Using VR to explore our own realities and foster deeper connections with others

01

Can experiencing someone else’s reality help us build a connection, even when we cannot fully understand what they are going through?

Design Matters 2026

A presentation by



Sacks of Spice

02

A Matter of Perspective

Exploring how VR might help us understand mental health by sharing a lived experience of someone who lives with mental health difficulties.



One Diagnosis, Different Realities

A shared diagnosis of **anxious attachment** doesn't mean shared experiences. Everyone experiences it differently.

We collaborated with 27 year-old woman to translate aspects of her day-to-day reality into VR, serving two purposes

To be Understood

Communicating her experiences to loved ones

To Reconnect

Using VR to revisit and better understand her own reality


04



05

“I actually never liked reading before I started therapy because I get distracted a lot. But now that I’m starting to get into this habit, I’m quite enjoying it. It takes me away from whatever it is that I’m thinking about and it’s quite freeing.”

06

“I sometimes work in this room, but the chair there is quite awkward to use when I’m on my computer. I usually end up sitting on the carpet and working on my laptop instead. But I do get back pain after awhile. So probably need to get a proper desk and chair very soon.”





07

“Ever since COVID, my mom started watching one of those cooking shows where they pick their own vegetables. Since then, she started growing her own there and would pick some whenever she needed them for cooking.”



08

Understanding Anxious Attachment

Heightened Sensitivity
Noticing changes in communication within

Tone Awareness
Picking up on subtle shifts in tone

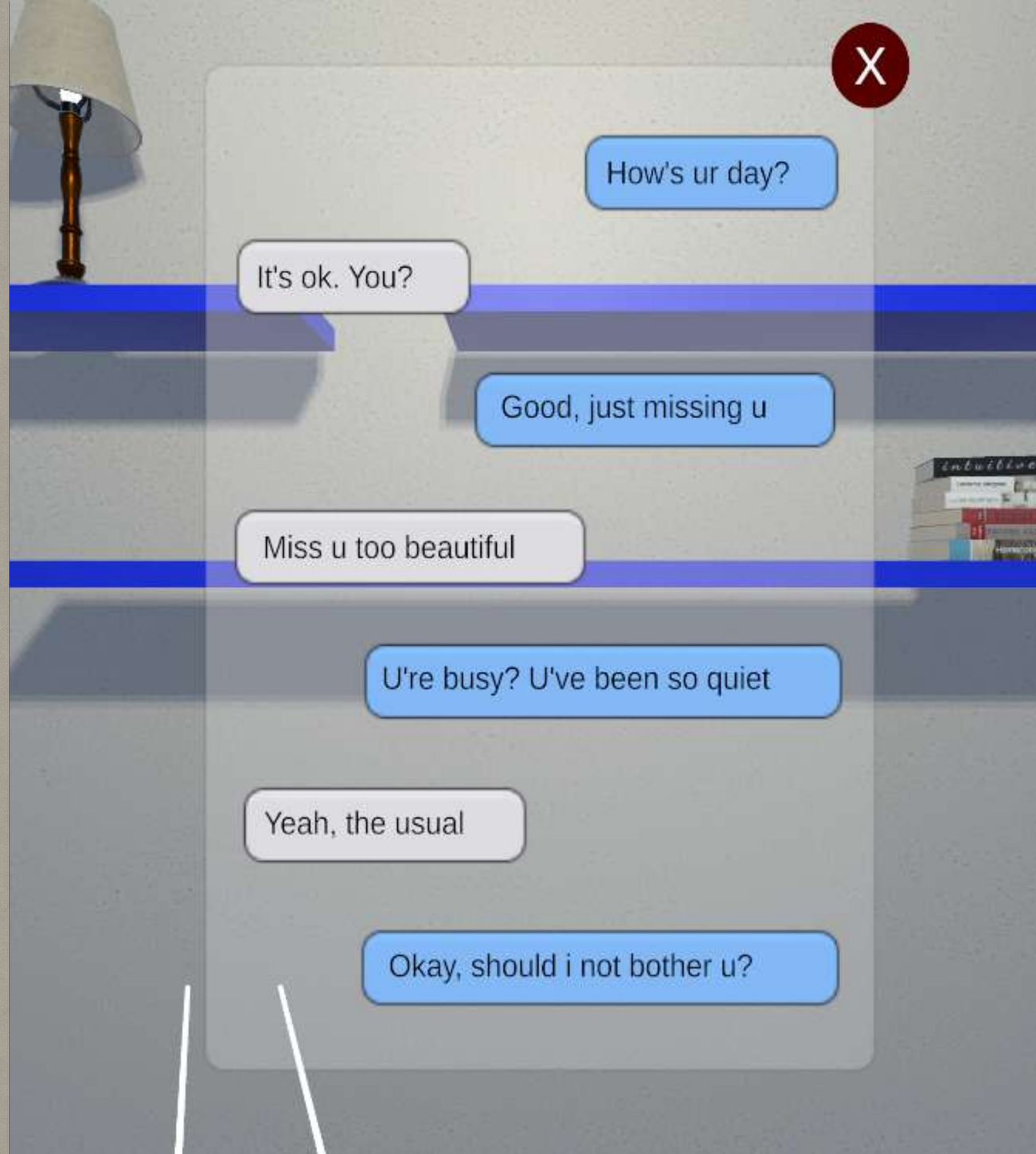
Overthinking
Questioning whether something is wrong

Relationship Anxiety
Interpreting small changes as signs of trouble

Emotional Overwhelm
Struggling with uncertainty

Reassurance-seeking
Looking for validation to ease anxiety

“His replies were so dry I felt like something was wrong. But before that, everything was good. So that’s why I was worried and confused.”



