. That's what it is (P3: 820-1).

You know when I had the stuttering problem and everything. Kind of from that, I've lost.. I've lost.. (...) (heavily sighs) I've lost the way I should speak to people, innit (P3: 834-5).

I used to be enthusiastic and everything. I make jokes, but now I'm just, like, 'what do I say to people?' (P3: 839-40).

Right. Because.. because nowadays, yeah, every time I'm with my other friends, they're just silent and everything and we're just thinking about what to say and everything (P3: 844-5).

There are similarities with the negative cycle described by Participants 1 and 2, where difficulties in interacting with others feeds back in to deeper isolation. However for Participant 2, a pattern has developed in which he has shifted from frustration in not getting others to explain themselves to a sense that he can no longer express himself to others. Where for his previous self, interaction seemed effortless and natural, his current self is burdened with the imminent prospect of silence and disinterest in the company of others.

4.6.4 Future selves

Not all of the participants expressed thoughts concerning the future. For Participant 4, preserving control over his self and managing its continuity through the disturbances of outside authority figures (such as teachers) as well as anxiety, illness and tiredness was a priority. He sought to manage the effect that his absences had on his work in college:

I don't try and miss two days, so that's like my target for the week. So that I'll be off a maximum one day, that's like my aim I guess (P4: 803-5).

He showed wariness of those who challenge his division of time between home and learning, his blurring of tenses showing continuity with the self in Year 11:

And Year 11 as well, they told us not to miss some days but I still missed some days. And it wasn't my fault basically. Because I feel like, if I am off for a reason, then the reason is there I guess (P4: 722-4).

Participants 1 and 2 both showed evidence of having transcended their previous selves, moving from naivety through depression and withdrawal, to a new found sense of purpose and control. Participant 1 enjoyed crediting unlikely figures from her period of withdrawal – police officers, her Art teacher – to illustrate that lessons learned from the darker period of her life provided material for the construction of a more autonomous self. While Participant 3 felt like he

was losing his voice, she found hers as she explained herself to adults during her withdrawal. As she found her voice, the judgements of others became less important. Like Participant 3, she expressed a desire to make lots of money, in her case for doing not very much (P1 timeline).

Participant 2 similarly showed that he wanted to shape his future in line with lessons learned in the past. His desire to 'study more' was explained in terms of making up for the time that he had spent gaming in his earlier years (P2: 1174), although he did not share moments of reflection on the transition between his withdrawn self and his current/future self, with this comment a representative example: 'Oh, it just clicked one day I guess' (P2: 1179). This again suggests an adventitious event happening to Participant 2 rather than the construction of a new self after deep reflection as described by Participant 1. However, he continues: 'I just completely burned out a video game, so I just had nothing to do. (Laughs)' (P2: 1183). This suggests that he exhausted the possibilities of the world of gaming and excluded all other options than engaging in his current world. While related as if these are facts about the external world, for Participant 2 they explain a radically new departure that others might account for in terms of individual motivation or resilience. He describes his motivations in terms of a world which is present to him and to which he responds.

In keeping with his ambivalence in a number of areas, he retained an awareness of himself as 'really addicted to things' (P2: 1098). This undergirded his new enthusiasm for *animé* and following discussions about it on the discussion forum Reddit. He enjoyed a discussion at the end of the interview about social withdrawal and personality which suggested an interest in understanding himself in terms of such categories while, as discussed above, challenging some of them. In revealing that he had a diagnosis of 'mild autism', he stated that he identified with an interest in a narrow range of things but not the other aspects of the condition (P2: 1474-1547). While he had previously said (as mentioned above) that he was 'carefree' and 'didn't really think about .. things', towards the end of the interview he described his deliberate attempt to overcome a negative cycle of withdrawal and social anxiety through volunteering at a Youth Club. This had been a success and he described this

new experience in terms of a return to an old self rather than the construction of a new one:

I just got to know everyone, messing around. Returned to my old self, I guess you could say. (Laughs) (P2: 1406-7).

Because I really don't care about what I say, I guess you could say. (Laughs)

This return to a sense of not knowing, associated with his early childhood in previous comments, is perhaps in keeping with the idea that Participant 2 prefers to understand his behaviour as a natural response to a given world rather than a conscious expression of a deliberate personal strategy. Nonetheless, when he needed to call upon his own reserves to shape his future without the benefit of a transformative event or 'enchanted' interest, through forcing himself to undergo social exposure, he was able to find the resources to do so.

This sense of autonomy and freedom from externally imposed constraints was an overlapping element of all the narratives, expressed as implicit or explicit aspirations by each of these young people in the construction of their future selves. However, Participant 3 seemed the most troubled when discussing his ability to relate to others in the future. He raised the question of the degree to which people can share a space while preserving their differences. Is it possible for people to share a common space and appreciate each other for their differences? Or must they have something which they share, which can act as a foundation for their future relationship? The social antagonisms that he described as beginning from the very moment of his birth led to him either to ask questions that were not answered, or, eventually, to lose his ability to express himself to people who might listen. His belief that people could hold a world in common, in which each recognised the other and could express themselves and feel listened to, was thus undermined. Instead, in the absence of a common world, relationships could only build on similarities between individuals, sameness, as the foundation of any bond:

Well, in the future, I just want to, like, I just want to lose this stuttering thing and lose this whole, 'I don't know what to say to people' and all that (P3: 988-9).

Cos I know.. I know like, I know from people's appearance that people want to be my friend. But it's just that's (...) it's just, it's just that I need to, like.. it's just, it's just that.. I need to have something in common, you know what I mean? (P3: 992-5).

And I don't know whether that's a bad thing or a good thing, innit (P3: 999).

4.7 Conclusion

The participants' narratives gave nuanced responses to the concerns of the research questions: their past experience of social withdrawal and their explanations of social withdrawal, in the context of their wider lives. Their definitions of social withdrawal showed awareness of the outside world, association with conditions such as anxiety. Certain 'Catalytic Events' were associated with significant changes in their experience, such as moving home, starting new educational settings and confrontations in the social context of the classroom. Epiphanies revealed the interaction of humiliation and shame with power and resistance, in particular in relation to resistance in the classroom, peer interactions and shame in the classroom. Symbioses involved an awareness of continuity and change across early selves, continuing selves, withdrawn selves and future selves.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the findings and analysis will be discussed in light of the broader literature on social withdrawal. In particular, it will be related to the 'social withdrawal as maladapted development' model, which has become the dominant paradigm for understanding the mechanisms that produce this behavioural phenotype, and Asendorpf's matrix of subtypes of social withdrawal, which provides the dominant framework for classifying those who display the behavioural phenotype. As this study addresses a gap in the literature in which the understanding of those who experience social withdrawal is foregrounded, there will first be a discussion of aspects of this study which support and deepen the conclusions of the research in the existing literature. Then there will be a discussion of aspects of this study's findings which are in tension with some of the interpretations offered in the literature. A concluding section will identify possible avenues for further research.

5.2 Findings consistent with the existing literature

Rubin, Coplan and Bowker devised the 'transactional model' of social withdrawal (see Figure 3) (Kenneth H. Rubin et al., 2009). This combines factors relating to the individual such as innate arousal threshold and personality and behaviour traits with environmental factors such as parenting style and peer relationships. This model is 'transactional' in that it is sensitive to the dynamic feedback between processes of 'social withdrawal', construed as the intentional avoidance of social contact, and 'active isolation' defined as peer rejection. While Rubin, Coplan and Bowker tried to find an encompassing framework to account for variation within the complex of social withdrawal, Asendorpf distinguishes between different subtypes to give precision to the distinctive trajectories of those who exhibit this behaviour, using high and low social approach and social avoidance motivations to construct a four-part matrix (Figure 4).

5.2.1 Background information and Asendorpf's matrix

Based on the answers reported to the questionnaire in Chapter 4, Participant 1 could be classified in the shy quadrant in Asendorpf's matrix. Participant 2 could be placed between the sociable and unsociable quadrants and Participant 3 somewhere between shy and sociable. Finally, Participant 4 would be placed somewhere between avoidant and sociable.

As such, only one of the participants clearly fitted within Asendorpf's matrix, even though they all identified themselves as experiencing social withdrawal and were able to discuss this at length. Several implications of their responses to the questionnaire are worth noting. None of the participants saw themselves as wholly defined by social withdrawal. It is something which they experienced during particular times in particular circumstances. Yet they all felt that seeking and enjoying the company of others was an important aspect of each of their personalities. Participant 2 most directly challenged strict and static categorisation in the course of his narrative. However, all of them provided answers which resisted a classificatory framework as simple as that provided by Asendorpf. Participant 1, who fitted most neatly into the framework, agreed that she liked being in social situations, while none of the participants agreed that they did not enjoy social interactions.

Many of the answers clustered in the middle, with 3 of the 10 statements resulting in three of the participants neither agreeing or disagreeing: 'I stay away from people', 'It is hard for me to join groups', and 'I much prefer to be alone than with others'. It is difficult to derive precise interpretations from the neutral response to these statements, but it is significant that they do not reject them. With regard to the participants of this study, Asendorpf's matrix is useful at distinguishing different social orientations, in particular shy, avoidant and unsociable. However, it was not clear from the questionnaire responses or, as we shall see, the narratives that the participants understood themselves merely through one of these orientations.

5.2.2 Participants' narratives and the 'transactional model'

The age range of the participants was between 16 and 19 and as such they had moved through most of the pathway outlined by Rubin, Coplan and Bowker. The dynamic way in which feelings and thoughts interact and feedback to social relationships was identified by Participants 1, 2 and 3 as a significant aspect of their experience. Participant 1 and 2 referred to negative cycles in which withdrawal deprived them of the resources they would need to overcome it. Participant 3 referred to an incident where classmates questioned his ability, which 'knocked his confidence' and thus made it difficult to overcome in future, explicitly judging it to have had long-lasting impacts. His feeling that people would walk away while he was talking, particularly acute after he developed a stutter, reinforced his difficulties in approaching people.

The model also identifies school specifically as a location in which the withdrawal phenotype emerges. All of the participants identified school as an important setting where incidents which contributed to their withdrawal took place, they became aware of their withdrawal or was itself the place from which they sought to withdraw. This points to a broader implication of withdrawal as in part a spatial concept which entails an understanding of how experience is related to location.

The 'transactional model' is underpinned by Rubin's conception of withdrawal as maladapted development. As discussed above, Participants 1, 2 and 3 identified a negative cycle in their withdrawal, suggesting that they had a weaker capacity to engage with others as a result of withdrawal. It must be stated that they did not present this specifically in developmental terms, as if an opportunity missed at one point in their development narrowed a range of outcomes in the future. Participant 3 came closest to suggesting this in his comment regarding long-term effects of a 'knock in confidence', as mentioned above. Participant 4 did not show a developmental understanding of withdrawal, with an interaction between environment and individual behaviour and experience. He came closest to a trait-based understanding of his personality in

which continuity was more evident than change, although changing circumstances would lead to variation in behaviour and experience. For all the participants, their direct description of withdrawal was in negative terms, although there was more ambiguity in their more general descriptions as will be discussed below. For instance, Participant 2, whose narrative was ambivalent in many respects, made a concerted attempt to overcome an aversion to social contact he developed during withdrawal and expressed a regret that he had not studied more.

A final area which emerged in line with the existing literature was the importance of peer victimisation in precipitating withdrawal. Participants 1 and 3 both indicated that their isolation was partly the result of such experiences.

5.3 Findings in tension with the existing literature

The existing literature examines the interaction between individual tendencies and traits and environmental factors which feedback into a developmental pathway, with a phenotypical behaviour emerging across a number of social-motivational subtypes, as identified in Asendorpf's matrix. The present study was designed to address the experience of withdrawal, an approach which has been ignored outside of the emerging research on *hikikomori*. The perspectives of the participants indicated areas which may usefully inform further research.

Participants 1 and 2 considered their experiences of withdrawal to contrast radically with their early experiences, describing themselves as 'sociable' and 'extrovert' and their experience as 'carefree' and 'happy'. Along with Participant 3, they considered themselves to be 'stupid', or 'delusional', not knowing about things and otherwise naïve at this time. The implication for these participants is that they would in time be initiated into a more complicated and difficult world. Their increased knowledge would only heighten their awareness of their difficulties. For these three participants, this knowledge was gained through lessons in particular encounters that they had, which at times formed dramatic

thresholds in their unfolding stories (or 'Catalytic Events' in the language of the analysis).

The transactional model does not account for incidents which have a sudden transformative effect on the social orientation of the young person in question. This may be function of the different question which it is seeking to answer. As the behaviour emerges in response to the factors that are built in to the model, the young person will perhaps notice emerging behaviour in particular incidents which condense and represent this change for them in retrospect. However, the degree to which such factors were given causal force by the participants was notable. Participant 1 experienced her entry into Secondary school as 'brutal', suggesting it had a powerful, negative transformative effect on her social orientation. Participant 2 recounted his break from his friends, when he committed to gaming rather than maintaining friendships, as the culmination of a longer process in which he had become 'annoyed' with his friends. He further explained that the argument was not particularly heated, implying that a tension between gaming and maintaining these friends had been building for him for a while. While this may align with the longer term processes highlighted in the model, the incident marked a radical shift in the quality of his social experiences, the effect of which would later in his narrative be understood by him to feed back in to difficulties reconnecting with people.

While the model acknowledges location as an aspect of withdrawal through reference to school, it was more salient in the narratives in other areas as well. For each of the participants, the relationship between home and school was highly significant, as each came to represent specific kinds of social engagement. For Participant 1, as presented in her narrative in Figure 8 and Appendix 15, her withdrawal to her bedroom was discussed in reference to her difficulties in school, suggesting that it was a place of refuge from the difficulties which she associated with the space of school. Similarly, her use of the curtain to create a space which she would refer to as a kind of home: 'I felt like I was leaving a home behind (Laughs)' (P1: 847). Participant 2 and Participant 4 both had low school attendance, while all participants identified the interaction between relationships with teachers and other students in school as highly

significant in their developing narratives. Participant 3 sought a new start in a new college when he had left Secondary school, although it perhaps aligns with the 'transactional model' as he found that his experiences were similar to Secondary school. A more dedicated focus on location, including school, but also home and other places, would be a valuable addition to the research on social withdrawal. Furthermore, the meaning attached to these places for those experiencing social withdrawal can illuminate why they adopt a strategy which has an essentially spatial character to serve a social-motivational style.

Specific incidents as well as locations were considered by the participants to be critically important in the development of their narratives. Participant 1 cited humiliating incidents in the classroom as influencing her experience and behaviour. Incidents such as the police visiting her house and her hospitalisation were also important in her story and entering and leaving withdrawal. Participant 2 described his immersion in gaming during withdrawal in terms that were interpreted in the analysis as equivalent to a kind of 'enchantment', with a sudden beginning and ending. Participant 4 recounted a series of incidents involving antagonisms with peers, teachers and family members that eventually affected his ability to communicate and connect with others. Participant 4 told a narrative that was more consistent with a trait-based understanding of behaviour and experience. In the narratives, these were identified as 'Catalytic Events'

In addition to school as a location in itself, as well as a site of highly formative 'Catalytic Events', the participants discussed the importance of the relationships that characterised their experience of school. All of the participants related incidents in which their relationships with teachers impacted on their standing with their peers. The social context of school is unique in the sense that an authority figure oversees the interactions of peers. They are a source of power and justice and provide a model for how peers regard and treat each other. The participants considered relationships with peers and teachers, as well as the interaction between the two, as particularly important to them. Sometimes this involved judgments of the participant's academic ability given by teachers in the context of the classroom, as related by Participants 1 and 3. At other times, this

involved a struggle between the teacher's authority and the participant's emerging claim to autonomy as was the case for Participants 2, 3 and 4. Finally, the role of the teacher as an authority who could redress injustices in the relations between peers was a feature of Participant 3's narrative and, to a lesser extent, Participant 1. School featured in all of the narratives as a place in which a new developing sense of self emerges, which requires recognition as worthy of respect and autonomy from peers and teachers in order for young people to confidently inhabit this space. The effect of the particular social context of school on the development of withdrawal could inform further research.

