Greyfrog Interview

KA: I always record on both my laptop and my phone because I have this nightmare that we're going to do this whole amazing interview and then um I'm going to get to the end and realise I haven't been recording which would be rubbish um

Greyfrog: Yeah yeah

KA: But yeah (.) so I always um double record that (.) um (.) great (.) um (.) and yeah the last thing (.) I know we spoke about it in our intro call but were there any preferences you had with regards to communication or are you all just good to go?

Greyfrog: No yeah I'm fine. Good to go. Yeah

KA: OK fantastic. Um uh yeah (.) so I'm recording now we'll start kind of the main interview. Just huge huge thanks first of all for participating in this study it really means a lot to me and it means a lot to everyone in our lab (.) um (.) yeah. So first question just to ease you in and you can interpret this however you want to but do you want to just tell me a little bit about yourself? And this can be your hobbies, things you like, things you don't like, all of that kind of thing

Greyfrog: Ok (.) umm ((pause)) I (.) gosh I don't know um (.) I really like listening to music and stuff like that um I am quite big into that like I have (.) um (.) like I've got my records like vinyls and everything

KA: That's so cool. I always wanted a vinyl collection ((overlaps))

Greyfrog: Yeah

KA: but yeah never got round to it

Greyfrog: No yeah they're quite expensive but they are so cool. And um so yeah I've got my little collection going. Um (.) and I also really like like drawing and art and stuff like that (.) um (.) I feel like it's (.) um (.) because I suffer with depression as well it's quite difficult um to continue that just when you're feeling quite down you just sort of wanna lay and not really do that as much um but as of recent I'm just trying to get more into that just because it's quite like a calming activity and stuff like that um (.) Or even just like arts and crafts in general um like I like doing uh decoupage I don't know if you know what that is like

KA: No?

Greyfrog: It's like um (.) I don't know like (.) best way to describe it is like a cardboard uh figure or cardboard something I don't know it could be like um uh what's it called Christmas tree decoration or anything like that um and you just paint it with glue cut like little squares of like tissue paper and stuff and just sort of paint on it

KA: Ahh

Greyfrog: Yeah it does sound like quite boring but for some reason like you literally just as you do it you're just sort of I don't know I'd listen to music or watch Netflix or something like that and just you know do that um

KA: That sounds fantastic it doesn't sound boring at all

Greyfrog: ((overlaps)) oh it's

KA: sounds like a really good like activity

Greyfrog: yeah

KA: to just get on with yeah

Greyfrog: Yeah um (.) uh trying to think if there's anything else (.) um (.) I haven't really like (.) um continued to do it recently again just sort of because of when you're feeling really low it's you know

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: but I did used to be in like drama groups and stuff like that like I quite like acting and everything

KA: Ooh

Greyfrog: Uh (.) yeah and like (.) I think it's just the fact of being able to sort of just step in literally step into someone else's shoes and just sort of act like someone else or try and interpret someone like the script into something that you can actually act out sort of thing (.) um (.) But yeah I dunno I didn't really have like (.) many hobbies um (.)

KA: Well I mean it sounds the ones you've given sound like uh more than enough to be keeping you busy but yeah

Greyfrog: Yeah

KA: Yeah yeah (.) cool. And um I wanted to ask now just a bit about your and I'm going to put it in like quote marks

Greyfrog: yeah

KA: but like your autism journey. So in terms of when you were diagnosed and kind of the effect that had on your life and things like that

Greyfrog: Yep ((pause)) um (.) so I was diagnosed in November of 2020 and so very sort of late I guess you could say um (.) and it was um ((pause)) as I wanted to start going to uh therapy just because of how I was feeling and my mum suggested it um (.) and a part of that I was also

wondering um whether I had like autism or it ADHD or anything sort of on that scale just because it was quite funny I saw like this video um of someone explaining how it shows differently in girls than it does to boys

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Um (.) And also because my dad my dad has autism. I have cousins with autism. It was very much sort of like well actually it would sort of make sense (.) um ((pause)) and yeah so then I went through that got diagnosed with it and um it was one of the things where like my mum sort of (.) she said it was something that she obviously looked out for in as I was growing up and stuff just you know cause it's something that you can get help for and everything like that. Um but she said she didn't really ever think there was anything um that really stood out to her. But then when we started going through the process of getting a diagnosis and everything it was sort of as she looks back she realised ah maybe that was sort of like a I dunno quote re- red flag in a way um

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Um (.) uh (.) but (.) she yeah I feel like it was very much sort of a thing like ohh that's just [REMOVED] like because obviously I've been like a lot of time sort of as a kid you do tend to do like silly things or like oh my gosh what are you doing? Or you know a bit silly or anything um ((pause)) but yeah (.) So obviously I got the diagnosis and everything and um ((pause)) I me personally it is not something that I wanted to have. I wanted to know whether I did or not um just for say like it's like with anything if you've got an illness you want to know about it so that you can get the treatment or help you need to get over it sort of thing but with this it was sort of like yes I can get help but it's not something I can get rid of to say um (.) and it was something that I well still continue to keep very private. Um I (.) have a very select few of like friends like my family know but friends wise or people that I meet sort of thing I don't really like to (.) share that um (.) Just in terms of obviously you don’t have to tell anybody but also like I said in our introductory like call um (.) is people do tend to see it as sort of a joke or um (.) me personally I've grown up with like (.) say in school and stuff as it being a joke or say um it as it is tend to be seen as something that if you have autism you're on the most extreme level you know and you're sort of like um a clown and like someone to laugh at um and so it was something that I did want to keep quite private um

