

Running head: DISORDERS OF THE OTHER

DISORDERS OF THE OTHER:  
TOWARD A PHENOMENOLOGY OF SOCIAL ANXIETY

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# DISORDERS OF THE OTHER

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## Abstract

This dissertation proposes an original theoretical perspective on the phenomenology of social anxiety disorder and related clinical presentations, inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre's analysis of the existential predicament of "being-for-others" ("*être-pour-autrui*"). In Sartre's phenomenological ontology, "being-for-others" refers to the persistent awareness of the self as the actual or potential object of a conscious Other. Sartre posits that to find oneself the object of the Other's "look" entails profound changes in the basic conditions of self-experience, broadly characterized by a diminished sense of the self as freely self-determining, and by extension, a heightened feeling of vulnerability to the judgments and projects of the Other. It is argued that Sartre's conception of the social object position as inherently vulnerable and incapacitating reflects the anomalous self-experience at the heart of social anxiety pathology. The paper proceeds as follows: First, the concept of pathological social anxiety is examined from historical, nosological, and theoretical perspectives, with the aim of distilling a contemporary consensus definition. Next, the new phenomenological account of social anxiety disorder is presented. Aspects of Sartre's analysis of the encounter with the Other are introduced and explicated in relation to three central features of social anxiety pathology: a sense of powerlessness over the way one is perceived by others; anticipation of negative evaluation by others; and enactment of patterns of self-protective interpersonal behavior. Through analysis of both empirical literature and multiple first-person descriptions of the experience of chronic social anxiety, each of these pathological features is shown to be rooted in an anomalous experience of the self as bereft of existential freedom when in the presence of other people. Implications of the theory for the classification and treatment of social anxiety disorder are considered, along with avenues for future phenomenological research.

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### **Introduction**

The experience commonly known today as social anxiety disorder boasts a broad family tree of psychological constructs. The presence of marked distress surrounding social interaction has, at various times in history, been named social phobia, performance anxiety, avoidant personality disorder, social withdrawal, social isolation, public speaking anxiety, speech anxiety, communication apprehension, fear of interpersonal rejection, separation anxiety, stage fright, fear of strangers, social inhibition, and social timidity (Leitenberg, 1990). The abundance of nuanced terms for the kinds of anxiety that stem from the demands of social life bespeaks the pervasiveness of the phenomenon. Kessler et al. (2010) estimate social anxiety disorder to be the most commonly occurring type of anxiety disorder after specific phobias, in terms of lifetime prevalence. Results from the National Comorbidity Survey showed that 38.6% of respondents reported having been, at some point in their lives, given to ongoing fearful avoidance or significant discomfort relating to one or more social situations (Kessler et al., 2014).

The notion of social anxiety as a distinct pathological condition was introduced to the field of psychiatry by Pierre Janet at the turn of the twentieth century, bearing both the label and nosological status of a phobia. Over the course of the century, however, mainstream clinical and scientific perspectives on social anxiety gradually moved away from the phobia classification and came to consider it a separate species of anxiety disorder, elevating its taxonomic rank. This evolution can be understood as reflective of the wider historical movement away from a pure behaviorist orientation in the field toward one that privileges cognition as a driver of psychopathology. The notion of the specific phobia is perhaps the last expression of straightforward behavioral learning theory in mainstream psychopathological science. The object of the phobia, be it snakes, heights, or enclosed spaces, is easily conceived of as a conditioned

stimulus, and the avoidance of it, as a conditioned response. The most popular treatment for specific phobia is exposure therapy, which deploys conditioning procedures to decouple the fear response from the problematic stimulus. Conspicuously missing from the concept of the phobia is the contribution of patterns of thinking to symptom formation. To wit, the latest edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, in its introduction to the anxiety disorders, propounds the mainstream view in clear terms: “Individuals with specific phobia are fearful or anxious about or avoidant of circumscribed objects or situations. A specific cognitive ideation is not featured in this disorder, as it is in other anxiety disorders” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). By contrast, the manual’s introductory summary for social anxiety disorder reads as follows: “In social anxiety disorder (social phobia), the individual is fearful or anxious about or avoidant of social interactions and situations that involve the possibility of being scrutinized...The cognitive ideation is of being negatively evaluated by others, by being embarrassed, humiliated, or rejected, or offending others.” In spite of sharing certain marked features, such as excessive worry and behavioral patterns of avoidance, specific phobia and social anxiety disorder are here differentiated by the presence or absence of explicitly cognitive properties. The implication is that that unlike specific phobia, the nature of social anxiety cannot be fully understood without reference to characteristic patterns of thinking.

This primary distinction, more than a point of differential diagnosis, also has radical epistemological implications for the study of social anxiety. Namely, it rejects the pure empiricism of behavioral psychology as an adequate explanatory framework, insisting instead that any theory of social anxiety disorder must appeal to the subjective dimension of the pathology; that is, to the particulars of the internal experience. Accordingly, the field of social anxiety research and theory has been dominated for the last several decades by the cognitive

school (Alden & Regambal, 2010). An array of explanatory schemes has been put forth by scholars working within the cognitive psychology frame. Some have attempted to model the intrapsychic mechanisms, which create and maintain social anxiety symptoms (the cognitive-behavioral approach), while others emphasize the role of interpersonal forces in the formation of symptoms (the interpersonal approach). Each is firmly rooted in the traditional metapsychology of cognitive science, which renders the human subject as the processor and interpreter of an objective physical reality. The subjective experience of social anxiety is thus represented as a pathological misconstrual of one's social situation, emerging on the basis of disturbances in attention, perception, memory, prediction, valuation, and so on.

In view of the broad acceptance of the centrality of subjective experience in the contemporary conception of social anxiety disorder and its related pathologies, the present study aims to open an alternative avenue of inquiry by proposing a phenomenological account of social anxiety disorder. Parnas and Zahavi (2002) have made a compelling case as to the value of doing phenomenological research in areas of psychopathology conventionally dominated by empirical approaches. The methods and conclusions of behavioral and cognitive research paradigms often obscure basic elements of human subjectivity such as the self, world, narrative, and identity, as well as subtle variations in perception and cognition. Consequently, the systems by which psychopathological conditions are defined, classified, and diagnosed are largely ignorant of these dimensions of conscious experience. Owing to the historical influence of logical positivism, much psychopathological theory tends toward simplified description of complex phenomena, as well as overreliance on observable and measurable behaviors (be they verbal or physical) as determinants of classification and diagnosis. The elimination of subjective factors from diagnostic consideration may well weaken the diagnostic validity of standardized models like the



DSM (Van Praag, 1992). Phenomenological reconsideration of the current rubrics of describing mental illness can help restore to them these integral aspects of subjective experience, as well as help expose the metatheoretical biases underlying allegedly neutral systems of psychopathological knowledge production. The phenomenological approach in psychopathology has grown in reach and visibility in recent years, especially with respect to the study of schizophrenia (Parnas, Sass & Zahavi, 2008) and depression (Ratcliffe, 2014).

Phenomenology originated as a method of philosophical investigation developed by twentieth-century continental philosopher Edmund Husserl. Husserl challenged the notion that human nature could be properly understood by the experimental methods of natural science, and instead advocated for the investigation of individual conscious experiences (what Kant termed *phenomena*). The phenomenological approach in psychology and psychopathology is similarly concerned with “attaining an understanding and proper description of the structure of our experience” (Parnas, Sass & Zahavi, 2007). As a method of psychological research, phenomenology works to develop descriptive concepts by means of sustained observation of psychological phenomena as they occur in lived experience. Furthermore, phenomenology aims to understand individual behaviors and experiences in terms of their significance within the larger structures of consciousness, and as such has the potential to highlight relationships between seemingly unconnected aspects of pathology (Parnas & Zahavi, 2002).

With these aims in mind, this paper advances an original phenomenological theory of social anxiety, based in the existential-phenomenological philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre was one of the central figures in the existentialist movement in continental philosophy, and is widely regarded as one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century. His magnum opus, *Being and Nothingness*, is a classic text in the existential and phenomenological traditions,

and it is from this work that the central concepts of the present theory are derived. Sartre's philosophical method, as indicated in the subtitle of his masterwork, is phenomenological ontology. His purpose in *Being and Nothingness* is to provide a descriptive account (thus, phenomenology) of human existence (ontology being the study of what there is, what exists).

Phenomenology is the description of reality as it appears to consciousness; in fact, Sartre argues forcefully, there is no "reality" as such outside of what consciousness beholds:

But if we once get away from what Nietzsche called "the illusion of worlds behind the scene," and if we no longer believe in the being-behind-the-appearance, then the appearance itself becomes full positivity; its essence is an "appearing" which is no longer opposed to being but on the contrary is the measure of it. For the being of an existent is exactly what it appears. (p. 4)

Sartre asserts that the existence of the noumenal "thing-in-itself" is no longer philosophically tenable. Rather, all that we can be certain of is the existence of the phenomenon, or consciousness of the thing. At the same time, however, Sartre follows Husserl in holding that consciousness is intentional; that is, it is always consciousness *of* something (*BN*, p. 23).

Consciousness, in this way, by its very nature implies the presence of the separate being which is it is consciousness of. Being thus presents itself to us with every act of consciousness. In that sense, Sartre surmises, being has an appearance of its own:

The phenomenon is what manifests itself, and being manifests itself to all in some way, since we can speak of it and since we have a certain comprehension of it. Thus there must be a for a *phenomenon of being*, an appearance of being, capable of description as such...ontology will be the description of the phenomenon of being as it manifests itself. (*BN*, p.7)

This, then, is the essence of Sartre's ontological project in *Being and Nothingness*: to disclose the structures of existence by rigorous description of the nature of conscious experience itself.

Fully a third of *Being and Nothingness* is devoted to the analysis of the experience of "the existence of others." The phenomenological study of the Other is concerned with how we come

to be certain of the existence of other humans who share equally in our humanness. The question is a long-standing one in the phenomenological tradition, and various answers have been propounded over time by the likes of Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger. Sartre's own answer to this problem takes the form of an extensive investigation into the experiential character of social intercourse. Perhaps owing to his background as a student of psychoanalysis, Sartre's treatment of the topic includes a detailed analysis of social behavior and its associated feelings and motivations, in the attempt to explain these phenomena in terms of the existential structure of the interpersonal situation.

The field of phenomenology has produced several substantively divergent accounts of the nature of intersubjectivity, including Sartre's. Comparative analyses of Sartre's thought in this area alongside and in comparison with those of his closest intellectual kin – Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty - can be found in Zahavi (2001) and Theunissen (1984). While it is not possible to adequately represent each position and its relation to Sartre's here, what is important to note is that Sartre's account represents only one possible outlook, which is not shared by other thinkers using the same phenomenological analytic framework. My reason for pointing this out is that the proposed theory is not a work of philosophy but of psychopathology. To describe any instance of psychopathology is to describe not *the* human condition but *a* human condition, one human possibility among many possibilities, and at that, one that is by definition non-normative, but rather limited to a certain subset of individuals at certain times. I make no contention here that Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* had the intention of describing a specifically psychopathological or “abnormal” way of being. Yet in light of the fact that other phenomenological analyses of intersubjectivity have led to fundamentally different conclusions

about the nature of social interaction, we may suppose that Sartre's account reflects one possible way of experiencing the social world.<sup>1</sup>

The central aim of this paper, therefore, is to demonstrate that aspects of Sartre's unique conception of social reality in *Being and Nothingness* are illuminative of the experiential situation of the socially anxious individual. The basic affinity of Sartre's account of the nature of social existence with the clinical picture of social anxiety is epitomized in a famous scene from his play "No Exit." One of his characters, trapped in a room with two others for what will likely be the rest of eternity, comes to the morose realization that "Hell is other people." The scene, and the play itself, comprises a metaphor underscoring two basic truths of Sartre's view of the social situation: first, that it is inescapable, and second, that it is innately problematic. It is the same worldview that inspires the proclamation "Conflict is the original meaning of being with others" (p. 475) in *Being and Nothingness*. Such expressions cannot be read simply as exposing some paranoid or misanthropic attitude in their author. Rather, the uneasiness of interpersonal relations is, for Sartre, a major tenet of his overall account of human existence, having its logical foundations in the most basic structures and operations of consciousness. Thus, what Sartre's work offers to the field of social anxiety research is a fully formed analysis of the particular structure of an individual consciousness whose lived experience is one of profound and persistent discomfort in social interaction. The task, then, is to demonstrate where and how existential-phenomenological notions put forth by Sartre to describe the difficulty of social interaction are specifically relevant to the construct of social anxiety disorder as it is understood in contemporary psychopathological science. Through this I aim to develop an account of the

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<sup>1</sup> A note on terminology: Any discussion of Sartre's ontology of sociality necessitates use of both the terms "others" and "the Other", which carry different senses. "Others" or "others" refers to any number of concrete individuals; "the Other" epitomizes the sum of experiential qualities that characterize the social encounter.

phenomenology of social anxiety disorder that is at once descriptive of its first-person experiential structure and explanatory of the underlying coherence of its observable signs and symptoms.<sup>2</sup>

The paper will proceed as follows. In Part I, the concept of social anxiety disorder will be examined from several vantage points for the purpose of clarifying its contemporary meaning. I present a developmental history of the concept from the earliest days of psychiatry up to and including its most recent iteration in the DSM 5. Next, I review current literature comparing three distinct diagnostic constructs – social anxiety disorder, avoidant personality disorder, and shyness – for the purpose of establishing whether or not they ought to be understood as demarcating qualitatively distinct categories of pathology. In doing so, I seek to establish the range and limits of the explanatory reach of the present theory. Finally, I summarize four of the most influential extant models of pathological social anxiety, with the aim of distilling a contemporary consensus definition of the construct.

In Part II, I present the eponymous phenomenological theory of social anxiety. Given the general unfamiliarity among psychological professionals with the concepts and language of Sartrean existential philosophy, I first provide a general orientation to Sartre's method and foundational concepts. Next, the theory is developed over the course of three sections, each focusing on one defining feature of pathological social anxiety. Throughout each section, I provide explanation and interpretation of specific ideas from *Being and Nothingness*, and demonstrate their descriptive and explanatory validity for social anxiety disorder by extensive reference to both empirical literature, and to qualitative data on first-person experience. The latter is drawn from three published, commercially available autobiographical memoirs focusing

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Sass (2014) regarding the overlap of description and explanation in phenomenological psychopathology.

on the authors' experience of living with pervasive social anxiety. My primary source for narrative data is titled *On the Outside Looking In: My Life With Social Anxiety Disorder* by Daniela Grazia (2010). Supplemental evidence is drawn from the following books: *Brave: A Memoir of Overcoming Shyness* by Helen Rivas-Rose (2010), and *What You Must Think of Me: A Firsthand Account of One Teenager's Experience of Social Anxiety* by Emily Ford (2007). Each work offers a descriptive account of the authors' internal experience moving through the social fabric of North American life, detailing the painstaking effort to maintain a normative social existence from childhood and through various stages of adulthood. Through careful analysis, these self-reported narratives yield an initial round of phenomenological evidence in support of conceptualizing social anxiety disorder using a Sartrean lens.

In Part III, I examine where and how the proposed theory forms a meaningful contribution to the field of social anxiety studies. This effort subdivides into two parts: first, looking at the implications of the phenomenological perspective as to the psychiatric classification of disorders of social anxiety, and second, at the implications it holds for clinical treatment. Finally, I conclude the paper by discussing the limitations of this study and proposing avenues for further research.

## Part One: Toward a Modern Concept of Social Anxiety Disorder

### Social Anxiety Disorder: A Brief History<sup>3</sup>

Observers of the human condition from antiquity have noted that social interaction is cause for anxiety and avoidant behavior in certain individuals. Hippocrates, according to a medical treatise from 1621, was known to “dare not come in company, for fear he should be misused, disgraced, overshoot himself in gestures or speeches or be sick; he thinks every man observes him” (Burton, 1621, cited in Marks, 1987, p.362). The modern notion of social anxiety disorder as a distinct pathological form, however, developed in piecemeal fashion over the course of the twentieth century. The term *social phobia*<sup>4</sup> was coined by pioneering psychiatrist Pierre Janet in 1903. Janet considered the condition one among a class of situational phobias, forming, with claustrophobia and agoraphobia, one of four major categories of phobic fears: situational, bodily, of objects, and of ideas. Janet’s conception of social phobia was broad, subsuming fears of blushing, of intimacy and sex, of public speaking, and of acting with authority. With regard to blushing, Janet stressed that the response was not in itself the object of fear, but rather the prospect of being seen blushing by others; blushing in private was not of concern to his patients.

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<sup>3</sup> The following sketch of the history of the concept of social anxiety as a pathological condition has been adapted from multiple sources: Stravynski, A. (2007). *Fearing others: The nature and treatment of social phobia*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 16-24; Moutier, C. Y., & Stein, M. B. (1999). The history, epidemiology, and differential diagnosis of social anxiety disorder. *The Journal of clinical psychiatry*, 60(suppl 9), 4-8;

<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this paper, I will be using the following set of terms: *Social anxiety* will refer to the basic type of experience that is hypothesized to form the substratum of various pathological and non-pathological conditions. *Social anxiety disorder* will designate the formal clinical condition based on the diagnostic criteria of the DSM-5. *Social phobia* was the term used for this construct in previous editions of the DSM, and is therefore used in much of the literature cited; it should be considered interchangeable with *social anxiety disorder*.

Contemporaries of Janet, namely Dugas (1898) and Hartenberg (1921) took a different view of these excessive fears of social situations, seeing them not as discrete pathological entities but rather as morbid exacerbations of normal shyness. Hartenberg believed that social anxiety was a common affective experience that in certain individuals becomes exaggerated, over-generalized, and chronic. The personalities of such individuals tended toward sensitivity, passivity, politeness, isolation, pessimism, and suppression of resentment toward others. Hartenberg advocated for treatment by what would today be called cognitive restructuring and in vivo exposure, as well as rehearsal of social interaction and even modification of posture.

The next fifty years saw a decline in scientific interest in social phobia, as well as the disappearance of the term. An article in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* in 1945 explored possible connections between schizophrenia and what was called *social anxiety neurosis* (Myerson, 1945), the latter resembling earlier descriptions in emphasizing physiological over-activation, intense concern with appearance, and proneness to withdrawal. With the post-World War II rise of psychometric assessment, social phobia became an object of research once more. The first scale for the measurement of social anxiety (as a stand-alone construct) was devised and tested by Dixon, De Monchaux & Sandler (1957). The term social phobia was brought back into usage by Marks and Gelder (1966), whose work supported the construct validity of social phobia by showing that it is distinguishable from agoraphobia and specific phobias, primarily in terms of age of onset. Marks's (1987) subsequent work determined three identifying features of social phobia: anxious distress evoked by social activities, a pattern of social avoidance, and resultant impairment in functionality. By 1990, both the DSM and the ICD systems of classification had adopted some version of these diagnostic criteria, which have remained essentially consistent until today.



### **Evolution of Social Anxiety Disorder in the DSM<sup>5</sup>**

Longitudinal changes in both the terminology and concept of social anxiety disorder, as expressed in the American Psychiatric Association's manual of diagnosis, have followed two main trajectories: from narrower to more inclusive, and from a categorical to a continuum view of its variability. Social phobia first appeared as a diagnosis in the DSM-III in 1980, and was grouped with the specific phobias, which in turn comprised a subset of anxiety disorders. The manual advised clinicians that individual social fears typically center on one performance situation— whether it be public speaking, eating in public or using public bathrooms. Avoidant personality disorder and social phobia were considered mutually exclusive diagnoses, and the social phobia diagnosis did not extend to children. The DSM-III-R of 1987 featured an expanded list of commonly feared scenarios, including “hand-trembling when writing in the presence of others, and saying foolish things or not being able to answer questions in social situations.” The latter option denoted a conceptual expansion from pure performance-focus to more generalized interactional fear. Avoidant personality could now be diagnosed as comorbid with social phobia, signifying a trend toward understanding the two as linked. Finally, a diagnostic specifier was introduced for indicating the presence of a “generalized subtype” of social phobia, in light of growing recognition that the scope and intensity of social fears and avoidance behaviors could vary greatly between individual cases.

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<sup>5</sup> The information regarding DSM-III, DSM-III-R, DSM-IV, and DSM-IV-TR in this section is adapted from multiple sources: Bögels, S. M., Alden, L., Beidel, D. C., Clark, L. A., Pine, D. S., Stein, M. B., & Voncken, M. (2010). Social anxiety disorder: questions and answers for the DSM-V. *Depression and anxiety*, 27(2), 168-189; Heckelman, L. R., & Schneier, F. R. (1995). “Diagnostic issues” in Heimberg, R. G. (Ed.). (1995). *Social phobia: Diagnosis, assessment, and treatment*. Guilford Press.

The publication of the DSM-IV in 1994 saw further development in these directions. The entry for the disorder became entitled “Social Phobia (Social Anxiety Disorder),” reflecting a change of perspective as to its nosological status; it was now seen as differing in important ways from specific phobias. Further potential sources of anxiety were enumerated in the criteria, with the fear of appearing anxious to others by blushing or stammering being elevated to Criterion A. The division between social phobia and avoidant personality was partially collapsed, as the text noted that “Avoidant Personality Disorder may be a more severe variant of Social Phobia, Generalized, that is not qualitatively distinct.” *Avoidant disorder*, a disorder of childhood included in previous editions of the DSM, was jettisoned in favor of extending the social phobia diagnosis to children, based on a finding that the two constructs showed a high degree of overlap.

The 2013 publication of the DSM-5 furthered the movement away from the paradigm of phobic fear, as the diagnosis was officially amended to “Social Anxiety Disorder (Social Phobia).” The change was explained by the section’s editors as reflecting “a new and broader understanding of the condition in a variety of social situations,” forgoing the DSM’s traditional emphasis on performance anxiety in favor of a broader concept encompassing variegated specific and generalized forms of socially-themed anxiety responses. In another expression of this reversal, the DSM-5 aborted the “generalized subtype” specifier while simultaneously adding a “performance only” specifier, preserving the recognition that marked performance anxiety can manifest in the absence of other social fears. The final form of the DSM-5 criteria appears as follows, all of which must be met for diagnosis:

Social Anxiety Disorder (Social Phobia)  
Diagnostic Criteria

- A. Marked fear or anxiety about one or more social situations in which the individual is exposed to possible scrutiny by others. Examples include social interactions (e.g., having a conversation, meeting unfamiliar people), being observed (e.g., eating or drinking), and performing in front of others (e.g., giving a speech).

**Note:** In children, the anxiety must occur in peer settings and not just during interactions with adults.

- B. The individual fears that he or she will act in a way or show anxiety symptoms that will be negatively evaluated (i.e., will be humiliating or embarrassing; will lead to rejection or offend others).
- C. The social situations almost always provoke fear or anxiety.
  - o **Note:** In children, the fear or anxiety may be expressed by crying, tantrums, freezing, clinging, shrinking, or failing to speak in social situations.
- D. The social situations are avoided or endured with intense fear or anxiety.
- E. The fear or anxiety is out of proportion to the actual threat posed by the social situation and to the sociocultural context.
- F. The fear, anxiety, or avoidance is persistent, typically lasting for 6 months or more.
- G. The fear, anxiety, or avoidance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.
- H. The fear, anxiety, or avoidance is not attributable to the physiological effects of a substance (e.g., a drug of abuse, a medication) or another medical condition.
- I. The fear, anxiety, or avoidance is not better explained by the symptoms of another mental disorder, such as panic disorder, body dysmorphic disorder, or autism spectrum disorder.
- J. If another medical condition (e.g., Parkinson's disease, obesity, disfigurement from burns or injury) is present, the fear, anxiety, or avoidance is clearly unrelated or is excessive.