In OOO terms, the development of a new sense of self has been interpreted as a kind of symbiosis, in which aspects of an existing self are blended with features of the world, including others who are in it, to create a new self. The way in which the participants were able to develop such new selves through an engagement with the world was a significant aspect of their narratives. For example, Participant 1 found an outlet for self-expression in drawing, which she discontinued at the same time as she was being criticised in the classroom by her teacher and mocked by her fellow students. She resumed it towards the end of her narrative at a point in which she felt less dependent on the opinion of others. As such, she was able to express herself and her relation to the world in this creative medium. Participant 2 reached a point where he imagined a binary choice between social interaction with peers, which he had found frustrating, and immersion in a world of gaming, which he found liberating. He developed a new self through engagement with this world, later finding that when it disappeared, it inhibited engagement with the enduring outside world. He broke through this inhibition through a deliberate strategy of exposure to social interaction.

Participant 3 sought connections in which he could feel that he could express himself and feel understood, while Participant 4 wanted control over how he presented himself to his peers in creative activities such as drama and performance. The narratives given by the participants suggest that development into a new self, through the latter part of childhood and adolescence, is a

process which can lead to withdrawal. This is consistent with some of the literature on *hikikomori*, which has identified a critical period in adolescence as key to understanding the development of acute social withdrawal across the lifespan (Saito, 2013).

Two of the participants (1 and 2) ended their narratives by describing significant breakthroughs. They described being able to communicate and relate to others, being more engaged in the world and able to pursue their goals more effectively. Participant 1 credited the help of some professionals in achieving this breakthrough. Yet this was phrased more in terms of how this helped her to practice talking about herself, using this opportunity to develop her own capacity to engage with the world on her own terms. Outside of some ironic tributes to a teacher who had made derogatory comments to her and police officers who explained the legal penalties for non-attendance of school, she described her present engagement with the world in terms of her own strengths. Participant 2 did not credit others at all, moving from a sudden realisation about his life to a difficult, self-motivated process of social exposure, albeit through an opportunity encountered at school. Both participants described their breakthroughs in terms of an increasing understanding of themselves and the world. Participant 1 in particular described herself as learning things she would otherwise not have known as a result of her period of withdrawal: 'Well, I think although I definitely wouldn't want anyone to have relived those experiences, I think they really shaped me to be who I am.' (P1: 1064-5). The ways in which young people are able to develop such capacity, through an developing greater self-understanding, is an important area for future research opened up by these narratives.

This study seeks to answer different questions to those posed by a lot of the existing studies on social withdrawal. Such studies have focussed on the mechanisms that account for the development of social withdrawal, bringing together individual traits and environmental influences. They have further sought to distinguish between subtypes of withdrawal as a behavioural phenotype. In the absence of qualitative work on the experience of social

withdrawal, this study sought to reflect the experiences of explanations of young people directly through their stories.

As discussed above, this difference in focus may account for this greater significance placed on contingencies, such as particular locations and events, in this study. Places, people and events may come to represent for young people more gradual processes explained by the interaction of individual tendencies and environmental influences. However, setting aside the privileging of a more objective account of experience and behaviour over the perspective of the person in question, there is little consideration in the existing literature of the effect that such representation of past experiences may have on current and future behaviour and experience. It has been seen that young people do indeed incorporate such representations into their stories of the past. When they felt themselves to be losing or gaining the capacity to engage with the world, they related this to contingent aspects of their experience, such as people, places and events, rather than longer-term developmental experiences. This in turn led to operative understandings of their engagement with the world which had effects on their behaviour and experience.

Furthermore, contingent events cannot be excluded as influences on development. There is some work within the literature on the relationship between attachment styles and subtypes of social withdrawal, which captures how early experiences can have long-lasting impacts (B.-B. Chen & Santo, 2016a; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Shaver & Hazan, 1987; Wildschut et al., 2010). However, outside of early formative experiences, there is little work on the impact of later experiences, considered alongside longer-term developmental processes, on the social motivation of young people.

The narratives presented in this study suggest that the relationship between home and school, including moving away from the area where the school peer group live, can be impactful. School transitions were also experienced as highly significant, as well as the way in which social interaction in the unique context of the classroom, involving peers and the authority figure of the teacher, was managed. The availability or absence of other worlds, such as the world of

gaming, in to which the self might develop was experienced as important. Experiences which exclude forms of expression which can confidently locate the self in a wider social world, either through negative peer social interaction (such as rejection or misrecognition) or a devaluing criticism of one's ability (for example, in Art or Maths) were further described as influential. Finally, the availability of experiences which allow for the development of capacity, through reflection on one's experiences and exposure to social interactions, were significant aspects of narratives in which participants were able to emerge from withdrawal. Such contingent aspects of experience after early childhood may be constrained by broader developmental processes, as in the 'transactional model', but the limited range of experience and behaviour left undetermined by such processes was experienced as including categorically different outcomes. Positive and negative outcomes, successful engagement with the world or withdrawal, were experienced within this range and attributed more to contingent experiences than the current research would suggest.

5.4. Limitations and areas for future research

The narratives analysed in this study were co-constructed in the context of an interview and a meeting in which a timeline was agreed. Inevitably, this meant that the perspectives, prejudices and priorities of the researcher have had more of an influence on the narratives than if they were produced with less prompting (these are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6). It was felt that without this support, the participants would not have had the confidence to deliver their stories or feel that people would have an interest in such a wide range of their experiences. Reconvening to agree the timeline allowed participants time to reflect on their experiences, as well as providing them with a visual summary of the narratives which they could use to reflect on the story that they had shared. So as not to obscure the origin of the narrative in a co-constructed interview context, the analysis focussed directly on the words that they chose in the interviews. Nonetheless, a process through which young people could take more control over the form in which they told their story would minimise the potential influences which the researcher might have on the final narratives.

This study took the narratives of the young people at face value and did not question the veracity of their accounts, due to the concern in the research questions to understand their narratives rather than verify them. This was in line with Donald Spence's privileging of 'narrative truth' over 'historical truth' in his account of clinical cases – whatever may have actually happened in the past is not as important as the story that the person tells about it (Spence, 1982). A further implication is that this study features no speculation about areas which the young people chose not to discuss. It may well be the case that a different researcher with a different approach would have encouraged them to push their stories in those directions. Readers may have questions about aspects of their experience that don't feature in the narratives. For ethical and epistemological reasons, such speculation was avoided and the narratives told by the participants respected as complete accounts that they were content to share.

There were some areas left unexplored by this study that could be valuably investigated in the future. The significance of gender and cultural background were not central aspects of the narratives in this study, although Participant 1's Algerian background was mentioned, and Participant 1 and 3 made references to the gender of their peer groups. There was more emphasis given in the narratives to relationships with peers and teachers than with parents. One participant made significant reference to sibling relationships. While this emphasis is interesting, more exploration of the experience of family relationships would be a useful addition. Finally, the exploration of the participant's past experiences did not deliver a clear picture of the ideal way they would like to engage with the world and other people in it. It would have added depth to the narratives if a description of an idealised day of social engagement with others was offered.

Emerging research on the phenomenon of *hikikomori* has attempted to foreground the experience of young people and interpret their behaviour through the way in which they engage with the world. Nicolas Tajan has analysed accounts from former *hikikomori*, classifying them as 'post-modern social renouncers' who experience social withdrawal not as a pathology but as

an 'idiom of distress' (Tajan, 2015). He describes their situation as one of implicit criticism of the normative social expectations of modern Japan, in particular its educational and economic system. Using a Lacanian framework, he suggests that '*hikikomori* can be seen as a step toward subjectivity, which cannot be experienced in the educational or social setting' (Tajan, 2015: 296). He uses the Lacanian term *jouissance* (an approximate translation of *enjoyment*) to describe aspects of their motivation towards and experience of withdrawal. He calls for further research along these lines :

it is necessary to make a radical shift into qualitative research in order to focus on the experiences of the socially withdrawn, using a rigorous methodology that can take into account their subjectivities. In other words, I suggest that a qualitative approach focusing on narratives is implemented (Tajan, 2015).

Marco Crepaldi, who is at the forefront of *hikikomori* research in Italy, settled on a definition of this phenomenon which highlights the social context in which it emerges:

a drive towards physical isolation, continuing over time, which begins as a reaction towards the excessive pressure towards social realisation typical in societies with developed capitalist economies (Crepaldi, 2019).

From the outset, research on *hikikomori* has been sensitive to social context due to an interest in the degree to which it was specific to the conditions of Japan (Saito, 2013). While many conforming to *hikikomori* behaviour have been found outside of Japan, the sensitivity of research to social context has remained in place. The broader social withdrawal literature, as examined in Chapter 2, has examined cultural differences, for instance, in China and Turkey (Cheah & Xu, 2015; B.-B. Chen & Santo, 2016b, 2016a; X. Chen, 2015, 2019; Coplan et al., 2015, 2016; Ding et al., 2015b, 2015a; T. M. H. Li & Wong, 2015a; Y. Li, Archbell, Bullock, Wang, & Coplan, 2018; Y. Li et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2015; Özdemir et al., 2015; Yu, 2015; Zhang, 2015). However, cultural variation in the understanding and presentation of withdrawal is distinct from the

ways in which those who experience withdrawal understand their relation to others and the world.

While none of the participants in this study conformed to the *hikikomori* pattern of behaviour, there is evidence that they experienced tension with their social contexts that would fit the profile of ‘social renouncers’ or ‘resisting pressure toward social realisation’. One of the few studies which bridges the broader research on social withdrawal with *hikikomori* found a significantly higher prevalence among the sample of Psychology undergraduate students in Nigeria than Singapore or the United States (Bowker et al., 2019). A speculative interpretation may be that what Crepaldi termed ‘excessive pressure towards social realisation’ was more intense among those at an advanced level of education in a country least like a ‘developed capitalist economy’, because of competing cultural influences, intergenerational tensions and uncertainty about the precise nature of the social roles (or ‘selves’ in the language of the current study) they were ‘realising’. Tensions between economic development and older cultural influences have been examined in the social withdrawal literature that has been focussed on China (Ding et al., 2015b).

It was notable that three of the participants in this study were from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) (Participant 2 did not agree to disclose his ethnicity) and all were maturing into a world with great economic uncertainty, heightened by aspects of the local context mentioned in Chapter 1. Culture, family, and socio-economic context, as mentioned above, did not feature prominently in the narratives. However, future research could usefully examine these areas. Participant 3 did deliver a general judgement on his generation in relation to society, as ‘screwed up’ (P3: 548). All of the participants showed the resistance that are referred to by Tajan and Crepaldi. Participant 2 showed a degree of *jouissance* in his ‘enchantment’ with gaming as he rejected social interaction with friends, suggesting that a framework being used to understand *hikikomori* could possibly be used to understand the experiences of those with less severe forms of social withdrawal. Greater cross-pollination between these two fields could lead to interesting and informative research.

5.5. Implications for practice

For the practicing Educational Psychologist (EP), there are a number of insights which can be taken from this study. Firstly, there is value in using narrative approaches both to support the expression of the voice of a young person, but also in analysing what they and others have to say about their situation. If narrative is the focus of a piece of work with a young person, they can come to understand that they are the person best placed to tell the story. Participant 1, for instance, felt initially as if she would have little to say, perhaps as a result of past academic experiences in which she felt disempowered and devalued. The narrative focus on her experience meant that only she could really guide the process and she was surprised at the detail that she was able to offer.

Narrative, in focussing on the relation between the sequence of events, can move the focus away from emotionally intense experiences that they may feel uncomfortable discussing. They can then build a context around such experiences or perhaps even change the focus, directing emphasis to another event. All of the participants experienced satisfaction when reflecting on their timelines in the second meeting. This is perhaps because they felt that the narratives built a coherence and legitimacy around their experiences, as a specific object external to them through which they could observe their presence in the world. 'Objectifying' their experiences in this way may also have helped them to feel a sense of control over their experiences.

A further benefit for work with young people, is the degree to which narrative encourages reflection on their past selves, beyond their current situation. As a matter of perspective-taking, they are encouraged to explain their past to a third-party and, as a result, to take that third-party perspective on their past and, as such, see themselves as others might see them. This does not favour a 'fixed' view of their own personality and identity as they will often reflect on considerable changes which they have undergone.

Further, narratives encourage an *explaining* rather than a *blaming* mode of understanding due to the fact that a storyteller has to locate an event or

experience in the course of a succession of events and, as such, look at causes and effects. The narratives in this study show that apportioning of responsibility certainly emerged as a salient feature. However, this was also accompanied by descriptions of incidents, attempting to understand the perspectives of others and so on, rather than straightforward blaming. As such, the participants were able to *give reasons why* they might blame someone else rather than simply resort to a label. Similarly, the participants' description of themselves was nuanced, arguably because they did not have to find words to describe themselves in absolute terms, but could describe aspects of themselves that emerged in response to specific events and experiences. This encouraged reference to influences which might have acted upon them as agents, and as such encouraged them to understand themselves in terms of a developing interaction with the world.

With regard to social withdrawal, this study should encourage EPs to understand social interaction itself as a dynamic process which is not simply the unfolding of personal, temperamental traits, but as profoundly affected by contingent, external events that continue well beyond early childhood. In the corner of the discipline of Psychology in which EPs work and practice, this is already well-appreciated by many. However tendencies within the discipline as a whole suggest that the understanding of personality and behaviour through fixed traits is becoming more deeply embedded. Psychological research on an unprecedented scale (with potential datasets of billions of people) is being undertaken privately by 'tech' companies such as Facebook who interpret the behaviour of their users in terms of the Five Factor Model of personality (Zuboff, 2019). It is likely that research on this scale will have a profound influence on the future of the discipline. It is important therefore that EPs are able to retain a focus on the dynamic interaction between young people and the world they inhabit.

More particularly, this study suggests that the social orientation of young people should be viewed in terms of the way in which they feel their developing self can be accommodated within their existing social world. When this is not available, it will be important to identify the point at which a dilemma formed in their mind

between continuing social interaction and withdrawal. Events which appeared to be significant triggers were identified as 'Catalytic Events'. Particular attention should be given to the way in which they feel that they are recognised by others in the unique social context of the classroom. The forms of creative expression available to them should be considered, as well as how that is recognised and validated in the context of school. The degree to which they are able to engage in such forms of expression with others will also be an important area to consider.

Finally, the strengths of the participants as communicated in their narratives should also be recognised. Participants 1 and 2 felt ownership of their transition away from withdrawal and this will be important to consider when helping young people in this position. For all of the participants, feeling listened to, having control over their lives and finding a way to develop an interpretation of their experiences which reflects their emerging sense of self was vitally important.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, the findings and analysis of the study have been related to the existing literature on social withdrawal. While some aspects overlapped, this study took a fundamentally different approach in seeking the experiences of young people through narratives. The importance of contingent events on the course of their lives and their developing interpretation of their selves through time were important aspects of this study that are not examined in enough detail in the literature. The emerging literature on *hikikomori* has developed in this direction and insights could be gained from a bridge between this field of research and that of social withdrawal. The participants experienced the construction of the narratives positively and responded through nuanced and contextualised descriptions of past experiences. EPs should heed the advantages conferred by the narrative approach in developing a capacity for change. They should also have an awareness of the importance of contingent events past early childhood and the importance for young people to be able to have ownership of their story when attempting to come out of a period of withdrawal.

