**Picturing ourselves in the world: Drawings, IPA and the Relational Mapping Interview**

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**Abstract**

Some aspects of experience can be challenging for research participants to verbalise. IPA researchers need to get 'experience-near' to meet their phenomenological commitments, capturing the 'texture' and quality of existence and placing participants in-relation-to events, objects, others, and the world. Incorporating drawing into IPA designs provides a vehicle through which participants can better explore and communicate their lifeworlds. IPA researchers also require rich accounts to fulfil their interpretative commitments. Drawing taps into multiple sensory registers simultaneously, providing polysemous data, which lends itself to hermeneutic analysis. This paper outlines a multimodal method, the Relational Mapping Interview, which was developed to understand the relational context of various forms of distress and disruption. We illustrate how the approach results in richly nuanced visual and verbal accounts of relational experience. Drawing on an "expanded hermeneutic phenomenology", we suggest how visual data can be analysed within an IPA framework to offer significant experiential insights.

**Keywords:** visual methods, drawings, phenomenology, hermeneutics, qualitative methods, IPA, relationality, social networks, social support

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IPA is concerned with people's experiences, understandings, and how they find themselves *in-the-world,* and it requires data in the form of "rich, detailed, first-person" accounts of idiographic experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p56). IPA researchers need to get 'experience-near' to meet their phenomenological commitments, whilst also seeking accounts that are rich in expressive content, to support more expansive interpretation suitable for IPA's hermeneutic commitment. In IPA studies, data has predominantly been collected via participants' *verbal* accounts, with interviews and diary methods advocated as the most suitable (Smith et al., 2009). Yet the fullness of lived experience is not easy to communicate verbally (Boden & Eatough, 2014), and many aspects of the human predicament can seem beyond words (Todres, 2007). This is often true of the ambiguous, contradictory and idiosyncratic aspects of felt-experience, which frequently occur in the pre-reflective, implicit domain (i.e. they are taken-for-granted, but fundamentally orient us within our world; Ratcliffe, 2008). Relational experience – the topic of our enquiry – is fraught with such felt-experience, which could easily elude researchers using only traditional methods of enquiry.

Whilst there are a number of innovative ways to get 'experience-near' within a phenomenological paradigm, in this paper, we explore why and how researchers might incorporate visual methods into the IPA canon, specifically drawing. Whilst a number of recent phenomenologically-oriented articles use drawings (e.g. Attard, Larkin, Boden & Jackson, 2017, Boden & Eatough, 2014, Shinebourne & Smith, 2011), and visual methods are becoming increasingly accepted within qualitative psychology more broadly (see Reavey, 2012), there has been relatively little exploration of what drawings can add to IPA methodology specifically. This paper will describe one example of a drawing-and-talking data collection approach, the 'Relational Mapping Interview'. This was designed to support participants to express and reflect upon the complexity, subtlety, and intensity of their relational experience at times of disruption and distress, as part of a series of projects exploring this theme.

In this paper, we draw upon our experience of developing and using this approach in two separate studies; one with international postgraduate students, and one with young people after a first episode of psychosis. Although seemingly disparate, both these participant groups had recently experienced an event that was likely to have disrupted their relational networks (moving overseas, having an episode of psychosis), and we wanted to explore how participants experienced their relational lives at these times. We draw on examples from these two projects to illustrate how incorporating drawings within an IPA frame can support participants to share hard-to-reach aspects of their lived experience, and how we can utilise that data within hermeneutic-phenomenological analysis. Ethical approvals were granted for both projects, and all participants gave informed consent. Names are pseudonyms and some identifying material has been obscured or redacted. We also considered specific ethical issues related to visual material (see Temple & McVittie, 2005; Wiles et al., 2008).

### 1. What do we mean by lived experience?

The term 'lived experience' refers to our *encounters* with everything within our 'lifeworld' – the world as it appears to us, and is salient for us. In phenomenological terms, when we refer to experience this way, we are attempting to capture that quality of human existence that places us 'in-relation-to' events, objects, others, and the world. In this sense, experience is both *perspectival* (it has a point of view, which is situated and embodied) and *relational* (it reaches out, and is concerned with the objects of the lifeworld). We each have unique ways of being-in-the-world, but these are

framed by a number of universal facets of human existence. These may include embodiment, discourse, sociality, spatiality, selfhood, temporality, our life projects, and mood-as-atmosphere (Ashworth, 2003). If, as researchers, we only attend to traditional, narrative and linear forms of enquiry then we may miss some of the subtler aspects of the lifeworld, particularly the embodied, intersubjective, temporal, spatial and atmospheric aspects, which tend be implicit (Fuchs, 2005; Petitmengin, 2007, Ratcliffe, 2008). However, experience does not have to be communicated in a literal, narrative form, to be meaningfully understood. Analogy, metaphor and imagery enable us to express and interpret these aspects of experience (Schneier, 1989), and participants will draw on both normative (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and spontaneous metaphors (Svendler Nielsen, 2009) as they attempt to do this.