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: But I think (.) there was obviously some good things that came out of it in terms of say when I did my GC- GCSE's or just during classes and stuff I got certain bits of help um so say like with my exams I got to go into a separate room so it wasn't as like intimidating and everything um and I got extra time and um also just during lessons I was able to have like um (.) What were they called? Like (.) They’re called learning breaks um so you could just leave the lesson anytime um you know take the time that you need to just sort of ground yourself calm down and um (.) because obviously one of the parts of having autism is everything is a lot more overwhelming than it is for others (.) um (.) like (.) I've described it before as say on an anxiety scale say someone's uh five is like my one on like a one to ten uhm

KA: Mm ((coughs))

Greyfrog: So say like someone's being like oh my gosh I'm feeling really really really anxious like I'm whatever and for me that is just like a day-to-day struggle sort of thing (.) um (.) And (.) I think (.) it's still something that I (.) definitely am struggling with like (.) it's not something that I've managed to accept yet even though I found out quite a few years ago now

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Um ((pause)) and I just sort of hope that I can one day just sort of be like ((pause)) not necessarily happy with it but just sort of like I don't know um (.) say like I've got a friend and she's got autism and she's quite content with the fact that she's got it and she likes to be unique and you know all of this where as I feel like for me it almost I think the best way to describe it which I've seen someone else say as well is that like um it's almost like everyone else around you has this inside joke but you don't know anything about it like they don't tell you what the joke is

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Um and I just think that is a very big part that I think a lot of people don't know about is that you just feel so like left out um (.) especially in terms of like say um (.) personally I dropped out of college and I think partly that is just because of like (.) I find it very difficult like the idea of say (.) um (.) schooling in general is like everyone sits in a classroom everyone's at the same desk with the same paper with the same teaching. But everyone autism or not learns differently

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: And I think another thing is that that needs to be sort of um (.) understood a lot more you know

KA: Yeah yeah of course

Greyfrog: But yeah

KA: yeah I think in general just to kind of (.) I guess pick up on what you're saying there I think (.) it's tough and even people who sometimes seem like you mentioned your friend who cope with it and embrace it really well that's not to say that your friend doesn't also experience I guess the setbacks of having a society that's really not built or not fair for everyone ((overlaps))

Greyfrog: No

KA: and doesn't offer everyone you know the same kind of opportunities and Isn't as geared towards everyone's way of thinking um. But I'm also (.) I'm optimistic and I hope you're

optimistic too that people's attitudes towards these things do seem to be changing a bit as people become better educated

Greyfrog: Yeah

KA: Um so yeah I really really hope that in the future it's certainly not used as a joke or like an insulting word or things like that because

Greyfrog: Yeah

KA: That is ((stutters)) it's just so horrible and it just comes from a place of ignorance. I'm sure if these people understood a bit better they wouldn't you know

Greyfrog: Yeah

KA: They wouldn't use it as such. But yeah (.) um ((pause)) Cool and you mentioned a little bit about the anxiety scale there and how like a five for someone else ((overlaps))

Greyfrog: Yeah

KA: might be like a one for you (.) um (.) do you want to tell me a little bit about like the way that anxiety feels to you?

Greyfrog: Um ((pause)) I think for me it's (.) it's almost like breathlessness um and I do tend to feel like it's almost like you know you need an inhaler you need like you can't breathe sort of thing. Um and (.) I I tend to get really tense like sort of without noticing my shoulders sort of tense up and (.) um ((pause)) I think it just (.) even if I'm not on the outside so on like on the outside I could be acting sort of just like you know "hiya" whatever like acting all- especially say if it happens in work or around friends or anything I do tend to try and it's like masking it em (.) but in my head it's like ((pause)) it's almost just like um (.) your brain is on a loop of all the different things that you're worrying about whether it be past present future anything (.) um (.) And (.) Mine tends to centre around either (.) um (.) I feel like it's mainly about future things um or things that (.) I quite literally have no control over um which obviously isn't very helpful because say the future you don't know what's going to happen um (.) the past you can't change it or say there's just um I dunno say when I was going to college I just felt very trapped within that of I just can't change anything about that or say in school I couldn't change the fact that I had to go (.) um (.) and so I feel like (.) it does just make you f- or for me it makes me feel very trapped and (.) sort of I don't know what to do you know

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: And sort of tryna fix that you know

KA: Yeah yeah (.) Um and you described there I think really well certain like the physical aspects of it but as well kind of the thoughts that you'll be thinking um (.) now I'm not sure if you've ever had experience with CBT but sometimes in CBT we like to look at things through what's

called a hot cross bun model which sounds really delicious and it's not that ((laughs)) not that exciting at all um (.) but where we would split things into four parts and we've got our thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations and our behaviours as well

Greyfrog: Yep

KA: And for some people their experiences of anxiety are really (.) just focused in one section of that for some people they can kind of at all times access all of those aspects of anxiety um but I know you mentioned a bit yeah about like those bodily sensations and the thoughts um are there certain emotions or behaviours that you would associate with anxiety?