Chapter 6: Personal reflection/'Narrative Form'

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will be writing in the first-person as part of a personal reflection on the influence of my own assumptions and prejudices on this study. Beyond this, I will reflect on the use of certain narrative techniques – referred to as 'Narrative Form' in the previous chapter – by the participants and their effect on me as the primary audience for their narratives in the context of the interviews that we conducted. This is informed by a discussion within the OOO literature about metaphor and aesthetic modes of gaining knowledge of an object. In this discussion, metaphor (and by extension other narrative techniques) exerts its effect by the audience taking on themselves the different properties of the different objects that are being associated, and in that way gaining knowledge of aspects of the objects that would otherwise remain unknown. I describe how several narrative techniques were used to achieve that effect on me in the interview context: irony, absurdity, direct speech and foreshadowing.

6.2 My assumptions and prejudices

When interpreting the narratives of others, it is important to reflect and make explicit the assumptions and prejudices that one brings to such an interpretation. In the field of hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer discussed 'prejudice' not as a negative bias towards someone or something, as it features in common usage, but literally as a kind of 'pre-judgement'. Such pre-judgements are inevitably present when we come to interpret a text or narrative. An important consideration then is, firstly, to be as aware as possible of one's 'prejudices' and, secondly, to consider the product of one's interpretation as inevitably coloured by these prejudices. However, while such prejudices are the starting point for one's interpretation, they are remoulded as they come in to contact with the text or narrative. As both prejudices and the text/narrative, Gadamer referred to the process of interpretation as the 'fusion of horizons', a

dynamic process in which understanding flows between the interpreter and the text/narrative as part of the 'hermeneutic circle' (Gadamer, 2013).

My prejudices concerning social withdrawal are rooted in my own experiences of social interaction in the school context and, more especially, when I was in the age range of the participants of this study. I found some overlaps between the experiences of the participants and my own experiences. These included:

- Moving home, away from easy contact with school friends, when I was 6.
- A period of illness with whooping cough when 7, after which I found it hard to return to school.
- Not knowing anyone when starting Secondary school and finding it difficult to make friends in my first months there.
- An intense interest in subjects that would be replaced after some years by another one, while the previous one is forgotten (superheroes, football, video games, music).

At the outset of the project, I imagined that I might identify with some aspects of the experience of the participants. It is likely that I was sensitized to these aspects of their experience due to my own experience. This identification can be dangerous as the project requires the foregrounding of the experiences of the participants over those of the researcher. In order to manage my own prejudices as I moved through the project, I realised that I had to be aware of the degree to which I was considering the participants, through their narratives, as 'heroes' or 'victims' as this would signify a degree of identification with their fate. Nonetheless, I felt it would be distortion of the narratives if their description of themselves in such terms were left out. The purpose of alerting myself to this was simply to make explicit that I was emotionally connected to the experience as a result of my past experiences.

A further necessary step was to highlight important aspects of difference between my experience and those of the participants. My experience dates from the pre-internet and social media era in the 1980s and 1990s, in a semi-

rural, ethnically and culturally homogenous environment in Northern Ireland. Although I had a small group of friends, I wasn't as popular as I would have liked. Nonetheless, my time at school went smoothly and without much disruption. All of the participants grew up by contrast in very different circumstances, which I needed to keep in mind if I ever encountered a feeling of identification.

In summary, I needed to reflect on aspects of my past that influenced my assumptions and prejudices concerning the narratives of the participants. I found that there were aspects of my past that predisposed me to identify with the participants' experiences, or at least to interpret them in light of my own. In order to address this, I needed to be wary of when I seemed to be interpreting characters in their narratives as 'heroes' or 'villains', as this might be a sign of emotional identification. Nonetheless, I needed to recognise that the participants may have been shaping their narratives in this way through their own choice.

6.3 'Narrative Form'

In the previous chapter, the participants' narratives were analysed according to a distinction between 'Narrative Content' and 'Narrative Form'. In this chapter, aspects of 'Narrative Form' are examined in terms of how they operated on me as the primary audience for the participants' narratives.

6.3.1 Irony

The philosopher Richard Rorty described 'ironists' as people who reject 'final vocabularies' which might explain themselves and their relation to the world, seeing that there are always other ways that one might engage with the world. The place we are in at any moment reflects the contingencies of events beyond our control, such as the country or the religion we may have been born in to. He continues to describe an 'ironist' as:

never quite able to take themselves seriously because always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are always subject to change, always aware of the fragility and contingency of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves (Rorty, 1993: 73-4).

This form of irony seemed to be present in particular in the narrative of Participant 1. Paralinguistic transcription of the interview recorded many instances of laughter as she discussed many emotionally intense subjects in her recent past. One approach might be to dismiss such laughter as an idiosyncrasy, that emerged in the particular circumstances of the interview. However, if the laughter is seen as serving some purpose, it has an interesting effect on the narratives. For instance, Participant 1 discusses the incident where the police came to her home concerning her non-attendance:

(Laughs) Yeah, if the police hadn't come, I probably would still be too scared to go out now. (Laughs) (P1: 156-7).

The ironic effect is achieved here through the distance between her current self and her past self. The emotions felt by her past self – 'scared' – are not shared by her current self, who is laughing.

When the researcher mentioned that they were laughing about issues that must have been serious to her at the time, she said:

(Laughs) I know. I'm laughing about it now. But when I was going through it, I was *not* laughing. (Laughs) (P1: 448-9).

Well, it's all right, because I'm at the point where I can look back at that day and laugh about it. (Laughs) (P1: 542-3).

Laughter, created a distance between the past and the present, her past and current selves, and gave her a kind of power to redescribe events in a different mode to the one in which she experienced them. This recalls Rorty's description of the ironist as not able to take themselves seriously, aware that their 'final vocabulary' and thus their selves, are subject to change.

In OOO terms, Harman argued that, in a metaphor, the audience takes upon themselves the properties associated between two objects, bringing them together in themselves and allowing for an aesthetic form of understanding, giving the example of 'the wine-dark sea' which the reader of a poem must create through combining in themselves the distinct properties of wine and the sea (Harman, 2017). In the example of the use of irony just given, Participant 1 invites the researcher to look at her past self as if it was distinct from her current self. In joining with her laughter, the researcher affirms the separateness of the selves as invited by Participant 1 through the use of the technique of irony, meaning that she has successfully brought her past experience within an aesthetic form of control.

6.3.2 Absurdity

Absurdity is understood here in terms of a description of events in which a character works towards a purpose, which the narrative reveals to be futile. This has been given narrative form in the past through the myth of Sisyphus, rolling a boulder up a hill only for it to roll back and his labour to continue endlessly (Aronson, 2017). Where the story-teller is relating their own experience, they show to ways in which they relate to the events, through the character's commitment in the context of the narrative itself, and the story-teller's recognition of its futility, sometimes occasioning laughter. Participant 3 provided examples of absurdity in distinction from Participant 1's of irony. He told the following story:

So I'm.. so I was on the computer. I wanted to click on an icon but I couldn't find it. Yeah, so I asked the teacher, 'Could you, like, show me where the icon is?' The teacher was like, '*it's there*', without pointing at the icon. She's just sitting like this saying, '*It's there, it's there*'. (Laughs)

How can you like.. like if I.. if you're, if you're like.. let's say that you were asking me for directions. Let's say 'Where's Dalston?' And I say 'It's there, it's there', would you know what I'm talking about? (Laughs)

In this example, Participant 3 maintains an identification with his previous self. However, he is able to take a different relation to the event itself through a

distancing technique which, again, had a comic effect. He does this through involving the researcher in an equivalent scenario which would instil in them feelings of confusion. As both events, one non-fictional and one fictional, are experienced at a distance, Participant 3 and the researcher can adopt the same orientation to them as absurd. This is achieved through an aesthetic reordering of his own experience which relies on invoking an experience in an audience - in this case the researcher – to achieve its effect.

6.3.3. Direct speech

Direct speech was used by all of the participants as a way of re-creating certain situations that they were describing. For example Participant 4 described his reluctance to take part in drama class in this way:

I don't want to be feel like I'm a pushover, like they say (...) like, I'll say.. it will go back and forth (...) and I'll feel like, 'okay, well I guess I have to do it'. I don't want anything like that, so I'll say, 'I'm not going to do it because of this reason and I feel this way because of this..' so it's like that (P4: 303-5).

Participant 2 described peers noticing that he had 'low energy':

So there would have been.. some people would say really low energy, but after.. yeah. But only after I got all my energy, as you could say, only were.. 'Oh, you used to be like, yeah, low energy' and stuff like that (P2: 1269-71).

The effect of this resort to direct speech is to move away from the interpretation that they are giving in retrospect, to allow the audience to experience more directly the situation that they experienced and to make their judgement accordingly. In the case of Participant 4, this meant defending his decision not to take part and showing how reasonable he was being in explaining this to the teacher, with the audience taking the perspective of the teacher. For Participant 2, this involved mimicking the comments made by peers so that the audience take his perspective. This induces in the audience the feeling that he may have had in hearing such comments. Direct speech as a result has the effect of placing the audience more directly in the scenarios that the participants

describe. As the audience experience the scenario more directly, they experience its emotional impact more directly, confirming the account of the narrator.

6.3.4 Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is the introduction in the narrative of an event which, in retrospect seems to have set the scene for a more significant event with greater dramatic impact. This can create a mood of expectation or unease, particularly with audiences familiar with the device and who understand that it may offer a clue to a development further in the story. In the narratives, the introduction of an event, the full significance of which could only be understood in light of future events, was considered to be a case of 'foreshadowing'.

Participant 2 provided an example of this:

It was obviously.. I didn't really think about, you know, things. Haven't really.. what's the word I'm looking for? (...) You weren't really worried about anything. You were kind of like carefree (P2: 171-3).

By mentioning 'you know, things', the audience is ready to place this event in contrast with later events. Participant 2 is very deliberately creating a contrast between the emotional experience of an early time in childhood and later, more worrying events. As it was clear that discussion of social withdrawal would follow, this has a nostalgic and melancholy effect. It also creates a tension, in that the audience seeks an explanation of the change that is alluded to in the foreshadowing event.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter provided a background account of the prejudices and assumptions that the researcher brought to the project and the way in which they were addressed. It then discussed how the researcher, as the primary audience, was involved in a series of aesthetic experiences created through the use of narrative techniques as deployed by the participants. The narratives at

particular times interacted with the researcher's assumptions and prejudices rooted in the past, and the particular techniques were effective at creating a form of understanding appropriate to their experience. This further shows how deeply narrative techniques are embedded in the ways in which people relate their experiences, when invited. It confirms the need for methodologies which are sensitive to the narrative form of experience, as well as the variety of narrative forms in to which it can be placed by those who choose to tell their stories.

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Zhang, X. (2015). The differential role of symptoms of anxiety and social withdrawal in Chinese children's dependency on their teachers during the transition to nursery care. *Early Education and Development*, 26(7), 956–969. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2014.915675>

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Papers that remained after exclusion criteria applied

Author(s)	Article Title	Year
Barzeva, S. A., Meeus, W. H. J., & Oldehinkel, A. J.	Social Withdrawal in Adolescence and Early Adulthood: Measurement Issues, Normative Development, and Distinct Trajectories.	2019
Cheah, C. S. L., & Xu, Y.	In the eyes of the beholder: Understanding subtypes of social withdrawal among young Chinese children.	2015
Chen, B.-B., & Santo, J. B.	Mother–child attachment and social withdrawal in urban Chinese children.	2016
Chen, X.	Culture, types of social withdrawal, and children’s beliefs: An integrative perspective.	2015
Choi, O., Choi, J., & Kim, J.	A longitudinal study of the effects of negative parental child-rearing attitudes and positive peer relationships on social withdrawal during adolescence: An application of a multivariate latent growth model.	2019
Cole, C. E., Zapp, D. J., Fetting, N. B., & Pérez-Edgar, K.	Impact of attention biases to threat and effortful control on individual variations in negative affect and social withdrawal in very young children.	2016
Coplan, R. J., Liu, J., Ooi, L. L., Chen, X., Li, D., & Ding, X.	A Person-Oriented Analysis of Social Withdrawal in Chinese Children.	2016
Coplan, R. J., Ooi, L. L., Xiao, B., & Rose-Krasnor, L.	Assessment and implications of social withdrawal in early childhood: A first look at social avoidance.	2018

Ding, X., Coplan, R. J., Sang, B., Liu, J., Pan, T., & Cheng, C.	Starting small: Revisiting young children's perceptions of social withdrawal in China.	2015
Ding, X., Coplan, R. J., Sang, B., Liu, J., Pan, T., & Cheng, C.	Young Chinese children's beliefs about the implications of subtypes of social withdrawal: A first look at social avoidance.	2015
Eggum-Wilkens, N. D., Zhang, L., & An, D.	An exploratory study of Eastern Ugandan adolescents' descriptions of social withdrawal.	2018
Gazelle, H., & Rubin, K. H.	Social withdrawal and anxiety in childhood and adolescence: Interaction between individual tendencies and interpersonal learning mechanisms in development: Introduction to the special issue.	2019
Kljakovic, M., & Kelly, A.	Working with school-refusing young people in Tower Hamlets, London.	2019
Kopala-Sibley, D. C., & Klein, D. N.	Distinguishing types of social withdrawal in children: Internalizing and externalizing outcomes of conflicted shyness versus social disinterest across childhood.	2017
Li, Y., Zhu, J.-J., Coplan, R. J., Gao, Z.-Q., Xu, P., Li, L., & Zhang, H.	Assessment and Implications of Social Withdrawal Subtypes in Young Chinese Children: The Chinese Version of the Child Social Preference Scale.	2016
Morgan, J. K., Shaw, D. S., & Forbes, E. E.	Fearfulness moderates the link between childhood social withdrawal and adolescent reward response.	2015
Smith, K., Barstead, M., & Rubin, K.	Neuroticism and Conscientiousness as Moderators of the Relation Between Social Withdrawal and Internalizing Problems in Adolescence.	2017

Watling, D.	Children's judgements of social withdrawal behaviours.	2015
Zhang, X.	The differential role of symptoms of anxiety and social withdrawal in Chinese children's dependency on their teachers during the transition to nursery care.	2015

Appendix 2 – Literature added after ‘snowballing’

Author(s)	Title	Year
Asendorpf, J. B.	Beyond Social Withdrawal: Shyness, Unsociability and Peer Avoidance.	1990
Asendorpf, J. B., & Meier, G. H.	Personality Effects on Children’s Speech in Everyday Life: Sociability-Mediated Exposure and Shyness-Mediated Reactivity to Social Situations.	1993
Barry, C. M. N., Nelson, L. J., & Christofferson, J. L.	Asocial and afraid: An examination of shyness and anxiety in emerging adulthood.	2013
Barzeva, S. A., Meeus, W. H. J., & Oldehinkel, A. J.	Social Withdrawal in Adolescence and Early Adulthood: Measurement Issues, Normative Development, and Distinct Trajectories.	2018
Booth-LaForce, C., & Oxford, M. L.	Trajectories of Social Withdrawal From Grades 1 to 6: Prediction From Early Parenting, Attachment, and Temperament.	2008
Bowker, J. C., Bowker, M. H., Santo, J. B., Ojo, A. A., Etkin, R. G., & Raja	Severe Social Withdrawal: Cultural Variation in Past Hikikomori Experiences of University Students in Nigeria, Singapore, and the United States.	2019
Bowker, J. C., & Raja, R.	Social withdrawal subtypes during early adolescence in India.	2011
Bowlby, J.	<i>Attachment and Loss Volume 1: Attachment. Attachment and Loss (Second).</i>	1982
Bukowski, W. M., & Véronneau, M.-H.	Studying Withdrawal and Isolation in the Peer Group: Historical Advances in Concepts and Measures.	2014