IPA methodology encourages participants to describe and reflect on their experience, and several IPA researchers have considered the role of metaphor as a source of rich description and meaning (e.g. Smith, 2011, Rhodes & Smith, 2010). Shinebourne and Smith (2010) argue that metaphor allows us to communicate the nuanced texture of our lives. This is because metaphors are multidimensional (Svendler Nielsen, 2009), or *transmodal* (Petitmengin, 2007), working simultaneously across different sensory registers to summon up a holistic, situated, bodily experience, and translate it into a reflective, verbalised account (Stelter, 2000). In IPA, metaphors can be 'gems'; pieces of data, that with the right amount of hermeneutic 'detective work' can illuminate the whole research endeavour (Smith, 2011). However, lived experience is always more than we can capture in words (Gendlin, 1997; Todres, 2007). In research terms, a focus solely on language – even poetic, metaphorical language – will limit what we can know about the world. Non-linguistic metaphors and visual imagery may therefore provide an important complementary starting-place for researching lived experience within the context of IPA.

### 2. Visual imagery as a means of disclosing pre-reflective experience

Like metaphor, visual images tap into several sensory registers at once, and can therefore be rich with meaning (Malchiodi 2005). Visual methods can easily be incorporated within a data-collection process, and drawing in particular is consonant with IPA principles, in that it helps express subjective experience in ways that lend themselves to both phenomenological and hermeneutic analysis. Drawings can do this by circumventing the initial need for language, spontaneously capturing the texture of an experience. This combination of immediacy and flexibility can allow the unsayable to reveal itself (Kirova & Emme, 2006), and as images have a tangibility and stability that the spoken word does not (Hustvedt, 2006), they can provide a shared focus for parallel or subsequent verbal discussion. As with other modes of communication, drawing is not a direct 'representation' of experience. The participant *impresses* meaning upon the paper through the act of drawing, and offers up an *expression* of the experience for consideration (Schneier, 1989). In this way, the participant is bodily engaged with their tangible lived experience (Malchiodi, 2005; Merleau-Ponty, 1964a/1964). A drawing can therefore be an echo or residue of the subjectivity that created it (Hustvedt, 2006; Merleau-Ponty, 1964a/1964). In turn, encountering an image as the viewer is also a bodily, sensory and non-sequential experience (Hustvedt, 2006). Thus, like metaphor (Shinebourne & Smith, 2010), drawings seem to create a bridge, connecting one person's embodied experience to another's, without the immediate need for a verbal translation.

How we use images and image-making within research will depend on our epistemological frameworks and research interests (Reavey, 2012, Rose, 2001). At the very least, a participant drawing can provide an interesting starting point to elicit verbal data. Visual methods seem to 'disrupt' participants' rehearsed narratives (Reavey, 2012), allowing multiplicity to surface more readily. Through drawing, participants also seem encouraged to utilise the aesthetic qualities of language (Todres & Galvin, 2008), trying out words to communicate their fuller experience, for example by switching to more metaphorical and poetic language. Thus visual methods seem to improve the depth of the verbal data. However, we feel drawings also deserve to be seen as communicative in their own right, standing alongside the verbal account, as a secondary mode through which to interpret the phenomenon directly. A drawing can therefore provide the "thick depiction" that complements the 'thick description' gathered in a traditional interview (Kirova & Emme, 2006, p2). Images, like metaphors, are ambiguous, polysemous and emergent (Dake and Roberts, 1995; Reavey, 2012), and this is an advantage for an explicitly interpretative approach, like IPA.

