



Social Anxiety and the Big Five Personality Traits: The Interactive Relationship of Trust and Openness



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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: Research has found that social anxiety disorder (SAD) has a positive relationship with neuroticism; negative relationship with extraversion (Bienvenu et al., 2001); non-significant or weaker relationships with agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness (Glinski & Page, 2010); and a negative relationship with trust (Bienvenu et al., 2004). No research has examined interactions among the Big Five and facet levels of personality in relation to social anxiety (SA). We examined the relationships between trust, the Big Five, and SA.

RESULTS: SA correlated positively with neuroticism, negatively with extraversion, and had weaker relationships with agreeableness, openness, and trust. In linear regression predicting SA, there was a significant interaction between trust and openness over and above gender.

DISCUSSION: In addition to supporting previous research on SA and the Big Five, we found that openness is related to SA for those low in trust. High openness could protect against negative consequences of low trust.

INTRODUCTION

Personality and Social Anxiety (SA)

- SA has a positive relationship with neuroticism
- Negative relationship with extraversion (Bienvenu et al., 2001)
- Non-significant or weaker relationships with remaining Big Five factors (Glinski & Page, 2010)
- Negative relationship with trust, a facet of agreeableness (e.g., Bienvenu et al., 2004)
- No research on interactions among the Big Five personality factors and facet levels of personality in relation to SA

Tested in current study:

- Relationship between trust, the Big Five, and SA
- Explored gender to account for gender differences in personality (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 2001)

HYPOTHESES

- Results will replicate previous findings that SA is significantly correlated with extraversion and neuroticism
- Personality factors such as openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, and lower-order facets such as trust, might protect against SA only when their interactions are taken into account
 - For example, the effects of trust could moderate otherwise non-significant relationship between openness and SA, such that participants low in both traits would have highest SA scores

MEASURES

Straightforward Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (S-SIAS; Mattick & Clarke, 1998; Rodebaugh et al., 2006, 2011)

- 17-item measure of anxiety-related reactions to social situations
- In our sample, internal consistency was good ($\alpha = .92$)

Social Phobia Scale (SPS; Mattick & Clarke, 1998)

- 20-item measure that assesses *fear of scrutiny* (performance fears)

Mini-International Personality Item Pool Inventory (MINI-IPIP; Donnellan et al., 2006)

- 20-item short form measure of five basic factors of personality: extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness.
- Internal consistency for openness was good ($\alpha_s \geq .70$)

International Personality Item Pool (Johnson, J. A., 2001, May)

- 120-item representation of the 30 facets of the Big Five factors, including the facet trust (e.g., believe that others have good intentions)
- Internal consistency for trust was good ($\alpha_s \geq .79$)

PARTICIPANTS

- Sample 1
 - Participants were 502 undergraduates
 - Mostly women ($N = 349$; 70%)
 - Mostly Caucasian ($N = 236$; 47%)
 - Mean age of 19.04
- Sample 2
 - Participants were 698 undergraduates
 - Mostly women ($N = 449$; 64%)
 - Mostly Caucasian ($N = 614$; 88%)
 - Mean age of 19.03

RESULTS

Zero-order Correlations

Table 1.

Row 1: Zero-order Correlations between Social Interaction Anxiety and the Big Five Personality Traits (Sample 1).

Row 2: Zero-order Correlations between Social Anxiety Composite and the Big Five Personality Traits (Sample 2).

	Trust	Extra	Neur	Agree	Consc	Open
Sample 1: S - SIAS	-.20*	-.55**	.32**	-.16*	-.07	-.12*
Sample 2: SA	-.22**	-.52**	.27**	-.22**	-.18**	-.15**

Note. S-SIAS = Straightforward Social Interaction Anxiety Scale; SA = composite measure ($\alpha = .86$) of social interaction anxiety and fear of scrutiny; Extra = Extraversion; Neur = Neuroticism; Agree = Agreeableness; Consc = Conscientiousness; Open = Openness; ** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$.