Buss, A.H. & Plomin, R.	<i>Temperament: Early Developing Personality Traits.</i>	1984
Buss, K. A., Malmstadt Schumacher, J. R., Dolski, I., Kalin, N. H., Goldsmith, H. H., & Davidson, R. J.	Right frontal brain activity, cortisol, and withdrawal behavior in 6-month-old infants.	2003
Calkins, S. D., Fox, N. A., & Marshall, T. R.	Behavioral and physiological antecedents of inhibited and uninhibited behavior.	1996
Caspi, A., Elder, G. H., & Bem, D. J.	Moving away from the world: Life-course patterns of shy children.	1988
Cassidy, J., & Kobak, R. R.	Avoidance and its relationship with other defensive processes.	1988
Cheah, C. S. L., & Xu, Y.	In the eyes of the beholder: Understanding subtypes of social withdrawal among young Chinese children.	2015
Cheek, J. M., & Buss, A. H.	Shyness and Sociability.	1981
Chen, B.-B., & Santo, J. B.	Mother–child attachment and social withdrawal in urban Chinese children.	2016
Chen, X.	Culture, types of social withdrawal, and children’s beliefs: An integrative perspective.	2015
Chess, S., Thomas, A., & Birch, H.	Characteristics of the individual child’s behavioral responses to the environment.	1959
Coplan, R. J.	Assessing nonsocial play in early childhood: Conceptual and methodological approaches.	2000
Coplan, R. J., Liu, J., Ooi, L. L., Chen, X., Li, D., & Ding, X.	A Person-Oriented Analysis of Social Withdrawal in Chinese Children.	2016

Coplan, R. J., Ooi, L. L., Xiao, B., & Rose-Krasnor, L.	Assessment and implications of social withdrawal in early childhood: A first look at social avoidance.	2018
Coplan, R. J., Prakash, K., O'Neil, K., & Armer, M.	Do You "Want" to Play? Distinguishing Between Conflicted Shyness and Social Disinterest in Early Childhood.	2004
Coplan, R. J., Rose-Krasnor, L., Weeks, M., Kingsbury, A., Kingsbury, M., & Bullock, A.	Alone is a crowd: Social motivations, social withdrawal, and socioemotional functioning in later childhood.	2013
Coplan, R. J., & Rubin, K. H.	Social withdrawal and shyness in childhood: History, theories, definitions, and assessments.	2010
Coplan, R. J., Rubin, K. H., Fox, N. A., Calkins, S. D., Shannon, L., & Being, S.	Being alone, playing alone and acting alone: Distinguishing among reticence, and passive- and active-solitude in young children.	1994
Coplan, R. J., & Weeks, M.	Unsociability and the preference for solitude in childhood.	2010
Ding, X., Coplan, R.J., Sang, B., Deng, X., Ooi, L., Li, D & Sang, B.	Sad, Scared, or Rejected? A Short-Term Longitudinal Study of the Predictors of Social Avoidance in Chinese Children.	2019
Ding, X., Coplan, R. J., Sang, B., Liu, J., Pan, T., & Cheng, C.	Young Chinese children's beliefs about the implications of subtypes of social withdrawal: A first look at social avoidance.	2015
Eggum-Wilkens, N. D., Zhang, L., & An, D.	An exploratory study of Eastern Ugandan adolescents' descriptions of social withdrawal.	2018
Fox, N. A., Henderson, H. A., Marshall, P. J., Nichols, K. E., & Ghera, M. M.	Behavioral Inhibition: Linking Biology and Behavior within a Developmental Framework	2004

Gazelle, H.	Behavioral Profiles of Anxious Solitary Children and Heterogeneity in Peer Relations.	2008
Goosens, L.	Affinity for Aloneness in Adolescence and Preference for Solitude in Childhood.	2014
Harrist, A. W., Zaia, A. F., Bates, J. E., Dodge, K. A., & Pettit, G. S.	Harrist, A. W., Zaia, A. F., Bates, J. E., Dodge, K. A., & Pettit, G. S.	1997
Henderson, H. A., Fox, N. A., & Rubin, K. H.	Temperamental contributions to social behavior: The moderating roles of frontal EEG asymmetry and gender.	2001
Henderson, H. A., Marshall, P. J., Fox, N. A., & Rubin, K. H.	Psychophysiological and Behavioral Evidence for Varying Forms and Functions of Nonsocial Behavior in Preschoolers.	2004
Hobson, J.	<i>The Cradle of Thought: Exploring the Origins of Thinking.</i>	2002
Jennings, K. D.	People versus object orientation, social behavior, and intellectual abilities in children.	1975
Jones, K. M., Schulkin, J., & Schmidt, L. A.	Shyness: Subtypes, Psychosocial Correlates, and Treatment Interventions.	2014
Kagan, J.	Temperament and the Reactions to Unfamiliarity.	1997
Kanner, L.	Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact.	1943
Kasari, C. & Sterling, L.	Loneliness and Social Isolation in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders.	2014
Kljakovic, M., & Kelly, A.	Working with school-refusing young people in Tower Hamlets, London.	2019
Klohnen, E. C., & Bera, S.	Behavioral and Experiential Patterns of Avoidantly and Securely Attached Women Across Adulthood: A 31-Year Longitudinal Perspective.	1988

Kopala-Sibley, D. C., & Klein, D. N.	Distinguishing types of social withdrawal in children: Internalizing and externalizing outcomes of conflicted shyness versus social disinterest across childhood.	2017
Krieg, A. & Dickie, J.	Attachment and hikikomori: A psychosocial developmental model.	2013
Kwapil, Thomas, R., Silvia, P. J., & Barrantes-Vidal, N.	Social Anhedonia and Solitude.	2014
Larose, S., & Bernier, A.	Social support processes: Mediators of attachment state of mind and adjustment in late adolescence.	2001
Larson, R. W.	The solitary side of life: An examination of the time people spend alone from childhood to old age.	1990
Larson, R. W.	The emergence of solitude as a constructive domain of experience in early adolescence.	1997
Li, Y., Zhu, J. J., Coplan, R. J., Gao, Z. Q., Xu, P., Li, L., & Zhang, H.	Assessment and Implications of Social Withdrawal Subtypes in Young Chinese Children: The Chinese Version of the Child Social Preference Scale.	2016
McManis, M. H., Kagan, J., Snidman, N. C., & Woodward, S. A.	EEG asymmetry, power, and temperament in children.	2002
Mickelson, K. D., Kessler, R. C., & Shaver, P. R.	Adult attachment in a nationally representative sample.	1997
Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R.	Attachment Strategies in Adulthood: Structure, Dynamics and Change.	2007
Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R.	An Attachment Perspective on Loneliness.	2014

Mitchell, J. V.	The factor analysis of a “guess who” questionnaire designed to identify significant behavior patterns in children.	1956
Morgan, J. K., Shaw, D. S., & Forbes, E. E.	Fearfulness moderates the link between childhood social withdrawal and adolescent reward response.	2015
Mundy, P., & Newell, L.	Attention, Joint Attention, and Social Cognition.	2013
Nelson, L. J.	Going it alone: Comparing subtypes of withdrawal on indices of adjustment and maladjustment in emerging adulthood.	2013
Oh, W., Rubin, K. H., Bowker, J. C., Booth-LaForce, C., Rose-Krasnor, L., & Laursen, B.	Trajectories of social withdrawal from middle childhood to early adolescence.	2008
Okamoto, Y.	A comparative study of homelessness in the United Kingdom and Japan.	2007
Özdemir, S. B., Cheah, C. S. L., & Coplan, R. J.	Conceptualization and assessment of multiple forms of social withdrawal in Turkey.	2015
Rubin, K. H.	Nonsocial Play in Preschoolers: Necessarily Evil?	1982
Rubin, K. H.	The Waterloo Longitudinal Project: Correlates and consequences of social withdrawal from childhood to adolescence.	1993
Rubin, K. H.	On Solitude, Withdrawal, and Social Isolation.	2014
Rubin, K. H., & Asendorpf, J. B.	Social Withdrawal, Inhibition and Shyness in Childhood.	1993
Rubin, K. H., & Coplan, R. J.	Paying Attention to and Not Neglecting Social Withdrawal and Social Isolation.	2005

Rubin, K. H., Coplan, R. J., & Bowker, J. C.	Social Withdrawal in Childhood.	2009
Rubin, K. H., Coplan, R. J., Bowker, J. C., & Menzer, M.	Social Withdrawal and Shyness.	2011
Rubin, K. H., Coplan, R. J., Fox, N. A., & Calkins, S. D.	Emotionality, emotion regulation, and preschoolers' social adaptation.	1995
Rubin, K. H., & Mills, R. S. L.	The Many Faces of Social Isolation in Childhood.	1988
Rubinstein, C., & Shaver, P.	The Experience of Loneliness.	1982
Rubinstein, E.	Emplotting Hikikomori: Japanese Parents' Narratives of Social Withdrawal.	2016
Saito, T.	<i>Hikikomori: Adolescence without End.</i>	2013
Schmidt, L. A.	Frontal brain electrical activity in shyness and sociability.	1999
Schmidt, L. A., & Fox, N. A.	Conceptual, biological, and behavioral distinctions among different categories of shy children.	1999
Schmidt, L. A., & Miskovic, V.	Shyness and the Electrical Activity of the Brain: On the Interplay between Theory and Method.	2014
Shaver, P., & Hazan, C.	Being lonely, falling in love: Perspectives from attachment theory.	1987
Smith, K. A., Barstead, M. G., & Rubin, K. H.	Neuroticism and Conscientiousness as Moderators of the Relation Between Social Withdrawal and Internalizing Problems in Adolescence.	2017
Stevenson-Hinde, J., & Glover, A.	Shy boys and girls: a new look.	1996

Tajan, N.	Japanese post-modern social renouncers: An exploratory study of the narratives of Hikikomori subjects.	2015
Unruh, K. E., Sasson, N. J., Shafer, R. L., Whitten, A., Miller, S. J., Turner-Brown, L., & Bodfish, J. W.	Social orienting and attention is influenced by the presence of competing nonsocial information in adolescents with autism.	2016
Vanhalst, J., Soenens, B., Luyckx, K., Van Petegem, S., Weeks, M. S., & Asher, S. R.	Why do the lonely stay lonely? Chronically lonely adolescents' attributions and emotions in situations of social inclusion and exclusion.	2015
Vellut, N.	Retrait Social et Usages du Numérique [Social Withdrawal and the Usages of the Digital].	2015
Watling, D.	Children's judgements of social withdrawal behaviours.	2015
Wesselmann, E., Williams, K., Ren, D., & Hales, A.	Ostracism and Solitude.	2014
Weiss, R.	Loneliness: the experience of emotional and social isolation.	1973
Wildschut, T., Sedikides, C., Routledge, C., Arndt, J., & Cordaro, F	Nostalgia as a Repository of Social Connectedness: The Role of Attachment-Related Avoidance.	2010
Winnicott, D.	The Capacity to be Alone.	1958
Zhang, X.	The differential role of symptoms of anxiety and social withdrawal in Chinese children's dependency on their teachers during the transition to nursery care.	2015

Appendix 3 – Overview of the papers identified in Appendix 1.

Author(s)	N=	Age range (years)	Methodology
Barzeva, S. A., Meeus, W. H. J., & Oldehinkel, A. J. (2018)	1917	16-25	Longitudinal; Self-Report
Cheah, C. S. L., & Xu, Y. (2015)	N/A	N/A	Commentary
Chen, B.-B., & Santo, J. B. (2016)	142	6-10	Longitudinal; Self-Report, Self-Rating, Peer nomination
Chen, X. (2015).	1061	11-15	Longitudinal; Peer assessment, Peer nomination
Choi, O., Choi, J., & Kim, J. (2019).	2031	13-17	Longitudinal; Self-Report
Cole, C. E., Zapp, D. J., Fetting, N. B., & Pérez-Edgar, K. (2016)	47	4-7	Task performance; Parental report
Coplan, R. J., Liu, J., Ooi, L. L., Chen, X., Li, D., & Ding, X. (2016)	1344	10-12	Self-report; Teacher ratings; Peer nominations
Coplan, R. J., Ooi, L. L., Xiao, B., & Rose-Krasnor, L. (2018)	564	4-7	Parental report; Teacher report
Ding, X., Coplan, R. J., Sang, B., Liu, J.,	N/A	N/A	Reply to Commentary

Pan, T., & Cheng, C. (2015a)			
Ding, X., Coplan, R. J., Sang, B., Liu, J., Pan, T., & Cheng, C. (2015b)	133	5-7	Quantitative analysis of structured interviews
Eggum-Wilkens, N. D., Zhang, L., & An, D. (2018)	219	11-17	Open-ended questionnaire
Gazelle, H., & Rubin, K. H. (2019)	N/A	N/A	Introduction to special edition
Kljakovic, M., & Kelly, A. (2019)	47	16 (mean age)	Qualitative interviews with adult professionals known to young people; Thematic analysis
Kopala-Sibley, D. C., & Klein, D. N. (2017)	493	3-9	Longitudinal; Parental report
Li, Y., Zhu, J.-J., Coplan, R. J., Gao, Z.-Q., Xu, P., Li, L., & Zhang, H. (2016)	350	3-5	Parental report
Morgan, J. K., Shaw, D. S., & Forbes, E. E. (2015)	129	5-20	Parental report; Peer nomination; adult report; fMRI scan; Structured clinical interviews
Smith, K., Barstead, M., & Rubin, K. (2017)	103	13-15	Short-term longitudinal; Self-report; Peer report
Watling, D. (2015)	N/A	N/A	Commentary
Zhang, X. (2015)	106	2-5	Short-term longitudinal; Teacher report

Appendix 4 – Literature organised according to theme and age groups

Historical, Conceptual and Theoretical Works (including commentaries and responses to commentaries)

Author(s)	Title	Year
Asendorpf, J. B.	Beyond Social Withdrawal: Shyness, Unsociability and Peer Avoidance.	1990
Bowlby, J.	<i>Attachment and Loss Volume 1: Attachment. Attachment and Loss (Second).</i>	1982
Bukowski, W. M., & Véronneau, M.-H.	Studying Withdrawal and Isolation in the Peer Group: Historical Advances in Concepts and Measures.	2014
Cassidy, J., & Kobak, R. R.	Avoidance and its relationship with other defensive processes.	1988
Cheah, C. S. L., & Xu, Y.	In the eyes of the beholder: Understanding subtypes of social withdrawal among young Chinese children.	2015
Chen, X.	Culture, types of social withdrawal, and children's beliefs: An integrative perspective.	2015
Chess, S., Thomas, A., & Birch, H.	Characteristics of the individual child's behavioral responses to the environment.	1959
Coplan, R. J.	Assessing nonsocial play in early childhood: Conceptual and methodological approaches.	2000
Coplan, R. J., & Rubin, K. H.	Social withdrawal and shyness in childhood: History, theories, definitions, and assessments.	2010
Coplan, R. J., & Weeks, M.	Unsociability and the preference for solitude in childhood.	2010
Fox, N. A., Henderson, H. A., Marshall, P. J.,	Behavioral Inhibition: Linking Biology and Behavior within a Developmental Framework.	2004

Nichols, K. E., & Ghera, M. M.		
Goosens, L.	Affinity for Aloneness in Adolescence and Preference for Solitude in Childhood.	2014
Hobson, J.	The Cradle of Thought: Exploring the Origins of Thinking.	2002
Jennings, K. D.	People versus object orientation, social behavior, and intellectual abilities in children.	1975
Jones, K. M., Schulkin, J., & Schmidt, L. A.	Shyness: Subtypes, Psychosocial Correlates, and Treatment Interventions.	2014
Kanner, L.	Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact.	1943
Kwapil, Thomas, R., Silvia, P. J., & Barrantes-Vidal, N.	Social Anhedonia and Solitude.	2014
Larson, R. W.	The solitary side of life: An examination of the time people spend alone from childhood to old age.	1990
Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R.	Attachment Strategies in Adulthood: Structure, Dynamics and Change.	2007
Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R.	An Attachment Perspective on Loneliness.	2014
Rubin, K. H.	Nonsocial Play in Preschoolers: Necessarily Evil?	1982
Rubin, K. H.	The Waterloo Longitudinal Project: Correlates and consequences of social withdrawal from childhood to adolescence.	1993
Rubin, K. H.	On Solitude, Withdrawal, and Social Isolation.	2014
Rubin, K. H., & Asendorpf, J. B.	Social Withdrawal, Inhibition and Shyness in Childhood.	1993