*Specify if:*

- **Performance only:** If the fear is restricted to speaking or performing in public.  
(American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

### **Social Anxiety Disorder, Avoidant Personality, and Shyness: One Thing or Three?**

Since the 1990's, a substantial body of literature has been produced examining the relationships between constructs thematized by distress or avoidance in interpersonal contact. The guiding objective of this field of research has been to establish whether these constructs –the diagnostic categories social anxiety disorder and avoidant personality disorder, and the personality trait shyness- are to be understood as qualitatively distinct, or as gradations in the frequency and intensity of a given factor. In the context of this paper, the following review of literature will help clarify whether a general theory of social anxiety may be viewed as pertinent only to the formal diagnosis of social anxiety disorder, or to avoidant personality and shyness as well.

**Social anxiety disorder and avoidant personality disorder.** There is little empirical support for the existence of important qualitative differences between social anxiety disorder (SAD) and avoidant personality disorder (AVPD) (McNeil, 2010). Three related studies conducted in 1992 comparing those diagnosed with social phobia (SP) and those diagnosed with comorbid SP and AVPD found that the presence of AVPD is associated with poorer overall psychophysiological wellbeing, more comorbid disorders, and greater levels of social anxiety, generalized anxiety, and depression. However, significant differences were not detected between groups on a variety of social skills performance tasks, and all three papers concluded that AVPD appears to be a quantitatively more severe form of SP (Herbert, Hope, & Bellack, 1992; Holt, Heimberg, & Hope, 1992; Turner, Beidel, & Townsley, 1992). McNeil et al. (1995) compared those two groups on a variety of socially-themed Stroop tests, in addition to a group of individuals diagnosed with circumscribed social phobia (fear of only one kind of situation, like public speaking), and likewise found no meaningful differences between the SP with AVPD and SP without AVPD groups. Those with circumscribed fears of public performance differed from the other two groups only in that they demonstrated difficulties specific to public speaking. Boone et al. (1999) assessed the same three subtypes performing two kinds of social tasks, and collected measurements of behavior, physiological reactivity, and self-related statements uttered during the exercises. They concluded that the three diagnostic groups appear to exist on a continuum of severity, and that “the utility of separate social phobia and APD diagnoses on different DSM-IV axes is questionable” (p. 287). Hoffman et al. (2004, p.775), in a comprehensive review of the research on this issue, similarly concluded that “there is little empirical support for retaining both diagnoses as separate clinical entities.” It should be noted that the trend among authors on this subject, whatever their findings, is to call for further

research aimed at detecting possible qualitative differences that their own studies may have lacked the sensitivity to reveal.

Studies that have successfully found qualitative differences between diagnostic groups constitute a small minority within the wider field of research. Tran & Chambless (1995) found that the AVPD diagnosis group in their study showed poorer social skills than the non-AVPD group, in contrast to some of the earlier studies mentioned above. However, the authors suggest caution in interpreting this result, given its thin margin of statistical significance and the presence of various confounding design factors. An entirely different perspective on qualitative difference looks at possible linkages between AVPD and schizophrenic spectrum disorders. Several studies yielding mixed results have looked at the likelihood of developing AVPD among close offspring and other relatives of those with schizophrenia spectrum diagnoses, with at least two studies concluding that AVPD may itself constitute a schizophrenia spectrum disorder, similarly to paranoid PD and schizotypal PD (reviewed in Bögels, 2010). Finally, a third approach to differentiating AVPD has examined the prevalence of non-social avoidance patterns among an AVPD population, finding low to moderate associations between the AVPD diagnosis and avoidance of emotional and novel experiences as well as non-social events (Taylor, Laposa & Alden, 2004). While making mention of these outlying results, reviewers of the aggregate picture of AVPD research nonetheless tend to question the validity of holding AVPD and SAD as separate constructs.

**Social anxiety disorder and shyness.** Research on the relationship between social anxiety disorder and trait shyness has been driven both by growing awareness of the seriousness and prevalence of SAD since the 1990's, and by popular concern that this trend would result in

the pathologizing of a common trait.<sup>6</sup> Efforts to test for discriminant validity between the two have yielded broad support for locating shyness on the low end of a social anxiety spectrum, along with ambiguous indications of the existence of subtypes of shyness. Heiser et al. (2009) compared groups of highly shy persons with social phobia diagnoses, highly shy persons with no diagnoses, and non-shy persons, finding no meaningful differences between the shy with and without SP groups on measures of anticipatory anxiety before an informal conversation task, subjective anxiety during the task, and physiological reactivity during the task. The social phobia group did, however, show greater numbers of social fears, negative thoughts, and somatic symptoms, and reported more functional impairment and lower quality of life than the shy-only group. The authors interpret their results as generally supporting the continuum hypothesis, consistent with the findings of a number of earlier studies (Amies, Gelder, & Shaw, 1983; Liebowitz, Gorman, Fyer, & Klein, 1985; Schneier et al., 1994; Stein & Kean, 2000; Stein, McQuaid, Laffaye, & McCahill, 1999; Turner et al., 1986; Wittchen & Beloch, 1996). Tellingly, this conclusion contradicts an earlier study by the same authors that endorsed the view of shyness and social phobia as overlapping but distinct constructs (Heiser et al., 2003).

Measures of co-occurrence of high-level shyness and social phobia have ranged from as high as 97% in a treatment sample (Lorant et al., 2000) to 49% in an undergraduate sample (Chavira et al., 2002) to 18% in another undergraduate sample (Heiser et al., 2003). This partial overlap of high level shyness and social phobia has been hypothesized to indicate the existence of heterogeneous types within shyness. Zimbardo (1977) divides shy persons into shy introverts, who desire only minimal social interaction, and shy extraverts, who desire substantial social interaction and thus suffer as a result of their inhibition. Turner (1990) suggests that Zimbardo's

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<sup>6</sup> To wit, a 2008 book on the topic was entitled *Shyness: How Normal Behavior Became a Sickness*, published by Yale University Press (Lane, 2008)

latter category, given their discordant combination of high sociability and high shyness, are more likely to be diagnosed with social phobia. Heiser et al. (2009), noting that a full third of the shy persons who took part in their study reported having no social fears whatsoever, suggest that those whose shyness includes social fears are the most likely to manifest social phobia. Chavira et al. (2002) propose that non-pathological shyness (i.e. shyness without distress or functional impairment) may break down into similar categories as does social phobia, with normative levels of shyness corresponding to performance-specific social phobia, and high shyness corresponding to the notion of generalized social anxiety disorder.

### **Contemporary Theories of Social Anxiety Disorder**

Contemporary efforts to describe the underlying basis of social anxiety break down into two general approaches. The cognitive-behavioral approach emphasizes how cognitive processes such as attention, perception, and representational memory work together to produce an unrealistic impression of the danger of social interaction. On the other side, the social-cognitive, or interpersonal, approach focuses on the ways in which social anxiety forms as a response to dynamics of interpersonal life. The cognitive-behavioral approach is here exemplified by the theoretical models of Clark and Wells, and Rapee and Heimberg; representing the interpersonal approach is Baldwin's relational schema theory and Leary's self-presentation theory. It should be noted that all four sets of researchers describe their projects as compatible and mutually informative (cf. Clark (2001), Leary (2010), Baldwin & Fergusson (2001) for examples of how each author frequently cites the others).

#### **Cognitive-behavioral theories.**

**Clark and Wells.** A well-known and widely-researched model of social anxiety was first articulated by Clark and Wells in 1995, and has since been continuously developed and refined

by the authors and their associates.<sup>7</sup> At the heart of their model is the idea of pathological core beliefs, first proposed by Beck (1979) in his work on depression. An individual is thought to hold fixed beliefs formed out of early life experiences. According to Clark (2001), social anxiety initially arises from the combined effect of three types of firmly held and unquestioned assumptions. First, the socially anxious individual (SAI) holds one or more unconditional negative beliefs about the self: for example, “I am odd”, “I am unlikeable”, or “I am boring”. Second, the individual holds excessively high standards for social performance, in the form of self-imposed behavioral rules, such as “I must sound intelligent”, “I should only speak when it is my turn”, “I should always have something interesting to say”. Third, the SAI holds conditional beliefs about the consequences of social performance, which can be expressed in the form of if-then statements: “If I disagree with someone, they will reject me”, or “If I am quiet, people will think I am boring”. These beliefs are thought to lie dormant until activated by relevant stimuli, in this case, the onset or anticipation of a social encounter. Once activated, these beliefs form a framework for interpreting social input and predicting the outcomes of interaction. Thus, a relatively insignificant social exchange, such as greeting another person as they walk by, comes to be perceived as a test of social competency that one expects himself to fail, resulting in negative evaluation by the other. The anticipation of being appraised as undesirable also influences the SAI to interpret ambiguous social cues as corroborating this prediction, as in the example of a smile being read as mocking rather than friendly.

The Clark and Wells model depicts social anxiety as a chain of psychophysiological events. The activation of core beliefs is the first step in the sequence. The next step is described as the “processing of the self as a social object.” Clark and Wells (1995) surmise that in response

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<sup>7</sup> While I do not review the empirical evidence for the model in this paper, Clark (2001) provides an extensive review of research supporting each of its hypotheses.



to the appraisal of social danger, a socially anxious individual will automatically redirect their attention away from the environment and engage in intensive self-monitoring. This results in their forming a representative impression of their present state culled from three internal sources of information: 1) Sensations of physiological anxiety, such as sweating or trembling, as the nervous system responds to the appraisal of ensuing threat; 2) The appearance of an image of one's own face or body corresponding to these sensations- for example, one suddenly sees a mental image of herself visibly red-faced and sweating; 3) The emergence of a "felt sense" reflecting some negative core belief about the self, such as that one is "odd" or "different". The aggregated self-image derived from these somatic and mental information is then presumed to accurately reflect how one presently appears to surrounding others.

The next stage in the sequence outlined by Clark and Wells is the enactment of safety behaviors (Clark, 2001). Safety behaviors are defined in this model as "behaviors that are intended to prevent or minimize the feared catastrophe" (p.408). Clark and Wells take a view of the behavioral aspects of social anxiety that combines behaviorist and cognitivist perspectives. Certain safety behaviors typical to social anxiety are understood as simple phobic avoidance. For example, an SAI may sidestep an imminent interaction by avoiding eye contact, pretending to be preoccupied with something else, or hiding their face so as not to be recognized. The success of these moves in reducing the anxiety state brought on by the social stimulus both reinforces the behavior pattern and precludes the individual from potentially experiencing a better-than-expected outcome. However, the model also importantly recognizes that in many circumstances, SAIs choose to endure social interaction with much distress rather than flatly avoid it. Clark and Wells therefore include in the category of safety behaviors more subtle methods of preventing negative evaluation. Clark (2001) offers the example of SAIs who worry that they will speak

incoherently or sound unintelligent, who report rehearsing what they want to say before they say it, and closely monitoring themselves to be sure they stick to their script. Safety behaviors may be reactive as well as preventive: one whose social anxiety centers on an intense fear of being seen blushing, when the dreaded event happens, might say “It’s hot in here” to escape being thought of as a nervous person. Finally, Clark and Wells suggest that safety behaviors can paradoxically serve to provoke the very negative evaluations they are meant to prevent. Avoiding eye contact may be seen by others as unfriendly or aloof; covering one’s face during blushing is likely to draw even more attention; concentrating on how one acts and sounds when meeting someone new can appear to others as inattention or disinterest. Others’ interpretations of safety behaviors may cause them to act less friendly toward the SAI, which is then taken as further confirmation of preexisting beliefs about the self and the risks of social interaction.

The final aspect of social anxiety identified by this model is pre- and post-event processing. Clark (2001) notes that anxious ideation often occurs both in anticipation of and subsequent to social encounters. On the anticipatory side, the expectation of social threat and negative evaluation calls forth memories of past embarrassments and failure, negative images of the upcoming engagement, and predictions of poor performance. This rumination sometimes results in total avoidance, and otherwise primes the individual to be selectively attentive to evidence of social threat during the interaction. Similarly, the cessation of social interaction does not necessarily result in the cessation of the social anxiety symptoms. SAIs often review an interaction in detail after it is over, judging their own performance and ruminating over the meaning of others’ ambiguous responses to them. During these “post-mortems,” the bodily anxiety and negative self-perceptions activated by interaction influence the way memory is encoded, such that it is quite possible for an interaction to be remembered as much more of a

failure than it had realistically been. Clark notes in this vein that some SAIs report a lingering sense of shame even once their anxious physiological arousal has diminished following a social exchange.

***Rapee and Heimberg.*** A competing, albeit similar cognitive-behavioral model has been developed and researched by Rapee and Heimberg and associates. This model (Heimberg, Brozovich & Rapee, 2010; Rapee and Heimberg, 1997) includes many of the same elements as Clark and Wells' paradigm- in fact, both sets of authors frequently cite each other – and differs from the latter primarily with regard to the primacy given to certain processes over others. Rapee and Heimberg (1997) emphasize the role of external cues, over against internal sensations and representations, in giving rise to the sense of social threat. A socially anxious individual sensing the presence of a “perceived audience” will form a prediction of the level and kind of social performance expected of him, which will vary in accordance with the particular audience (e.g. employer, friend) and scenario (e.g. formal or informal). Simultaneously, the SAI will form an impression of how he appears to his audience, based on external cues (e.g. seeing others yawning) and internal self-representations and feelings. The SAI next compares these two representations - what is expected of him in the moment, versus how well he thinks he is performing. As a result of pre-existing biases in attention to and processing of social information, combined with memories of past failure, an SAI is likely to judge that (a) he is probably being negatively evaluated and (b) that this interaction will therefore be costly to his social standing. This determination triggers a physical anxiety response, which then feed back into and reinforce his negative appraisal of the situation.

**Interpersonal theories.**

**Relational schema theory.** Baldwin's (1992) relational schema theory blends aspects of cognitive psychology with an interpersonal conception of the self. Like Clark and Wells (1995), Baldwin sees social anxiety as resulting from the activation of specific kinds of mental representations derived from recurring patterns of social experience. Baldwin's unique contribution is to conceptualize these representations, or schemas, as tripartite systems which include a self-schema, an other-schema, and an interpersonal script that predicts the outcome of interaction. For instance, the self-schema "incompetence" might be associated with the other-schema "critical", with the script connecting these two dictating "If I fail, then others will criticize me." Rather than existing and arising as isolated pieces of cognitive data, these representations of self, other, and social process form associational networks. Thus, the activation of just one node of the network – an encounter with a critical person - carries the potential to light up the entire network, resulting in a felt sense of oneself as incompetent, and the expectation of being criticized by the other. Though every individual would in theory possess a variety of such relational schemas, fitted to variegated social scenarios, socially anxious individuals are hypothesized to be prone to those characterized by poor self-esteem and fear of judgment. The relationship between schema activation and resultant social anxiety symptomology in Baldwin's model is congruent with the mainstream cognitive-behavioral view, in that it leads to increased self-focus, increased access to memories of social failure, negative interpretation of ambiguous social cues, enactment of dubiously successful avoidance and safety behaviors, and so on.

**Self-presentation theory.** A second influential interpersonal model of social anxiety is self-presentation theory, based on the work Mark Leary and associates (Schlenker and Leary,

1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1995; Leary, 2010). Leary's model is distinguished by a focus on the meaning rather than underlying mechanics – the why rather than the how - of social anxiety.

Self-presentation theory proposes that social anxiety results from the coincidence of two factors: (a) The motivation to make a particular impression on other people, coupled with (b) substantial doubt that one will succeed in making this impression. Following Baumeister and Tice (1990), the theory assumes that impression management is a basic survival need, given the evolutionary need to maintain ties of belonging to a supportive social group. Leaving a bad impression runs the risk of lowering one's "relational value," the degree to which one is seen as valuable or important to others. Though every person must engage in impression management at times, a socially anxious individual is abnormally preoccupied with the task (Leary, 2010).

Leary (2010) also proposes the notion of the "sociometer," a hypothetical mental mechanism whose purpose is to monitor threat to relational value. Much as fear indicates the proximity of physical threat, the complex cognitive and physiological features of social anxiety are the sociometer's signal to the individual that his relational value is in jeopardy. Leary construes the typical behavior patterns of socially anxious individuals as styles of "protective self-representation" (Leary & Kowalski, 1995), designed to avoid social losses, in contrast with "acquisitive self-representation" styles, which are intended to make social gains. These protective behaviors range from total avoidance or withdrawal from social situations, to general reticence in group conversations, to assuming an "innocuously sociable" stance (nodding and smiling frequently while verbally conveying attentiveness), to asking many questions while avoiding making firm statements (Leary, 1983; Leary, Knight & Johnson, 1987). Each of these represents a strategic effort to maintain connection to a person or group while lowering the risk of damage to one's image, by being agreeable and keeping out of the spotlight. Even total

withdrawal from a social encounter can be thought of as protective of one's social standing, if appraised as less potentially costly to one's relational value than showing up and risking a more flagrant offense.

**Summary.** The four models reviewed here are united by a common foundation in cognitivist metapsychology, each offering a distinct account of how social anxiety arises from internal dysfunction in the processing of social information. For Clark and Wells' cognitive-behavioral model, as well for Baldwin's relational schema theory, the crux of the problem lies with pre-encoded negative representations imprinting perceptions of self and other and exaggerating the consequentiality of social error. Rapee and Heimberg, alternatively, put more onus on the way the socially anxious individual makes sense of cues in the environment, overattending to others' reactions and tending to interpret them as evidence of failure. Leary's self-presentation theory provides a conceptual frame as to why social performance should be cause for anxiety in the first place, proposing that the socially anxious individual's preoccupation with impression management is an instance of adaptive evolutionary strategy run amok. Distinguishing the interpersonal models of Baldwin and Leary from the more conventional cognitive-behavioral accounts is the assertion that the structure of mind is, at least in part, innately social. Their notions of *relational schema* and the *sociometer*, respectively, seek to explain individual cognition and behavior in the terms and conditions of a primary interpersonal reality.

### **Conclusion**

Based on preceding review of the clinical and academic literature surrounding social anxiety, the following conclusions may be drawn: The modern notion of social anxiety disorder designates a broad range of experiences of distress, impairment, and patterns of avoidance

pertaining to social interaction and public performance. While previously held as qualitatively distinct conditions, non-pathological shyness and avoidant personality disorder are now thought by many researchers to reflect variations in severity and frequency of the same basic experience typified by social anxiety disorder proper.

In consideration of the preceding data, several core elements of the experience of social anxiety disorder may be identified. Stravynski (2007), in his comprehensive review of social anxiety research, theory, and treatment, offers a definition that encapsulates these themes:

Social phobia is simultaneously an inordinate fear of humiliation resulting from public degradation that one is powerless to prevent, ending in subsequent loss of standing or membership in the social worlds to which one belongs, as well as a comprehensive defensive interpersonal pattern (constitutive of various subpatterns) protective against the threat of being treated hurtfully by others. (p. 13)

The three elements I mean to highlight are: (1) Powerlessness over social presentation; (2) Expectation of negative evaluation; (3) Enactment of avoidant and protective patterns of behavior. The unique character of social anxiety over against other pathological formations is marked the confluence of all three features. To wit, many people possess an intense aversion to public humiliation, but feel confident in their ability to avoid or prevent such an outcome. Others, such as agoraphobes, engage in avoidant and self-protective behaviors, but their fear does not center on social disapproval so much as the prospect of physical harm or the onset of panic. In the next chapter, my presentation of the proposed phenomenological theory will be built around these three defining elements of social anxiety pathology. Over the course of the presentation, I aim to develop a phenomenological conception of each element that discloses both its particular significance and its connection to the larger experiential context of the socially anxious consciousness.

### **Part Two: A Phenomenological Theory of Social Anxiety**

The present theory derives its conceptual frame and much of its language from the writing of Jean-Paul Sartre in his masterwork *Being and Nothingness*.<sup>8</sup> It will therefore be helpful to provide a simplified synopsis of the basic tenets of Sartre's existential-phenomenological philosophy, and especially his understanding of the conflictual nature of human sociality. Before that, however, some additional preparatory comments on the use of Sartre's thought for this purpose: The central epistemological difficulty involved in the appropriation of philosophy for psychopathological research concerns the opposition between their aims: the former is a search for universal principles, while the latter comprises a science of abnormality. In Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, a shining example of this characterization of philosophy, reality is stripped down to its most basic components in order to be built back up on new phenomenological foundations (to wit, the first sentence of the first chapter: "Our inquiry has led us to the heart of being" (*BN*, p. 33)). In this respect, Sartre's treatment of social existence is intended as a fully normative account. In what ways, then, can the case be made for reading his thoughts on the matter as representative of a specific variety of the experience of interpersonal life?

In their *Faces in a Cloud*, Atwood and Stolorow (1979) argue that the analysis of any theory of human personality ought to consider the contribution of the theorist's subjectivity to his or her project:

The ultimate aim of personality theory is to arrive at comprehensive principles to account for human experience and human conduct. But the empirical phenomena of the human world present themselves differently according to the perspective of the observer. The

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<sup>8</sup> Throughout the rest of the paper, I use shorthand for citations of the four most referenced sources: Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* is shortened to *BN*, and the three memoirists of social anxiety are referred to by their initials: *DG* for Daniela Grazia, *EF* for Emily Ford, and *HRR* for Helen Rivas-Rose.



particularity of the psychological context from which the personality theorist views reality guarantees that his interpretations will be focused on select features of the empirical field, and that specific dimensions of human conduct bearing a correspondence to his own pre-theoretical vision of man will be magnified in his eventual theoretical constructions.

The authors posit their style of phenomenological research, “psychobiographical analysis,” as thus serving, in line with the question posed above,

...not only to establish a relationship between the theorist and his works, but also to determine the particularization of scope of the theory, and hence to delimit its generality and validity. (pp. 10-11)

Taking up this point of view permits us to reframe the question of the validity of Sartre’s thought for this project. We may acknowledge that Sartre intended to describe the experience shared by all conscious beings, while also affirming that such an achievement is effectively impossible. In assuming that Sartre’s capacity to investigate and describe consciousness is constrained by the particulars of his own individual existence – inclusive of both personal and world-historical circumstances – we unburden his thought from the requirement to be universally true in order to be considered phenomenologically valid. Instead, the value of Sartre’s formulations may be substantiated specifically by investigating in what circumstances they are a “subjectively true,” that is, comprehensively illuminative of a particular variety of interpersonal experience.<sup>9</sup> To that

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<sup>9</sup> While a comprehensive psychobiographical analysis of J.P. Sartre will not figure into this paper, it is worth noting the work of Kirsner (1976) in *The Schizoid World of Jean Paul Sartre and R.D. Laing*. Kirsner draws on biographical and autobiographical writings, in conjunction with various pieces of Sartre’s philosophical and literary oeuvre, in ascribing to him the schizoid personality structure propounded by the British object-relations school of psychoanalysis. Kirsner cites Guntrip’s (1971) explanation of the “schizoid problem” as that concerning “people who have very deep-seated doubts about the reality and validity of their very ‘self’, who are ultimately found to be suffering from various degrees of depersonalization, unreality, the dread feeling of ‘not belonging’, of being fundamentally isolated and out of touch with their world.” (p. 45) Later on, I will make the case for re-conceptualizing social anxiety disorder as a pathological subtype of schizoid psychology. For the moment, though, it is interesting to note the ways in which the historical Sartre may have indeed endured the kinds of troubling experience in relation we have thus far identified with social anxiety. Sartre was, Kirsner tells, “...an only child without peers who was shut up in his grandfather’s house where his only friends were his

end, the method employed by this study is to test Sartre's formulations against the self-descriptions of real sufferers of social anxiety disorder. If valid for our present purposes, Sartre's work on the interpersonal encounter will be (a) generalizable to multiple first-person accounts of the lived experience of social anxiety disorder and (b) capable of explaining the variegated manifest cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions of social anxiety in terms of one or several basic organizing principles.