Greyfrog: Um (.) Is there any like examples you can give me? Just cause I'm ((overlaps))

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: trying to think of like I dunno ((overlaps))

KA: Yeah. So it of course it varies so much person to person um but for me um I don't really it sounds weird I don't really feel the emotions of anxiety until a little while afterwards. I just feel the physical stuff really

Greyfrog: Right

KA: and then it's not until a little bit later that I'm like ohh I felt really worried (.) I felt really frustrated and kind of angry that I couldn't get out of you know whatever situation I had in my head. Um and in terms of my behaviour with anxiety I normally get quite irritable and stressed out and will snap at other people um or I'll cry a lot of the time as well. I don't know if any of that resonates with your own experiences?

Greyfrog: Um (.) I think to be fair like you said I tend to uh (.) like experience it all at once um so I'll (.) know what emotions I'm having whether it be anger, scared, worried, anything. Um I'll have the physical as well so say like it does tend to affect my breathing or um I tend to yawn a lot um which is like uh I've been told it's like your body is just trying to take in the more air um

KA: Ahh

Greyfrog: Yeah and (.) I um (.) What else er (.) I don't know I think like say ((pause)) what else ((pause)) sorry my mind's just gone blank

KA: Ohh no problem at all take your time no rush

Greyfrog: Um (.) I think I don't tend to do it as much now I'm doing it now but that's because like say we're talking over a call not in person

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: but tend to sort of like I dunno be like my hands like sort of rub my knuckles or like (.) very much sort of just tryna um (.) sort of find anything to (.) I dunno sort of focus on um

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Or say if I'm (.) um (.) a lot of times it's like um (.) even when I'm walking doesn't matter where I'm walking to work just walking my dog or anything um it's sort of like a I saw it on TikTok actually it was it's like going like sort of counting your fingers

KA: I used to do that all the time like with both hands as well yeah yeah

Greyfrog: Yeah yeah so when I'm walking I tend to do stuff like that so it's not as noticeable but it's sort of just to like I ((stutters)) it's almost like you don't really know why but it's just sort of like to have that sort of stimulation almost

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: But yeah I think I just when I'm feeling anxious I know about it like instantly even if I don't know exactly why

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: I just have all the emotions and feelings um (.) behaviourally I could (.) um (.) I think it depends on why um I'm sort of feeling the way I'm feeling um so say if it's a very like overwhelming moment um I do tend to get quite angry or sort of like I just wanna run away from a situation or um yeah it could or it could just sort of be like um crying over spilt milk. Like if you're feeling like that anyway

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: the smallest thing can happen and then I'll be really really upset or you know I feel like yeah it just does affect everything

KA: Mm. Yeah and with your I guess anxiety journey can you remember when you first noticed that you maybe felt more anxious than the average person? Is it something you've kind of had all your life?

Greyfrog: Um ((pause)) I think um ((pause)) I really started to notice it like when I first started secondary school so like year 7

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Um ((pause)) but quite honestly, it could have been before that as well (.) um (.) but I think that is when it first started because of like say I guess you could say like the culture of um (.) secondary school and then the wide variety of people and things you encounter and (.) um (.)

you know I think that's (.) I think as well because I uh that's when like I first actually started experience like bullying and stuff um

KA: Oh I'm sorry

Greyfrog: That's alright. But yeah I think that is when it truly started because it you know it's sort of like you leave primary school being ohh I'm sad I'm leaving here but I'm really excited to sort of be um grown up and you know going to big school and all of this and yeah I think that's when I would sort of say when say when it started like to be bad you know

KA: Yeah yeah. And how do you think your autism affects your anxiety?

Greyfrog: Um (.) I think it affects it in a way that even though already my anxiety levels are quite high I feel like it does just tend to make me say feel anxious about things that um most people wouldn't worry about um (.) like it's all it a lot of time it almost feels like you're having like a midlife crisis at 17 ((laugh))

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: And like I'm (.) sort of thinking about oh well what am I going to do in this situation well what will I like it's sort of like I'm trying so instead of the saying of like crossing the bridge when you come to it I'm already trying to cross the bridge when it's all the way down the road down near whatever

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Um ((pause)) and (.) I think it's just (.) yeah (.) Or like say when ((pause)) it's almost like um (.) I dunno you feel like everyone is judging you all the time or when you're walking somewhere you feel like everyone's looking at you or say I don't know you tripped or you if you were looking for say like looking for my phone in my bag or something I'm thinking oh gosh I bet everyone's you know judging me or anything like that I feel like it just (.) um (.) say where someone would be like "oh that was a bit embarrassing" I'll be like oh my gosh like end of the world I feel rubbish you know

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: Sort of thing

KA: Oh that sounds very intense

Greyfrog: Yeah ((laughs))

KA: Yeah yeah. Um and this is a bit of an abstract question so don't worry if it's a bit you know over your head (.) um (.) but for some of the people I've interviewed they sort of talk about how for them their autism and their anxiety kind of exists as one thing that they can't really

be separated out. And I wondered did you ever feel like that? Or for you is your anxiety something that's separate and distinct from your autism?