Linear Regression Analyses

- Significant interaction between trust and openness over and above gender (part $r = .09$, $p = .047$), such that individuals low in both trust and openness were at the greatest risk for high levels of social anxiety (see figure 1)
- There were no other interactions between trust and the other Big Five factors
- Findings replicated using composite measure of SA in Sample 2 (part $r = .08$, $p = .042$) (see figure 2)

Figure 1. Standardized Graph of Interaction in Sample 1

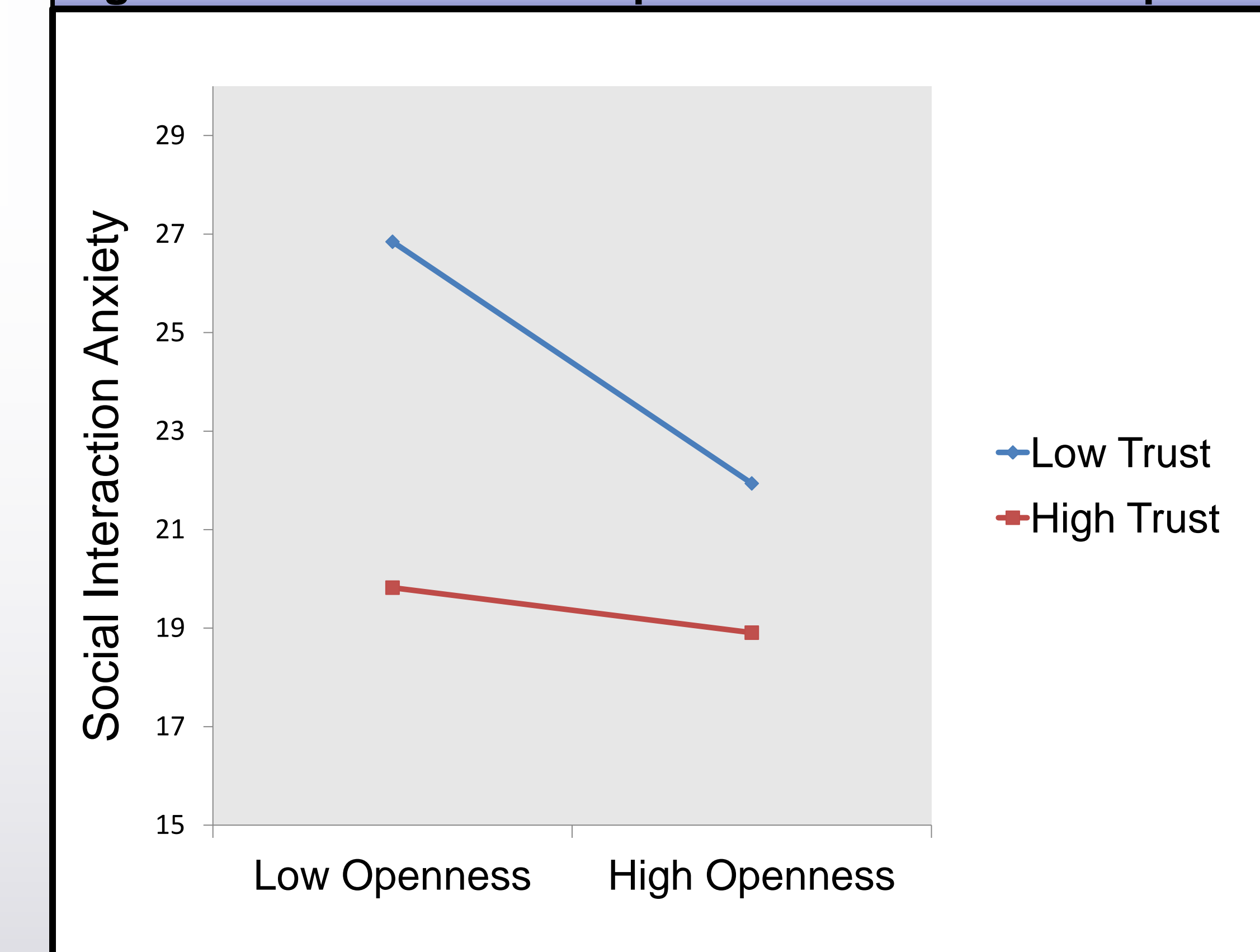
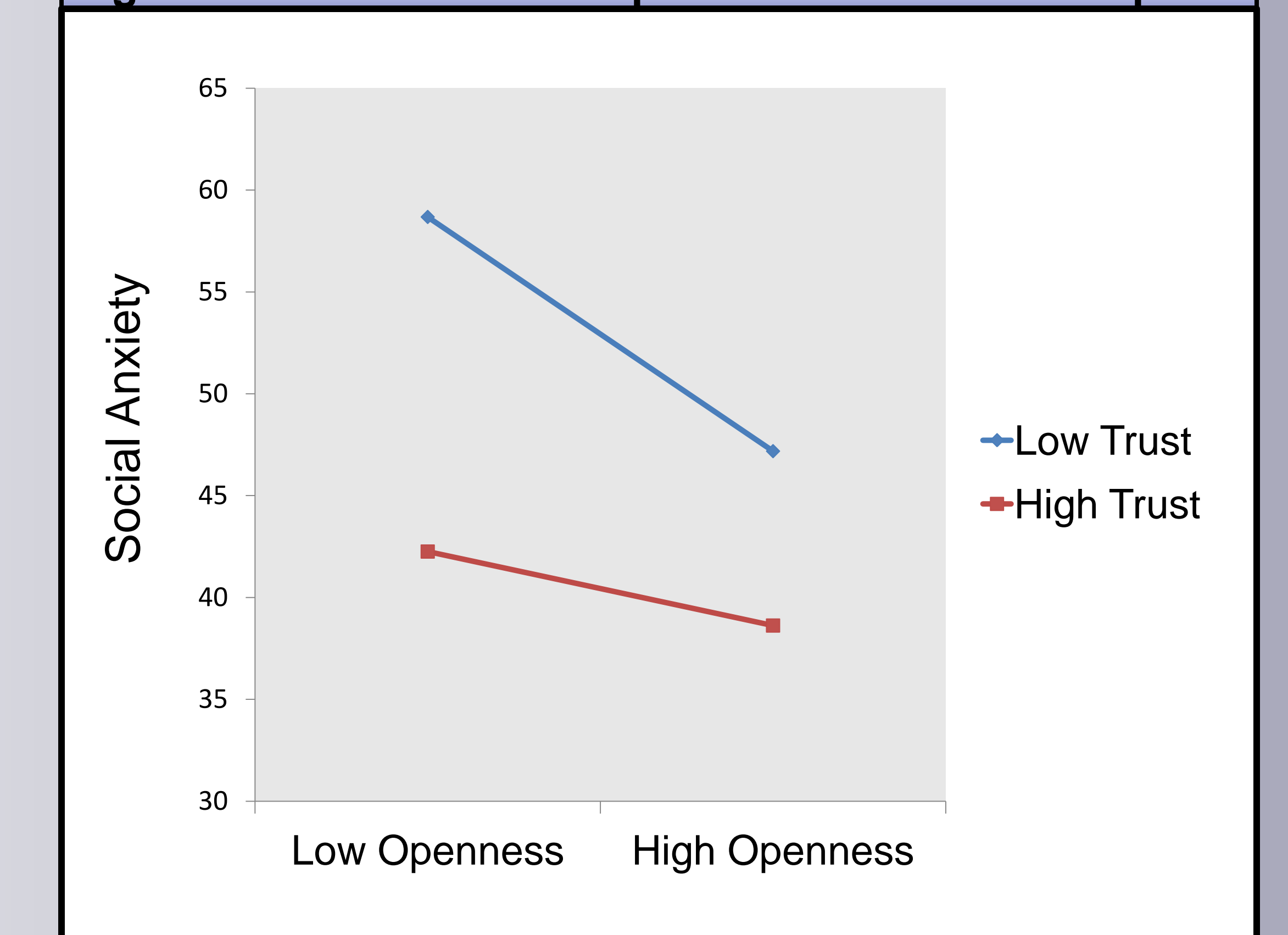


Figure 2. Standardized Graph of Interaction in Sample 2



DISCUSSION

- Results support previously found relationships between social anxiety and extraversion, neuroticism, and trust
- Notably, openness may be related to social anxiety primarily for participants low in trust
 - Given that individuals high in openness are more receptive to new sensory, cognitive, and emotional input from people and surroundings (McCrae, 1994), it may be that high openness protects against negative consequences of low trust
- Trust may be a modifiable trait (e.g. when using group cognitive-behavioral therapy) (Glinski & Page, 2010)
- Thus, clinicians may consider using group CBT with individuals who have SAD and low levels of trust, particularly when openness is also low