I should clarify that it is by no means my contention here that the socially anxious individual is the archetypal "Sartrean man," as if the phenomenological conditions of social anxiety disorder precisely echo every facet of Sartre's system. Nor am I contending the reverse, that Sartre himself suffered from social anxiety disorder *per se*, such that his philosophy should be read as clinical literature. It is rather the case that through my involvements in the field of clinical psychology and readings in existential philosophy, I have observed a robust correspondence between certain viewpoints and motifs in Sartre's thought and the patterns of thinking, feeling and acting that turn up in the self-descriptions of individuals afflicted with persistent social anxiety. As noted earlier, what first alerted me to the possible utility of *Being*

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grandfathers books....He was treated as a doll, a cute exhibition piece, an object – but never as a worthwhile person in his own right who had real and valid feelings of his own. The young Sartre's internal reality was systematically invalidated: his being became his being-for-others. Sartre felt his true self to be in the hands of the adults. Feeling empty, he was an impostor, playing the part he understood was expected of him by adults...He felt as malleable as clay, like a jellyfish inside and was disgusted with what he saw as the "trivial unreality" of the world" (p. 46). Indeed, Sartre's early developmental environment seems to be one which would have left him with a lasting impression of the Other as, in general, overwhelmingly powerful and threatening to personal agency. Two of the three thematic elements of social anxiety disorder described earlier find clear expression in the above biographic sketches: Powerlessness over social image ("treated as a doll, a cute exhibition piece"), and protective compliance with the Other's perceived expectations ("playing the part he understood was expected of him by adults"). The third element, fear of negative evaluation, is indicated as well but in such a way as has not yet been discussed: to wit, the purpose of the child's compliant behavior being to distract others from seeing that he is not "a worthwhile person in his own right."

*and Nothingness* for the study of social anxiety disorder was the tone of dread permeating its view of social reality. In light of that basic commonality, it seemed reasonable to expect that within Sartre's larger existential-phenomenological edifice should appear a good deal of content aimed at the "specific dimensions of human conduct" (Atwood & Stolorow, 1979) bearing upon the experience of uncomfortable or conflictual social relation. As will be seen, contained within Sartre's wide-ranging analysis are indeed to be found a set of finely developed, pertinent phenomenological concepts which, when brought together, compose an impressive portrait of the subjective character of social anxiety disorder as reported in contemporary empirical and qualitative sources. One could perhaps then formulate the position of the present study as: *Being and Nothingness* is not uniformly *about* social anxiety disorder, but social anxiety disorder is certainly one genuine, lived expression of its vision of the existential crisis of being human.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Other as the Limit of Freedom**

Sartre's edifice in *Being and Nothingness* is founded on a revision of Descartes's (1668) classic equation of cognition and being. Descartes argued that while he may doubt the reality of any object, in the very act of doubting he cannot deny the existence of the doubting subject, himself. Sartre counters that the doubting act is not itself aware of itself as an "I"; rather, that there must be a separate, accompanying consciousness of the doubting. Barnes summarizes this position: "In other words this cogito is not Descartes doubting; it is Descartes reflecting upon the

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<sup>10</sup>In this respect, it is not hard to imagine that spread throughout Sartre's oeuvre are to be found expressions of the phenomenological essences of other distinct psychopathological categories. To wit: Macgregor, C. (2012). Sartre, Minkowski and depression. *Existential Analysis*, 23(1), 67-75; Reed, R. C. (1994). "Love" and Addiction. The Phenomenological Ontologies of Kierkegaard and Sartre: An Existential Theory of Addiction. (Dissertation); Klass, D. B., & Offenkrantz, W. (1975). Sartre's contribution to the understanding of narcissism. *International journal of psychoanalytic psychotherapy*, 5, 547-565.

doubting. “I doubt therefore I am” is really “I am aware that I doubt, therefore I am” (*BN*, p. xi).

The significance of this move can be better understood in light of Sartre’s adoption of Husserl’s principle of intentionality:

Consciousness is consciousness *of* something. This means that transcendence is the constitutive structure of consciousness; that is, that consciousness is born *supported* by a being which is not itself. (*BN*, p. 23)

To become conscious of a thing (whether I doubt its reality or not) immediately suggests that there is a thing to be conscious of, by necessity a thing that is not co-extensive with consciousness itself. Yet that we intuitively know that our consciousness of a thing is just that – consciousness of, and not the thing itself – implies the presence of a second level of consciousness, a consciousness of consciousness, which takes the primary object-consciousness as its own object.

The necessary and sufficient condition for a knowing consciousness to be knowledge *of* its object is that it be consciousness of itself as being that knowledge. This is a necessary condition, for if my consciousness were not consciousness of being conscious of the table, it would then be consciousness of that table without consciousness of being so. In other words, it would be a consciousness ignorant of itself, an unconscious – which is absurd. (*BN*, p.11)

Sartre describes the process as one of *reflection*, in this way distinguishing between the original *pre-reflective* consciousness of the object and the separate *reflective* consciousness; for instance, the former being the original perception of a table and the latter being the awareness of (or, reflection upon) having a perception of the table.

For our purposes, what is critical here is the identification of a basic property of the phenomenology of being. Per Sartre, one’s experience of being naturally divides into two “regions”: the *en soi/in-itself*, and the *pour soi/for-itself*. The in-itself designates the being of world, all that exists outside of consciousness, which consciousness is consciousness *of*. Sartre describes the in-itself as that which simply “is what it is” (*BN*, p.29); pure, undeniable presence,

its only relation its identity with itself. "It is full positivity. It knows no otherness; it never posits itself as *other-than-another-being*. It can support no connection with the other. It is itself and exhausts itself in being." The for-itself, conversely, designates the being of consciousness. In contrast to the "full positivity" of the in-itself, Sartre states that "For consciousness there is no being except for this precise obligation to be a revealing intuition of something" (*BN*, p. 786). In other words, as stated above, consciousness recognizes itself as consciousness, knowing with immediacy that it is the revelation of the thing but not the thing itself. In an important sense, the phenomenological marker of the for-itself is precisely its non-being, as Barnes writes, "Thus the For-itself is a revelation of Being, an internal nihilation of Being, a relation to Being, a desire of Being, and choice of Being. All of these it can be only because it *is not* Being" (*BN*, xxix). If being-in-itself describes the existence of things in the world, being-for-itself describes the sum of one's shifting, dynamic relation with world as it arises in consciousness.

It is this non-being character of the for-itself that leads Sartre to one of the central claims of *Being and Nothingness*: that the essence of consciousness is nothingness. While an endless flux of experiences give form to consciousness at every moment, it itself is necessarily none of them in particular. The nothingness of consciousness is not merely a characteristic but an active process of self-perpetuation. Consciousness must *nihilate* itself (make itself into nothing) perpetually in order to be what it is. Whatever thing in its world it becomes conscious of, it must also simultaneously *not be* that thing in order to maintain itself as consciousness. Nothingness is essential to the possibility of human experience; only by virtue of the nothingness of consciousness can what exists (the in-itself) become experience (the for-itself). In a world that exists for us as pure being, nothingness is the special province of human consciousness: "Man is the being through whom nothingness comes to the world" (*BN*, p. 59).

I stress once again that the preceding synopsis comprises a gross and incomplete simplification of Sartre's elaborate edifice. My main purpose in including it is to provide readers unfamiliar with Sartre a rudimentary sense of the significance of "nothingness" in the Sartrean framework and its relationship to consciousness. The thesis of consciousness as nothingness forms the conceptual ground of the first concept of critical importance to the proposed theory of social anxiety: *freedom*. Freedom has a specialized connotation in Sartre's philosophy. The ability of consciousness to perpetuate itself as consciousness owes to its freedom from the particular facts of its experience in the world at any given moment. In fact, Sartre points out, humans are quite capable of, and accustomed to, questioning the accuracy of perception. The ability to question perception implies a capacity to remove oneself from what exists around oneself, not to be defined by it:

He must be able to put himself *outside* of being... Man's *relation* with being is that he can modify it. For a man to put a particular existent out of circuit is to put himself out of circuit in relation to that existent. In this case he is not subject to it, he is out of reach, it cannot act on him... (*BN*, p. 59-60)

The "circuit" Sartre speaks of here refers to the stream of percepts that form the ground of reality for a conscious being. Since, in Sartre's philosophy, there is no distinction between being and perception, then to freely question the validity of perception is to freely step outside of being itself. This sort of freedom to determine the meaning of reality is the special property of the being of human beings; in fact, for Sartre, freedom is synonymous with humanness. The existentialist fascination with freedom is typified by "The Myth of Sisyphus", a 1942 essay by fellow existentialist Albert Camus. The eponymous character of Greek mythic origin is famously condemned by the gods to perpetually push a large stone to the top of a mountain, whereupon it inevitably rolls back down to the bottom. Sisyphus's task is futile, his situation, inescapable. Yet, Camus contends, as long as he is in control of his state of mind, he is free to determine the

meaning of his existence. Were he to embrace the absurdity of his situation, he may become content or even happy to live it in perpetuity – thus he can be said to have his freedom intact despite his enslavement to his fate. As long as one is conscious, one maintains the capacity to determine what one finally *is*, rather than to be determined by what is external to the self.<sup>11</sup>

Yet is it indeed the case in lived experience that the meaning of subjective reality is determined fully within the bounds of the self? Sartre's exposition of the character of social life begins with a phenomenological demonstration to the contrary. He introduces his thoughts on the ontology of the Other with a brief analysis of the nature of shame. Shame, he argues, is "a non-positional self-consciousness," meaning that it is not a perception, but a reflective apprehension of a particular perception, which in this case is a perception of the self: "It is a shameful apprehension *of* something and this something is *me*. I am ashamed of what I *am*. Shame therefore realizes an intimate relation of myself to myself. Through shame I have discovered an aspect of *my* being" (*BN*, p. 301). Yet, as much as shame is an internal affair, the experience of shame implies the presence of an observer. One is never merely ashamed, rather always ashamed before someone. Consider the common scenario in film and television in which a character, believing himself to be alone, begins to perform a dramatic dance movement. The expectable comedic twist comes as he turns around to find he is being watched by another character, at which point the dancing stops suddenly, and the audience empathically intuits that the character is feeling shame. Note that until the character becomes aware that he is being watched, we do not

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<sup>11</sup>After World War II, Sartre would come to acknowledge that true freedom is contingent upon the possession of basic material freedom, which may be lost or diminished through social oppression. "[I]t is important not to conclude that one can be free in chains," he writes in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (p. 578). [cf. Anderson, Thomas C., 1993, *Sartre's Two Ethics: From Authenticity to Integral Humanity*, Chicago: Open Court.]

presume that he finds his own behavior to be shameful. Shame is the self's feeling about the self, yet is revealed to the self only by the appearance of the watching Other. The Other appears involved in the "circuit" of the self's self-consciousness, which in Sartre's view is tantamount to playing a constitutional role in the *being* of the self. "Thus the Other has not only revealed to me what I was, he has established me in a new type of being ..." (*BN*, p. 312).

The type of being Sartre refers to here is what he will call *being-for-others*. The phenomenology of shame reveals that a profound transformation in the self's experience of itself accompanies the awareness that one is being perceived by another conscious being. The effect of being seen is dramatic and instantaneous; it does not require communication of any kind. With the appearance of the observing Other, I know with immediacy and certainty that there exists a knowledge of me, an aspect of my being, that is nonetheless not apparent to me. Yet if this being I am for the Other transcends my perception, how can I know of it to begin with? Sartre's solution centers around a second concept that will be of critical importance to the phenomenological theory of social anxiety, the notion of *the look*.

The idea of *the look* can be understood in the broader context of Sartre's treatment of the phenomenological problem of the existence of the Other. Human bodies are given in consciousness as objects in the world. If that is the case, however, how is it that one immediately understands these human forms to possess consciousness akin to one's own? By what means is the fact of the Other's consciousness disclosed? It is certainly not perceptible as such, since consciousness is, in Sartre's system, a fully transcendent entity. Sartre resolves the problem by proposing that the subjectivity of the Other is revealed through an experiential transformation in the self:

It is in and through the revelation of my being-as-object for the Other that I must be able to apprehend the presence of his being-as-subject. For just as the Other is a probable



object for me-as-subject, so I can discover myself in the process of becoming a probable object for only a certain subject. (*BN*, p. 344)

I cannot perceive the subjectivity of the Other, but I recognize its existence in and through the experience of being seen by him. In being seen I become aware of myself as object – not my own object, but the object of a consciousness beyond mine. I encounter the Other through the revelation of my own being-for-others, the dimension of my existence that belongs to the consciousness of the Other.

*The look*, then, is Sartre's shorthand for the shift in the phenomenal sense of self that accompanies the awareness that I am the object of another's awareness. The look can take the form of any percept that suggests the presence of a knowing other. In a well-known passage, Sartre gives the example of a person peering through a keyhole at a scene he ought not to be seeing, thinking that he is alone, when suddenly he hears a footstep: "Somebody has seen me. I straighten up. My eyes run over the deserted corridor. It was a false alarm. I breathe a sigh of relief" (*BN*, p. 369). Even the slightest indicator of the possibility of another's presence may bring on the sense of being-looked-at, or "objectivation." The look is not always immediately present, but never far away; one escapes it only temporarily. "Wherever I go, whatever I do, I only succeed in changing the distances between me and the other-as-object, only to avail myself of paths to the Other" (*BN*, p. 373).

I had noted in the introduction to this paper that Sartre understands all social relations as essentially conflictual. Let us now return to the example of the cinematic character caught dancing to clarify why this is so. We can now specify that what appears to the dancing man as he turns around is the Other manifesting the look. It is the look which occasions the sudden sense of shame that overtakes his self-apprehension. In being looked at, he becomes aware that the meaning of his being is not given to him alone to determine. His shame at being seen is, in this

sense, entailed in the recognition of the freedom of the Other to judge his actions. The Other's judgments define the being one is for the Other; one must *be* whatever the Other determines one to be. To encounter this dimension of one's being, the self-as-object, is therefore to encounter the limit of one's own freedom of self-determination. The permanent possibility of objectivation by the Other's look thus constitutes a genuine threat to the existential freedom that founds one's very humanity. This is what Sartre means when he describes the existence of the Other as "the limit of my freedom" (*BN*, p.351). Based on this conception of the danger of being looked at does Sartre sometimes depict the social encounter as a kind of duel, in which each combatant struggles to maintain their own subjective freedom by objectivating the Other first:

Therefore as the subject of knowledge, I strive to determine as object the subject who denies my character as subject and who himself determines me as object.  
(*BN*, p. 310)

Therefore my constant concern is to contain the other within his objectivity, and my relations with the other-as-object are essentially made up of ruses designed to make him remain an object. But one look on the part of the Other is sufficient to make all these schemes collapse and to make me experience once more the transfiguration of the Other.  
(*BN*, p. 394)

The "ruses" and "schemes" to which Sartre refers here, strategies by which the existential conflict is waged in concrete relations, will be discussed in more detail later on. For the moment, what shows through is Sartre's distrust in the possibility of genuine social mutuality. The world of *Being and Nothingness* is one in which social life is a zero-sum game. At each discrete moment of social interaction, one is looking or looked-at, limiting the Other's freedom or limited by the Other's freedom. Hell is indeed other people in such a world, in which every chance encounter leaves the self exposed to the tyranny of judgment, and in which judgment implies the loss of the ontological freedom that is the essence of the self.

**Vulnerable Being-for-Others: The Root of The Socially Anxious Consciousness**

Sartre's formulation of being-for-others provides a cogent framework for thinking about the nature of the interdependence of self and the social context. His phenomenological-ontological approach, which makes no distinction between consciousness and existence, permits the claim that one's public image constitutes not merely an idea one holds about the self, but a part of the very structure of selfhood. The concept of being-for-others suggests that something in the essential character of selfhood changes when one becomes aware that he is presently, or may soon be, being perceived by others. As noted, such a transformation does not appear contingent upon the physical presence of other people. Any amount of time that an individual spends contemplating what others think of him, or what influence others might have over his life, could be considered consciousness of being-for-others. Consciousness of being-for-others describes the state in which one is most acutely aware of being permanently situated within a social order, wherein the judgments and desires of other people are of real consequence. It is not in itself an anomalous experience, but a fact of everyday life and a facet of normal psychological functioning. One could argue that with the hegemonic rise of social media in culture and commerce, being-for-others is more at issue now than ever before in history. Millions around the world spend hours per day checking and curating their virtual profiles, preoccupied at all times with the measure and quality of the attention they attract.

An important distinction to make here is between being-for-others and the related existential notion of being-with-others. I had mentioned that Sartre's social ontology differs from those of other leading phenomenologists.<sup>12</sup> Sartre himself makes this clear by explicitly opposing his view on the nature of sociality with that of Heidegger. Heidegger in *Being and Time* (1962) posits that one's existence among like others reflects an essential characteristic of human being:

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<sup>12</sup> Zahavi (2001) offers a clear and careful analysis of the development of Husserl's phenomenology of intersubjectivity in the hands of Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty.

“...The world is always the one that I share with Others. The World of Dasein is a with-world (Mitwelt). Being-in is Being-with Others” (p.155). For Heidegger, the existence of others is fundamental to human reality; we are always already open to relation with others, as an *a priori* fact of our existence. Sartre adopts Heidegger’s claim as to the essentiality of the social in human reality, but rejects the notion that the awareness of, or openness to, the existence of the Other ontologically precedes real bodily (or “ontic”) encounter.

Thus the existence of an ontological and *a priori* “being-with” renders impossible all ontic connection with a concrete human-reality which would arise for-itself as an absolute transcendent. The “being-with,” conceived as a structure of my being, isolates me as surely as the arguments for solipsism. (BN, p. 335)

That is to say, if Heidegger’s vision is correct, it would be impossible to conceive of a transcendent subjectivity outside myself; the Other would be, in a sense, already constituted in the structure of my own being, merely an extension of my own solipsistic consciousness. Rather, writes Sartre,

Human reality remains alone because the Other’s existence has the nature of a contingent and irreducible fact. We *encounter* the Other; we do not constitute him. (BN, p. 337)

It is thus for Sartre the real experience of being-*for*-others, rather than an abstract *a priori* connectivity, that is the origin of sociality. Sartre’s subsequent effort to furnish a “new *proof*” of the existence of Others will take the shape of his explication of the idea of *the look*. As explained above, the look reveals the Other’s subjectivity to me by making me into an object for him, and I in the same fashion am revealed to him in his becoming an object for me. From this point of view, all relation is constrained by the subject-object structure of perception. Persons can only truly meet through the limited glimpses and limiting judgments each of us makes of the other through any number of real encounters.

Sartre's differentiation from Heidegger on this point underscores the most basic sense in which his philosophy lends itself to the study of social anxiety disorder. The first claim that I will make about the socially anxious consciousness is to define it as a state of awareness in which all being-with is being-for. In other words, I am suggesting that social anxiety arises on a horizon of self-experience dominated by the sense of being looked at. In this state, the phenomenological relation of self and other is asymmetrical. The self does not primarily apprehend itself as an independent subject among independent subjects, nor as an extension of a mass-subject (as in Heidegger's *we-subjectivity*), but rather first and foremost as another's object.

In her memoir of living with social anxiety disorder, *On the Outside Looking In*, author Daniela Grazia vividly describes the overwhelm stemming from such hyperconsciousness of being-for-others:

*While the other girls cheered each other on, I sat to the side waiting to bat quietly and immobilized. I felt the other girls were talking about me and making fun and didn't like me. (DG, Kindle Locations 310-311)*

*In the mall, I felt like people's eyes were all on me and they were talking about me saying how strange I acted. I had mostly started walking with my eyes down in order to avoid making eye contact. (DG, Kindle Locations 1119-1120)*

It is telling that Daniela describes the sensation that comes over her as a "feeling" and not a thought or perception. The choice speaks to the validity of conceptualizing being-for-others as a quality of experience, rather than as a matter of perception (as in perceiving others perceiving the self). To wit, the feeling of being-for-others comes to Daniela merely as a result of being present with other people, in the absence of any positive indication that she has become the focus of others' attentions and judgments. The experience of inexplicably feeling oneself being looked at and talked about bears some similarity to the notion of ideas of reference, seen in some psychotic presentations. Social anxiety could, in this vein, be said to include 'ideas of *social* reference' as a

pathological feature, referring to this painful intuition that one is the focus of attention of both acquaintances and strangers alike. This quasi-delusion is also captured quite vividly by Emily, author of *What You Must Think of Me*, describing an average day in high school: “*I believed everyone around me was exchanging subtle signs and signals, conveying to one another that for any number of reasons, I was out of place*” (EF, p. 2).

Helen, the protagonist of the memoir *Brave: A Memoir of Overcoming Shyness*, writes of her fascination with the turtles in her childhood backyard, recalling her envy of their ability to withdraw into their shells at will:

*How I wished I were a turtle and could hide so easily! When I was in school I had to stay visible, stand with my long arms and big hands hanging down by my sides and in front of me for everyone to notice and see I had no one to play with. Many times I wanted to be out of sight but I couldn't disappear like a turtle. (HRR, p. 18)*

As for the other writers, Helen's experience of being with others is pervaded by the sensation of acute visibility, focused upon the parts of her self that feel most abnormal. The wish to be hidden from sight extends not merely to the limbs that feel unusually proportioned, but in fact to her whole embodied presence, which protrudes awkwardly in its isolation from the rest of the group at play.

It is clear that for socially anxious individuals, the sensation of objecthood is deeply uncomfortable. Yet, it would not seem to be the case for most people, most of the time, that being-for-others necessarily constitutes an anxious state of awareness. In the practice of psychotherapy, for instance, clinicians work to make patients *feel understood*. This is a concrete instance of being-for that is known to be able to diminish shame, guilt, or anxiety. As an even more common example, we regularly speak of the sense of *feeling appreciated* or *valued* by others as the basis of self-confidence and the binding agent of happy relationship. My point in highlighting these scenarios is to suggest that within our sense of what constitutes psychological

normality, specific qualitative variations of being-for obtain specific kinds of affective experiences. That we understand social anxiety to be a psychological abnormality reflects the fact that socially anxious individuals experience interpersonal situations in ways that deviate from general expectation. Stravynski (2003) observes that socially anxious individuals seem to experience social situations that most would deem innocuous similarly to the way non-clinical individuals experience high-pressure performance situations or interaction with authority figures. Job interviews, public performances, and close encounters with law enforcement would all count as situations in which it is considered normal to feel anxious about the quality of self-presentation. Yet a socially anxious individual might feel a similarly strong sense of dread while passing a stranger in the street, going to visit a relative, or handing money to a cashier. From a certain point of view, there is a mismatch between the “objective” meaning of the situation of paying a cashier and the anxious feelings and behaviors it produces in the socially anxious individual. This is precisely what prompts cognitive-behavioral theorists to suppose that social anxiety stems from an error in information processing, such that one’s inner representation of an objectively neutral social encounter gets distorted by other pre-existing representations. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is thus designed to fix this “glitch” in processing by attempting to replace the faulty representations with other representations that are ostensibly more realistic.