Greyfrog: Um ((pause)) I think it can be joined because in terms of say um (.) situations that I will find difficult that I now realise is probably because of my autism

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Is why I experience anxiety during those situations (.) Um (.) say a teacher is explaining something in class and I'm the only person that didn't understand it so then I have to ask for another explanation um and in that instance it is a bit like well I probably didn't understand it because of my different thought process because of the autism because everyone else isn't

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Um and that caused me to feel anxious because it's like (.) it's (.) it's almost like it makes you feel stupid because well why don't I understand it? Why does everyone else know? You know and then say people would be like "ohh how do you not understand that's so easy" and a lot of times it's like well once they explain it in a different way or they show me physically right this is how you do this equation or whatever then I'll understand it and I'll be like oh yeah that is easy. But it's just in terms of it's like you need to explain it to me two three times possibly in a different way or just the same way but just reiterate your points um (.) and I think in terms of that it does tend to make you feel quite anxious because you don't want people to think you're not listening or

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: you know you're stupid because of it or anything like that so I feel like (.) um (.) it does tend to come hand in hand um

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: Cause it I feel like it's quite weird to think (.) or it's quite weird to me that obviously say my mum she doesn't have autism but I do so (.) I feel like it's interesting to me the fact that we have completely different thought processes even though we act in the same kind of manners in most situations or you know we can have a (.) sort of normal conversation, even though our brains are working completely different ways um

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: and I know that's with everyone, everyone works differently but obviously it's just a little bit different whether you're autistic or not

KA: yeah (.) yeah definitely. OK moving on a little bit from just anxiety specifically um I'm going to talk a bit about something called alexithymia which we tend to see a lot within autistic populations but also within populations with high anxiety as well um and alexithymia is a

difficulty in describing or identifying your own emotions. And of course that can sometimes translate into difficulty identifying those emotions in other people but at the moment we're focusing more on just identifying and describing those emotions within yourself. Um (.) so for some people things like happiness, sadness, anger they're difficult to actually distinguish. And sometimes you can know you're feeling a very intense emotion but you can't really label what that is. Um so is this something that you've ever experienced or not so much?

Greyfrog: Um (.) I think (.) um ((pause)) that is that is quite a difficult emotion because uh- emotion? Difficult question. Sorry

KA: No worries

Greyfrog: Cause um say certain times you might be feeling multiple emotions at once

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: and would make it a bit more difficult to go well I'm feeling this, this and this. Um (.) but I think in general I don't tend to experience that just because I feel like um (.) myself personally I'm quite good at like explaining things or (.) even if it's like using metaphors or something else so that I can truly like explain what I'm feeling

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Um I think I don't struggle with that so much, but I do tend to struggle with obviously the in terms of other people and how they are feeling um

KA: Right yeah

Greyfrog: Yeah so say like my mum's angry or something but I won't notice it until it's sort of too late and then I've annoyed her even more. And I'm like oh you know. Um but I think with myself like I think the only times that I do tend to struggle is just say if it's like I'm having a great day but then this has happened but then this has happened. So I'm a bit like ooh do I feel happy still or do I feel you know I feel like (.) but not on a whole you know

KA: Yeah yeah. And I think for everyone sometimes yeah when a lot of different conflicting things have happened it is really hard to work out how you should feel if that makes sense. Sort of that moment of mm do I am I happy about this? Is this good news?

Greyfrog: Yeah yeah

KA: I think that's I think that's yeah that's completely normal. I definitely experience that a lot. Um and again this is a bit of an abstract question but when you're I guess identifying what your feelings are, are there certain signals that you'll pay attention to or is it just more of like a completely automatic thing?

Greyfrog: Um (.) I think (.) I think I would say say like in terms of paying attention to signals is if I'm trying to calm myself down before it gets really bad so say like (.) going to um (.) for example when I had prom um (.) the whole of prom I was feeling really really anxious but not in like a bad way necessarily but sort of like a oh my gosh right you gotta look good you've gotta do this right oh my gosh like all of this is happening sort of thing

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: By the end of the night when we had like the after party and everyone sort of out of their dresses and suits and everything um (.) it was (.) in that moment it was me trying to calm myself down because I could tell I was getting really anxious in a bad way

KA: Right

Greyfrog: Um I do tend to experience that if I do go to like parties or say if I'm (.) uh sort of I don't know anything quite like big I guess you could say in that in that sense (.) um (.) and if I don't manage to calm myself down I know that I will end up going home because I just want to be in my own bed with my mom and just watch TV and sort of calm myself down and

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: And (.) but I think it's sometimes it almost just feels like it's very much out of your control because ((pause)) because the emotions or the signals are so intense (.) um it's

KA: Right

Greyfrog: Yeah it cause with what you said earlier about how does anxiety feel as well

KA: ((sneezes)) sorry

Greyfrog: Bless you ((laughs)) that's alright. Um (.) it (.) it almost it feels like (.) the best way to describe it is almost like feels like painful like your chest is like (.) like you gotta weight there

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: And it's almost just like when you notice that you're just trying to pull it off but it's really really heavy (.) and yeah I think in terms of that I guess I would notice it you know because the feelings are intense and they (.) it's almost like they start building up or sometimes they sort of (.) they hit you but they're not as strong as you know they can be so then when they hit you you just try and calm yourself down straight away

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: you know?