*2.1 Visual methods, drawings and IPA*

The use of visual methods within IPA research is gaining traction. IPA studies using photo-elicitation (e.g. Silver & Farrants, 2016), visual voice (e.g. Williamson, 2018) and found images (e.g. Bacon, McKay, Reynolds & McIntyre, 2017) are increasingly being published, and there are a number of student theses combining photos, objects or found images with IPA. There is also a small body of IPA and hermeneutic-phenomenological studies that specifically incorporate the use of drawings. Shinebourne & Smith (2011) appear to be the first to publish an IPA study using drawings with their paper about long-term recovery from addiction. They note that rehearsed narratives can be a feature of recovery accounts, and introduced drawings as a way to potentially disrupt these narratives and to gain new insights into the phenomenon. Their paper includes analysis of a number of drawings, and they explain how their hermeneutic process was grounded in the participants' own interpretations, and was derived through an iterative analytic method of moving between the verbal and visual. Boden and Eatough (2014) develop these ideas in their methodological paper, which describes a multimodal approach involving embodied, poetic/metaphoric, reflective, and visual data, which they illustrate with a case-example on relational guilt. They provide two frameworks to assist in analysing drawings from a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective: one focusing on how the drawing is produced, and one on what is produced.

Nizza, Smith & Kirkham (2017; pain and identity), Attard et al., (2017; psychosis and adaptability) and Bögle and Boden (under review; crisis in psychosis) all cite elements of the Boden and Eatough (2014) approach. The Nizza et al. (2017) study further progresses the methodology by including drawings within a longitudinal design, analysing six drawings completed over three interviews. Kirkham, Smith & Havsteen-Franklin's (2015) paper, also on pain, cites the Shinebourne & Smith approach, describing how they analysed the drawings for "style, tone, colour and content" (p?) alongside the verbal data. Developing the IPA notion of the 'double-hermeneutic' (Smith et al., 2009) they suggest including drawings results in a "triple hermeneutic" (p?) linking the sense-making of both researcher and participant, with the participant's imagery and their lived experience.

Unlike qualitative research more broadly, the papers in this small corpus seem to share an understanding that drawings contribute data in their own right, that they support participants to

engage with a phenomenon anew, and that drawings should only be understood in relation to the participants' own meaning-making (as opposed to making interpretations based on pre-existing meanings via symbols, archetypes, etc.). Each paper describes broadly similar adaptations of IPA to develop an analytic process of iteratively moving between image and verbal account. However, the degree to which the analytic engagement with the drawings is reflected in the published findings varies, and may be due to differences in focus, method, or publication choice. The papers seem to vary more in terms of how the data is collected. Both the Kirkham et al. (2015) and Nizza et al. (2017) studies describe leaving their participants to produce the drawings privately, whereas the Boden & Eatough (2014) approach argues that *how* the picture is produced can be as informative as what is produced, so recommend observing the participant and writing reflexive notes on the process. There also seem to be differences in how the invitation to draw is given to participants. These include the type of image to be produced (e.g. abstract, no specification), the prompts provided (turning attention towards the body, remembering a specific experience, focusing on present self-experience, focusing on meaning-making) and how instructions or prompts are given (verbally, guided, written-down). However, they all seem to draw attention to how the drawings enhanced the research, providing rich, evocative data in themselves, and encouraging insightful metaphoric verbal accounts.

*2.2 Capturing relational experience through drawings*

In our work on disrupted relational experience, we are interested in understanding what it is like and what it means to be connected with others at times of distress and instability, primarily because connectedness has been shown to be so fundamental to our psychological and physical wellbeing (e.g. Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Sociality and intersubjective experience is a key feature of the lifeworld, but traditional one-to-one interviews tend to favour more individualistic and internalistic accounts. Whilst there is plenty of quantitatively-oriented research examining the structure and size of people's relational networks (e.g. using Social Network Analysis or Sociomapping to produce visual diagrams picturing quantitative data-sets), much less is known about the subjective *quality* and *texture* of people's relational experiences, particularly at times of distress and disruption. Qualitatively-oriented methods for tapping into this aspect of lived experience are needed.

Relational experience lends itself particularly well to visual-spatial representations, and practitioners and researchers in the fields of psychology and sociology have long utilised diagrammatic forms to capture the complexity of social relationships. Psychotherapy provides two significant starting points, genograms and sociograms, which both offer systematic ways to capture some 'objective' and some 'subjective' information about groups. Genograms (Bowen; Jolly, Froom & Rosen, 1980), which originate from systemic therapy, are a formal and structured way to capture information about a family system. Sociograms (Moreno, 1951) use spatial and diagrammatic details to capture the relative positioning of an actor compared to the rest of the network, and are used within sociology to explore group relations. Both use standardised imagery and symbols to capture aspects such as gender, relationship status, and so on. Extending these ideas, our goal was to develop a method of supporting participants to map their own relationships without the need for standardisation or the goal of objectivity. This positions the participants as the experts in their own experience (Smith et al., 2009), and avoids putting unnecessary constraints on them in terms of how the image should be produced.

