

Informed Consent

Invitation to Take Part

You are being invited to take part in a research study to further our understanding of perceptions of social interactions. Thank you for carefully reading this information sheet. This study is being conducted by student researchers Riehana Aziz, Emma Benn, Maisie Bennett, Summer-Lili Cloke and Poppy Duval-Johnston, and project supervisor Dr Dominique Makowski from the School of Psychology, University of Sussex (see contact information below). This study needs to be completed on a computer/laptop to ensure all elements of the task appear correctly. If at any point you wish to stop participating and withdraw your data, please close the tab. This will prevent your data from being saved. Please be aware, your data will be anonymised and encrypted, meaning it will be impossible to withdraw your data upon **total completion and agreement for this to happen.**

Why have I been invited to take part and what will I do?

This study aims to investigate perceptions of social interactions and how this relates to trust, loneliness, empathy, social effort, and social relationship quality. In addition to this, the study investigates the relationship between interoceptive sensibility (bodily awareness - how aware you are of the processing and integration of your internal bodily states) and mental and physical health conditions. To participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a series of questionnaires related to **mood, mental and physical health, social experiences, and attitudes.**

Before the main task, you will respond to questions about:

- **Social and emotional experiences:** Feelings of social and emotional loneliness, and social isolation.
- **General well-being:** Life satisfaction, mood, and anxiety levels.
- **Mental health:** Presence of psychiatric disorders (conditions affecting mood, thinking, or behaviour) and any current treatments you may be following, ranging from mindfulness practices to medication.
- **Physical health:** Psychosomatic conditions caused by autonomic nervous system dysfunction, including musculoskeletal, dermatological, cardiovascular, and other related disorders.

You will then begin the main task. You will be shown several screenshots of conversations taken from Reddit (with the consent of users for their images to be used during the study). Please imagine that you are participating in the interaction while reading the dialogue. After each conversation, you will be asked a couple of questions about your experience.

After completing the main task, you will then be asked to complete additional questionnaires on:

- **Attitudes toward AI:** Your general views on AI and beliefs about its current abilities in producing videos, images, and other outputs.
- **Social and emotional experiences:** Feelings of sympathy and compassion for others, and your ability to take others' perspectives.
- **Social behavior:** Your social effort and social conscientiousness.
- **Self-perception and internal awareness:** Your ability to perceive and understand information from internal bodily signals in a variety of contexts, including during sexual activity.

The whole experiment will take you **-25 minutes** to complete. Please make you sure that you are **attentive and in a quiet environment**, and that you have time to complete it in one go.

Note: We understand that some of these questions may feel **personal or potentially distressing**. However, your responses provide important information about the general participant population, which will help us answer our research questions. Your participation is completely **voluntary**. You are free to **close the webpage at any time** if you do not wish to continue. Your data will not be saved if you do so. Please be assured that all information you provide will remain **completely anonymous**.

Are there any risks or benefits to taking part?

Content warning: The conversations you will read contain content that some people may find distressing, including themes of **alcohol use, self-harm, suicidal thoughts** and **mental health struggles**. As stated above, you can **withdraw from the study at any time** by closing the tab (your data will **not** be saved).

What will happen to the results and my personal information?

The results of this research will be written into scientific reports for Psychology dissertations. In addition, this data will be used for other studies and the anonymised data will be made publically available. We anticipate being able to provide a summary of our findings on request from 30/05/26 (D.Makowski@sussex.ac.uk). Your anonymity will be ensured in the way described in the consent information below. **Please read this information carefully** and then, if you wish to take part, please acknowledge that you have fully understood this sheet, and that you consent to take part in the study as it is described here.

Consent

- I understand that by signing below I am agreeing to take part in the University of Sussex research described here, and that I have read and understood this information sheet
- I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the study, and that I can withdraw at any stage without having to give a reason and without being penalized in any way (e.g., if I am a student, my decision whether or not to take part will not affect my grades).
- I understand that since the study is anonymous, it will be impossible to withdraw my data once I have completed it.
- I understand that my personal data will be used for the purposes of this research study and will be handled in accordance with Data Protection legislation. I understand that the University's Privacy Notice provides further information on how the University uses personal data in its research.
- I understand that my collected data will be stored in a de-identified way. De-identified data may be made publicly available through secured scientific online data repositories.
- By participating, you agree to follow the instructions and provide honest answers. If you do not wish to participate or if you don't have the time, simply close your browser.

For further information about this research, or if you have any concerns, please contact Dr Dominique Makowski (D.Makowski@sussex.ac.uk), Riehana Aziz (ra549@sussex.ac.uk), and/or Emma Benn (eb672@sussex.ac.uk). This research has been approved (ER/....) by the Sciences & Technology Cross-Schools Research Ethics Committee (C-REC) (crescstec@sussex.ac.uk). The University of Sussex has insurance in place to cover its legal liabilities in respect of this study.

I read, understood, and I consent