KA: Yeah. Yeah that’s really really interesting. I definitely can relate to the heaviness on chest feeling

Greyfrog: Yeah

KA: And you're right it's really physically painful sometimes. And yeah this is certainly something we've seen a lot with the interviews we've been doing this sense of how especially anxiety but kind of any emotion really can quite quickly become really overwhelming and yeah

Greyfrog: Yeah

KA: Just really uh affect your ability to function. Um (.) we've just slightly gone over the half halfway point now so I just wanted to check in. Did you want a quick five minute break or are you good to keep going?

Greyfrog: I think I'd rather keep going just like you said about being in the flow of things and

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: Yeah

KA: I completely understand that's yeah that's absolutely fine. Um (.) So we'll start talking a bit now about interoception which is ((laughs)) my favourite because it's my PhD topic

Greyfrog: Yep

KA: Uh but yeah just to go over once again I know I've probably said it to you before but interoception is our ability to feel and understand the signals that come from inside of our body so these can be things like how fast our heart is beating, how hungry we are and relatedly how empty our stomach is (.) um (.) it could be how much we need to use the bathroom (.) all of those kind of things (.) and the theory is (.) that this might be affected in things like anxiety but also in autism as well. It's just no one really knows you know in what way it affects it or the mechanisms there so that's what we're kind of trying to understand in our lab um (.) So if I think about myself just now I really can't feel my heart beating at all. If someone was like how fast is your heart beating I would have to like touch my wrist and feel my pulse. Um but for some people they can just feel their heart all the time in their chest. Now if I were to do a lot of running or if I was lets say about to have a huge exam for uni

Greyfrog: Yeah

KA: um I would start to feel my heart a little bit but

Greyfrog: Yep

KA: unless I'm really stressed or have done a lot of heavy exercise I don't feel it. So there might be certain times you feel it differently and you also might feel the different sensations

differently. So for example one person might be really really good at telling how hungry they are but really really bad about telling how much they need to use the bathroom (.) Um so all of these things can vary loads. Um but yeah I just wanted to ask first off are these type of signals something that you feel quite aware of in your everyday life?

Greyfrog: Um it's actually quite funny because when I first like saw about that I was like ohh I'm not too sure but for some reason just hearing you say it again it's made me think of um (.) I know when I was quite like a lot younger I would sort of struggle with knowing when I needed the toilet

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Um and it would quite literally get to the point where I would like it's almost like when you're bursting for the toilet and you're sort of like dancing like oh my gosh I need to go to the toilet and like I would almost be doing that and my mum would be like go go to the toilet now or you're gonna wet yourself

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: And ((laughs)) then I would go and then be like gosh yeah like why didn't I just go straight away (.) and (.) it was it's almost like sort of my brain was like forgetting to go actually yeah this is you know you need to go to the toilet and why didn't you just go straight away? And it was one of those things where (.) it's almost like without realising it you were just holding it in holding it in because you wanted to keep doing what you were doing or you know you for whatever reason sort of thing (.) um

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: I know I had that. Um I don't think I've really experienced it as much anymore I think that's probably because you don't really want to wet yourself at seventeen

KA: ((laughs)) yeah yeah

Greyfrog: And so I feel like you know now it's I've sort of gotten more control of that

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Um but I think another thing as well is that in terms of hunger I feel like um I (.) I remember especially during lockdown because um (.) it was like (.) I started doing like exercise and everything started trying to get a bit more healthier and everything um because I was not like overweight but I just wanted to be a bit more slimmer and a bit more healthier and everything. Um and I remember like the first time I'd actually ever felt hungry. Like it was it was really odd because it was sort of like I could physically feel your stomach is empty you need to eat

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: I'd never like experienced that before um and I feel like it was just because I didn't realise that there was actually like a feeling I felt I feel like I used to think like but yeah you eat breakfast, lunch, dinner um and then maybe pudding or whatever and I would just you know do that and I wouldn't ever have this moment of obviously because in lockdown you didn't really have like a school routine or anything um and it was sort of like (.) it because I sort of had noticed that I would just keep going downstairs have a snack and everything like that and I thought (.) you know (.) I need to stop doing that because I feel like a lot of people had that because you're right there in the kitchen what else you supposed to do? You know it's like

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: And then um because I'd started working out eating a little bit less and everything it was sort of that realisation of actually (.) you're (.) to be fair I don't fully know but it almost felt like you're not always supposed to feel full you're

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: you're supposed to allow your body to uh digest and everything and then you eat again or you know OK yes you're supposed to have about like 3 meals a day but (.) you know it's not (.) I dunno (.) like mandatory sort of thing

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Cause like say if you um (.) say if you have like lunch really really late and then it's like ten o'clock and you're like ohh I need to have dinner but it you've already eaten you're already full so you don't really need to eat dinner and then it's sort of like it's that feeling of (.) um (.) it's almost like cause (.) I dunno (.) I dunno I dunno what I was just saying

KA: No no that makes sense yeah. And do you find it a bit easier now to listen to those to your body's signals to let you know when to eat rather than just eating whenever you're bored and stuff?

Greyfrog: Um I think I do tend to struggle with eating. I (.) um never I would say I've had an eating disorder or anything

KA: OK

Greyfrog: I do know that like I um my mum and sister in particular were quite worried in terms of I was very (.) I became very obsessive over exercising don't want to eat too much but you can't eat that cause you already eaten and like stuff like that

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: And so I think I've always sort of had quite an unhealthy relationship in terms of food (.) um (.) so I think I'm sort of still trying to find the balance of eating healthily but also not eating

too little but not eating too much because with a lot of things it's very difficult to find that balance because

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: The way you're unhealthy sort of thing or doing the wrong thing or anything like that um (.)