### 3. The Relational Mapping Interview

Whilst IPA guidance often suggests using a semi-structured interview schedule (Smith et al., 2009), the Relational Mapping Interview approach uses an 'interview arc' and the format of 'draw-talk-draw-talk' to structure the interview encounter.

*3.1 The interview arc*

Semi-structured interviews are often organised with awareness of issues such as the sensitivity of the questions, the temporal structure, or funnelling from the general to the particular (Smith et al., 2009). The 'interview arc' approach extends this idea, by structuring the interview around touchpoints that help guide the participant through a journey, in the same way that a novel may follow a narrative arc, or a symphony may have a musical arc. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p48) argue that a phenomenological interview should involve 'wandering together with' the participant, and this approach draws on that ethos. The schedule is less prescriptive than a typical semi-structured interview, with most of the interviewer's contribution involving spontaneous enquiries into the participant's emerging image and their verbal responses to the drawing process. The Relational Mapping Interview is structured around four touchpoints: (i) mapping the self, (ii) mapping important others, (iii) standing back, and (iv) considering change. Instead of the standard ten or so interview questions, there are fewer main questions, but many more prompts and probes, and the researcher is even less concerned with sticking to their agenda, beyond using the arc as a support to navigate around the four touchpoints.

*3.2 The draw-talk-draw-talk process*

Participant information sheets should be transparent about the request for participants to draw/diagram/map their relational networks. The interview begins with a preamble that should point out a good supply of art materials, remind the participant that their drawing skills are not being judged, and reassure them that there are no right or wrong ways to approach the exercise. We found it helpful to informally explore the participants' relationship to creativity/arts/drawing, prior to introducing the task in any detail. However, we encouraged all participants to make use of the materials spontaneously and in whatever way they wished, providing reassurance where needed. We also clarified that we would guide them through the mapping process.

The first touchpoint is mapping the self. The initial invitation is for the participant to 'represent yourself on the map in any way you wish'. If participants struggled, we would perhaps follow up with, 'you can use words, symbols or images – whatever you prefer'. After the participant has finished drawing, the interviewer prompts the participant to say a little bit about what they have done and why. To encourage the participant to flesh out their comments, the interviewer can enquire into position, colour, content or form by making simple observation statements, which are typically enough to elicit more detail from the participant. For example: 'you chose pink'; 'you're sitting on the grass'; 'you wrote your name and put a heart around it'. Typically this part of the interview is fairly brief, but what is said here can foreshadow important themes to emerge later on. Jake, for example, who was a participant in the psychosis study, drew himself as a cartoon figure with his mouth sewn together. Later, he talked at length about how he cannot share certain aspects of his distress with those around him.

The second touchpoint typically takes most of the time and involves mapping relationships with important others. Participants are invited to start by mapping the relationship that is most important to them. A similar process of 'stating what you see', prompting and enquiring follows. This draws on phenomenological principles, for example, curiosity (asking open questions and maintaining a stance of 'wonder'; Merleau-Ponty 1945/2002), dwelling (being patient with what is unfolding) and bracketing (or better, "bridling" your assumptions so they do not run away with you; Dahlberg, 2006, p16). Our prompts centred around understanding the quality and texture of the relationship, how it was sustained (i.e. activities, interests, means of communication), and how it had been impacted by the participants' life situations (i.e. moving overseas, or experiencing psychosis). This process of draw-talk-draw-talk continues with the participant adding further important people to the map, and with the interviewer's support, describing those relationships in rich detail. Our participants represented a wide range of relationships, which included friends and family, sometimes professionals, but also pets, the deceased, deities, organisations, and also occasionally creative activities (specifically music and art). Some participants used more than one page. It feels important to be open to how participants interpret the task and to be equally curious about each relationship. After mapping the important relationships in the person's life, the interview can then enquire into other people in the participant's life. This could include people who are part of the participant's quotidian social landscape, but who may not be well known to them, such as a significant receptionist or teacher. We found that some participants did not want to add certain people to the map, and we respected that, asking instead whether they would still like to say something about those connections, or not.