Rubin, K. H., & Coplan, R. J.	Paying Attention to and Not Neglecting Social Withdrawal and Social Isolation.	2005
Rubin, K. H., Coplan, R. J., & Bowker, J. C.	Social Withdrawal in Childhood.	2009
Rubin, K. H., Coplan, R. J., Bowker, J. C., & Menzer, M.	Social Withdrawal and Shyness.	2011
Rubin, K. H., Coplan, R. J., Fox, N. A., & Calkins, S. D.	Emotionality, emotion regulation, and preschoolers' social adaptation.	1995
Rubin, K. H., & Mills, R. S. L.	The Many Faces of Social Isolation in Childhood.	1988
Schmidt, L. A., & Fox, N. A.	Conceptual, biological, and behavioral distinctions among different categories of shy children.	1999
Schmidt, L. A., & Miskovic, V.	Shyness and the Electrical Activity of the Brain: On the Interplay between Theory and Method.	2014
Shaver, P., & Hazan, C.	Being lonely, falling in love: Perspectives from attachment theory.	1987
Watling, D.	Children's judgements of social withdrawal behaviours.	2015
Weiss, R.	Loneliness: the experience of emotional and social isolation.	1973
Winnicott, D.	The Capacity to be Alone.	1958

Work examining pre-school children (0-5)

Asendorpf, J. B., & Meier, G. H.	Personality Effects on Children's Speech in Everyday Life: Sociability-Mediated Exposure and Shyness-Mediated Reactivity to Social Situations.	1993
Buss, K. A., Malmstadt Schumacher, J. R., Dolski, I., Kalin, N. H., Goldsmith, H. H., & Davidson, R. J.	Right frontal brain activity, cortisol, and withdrawal behavior in 6-month-old infants	2003
Calkins, S. D., Fox, N. A., & Marshall, T. R.	Behavioral and physiological antecedents of inhibited and uninhibited behavior.	1996
Chess, S., Thomas, A., & Birch, H.	Characteristics of the individual child's behavioral responses to the environment.	1959
Coplan, R. J.	Assessing nonsocial play in early childhood: Conceptual and methodological approaches.	2000
Coplan, R. J., Ooi, L. L., Xiao, B., & Rose-Krasnor, L.	Assessment and implications of social withdrawal in early childhood: A first look at social avoidance.	2018
Coplan, R. J., Rubin, K. H., Fox, N. A., Calkins, S. D., Shannon, L., & Being, S.	Being alone, playing alone and acting alone: Distinguishing among reticence, and passive- and active-solitude in young children.	1994
Ding, X., Coplan, R. J., Sang, B., Liu, J., Pan, T., & Cheng, C.	Young Chinese children's beliefs about the implications of subtypes of social withdrawal: A first look at social avoidance.	2015
Fox, N. A., Henderson, H. A., Marshall, P. J., Nichols, K. E., & Ghera, S. M.	Behavioral Inhibition: Linking Biology and Behavior within a Developmental Framework.	2004

M. M.		
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Appendix 5 – Original version of 25 item hikikomori questionnaire

Over the last 6 months, how accurately do the following statements describe you?					
	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
1	0	1	2	3	4
2	0	1	2	3	4
3	0	1	2	3	4
4 [†]	0	1	2	3	4
5	0	1	2	3	4
6	0	1	2	3	4
7 [†]	0	1	2	3	4
8	0	1	2	3	4
9	0	1	2	3	4
10 [†]	0	1	2	3	4
11	0	1	2	3	4
12	0	1	2	3	4
13	0	1	2	3	4
14	0	1	2	3	4
15 [†]	0	1	2	3	4
16	0	1	2	3	4
17	0	1	2	3	4
18	0	1	2	3	4
19	0	1	2	3	4
20	0	1	2	3	4
21 [†]	0	1	2	3	4
22	0	1	2	3	4
23	0	1	2	3	4
24	0	1	2	3	4
25 [†]	0	1	2	3	4

The HQ-25 has a theoretical score range of 0-100.
[†]Item was reverse-scored.

(Teo et al., 2018)

Appendix 6 – Demographic information sheet and adapted version of *hikikomori* questionnaire.

Please provide information for the following categories:

Age:

Gender:

Ethnic Group:

Do you have any diagnoses (eg ADHD, Autism)? Yes/No

If Yes, then what are they?

Have you spent time getting away and staying away from people? Yes/No

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I stay away from other people.	0	1	2	3	4
I love meeting new people	0	1	2	3	4
People bother me	0	1	2	3	4
I feel uncomfortable around other people	0	1	2	3	4
I do not like to be seen by others	0	1	2	3	4
It is hard for me to join in on groups	0	1	2	3	4
I enjoy being in social situations	0	1	2	3	4
I avoid talking with other people	0	1	2	3	4

I much prefer to be alone than with others	0	1	2	3	4
--------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---	---

I strongly prefer to be around other people	0	1	2	3	4
---------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---	---

I do not enjoy social interactions.	0	1	2	3	4
----------------------------------------	---	---	---	---	---

Appendix 7 – Material used in group meeting to introduce research project to potential participants

The Stories of our Lives

Fintan McCullagh – Trainee Educational Psychologist

What Stories do you know?

- Fairy Tales – Little Red Riding Hood, Rapunzel, Jack and the Beanstalk.
- Books – Harry Potter, The Lord of the Rings, Dark Materials.
- Films – The Joker, Batman, Avengers.
- TV Shows – Breaking Bad, Teen Wolf, Stranger Things, Black Mirror.
- Games – Fortnite, Red Dead Redemption II, Minecraft.

Why do we like Stories?

- They are exciting. The bike chase scene from ET
<https://youtu.be/Ct6O2nSOMII?t=163>
- We find out that there are other people like us, who have felt the same way as us.
<https://youtu.be/9Es2mdKicNM?t=61>
- We can imagine how good people can win in the end
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uoLh_ZM4VIQ

What makes up a Story?

- Stories are about things that happened.
- They don't have to be about people, but they have to have characters.
- Things have to happen to the characters that are interesting.
- It is interesting when the characters go through changes of some kind.
- What kinds of changes can you think characters have gone through in stories?
- What does it feel like when things change for you?

Appendix 8 – Participant Invitation Letter and Consent Form



PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you agree it is important that you understand what will happen. Please take time to read the rest of this letter.

Who am I?

My name is Fintan McCullagh. I am a student training to be an Educational Psychologist in the School of Psychology at the University of East London and am studying for a Professional Doctorate. The research you have been asked to take part in is part of my studies.

What is the research?

I am conducting research into the stories that young people who have been through social withdrawal in the past tell about that time in their lives.

‘Social withdrawal’ is when someone stops making contact with other people, apart from when they need basic things like food, for example.

My research has been approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that my research follows the standard of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

Why have you been asked to participate?

You have been invited as someone who fits the kind of people I am looking for to help me with my research. I am interested in the stories of young people who have experienced social withdrawal in their lives at some point.

It is important that you know that you will not be judged and will be treated with respect.

You are free to say yes or no to taking part in the research and should not feel under any pressure.

What will your participation involve?

If you agree to take part, you can change your mind at any time. You can tell someone else to tell me if you prefer and that is fine.

The first thing we would do would be to meet with 5 to 7 other young people who have been through the same thing at ELATT. We will meet together to talk about any questions you might want to ask me. I will be asking you to tell me stories about your life, so you can think of the way that you would like to tell your story best.

On another day, we will go to a room at ELATT to meet for an hour to talk about different times in your life and how you felt at those times. I will have some questions ready that

begin 'Can you tell me...', but that is just to get things started. You can talk to me or use drawings or something else if you want to tell your story that way.

Then on another day the group will meet again at ELATT to talk about how we felt about the research. You can tell me, or tell someone to tell me, that you don't want me to write about our conversations for three weeks after our last meeting. I will need to write about our meetings so I will record the sound so that I can listen to them later. I will try to see if there is anything that can be learned from the stories that young people tell that might help others to understand or make things better for others.

Your taking part will be safe and confidential

Your privacy and safety will be respected at all times. I will take a note of your name, age and contact details but I won't share them with anyone else, except if you tell me something that might be a danger to you or someone else. I will get rid of them once I have finished the research, after I send you a copy of what I have written. When I write about our conversations in my research, I won't use your name, so no one will know it is you who is speaking.

I will keep the recordings of our conversations for 2 years, and then I will delete them. I will write down what was said on paper. Your name will not be on this. I will use a different name so that no one will be able to tell that it is you.

What will happen to the information that you provide?

I am going to keep your name and contact details on an SD card which no-one else has access to apart from me and then I will get rid of them when the project is finished. I will keep the recordings on a hard drive for 2 years before deleting them. I will also write down

what you say, but I will change your name on this version and no one will be able to tell who you are.

I will write about the conversations we have and come up with some ideas about the things that you say as a way of getting to know how people feel about the things they have been through and how what you say might help them in the future. Your real name will not be used in this and no one will be able to tell that it is you. I will also show them to someone who will help me with my writing, called my supervisor. I will then show it to people who will decide if I have passed my training, called my examiners. One day, I might put what I write in a journal, which members of the public can read.

What if you want to withdraw?

You might feel like you have changed your mind and don't want to take part any more. That is completely fine and no one will mind about this. You can do this at any time and even three weeks after we have met for the last time. Then I will write about what we talked about, but without telling anyone about your name or anything that could let anyone know that it is you in the research.

Contact Details

If you want to know more or ask any questions, please get in touch with me on this email.

Fintan McCullagh u1513199@uel.ac.uk

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact my research supervisor xxx School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,

Email: xxx@uel.ac.uk

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr xxx, School of
Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Email: xxx@uel.ac.uk)



UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Consent to participate in a research study

What stories do young people tell about their past experience of social withdrawal?

I have read the information sheet about the above research study and have been given a copy to keep. The point of the research has been explained to me, as well as what it would be like to take part in it, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what will happen and the different steps 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 researcher involved in the study will have access to details that will identify me. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

I freely and fully give my consent to take part in this study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without having to say why. I also understand that should I withdraw three weeks after the final meeting, the researcher can still use my data, so long as my name and identity are not made clear.

Participant's Name and Date of Birth (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Participant's Signature

.....

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Researcher's Signature

.....

Parent/Guardian's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS) and Signature

.....

Date:

Appendix 9 – Excerpt of first part of transcript of interview with Participant 1 including analysis

1 Researcher (R): Okay, then So, right. We're going to have a conversation today about social
2 withdrawal. And my question that I am interested in is what stories do young people tell
3 about their experience of social withdrawal? So if I could.. would you be able to tell me
4 what you think social withdrawal means?

5
6 Participant 1 (P1): I think it's isolating yourself from other people, like even the outside
7 world as well.

Commented [fm1]: Definition of social withdrawal.

8
9 R: Okay, great. Thanks for.. sharing your understanding. I think it's important to be clear of
10 where we're talking about the same thing I suppose. (Laughs) So would you say that you've
11 had an experience of social withdrawal? At some point?

12
13 P1: I've had a few small ones.

14
15 R: Okay. Okay. And when did those small ones happen?

16
17 P1: Well, the main one that I remember was when I didn't leave my house for.. I think two
18 and a half weeks.

19
20 R: Two and a half weeks. Okay. Right. So could you tell me what happens just before that?

21
22 P1: It was because my school was having issues with this, like, one teacher and (...) I don't
23 know, he like and he had this thing with me and he would always pick on me in class and be
24 really inappropriate with people.

Commented [fm2]: Catalytic event: lack of control, sense of injustice.

25
26 R: Right, right, so then...

27
28 P1: I started not turning up on days I had this class, but that was too hard to explain why I
29 was absent during this class. So then I just stopped going to school altogether.

Commented [fm3]: Symbiosis: taking control

30
31 R: And so you're in school, and you have this issue, like you said, but the teacher you felt the
32 teacher was picking on you, humiliating you, and then you didn't want to go to school

33
34 P1: / Yeah, I had that lesson twice a week. So, I was missing the first one. But then of course,
35 he would just cause more problems in the second one, so I started missing that lesson as
36 well. And obviously, the teachers find it suspicious. "Why are you not in Mondays and
37 Tuesdays?" (Laughs)

Commented [fm4]: Direct speech: irony.

38
39 R: Okay, and how long did this? Can I ask? What age were you at this time?

40
41 P1: I was 14. This was about two years ago.

42
43 R: And how long did the problem that you had with the teacher? How long did that go on
44 for this sort of feeling that they are humiliating you and you're feeling not good about that?
45 How long was it before you stopped going into school?

46

47 P1: / He knew my face from before. But as soon as I started to go into his lesson, because I
48 picked that subject for GCSE, and he was my teacher for it and (...) / I think the first two
49 lessons were all right. But then the week after it just all started going downhill.

Commented [fn5]: Foreshadowing

50
51 R: And how long did the journey downhill take before you didn't go anywhere?

52
53 P1: Because my school was very strict. It only took about a few weeks before they started
54 saying it's very strange. 'Why are you not in on Monday and Tuesday? Where is your
55 evidence?'

Commented [fn6]: Symbolism: lack of control. Direct speech.

56
57 R: Okay, evidence of what? So then when you were at home, what happened there? What
58 would you do when you were at home?

59
60 P1: I wouldn't really do anything. I wouldn't even go out. It was either just reading a book or
61 using the phone or something like that (...) or sleeping on the worst of the days. (Laughs)

Commented [fn7]: Symbolism: endurance of 'withdrawal' irony.

62
63 R: Yeah. So could I ask you about, like, talking about a typical day, from the morning through
64 to the evening, during this two and a half weeks? Like, what sort of things would you do, in
65 that kind of..? Starting at the morning, and going through to the end of the day?

66
67 P1: I don't really remember.

68
69 R: Okay, so you do remember some of those things like reading books, what else was it
70 using the phone or sleeping?

71
72 P1: Right.

73
74 R: And so did it change at all during the two and a half weeks? Did you change things that
75 you did?

76
77 P1: No, but the longer I didn't go out for the more terrified I became of going out.

Commented [fn8]: Symbolism: lack of control, withdrawal as object.

78
79 R: Okay, um, what did you think? Back then? What did you think would happen if you did go
80 out?

81
82 P1: (...) I would probably have had a lot of issues now (...) if I did then.

83
84 R: You would have a lot of issues if you had gone out.

85
86 P1: No, if I hadn't gone out. Sorry, I didn't understand that. (Laughs)

87
88 R: It was just that you were saying the longer that you were home during this two and a half
89 weeks, my kind of.. what I heard you say was 'I became more terrified going out'.. and what
90 were you terrified of? What was the fear? Do you think? Looking back now, from - it's a
91 different time now - but if you were to put yourself back in yourself then, what was that
92 fear?

93

94 P1: I think it was just like a paranoia growing, I didn't want people to see me, that I even
 95 exist.
 96
 97 R: Okay, so what you're saying is that it was getting more and more, building up, then you
 98 say it lasted two and a half weeks and then it stopped. How did that happen?
 99
 100 P1: Well that's because my school called the police to my house (laughs).. and then the
 101 police came to my house and asked me what was going on. I didn't open the door to them
 102 the first time. So they came back another day. And then I didn't have an excuse. And they
 103 were threatening to find my mum. So I had to go to school.
 104
 105 R: Okay. So when was the day of the week that you knew you would go back to school?
 106
 107 P1: I think I remember going back on the Wednesday.
 108
 109 R: And when the police come to sort of say, look, you have to go?
 110
 111 P1: The day before that.
 112
 113 R: So the Tuesday so right the day after.
 114
 115 P1: / The day after. And even then, I wasn't even in the place for going out. So I ended up
 116 only going to school for an hour at the end of the day.
 117
 118 R: What was that like?
 119
 120 P1: It was horrible. (Laughs) I couldn't concentrate on anything.
 121
 122 R: Okay. So you went for an hour. It was horrible. And then what did you do at the end of
 123 school? Simple question, but where did you go?
 124
 125 P1: I was still really upset, about having to come back like when you haven't seen the
 126 outside world for a long time. It's like, I don't know, I couldn't go home by myself. My
 127 mother had to come and pick me up.
 128
 129 R: And what was it like going to that school for an hour? Was, was there anyone to help
 130 you?
 131
 132 P1: No, I was on my own.
 133
 134 R: Did you go by yourself?
 135
 136 P1: No, my mother took me and then my head of year dropped me off for the last lesson of
 137 the day.
 138
 139 R: And then after school, was your mum waiting for you? And then did you have to call your
 140 mum to go home?