In taking a phenomenological lens to social anxiety, we shift from speaking about it as a misperception of objective reality to trying to reconstruct the subjective reality within which it is a comprehensible response. It is for this task that Sartre’s unique perspective on the underpinnings of social life becomes highly instructive. What does it mean that a socially anxious individual experiences casual conversation as qualitatively comparable to a job interview? A phenomenal equivalence of these two situations makes sense if we assume that

within the world of the socially anxious consciousness, something approximating Sartre's notion that all relation is conflict is subjectively true. Perhaps most people would agree that when appearing before a potential employer, one is likely to be made anxious in light of the obvious power differential between self and other. The interviewer's judgments about me will determine important aspects of my life, such as status, livelihood, perhaps self-esteem and life-satisfaction. The interview can be conceived in existential terms as a struggle to define myself and my future, albeit a struggle in which I by no means have the upper hand nor the last word. I cannot guarantee to myself that I will be hired, no matter how confidently and competently I present myself.<sup>13</sup> The outcome of the interaction hinges on the interviewer's impression of me, over which I have no final control. In that sense, it is quite understandable that I should experience myself as the conditioned object of his free, subjective looking. I contend that for the socially anxious consciousness, this experiential sense, which I will call *relational vulnerability*, is endemic to the general state of being-for-others. Sartre's talk about the "danger" of objectivation is suggestive of a qualitative variety of being-for-others for which to be seen is necessarily to experience the self as profoundly vulnerable to others' judgments and choices. In specifying this as the root condition of the socially anxious consciousness, I mean to avoid proposing that anyone who struggles with social anxiety experiences reality in this way all of the time; rather, much as varieties of reality-altering psychosis come and go, strengthen and diminish, so the socially anxious consciousness is a world-sense that is variably in effect. From this perspective, the severity of a given case of a social anxiety disorder would reflect the extent to which such feeling of relational vulnerability accompanies the performance of everyday life in society.

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<sup>13</sup> Of course, it is also possible to be extremely confident in one's powers to achieve a goal like getting hired for a desirable job, to the point that one's experience at an interview would not include any such existential vulnerability. But this is simply a different kind of abnormality, perhaps the phenomenological antithesis of social anxiety.



I stipulated earlier that any sufficient theory of social anxiety must offer a unifying account of the co-occurrence of three pathological elements: (1) Feeling of powerlessness over how one is perceived; (2) persistent expectation of negative evaluation; (3) enactment of protective patterns of behavior. Within Sartre's analysis of the phenomenology of being-for-others can be found ideas corresponding to each of these three core features of social anxiety. In elucidating each concept and its connection to specific aspects of social anxiety pathology, I aim to develop a comprehensive phenomenological account of the disorder that posits social anxiety as a disturbance in being-for-others. To buttress these arguments, I continue to provide narrative data that demonstrate how the various phenomena to be described manifest in lived experience. In addition, I highlight where and how the Sartrean account is supported by the findings of empirical research.

### **Powerlessness over Self-Presentation: Alienation**

The first element of social anxiety pathology to be addressed is the felt sense of powerlessness to exercise control over one's social image. This dimension of the disorder is emphasized in Leary's (2010) self-presentation theory, which argues that socially anxiety arises from an individual's desire to make a particular kind of impression coupled with a deep-seated distrust in their ability to accomplish this end. In this section I will argue that this feeling of impotence in self-presentation is an expression of the Sartrean phenomenon of *alienation*. Alienation is a more precise term for the notion I had begun to describe earlier, that to be seen by the Other amounts to a limit on the freedom of existential self-determination. I have subdivided the concept into two aspects: The first, *alienation from self*, describes the way in which the character of the self or its actions (what one *is*) comes to feel externally determined; the second, *alienation from possibility*, describes the way in which being seen has the effect of foreclosing

possible courses of behavior, or causing a general sense of incapacitation. I will begin with an explanatory discussion of alienation as it occurs in the text of *Being and Nothingness*, and subsequently elaborate on its specific implications for the understanding of the socially anxious consciousness.

**Alienation from Self.** Sartre writes that to become conscious of the presence of the Other has an impact on the quality of experience, even prior to the objectivating effects of being looked at. The mere appearance of a conscious other in my surroundings effects a shift in my phenomenal world, which Sartre depicts as the sliding of physical reality toward an organizing center external to me. In his characteristic gloom, Sartre elaborates on this theme through the image of something escaping away that was originally mine: "...there is a total space which is grouped around the Other, and this space is made *with my space*; there is a regrouping in which I take part but which escapes me, a regrouping of all the objects which people my universe" (*BN*, p. 343). The grass of the field around me, before the incursion of the Other, exists only for me; its green color is only the green that I recognize in it. As I become aware of the Other in the scene, I intuit that the grass possesses a phenomenal character for him from which I am radically restricted. The greenness that appears to me no longer uniquely constitutes the color of the grass. The green that the grass is for the Other is not the green it is for me, yet is no less constitutive of its greenness. It is in this sense that the appearance of a consciousness that is not mine alienates me from the world that was mine. The Other has "stolen the world from me" (*BN*, p. 343) to the extent that all of the things in the world we both inhabit come to exist beyond their existence for me alone.

For Sartre, the consciousness that is mine and the consciousness that is the Other's are separated by an impassable gulf. To be conscious of a nearby other is to be aware of a fully

formed reality that I nonetheless cannot see, nor touch, nor know with any immediacy. Thus when I become conscious of the Other looking-at-me, I myself am unwittingly drawn into this alternate reality that I cannot experience. Like the grass in the paragraph above, in the Other's look I am made into an object in his world. Yet again as with the grass, that existence I have for him belongs to a reality that is not and can never be mine. Sartre's remarkable inference is that in becoming the Other's object, there appears to me a dimension of my being (my being-for-him) that I am certain exists, but which I am barred from knowing. In alienation from self,

the world flows out of the world and I flow outside myself. The Other's look makes me be beyond my being in this world and puts me in the midst of a world which is at once *this world* and beyond this world. (*BN*, p. 350)

The word "beyond" in this passage points to another important concept that informs Sartre's sense of what occurs in the encounter with the Other, namely the notion of transcendence. Transcendence, in the Husserlian sense, is the defining property of the in-itself being of worldly beings. Things are present in consciousness only as phenomena, while the things-in-themselves exist beyond immediate apprehension. That the look "makes me be beyond my being" means that a part of my being transcends the reach of my consciousness in the character of the in-itself. In being perceived by the Other, part of my being takes on the ontological status of a transcendent object: "For the Other, *I am seated* as this inkwell *is on* the table; for the Other *I am leaning over* the keyhole as this tree *is bent* by the wind" (*BN*, p. 352). The italics in this clause (all original emphases) are intended to underscore the ontological congruence of the descriptions of the human subject and the inanimate objects. I am seated at the table. I know that the Other sees me seated at the table. Yet the meaning for him of my being-seated-at-the-table, I cannot know. The being that I am in his consciousness is no more within reach of my consciousness than the inkwell-in-itself; with respect to me, both occupy the

transcendent region of the in-itself. Sartre describes this experience in terms of the realization that one has “an outside” or “a nature,” some aspect of one’s being that cannot be grasped but through being seen by others. Alienation from self is thus “the apprehension of myself as a nature although that very nature escapes me and is unknowable as such” (*BN*, p. 352).

I have so far said that the Other’s look alienates me from myself by confronting me with an aspect of my being that transcends my conscious grasp as does a thing-in-itself. What is precisely problematic about this alienation is that it amounts to a limit on the freedom of self-definition. As noted earlier, freedom in the Sartrean sense refers to the capacity to qualify, rather than be qualified by, the content of perception. Through consciousness, being becomes being-for-me, and being-for-me by necessity takes the character of my subjective appraisal of what I perceive. But in my being-for-others, my freedom gives way to that of the Other:

To be looked at is to apprehend oneself as the unknown object of unknowable appraisals – in particular, of value judgments. Thus being-seen constitutes me as a defenseless being for a freedom which is not my freedom. (*BN*, p. 358)

To illustrate, let us apply Sartre’s principle of alienation to the situation of Sisyphus described by Camus. Freedom enables Sisyphus, in his isolation, to determine that his situation is a happy one, despite its innate hardship and futility. But imagine that a human spectator lands on Sisyphus’s hill, and watches him go about his repetitive task. Through the spectator’s look, Sisyphus becomes aware that there is a part of his being that is beyond his freedom to define. Perhaps the spectator perceives Sisyphus’s situation as tragic, or pathetic, and imagines that Sisyphus feels dejected and defeated as he goes about his labor. This part of his being comes to him only in the mode of in-itself; it *is* him but it does not present itself *for* him. He cannot evaluate it, or modify it, for that power is given to the spectator for whom Sisyphus is an object of experience, and who herself exists in a state of freedom to determine the meaning of her perception of him. In this

sense, one is defenseless to the judgments of the Other insofar as they come to him from beyond the ontological borders of his subjectivity. In being seen, the Other's appraisals "cling" to the self, defining it from afar.

In this respect does Sartre's notion of alienation from self figure into the theory of the social anxious consciousness. The sense of relational vulnerability that I have posited as the root character of the socially anxious consciousness includes the "defenselessness" to judgment that Sartre understands as a fact of being-for-others. The predicament of the socially anxious individual is to be hyper-conscious of his being-for-others (his "image"), such that it defines his self-experience from without. To be seen by another is to be apprehended by "a freedom which is not my freedom"; whatever I am for the Other I therefore have to be, since it is their subjectively held impression to change or dismiss, and not mine. Relational vulnerability, in this respect, refers to an atypically intense feeling of encumbrance under the gaze of others, so much so that the appraisals of others, real or imagined, should be experienced as disclosing essential characteristics of the self. In this respect, the oft-given advice "Who cares what other people think?" is virtually incomprehensible within the phenomenal world of the socially anxious consciousness. As Sartre writes, in being seen, "I have discovered an aspect of *my* being" (*BN*, p. 301).

**Alienation from possibility.** The concept of *possibility* is a central feature of Sartre's vision of human being. As evident in his positing of freedom as the foundational condition of consciousness, Sartre was intrigued by the mystery of free will, seeing in it the unique character of humanity. He observes that the exercising of free will does not reflect an act of unlimited *creatio ex nihilo*, but rather that we are free at every moment to choose from a limited range of "possibles" that present themselves to us. Every choice reveals a new set of possibles, in endless

progression until death. But where does the possible exist? Sartre rebuts the notion that possibility is a property of being-in-itself, arguing instead that it arises in the interaction of consciousness and world, for-itself and in-itself. If the freedom under which consciousness operates is the freedom *from* world, possibility is the condition by which consciousness goes forth *toward* world. The choice presented by the range of the possible determines what one will be next, and next, and next. “The possible is *the something* which the For-itself lacks *in order* to be itself” (*BN*, p. 155). The possible is always something I am not yet, but must come to be, in order to go on existing. As soon as I choose to be something, I am suddenly confronted again by a range of things that I am not, from which I again must choose. Consciousness in this way persists by constantly becoming what it is not; both this becoming and this not yet being (“lack”) are integral to the process. Sartre depicts the cycle as a “circuit of selfness” (*BN*, p. 155), by which the self continuously becomes itself by traversing its world. To take a simple example: I am standing at a fork in the road. This statement both discloses a positive meaning of my being with respect to my world, as well as a horizon of states of being that I am not yet but could be. My relationship to these options is in the negative; they are what I am not. I am not yet turning right, and I am not yet turning left, nor am I yet continuing to stand still. In order to positively be one of these options, to actualize the possible, I must project myself toward the world in one of these ways. To proceed from what I am now (*I am* standing here) to what I will be in the next moment (*I am* turning right), I must choose a new relation to world from among those presented.

We had previously noted that Sartre views the appearance of the Other in my midst as having the effect of “stealing” the world away from me, such that I no longer solely occupy its organizing center. In that scenario, the Other and I are conscious of the same world, but the Other is not yet conscious of me in it. Yet when I find myself being-looked-at, when the Other

becomes conscious of me in his world, not merely is the world as I experience it transformed, but so is my constituting relation to the world – the horizon of the possible. Much as the look alienates my self from itself, it alienates my possibles from me (*BN*, p. 352). Sartre, as he is wont to do, illustrates this notion by reference to a life-or-death scenario, which I will paraphrase. Suppose I am robbing a store at night where a night watchman is working. If I can evade him well enough, I can leave with the goods without him ever knowing I was there. As I look towards the door, various possible routes of escape present themselves to me. They are my possibles, and he knows nothing of them because he knows nothing of me. Now suppose I drop a bottle, and becoming aware of my presence, the watchman brandishes his gun and flashlight (this is the appearance of *the look*). In order to stay alive, I must hide. I see a dark corner in which I might hide until he wanders away. For me, the corner holds out the possibility of safety. Yet I simultaneously recognize that the watchman may decide to point his flashlight at that corner as soon as I get there. In other words, I have an awareness that the Other is aware of me in the context of the world we are both in. He is not merely conscious of me, but of me in relation to my possibles in the world we share. Perhaps he is already suspecting that I will choose to hide in that exact corner, in which case that possible of mine includes a potentiality that could spell my doom. Sartre writes, in this case “my very possibility becomes an instrumentality,” meaning that in choosing to hide in the corner, I may be inadvertently serving the purposes of the Other against my own purposes. In this way I lose full ownership over the meaning of hiding in the corner. “The possibility is there, and I apprehend it but as absent, as *in the Other*” (*BN*, p. 353). Possibility is still with me but no longer fully mine to determine, its full meaning obscured behind the veil of the Other’s consciousness.

Alienation from possibility as such comprises the second phenomenological basis of the socially anxious individual's felt powerlessness over her public persona. Though Sartre illustrates the concept through its application to a situation of physical danger, I contend that the same felt loss of possibility applies for the socially anxious individual in the context of "social danger." This, in combination with the phenomenon of alienation from self described above, can be observed unfolding in the following passage from *On the Outside Looking In*. In this excerpt, Daniela describes elements of the nightly ordeal of going to work as an industrial machine operator:

*Once in a while, I'd see our supervisor coming by and I'd tense up even more. I hoped she would turn and go a different direction or I'd act as if I had something to do in a different area and leave before she got there. She'd stop and talk to the others and tried talking with me but mostly all I had to say was things were going well and even that would come out all jumbled. After that I could think of nothing to say. My facial muscles tensed, my mouth went dry, and my mind was blank. If I did happen to try to say something more, it sounded completely ridiculous or uninteresting. I knew she'd leave and think "what an idiot." This provoked even more negative self talk and loathing.*

*I really dreaded when a machine had problems and I had to call a technician to come fix it. I dreaded just making the call. I felt obligated to talk with them while they were there but I didn't have a thing to say, not of any importance any way. The other women talked and joked with them. It was important to have the technicians on your side. They'd ask me to explain what had happened or how the machine was acting and I couldn't get it out in an intelligible manner. Again my facial muscles tensed, my mouth went dry and my mind blank. I stumbled and stammered in an attempt to tell them. I thought I sounded incredibly stupid and was sure they wondered if I really knew how to operate it correctly. (DG, Kindle Locations 1560-1565)*

The arrival of Daniela's supervisor poses a genuine, looming threat of face-to-face interaction. Observe what occurs experientially when the supervisor finally reaches her and initiates conversation. Daniela describes feeling as though she has lost the capacity to respond – her mind goes blank, her facial muscles tighten, and her mouth goes dry. The loss of possibility is here expressed physiologically and psychologically. In the phenomenon of the mind going blank during social interaction, a commonly reported feature of social anxiety, we can see how



Sartre's concept of possibility manifests in the realm of speech and language. Much as being-in-the-world proceeds by means of the appearance of possible world relations, being in conversation proceeds by each locution opening multiple pathways for the continuation of verbal exchange. Daniela experiences a failure of verbal possibility, in the sense that options for response fail to spontaneously materialize for her. Relatedly, Emily in *What You Must Think of Me* describes her own experience of the loss of possibility manifesting as the cessation of volitional control over speech:

*My free periods were supposed to be spent making telephone calls to the students' parents, but I couldn't do it. The phone was in a shared office space, and knowing that someone could easily overhear me speaking about my class made it impossible to squeeze the words from my throat. (EF, p. 60)*

Returning to Daniela's anecdote, the sense of alienation from self is also present in the narration, though in a more subtle way. From the moment the supervisor approaches, Daniela's descriptions of the behaviors she does manage to perform are qualified in terms of how they *sound*. At first she *sounds* "jumbled," then subsequently, she *sounds* "ridiculous" and "uninteresting." Despite its commonality as an idiom, the expression "I sounded" has a profound phenomenological significance, in that it always implies the existence of an otherness (irrespective of whether a concrete other is present). "I sounded" qualifies an act of the self in terms of its presumed meaning for a listener who is not identical with the speaker; in other words, it is an expression of being-for-others. Thus, being heard by the supervisor "reveals" to Daniela the poor quality of her speech. Now this appraisal is with her, defining her self-experience, and yet since it seems to originate in the supervisor's consciousness, is beyond Daniela's freedom to challenge or dismiss. Punctuating the sense of the finality of these appraisals, the last thought in the paragraph depicts her supervisor walking away, ending the exchange with the lasting impression "What an idiot." The same combination of alienation from

possibility and alienation from self is described in the third paragraph, regarding Daniela's interaction with the company's technicians. My earlier suggestion that socially anxious individuals experience relational vulnerability even in the absence of an "objective" power differential is supported by the congruence of these two narrative moments.

In another passage from Daniela's memoir, we are given a more nuanced perspective of the phenomenon of alienation in its two facets. In the context of speaking about a friendship that includes frequent communication by telephone, Daniela explains why speaking by phone can be even more anxiety-inducing than talking in-person:

*When you're in the same room, you can rely on other distractions but on the phone, it's just you and the other person and silent moments can seem to last forever. You're basically forced to maintain a conversation and under pressure I can think of even less to talk about. My mind basically goes blank. The silent moments felt incredibly awkward to me and I took all responsibility for them. The negative thoughts took over and filled my head. "She thinks I'm stupid," "I'm so boring," "I have nothing interesting to say," "She'll find out who the real me is and not want to see me again." Why was I even attempting to have this relationship? At one point, Rachel did make a comment about how quiet I was and asked if she always had to be the one to make conversation. I sensed a little tension in her voice and of course I took it harder than what it was meant to be. The "negative self talk" snow-balled and took over the way it always had. (DG, Kindle Locations 2150-2157)*

Daniela's description of the difficulty of telephone-based communication importantly substantiates the notion that the feeling of being-for-others is not contingent on visual contact. In this case, "the look" comes through the phone wire and produces the same phenomenological transformations as does face-to-face encounter. We hear once more that when Daniela feels "under pressure" to speak, the possibility of fluent speech disappears. Yet, it is not as though the absence of things to say reflects a general stoppage of consciousness of being-for-others. Quite to the contrary, Daniela experiences her silence as being "heard" and apprehended as evidence of her undesirable character. At the same time, the barrage of thoughts that accompany these silences expresses her phenomenal alienation from self. To wit, we can observe in the flow of her

internal monologue how permeable is the line between external and internal appraisal: “She thinks I’m stupid” (expressing being-for-others) leads right to “I’m so boring” and “I have nothing interesting to say” (expressing being-for-herself). What I have been trying to articulate about the anomalous relational vulnerability in social anxiety is neatly captured in this moment, where Daniela’s sense of herself is shown to be entirely contingent on the value she believes she has for the Other. The excerpt also makes clearer how the two types of alienation are really two sides of a single phenomenal moment. In this example, Daniela’s silence is both the expression of her alienation from possibility (in that no words come to her) and simultaneously is the aspect of her self that is alienated within the Other’s consciousness, such that its meaning-for-others (awkward, boring, etc.) defines her from beyond.

One final excerpt depicting alienation speaks directly to the notion that for socially anxious individuals, being seen *reveals* the character of the self through the Other’s look. Here Daniela is visiting an old teacher of hers with whom she had a comfortable and enjoyable relationship before she developed social anxiety disorder as an adolescent.

*I felt my muscles tense especially in my face, my mouth go dry, and my mind go blank as I entered her office. I only hoped I wouldn’t make a complete ass out of myself. I wanted to be that same person I was back then but when I tried to say the things I’d rehearsed, they didn’t come out anywhere near as clever as they’d sounded in my head. Instead, I stumbled and stuttered and felt my face grow hot. I was sure she could see my uneasiness. As usual when in these situations, I acted as if I had somewhere to be and hurried off. I wanted to crawl under a rock somewhere – what a pitiful excuse for a human being I was. (DG, Kindle Locations 1848-1853)*

This is a clear description of the phenomenal transformation involved in alienation. Certain lines that Daniela had rehearsed before the meeting, which had seemed clever to her at the time, are revealed as embarrassing in the experiential context of the face-to-face encounter. The undesirable character of her own actions becomes apparent to Daniela only as of their being heard by the teacher.

The notion that social anxiety involves the experience of alienation also finds support in the models reviewed earlier. As far as alienation from possibility, Heimberg, Brozovich and Rapee (2010) observe that a socially anxious individual engaged in social interaction may interpret anxiety symptoms as signaling that one “may be about to lose control of his or her behavior” (p. 400). Leary (2010) summarizes research suggesting that the strong emotional reaction experienced in social interaction has the effect of interrupting the process of behavioral decision-making and inducing a state of self-preoccupation, suggestive of a felt loss of possibility.

In summary, the sense of powerlessness over the way others perceive the self that is a central feature of social anxiety pathology can be understood as an expression of the phenomenon of alienation. The overwhelming sensation of being-for-others that dominates the socially anxious consciousness entails a felt loss of freedom to (a) appraise the character of one’s self and own actions, and (b) choose and actualize one’s possibilities for future action. The diminishing of the feeling of basic subjective agency in this way leaves the self in a state of vulnerability to the judgments and choices of others; in being seen, one is forced to be what one is for the Other.

### **Expectation of Negative Evaluation: The *De Trop* Self**

If the idea of alienation serves to explain why socially anxious individuals feel inordinately vulnerable to the judgments of others, what it does not explain is why these judgments are persistently assumed to be negative. Looking back at each of the narrative passages cited in the preceding section, it is clear that the alienated self is deemed to possess a character of profound undesirability for the Other. Social interactions leave Daniela variously

feeling herself to be “stupid”, “uninteresting”, “boring”, “a pitiful excuse for a human being.” In considering this one of the three core features of social anxiety pathology, we must ask: What in the experience of social interaction leaves socially anxious individuals certain that they have failed, or will fail, to make a positive impression? In this section, I will put forth an explanation of this persistent sense of fatedness to public degradation in terms the phenomenology of being-for-others, specifically in light of the Sartrean notion of *de trop* consciousness. I will first provide a discussion of the meaning of *de trop*, and subsequently demonstrate its relevance to social anxiety pathology.