Once the participant has added everyone they wish to include, the interview moves towards the third touchpoint, standing back. This involves a shift from the 'close', experience-near, idiographic and phenomenological enquiry into specific relationships, to a more reflective, explicitly integrative and interpretative stance. The participant should be invited to (metaphorically) 'step back' from their picture in order to take it all in. The drawing process may enable participants to experience themselves differently (Gladding, 1992) and the drawing itself can act as an anchor helping the participant get some distance and see a new perspective (Malchiodi, 2005). Compare these two examples:

> *I:* So what do you think when you look at your picture as a whole?
>
> *Karina:* Yeah, that's many people actually!
>
> *I:* What do you think about there being many people there? You sounded a bit surprised.
>
> *Karina:* Yeah. I didn't realise before [laughter ... counting aloud]. It's quite a big number and I know that there are many people to trust in and now it's made me realise even more who is the most important people in my life [laughter].
>
> ***
>
> *I:* So, when you look at your whole map that you've drawn, and just reflect on the whole thing, do you think anything in particular, or feel anything in particular?
>
> *Manu:* Erm, it's quite funny to see my whole life on, like, on one, one diagram.

*I:* Is that how it feels, like your whole life?

*Manu:* Yeah, I feel like it's my whole life really. There is [faith], uni, friends, family. There's nothing really else. Yeah, to see all the relationships with everyone. I don't know, it's quite… It doesn't feel like a lot.

This part of the interview allows the participant time to interpret and integrate their experience, and to make 'big picture' statements. The interviewer can also surface any specific 'themes' that have seemed important across the interview, but which would benefit from further fleshing out or contextualisation.

The final touchpoint, considering change, explores what has changed in the past, in our case paying particular attention to before and after the disruptive events, and concluding by exploring what changes, if any, they would like to make in an *ideal* future. If there is a significant event on the horizon, questions could also explore those changes.

*I:* So, in an ideal world, some sort of magical world, would this map look like this or would you change something?

*Ceri:* Yeah it would look a bit like this. In an ideal world, these [people] would still be alive. My dad might be on the map if he changed his ways.

*I:* Mmhmm, in an ideal world.

*Ceri:* Yeah. It's fine. [pointing to her ex-partner] He'd be way off on the map. [… He'd] just, get out of my head, you know? I still think about him, but like that side of it - that just needs to go.

The ideal future question allows participants to explore how they would like their relational lives to be – their expectations, beliefs, fantasies and hopes – however, this also brings new information about how things actually are in the present.

### 4. Analysis of the drawings: An "expanded hermeneutic phenomenology"

We have argued that the drawing process can elicit rich verbal data, but the images themselves are deserving of analytic attention. Kirova and Emme (2006, p22) argue that research 'texts' should include *any* pertinent information, including verbal, visual and bodily data, as all are valid forms of meaning and offer sites for interpretation, thus making the case for an "*expanded hermeneutic phenomenology*". In this vein, we suggest a framework (Box 1) to help guide initial analysis of the visual material. It has been developed from the framework described in Boden & Eatough (2014) for use with abstract drawings. Any analysis of visual material must be consonant with the principles of IPA, if it is to be incorporated within an IPA study. Hermeneutic phenomenology is articulated as the process of revealing something that "lies hidden" within the phenomenon, yet constitutes its essential nature (Heidegger, 1962/1927, p59). Interpretative "detective work" (Smith et al., 2009, p35) fully reveals these deeper meanings, and can equally apply to visual as well as verbal material. The interpretative process is a dialectical encounter between what the phenomenon can tell us and what we bring to it (Gadamer, 1990/1960) and "is neither fully one's own, nor is it another's alone" (Todres & Galvin, 2008, p571). Thus, we are not suggesting that any one 'truth' can be revealed

through analysis of the drawing. Instead, attention to the image can begin to establish a dialogue between what is said and what is revealed visually, deepening the analysis as a whole.

1. How can the overall nature of the map be characterised? (e.g. shapes, hierarchy, list, mind map, extended visual metaphor, visual narrative, unconnected, etc.)
2. How is the participant represented in the map? (colour, shape, location, texture, meanings)
3. How many people are included in the map? Is anyone left out but named?
4. In what ways are other people represented?
5. In what ways are the relationships and their qualities represented?
6. In what ways are people interrelated? (i.e. social density, fluidity, separation, hierarchy)
7. What kinds of relationships and types of people are represented? (who are they? Age, length of time known, category, status, etc.)
8. Where are the people located? (and how does this relate to their emotional or geographic accessibility to the participant)
9. How can the overall tone and impression of the image be characterised? (e.g. style, expressive content, effect upon viewer).