Commented [fm9]: Epiphany

Commented [fm10]: Catalytic event: lack of control

Commented [fm11]: Symbiosis: endurance of 'withdrawal' despite return to school

Commented [fm12]: Symbiosis versus Catalytic event

Commented [fm13]: Epiphany

Commented [fm14]: Symbiosis versus Catalytic event

141
 142 P1: I can't remember exactly, but I think the receptionist called her.
 143
 144 R: So you went home. It sounded like that was really, really difficult.
 145
 146 P1: / It was.
 147
 148 R: So for that two and a half weeks. The more you were inside, the more difficult it became.
 149
 150 P1: / The thing is, like, during that time, I wouldn't even go out to help my mum with, like,
 151 shopping.
 152
 153 R: And so you were you say you became more terrified of going out. And then you hit this
 154 big moments with the police.
 155
 156 P1: (Laughs)/ Yeah, if the police hadn't come, I probably would still be too scared to go out
 157 now. (Laughs)
 158
 159 R: (Laughs) So that was like a big turning point. And..
 160
 161 P1: Yeah.
 162
 163 R: So what.. So what was the feeling that the police being there give you?
 164
 165 P1: The thing was, it was getting to the point where I thought I didn't have a choice. Um, my
 166 mum was pushing me about and saying, 'I'm going to have to pay fines. I'm not going to pay
 167 fines for you'. (Laughs)
 168
 169 R: Okay, yeah. And then you had the big day. You went in with your mum. When you got
 170 home.. so you went with your mum home. And then what did you feel about what
 171 happened that day, going in for an hour?
 172
 173 P1: I remember I was like, upset about it. And I really didn't want to go in the next day,
 174 because I felt everyone was looking at me and everyone was judging me.
 175
 176 R: So that's the next day. The next thing to think about, I suppose. How did you go into
 177 school the next day? And what time did you go in? And that sort of thing?
 178
 179 P1: This time, I had to go in the morning at the normal starting time. So my mum dropped
 180 me off... yeah.
 181
 182 R: Yeah. And what was that like going in, compared to the day before?
 183
 184 P1: It still felt bad. But it was a little bit better. But I still felt really paranoid 'Oh no, people
 185 are going to judge me. So if I just keep my head down and get on with it and I'll be fine'.
 186 (Laughs)
 187

Commented [fn15]: Symbiosis: endurance of 'withdrawal'

Commented [fn16]: Catalytic event: lack of control. Irony.

Commented [fn17]: Catalytic event: lack of control. Symbiosis: endurance of 'withdrawal'. Epiphany

Commented [fn18]: Catalytic event: lack of control. Symbiosis: endurance of 'withdrawal'. Epiphany

Commented [fn19]: Catalytic event: lack of control. Symbiosis: endurance of 'withdrawal'. Epiphany. Irony

188 R: And how did that go? Did you look around and think what people were doing? And how
189 people were with you? How did you feel people were with you, with other students that
190 day?

191
192 P1: Well, the teachers were a little bit nicer than usual. But they still seemed very (...) if they
193 were laughing or I heard them whisper, I thought it was about me. (Laughs)

Commented [fm20]: Foreshadowing, Irony.

194
195 R: Okay, I got it. Yeah. So you were there for the whole day that day?

196
197 P1: I was.

198
199 R: So it's sort of... Yeah. So that's a sort of different thing to the previous day. How did you
200 go home then after that day? Was it the same as the day before?

201
202 P1: My mum still came and picked me up.

203
204 R: What did you think about how the day went?

205
206 P1: I think I was ashamed. I remember teachers asking me to answer questions, even
207 though they knew what I had just been through... The teachers still asked me to answer
208 questions in front of the class. And I had just been away from people for a long time. The
209 last thing I wanted to do was talk in front of them.

Commented [fm21]: Epiphany, Foreshadowing, Irony.

210
211 R: So you had the long day and that was like, Wednesday or this was maybe a Thursday? Did
212 it feel like there was a lot of days coming? So you have Wednesday, there's an hour, then
213 you have this full day, then you have to go in another day.

214
215 P1: / Friday was a full day as well.

216
217 R: And how did that go?

218
219 P1: Well, at this point, I was kind of like starting to get back into, like, how I was before. / I
220 was still quiet and not hanging out with other people. But I wasn't that scared to be by
221 myself.

Commented [fm22]: Symbiosis: some change in
'withdrawal'

222
223 R: So this is when you were 14, a couple of years ago, and did that.. How did things go?
224 There was that two and a half week time, when you were at home, then this big moment
225 where you had to come back. How did things go, like, in the weeks after that? How did you
226 sort of feel about going in and getting into that routine of school? What was that like
227 afterwards?

228
229 P1: The other lessons were quite normal. But this one lesson that I.. skipped the whole time.
230 The teacher there was starting to make things really, really difficult for me. So I had, I had so
231 much work to do from him and..

Commented [fm23]: Foreshadowing

232
233 R: Right. And you were saying it was really difficult before the two and a half weeks,
234 particularly with this teacher in this class. So what was it like.. dealing with that again?

235
 236 P1: (...) (Laughing) I can definitely say that I did have some absences on the day of that
 237 lesson.
 238
 239 R: Yeah. Okay. And how long did that last? How long did you have to sort of be in this class?
 240 I say have to, because it sounds like you didn't want to! Yeah. How long did you have to be
 241 in that class then?
 242
 243 P1: (Laughs) I had to be in that class for another two years.
 244
 245 R: With the same teacher.
 246
 247 P1: Yes. With the same teacher, like the same teacher teaches you the same GCSE subject.
 248
 249 R: And how did.. how did that go for you? Was it something that was.. yeah, how did you
 250 find for two years having to do that?
 251
 252 P1: Well (laughs), things start definitely started getting worse again and (...) I nearly did the
 253 same thing again, where I didn't go to school.
 254
 255 R: And when did that happen?
 256
 257 P1: (...) So I think I had no choice, I had to be in school for the rest of that year. And the next
 258 year, we came back for GCSE year. And this is probably the worst time I had with this
 259 teacher.
 260
 261 R: So what got worse really?
 262
 263 P1: Yeah.. / every week, I was absent. So I didn't want it to make it suspicious, so I would be
 264 absent on a different day I didn't have this lesson as well. (Laughs)
 265
 266 R: Right.. and that was through the GCSE year. That's how things went. How did.. just sort of
 267 thinking about it... It's very interesting, what you're telling me. I'm trying to think about it.
 268 Thanks for.. sharing all of that with me. And I realise that must be kind of difficult to think
 269 back to that time.
 270
 271 P1: / It wasn't that personal so. (Laughs)
 272
 273 R: Okay. I'm just really interested in that year to think about how things went. Because
 274 you've been through this two and a half weeks and that's there in the past. How did you..
 275 how did you.. how did you feel about going into school? If I was to sort of talk to you back
 276 then, what would you say your feelings were about going into school when you had to end
 277 that period?
 278
 279 P1: I would say I hated it. I would say that school was the worst part of my life.
 280
 281 R: You said you thought about not going into school?

Commented [fm24]: Foreshadowing, Irony.

Commented [fm25]: Foreshadowing, Irony.

Commented [fm26]: Foreshadowing, Irony.

Commented [fm27]: Foreshadowing, Symbolism: lack of control.

Commented [fm28]: Irony.

Commented [fm29]: Irony.

Commented [fm30]: Epiphany

282
 283 P1: / Yeah, every morning, I would just dread waking up and having to get ready and walking
 284 to that horrible place. (Laughs)
 285
 286 R: And so the morning you would go in to that.. you would have that class. Could you tell me
 287 about what that day would be like, from when you woke up? Knowing that that class would
 288 happen? Could you sort of run me through from the morning too, then what would happen
 289 afterwards? Would you be able to do that? Do you think?
 290
 291 P1: Yeah, (laughs) I couldn't forget, because I did it for a long time. So my alarm would go off
 292 at five o'clock, I would hit snooze (Laughs). And then I would keep doing that. And then
 293 there would be a panic hour.. and then I would have to get ready really quickly, I wouldn't
 294 have time for breakfast, and then I would have to run. And then I would have to wait for the
 295 bus. And if the bus didn't turn up in the next two minutes, I just would have to leg it to
 296 school. And then (...) yeah, then I would just go in and they would have this registration
 297 period. And then I would start go into lessons. And then you would have a break at around
 298 1030. And then you would go to lessons again, for another two hours, and then we'd have
 299 lunch. for / half an hour, which is ridiculous, and then you go to your afternoon lesson (...)
 300 and then for me on Mondays and Tuesdays, that lesson I hated. (Whispers)
 301
 302 R: Okay Monday and Tuesday you would go to that lesson and then what would happen
 303 after, after the lesson?
 304
 305 P1: After the lesson (...) / Some days I couldn't just go home because my teacher would give
 306 me a detention of course. (Laughs)
 307
 308 R: So you would have a detention maybe. And then what would you do, say, after school
 309 basically?
 310
 311 P1: I would go straight home. (Laughs)
 312
 313 R: What would you do at home afterwards?
 314
 315 P1: Well, they would give me a tonne of homework. So that's when I, like started throwing
 316 away, like, my hobbies and stuff and just do homework.
 317
 318 R: So you would do homework on those days. Would you say that Mondays and Tuesdays
 319 were the days that this class.. would you say Wednesday or Thursday.. Would they be.. what
 320 would they be like in terms of like getting up?
 321
 322 P1: They were still bad because I had another class that I hated (laughing).
 323
 324 R: Two classes that you hated.
 325
 326 P1: But I would say that art class, the one I had on Mondays and Tuesdays was the worst.
 327

Commented [fm31]: Foreshadowing, Irony, Epiphany.

Commented [fm32]: Symbolism: endurance of school experience, without sense of control. Epiphany: control through judgement. Irony: control through judgement

Commented [fm33]: Irony.

Commented [fm34]: Irony.

Commented [fm35]: Foreshadowing.

Commented [fm36]: Symbolism: endurance of school experience, without sense of control. Irony.

Commented [fm37]: Symbolism: endurance of school experience, without sense of control.

Appendix 10 – Preparatory notes for interviews

In this interview, I am going to ask you about times in your life that have to do with social withdrawal, or wanting to be away from other people and then keeping away from them.

What does social withdrawal, or wanting to be away from other people and staying away from them, mean to you?

When you look back, when was the first time you had any feeling to do with social withdrawal, or wanting to be away from people and staying away from them? Could you tell me about it, please?

What times in your life would you say you most wanted to get away from other people and stay away from them? Could you tell me about them?

Please tell me about an experience you shared with someone else at school when you were in primary school?

Please tell me about a trip that you took, with school or your family, at the time you were at primary school?

Please tell me about a time, during primary school, when you noticed something about getting older?

Please tell me about any time from then when you wanted to get away from people?

Please you tell me about what you would have felt - at that time - would have been a typical day if you were to have gone out to school or met other people?

Please tell me how you would have felt about being around someone when you were keeping away from people?

Please tell me the kinds of things you liked to do on a typical day when you were going through (social withdrawal)?

What did you think would happen to you in the future when you were going through (social withdrawal)?

What things, objects or whatever, do you associate with that time?

What sights, sounds, smells do you associate with that time?

Was there anything missing from the interview that would have given you an opportunity to give your point of view?

Was there anything bothering you during the interview?

Appendix 11 – Application for Ethical Approval

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

School of Psychology

APPLICATION FOR RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL

FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

FOR BSc RESEARCH

FOR MSc/MA RESEARCH

FOR PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE RESEARCH IN CLINICAL, COUNSELLING &
EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

If you need to apply for ethical clearance from HRA (through IRIS) for research involving the NHS you DO NOT need to apply to the School of Psychology for ethical clearance also. Please see details on

<https://uelac.sharepoint.com/ResearchInnovationandEnterprise/Pages/NHS-Research-Ethics-Committees.aspx>

Among other things this site will tell you about UEL sponsorship

PLEASE NOTE that HRA approval for research involving NHS employees is not required when data collection will take place off NHS premises and when NHS employees are not recruited directly through NHS lines of communication. This means that NHS staff can participate in

research without HRA approval when a student recruits via their own social or professional networks or through a professional body like the BPS, for example.

If you are employed by the NHS and plan to recruit participants from the NHS Trust you work for, it please seek permission from an appropriate person at your place of work (and better to collect data off NHS premises).

PLEASE NOTE that the School Research Ethics Committee does not recommend BSc and MSc/MA students designing research that requires HRA approval for research involving the NHS as this can be a demanding and lengthy process.

Before completing this application please familiarise yourself with:

The *Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009)* published by the British Psychological Society (BPS). This can be found in the Ethics folder in the Psychology Noticeboard (Moodle) and also on the BPS website

http://www.bps.org.uk/system/files/Public%20files/aa%20Standard%20Docs/inf94_code_web_ethics_conduct.pdf

And please also see the UEL Code of Practice for Research Ethics (2015-16)

<https://uelac.sharepoint.com/ResearchInnovationandEnterprise/Documents/Ethics%20forms/UEL-Code-of-Practice-for-Research-Ethics-2015-16.pdf>

HOW TO COMPLETE & SUBMIT THIS APPLICATION

Complete this application form electronically, fully and accurately.

Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (5.1).

Include copies of all necessary attachments in the ONE DOCUMENT SAVED AS .doc

Email your supervisor the completed application and all attachments as ONE DOCUMENT. Your supervisor will then look over your application.

When your application demonstrates sound ethical protocol your supervisor will type in his/her name in the 'supervisor's signature' (section 5) and submit your application for review (psychology.ethics@uel.ac.uk). You should be copied into this email so that you know your application has been submitted. It is the responsibility of students to check this.

Your supervisor should let you know the outcome of your application. Recruitment and data collection are NOT to commence until your ethics application has been approved, along with other research ethics approvals that may be necessary (See section 4)

ATTACHMENTS YOU MUST ATTACH TO THIS APPLICATION

A copy of the participant invitation letter that you intend giving to potential participants.

A copy of the consent form that you intend giving to participants.

A copy of the debrief letter you intend to give participants.

OTHER ATTACHMENTS (AS APPROPRIATE)

A copy of original and/or pre-existing questionnaire(s) and test(s) you intend to use.

Example of the kinds of interview questions you intend to ask participants.

Copies of the visual material(s) you intend showing participants.

A copy of ethical clearance or permission from an external institution or organisation if you need it (e.g. a charity, school, local authority, workplace etc.). Permissions must be attached to this application. If you require ethical clearance from an external organisation your ethics application can be submitted to the School of Psychology before ethical approval is obtained from another organisation (see Section 5).

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificates:

FOR BSc/MSc/MA STUDENTS WHOSE RESEARCH INVOLVES VULNERABLE PARTICIPANTS: A scanned copy of a current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate. A current certificate is one that is not older than six months. If you have an Enhanced DBS clearance (one you pay a monthly fee to maintain) then the number of your Enhanced DBS clearance will suffice.