The French expression *de trop* literally translates as “too much,” though Sartre’s use of the term approximates something closer to “superfluous,” in the sense of existing in a quantity that is nonessential.<sup>14</sup> It points to a defining characteristic of being-in-itself, which Sartre calls the “principle of identity” (*BN*, p. 28). Being can only *be*, and cannot *not-be*; in other words, the foundational property of an existing thing is that it exists. Non-being cannot enter into it. As a consequence, Sartre infers, “being can neither be derived from the possible nor reduced to the necessary” (*BN*, p. 29). These two designations highlight the ontological relation of the for-itself to the in-itself. Suppose I am seated at a table. The table inhabits both of Sartre’s regions of being: it is a table-in-itself, and also a table-for-me. In and through its being-for-me, the table can be said to be present out of some necessity. For instance, one can say that it is a surface for eating and working, and thus exists on the basis of a need of mine that preceded it. Likewise, in being-for-me the table has possibility, which consists in what it is not yet. Its possibility arises out of a relation to it which I will choose: in this moment it is a surface for eating, though when I clear away the food it will be a surface for working – this change to the significance of its being

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<sup>14</sup> Given its usage as a term of art in Sartre’s writing, the expression is typically left untranslated in critical editions of *Being and Nothingness*, and I mostly follow suit in this paper.

comes through me and the freedom which I bring to the world. Yet in the table's being-in-itself, such properties do not adhere to it, neither justifications for its existence nor possibilities for future utility. To say that being-in-itself is superfluous (*de trop*) means that it overflows the meanings within which consciousness momentarily contains it. The web of instrumental and symbolic relations, the history and future of the object – all that which human intelligence perceives in reality – does not touch being-in-itself. “Uncreated, without reason for being, without any connection with another being, being-in-itself is *de trop* for eternity” (*BN*, p. 29).

In his presentation of the structure of the for-itself, Sartre notes that *de trop* is not merely the essential quality of inanimate things, but also constitutes a phenomenological possibility for the conscious being. Consciousness, as being-for-itself, is ontologically unique: “The for-itself is necessary in so far as it provides its own foundation. And this is why it is the object reflected on by an apodictic intuition. I cannot doubt that I am” (*BN*, p. 132 and all following citations). Consciousness perpetuates itself by the nihilation of a preceding consciousness, which was itself a nihilation, and so on; each iteration serving as the foundation for the next, each necessitating the next nihilation. In Sartre's view, Descartes was unable to doubt the reality of his own thinking (his “apodictic intuition”) precisely because one cannot be conscious without knowing one is conscious. Thus does consciousness necessitate its own existence. “But,” Sartre continues, “in so far as this for-itself as such could also not be, it has all the contingency of fact... It has the feeling of its complete gratuity; it apprehends itself as being there *for nothing*, as being *de trop*.” Though consciousness finds its own necessity, it cannot account for its being present to begin with, what Sartre calls “the simple *fact* ‘of being-there’.” In this way it is forced to reckon with its origins in pure, unconscious being-in-itself. The in-itself as such “resides in the for-itself as a memory of being, as its unjustifiable *presence in the world*.” Consciousness recognizes itself as

persisting in and through its own nihilating freedom, but is simultaneously aware that it never chose in its freedom to originally come into being. In this aspect, the for-itself beholds its non-necessity, its non-justification, an absence of freedom in its very core which, Sartre advises, “is apprehended in anguish.”

Given the phenomenological bent of Sartre’s work, and of this study, we must be able to represent *de trop* not merely as an abstract ontological notion but also as an identifiable human experience. In that case, we might think of *de trop* as describing a quality of self-experience in which one acutely feels one’s innate thing-ness, or in-itself-ness. If the fundamental property of being-for-itself is freedom – that is, the ability to choose the direction of one’s being from what is possible, and the fundamental property of being-in-itself is ontological identity – signifying a lack of such freedom – then we can say further that to feel *de trop* is to feel oneself as not existentially free. That freedom can express an experiential quality, as opposed to a concrete state of physical or political liberty, is attested in common parlance – one can “feel free” much as one can “feel compelled” or “feel trapped” without these reflecting literal physical circumstances. In this sense of the word, feeling free refers to the perception of a smooth continuity of impulse and action. Other ways of describing this quality might be self-possession, self-directedness, self-control, self-command, or poise; varieties of the attribute of internal directedness. *De trop*, then, would stand for the general opposite of this characteristic, encompassing qualities like stuckness, impotence, incoordination, clumsiness, paralysis of movement and speech, awkwardness, or confusion. *De trop* could in this sense be understood as the phenomenal essence of such varied notions as “writer’s block,” having “two left feet,” or frozen as a “deer in the headlights” each of which imply an absence of willful control over the movements of mind and body.

At the same time, a different sense of the phenomenological meaning of *de trop* is suggested by Sartre's notion of a consciousness recognizing its presence as unjustified, or as "being there *for nothing*." An instance of the term in Sartre's novel *Nausea* (1938, trans. 1964) tends more in this direction, while also identifying *de trop* with certain affective flavors:

We were a heap of living creatures, irritated, embarrassed at ourselves, we hadn't the slightest reason to be there, none of us; each one, confused, vaguely alarmed, felt *de trop* in relation to the others. (p. 172)

In context, the speaker is gazing at an outdoor scene consisting of trees, stones, and man-made structures, all the while experiencing the futility of capturing them within some meaningful relation. His sense of himself is as one more thing in this scene, who in his thing-ness is given as an unjustified protrusion of being. From the list of affective labels that accompany the *de trop* sensation – irritation, embarrassment, confusion and alarm – it is clear enough that Sartre held it as an overwhelmingly uncomfortable experiential state. This description of *de trop* consciousness calls to mind a breakdown of a smooth superficial order, in which the pieces of an organized whole are revealed to have been assembled by sheer accident. We might characterize the feeling of *de trop* in this context as the sense of being profoundly out of place in one's surroundings. Similar descriptors that would cluster around this sense of the term would be: different, odd, alien, incongruous, ill-suited, wrong, or incompatible.

Thus we are left with two distinct senses of the phenomenological meaning of *de trop*, whose pairing is roughly suggested in Sartre's statement that being-in-itself "can neither be derived from the possible nor reduced to the necessary" (*BN*, p. 29). A *de trop* thing possesses neither the character of possibility nor of necessity; in other words, it is at once lacking in freedom and fundamentally superfluous. We must pause again to examine whether an authentic connection between these two abstract qualities can be located in the realm of real experience. A



particular instance of the use *de trop* in *Being and Nothingness* provides initial confirmation. In the course of his analysis of the phenomenology of flesh, Sartre considers the image of a naked body performing a walking motion, observed from behind. The movement of the legs strikes the observer as coordinated and purposeful, as if incarnating the will of the walker. The gracefulness of the legs “enclose it with an invisible garment, while entirely disrobing its flesh” (p. 520); in other words, the dominant quality of the image of the legs is their purposefulness, and not their nudity. By contrast, the buttocks, which does not itself participate in walking but is rather carried on top of the legs, “has the passivity of a thing...it is revealed as an unjustifiable facticity; it is *de trop* like every contingent” (*BN*, p. 521). For Sartre, it is precisely this passivity, the “inertia of its flesh,” that renders it as qualitatively obscene. The sight of the buttocks is obscene precisely with respect to its superfluosity to the walking motion: “It is isolated in the body for which the present meaning is walking; it is naked even if material covers it” (*BN*, p. 521). The connection between the two facets of *de trop* comes to light here in that it is the passivity ascribed to the buttocks that makes it stand out as superfluous with respect to the quality of self-directedness that characterizes the moving human body.

In the same vein, it is against the phenomenal backdrop of humanness that the two meanings of *de trop* coalesce into one bi-faceted property. “As we have seen,” writes Sartre, “for human reality, to be is to *choose oneself*...Thus freedom is not *a* being; it is *the being* of man – i.e. his nothingness of being” (*BN*, p. 569). The ontological paradigm of *Being and Nothingness* posits existential freedom, the capacity to “choose oneself,” as nothing less than the foundational attribute of the human being. Freedom is the mark of humanity in Sartre’s world. The immediate apprehension of the Other’s freedom is precisely what establishes him as an Other, that is, as a being whose being is comparable to that of the self. In that sense, freedom can be understood as

the shibboleth of human belonging. To perceive oneself as lacking in this kind of freedom is then to perceive oneself as out of place in the social order. *De trop* consciousness may, in that case, be understood as a configuration of being-for-others; that is to say, it is a characterization of the self derived from a quality of social relation. In this case, the meaning of the self in relation to the Other is characterized by alienation and lack. In lacking the freedom that the Other possesses, that all humans ought to possess, one is revealed as ill-suited to social belonging. Poignantly, Emily writes to this effect, “I wandered up to my old clique, saying just enough to earn the right to stand among them” (*EF*, p. 27), capturing the sense that the right to social inclusion is contingent upon self-possession in the presence of others. *De trop* consciousness as such inhabits a stark contradiction, in that one is possessed of both one’s inescapable entrenchment within the human collective, and simultaneously, of one’s profound deficit in the basic qualification of humanness. In effect, the *de trop* self is condemned to live its humanness as a lie.

I now return to the memoir *On the Outside Looking In* (the title itself suggestive of a deep feeling of being out of place) to demonstrate how the plight of *de trop* consciousness figures in the lived experience of social anxiety. The following reflection appears after an anecdote in which the narrator, Daniela, drinks too much alcohol at a family barbecue (a common form of self-medication for social anxiety), and leaves feeling deeply ashamed:

*These had been my experiences in social gatherings. Each time I thought this time will be different but each time I failed miserably. You can imagine how these repeated feelings and actions could leave someone, especially a grown woman, feeling humiliated, inadequate, and pathetic. I hated myself for being this way. I hated myself for not being like everyone else. I didn’t want the people close to me to find out my secret, that I was a total loser out in the world.*

*I struggled everyday to be like everyone else and feel like I fit in the world but I didn’t feel that way inside at all. Inside I was miserable. I felt so out-of-step with society and people in general. I didn’t know what my place was in the world. I’d look at the people around me and think how different I was. I felt so disconnected from them. I forced myself to go on every day. I pretended every day to belong and do the things I should be doing –*

*going to work, having a boyfriend, and being the good daughter. Then at night I sat alone thinking about another day I had spent acting like a pathetic loser, I cried uncontrollably. I was stuck in a living hell. There was no way out.*

*It was obvious though on my face that I wasn't happy. My facial expression became that of a permanent frown compared to when I was little and always smiling. People made comments that I never looked happy and one person at work once asked me if I was mute because I rarely spoke. It was bad enough that I recognized these things about myself but when they were affirmed by others, it made me feel even worse. (DG, Kindle Locations 1173-1181).*

Daniela's self-descriptions are replete with expressions of *de trop* consciousness:

inadequate, pathetic, a loser, permanently unhappy with no way out, not like everyone else, not fitting in the world, out of step with society, not knowing my place, different. Even more striking is the remarkable conception of the *de trop* self as a protected "secret." In her life with others, Daniela feels thoroughly like an impostor, feigning a normality she is certain she does not possess. Even her closest relationships feel tenuously founded on the performance of this lie. At the end of the passage, we are shown what happens when the ruse fails. Note that the comments that cause Daniela greater emotional suffering ("that I never looked happy"; "asked me if I was mute") are not outright statements of rejection or dislike, but rather merely call attention to aspects of her self-perceived *de trop* character – that she is fixed in a certain mood, unable to communicate freely – exposing her "secret" by singling her out as deficient in self-directedness. A similar note is sounded in *Brave*, where the narrator Helen tells of one of her most pained moments of humiliation and self-loathing, resulting from having attention called directly to her shy behavior:

*But then there was the day Peter wasn't in the cafeteria, and a group regular, a doctoral student in psychology, looked me straight in the eyes from the other end of the table. "Helen, what's wrong with you! You're the quietest person I've ever seen. Can't you talk? Don't you ever have anything you want to say?"*

*Gaping at him, I muttered as low as I could, "I'm okay." ... I left shortly, studying my feet and holding back tears, cursing him under my breath and at the same time damning myself for being unable to speak. (HRR, p. 76)*

The following passage from Daniela's story presents another depiction of *de trop* consciousness, this time *in situ*. Here Daniela describes her nightly experience at a work facility where she had recently become employed:

*There were three of us that worked in close proximity at the one job, each operating our own machine. My anxiety lasted from the time I pushed "on" and only increased as the night went on. During the course of the night the other two people near me would talk and joke around as they worked. I just kept working and looked like I was too busy to talk. I listened to the talk going on within my own head which was telling me what a pathetic excuse for a human being I was. I couldn't even hold a conversation with my co-workers. The more this negative self talk went on in my head the worse I felt. (DG, Kindle Location 1551)*

At the outset, Daniela finds herself in the presence of others with no possibility of escape (a neat metaphor for the existential facticity of the Other), and immediately feels herself in a state of anxiety. Prior to even having to engage with the other people in the room, Daniela is already overwhelmed by her being-for-others. She is preoccupied with her coworkers' conversation, as well as the threatening possibility of being noticed by them. The coworkers' banter strikes her as easy and natural, revealing simultaneously the property of self-directedness in them and the lack thereof in herself. On the basis of her timidity relative to her coworkers does Daniela determine herself as a failed human being. This self-recognition of *de trop* defectiveness is for the moment a private matter, yet as always it is a vulnerable secret. Out of fear of being seen, Daniela takes shelter beneath a façade of busy-ness, which we can read as a guise of furtive self-directedness (as if to convey that she could converse if she liked, but currently has important matters to attend to).

Here is another clear expression of the notion that the *de trop* self is experienced as something that can and should be hidden from others. This excerpt appears among Daniela's recollections of the onset of social anxiety in early adolescence.

*I wanted so desperately just to fit in. The other kids on the bus were just being themselves acting like kids and carrying on. I had to pretend. I could not be myself. And so began the vicious cycle of "faking" just to fit in and be accepted and liked - how exhausting this effort became. I only wanted to be like everyone else. (DG, Kindle Locations 322-324)*

Riding the school bus as a child, Daniela's sense of self is formed in comparison with the children around her, whom, in their "carrying on," seem free of her perpetual hesitation. Most striking in this passage is Daniela's self-imposed injunction, "I had to pretend. I could not be myself." The defectiveness of the self is a foregone conclusion, as Daniela finds herself missing the spontaneous aliveness of her schoolmates. To *be herself* – to follow her natural inclination to sit quietly on the bus – would be to risk being exposed as insufficiently free, fundamentally abnormal.

Notably, the way in which Daniela's negative self-apprehension arises in direct comparison with her perceptions of the other children's unbridled self-possession is echoed many times over in the two other memoirs under consideration. Helen, in one passage, exemplifies how the internal perception of self as *de trop* emerges concomitantly with the perception of the Other as existentially free:

*In spite of having almost no money and living in yet another apartment with nothing but a simple kitchen table, egg crates for storage, and the floor to sleep on, Antonio still exudes an air of everything I crave: energy, joy, and accomplishment. I don't think it's possible for me to be like that. Could I? Compared with him, I've got no personality, and nothing exciting happening in my life. (HRR, p. 106)*

In this same vein, Emily perceives the other students in her high school as possessing a kind of practical know-how of public conduct covering even the most subtle details of behavior, which she herself somehow never acquired:

*The other students arrived in groups of three or four, talking about last night's basketball game or comparing answers to trigonometry problems. I was in awe of the ease with which they moved. They knew how to do what I did not – how to wear the perfect outfit, how to nonchalantly drop their book bags at their feet, and how to casually move florescent gum from one cheek to the other. They knew everything. They knew how to be normal. (EF, p. 27)*

The data thus reinforces the earlier characterization of *de trop* consciousness as figure-ground type phenomenon, where the sense of inertia in the self emerges in awareness against the field of seemingly effortless activity on the part of the Other. In this way does the *de trop* self appear as essentially in violation of a human norm.

***De trop and the look.*** It would seem from the narrative data reviewed so far that the *de trop* feeling may take hold independently of the sensation of being-seen. Daniela's denigrating self-talk occurs in conjunction with the perception of the Other's freedom from afar, when she is not yet formally caught in the look. At this juncture, *de trop* is a fully internal self-apprehension, with which the consciousness of the Other is not yet involved. Correspondingly, however, the onset of *de trop* consciousness is accompanied by the dread of *being seen as de trop*. It is one thing to feel out of place in the group, and quite another to sense that others perceive the same thing about oneself. Between, "I know I don't belong here" and "They know I don't belong here", or between "I feel impotent" and "They see me as impotent" is the difference between internal angst and public humiliation. The socially anxious individual fears that others will apprehend in her the precise thing she already apprehends in herself: that she does not belong. Or, to take the Sartrean phrase, one fears being seen as "being there for nothing"; that is, present for no good reason.

To that end, I would argue that the moment of being seen as *de trop* constitutes the "phobic object" of social anxiety. Being recognized as essentially abnormal is the outcome that socially anxious individuals are primarily afraid of; the inner reality of *de trop* is the secret that

must not be revealed. Clark's (2001) cognitive-behavioral model of social anxiety disorder bears out this notion quite well. The model's claim is that socially anxious individuals hold certain specific "unconditional negative beliefs about the self." The exact themes of the self-characterizations shown to be widespread among sufferers of social anxiety coincide with the experiential meaning of *de trop* consciousness: "I'm odd/different", "I'm unlikeable/unacceptable", "I'm boring", "I'm stupid" (p. 407). Taken together, these attributes span the two interlocking dimensions of *de trop* as I have interpreted it: exclusion from normative humanness, on the basis of lacking self-possession. Even more to this point, Clark identifies commonly held "excessively high standards of social performance," beliefs held by socially anxious individuals that dictate strict rules of social engagement. Common examples are: "I must not show any signs of weakness", "I must always sound intelligent and fluent", "I should only speak when other people pause", "I should always have something interesting to say." (p. 406) Each injunction points to an opposite internal reality that must be prevented from showing. One "passes" as normatively human by demonstrating strength, verbal fluency, social aptitude, and the power of fascination, so that the secret deficits known to the self should not become known to others.

The notion that being seen as *de trop* is the central fear of social anxiety may also help explain the meaning of the pathological fear of blushing, which is a common feature of social anxiety disorder, and has sometimes been observed to constitute a condition unto itself (Mulken et al., 1997). Explanations as to the significance of blushing tend to posit it as an evolutionary adaptation that facilitated group survival in humans by maintaining social order. For instance, blushing has been theorized to signal submission and appeasement in the anticipation of another's aggression, thus forestalling socially disruptive violence (Keltner, Young & Buswell, 1997). Alternatively, Edelman (1987, 1994) has suggested that blushing communicates

embarrassment over indiscretions as a way of inviting sympathy and forgiveness from group members. While compelling, such theories only complicate the matter of explaining why blushing itself should become a source of dread for certain individuals. If blushing signifies submission, why would one's anxiety focus on the physiological signal, rather than the act of submission itself? And if it calls for sympathy and forgiveness from others, why would blushing bring up the concern of negative evaluation at all? Instead, if we consider blushing from a phenomenological perspective, it turns out to be a profound instance of the loss of freedom over self-presentation. Blushing betrays us to others, disclosing a private self-consciousness without volitional participation. In this way blushing fits neatly with the characterization of social anxiety disorder as the fear of being seen as *de trop*, where we have defined the latter as being exposed as lacking willful control over one's own being. The same explanatory logic may be applied to the fears of sweating or shaking in front of others, both common facets of social anxiety, which similarly amount to the visible cessation of physiological self-directedness.

The concept of *de trop* consciousness thus pinpoints the specific meaning of the negative appraisal that the socially anxious individual fears, and clarifies that socially anxious fear is as much a fear of self-disclosure as a fear of judgment. Yet it does not in itself answer the central question of the present section, as to why the socially anxious individual presumes to know that the Other perceives her in this negative light. For this, we must return to the phenomenology of *the look*. If we may assume an authentic qualitative difference between private *de trop* consciousness and the state of the being seen as *de trop*, what obviously separates them is the condition of being seen. In the context of the socially anxious consciousness, to be seen amounts to the phenomenon of alienation described above. Though the two phenomena were introduced separately for the sake of clarity, the question regarding how the socially anxious individual



comes to “know” the mind of the Other can be addressed in examining the way *de trop* consciousness and alienation work in tandem.

A brief review of some of Sartre’s basic points about the encounter with the Other is helpful in representing the relationship between *de trop* consciousness and alienation in social anxiety. Sartre understands the existence of others as an existential fact, albeit a fact whose facticity is contingent upon real meetings with real others. All that is known about the Other is thus derived from myriad discrete encounters. For Sartre, the defining phenomenological property of the encounter with the Other is the experience of self-as-object. Thus in interpersonal life, one is never fundamentally “with” the Other so much as “for” the other, a being-for-others. The position of objecthood, of being seen by the Other, is qualified by the felt loss of existential freedom over the meaning of the self and its actions. As an object, one must be whatever one is in the subjective consciousness of the Other. Thus the overall structure of Sartre’s phenomenology of the interpersonal can be succinctly represented as follows: To be conscious of others is to live with the constant reality of being-for-others and the constant possibility of being seen by others. The certain existence of others threatens the loss of existential freedom, and this threat is verified in the actual experience of being seen.

My overall contention in this paper is that the above synopsis aptly represents the experiential conditions under which social anxiety disorder occurs. Social anxiety disorder can be thought of as an anomalous learned disposition toward social interaction that is perpetuated by repeated anomalous experiences of social interaction. In other words, it is a particular character of being-for-others that arises from a particular kind of repeated experience of being seen. In that respect, the general character of being-for-others for the socially anxious consciousness corresponds to what I have described as *de trop* consciousness, while the particular repeated

experience of being seen, from which it derives, corresponds to what I have called alienation. Alienation, in this sense, is the realization of the fear of being seen as *de trop*. Even further, alienation can be thought of as the *objectification* of the *de trop* feeling. Indeed, as we have seen, in becoming the object of the Other's perception, the socially anxious individuals' sense of thing-like impotence transforms from a subjective self-perception to an objective reality. Here we are speaking of Husserl's "intersubjective constitution of objectivity," the notion that for something to be described as objective, it must be assumed to appear to other subjects in just the way it appears to oneself. The fear of being seen as *de trop* is indeed the fear that what is apparent to oneself will become apparent to others, transforming *de trop* from a subjective to an objective reality. Remarkably, the specific effects of alienation do reflect a kind of psycho-physiological reification of the *de trop* feeling, wherein both mind and body are temporarily given to abnormal states of incapacitation (e.g. mind going blank, mouth going dry, loss of verbal fluency, muscle tension, etc.) or involuntary response (blushing, sweating, shaking) that may profoundly affect self-presentation.

The interplay of alienation and *de trop* consciousness can be observed in the detailed self-descriptions of *On the Outside Looking In*, in the course of a piece of continuous narrative that I had previously presented in two separate segments. Here I reprint the full passage, noting where and how the relevant phenomenological transformations occur.

*There were three of us that worked in close proximity at the one job, each operating our own machine. My anxiety lasted from the time I pushed "on" and only increased as the night went on. During the course of the night the other two people near me would talk and joke around as they worked. I just kept working and looked like I was too busy to talk. I listened to the talk going on within my own head which was telling me what a pathetic excuse for a human being I was. I couldn't even hold a conversation with my co-workers. The more this negative self talk went on in my head the worse I felt.*

[Being in the room with others is immediately uncomfortable, as Daniela becomes hyperconscious of her being-for-others. In light of the apparent freedom of the others to act as they will, Daniela experiences her own relative timidity as a disqualification from normative personhood. For now, this sense of herself as *de trop* is a private awareness, for she has not yet “been seen” by her coworkers. As of this moment, she finds some solace in the sense that her essential defectiveness is hidden from others under the guise of busy-ness.]

*Once in a while, I'd see our supervisor coming by and I'd tense up even more. I hoped she would turn and go a different direction or I'd act as if I had something to do in a different area and leave before she got there.*

[The threat of being seen now looms larger, raising her anxiety.]