*Box 1. Framework for analysing the relational maps*

### 5. Relational Mapping Interviews: Some examples of their potential

Relational Mapping Interviews seem to result in exceptionally rich and experientially textured data. We offer three ways in which they can help us grasp complex relational experience, illustrating the diverse ways participants chose to take up the task of mapping their relationships.

*5.1 Situating the person in their world: Mapping quickly illustrates complexity and context*

Mapping participants' relational experience provides a way to situate the participant within their world. Sahil's map (Figure 1) is a particularly clear example of how he positions himself within a social hierarchy. It symbolises the value and importance he placed on certain relationships: prioritising his family and spiritual guide above him (the primary tier), his sister at the same level as him, and his friends and other alliances below him, split into two tiers. Those in the tertiary tier had fallen short of the secondary tier in some emotional or practical way. There is also a clear compartmentalisation of his primary relationships (he circles them), which he attributes to their transcendental and enduring nature. Finally, he mentions a group of women, including someone with whom he had had "a fleeting affair". He speaks about these women disparagingly and seems upset that he could not understand them: "There's this wall – they're not letting you in and they are not trying to show their real selves." This is explored visually by his drawing a box around these names. Unlike the intuitive and spiritual relationships of the encircled primary tier, these interactions have been 'exiled' to the bottom right corner, away from the self and close family and friends, and 'walled in', perhaps indicating a psychological need for separation and/or fear of contamination.

[Figure 1 ABOUT HERE]

The relational mapping interview can allow participants to quickly demonstrate the complexity and intensity of a range of relationships, and how they situate themselves within this context. Through speaking about relationships, as they are drawing, the participant is engaged in a three-way dialogue about their relational realities, between themselves, the researcher, and the emerging image.

*5.2 Sense-making in the moment*

How and when a participant decides whether or not to include a particular relationship in the drawing is a fertile source of information about their experience of that relationship. The following two examples demonstrate how drawing can enact relational dynamics, and elicit rich verbal data.

Towards the end of his drawing, Jay is deciding whether or not to add an additional person, Shreya, to his map. Immediately, the ambivalence inherent within his relationship with her becomes obvious, and this choice – whether or not to include her – leads to the following description:

> *Jay:* Hmm... Bit of a sticky issue, but then I will add her. She is my girlfriend. For the last, how many years? We've been dating, dating is the wrong word - she'll slap me. Umm... Shreya. So we've been with each other for seven and a half years now. I met her when I was in school and I don't know, we never had this typical inverted-commas-love-story. […] I don't know what exactly to say about my relationship with her. It's a bit of a sticky issue. Ok. See if I were to talk about it, it would be like you cannot separate two sides of the same coin. They might not be complementary to each other, but they stick to each other. [...] It's been quite rough, quite rocky. But then, we've come a long way actually. Two very identically opposite people, I don't know how we have stuck together to each other. I don't even know if it's going to culminate into something definitive. My family is not very accepting towards it, but then they've given me the freedom to do whatever. I have not come to a point in my life where I can actually take a decisive stand on this.

Everything that Jay offers to describe his relationship with Shreya is followed by something that seems to say the opposite, indicating his ambivalence. Jay and Shreya are "identically opposite". The metaphor of the coin, and the repeated variations on the theme of 'sticking' are insightful: do they stick together, are they stuck together, or are they sticking it out together? It's a "sticky issue"; irresolvable and awkward. Jay's family are not accepting of her, and yet are liberal about his choice. It is unsurprising that he cannot make a "decisive stand"; he is psychologically 'stuck'.

Similarly, Jake's drawing process seemed to help him name aspects of his relational life that were complicated, felt marginal and/or were not socially sanctioned. In drawing his map, he first added his best friend, then girlfriend, before adding his mother. When reflecting on this later, he noticed:

> *Jake:* I find it odd that I kind of, I don't really confide or trust in her [mother] as much as friends and that kind of bothers me.
>
> *I:* Why does it bother you do you think?

> *Jake:* Because I thought family was supposed to be the most important thing, I mean that's the way everyone else sees it. […] It's kind of- I would see it as offensive if, if she found out about this, she'd find it offensive that I placed her third.