DBS clearance is necessary if your research involves young people (anyone 16 years of age or under) or vulnerable adults (see Section 4 for a broad definition of this). A DBS certificate that you have obtained through an organisation you work for is acceptable as long as it is current. If you do not have a current DBS certificate, but need one for your research, you can apply for one through the HUB and the School will pay the cost.

If you need to attach a copy of a DBS certificate to your ethics application but would like to keep it confidential please email a scanned copy of the certificate directly to Dr Tim Lomas (Chair of the School Research Ethics Committee) at t.lomas@uel.ac.uk

FOR PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE STUDENTS WHOSE RESEARCH INVOLVES VULNERABLE PARTICIPANTS: DBS clearance is necessary if your research involves young people (anyone under 16 years of age) or vulnerable adults (see Section 4 for a broad definition of this). The DBS check that was done, or verified, when you registered for your programme is sufficient and you will not have to apply for another

for the duration of your studies in order to conduct research with vulnerable populations.

Please read all guidance notes in blue carefully to avoid incorrect or insufficient applications

[If yours is an online study using Qualtrics please see the example ethics application in the Ethics folder in the Psychology Noticeboard](#)

SECTION 1. Your details

Your name:

Peter Fintan McCullagh

Your supervisor's name:

Dr. xxx

Title of your programme: (e.g. BSc Psychology)

Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

Submission date for your BSc/MSc/MA research:

Please tick if your application includes a copy of a DBS certificate (see

page

3)

Please tick if your research requires DBS clearance but you are a Prof Doc student and have applied for DBS clearance – or had existing clearance verified – when you registered on your programme (see page 3)

Please tick if you need to submit a DBS certificate with this application but have emailed a copy to Dr Tim Lomas for confidentiality reasons (Chair of the School Research Ethics Committee) t.lomas@uel.ac.uk

Please tick to confirm that you have read and understood the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009) and the UEL Code of Practice for Research Ethics (See links on page 1)

SECTION 2. About your research

What your proposed research is about:

Please be clear and detailed in outlining what your proposed research is about. Include the research question (i.e. what will your proposed investigate?)

The title of my proposed research is 'What stories do young people tell about their past experience of social withdrawal?'. Specifically, it will investigate how young people describe and relate different parts of their life to each other, before during and after the experience of social withdrawal, and how they relate it to their current

experience. Through investigating 'stories', the research seeks to illuminate the stories that young people tell about specific times in their life, but also how they build a coherent narrative over the course of their whole life, with a view to understanding the role of a period of social withdrawal within that.

Design of the research:

Type of experimental design, variables, questionnaire, survey etc., as relevant to your research. If the research is qualitative what approach will be used and what will the data be?

This will be a qualitative research project that will use narrative analysis to interpret the stories that young people give in response to questions given by the researcher concerning various periods of their life and types of experience that they will have had. The researcher will prompt the participants through interview-style questions to relate their experiences in the form of a narrative, but scope will be left for the participants to express their stories in a variety of ways. The data will be the narratives delivered by the participants, but this may be in the form of a spoken answer, a drawing or set of drawings or other means which the participants feel comfortable using to express themselves.

10. Recruitment and participants (Your sample):

Proposed number of participants, method/s of recruitment, specific characteristics of the sample such as age range, gender and ethnicity - whatever is relevant to your research.

I will attempt to recruit 10 participants, with a view to collecting data from 4 to 6 if some withdraw. The age range will be from 16 to 25 and there will be no selection criteria relating to gender or ethnicity. Participants will be recruited through contact with settings likely to have had contact with young people with experience of social withdrawal. The Home Tuition Service in Hackney Learning Trust and the xxx setting will be approached for the purposes of recruitment. Recruitment will involve discussion with people who manage the Home Tuition Service and xxx, before approaching potential participants with an information sheet, participant invitation letter and a consent form. As the participants will be over 16, consent will be sought directly from the participants. However, as it is anticipated that many of the participants may be classed as 'vulnerable' due to possible Special Educational Needs and social, emotional and mental health conditions, a guardian/parental consent form will also be prepared and sought before any interviews take place. The setting, xxx, in their written permission have made requested that parents of students at their setting to be able to consult materials, such as survey questions and the type of personal information on request in advance of the collection of data (see Appendix E).

11. Measures, materials or equipment:

Give details about what will be used during the course of the research. For example: equipment, a questionnaire, a particular psychological test or tests, an interview schedule or other stimuli such as visual material. See note on page 2 about attaching copies of questionnaires and tests to this application. If you are using an interview schedule for qualitative research attach example questions that you plan to ask your participants to this application.

A list of questions for semi-structured interviewing will be used to prompt the narratives of participants and audio recording equipment to allow for post-interview transcription. Please see Appendix A for example questions.

12. If you are using copyrighted/pre-validated questionnaires, tests or other stimuli that you have not written or made yourself, are these questionnaires and tests suitable for the age group of your participants?

NA

13. Outline the data collection procedure involved in your research:

Describe in detail what will be involved in data collection. For example, what will participants be asked to do, where, and for how long? If using online surveys will you be using Qualtrics? [Detail what you will include in the Qualtrics page that you intend to make available to potential participants \(see the example ethics application for a student study using Qualtrics in the Ethics folder of the Psychology Noticeboard\).](#)

Participants will be met as a group after consent has been confirmed, where they can ask me questions about the project. A member of staff at xxx will be present at this session. They will be asked to take part in individual semi-structured interviews in a room in the xxx setting. 1 to 2 will be collected per week. Individual interviews will last approximately one hour. The group will meet for one hour after the individual interviews have concluded. The participants will have an opportunity to reflect and share their experiences with the researcher and each other. A member of staff at xxx will be present at this meeting also.

SECTION 3. Ethical considerations

14. Fully informing participants about the research (and parents/guardians if necessary):

How will you fully inform your participants when inviting them to participate? Will the participant invitation letter be written in a style appropriate for children and young people, if necessary?

The participant invitation letter will be written in clear language, understandable to adolescents. Please see Appendix B.

15. Obtaining fully informed consent from participants (and from parents/guardians if necessary):

Is the consent form written in a style appropriate for children and young people, if necessary?
Do you need a consent form for both young people and their parents/guardians? How will you gain consent if your research is collecting data online (e.g. using Qualtrics)?

The consent form will be written in clear language, understandable to adolescents. Please see Appendix C.

16. Engaging in deception, if relevant:

What will participants be told about the nature of the research? The amount of any information withheld and the delay in disclosing the withheld information should be kept to an absolute minimum.

The participants will be fully informed about the nature and purpose of the research. No deception towards will be used as a part of this research project.

17. Right of withdrawal:

In this section, and in your participant invitation letter, make it clear to participants that 'withdrawal' will involve (1) participants being able to decide to not continue with participation in your research, and (2) the right to have the data they have supplied destroyed on request. You are asked to give participants a three-week window from the time they participate in your study to when they can withdraw their data. Make this clear in your participant invitation letter.

Note: If your study involves data collection through Qualtrics, it is essential that you ask participants to provide their own participant code on Qualtrics (e.g. two letters and two numbers) so that you will be able to identify them if they later want to withdraw their data.

The right to withdrawal in the course of the research will be made clear to the participants, both in terms of ceasing their participation and having the right for their data to be destroyed within three weeks of the conclusion of data collection. Please see Appendices B, C and D.

18. Will the data be gathered anonymously?

This is where you will not know the names and contact details of your participants? In qualitative research that involves interviews, data is not collected anonymously because you will know the names and contact details of your participants.

NO

19. If NO what steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality and protect the identity of participants?

How will the names and contact details of participants be stored and who will have access? Will real names and identifying references be omitted from the reporting of data and transcripts etc? What will happen to the data after the study is over? Usually data will be destroyed after a study is over but if there is a possibility of you developing your research (for publication, for example) you may not want to destroy all data at the end of the study. If not destroying your data at the end of the study, what will be kept, how, and for how long? (suggested time is two years). It is advised that you destroy all names and contact details of

[participants at the end of your study regardless of how long will keep your data for. Make this clear in your participant invitation letter.](#)

The names and contact details of participants will be stored on a password protected SD card to which only I will have access. They will be kept until the successful completion of the study, which I intend to be June 2020. I will use the contact details to send the participants a copy of the final study. At this point, the details will be erased. The details of participants will be anonymised in transcripts and written study.

The audio recordings and transcripts will be kept on a hard drive for 2 years before being deleted.

20. Will participants be paid or reimbursed?

[This is not necessary but payment/reimbursement must be in the form of redeemable vouchers and not cash. Please note that the School cannot fund participant payment.](#)

NO

If YES, why is payment/reimbursement necessary and how much will the vouchers be worth?

SECTION 4. Other permissions and ethical clearances

21. Research involving the NHS in England

Is HRA approval for research involving the NHS required? NO

[Please see Page 1 of this application for important information and link](#)

Will the research involve NHS employees who will not be directly recruited through the NHS and where data from NHS employees will not be collected on NHS premises?

NO

If you work for an NHS Trust and plan to recruit colleagues from the Trust will permission from an appropriate member of staff at the Trust be sought and is a copy of this permission (can be an email from the Trust) attached to this application?

NO

22. Permission(s) from an external institution/organisation (e.g. a school, charity, workplace, local authority, care home etc.)?

[You need to attach written permission from external institutions/organisations/workplaces if they are helping you with recruitment and/or data collection, if you are collecting data on their premises, or if you are using any material owned by the institution/organisation.](#)

Is permission from an external institution/organisation/workplace required? YES

If YES please give the name and address of the institution/organisation/workplace:

xxx

Educational Psychology Service
Hackney Learning Trust
Technology and Learning Centre

1 Reading Lane

London

E8 1GQ

[COPIES OF PERMISSIONS \(LETTER OR EMAIL\) MUST BE ATTACHED TO THIS APPLICATION](#)

In some cases you may be required to have formal ethical clearance from the external institution or organisation or workplace too.

23. Is ethical clearance required from any other ethics committee?

NO

If YES please give the name and address of the organisation:

Has such ethical clearance been obtained yet?

NA

If NO why not?

If YES, please attach a scanned copy of the ethical approval letter. A copy of an email from the organisation confirming its ethical clearance is acceptable.

Ethical approval from the School of Psychology can be gained before approval from another research ethics committee is obtained. However, recruitment and data collection are NOT to commence until your research has been approved by the School and other ethics committee/s as may be necessary.

SECTION 5. Risk Assessment

If you have serious concerns about the safety of a participant, or others, during the course of your research please see your supervisor as soon as possible.

If there is any unexpected occurrence while you are collecting your data (e.g. a participant or the researcher injures themselves), please report this to your supervisor as soon as possible.

24. Protection of participants:

Are there any potential hazards to participants or any risk of accident or injury to them? What is the nature of these hazards or risks (can be physical, emotional or psychological)? How will the safety and well-being of participants be ensured? Will contact details of an appropriate support organisation or agency will be made available to participants in your debrief sheet, particularly if the research is of a sensitive nature or potentially distressing?

The support organisation or agency that you refer participants to in your debrief letter should be appropriate. That is, is there a more appropriate support organisation than the Samaritans, for example (i.e. anxiety, mental health, young people telephone support help-lines?

The physical safeguarding of participants will be addressed through making them aware of the safety procedures of the setting, such as making them aware of the fire safety procedures.

Details for referring to CAMHS and Adult Mental Health Services will be included in debriefing material, as well as themix.org an online emotional support resource, with live chat and moderated forums, recommended by Mind for 16-25 year olds.

In my role as a trainee educational psychologist I am under supervision with the Educational Psychology Service in Hackney Learning Trust working with young people with complex needs and their families in an everyday capacity. I have training and experience in taking account of their well-being in the course of working with such young people and their families in exploring issues which can be sensitive.

25. Protection of the researcher:

Will you be knowingly exposed to any health and safety risks? If equipment is being used is there any risk of accident or injury to you and how will you mitigate this? If interviewing participants in their homes will a third party be told of place and time and when you have left a participant's house?

There will be negligible threat to the researcher from equipment or any risk of accident or injury. The manager of SEND and Youth Projects will be aware where I am in the building and for how long I am due to be there. My supervisor in the Educational Psychology Service will be aware of where I am outside of the setting and the amount of time I am due to be there.

26. Debriefing participants:

How will participants be de-briefed? Will participants be informed about the true nature of the research if they are not told beforehand? Will contact details of a support organisation be made available to participants via the debrief letter? All student research must involve a

[debrief letter for participants \(unless the research involves anonymous surveys\) so please attach a copy of your debrief letter to this application \(see page 12\).](#)

Participants will be signposted towards the appropriate support if they are experiencing any distress. There will be a discussion of their experience of the research as a group at the end and they will be encouraged to share their feelings about their contributions to the study. Please see Appendix D.

27. Other: [Is there anything else the reviewer of this application needs to know to make a properly informed assessment?](#)

No

28. Will your research involve working with children or vulnerable adults?*

YES

If YES have you obtained and attached a DBS certificate?

YES

If your research involves young people under 16 years of age and young people of limited competence will parental/guardian consent be obtained.

YES

If NO please give reasons. (Note that parental consent is always required for participants who are 16 years of age and younger)

* You are required to have DBS clearance if your participant group involves (1) children and young people who are 16 years of age or under, and (2) 'vulnerable' people aged 16 and over with psychiatric illnesses, people who receive domestic care, elderly people (particularly those in nursing homes), people in palliative care, and people living in institutions and sheltered accommodation, and people who have been involved in the criminal justice system, for example. Vulnerable people are understood to be persons who are not necessarily able to freely consent to participating in your research, or who may find it difficult to withhold consent. If in doubt about the extent of the vulnerability of your intended participant group, speak to your supervisor. Methods that maximise the understanding and ability of vulnerable people to give consent should be used whenever possible. For more information about ethical research involving children see:

<https://uelac.sharepoint.com/ResearchInnovationandEnterprise/Pages/Research-involving-children.aspx>

29 Will you be collecting data overseas?

No

This includes collecting data while you are away from the UK on holiday or visiting your country of origin, and distance learning students who will be collecting data in their overseas country of residence.

If YES in what country or countries (and province if appropriate) will you be collecting data?

Please click on this link <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice> and note in the space below what the UK Government is recommending about travel to that country/province (Please note that you MUST NOT travel to a country/province/area that is deemed to be high risk or where essential travel only is recommended by the UK Government. If you are unsure it is essential that you speak to your supervisor or the UEL Travel Office – travel@uel.ac.uk / (0)20 8223 6801).

SECTION 6. Declarations

Declaration by student:

I confirm that I have discussed the ethics and feasibility of this research proposal with my supervisor.

Student's name: *typed name acts as a signature*

Fintan McCullagh

Student's number: 1513199

Date: 28.01.19

Supervisor's declaration of support is given upon their electronic submission of the application

YOU MUST ATTACH THESE ATTACHMENTS:

PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER(S)

See pro forma in the ethics folder in the Psychology Noticeboard on Moodle. This can be adapted for your own use and must be adapted for use with parents/guardians and children if they are to be involved in your study.

Care should be taken when drafting a participant invitation letter. It is important that your participant invitation letter fully informs potential participants about what you are asking them to do and what participation in your study will involve – what data will be collected, how, where? What will happen to the data after the study is over? Will anonymised data be used in the write-up of the study, or at conferences or in possible publications etc.? Tell participants about how you will protect their anonymity and confidentiality and about their withdrawal rights.

Make sure that what you tell potential participants in this invitation letter matches up with what you have said in the application.

CONSENT FORM(S)

Use the pro forma in the ethics folder in the Psychology Noticeboard on Moodle. This should be adapted for use with parents/guardians and children.

PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF SHEET

This can be one or two paragraphs thanking participants, reminding them what will happen to their data and, if relevant, should include the contact details of a relevant agency or organisation that participants can contact for support if necessary. Should include the true nature of the study if your research involved deception.

OTHER ATTACHMENTS YOU MAY NEED TO INCLUDE:

See notes on Page 2 about what other attachments you may need to include – Example interview questions? Copies of questionnaires? Visual stimuli? Ethical clearance or permission from another institution or organisation? Current DBS clearance certificate?)