*She'd stop and talk to the others and tried talking with me but mostly all I had to say was things were going well and even that would come out all jumbled. After that I could think of nothing to say. My facial muscles tensed, my mouth went dry, and my mind was blank. If I did happen to try to say something more, it sounded completely ridiculous or uninteresting. I knew she'd leave and think “what an idiot.” This provoked even more negative self talk and loathing. (DG, Kindle Locations 1560-1565)*

[Once engaged by the supervisor, Daniela's internal sense that she “couldn't even hold a conversation with her co-workers” becomes realized through the alienation of possibility and alienation of self. She indeed cannot hold a conversation, because her mind and body have ceased to offer the means to go on speaking. Now that she can be observed in her awkwardness and incapacitation – i.e. now that her *de trop* character has been exposed as objectively true – she is certain that her supervisor feels as unaccepting of her as she feels of herself.]

In a literal sense therefore, for the socially anxious consciousness, to be objectivated by the Other's look is to experience the *de trop* self as suddenly on public display. It is in this manner, then, that the socially anxious individual “knows” just how negatively others perceive her. On the phenomenological level, the presumption of negative judgment is not a matter of projection or distortion, but of the lived experience of being exposed as an impostor to the social order.

### **Protective Interpersonal Behavior: The Seductive Attitude**

The third and final aspect of social anxiety pathology I have set out to explain in terms of the phenomenology of being-for-others is the enactment of protective patterns of interpersonal

behavior. The term “protective” importantly denotes that the behavioral features of social anxiety go beyond phobic avoidance. Though outright avoidance of social contact is certainly normal in social anxiety, there are also predictable interpersonal styles common to socially anxious individuals. Stravynski (2007) identifies five categories of protective behavior, which I paraphrase here:

1. Seeking security in being liked: making themselves agreeable and helpful; refraining from being critical; being willing to accept blame; concealing resentment
2. Preferring to appease rather than fight: soft spoken, mild-mannered; non-competitive; compliant, or non-compliant only in secret
3. Attempting to lead a blameless life: strict scrupulosity; refraining from manipulative behavior; perfectionistic
4. Preferring to escape notice to avoid embarrassment: self effacing, avoiding being singled out for praise or criticism
5. Passive participation in social life: more likely to observe others than engage; shun novel people as unpredictable; novel others are experienced as menacing until proven otherwise; prefer to miss out on social opportunities than show up and commit a blunder

Starvynski explains these tendencies toward likability, appeasement, blamelessness, escaping notice and passivity as comprising a strategy of “feigning poise while dreading exposure as an impostor” (p. 8). In the present section, I aim to show that this precise notion is already present in Sartre’s own analysis of the various strategies people employ to manage the vicissitudes of social existence, specifically with regard to his notion of *seduction*. Through the analysis of both Sartre’s text and the narrative memoir at our disposal, I aim to render the concept of protective interpersonal style in terms of the broader structure of vulnerable being-for-others thus far described.

### **Sartre: Concrete relations with others.**

Everything which may be said of me in my relations with the Other applies to him as well. While I attempt to free myself from the hold of the Other, the Other is trying to free himself from mine; while I seek to enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me. We are by no means dealing with unilateral relations with an object-in-itself, but with

reciprocal and moving relations. The following descriptions of concrete behavior must therefore be envisaged within the perspective of *conflict*. (p. 475)

Sartre's existential-phenomenological method entails that any claims he makes must be rooted in the content of first-person experience. Here Sartre reminds his reader that whatever can be said of the "me" who is his protagonist should be assumed to hold true for every instance of "me", in other words for every experiencing subject. Thus we must imagine that for any given meeting between two concrete individuals, the problems of being-seen arise in reciprocity. Every looking is also looked-at, and every looked-at is also a looking. To apprehend the Other apprehending me is to throw us both into an ambiguous, dynamic relation of subject and object.

The struggle to "enslave or be enslaved" that unfolds on the existential-phenomenological plane elicits varying patterns of behavior toward the Other. Each pattern, in Sartre's view, reflects a strategy for dealing with the constant threat of objectivation. "Such is the origin of my concrete relations with the Other; they are wholly governed by my attitudes with respect to the object which I am for the Other" (*BN*, p. 473). Sartre initially identifies two basic and mutually exclusive orientations, or "primitive attitudes," toward the problem of the Other. Though he does not name them, for the purposes of this paper I will refer to these as the *dominant* and the *seductive* attitudes. Sartre is particularly clear and concise in his depiction of this dichotomy, so I have elected to reproduce the passage in its entirety (from pp. 473-474) with commentary interspersed (all emphases original):

First – The Other *looks* at me and as such he holds the secret of my being, he knows what I *am*. Thus the profound meaning of my being is outside of me, imprisoned in an absence. The Other has the advantage over me.

Sartre first restates the essence of the danger of being-seen, which I have been discussing as alienation. Caught in the Other's look, I am forced to abide an apprehension of my being which

defines me from without. The Other gains control over the meaning of my being, and this entails a profound limit on my freedom.

Therefore in so far as I am fleeing the in-itself, which I am without founding it, I can attempt to deny that being which is conferred on me from outside; that is I can turn back upon the Other so as to make an object out of him in turn since the Other's object-ness destroys my object-ness for him.

This is the essence of what I am calling the *dominant* attitude. Sartre advises here that the loss of freedom experienced in being the Other's object hinges on my recognition of the Other's transcendent freedom. To feel trapped by the Other's subjective experience of me, I must preliminarily presume his free subjectivity. Thus it follows that were I to deny the Other's subjectivity, apprehend him as my object, I would be spared from experiencing his look as limitation on me. As pure object-for-me, the Other does not represent a limit on my freedom of self-determination, yet I as subject persist as the limit of his.

But on the other hand, in so far as the Other as freedom is the foundation of my being-in-itself, I can seek to recover that freedom and to possess it without removing from it its character as freedom. In fact if I could identify myself with that freedom which is the foundation of my being-in-itself, I should be to myself my own foundation.

This alternative approach forms what I will refer to as the *seductive* attitude. Sartre here points out that to become the Other's object entails the opportunity to regain a sense of existential purpose in and through that very objecthood. The self-as-object is constituted in the Other's apprehension of me, and given meaning in the Other's free appraisal of me. In the seductive attitude, the Other's freedom to constitute my being is, rather than resisted or denied, freely adopted. In willingly identifying myself with the Other's freedom – in other words, by freely accepting my being-for-him as the definitive meaning of my being – I am indirectly restored to a sense of subjective freedom. The notion of seduction therefore connotes a strategic comportment of oneself in accordance with the Other's free will.

Expressed in a less technical way, Sartre's two attitudes represent diverging approaches to maintaining one's freedom amidst a world full of others with competing aims. The dominant attitude follows the brute logic of "eat or be eaten," in other words, of pursuing one's own ends by forceful means. This category could include skillful argumentation, psychological intimidation, outright physical compulsion, or anything in between – an assertion of one's own needs, aims, or point of view meant to overcome or efface that of the Other. The seductive attitude, on the other hand, would favor the adage "you catch more flies with honey than vinegar." In the metaphor, the flies unwittingly further the aims of the catcher by following their own natural attraction to the honey. In seduction, freedom is preserved by aligning oneself with the other's aims in such a way that one's own aims are also achieved. Such a strategy is not in itself always a matter of insidious manipulation – for instance, in the case of the social contract, in which individuals elect to mutually align their aims for the common welfare, even at the cost of unbridled individual freedom.

Sartre proceeds to explain how these two basic attitudes undergird a range of possible styles of relating to others. His use of the term "concrete relations" as a heading indicates a shift in epistemological frame from the ontological to the psychological, the purpose being to demonstrate the relevance of his existential-phenomenological findings to the everyday words and ideas (as well as certain technical psychological constructs) that describe aspects of human relationship. The dominant attitude subsumes the emotional/relational categories of *indifference*, *desire*, *hate*, and *sadism*. Each of these dispositions is shown to reflect a variation on the basic strategy of subjugating the Other in objecthood to avoid being made the Other's object. Briefly put: *Indifference*, as pervasive ignorance of the Other's subjectivity; *desire*, meaning sexual desire, as the effort to limit the meaning of the Other to their fleshly presence; *sadism*, as the use

of violence toward this same end; and *hate*, as the wish to destroy the Other's transcendence altogether. On the other side, the seductive attitude forms the basis of *love* and *masochism*. Under the time and space constraints of the present paper, I will not be able to unfold the complexities of the sub-categories of the dominant attitude in Sartre's thought. Yet the seductive attitude bears direct relevance to social anxiety, and therefore will be explicated in more detail below.

**The seductive attitude and the socially anxious consciousness.** Sartre's two primitive attitudes, it should be remembered, represent two opposing strategies for insulating oneself from the potential disadvantages of being the Other's object. The seductive attitude as such reflects an embrace of the object position for the sake of founding one's own being in the Other's constitutive consciousness. It is an active strategy: not just an acceptance of the Other's regnant subjectivity, but in fact a seeking out and "appropriating" of the Other's freedom in the service of one's own aims.

In seduction I do not try to reveal my subjectivity to the Other. Moreover, I could do so only by *looking* at the other; but by this look I should cause the Other's subjectivity to disappear, and it is exactly this which I want to assimilate. To seduce is to risk assuming my object-state completely for the Other; it is to put myself beneath his look and to make him look at me; it is to risk the danger of *being-seen* in order to effect a new departure and to appropriate the Other in and by means of my object-ness. (*BN*, p. 484)

To seduce, in Sartrean terms, is to draw the look toward oneself, to establish oneself as the Other's object for one's own purposes. The goal is to avert or reverse the incapacitating effects of the look – alienation from self, loss of possibility – by establishing myself as a "fullness of being" (*ibid.*) through the Other's freedom. In fact, in drawing the look toward myself, I indirectly limit the Other's freedom to choose away from me, thus establishing my own subjective agency in and through the Other's with his full participation.



The idea of seduction is introduced by Sartre in the context of his analysis of love. One who wishes to be loved, advises Sartre, cannot simply will himself loved –“the lover must seduce the beloved, and his love can in no way be distinguished from the enterprise of seduction” (p. 484). Yet what is meant by “love” in this context? For Sartre, to be loved is to inhabit a type of objecthood that is existentially and phenomenologically distinct from the sense of enslavement to the Other’s subjectivity previously described. Until now, we have described being-seen in terms an uneasy alienation, specifically the loss of self-definition and the loss of possibility. On the contrary, in being loved one experiences being apprehended by the Other, not as a conditioned object among objects, but as the object which conditions all else in the Other’s world. “...hence I cease to be the thing who is understood from the standpoint of other beings or of its acts. In the loving intuition which I demand, I am to be given as an absolute totality in terms of which all its peculiar acts and all beings are to be understood” (p. 482). In other words, to be a love-object is to constitute an end unto oneself for the Other. Sartre demonstrates this by reference to the notion of a woman demanding to know whether her lover would betray his friends for her, steal for her, kill for her; these being expressions of the extent to which she is “the objective foundation of all values” for him (*BN*, p. 481).

If we may abstract a simpler way of expressing Sartre’s ontological notion of love, it could be framed in terms of the following questions: To what extent is the world as you will it a world in which I am present? Is the value of my presence in your world simply given in my being-for-you, or is it conditional? Conceptualizing love as a measure of how much one authentically wills the presence of another clarifies the meaning of seduction (the “enterprise” of love) in the world of the socially anxious consciousness. For one who apprehends the presence of the self as innately unjustified, the love of the Other is somewhat of a holy grail – that which is

most desired and yet most unattainable. The nature of the *de trop* feeling, as I have contended, is such that to present oneself to be seen by the Other contains the potential for the amplification of suffering in the reifying effects of alienation. Yet love reveals an alternative potentiality in being seen, wherein the Other's appraisal restores to the individual a sense of innate value. Daniela writes:

*If I couldn't actually "feel" like I belonged, the best I could do was to act as though I did. My actions didn't come naturally to me and my conversations became "forced." I laughed when I thought I should laugh. I went out of my way to please others thinking that was the only way I could get them to like me. I wanted to be a part of the world and my surroundings. (DG, Kindle Locations 90-92).*

The final two sentences above explicitly bear out the meaning of the strategy of seduction in social anxiety disorder: to "get them to like me" serves the ultimate purpose of feeling "a part of the world and my surroundings." The seductive appropriation of another's freedom (in the form of being likable) thus serves as a corrective for the pervasive sense of non-belonging that is central to the socially anxious consciousness. When, in the memoir, Daniela speaks of there being "no way out" of her misery, I believe she is referring to the predicament of being utterly dependent the positive valuation of others in order to feel basic human belonging, all the while certain that she is by nature undeserving of it.

With the phenomenon of seduction, we are once more dealing with a dimension of human relation that is, in itself, utterly ordinary. Many varied interpersonal circumstances, romantic, professional, or otherwise, naturally invite the strategy of aligning oneself with the Other's projects, whether for personal or mutual gain. Yet by virtue of the way the socially anxious individual feels his existence wholly bound up in its being-for-others, his use of seduction takes on a desperate rigidity. Seemingly at stake in every passing interaction is the justification of one's very existence. Whereas Sartre outlines two basic options for defending

against the vulnerability of object-experience, for the socially anxious consciousness there is no real choice. To attempt self-assertion or oppositionality is to risk catastrophic rejection (the reification of the *de trop* sense), thus one is compelled to conform oneself to the Other's will and hope to experience genuine belonging by means of the Other's approval. What lends this rigidity a truly pathological quality is that it is often upheld even when failing in its original purpose, and furthermore, even when it is apparently working to one's own social, emotional, or material detriment. In the next section, I present a sampling of narrative data which expresses the desperation and futility involved the seductive exercise in social anxiety disorder.

**Seduction as protective behavior.** How is seduction enacted, in Sartrean terms? Contrary to the dominant attitude, the project of seduction depends upon my ability to maintain the Other as pure subjectivity; in other words, to keep the Other "looking" and interested. Sartre identifies two types of behavior by which one would attempt to "fascinate" the Other: "In the first case I try to constitute myself as an infinity of depth, in the second case to identify myself with the world" (*BN*, p. 485) Let us look closer at this dichotomy. The aim of seduction, as stated, is to keep the Other looking at me (whether in the visual sense or in a broader sense of keeping me "on their mind"). The challenge in this amounts to preserving the Other's freedom in choosing me as her object, even as I lead her toward that end. On the one hand, there is a need to have the Other experience me as pure possibility for her. I must call attention to "to the infinity of my dead-possibilities" (*BN*, p. 485), in other words, to portray myself as possessing untold possibilities that are not mine to realize, but hers. Put differently, this is a matter of conveying my human potency as aligning perfectly with, and offering no resistance to, the Other's ends and desires. In the alternative mode, rather than comport myself as dead-possibility for her, I posit myself as in possession of my own live possibilities that I offer in service of her ends. In this

way, I become valuable to her as an independent bestower of value: "... I *present* the world to the beloved, and I try to constitute myself as the necessary intermediary between her and the world. I manifest by my acts infinitely varied examples of my power over the world" (ibid.). This relational tactic can be understood as the effort to maintain one's *relevance* for the Other; I aim to incorporate the Other's freedom by presenting myself as not merely abiding her free pursuit of her possibilities, but actively enabling her to pursue her ends by means of my own possibilities. One way to understand the distinction between these two varieties of seduction is in the difference between expressing to the Other "I can be what you want me to be" over against "I can give you what you want to have." The first proposes that one disavows any freedom with which to threaten the Other's freedom; the second proposes that whatever freedom one has is placed at the Other's service.

Correlates for each of the two modes of seduction can be found among socially anxious interpersonal styles. To reiterate, this does not include pure avoidance behaviors, such as hiding a blushing face or standing at the periphery of a group. Seduction rather refers to patterns of active engagement, by which the private *de trop* self is protected from public visibility by performance rather than avoidance. On the side of presenting oneself as pure possibility, we can group behaviors that portray one's presence as constituting no obstacle to the Other's pursuits: refraining from criticism, concealment of resentment, mild-mannered-ness, non-competitiveness, compliance. We are provided with phenomenologically rich descriptions of such behaviors in *On the Outside Looking In*. Here Daniela describes the pressure brought on by an innocuous job offer from someone she barely knows:

*She had been babysitting for a girl in our neighborhood during the summer and when she took the other job, the girl's mother asked if I would take over babysitting. It was hard for me to say no to people back then. I thought that I had to be accommodating in order to make up for what I lacked in other areas. (DG, Kindle Locations 444-446).*

Daniela's decision to comply with the mother's request does not reflect her own preference for how to spend the summer; in this sense, it is an example of the presentation of self as purely in accord with the Other's will. Its purpose is, as stated, to give the neighborhood mother a reason to like Daniela and to avoid the dreaded and ever-present possibility of disapproval (the objectification of the *de trop* self).

Along these lines, Helen describes voluntarily denying herself the opportunity to air her most painful feelings as a teenager, out of the fear of being perceived as selfish and impolite:

*I could only think of feeling lonely, of being unable to express myself, of fearing that the world was suited for other people, not for me. But, even with my mother, I couldn't say this. I never told anyone my worries. It didn't seem appropriate to complain about something that was only going on in my mind. (HRR, p. 57)*

Much later in life, she is still practicing the same approach with her impulsive, yet kind husband. Only this time, her strategic self-censorship comes at the cost of great financial risk for both of them:

*One year after moving into our new home, in 1983, I realized I couldn't cover my share of the mortgage and property taxes. I'd worried when we were building about the money it was costing, but I went along with Roland's suggestions believing that he knows best and I didn't want to be critical for fear he might get mad. I failed to speak up in a timely fashion and I let us build a house we couldn't afford. Damn, I never speak when I should. (HRR, p. 130)*

On the other side of the seductive attitude are grouped behaviors in which the socially anxious individual vies to be seen as freely providing value to the Other: offering help, accepting blame, being friendly and talkative. As opposed to projecting the self as fully adherent to the Other's will, one presents as freely choosing to enrich the Other's world, as though to pre-empt the possibility of being seen as worthless and impotent. One exemplary account emerges in Daniela's descriptions of the emotionally harrowing daily school bus rides of her youth. The

character Emily referenced here is Daniela's closest childhood friend, one of the few people with whom she feels comfortable.

*I remember that I did have fun with my friends at school but getting on that bus when I had to was so terrifying. The only consolation was that our neighborhood friends rode the same bus and I tried to stay close to them. It wasn't always possible though and I wondered if they could tell how awkward and nervous I felt. I didn't want Emily to be embarrassed by me and not want to be my friend. I started trying to fight and hide the anxiety and fit in. I would force a smile and try to think of things to say. I wanted so desperately just to fit in. (DG, Kindle Locations 318-322)*

Concerned that her friend might deem her a social liability, Daniela proactively attempts to represent herself as possessing social value as a companion. The forced performance of smiling and making conversation serves to convey "normal" self-possession, as well as to provide Emily with the sort of interest and attention that Daniela assumes she would want. The aim in every sense is to "seduce" her friend into providing the affection by which Daniela's sense of existential belonging subsists.

In *What You Must Think of Me*, author Emily Ford depicts how the unrelenting drive to make oneself of value to the Other can shape even major life decisions:

*I graduate from college one year later, then stayed at school to work on a master's program. However, a few credits short of my master's degree, I decided to return to New York City, accepting a teaching position at a vocational school in the South Bronx. I made up the excuse, at times even convincing myself, that I was doing a valiant deed by going to teach in the inner city. But the truth was, this was just another impulsive decision motivated by a desire to start over. In my mind, choosing a school that was desperate for teachers made it less likely that I would be rejected.*

*I landed myself in a heap of trouble from the start. The principal asked how soon I could begin working, and fearing they wouldn't want me if I had to wait too long, I nervously blurted out "Monday" – a mere five days away. I had less than a week to withdraw from graduate school, move six hundred miles, find a new apartment, and give my current roommate time to find someone to pay half the rent for the apartment we shared. (EF, pp. 59-60)*

The story continues that Emily lasts only three weeks in this challenging position, and subsequent to quitting, slips into a deep depression and retreats back to her parents' home. The

passage brings to light how powerful can be the fear of rejection in guiding the decision-making of socially anxious individuals. The intensity of Emily's aversion to disapproval is only understandable in light of the brittleness of her sense of existential justification. Yet the relentless pursuit of justification by the Other's will, in this case, yields only more and greater suffering.

**Conclusion.** The interpersonal strategies identified in this section are, once again, by no means unique to social anxiety disorder. Rather, what is significant is the socially anxious individual's excessive reliance upon seductive strategies, occasioned by the existential predicament with which they contend. The socially anxious individual experiences a perpetual vulnerability in social interaction, specifically pertaining to the fear of being seen as wholly out of place. Yet at the same time, her recognition of herself as an unjustified presence in the world necessitates reliance on the approval and affection of others to ameliorate this perpetual existential crisis. A rigid adherence to codes of protective behavior, in both its avoidant and seductive varieties, emerges as a strategy to prevent the private *de trop* self from becoming reified as a social identity. In proposing the self as either pure possibility for the Other, or as a source of value for the Other, the seductive performance aims to conceal one's secret sense of worthlessness, allowing the socially anxious individual continued engagement in society and preserving the possibility, however rare, of feeling authentic social belonging. At the same time, such extreme dependence upon seductive relational strategies, and the drive to remain in the good graces of others at all times, can easily lead socially anxious individuals to betray their own interests.

**Coda: Love, Alcohol, and the Release from *De Trop***

The picture of the socially anxious consciousness put forth in this paper is not intended to reflect a permanent state of affairs for socially anxious individuals. That the symptoms of social anxiety disorder come and go, are subject to treatment and remission, means that the phenomenological structures underlying them can give way to a different set of conditions. For our primary subject Daniela, social anxiety is indeed a lifelong struggle, and by the end of her memoir she still endorses many of the same problems in being-with-others that she first developed in adolescence. Yet over the course of her narrative, there are two factors that reliably alter, however temporarily, the fundamental character of her experience of others: feeling loved, and intoxication by alcohol. I would argue that the remedial potency of these two particular elements constitutes a proof from the negative of the *de trop* character of self-experience in social anxiety.

Let us take these one at a time. Excessive use of alcohol is a common comorbid condition of social anxiety disorder. The National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions found that approximately 48% of individuals with a lifetime diagnosis of social anxiety disorder also met criteria for an alcohol use disorder (Grant et al., 2005). Aside from its effect of dulling the depression that often accompanies persistent social anxiety, the popularity of alcohol for self-medication among social anxiety sufferers would seem to related to its disinhibiting effects on behavior. This is certainly the case for Daniela:

*During the course of the evening and considerable drinking, I was paired up with one of her sister's guy friends to play a game which involved kissing. Of course I wouldn't have had any part of it had there not been alcohol, but with its help, I was feeling uninhibited and able to join in and feel like I belonged with the others. (DG, Kindle Locations 576-579)*



Pursuant to the idea of *de trop* as described in this paper, it is notable that Daniela ties disinhibition to social belonging. I have argued that the *de trop* feeling encompasses two related facets self-experience: an absence of free self-directedness as compared with the Other, and the sense of self as existentially unjustified. The connection between these two is borne out in the fact that for Daniela, the disinhibiting effects of alcohol are precisely what allow her to feel that she “fits in” within a social setting:

*The drinking became heavier and more frequent. I didn't know how to pace myself because I was always in a hurry to get to that place where I would feel comfortable and fit in. (DG, Kindle Locations 457-458)*

What I am essentially suggesting is that the particular phenomenal transformations of alcohol, at least for Daniela, if not for socially anxious individuals at large, are valued specifically for their action upon the *de trop* feeling. The release from inhibition is simultaneously a release from the sense of being unsuitable for social inclusion. Feeling free to do and say what she will in a social context engenders in Daniela the sense of being normatively human, such that being-for-others is no longer a purely anxious affair. Alcohol is not known for inducing feelings of “belonging” per se; yet in the context of *de trop* consciousness, the loosening of inhibition that alcohol effects has this second shade of experiential meaning. That a shift in inhibition should enable Daniela to socialize free of anxiety supports the contention that the *de trop* self is a cornerstone of social anxiety pathology.