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: and (.) I think it does become very difficult if you are feeling really low just because um I am the type of person if you are feeling really depressed you you're just sort of like I don't know say if you know you've got your favourite chocolate bar in the cupboard you're like I'm not hungry but I really want to eat it because I know it's gonna taste really really good um

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: I think it's just that sort of like trying to listen to your body sometimes does become very difficult if you are feeling very strong emotions

KA: Right yeah

Greyfrog: But it is quite an interesting topic like you said because it is very as well like the body in general is quite interesting because there's so much to it and the fact that without you realising like it can help you so much

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Like I even find it quite interesting that like say you get a little graze or a cut or anything the body literally just grows back the skin and you know fixes it all for you

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Um and like I found out recently that um cause what hap- I uh was it the tendons or the lig- I can't remember which one. The I think I tore the tendons

KA: Ooh

Greyfrog: in my wrist or something like that and

KA: ((overlaps)) That sounds painful

Greyfrog: Obviously it's a lot. Yeah and it’s a lot worse like it's better to break it rather than tear or anything

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: Um but I found out that obviously if you break your bone it when it grows back it will grow back stronger than it did before

KA: That's quite cool

Greyfrog: Yeah

KA: I didn't know that

Greyfrog: Yeah (.) and no yeah and um (.) I did think like (.) that was it I feel like it's just very interesting and it's even though your body is really clever it's almost like your brain sort of needs to catch up and sort of be like listen to your body

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: But yeah ((laughs)) it is very confusing sometimes

KA: Yeah yeah. Um (.) you mentioned a bit earlier on about you know struggles I guess with eating and you wouldn't define it as like an eating disorder (.) would you say those struggles are like mostly motivated by I guess ideas and pressures around looking a certain way or is there anything else to that?

Greyfrog: Um (.) I think it definitely didn't help as when I was younger I um I had like a best friend and she was a gymnast she was really really skinny and like she was in like year five and she had like a six pack or like muscles and everything and sort of I was seen as like the big funny friend like there wasn't really much else to me sort of thing but she had everything all the skills she had looks and everything and I definitely don't think that helped especially when you would have these really skinny friends and they would be like “ohh I look so fat today”

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: and stuff like that and you would sort of be like if you think you look fat then what do you think I look like? Um and I definitely as well just in general like in the media obviously um in terms of looks it is very um dangerous almost as what they tend to portray as healthy and not healthy

KA: ((overlaps)) Mm

Greyfrog: or good and bad um and I think I do tend to struggle say like it's quite odd say (.) one day I really love my body and I think ohh I look great in this or this outfit looks really good or anything like that and then the next day it's sort of like you know you want to sort of suck in your stomach and be like what you want to look like um but I think (.) it’s quite (.) sort of say I would look back on photos from when I like lost a lot of weight in lock down and then I was like ohh I need to lose more. But now looking back I was like you know what? That was actually like a perfect sort of the ideal that I've always wanted but

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: Even then I wasn't happy with it. Um and I think it does tend to just spring from how other people look and what other people say um

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Especially just because of having grown up with people around you that have always been the skinny really really pretty people (.) um (.) but yeah it's I think it's just something that I've always sort of struggled with really

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: Even like when I was quite young because of (.) like it it's so it to me it's so depressing to think like I remember in year seven the conversation of we were all getting changed for PE and obviously the girls being like oh I look so fat or I look so ugly and stuff like that and you're sort of standing there like (.) you know you're the popular pretty one in the year and you think you don't look good you know

KA: Yeah it's this weird um I mean I certainly felt like a similar vibe from people when I was at school years and years ago now of it's almost seen like uh a cool thing or an accepted thing to do to really put yourself and your own appearance down um

Greyfrog: Yeah

KA: I'm not sure why among girls special- especially um just sort of you know this need to not accept yourself and show other people that you're not accepting of yourself

Greyfrog: Yeah

KA: And it's really strange looking back on it because yeah as it it's similar to what you said we'd be there before PE and everyone would just be listing everything they didn't like about themselves and it's a really unhealthy uh environment um. Hopefully it's reassuring for you slightly to know that it does definitely change a lot as you get older and it's just not something that anyone my age at least does anymore. You know we're not standing in circles listing flaws um

Greyfrog: Yeah

KA: But it is also I have a lot of sympathy for your generation because growing up with social media must have been really really tricky. I'm sort of just a bit too old like Instagram did exist when I was a teenager but no- it wasn't super popular I didn't really have an account and

Greyfrog: No

KA: It's just a whole whole other platform to create those kind of pressures so

Greyfrog: Mm

KA: Yeah I imagine that was really really tough um (.) Yeah and with the eating I guess another aspect of it that we we sometimes see um when we do these interviews is kind of like sensory difficulties with food. Um is that something you've ever experienced or is it more the weight linked ideas of it?