SCANNED COPY OF CURRENT DBS CERTIFICATE

(If one is required. See notes on Page 3)

eople 0-25 with SEND: www.hackneylocaloffer.co.uk

Appendix 12 – Evidence of Ethical Approval

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: xxx

SUPERVISOR: xxx

STUDENT: Peter McCullagh

Course: Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

Title of proposed study: What stories do young people tell about their experience of social withdrawal?

DECISION OPTIONS:

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.

APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES (see Minor Amendments box below): In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is not required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made before 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.

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, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES

Minor amendments required *(for reviewer)*:

Please have these amendments reviewed and agreed by your supervisor prior to data collection:

Section 10: Please make clear that parental consent will be obtained prior to interview ("a guardian/parental consent form will also be prepared and sought before the study begins" does not clearly state that it will be obtained prior to interview).

Section 13: Please make clear that ELATT staff member will also be present at the second group meeting, as they will be at the first.

Sections 14 & 15: Although it is made clear that the invitation letter will be "written in clear language, understandable to adolescents", extra consideration must be made for

the fact that the participants may additionally have “Special Educational Needs” or “social, emotional and mental health conditions” – please work with supervisor and ELATT to ensure that this is considered in the wording of the letter, over and above the consideration that participants are adolescents. Suggest you have a staff member of ELATT review the documents participants will receive and work with them to ensure they are appropriate for the prospective participants.

Section 19: Please consider data protection carefully – an SD card could be misplaced and the data could be accessed by whoever who found it, if it is not password protected. Please refer to data protection guidelines and ensure your data protection plan is in line with current legislation.

Section 26: “There will be a discussion of their experience of the research as a group at the end and they will be encouraged to” – please complete the sentence

Invitation letter: does “social withdrawal” need to be defined to participants – will they all know that this means?

Make sure to go through documents participants will receive carefully and iron out any errors, e.g. in the debrief the sentence “I will share a written version of what we talked about the my supervisor to help me write about our conversations.”

Major amendments required (*for reviewer*):

Confirmation of making the above minor amendments (*for students*):

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name (*Typed name to act as signature*): Fintan McCullagh

Student number: 1513199

Date: 01.04.2019

(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEACHER (*for reviewer*)

Has an adequate risk assessment been offered in the application form?

YES / NO

Please request resubmission with an adequate risk assessment

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

Please do not approve a high risk application and refer to the Chair of Ethics. Travel to countries/provinces/areas deemed to be high risk should not be permitted and an application not approved on this basis. If unsure please refer to the Chair of Ethics.

IUM (Please approve but with appropriate recommendations)

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

Reviewer (*Typed name to act as signature*): xxx

Date: 6.3.19

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

RESEARCHER PLEASE NOTE:

For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's Insurance, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

For a copy of UELs Personal Accident & Travel Insurance Policy, please see the Ethics Folder in the Psychology Noticeboard

Appendix 13 – Registration of research project

ResearchUEL <phdmanager@uel.ac.uk>

Wed 2/13/2019 9:20 AM

Peter Fintan MCCULLAGH

☒

ResearchUEL

Dear Peter,

Student number: 1513199

I am pleased to inform you that the **Research** Degrees Sub-Committee, on behalf the University Quality and Standards Committee, has registered you for the degree of DProf.

Title of programme

What stories do young people tell about their past experience of social withdrawal?

Director of Studies

Dr xxx

Supervisors

xxx

Expected completion

According to your actual date of **registration**, which is 01 Sep 2017, the **registration** period is as follows:

Minimum date: 01 Mar 2019

Maximum date: 01 Sep 2021

This is according to a full time mode of study.

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

Yours sincerely,

Mrs xxx

Application to register - Mr Peter McCullagh

Appendix 14 – Evidence of passing Research Integrity Module

CERTIFICATE of ACHIEVEMENT

This is to certify that

PETER MCCULLAGH

has completed successfully

Research Integrity Modules

21 January 2019

End of course quiz - Social and Behavioural Sciences Grade: 75.00 %

University of East London

Appendix 15 – Prose version of Participant 1's narrative

Participant 1 described her early life as based mainly in London, but involving a lot of travel by car and boat to Algeria via France, where both her parents and wider family come from. She sometimes travelled with her father, but her childhood was mainly spent with her mother and brother in London. She was home-educated by her aunt (her mother's sister). Her journeys to Algeria would sometimes be made with her father and she spent a significant amount of time with her wider family there. She has not travelled there since she started Secondary school. Her entry in to Secondary school was highlighted as a very significant change for Participant 1 and she used the word 'brutal' to describe this experience, referring to the way in which she was treated by her fellow students.

Through the course of Secondary school, she felt less enthusiasm for drawing as a hobby, which had been important to her in her early life, and stopped doing it in the first few years of Secondary school. As she began Year 10, she felt that she was being treated unfairly by two teachers: her Art teacher and her Maths teacher. She felt that both teachers criticised her in class in a way that made her feel bad about herself and look bad in front of her fellow students. She described how they would praise other students and then pass her over, before criticising her. In her Art class, her fellow students would ask her why she picked the subject if she was so bad at it.

A pattern of absences began to emerge as she sought to avoid going to these classes. She was aware that this was evident to her teachers. Eventually, she was absent for a period of two weeks during the first term of Year 11, which she spent mainly in her bedroom, along with some contact with her brother and her mother (who was at work during the day). The first time the police came around to check on her whereabouts, she did not answer the door. The second time she answered the door, they said that her mother would be fined if she did not return to school. Participant 1 returned to school the next day and continued to find attending school to be difficult. At a later point in the interview, she said that

she had been seeing a professional intermittently to discuss her feelings at this point. When the timeline was presented to her, she also said that at this point she went in to foster care for a period of time.

In the Spring term of Year 11, just after her mock GCSEs, she again stopped attending school and remained in her bedroom, this time with less contact with her brother and her mother. After saying that she was engaging in 'self-destructive behaviours', she said that she did not want to go in to detail. As the interview progressed, she stated that tissues and shavers were important objects at this time and were noticed by her brother and mother, who called for medical help which led to her going to hospital. She stated that she consented for this information to be included in this study during the meeting in which the timeline was agreed.

In the hospital she tried to screen herself off from other people in the ward, such as medical professionals and patients, using a curtain that was available around her bed. She looked forward to her mother visiting every day and felt ashamed that she had affected her mother's life. She sometimes met other patients when she would go from her bed to the bathroom and attempted to be polite. She thought a lot about how they perceived her and felt that she was different to them as they were mostly older females who may have been mothers.

After some time, the medical professionals attending to her said that she could go back home. She was very worried about how people would perceive her when she went back to school. She was surprised that her teachers and fellow students were so nice to her. In addition, she noticed that her art teacher was absent from school for a long while.

Talking about herself in the present, she is happy in her new college and even enjoys Maths even though some of the work is harder than in school. While she feels happy being around the other students there, she would prefer if there were more girls in her classes. She has taken up art again, having not done it as a hobby for many years. Her favoured form of art is drawing characters from stories, often from the fantasy genre, but she feels that the mistakes that she

makes stand out the most for her. She feels stronger now because of her experiences and learned not to care what people think of her. She spent a lot of time talking about herself to professionals, which has given her the confidence to do things like participate in this study, which she would not have been able to do a year ago. In the future, she would like to make money without doing much work. Another ambition is to see her family in Algeria because she hasn't seen them since before she started Secondary school.

Appendix 16 – Prose version of Participant 2's narrative

Participant 2 remembers his early childhood as a 'carefree' time in which he played outside a lot with friends who lived nearby. He moved to a different area when he was 6 years old, but remained at the same school. It took about 15 or 20 minutes by public transport to travel from his new home to school. While he made friends with other children who lived in this new area, he found it difficult to make lasting friendships at his school.

His first experience of gaming was when he was about 4 years old, when he played *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, thinking: 'Woah, this is amazing'. He continued to play 'run-outs' with other children who lived locally to him. At school, he felt that he was not able to take part in the conversations that other children were having because he did not live near them. He was unsure of the exact age he was when he began or ended his period of withdrawal, but he thought it happened between the ages of 8 and 15, with an intensification at the age of 13. He remembered having an argument when he was 8 years old with his friends from the local area. The argument was not about anything serious, but he thought 'screw this' and went back home feeling that he would rather pursue gaming rather than playing with friends. At this time he described himself as feeling 'alienated' as well as experiencing anxiety and depression. Later in the interview, he mentioned that it was at about the age of 8 that he received an ASD diagnosis. At the age of 10, he noticed his body developing and felt that he was the only boy in his Primary school with a moustache.

His gaming was almost completely focussed on the game *Skyrim*, a fantasy Role-Playing Game (RPG) which is played alone. Participant 2 continued to go to school, but would sometimes feign illness in order to persuade his mother to allow him to stay home to play *Skyrim*. As a result he had a low attendance rate at school. He had never been a good sleeper but, after he committed to playing *Skyrim*, he would stay up later and feel more tired during the day. This became more intense from the age of 13 when he would stay up gaming until several hours before school started. Towards the end of this period, he favoured the game *Destiny* over *Skyrim*. *Destiny* is a space first-person shooter which allows

gamers connected online to communicate via headsets as they collaborate to complete missions within the game. Participant 2 connected with people around the world online while he played *Destiny* sharing jokes and talking about missions. Some of the other gamers were three times his age.

When he was 15 he felt that he had become bored of gaming and did not know how to fill his time initially. He soon developed an interest in animé after watching a title on Netflix about a boy who gets trapped in a game. He pursued this interest through reading animé in print and watching titles through streaming platforms, all the while participating in discussion forums on sites such as Reddit. He eventually deleted the Reddit app on his phone as he felt he was becoming addicted to it. He continued to deepen his knowledge of animé and discuss it online in a way in which he had never done with gaming. After moving away from gaming, he also dedicated himself more to studying.

Participant 2 also made a deliberate effort to overcome his anxiety about being in social situations by volunteering at a youth club. While he was nervous at first about doing this, he felt that he needed 'social exposure' to overcome his anxiety after being away from social situations for so long. Talking about himself in the present, he said that he wants to continue studying in his new college.

Appendix 17 – Prose version of Participant 3's narrative

Participant 3 experienced a difficult birth. His mother had to have a Caesarean section. After birth, he was found to have a tumour in his left eye and it was removed and replaced with a glass eye. He temporarily died at this point and described himself as being 'resurrected'. When he began Primary school, he felt that he was placed by teachers with children who had 'special needs' and did not feel that his ability was appreciated by supporting adults. As an example, he described giving the correct answer to Maths problems in class but not being credited by teachers.

While he was at Primary school, he remembered a 'fear of missing out' and a need to have a good reputation. At this stage of his life, he also had memories of 'banter' with his younger brother. It was at this time that he had his first recollection of a problem in his relationship with his brother, as a result of a social care inquiry with his family, which Participant 3 attributed to his brother rather than any issue within the family. The social care inquiry concluded without any continuing involvement.

In Secondary school, he felt that he was more able to approach and talk to people. He also found that he wanted to avoid other students that he found annoying. The teachers were nice, but they would put him next to people he wanted to avoid. It seemed to him that the reason for this was to get him ready for working with other people, but he still wanted to avoid people he would get in conflict with. One fellow student in particular was looked up to by many as the 'cool kid' and he would get Participant 2 into trouble by, for instance, poking him with a compass. By year 11, this student had become more 'civil' and grown up, although other students still behaved in a 'stupid' way.

When Participant 2 left school, he went to a further education college that was far away from where he lived, because he wanted to get away from the people that he was at school with. His time at that college lasted a year and, just before he moved to a second college

close to where he went to school, his family moved to a new home nearby. At this first college, he made a friend with whom he maintained long-term contact. 'Sadly', the people at the second college had the same attitude as those he went to school with and he was miserable throughout his time there. Many of the other students thought 'they were gangster' and, as well as bothering him, they bullied another student who had an ASD diagnosis. He felt that they would provoke him in class and that he received no support from the teacher.

There was one teacher in particular that he felt was just as bad as the other students. When he would ask her for help when the other students were throwing pens at him, she would blame him instead. Another time, he needed help finding an icon on the computer screen because of his visual impairment, but when he asked her for help, he found that she was very dismissive, saying 'it's just there', without looking at him. At the end of his time there, she bought him a meal at Nando's as part of the end-of year celebrations, but he felt that she owed him an apology for how she had treated him.

While he was at the second college, he developed a stutter. When this happened, he felt that people would walk away from him when he was talking. When he had conversations with people that he knew, he felt that the conversation would run dry. This 'knocked his confidence a bit'. The stutter negatively affected his performance in an oral English exam and it continued to be an issue for him when he attended a third college. He failed the course that he was taking at this college. His relationship with his brother had also deteriorated at this point. His brother would not engage with him and he suspected that this was because of their 'banter' in earlier years.

When he left the third college, he spent a period of time at home without seeing many people as he prepared for the next stage in his education. The friend that he made at the second college was always a regular point of contact each weekend when they would meet to get food and talk. This friend could also be annoying, as he would not always be clear about any problem that he had. Participant 2 also had other difficulties social experiences at this time as when he met a girl at a social event held after a service at a local church. He told

some jokes that he had heard from a Comedy Central Roast, in which comedians take turns in insulting a guest, only to find that the girl found these jokes to be offensive.

In the present, he felt frustration that his generation are 'screwed up' and 'don't take responsibility for their actions'. In the future, he would like to do something practical to make a lot of money, to be happy and able to have fun around people.

Appendix 18 – Prose version of Participant 4’s narrative

Participant 4 grew up in a home that his mother and older brother and sister had moved to just before he was born. At the time of the interview, he had lived there for his entire life. In his early years, he made friendships with some boys who lived nearby which were continuing at the time of the interview. Primary school felt like a time when he and his classmates were part of one big group, playing together. A recurrent sickness in his stomach, along with anxiety, became a feature of his time in Primary school and by year 7 his attendance rate was down to 40%. He always had trouble sleeping as well, meaning that he would feel tired during the day at school. He saw home as a place that he felt ‘relaxed’ and ‘chilled’, although at the same time he felt ‘part of a different thing’ to his older and younger siblings, which he attributed to a gap in ages with these other sub-groups in his family.

In Secondary school, the pattern of absences along with anxiety and stomach ache continued. He continued to have trouble sleeping during this period and would feel tired when he would go to school. In Year 9, he found that his anxiety was an obstacle when he was asked to perform in Drama class and when he had to do exams. He felt that these kinds of activities did not really suit him, even though he was comfortable with some types of performance in front of people he knew. By Year 10, he felt that he didn’t like being told what to do by teachers. Some lessons and homework seemed pointless to him and he didn’t see why he had to do them. Although he did most of his work, he would receive detentions for those he felt were of no value. During one of the detentions, he fell asleep and the teacher sent him home. He also found some of the other students annoying, while others gave him energy when he would feel tired during the school day.

In Year 10, he started some breathing exercises to help him with his anxiety and his stomach aches, which helped to a degree. His attendance remained low and he would often spend his days at home gaming. Since he started at his new college at the start of the academic year, he has had some the same feelings as at school. He still felt that teachers ask him to do things in class that seem

pointless and will not help his learning. Feelings of anxiety could still emerge unpredictably. An example he gave was when he went to visit the BBC as part of a college trip. He had visited this location with college several times, yet on the last occasion he felt anxious in a way he hadn't before. This unpredictable onset of anxiety had happened on other occasions as well, of which the BBC trip was just one example. When this happened, he tried to use his breathing exercises, which helped to a degree, but did not eradicate the anxiety or prevent it from happening in the first place. The feelings of anxiety, illness and tiredness were ongoing for Participant 4. His attendance rate had improved and he felt that he had more freedom in his new college. He could see the point of the work he was asked to do, but he still had a tendency to remain at home when anxious, tired and ill.