For whatever its utility, alcohol comes with obvious downsides. Over the course of her memoir, overreliance on drinking yields much more sorrow and regret for Daniela than relief. By contrast, a more total and sustainable relief from social anxiety comes to her when in the presence of certain individuals whom she calls her “comfort people.” Here she details the

profound phenomenal transformations that accompany her time with this select class of people, which includes certain family members, romantic partners and close friends:

*It is amazing how different I feel when I can be “myself” around certain people. I call these people my “comfort” people and I’ve only had a handful my entire life. (I’m talking in the present tense now because although my symptoms have alleviated to a certain degree, I still experience them.) It is so freeing. I feel like my whole body just loosens up. I am able to express what I am truly feeling inside rather than what I think I should be. When I laugh, it feels so good and real - not forced. My actions, words, and emotions come naturally. (I’m not sure if anyone who has not felt the effects of S.A.D. can understand this.) If only I could feel this way more often. The same transformation takes place in reverse if I’m in a group and one of those people is a “comfort” person. If this person leaves the room, I immediately feel my entire body tighten up. I become uncomfortable, awkward and have a very difficult time holding a conversation and I’m sure it’s evident to the people around me. (DG, Kindle Locations 494-501)*

*These were people that had made my life worth living. I held on to them so tightly because I was lost without them. I’d only felt human and worthwhile when I was in their company and I hadn’t forged any new friendships in a very long time. (DG, Kindle Locations 2245-2247)*

These two passages, which refer to the same group of three or four individuals, when read together neatly summarize the precise phenomenal antithesis of the socially anxious consciousness. The theme of the first passage is captured in Daniela’s ontologically tinged declaration, “I can be myself,” which we may read in the Sartrean mood (I can *be* myself) as expressing a recognition of the self as self-creating. In the presence of those by whom Daniela feels genuinely loved, the tyranny of being-for-others gives way to the freedom of being-for-itself; constriction of body and mind gives way to spontaneous expression; pretense and performance give way to candor and authenticity. Each of these reflects a type of restoration to existential freedom, to the ontological character of a being who wills its own being, a human being. This becomes even more explicit in the second passage. Strikingly, it is only in the presence of those whose love for her feels assured that Daniela “felt human,” which we can read as: felt assured of her proper place within the human community. Daniela’s words echo Sartre’s

claim that, “This is the joy of love when there is joy; we feel that our existence is justified” (*BN*, p. 483). This thorough amelioration of social anxiety symptomology in the presence of loving others once more bears out the argument for their origination in a disturbance in existential feelings of freedom and belonging.

### **A Synopsis of the Phenomenological Theory of Social Anxiety**

The present theoretical effort proposes that the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors collected under the psychopathological construct “social anxiety disorder” reflect a unified and coherent experience of reality composed of specific phenomenological-existential relations between self, world, and other. A substantial amount of the conceptual groundwork and terminology used in constructing the theory are borrowed from Jean-Paul Sartre’s existential-phenomenological philosophy as expounded in his work *Being and Nothingness*. Though the book was written as a general theory of human existence, certain distinctive biases in Sartre’s thinking, especially his idiosyncratic sense of the inherent uneasiness of social relations, make him a relevant source in the phenomenological study of social anxiety disorder. By picking up and combining various pieces of his phenomenological edifice – the relationship of freedom and objecthood, the *de trop* mode of self-consciousness, and the interpersonal strategy of seduction – we have assembled a fully formed, descriptive and explanatory phenomenological model of social anxiety disorder that is fully consistent with both empirically derived and first-personal experiential data.

The theory proposes the following regarding the structure of the socially anxious consciousness:

A. The socially anxious consciousness is a hyperconsciousness of being-for-others. This means that the experience of the self in the social context is dominated by one’s awareness of existing in the minds of other people. One is preoccupied with this aspect of their being, such

that the self apprehends itself primarily as the object of others' perceptions. In objecthood, the meaning and character of the self is subjectively determined by those who perceive it. To be hyperconscious of one's objecthood is to experience a sharp limit on personal subjectivity, such that the power to determine the nature of the self seems to lie with the Other.

B. This felt loss of existential freedom in the presence of others is the central phenomenological disturbance of social anxiety. The socially anxious consciousness experiences "being seen" by others as a profound loss of subjectivity in two ways: 1) Alienation from self, the sense that the Other's judgments constitute the final meaning of the self; 2) Alienation from possibility, the felt loss of personal agency resulting from the perception of the Other as free to overcome or subvert one's choices.

C. The incapacitating effects of the social encounter on the socially anxious consciousness produces a sense of the self as essentially deficient in existential freedom and therefore unjustified in being present in the world, as characterized by the *de trop* feeling. In the mode of *de trop* consciousness, one feels oneself as though secret impostor to the social order. Thus, the danger inherent to social encounter for the socially anxious consciousness is the danger of being seen as *de trop*, in other words, of being discovered by others as defective and unworthy. In interacting with others, one is exposed to the possible objectification or reification of the private *de trop* self, wherein one's self-appraised character of thing-like impotence seems wholly observable to others by means of various involuntary mental and physiological responses (freezing up, making avoidable mistakes, mind going blank, stuttering sweating, blushing, etc.) or inadvertently presenting oneself as "weird", "odd", "boring", and so on.

D. The various avoidant and protective interpersonal behaviors common to social anxiety can thus be understood as strategic efforts to hide the *de trop* character of the self from public

perception. Interpersonal styles characterized by effusive politeness, self-effacement, passivity, appeasement, and helpfulness reflect an effort to *seduce* the Other into valuing the presence of the self. Yet these behaviors are experienced within the socially anxious consciousness as mere performance, inconsistent with the authentic disposition of the inward self. The possibility of authentic engagement with others can be brought on by external factors that modify the *de trop* feeling – either by reducing inhibition (as with alcohol) or providing a sense of innate belonging (as with feeling loved by others).

### **Part Three: Implications for Classification and Practice**

The phenomenological account of social anxiety formulated here is in certain respects continuous with extant research and theorizing on the subject, and yet also presents a novel perspective on the experience of social anxiety disorder and the meanings of its symptoms. This section discusses several ways in which the present theory forms a meaningful contribution to the research field. The first part focuses on the nosological implications of the theory, wherein the case is made for conceptualizing pathological social anxiety as a variation of schizoid psychology, in opposition to its prevailing classification as a phobic-type anxiety disorder. The second looks at the theory's implications for the clinical treatment of social anxiety.

#### **Pathological Social Anxiety as a Schizoid Phenomenon**

Social anxiety as a pathological construct has its conceptual roots in the notion of phobia. As discussed earlier, successive editions of the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual have charted a gradual shift in the scientific understanding of social anxiety disorder away from the category of phobia *per se*. What has underscored this shift, as attested in the most recent edition of the DSM, is the recognition of recurring patterns of ideation in socially anxiety disorder that are not apparently present in cases of phobic fear (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Once considered a subtype of phobia, at present social anxiety disorder holds the taxonomic rank of an anxiety disorder in its own right. Implied in such a categorization is that what is most essential to the phenomenon of social anxiety is that which it shares with the other members of its diagnostic class. Anxiety disorders, according to the DSM 5, are those that "share features of excessive fear and anxiety and related behavioral disturbances" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Thus it can be argued that while no longer being considered a species of phobia *per se*, social anxiety disorder is still pictured in

mainstream psychopathology as, at root, a disorder of excessive fearfulness whose particular situational object is public humiliation and/or social rejection.

Two lines of thinking about the nature of social anxiety disorder that have been raised in this paper militate against conceptualizing it in the mold of the anxiety disorders proper. The first is the widespread recognition among researchers of the lack of true qualitative differentiation between social anxiety disorder (SAD), avoidant personality disorder (AVPD), and certain forms of trait shyness. The existence of a meaningful distinction between SAD and AVPD was called into question as early as 1991 (Widiger & Tracie, 1991), and contemporary research, as summarized above, has largely confirmed this suspicion. Stravynski (2007) states, writing on this ambiguity, “Subversively, social phobia straddles both; it is simultaneously an anxiety and a personality disorder” (p. 183). It therefore seems increasingly valid to speak of social anxiety as a dimension of personality capable of greater and lesser pathological expression. As stated in the DSM 5, personality traits are “enduring patterns of perceiving, relating to, and thinking about the environment and oneself that are exhibited in a wide range of social and personal contexts” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Consequently, to define social anxiety disorder on the basis of one observable behavioral feature (exaggerated, object-specific fear and avoidance) runs the risk of obscuring its more subtle features as well as the scope of its impact in the life of the individual.

The second contra-argument derives from the phenomenological perspective. Earlier I had referred to the first question phenomenological philosophy asks in regard to the social nature of human life: how, in the first place, do we become certain of the essential sameness of ourselves and other human beings? In other words, how do we come to know some of the objects in our world as Others? Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* cites the efforts of his

phenomenological predecessors Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger to solve this riddle as he formulates his own. Theoretical differences notwithstanding, all concur that humans do, in fact, intuitively distinguish between the human and the non-human in their perceptual world. Modern cognitive-scientific research into the so-called “uncanny valley” continues to investigate this principle, attempting to decipher precisely what allows humans to automatically and correctly determine the non-humanity of humanoid robots (Seyama & Nagayama, 2007). Though the answer is not yet clear, what seems certain is that there is something utterly unique about the conscious apprehension of other people over against that of non-human things or animals. In this way as well does a simple fear-avoidance paradigm seem inappropriate as an explanatory basis for social anxiety. The singular phenomenology of the perception of other people ought to deter us from imagining that anxiety arising in social interaction is of the same kind and quality as that engendered by encounters with spiders, or heights. In fact, each of the four cognitively-oriented theories summarized earlier bore some amount of recognition of this basic non-parity. The two interpersonal theories of Leary and Baldwin both conceived of cognitive functions that deal exclusively with interpersonal relations. As for the cognitive-behavioral models of Clark and Heimberg and associates, each concurs that amidst the cacophony of internal and external information to which physiological anxiety is understood as the response, appear explicit representations of self, other, and social process. In every case, the reductive framework of *social rejection as phobic object* is rejected in favor of one which implicates the self’s experience of its own nature in the construction of a subjectively dangerous social reality. In light of this consensus position, the field’s continued emphasis on the phobic features of social anxiety justifies Parnas and Zahavis’s (2002) critique of modern psychiatric taxonomy for its “systematic underemphasizing of the patient’s subjective experience” (p. 140).



In light of the preceding, I propose that the study of social anxiety disorder would be better served by adopting the syndrome's anomalous quality of self-experience as its nosological marker in place of the behavioral feature of fear-based avoidance. Both of the problems I have highlighted with respect to the phobia paradigm logically point us in the direction of positing self-experience as the locus of disturbance: Firstly, in that we seek an account of the underpinnings of social anxiety disorder that supports the growing recognition of it as a dimension of personality rather than a discrete disease entity; and secondly, in that we seek to ground our understanding in structures of human existence that are uniquely human, of which selfhood is a prime example.<sup>15</sup> In this paper, I have characterized this quality as *vulnerable being-for-others*. Briefly summarized, I hypothesize that the self in social anxiety disorder is atypically experienced as having its existential foundation in others' consciousness of it, and consequently as losing, in the presence of others, the basic subjective freedom with which to determine its own character and its own future. A nosological analysis of social anxiety disorder would thus seek to understand it in relation to other pathological dispositions typified by alterations in selfhood. As it stands, the occurrence of pathological disturbance in self-experience has been studied primarily in connection with schizophrenia and schizoid psychology. Below I review two phenomenological theories of schizophrenia and their significance for the present theory of social anxiety.

**Self-disorder model.** The "self-disorder model" of schizophrenia (Sass & Parnas, 2003) conceptualizes the condition in terms of an alteration in elemental selfhood, referred to as *ipseity*. Sass (2014) defines *ipseity* as "the most basic sense of selfhood or self-presence: a crucial sense

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<sup>15</sup> Of course, it is possible that non-human animals and things do have some experience of selfhood of which we have no concept; yet we do not as yet experience them as such, in the way that we perceive other humans as possessing selves congruent to our own.

of self-sameness, a fundamental (thus nearly indescribable) sense of existing as a vital and self-identical subject of experience or agent of action” (p. 6). In schizophrenia, this “minimal self” is thought to be disturbed in two interrelated ways. One is *hyper-reflexivity*, referring to an abnormal intensity of self-consciousness, wherein processes and experiences which might normally be tacitly “lived” come into explicit focus. The second is *diminished self-affection*, an attenuation of the sense of self as the subject of experience and the agent of intentional action, as though one were to cease “existing in the first-person perspective” (Sass, 2014). These two facets of the alteration of *ipseity* in schizophrenia are, in theory, operative in all three traditional categories of symptomology – the so-called positive (e.g. hallucination, delusion), negative (e.g. avolition, alogia) and disorganized (e.g. tangentiality, bizarreness) symptoms. (Sass, 2003; Sass & Parnas 2003).

While it will be left to future research efforts to determine the precise nature of the relationship between the schizophrenia and social anxiety disorder, as a point of departure it is worthwhile to note certain gross similarities between the self-disorder model and the present phenomenological account of social anxiety disorder. Phenomena closely resembling both “hyper-reflexivity” and “diminished self-affection” have figured prominently in the foregoing analysis of the experiential character of social anxiety. The former recalls what I described as the socially anxious individual’s *hyper-consciousness of being-for-others*, referring to an atypically pervasive awareness of the self-as-object in the encounter with the Other. Just as Sass (2003) emphasizes with respect to hyper-reflexivity, the kind of self-focus operative in social anxiety is not a volitional act of self-reflection so much as an automatic mutation in self-awareness with which one is passively confronted. In the broadest terms, we might hypothesize that what distinguishes the phenomenon in social anxiety from its expression in schizophrenia is an

explicit reference to the social context. Spurr and Stopa (2003), proponents of Clark and Wells (1995) cognitive behavioral model, suggest along these lines that the “self-focused attention” involved in social anxiety is differentiated from other instances of self-awareness by its “observer perspective” character. As formulated in my own analysis, the reflexive focus of social anxiety is that which constitutes one’s “outside,” experiences of the self qualified by real, predicted or imagined apprehension by a conscious Other. Moments of self-experience bearing the valence of private interiority would in that sense be less likely to become objects of reflexive preoccupation in social anxiety. This in contrast to the schizophrenia, for which hyper-reflexive focus is likely not contingent on the external perceptibility of an experience; for instance, a bodily sensation or fragment of inner speech might incur intense attentive scrutiny in schizophrenia (Sass, 2014).

A similar relationship may be hypothesized to exist between the phenomena of diminished self-affection in schizophrenia and what I have termed *de trop* consciousness in social anxiety disorder. The *de trop* self is characterized by the felt loss of freedom to both bestow meaning upon self-experience and to determine one’s own future. These two dimensions roughly correlate to Sass’s (2014) description of diminished self-affection as a “decline in the (passively or automatically) experienced sense of existing as a subject of awareness or agent of action” (p. 6). Again, what separates the two may very well be the presence of the phenomenal Other, both in its role as the causal precipitant of pathological disturbance and as an explicit characteristic of the experiential horizon. In social anxiety, the *de trop* state as I described it is occasioned by the appearance of the Other, wherein one is alienated from subjective agency by means of the Other’s “objectivating” look. Following Sartre, in this moment one’s being becomes wholly conditioned by the Other’s perceptions and judgments; in this sense the self is

no longer experienced as the “subject of experience” so much as the passive object of another’s experience. Even one’s perceptual world, and by extension, one’s possibilities for agentic action, seem subsumed within the Other’s world and field of possibility. Thus the loss of subjectivity experienced in social anxiety occurs fully within the context of, and as a pathological reification of, social objecthood. In that sense, it could be qualified as a specifically relational phenomenon; the loss of subjectivity *to* the Other. Presumably, the decline of subjective sense observed in schizophrenia is not bound to the social object position as such. Rather, the schizophrenic variety seems equally operative independent of interpersonal context (that is to say, irrespective of the presence or non-presence of the Other). Thus perhaps, whereas in social anxiety disorder the self-as-subject gives way to self-as-object (though in either case, remains *present* as self), in schizophrenia the decline of subjectivity may constitute a more absolute effacement of minimal self-presence. Sass (2003) cites a schizophrenic patient who states in this vein “I was simply there, only in that place, but without being present” (p. 641). Thus in sum, with the support of further phenomenological research it may be possible to characterize social anxiety disorder as a self-disturbance in the mold of schizophrenia, albeit one whose site of action is primarily or exclusively the social or “for-others” region of experience.

**Ontological insecurity.** An alternative perspective on the nature of self-disturbance in schizophrenic and schizoid psychology is presented by R.D. Laing (1959) in his classic work of existential-phenomenological psychiatry, *The Divided Self*. Laing’s formulation bears its own significance for the present account of social anxiety disorder, offering a second, complementary framework for characterizing the relationship of the two conditions. Much in the vein of the dimensional concept of social anxiety favored by this paper, Laing’s work is likewise aimed at

describing a particular character type whose possibilities of expression range from “the sane schizoid way of being-in-the-world to a psychotic way of being-in-the-world” (p. 17).

Central to Laing’s (1959) phenomenology of schizoid psychology is the concept of *ontological insecurity*. This refers to the loss or absence of an assured sense of the persistent reality of self and world. Absent a stable experience of the self as “real, alive, whole, and continuous,” (p. 39) the ontologically insecure individual may experience feeling

more dead than alive; precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question. He may lack the experience of his own temporal continuity. He may not possess an over-riding sense of personal consistency or cohesiveness. He may feel more insubstantial than substantial, and unable to assume that the stuff he is made of is genuine, good, valuable. And he may feel his self as partially divorced from his body. (p. 42)

Given the fragility of selfhood for such an individual, Laing suggests, “the ordinary circumstances of everyday life constitute a continual and deadly threat” (ibid.). The intensity and chronicity of such experiences of primal unreality, as well as the strength of the individual’s defensive or self-preservative response to them, will determine the level of pathological dysfunction or the lack thereof.

Laing (1959) proceeds to propose three categories of existential anxiety encountered by the schizoid individual moving through the world. *Engulfment* refers to the loss of identity risked in entering into relation with “anyone or anything, indeed, even with himself” (p. 44). The fear of engulfment may appear even and especially in feeling loved or well-understood by another (much more than in being hated or misunderstood), for such conditions are experienced as a kind of ontological merging in which individual existence is destroyed. *Implosion* refers to the fear that the world is “liable at any moment to crash in and obliterate all identity as a gas will rush in and obliterate a vacuum” (p. 45). This anxiety arises from the sense of existing as an insubstantial self in a substantial world; thus, per Laing, “any ‘contact’ with reality is in itself

experienced as a dreadful threat” (p. 46). Finally, *depersonalization* refers to “the act whereby one negates the other person’s autonomy, ignores his feelings, regards him as a thing, kills the life in him” (p. 46). The schizophrenic or schizoid individual is “constantly afraid of being depersonalized by others...In the face of being treated as an ‘it’, his own subjectivity drains away from him like blood from the face. Basically he requires constant confirmation from others of his own existence as a person” (pp. 46-47).

Of these three, the last stands out as corresponding most markedly to the phenomenological character of social anxiety I have proposed in this paper. This is, in fact, no coincidence; Laing explicitly references Part 3 of *Being and Nothingness*, the primary source for my own ideas, as a “brilliant” explication of this facet of schizoid anxiety. Summarizing Sartre’s main theses, he writes:

The risk consists in this: if one experiences the other as a free agent, one is open to the possibility of experiencing oneself as an *object* of his experience and thereby of feeling one’s own subjectivity drained away. One is threatened with the possibility of becoming no more than a thing in the world of the without any life for oneself without any being for oneself. (p.47)

Laing’s triune system of schizoid anxieties is in this way suggestive of a similar sort of relationship between pathological social anxiety and schizoid psychology as had begun to emerge above. Namely, of the three genera of ontological dangers he outlines, depersonalization is the only one which takes form as an experience of true relation. Both the fears of engulfment and implosion, by Laing’s description, can be considered types of world-relations that are inclusive of, but not exclusive to, the encounter with the transcendent Other. More importantly, however, both describe phenomenological conditions in which the self is threatened with obliteration, either by merging with the object or by collapsing in upon its own emptiness. For both conditions, what is experienced is a breach in the ontological border between self and

world. In depersonalization, by contrast, the self remains present and intact but fundamentally altered by the Other's free agency, transformed from subject to object. In the vein of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, the phenomenon of depersonalization (or in Sartre's language, objectivation) requires that self and other remain ontologically distinct, in the sense that the "subject" and "object" refer to relative positions that are only intelligible in terms of each other.

Thus, a similar pattern emerges here as above: where Laing's theory exhibits meaningful overlap with the present formulation of social anxiety disorder is in its interpersonal dimension. Both here and with respect to the self-disorder model (Sass & Parnas 2003), the self in social anxiety disorder is seemingly distinguished from the self in schizophrenia in that its vulnerabilities are concentrated within the encounter with the real Other. To frame social anxiety disorder as a variant of schizoid self-disturbance might therefore go as follows: (a) Social anxiety disorder is a disorder of selfhood for which alteration in self-experience occurs exclusively in the phenomenological context of the interpersonal (the domain of *for-others*); (b) As such, phenomenological features common to disorders of selfhood, such as hyper-reflexive awareness, loss of subjective sense, and loss of free agency are expressed as qualities of the self-in-relation, but are not necessarily generalizable to self-experience in non-relational contexts.

**Conclusion.** I have argued that conventional categorization of social anxiety disorder in mainstream psychopathology is faulty, primarily in the way it mistakes the subjective dimension of social anxiety disorder as analogous to that involved in phobic fear. When taking a phenomenological, rather than behavioristic approach to nosological analysis, social anxiety disorder shows a more profound affinity with schizophrenic and schizoid ways of being. Specifically, social anxiety disorder appears to reflect a variant of schizoid self-disturbance

focused upon the experience of the social self. In the final section of this paper, I will discuss how further research on the topic may be able to test this formulation.

### **Clinical Applications of the Phenomenological Theory**

The body of contemporary clinical research in the treatment of social anxiety includes findings supporting the effectiveness of a variety of therapeutic modalities. A search of the term “therapy for social anxiety” on Google Scholar turns up peer-reviewed articles offering evidence for the effectiveness of: individual internet based cognitive-behavior therapy (Hedman et al., 2011), acceptance and commitment therapy (Dalrymple & Herbert, 2007), exposure therapy (Feske & Chambless, 1995), and attention training (Schmidt et al., 2009), among others. Evidence has also been found demonstrating psychodynamic psychotherapy to be equivalently effective (Bögels et al. 2014) or nearly as effective (Leichsenring et al., 2013) as cognitive-behavioral therapy, with other lines of research calling into question the validity of any such comparative findings (Luborsky et al. 2002). That no one specific approach that can claim clear superiority is suggestive of the presence of a so-called “common factors” effect across treatment modalities. (Ahn & Wampold, 2001; Laska, Gurman, & Wampold, 2014).