Persistence

Difficulty of redirecting attention when triggered and anxious

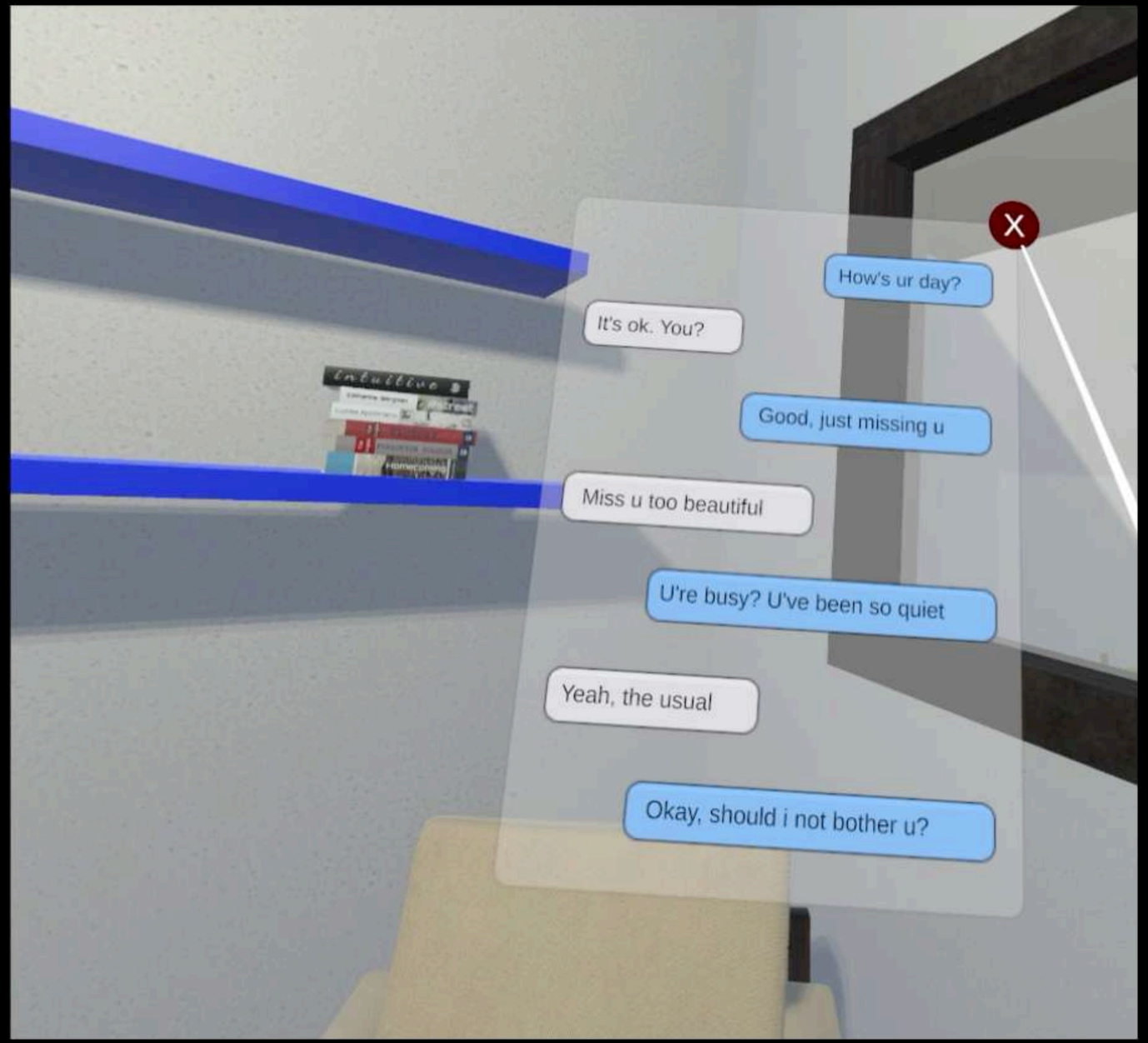
“I kept trying to close the message, but it just won’t go away. I thought there was something wrong with the VR.”

“I can imagine how this is triggering her. But honestly, it wasn’t that bad, I mean he was saying something nice to her too.”

“I can see exactly at which point she got triggered and that pretty much ruin her entire day.”






How's ur day?
It's ok. You?
Good, just missing u
Miss u too beautiful
U're busy? U've been so quiet
Yeah, the usual
Okay, should i not bother u?

The scene cuts off after
those moments of struggle

We didn’t want to give participants a tidy resolution, as though these moments can be neatly resolved.

Detachment

Taking a step back, reflect and question what they understood about the experience.

Building connection isn’t just about stepping into someone else’s world, it is also about **recognising where our understanding ends** and **their experience remains uniquely their own.**

For her

Seeing how others respond to her experience helps her reflect, make sense of her emotions and **build a healthier connection with her own reality**.

Designing for Dissonance

- Presence doesn’t necessarily mean understanding
- Emotional responses are not equivalent to lived experience

Design can reveal the limit of our own perspective

Designing for Emotional Presence,

Not Just Physical Presence

- Environmental Storytelling
- Emotional cues through sound and interaction
- Everyday objects as narrative devices

Connection doesn’t require complete understanding. Sometimes, it begins with the willingness to see the world through someone else’s perspective.

We enter through technology, but what we hope to build goes beyond VR: **a more human connection through the experience of seeing the world from someone else’s perspective.**