Greyfrog: Um (.) I think there is certain things that like (.) um (.) it is it's you just it is like horrible textures and stuff like that (.) um (.) that can like really upset you or like anything say um (.) even just like (.) uh (.) because I feel like a lot of people have it say um (.) it's almost like I don't know how to describe it uh (.) When you'll get like a head massage from like when you're getting your hair, hairdresser or whatever and

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: It's like they can hit a certain spot and you're a bit like ohh like that tickles or say if someone I don't know there's certain like I don't know what they're called but like on your back if someone tickles you or something you're a bit like ((intake of breath))

KA: Oh yep

Greyfrog: That. Um and I think it's almost just like it gives you that like gut reaction um but off the top of my head I can't really think of anything just because um (.) my sister does tend to say like my taste buds are not very refined

KA: ((laughs))

Greyfrog: I think (.) I eat quite a lot of (.) not particularly amazing tasting food um whereas say my mum and my sister would be like that tastes disgusting I'd be like no that's taste alright. You know it's like say um have you ever watched Friends?

KA: Yes yeah yeah yeah

Greyfrog: Y'know like how Joey he literally likes will eat anything ((inaudible))

KA: ((laughs)) yes

Greyfrog: Don't get me wrong I don't eat off the floor but it's almost like that is how it's sort of ((inaudible))

KA: That's so funny

Greyfrog: Yeah

KA: Good reference

Greyfrog: ((laughs)) yeah (.) and um (.) yeah I (.) Yeah off the top of my head or as of recent there hasn't been anything but I know I do tend to struggle with textures or say there's certain like for example I can't wear sequins because that really upsets me or like say certain furs or anything. Um (.) and I feel like some people do just experience that cause I also have like eczema and stuff or I used to when I was quite young

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: So ((inaudible)) thing but it was it is just certain textures and stuff that do you tend to upset me and I know that is because of autism as well which obviously isn't very helpful but

KA: Yeah yeah. Um and going back a bit to sort of like some of the other signals and stuff we talked about um I know I mentioned briefly heartbeat and this is something that a lot of researchers think might be especially important in anxiety um just because quite a lot of people when they describe anxiety they say ohh you know really feel my heart beating.

Greyfrog: Yeah

KA: So is your heart beating something that you can feel day-to-day um and then when you're anxious does anything change about the way you feel it?

Greyfrog: Um (.) I (.) when I do feel really anxious or have really high emotions I can feel it really really strongly

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Um and a lot of the times it's like say oh my gosh mum feel my heartbeat and she'll be like you know it doesn't seem that bad or you know or like I've um (.) you know anything like that. And (.) but me personally literally it's like heart palpitations you can feel it through your chest

KA: Right

Greyfrog: And I don't tend to feel that day-to-day like right now I can't feel it you know. But I think it is just say if I am feeling quite anxious or um scared or anything (.) anything like that it you can just feel it

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Even if I'm like I dunno really excited for something or um anything like that it's almost like not as strong as it would be if I'm feeling like if I'm having bad emotions. But if they're like happy and good then maybe a little bit but just not as like (.) horrible. It’s almost like um (.) sometimes it's like sort of like a butterflies in the stomach excited feeling other than the you feel like you're gonna throw up from the ((overlaps))

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: Horribleness sort of thing. Um but yeah I think it is only when I tend to feel strong emotions rather than day-to-day

KA: Yeah. No that makes a lot of sense that makes a lot of sense (.) um (.) And yeah another question kind of about these signals (.) um (.) When you can feel them so I know you mentioned that you know sometimes you can feel hunger signals sometimes you

Greyfrog: Yes

KA: you know you're getting a bit better attuned to (.) to recognising those when you do feel them do they just feel neutral to you or do sometimes they feel especially positive or negative?

Greyfrog: Um (.) I think ((pause)) um ((pause)) I feel like they do tend to just feel very neutral

KA: Mmhm

Greyfrog: Unless quite a lot of times it will get to the point where I feel (.) so hungry that I'm like I feel like I'm gonna pass out. Or maybe I don't feel hungry per say but I feel like I need to eat something now I feel really ill

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: And I think that's in terms of times where I don't really pay attention to the signals or if I genuinely just say if I'm running late to work and I need to get to work so I just get on the bus and forget about breakfast or anything um and then by the time it hits break I'm like right quick eat you know um (.) But it’s not really something that (.) uh (.) especially sticks out to me apart from that like one example

KA: Mm yeah. Ok well yeah thank you

Greyfrog: S’alright

KA: And just last kind of question on this and again this not might be something that you just don't have so much experience with and that's obviously absolutely fine um but for a lot of especially a lot of the girls that we interview um they have experience with masking um especially masking traits that would be indicative of autism um and I just wondered is is something that you ever feel like you've experienced or noticed yourself doing?