Studies of the common factors phenomenon such as those just mentioned have verified the hypothesis that taken collectively, theory-specific elements of treatment have no significant effect on overall treatment outcomes across diagnostic categories. At present, however, no research exists which identifies the specific factors critical to the successful treatment of social anxiety disorder in particular. One paper by McManus et al. (2010) that makes important inroads in this matter reports on a qualitative study of patients’ experience of therapeutic change whom have been treated using Clark’s (2003) popular protocol of cognitive therapy for social anxiety disorder. Clark’s model typifies the standard CBT approach against which newer treatment



concepts are often tested, combining cognitive restructuring elements with experiential, exposure-type activities (Herbert, Rheingold & Goldstein, 2002). In applying an “interpretive phenomenological” analysis to the self-reports of eight former social phobia patients, McManus et al. (2010) tease out several recurring themes of change process from the patients’ point of view. While the stated aim of the study is to help establish the relative therapeutic value of the various procedures comprising the protocol, it also opens the way for insight into *why* certain techniques are more effective, especially in so far as the meaning or value ascribed to a given treatment element by a patient may differ from its conventional theoretical justification. For our purposes, the study makes an apt preliminary test case for determining the clinical applicability of the Sartrean formulation of social anxiety in the context of a proven treatment model. In following, I explore several important correspondences between the phenomenological analysis of McManus et al. (2010) and my own phenomenological account of pathological social anxiety.

The model of cognitive therapy utilized in the treatments under investigation comprises the following technical elements<sup>16</sup>:

- Socialization to the model and reviewing a recent instance of the patient’s anxiety to develop out a case-specific formulation according to Clark and Wells’ (1995) model;
- Behavioral experiment(s) to evaluate the role of safety behaviors and self-focused attention in maintaining social anxiety; behavioral experiments involving video and other-person feedback to correct distorted self-impressions;
- Training in externally focused attention;

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<sup>16</sup> Readers may refer to the section on contemporary models of social anxiety disorder in Part One of this paper for explanation of most of these methods and concepts.

- Integrated cognitive restructuring and behavioral experiments to re-evaluate and test fearful predictions;
- Re-scripting of early, socially traumatic memories linked to negative self-imagery;
- Relapse prevention planning.

As noted above, the model is designed to strategically integrate cognitive and behavioral interventions; namely, those that target the thought patterns and perceptions associated with social anxiety, alongside those that have the individual participate in real interaction or performance situations. Study participants, comprising five women and three men between the ages of 23 and 41, had completed a full course of such treatment in the two years preceding data collection, and all had experienced some substantial amount of symptom reduction. The authors describe their data collection method as “open ended, and designed to invite participants to narrate, and then reflect upon, their experiences of CT for SP.” Participants were asked, in this format, the following five questions: How they came to have cognitive therapy for social phobia; what they recalled about the experience; which if any aspects of treatment they found helpful or unhelpful; what if any impact cognitive therapy had on their social phobia; and about any other influences that impacted on their social phobia during this time (Mcmanus et al. 2010, p. 583). The transcripts were then analyzed using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) as outlined Smith & Osborne (2003), which involves a close reading resulting in the extrapolation of recurring themes, these forming a hermeneutic frame for subsequent re-readings and the development of superordinate themes.

In their discussion, McManus et al. (2010) identify five superordinate themes emerging from their analysis: *Social phobia as a way of being*; *Learning to challenge social phobia as a way of being*; *Transformative mechanisms of therapy*; *Challenges faced in the pursuit of change*;

and *A whole new world: new ways of being*. Of these, we will focus on the third, pertaining to the change process. I summarize the study's findings below.

**Mechanisms of therapeutic transformation.** The authors begin this section by noting that all eight participants pointed to the profound importance of the quality of their relationship with the therapist in making therapeutic change possible. Across participants, two facets of the therapist's persona were perceived as "paramount" to the success of treatment, which the authors describe respectively as "openness *and* expertise." The former refers to the therapist's ability to convey "validation, understanding and support" of the patient's fears and difficulties, critical to dispelling the shame patients felt about their anxiety. One participant is quoted in this regard saying, "I felt like she wasn't looking down on me in any way, which was quite important I think because I guess it's obvious really but you know, you feel sort of, felt embarrassed you've got it." With regard to the latter, participants described the importance of being able to trust in the competence and skill of their therapist. Capturing both sentiments, one participant said, "He was very gentle and it was nice to finally speak to somebody who specializes in social phobia, I've seen other people who have got no idea really, I had to explain to people, me telling them how I feel" (p. 584).

The next subtheme relates to the perceived value of labeling the disorder and formulating one's personal experience of it using the framework of cognitive-behavioral theory. Seven out of the eight participants recalled these elements of the treatment as being helpful, according to the authors, in enabling them to "understand their difficulties, and ultimately to view themselves more positively." A representative quote reads:

I think it's really like opened my mind and it was really, really useful because first of all I realized that I wasn't the only one ... I didn't feel like I was not normal, this can happen to anyone. So from there on I felt I was a bit more confident ... and positive. (p. 584)

Finding out that the particulars of their social anxiety are shared by many others served to normalize the experience, further reducing participants' shame over their symptoms. In a similar vein, formulating the experience in a systematic fashion provided patients with, per the authors, "a non-blaming explanation of how their difficulties had developed, and were maintained." Sketching out the origins, mechanisms and maintaining factors of their anxiety seemed to allow patients to feel less personally implicated in their social difficulties. One participant noted that she experienced the formulation exercise as useful in allowing her to "look at this in a more objective way" (p. 584).

Finally, the third subtheme relating to therapeutic change process was participants' appreciation for the experiential components of treatment. By means of these interventions, "participants learned that they did not come across as badly as they feared, and that the 'cost' of negative social outcomes was not as high as they had anticipated" (p. 587). Participants cited the value of getting feedback from therapists and fellow patients as to how anxious they appeared during interactions, as well as viewing video footage of themselves, and watching other participants perform the exercises. One participant spoke about discovering that her anxiety was not as apparent to others as she generally feared, and furthermore, realizing that appearing anxious to others need not automatically result in negative evaluation:

While you can feel very nervous on the inside you don't generally look as nervous on the outside. And also that it's not really that important, you know, whether, if you are a bit nervous, that's not a crime or anything bad, it's just that you're a bit nervous and you know, that's nothing to really hide, yeah. (p. 585)

Another participant was impressed by being able to watch others interact and then compare their impressions of what occurred:

She started to shake as well while having soup. There was this person in front of her, and I was looking at both of them and she told me afterwards, she asked me 'Was this person talking to me and interested in what I was saying or was she looking at my hands

shaking?’ ‘She wasn’t looking at her hands shaking she was looking at you,’ so I realized that maybe if you shake, it doesn’t matter to people, people are not going to make much out of it. (p. 585)

In this case, the speaker was able to compare the reported subjective experience of her fellow patient with her own observations of the actions of a listening confederate, concluding that feeling anxious does not necessarily mean being appraised by others as anxious. Watching video footage of themselves in interaction was similarly instrumental in conveying this to the patients.

One important caveat emerged in the narratives of five out of the eight participants, pertaining to use of therapist feedback. These five doubted the ability of therapists and fellow patients to be unbiased in delivering feedback, given that it was delivered in a treatment context. One participant said about therapist feedback, “They’d still give a slightly positive spin on anything they’d say to make you feel better about yourself.” This limited patients’ ability to use what they heard from others about their social appearance to challenge negative self-impressions.

In summary, analysis of patient responses to the question of what in cognitive therapy most aided their change process yielded three important themes: First and foremost, the necessity that the therapist as person embody empathy, understanding, and expert knowledge; second, the value of the being able to normalize and depersonalize social anxiety; and third, the value of being able to challenge one’s assumptions about the impression one makes on others through the use of interpersonal feedback, videotape, and retraining of habitual patterns in attention and use of safety behaviors.

**Therapeutic transformation and the Sartrean perspective.** Much of what is described about the experience of treatment and change from the patient’s point of view in McManus et al. (2010) supports the existential-phenomenological account of the structure of social anxiety presented in Part Two. Foremost is the patients’ portrayal of the quality of the therapeutic

relationship as acting to ameliorate the shame they felt about their social anxiety. It is notable that it was the combination of the therapists' clear understanding of their difficulties and interpersonal warmth that most impressed patients and made further work possible. As I have suggested, the essential "danger" of social interaction for socially anxious individuals is the prospect of *being seen* as abnormal in light of the way the presence of the Other hampers their ability to act in a free and coordinated way. It was therefore preliminarily crucial for patients to perceive that their therapist both had a clear view of their *de trop* self-experience and nonetheless extended warmth and acceptance to them.

Along these lines, there is a case to be made that this foundational experience of feeling *seen* and *accepted* may have been more important to the change process than the more structured interaction experiences that came later in the treatment. Per the authors' presentation of the data, patient's did not report doubting the authenticity of therapist's overall supportive stance toward their suffering, yet the majority of them were skeptical of the positive verbal feedback they received from therapist on the quality of their social performances in experiential exercises. This difference can perhaps be understood in terms the phenomenology of vulnerable being-for-others. Firstly, I had argued with Sartre that the encounter with the Other is, in essence, the appearance of a transcendent freedom, before whom the socially anxious individual feels comparatively un-free, *de trop*, existentially unjustified and impotent. The socially anxious individual craves the approval of the Other in order that their presence, unjustified in their own self-reckoning, become justified by the Other's willing. Yet for the self to feel authentically willed, the Other's approval must be granted in absolute freedom; be, in a sense, unconditional. Along these lines, the majority who doubted the authenticity of the therapist's positive feedback on their social performance did so because they did not trust the unconditionality of the gesture,

believing instead that the therapist was compelled by her occupational role to “make you feel better about yourself.” Why then, we should ask, did patients seem unconcerned with the issue of role-demand with regard to their experience of the therapists’ overall stance of acceptance? For this we must recall that a feature of socially anxious consciousness is to frequently experience social activity as performance *per se*, the donning of a socially pleasing impostor persona. From the point of view of the patient, to be congratulated for a good job on a role-play exercise serves only to affirm the believability of this ‘normal person’ act, while communicating nothing about the inner self-experience of defectiveness and unacceptability. Such a positive evaluation would be rightly understood as intended for the external, feigned self, rather than having any particular significance for the private *de trop* self. The kind of response that is of genuine importance to the patient is rather the acceptance that comes in full view of their pained inhibition and sense of shame. The therapist’s knowledge and acceptance of the patient’s experience is, crucially, not an evaluation of any kind, positive or negative. Rather, it approximates the empathic stance that Rogers (1989, p. 62) is describing when he writes, “But when someone understands how it feels and seems to *me*, without wanting to analyze me or judge me, then I can blossom and grow in that climate.” We might see the significance of this quality of rapport reflected in Daniela’s descriptions of the liberating transformations in selfhood she experiences in the company of her “comfort people,” those before whom she fears no judgment and so may “be herself” (*DG*, Kindle Locations 494-501). Similarly, the feeling of worth and security occasioned by the non-judgmental interest of a skillful therapist is a pre-reflective self-apprehension, and therefore not open to doubt. It would seem reasonable to propose that the *sine qua non* of effective psychotherapy for social anxiety is thus for the patient to experience their private self as both authentically seen and authentically accepted within the therapy relationship.

The second consistent theme identified by MacManus et al. (2010) is patients' appreciation of having their social anxiety experiences normalized through psychoeducational intervention. In learning about and mapping their own social anxiety experiences onto a standard cognitive behavioral model of social anxiety, patients discovered that their worries and behaviors form a pattern shared by many others. While the discovery that one's psychological difficulties are not unique to oneself has been theorized as having therapeutic value across pathological presentations (Yalom, 2005), it is notable that the participants in McManus et al. spoke of this as one of the three most powerful catalysts of change in their treatments. The existential-phenomenological meaning of such an exercise for social anxiety sufferers shows through particularly well in the words of the patient cited above: "I think it's really like opened my mind and it was really, really useful because first of all I realized that I wasn't the only one." I argued earlier that the perception of being "the only one" within one's social surround to actively suffer with social anxiety is structural to the socially anxious sense of reality. In social anxiety, others are experienced as radically free and self-determining, in stark contrast to the impotent self. The *de trop* self appears against the backdrop of generally perceived existential freedom of the Other. It is precisely this structural relation of impotent-self/free-other in the experience of being with others that founds the perception of self as uniquely unacceptable. In that respect, therapeutic interventions aimed at normalizing the pathological experience of social anxiety can be viewed as directly targeting a basic feature of the its phenomenological character. Such interventions carry the potential to help restore the socially anxious individual to a sense of the self as properly belonging within the social collective, and by extension as possessing, intact, the signature human quality of subjective agency.



Finally, study participants broadly valued the experiential components of cognitive treatment for allowing them to challenge their perceptions regarding how anxious they overtly appear, and the extent to which others notice and negatively judge displays of anxiety. The change process identified here represents one more way which patients seem to overcome the painful and pervasive problem of being-seen as *de trop*. The *de trop* state, it should be recalled, is experienced as a kind of open secret, wherein one's inner defectiveness seems fully apparent to others. By means of the exercises described above, watching others interact and watching themselves on video, patients underwent a phenomenological shift restoring the sensation of privacy to self-experience. Such a shift is expressed in the quote, "While you can feel very nervous on the inside you don't generally look as nervous on the outside." Perhaps even more therapeutically important, however, is the shift in patients' beliefs that to appear outwardly nervous is necessarily to be appraised by others as detestable or unacceptable. This effect is captured in one participant's newfound insight that "it's not really that important, you know, whether, if you are a bit nervous, that's not a crime or anything bad, it's just that you're a bit nervous and you know, that's nothing to really hide, yeah." To begin to experience one's natural response to the presence of others, even if it tends toward inhibition, as not inherently shameful is a revolutionary movement for the socially anxious individual. Such a recognition opens the possibility of living more authentically, obviating the need to employ unproductive avoidant and protective strategies. Such a change may be thought of as the return of existential freedom, the power to assert the final meaning of the self and its actions as good and normal. When genuine and thoroughgoing, this may in fact represent the final aim of a successful treatment of social anxiety: to instill self-acceptance of the being that one naturally is. In Sartrean terms, we can think of self-acceptance as the property of a being who justifies its own being, the very antithesis

of the *de trop* self. For the socially anxious patient who attains to such an outcome, the Other need no longer be a threatening encumbrance nor a desperately sought justification.

**Conclusion.** The above represents a re-interpretation of the meaning of patients' experiences in CBT treatment for social anxiety disorder through the lens of the new phenomenological theory. While not disputing any of McManus et al.'s (2010) conclusions as to which interventions were most critical in patients' perceptions of the change process, I mean to offer an alternative explanation of the therapeutic value of said interventions (the *why* as opposed to the *which*). My analysis yields the following proposals as to the essential elements of successful treatment of pathological social anxiety: First, therapists should effort to establish a relationship in which the patient feels both *seen* and *accepted*. Given the patient's sense of possessing a nature that renders him unworthy of social belonging, the therapist's warmth and positive regard will be most effective in combination with the conveyance of a full comprehension of the nature of the patient's painful self-experience. As the patient's symptoms are likely to manifest at some point within the therapy situation (since psychotherapy is a social encounter, albeit an atypical one), clinicians would do well to notice shows of anxiety and protectiveness as they occurs and encourage patients to describe out loud what they are experiencing. This in turn gives the therapist the chance to warmly and empathically contact the patient's true self-experience, disrupting the patient's expectation of shame and rejection over having their discomfort exposed.

Secondly, given that a sense of the uniqueness of one's way of being with others is built into the phenomenological structure of social anxiety (the free-Other/impotent-self dialectic), patients would benefit from the discovery that others deal with the same kind of difficulties. A group psychotherapy format would be particularly well suited for this need, in which social

anxiety patients could recognize their own experiences and troubling perceptions echoed in the self-descriptions of others. As with McManus et al. (2010), a similar effect could potentially be achieved by means of expert presentation of one or another valid theoretical models of pathological social anxiety. To the extent that the patient can perceive their own experience reflected in the clinician's theoretical paradigm, the technique would serve to loosen the pervasive sense of personal abnormality that characterizes self-experience in social anxiety.

Finally, a successful treatment should include an emphasis on cultivating in the patient greater acceptance of their own feelings and ways of responding to social demand. As we have seen, socially anxious individuals tend to depend upon the approval of others in order to feel a basic sense of belonging in the world, such that a lack of explicit approval is felt as tantamount to humiliating rejection. Initially, the therapist is tasked with adopting the role of the accepting Other, to the effect that the patient should feel safe enough to speak and act authentically (rather than continuing to conceal their private experience) in the therapy situation. Yet over time, the therapist's aim is to transfer more and more of the responsibility for maintaining a feeling of personal acceptability over to the patient. Varying streams of psychotherapy would conceptualize and define this task differently. In a cognitive behavioral treatment, as here evinced, it might be such acceptance thought of as a new belief achieved through interpersonal experiential learning; a psychodynamic treatment might see it as the internalization of the therapist's accepting stance (Kohut, 1968); treatments utilizing mindfulness and meditation might emphasize contemplative practices that encourage self-compassion (Brach, 2004). In existential-phenomenological terms, what is sought is the rehabilitation of the freedom of the self to supply its own ontological legitimacy, and concomitantly, to retain the feeling of subjective agency in the presence of others.

#### **Part Four: Methodological Issues and Future Directions**

In this final section, I briefly review some of the methodological limitations of this study, and propose based on these possible directions for future research in the phenomenology of social anxiety disorder. This study is not easily characterized as adhering to one or another prescribed research methodology. While its orientation is phenomenological, it is not, strictly speaking, a work of pure phenomenological research. The primary point of differentiation is the study's use of Sartrean philosophy as its interpretive lens. Wertz (in Wertz et al., 2011), characterizes Giorgi's foundational approach to the phenomenological method in psychology as beginning with an immersion in the textual subject that is "without any agenda, aim, or even attention to the research phenomenon," and further, which "involves no judgment, no selectivity, and an openness to all details that provides a background for the next steps" (p.181). This sort of neutral stance, inspired by Husserl's method of eidetic reduction, is intended to promote the generation of "meaning units," persistent themes in the text that guide and organize the overall interpretation of the data. In the present study, however, narrative data was analyzed using interpretive categories derived from a source external to the data itself, namely Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. Given that one of my aims was to demonstrate the usefulness of Sartre as a resource in the analysis of the first-person experience of social anxiety disorder, by necessity my reading of the three memoirs was hermeneutically guided by Sartrean social ontology. The task of this paper may therefore be better described as the verification of a particular hypothesis about the meaning and structure of socially anxious experience.

In that case, it will helpful be to identify points of potential weakness in my efforts at such verification. One issue is the small number of subjects involved in the study. Smith (2007) identifies three subjects as a suitable *n* for doctoral level work in phenomenological analysis,

arguing that this sample size is large enough to permit observation of individual differences between subjects while small enough to permit intensive, in-depth analysis of each one. This sort of balance of expediency and thoroughness was indeed a helpful factor in the completion of the present study. Yet the size of the sample also owed to the dearth of available data of the type required. The three memoirs, all of which are explicitly concerned with representing the lived experience of social anxiety, are to the best of my knowledge among the only ones of their kind. I was also unable to locate first-person narrative data on the subject of social anxiety in the library systems and databases of peer-reviewed clinical materials currently at my disposal. Thus, while the final sample size of this study can certainly be considered appropriate given its particular conditions, future research efforts could be strengthened by including greater numbers of subjects. Another potential limit on the generalizability of the proposed theory is that the three works are demographically homogenous, representing the voices of three middle-class American women of European ancestry. In that respect, incorporating individuals representing greater gender and cultural diversity would be advantageous for future iterations of this study.

Another issue potentially affecting the validity of this study's findings pertains to the lack of a formal scheme for participant selection. Most research focused on a clinical population will screen potential participants for suitability using a standardized diagnostic tool. In this study, where there was no contact between the researcher and the authors of the various memoirs, no opportunity existed to ascertain that each one met some diagnostic standard for inclusion. Instead, the judgment of suitability relied upon the authors' descriptions of their chronic symptoms and interactions with mental health professionals.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Daniela sees a therapist in college who corroborates her self-diagnosis of social anxiety disorder (*DG*, Kindle Location 1963); Emily, also in college, sees a psychiatrist who diagnoses her with social anxiety disorder based on a symptom inventory (*EF*, p. 49); Helen is treated for

The problems resulting from my exclusive reliance on published memoirs for this study could be effectively addressed in future research efforts by changing the format of data collection to the semi-structured interview. Smith (2007) favors the semi-structured interview as the vehicle of choice for phenomenological research for the way it encourages rapport-building between researcher and subject, as well for its capacity to generate rich descriptive detail while maintaining a degree of repetition and reliability. In this format, the flow of the interview is “guided” by the schedule of questions “rather than be dictated by it.” (Smith, 2007, p. 58). Interviewers are enabled to dwell on or probe into areas of apparent significance, or change the order of questions to best facilitate rich description. The interview format offers researchers much greater methodological control over the participant variables discussed earlier. Participants could be drawn from a more diverse pool, and pre-screened for suitability using a standardized diagnostic instrument such as the SCID (First, 1995). Interview questions could be devised to encourage open ended reflection on past social experiences, anticipatory thoughts and feelings about future social experiences, impressions of the character of the self, and even the participants’ “here and now” experience of sitting and speaking with the interviewer. The emerging qualitative data could then easily be subjected to the same kind of analysis as was performed in the present study, where the transcribed text is interrogated for evidence of phenomenological processes and structures in the vein of Sartre’s social ontology.

In closing, one promising direction for future phenomenological research in social anxiety disorder would involve the use of the Examination of Anomalous Self Experience (EASE) developed by researchers of schizophrenic disorders in Denmark (Parnas et al., 2005).

The developers of the EASE describe it as “a symptom checklist for semi-structured,

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shyness by several therapists and has an epiphany of self-comprehension when she reads Zimbardo’s (1990) self-help book *Shyness*.

phenomenological exploration of experiential or subjective anomalies that may be considered as disorders of basic or ‘minimal’ self-awareness” (p. 236). Rather than a formal questionnaire, the EASE consists of an annotated list of common phenomenological features of schizophrenia relating to anomalous self-experience, intended to guide “mutually interactive reflection” (p. 238) between trained interviewer and interviewee on the contents of the latter’s self-reporting. Apart from its utility as a means to evoke experiential data, the EASE offers a particular advantage for the present theory given my earlier contention that social anxiety disorder may be reflect a variant of schizoid self-disturbance. My hypothesis could be tested by comparing the responses of social anxiety patients with those of schizophrenic patients. Given that certain dimensions of schizophrenic experience included in the EASE likely do not overlap with social anxiety disorder, such as “loss of common sense” and “confusion with one’s own specular image,” it may prove worthwhile to develop an adapted version of the interview that is more focused on their shared features. That being said, maintaining the interview in its original form may aid in revealing highly subtle manifestations of these more extreme disturbances in socially anxious individuals. Research of this type could also be augmented by utilizing, alongside the EASE, a more recent, parallel survey of psychopathological phenomenology, the Examination of World Experience (EAWE) (Sass et al., 2017). The EAWE focuses on dimensions of experience of the lived world such as time, space, language, and indeed, other persons, and could be especially apt in testing the validity of Sartre’s observations regarding the shift in one’s sense of their physical surroundings with the coming and going of the Other. The phenomenological data generated by administering the EASE and EAWE to a group of socially anxious individuals will be useful in refining our understanding of anomalous self and world experience in social anxiety disorder and related conditions.

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