Jake's concern about the order in which he chose 'the most important' people in his life, reflects his wider ambivalence about his mother: he says she "keeps me stable", but also that they have "kind of switched roles where I'm like the parent and she's like the child".

Similarly, Jake's decision not to include his father on the map was something he could surface and reflect on. Jake's account of his relationship with his father also seems contradictory:

> *Jake:* Like I didn't draw anything marking my dad on there, [whispers] cos I don't trust him at all, no matter what. I can't believe a word he said. [normal voice] Sometimes I even know he's lying but I just let him get on with his little stories [whispers] just cos I'm sick of him. [normal voice] I mean I don't have a bad relationship with him, I don't, but he sickens me, I wish he wasn't my father and I know that's a bad thing to say, I <u>know </u>that is, but…

Jake feels their relationship is not "bad", but nevertheless he is sick of his father, and sickened by him. His switching between a whisper and his normal voice seems to echo the split between his more hidden feelings and more socially-sanctioned answers ("I know that's a bad thing to say" indicates his awareness of the interviewer's perspective). He goes on to describe how his father did not "admit" paternity until Jake was a teenager. Jake's choice not to include him in his drawing, similarly to Sahil's example above, is indicative of an attempt to exile difficult and painful relationships from the representation. Unlike a genogram or sociogram, there is no attempt here to reach a 'truthful' representation of who is in the network. Our aim is to gain insight into how, psychologically, the participant makes sense of their relational experience, as it is lived subjectively. With curiosity, those who are and are not included may be discussed, as the participant wishes.

*5.3 Visual 'gems': Metaphorical imagery*

Although many participants chose to map their relationships as a structure, spider-diagram, or list often using words and sometimes with simple decoration, some participants chose symbols or images to represent their relationships. Hari, for example, used the image of a star/sun to represent himself, whilst he drew his mother as a swirling universe, indicating their relative power. Karina drew realistic representations of each of her family and friends, positioned together as if posing for a photograph. She added raindrops, butterflies and musical notes to illustrate the mood and personality of her subjects. Two participants however, approached the invitation differently again. Robert and Aaliya both drew complex, visual metaphors to describe their relational experience as a holistic gestalt. Robert drew an apple tree to represent his family – a "family tree" – with himself as a fallen apple, ready to be kicked away from the tree, either towards a target, or falling into a shark-infested sea, both of which he also illustrated.

Aaliya also chose a botanical theme. She drew herself as a flower (figure 2), something "innocent" and vulnerable to the threat of others:

> *Aaliya:* It's something like that people would usually say 'oh like it's quite nice', but it's quite like a simple flower, like it can be easily crushed and like I guess some people kind of like, erm, would underestimate it.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Next, she added her friends as sun and rain. Aaliya has very little family support, but has valued friendships:

> *Aaliya:* They give me like the kind of like support I need, so they're the sun and the rain, but, like I guess if you get too much sun or too much rain it can also be like negative for a flower. […] Like I can't always have them around, otherwise it'll be a bit over-powering, and I guess sometimes they don't really understand that, or sometimes they'll like back off too much and I won't have the support I need.

Next, Aaliya adds the grass and ground.

> *Aaliya:* It's just going to be the grass, erm…[drawing] maybe the ground beneath that as well and that would probably be my mum, and someone that I kind of like rely on for support and…[pause, looking emotional]
>
> *I:* How are you doing? Are you OK? [pause] Is it emotional to think about your mum?
>
> *Aaliya:* Yeah.
>
> *I:* But she's like the ground underneath you and the grass.
>
> *Aaliya:* Yeah and I guess, to an extent the grass also needs the sun and the rain, she needs me to be stable for like beauty to grow underneath her and stuff.

Aaliya's emotionality, her tentativeness about naming her mum ("probably"), and the confusion in her language regarding who is supporting who ("she needs me to be stable"; "beauty to grow *underneath* her"), and her consideration that her mum (the grass) also needs the support of others (the sun/rain) were indicative of the complex relationship she had with her mother, who also experienced mental health problems.

Towards the end of the interview, when we turned to the fourth touchpoint, 'considering change', Aaliya added the word 'animal' next to the flower and drew an arrow:

> *Aaliya:* I would rather be in the food chain or something, the animal eating the flower, rather than the like weak flower being trampled on underneath.