Greyfrog: One hundred percent I (.) I feel like I've done it (.) my whole life

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Um and it is one of those things where um (.) I talked about this in therapy before in terms of like it's almost quite clever how you're doing it without even realising or I was doing it without realising that's what I was doing

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: Because now when I do it say after the fact or you know once I've sort of um (.) I don't know say tried to join in on a joke or tried to sort of act like others around me I'll notice ohh my gosh why did I do that? Or sort of regret the way I was acting because it was almost involuntary

KA: Right yeah

Greyfrog: But it was it's something that I've definitely always done just because I feel like (.) when I was younger it felt like (.) um ((pause)) it's almost the best way to describe it it feels like you're not cool (.) that everyone else is cool so you just wanna be cool like everyone else

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: But in reality it's just because you've got autism and everyone else doesn't and so ((pause)) the way people are joking or talking about something you're a bit like ohh I'd better be joking about this as well um (.) or talking about this as well or understanding what they're talking about um ((pause)) And it can be very frustrating um because it makes you feel as if you don't actually know who you are

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: Um because it's quite literally like I before I knew had autism I just thought this is what everyone did um because I thought that even though it's true to a certain extent that like everyone acts differently depending on who you're with I feel like when you have autism, it's quite literally you step into a new persona with every single person

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: And (.) you don't fully know which one is you or the one that is you is the one that you're actually trying to hide away from everyone which is why you do act different with everyone

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: Um because I think some well one thing that I have always struggled with is it always always always upsets me when someone calls me annoying um I think that is like funnily enough one of the worst things you could say to me

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: Um in terms of like (.) You know I obviously I've had experiences where people have found out I was autistic and have used that against me or

KA: Ah that's awful of them. I'm really sorry

Greyfrog: Yeah no it’s alright it was um (.) I had a really horrible experience at school actually where um (.) I was I had I took art and obviously the exams are like full days and everything

KA: Yeah yeah

Greyfrog: And I asked to have a break in between because I had not much left to do I just needed a breather because for me personally sitting in silence is something that really upsets me

KA: Right yeah

Greyfrog: Because it is like um (.) because sounds tend to be heightened with people with autism

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: It's like instead of it just being silent it's almost like a humming noise or like your brain ((overlaps))

KA: Ohh

Greyfrog: is like talking to you like about all these different things and you're just trying to like ignore that (.) um (.) and uh I actually had these teachers they said in front of they were whispering but it wasn't you know it (.) students listen to what teachers say

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: and they said it and so people found out and then they used it against me

KA: Oh

Greyfrog: Yeah uh (.) but I um (.) ((sighs)) can't even remember what I was saying before that um (.) Oh gosh see my mind just goes black all the time

KA: ((laughs)) No worries I mean same here. Uh but yeah we were just talking about masking and you were saying like it's like stepping into a different persona and stuff

Greyfrog: Yeah and um (.) it’s ((pause)) It's just very difficult to differentiate between (.) what (.) oh I remember what I was saying sorry yes. So yeah I've had people call me annoying which is something that really tends to upset me just because (.) I feel like when people call me annoying that is who I actually am that's my actual personality

KA: Right

Greyfrog: So like annoying being annoying is me and um (.) it’s ((pause)) um ((pause)) I dunno for some reason it does really puts me down because all I am trying to do is just trying to act like everyone else and be this person that I want to be but in reality you can't change who you are and so say in situations where um say when I joined college what I was just trying to do I was just being like right you know just stay quiet sit at the back you know don't talk weirdly or don't do this sort of thing. Um and then (.) it’s (.) you slip up once you know and then that's it sort of thing. Once- it's almost like once you make a mistake then you just keep making them without even realising (.) um (.) or sort of uh ((pause)) but yeah it’s (.) it is so frustrating because you ((pause)) Say if you meet new people you don't know how to act because you don't know how that person's going to react to the specific personality that you sort of pick for that day um

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: And (.) yeah it can be very upsetting in the back of your head you know who you are but then because you constantly act differently depending on who you're around you do you do tend to sort of get like um ((pause)) I don’t think (.) I can’t remember what it’s called but like (.) almost just like confused on how to act

KA: Yeah (.) yeah and with that masking do you think like when you are masking do you think that affects at all your ability to tune into your own body and those kind of signals or do you think they're not super related?

Greyfrog: Um ((pause)) I think ((pause)) um ((pause)) I think it's quite difficult to say

KA: Mm

Greyfrog: Um ((pause)) Say like for example there's certain close friends I wouldn't mind saying ohh gosh I'm feeling quite anxious right now like you know can we do something to sort of calm me down or anything like that

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: Um whereas other people it is almost just like you've gotta talk to yourself in your head to calm you down because it’s almost like you don’t feel safe enough with those people to talk about something like that

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: Pardon me sorry

KA: No worries

Greyfrog: ((laughs)) so I think in terms of that um (.) you li- I will um ignore that kind of signal but other than that I don't think like it's not like with I dunno when I'm masking I'll be like I need the toilet but I'm not gonna go to the toilet

KA: Yeah

Greyfrog: You know or I'm not gonna eat sort of thing so yeah

KA: Ok yeah cool. Well thank you so much. That is the end of my little list of questions I have to ask you

Greyfrog: Yeah

KA: Um before we finish up and just go over some admin things I just wanted to check if there's anything that you would like to add or anything that you think I might have missed that might be relevant

Greyfrog: Um I don't think so. I feel like I did talk quite a lot so I'm hoping that (.) that any of that will be helpful sort of thing

KA: Ohh I can tell you now a hundred percent all of that is useful. You've given me some really really fantastic information (.) and yeah thank you for being so open and willing to talk about what I'm sure is like some you know quite difficult experiences. Um (.) Yeah if you you know over the next few days have any thoughts and you're like oh I wish I'd have said that again feel free to e-mail. This is all very like relaxed so I'm yeah happy

Greyfrog: Ok ((overlaps))

KA: to take ideas on board later