Through Aaliya's manipulation of her image, she alters her visual narrative to capture her hopes for a more empowered future. Taken as a whole, Aaliya's drawing indicates the tensions inherent in her relational life – being trampled underfoot or being underestimated, the heat of the sun and the drowning rain, being eaten or doing the eating – which seem to encapsulate her psychosocial struggle to recover, to survive. Both Rober and Aaliya's drawings are visual example of Smith's (2011) 'gem'. The images – as simplistic as they may first appear – illuminate not just Robert and Aaliya's experience, but the key relational tensions apparent within the whole psychosis project, specifically the challenge to negotiate intersubjective boundaries.

*Conclusions*

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In our two projects, the Relational Mapping Interview was clearly acceptable to, and engaging for, our participants. At the very least, the incorporation of the mapping activity was complementary and additive to the aims of conventional IPA interviewing, with its capacity for foregrounding the relational context of personal meaning. At times, its contribution far exceeded this, enabling complex and ambivalent experiences to unfold, whilst positioning the participant as the 'expert' in their relational lives, and allowing them to guide the interview. This revelatory aspect of the Relational Mapping Interview leads us to argue that the use of the draw-talk-draw-talk process, organised around an 'interview arc', can support participants to find ways to communicate the meaning of their relationship to the world that extend beyond traditional verbalisation.

The multimodal Relational Mapping Interview and the analysis of the drawings from within an "expanded hermeneutic phenomenology" (Kirova & Emme, 2006) provides researchers with one way of accessing complex relational experience. Incorporating visual methods into IPA can help researchers to get 'experience-near' - meeting IPA's phenomenological requirements – whilst also providing rich, polysemous data to meet its hermeneutic commitments. The embodied and tangible nature of drawing, tapping into multiple sensory registers simultaneously, may explain why it appears to provide such an effective vehicle through which participants can explore aspects of pre-reflective, idiosyncratic, or hard-to-articulate experiences.

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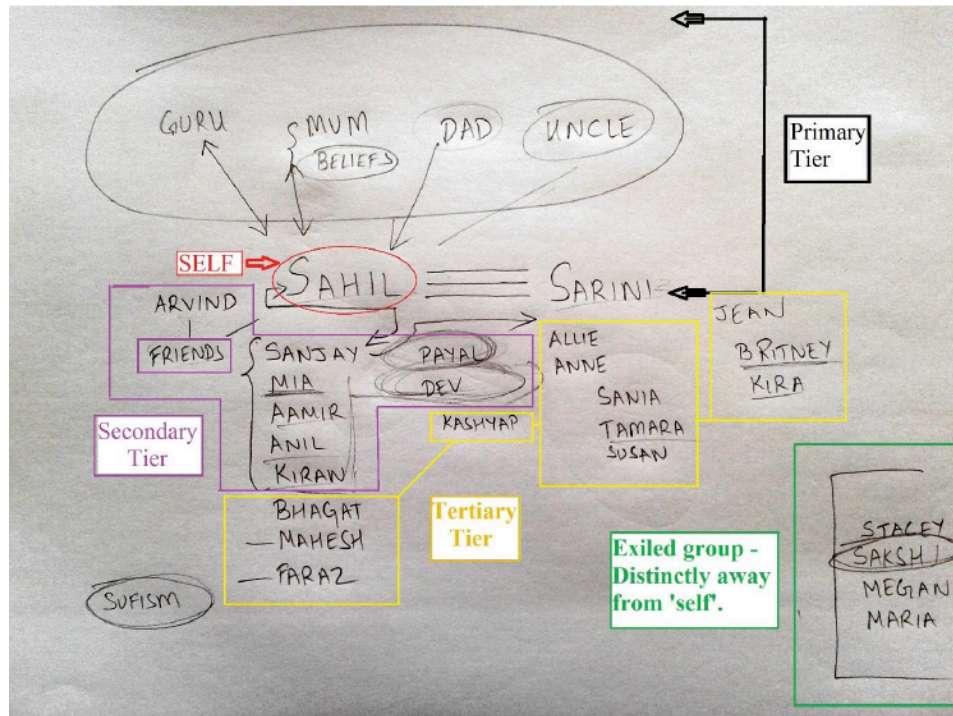
**Figures**



*Figure 1: Sahil's relational map (international student project) with notation added in colour. This map has been recreated as closely as possible from the original to allow for anonymisation.*

*Figure 2: Aaliya's relational map (psychosis project). The word 'animal' was added at the very end of the interview. This is an original map.*