The London School of Economics and Political Science

Virtual Selves in Virtual Worlds: Towards the Development of a Social Psychological Understanding of the Self in Contemporary Society

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Social Psychology of the London School of Economics for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, London, September 2015.

Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, grant number ES/1025111/1

Declaration

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Simon Evans

Abstract

Digital technology has given opportunities for multiple experiences of Self in contemporary society. Implications for this "Virtual Self" were investigated using "Second Life", a digital virtual world with an avatar population of 42 million. The research spanned a period of almost 5 years, adopting a digital ethnographic approach, emphasising the virtual world user perspective, and adapting conventional research procedures. It employed frameworks that emphasise the individual in context, such as Symbolic Interaction and Activity Theory, and investigated five aspects of the Virtual Self: representation, activity, processes, the intersection of social worlds, and trajectory. 64 participants were followed, some over the whole period, yielding 150 hours of interview data across five sets and a total of 92 procedures. Individual interviews and group discussions were held within a purpose-built virtual research centre, while Subjective Evidence-Based Ethnographic procedures were conducted in the physical world to directly access participants' experiences. All research was informed by participant observation in Second Life, with inductive Thematic Analyses used to reveal findings.

There are five main results. First, Virtual Self representation can be characterised as a succession of milestones: "name and avatar choice", "profile construction", "recording", "refinement", "avatar change", "begin again", and "stability". Second, a "Player Taxonomy" has been constructed defining users as members of at least one of the following categories: Extensionist, Experimenter, Gamer, Resource User, Alternative Seeker, and Cynic. Third, a Virtual Self Processes Model has been constructed, illustrating how Virtual Self experience is contingent on Self-virtual world reflection, and Self-Other/ Self-virtual world/ virtual-physical world interactions. Fourth, Virtual Self experience is contingent on the mediation of technology in a co-relationship between the physical and virtual realms. Finally, a Matrix of Player Timelines has been constructed, which indicates how the Virtual Self emerges from multiple trajectories relating to experience of the virtual world and Self, relationships and interactions with others, and the virtual world in context.

Overall, despite the potential for multiple Selves and experiences through digital media, the contemporary individual actively integrates virtual and physical experiences using multiple identities, from which emerges a Self that for them is unified and coherent.

Acknowledgments

This thesis is the culmination of several years' work, that extends long before I started putting pen to paper (or finger to keypad), and would have been impossible without the extensive help and support of others.

In the first instance, I must thank all those friends and supporters across the world, who I have met over the years within Second Life. None of this would have been possible without them and their willingness to share experiences with me, experiences that in many cases have not been shared with anyone else. I particularly want to thank "AM", who I first met as a rather green and naïve MSc student, and who has gone on to participate in many aspects of my research in the years since, as well as welcoming me into her "real life" home on several occasions.

There are also a number of people from the London School of Economics that I must acknowledge. First, I want to thank my supervisor Professor Saadi Lahlou, who has given me no end of academic and practical support, advice and encouragement, as well as also displaying no end of patience, as I dealt with some of the "real life" events that came along and tried to derail my completion of the PhD. I also want to thank Dr. Andy Wells, for having faith in the prospect of my conducting research in Second Life in the first place when I was that green MSc student, as well as Dr. Bradley Franks, Dr. Tom Reader, Dr. Caroline Howarth, Dr. Claudine Provencher, Dr. Alex Gillespie, Dr. Flora Cornish, Professor Sandra Jovchelovitch, and all the members of the academic staff, who have advised encouraged, and inspired me over the years. I also wish to thank other staff at the LSE, in particular Daniel Linehan and Terri-Ann Fairclough for lending an ear and making me laugh when I needed it (in addition to their administrative support of course!), as well as the technical team who helped me in the fine art of conducting SEBE analysis and other technical "stuff", in particular Steve Bennett and the late Steve Gaskell. I also wish to thank all my fellow students past and present, too many to mention by name, but who have all been a part of my PhD journey, supporting and encouraging me, as well as showing great interest in my work. Finally, I need to thank all of those at the LSE who provided particular support when I needed to take some time off, in helping making that happen and encouraging me when the going got tough.

There are a number of other people, organisations and institutions I must acknowledge, without whom this thesis would not be possible, and my PhD experience would have been less rich. Greatest thanks must go to the ESRC, for funding my

research, as well as all those who supported and facilitated my application within the LSE. I must acknowledge the organisers of the ELVW, VWRN, SNIC, Internet Research, Cycomp, IRVW, and ReLIVE conferences, who have given me the opportunity to meet other virtual world researchers and present my work. Finally, I am particularly grateful to the Open University and the huge number of wonderful people I met and experiences I had through my time as an OU student, for providing me with the belief that I could become a "doctor" in the first instance.

Finally, I need to thank family and friends for their encouragement and for keeping me on my toes with the perennial question, "How long until you finish?" Particular thanks to Grant, for bearing with my never-ending complaining and fretting as I rode the rollercoaster that is part and parcel of writing a PhD thesis.

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1.Introduction

1.1. The purpose of the document

The document presents work with respect to the topic "Virtual Selves in Virtual Worlds: Towards the Development of a Social Psychological Understanding of the Self in Contemporary Society". The research devised for it is situated in a tradition that seeks to understand the role of contemporary computer and digital technology, so-called New Technologies, in human experience. In particular, it aims to develop a social psychological understanding of the role that usage of one example, virtual worlds, has in the experience of Self, by employing one of these, Second Life, as a case history.

This chapter provides background for the research topic, specifically an overview of the virtual world phenomenon, its implications for the Self, and how it has been approached in research. It also provides a rationale of the overall research question and research objectives, before concluding with an outline of the structure of the thesis.

The nature of the research field means the document employs specialist terminology and expressions in common usage by virtual world users and professionals. A glossary is appended that offers a brief explanation for each of these.

1.2. Virtual worlds as an emerging environment for the Self

Virtual worlds have been variously described as: "any computer-generated physical space, represented in three dimensions, that can be experienced by many people at once" (Castronova, 2005, p.22); "a synchronous, persistent network of people, represented as avatars, facilitated by networked computers" (Bell, 2008, p.2);[1] and "computer-generated environments in which participants adopt an avatar to interact with each other and with the virtual environment around them" (Peachey & Childs, 2011, p.1). While the first virtual world was Lucasfilm's Habitat in 1986 (Britt, 2008; Yakal, 1986), by 2005 there was still only a handful. However, facilitated by the increasing availability of cost-efficient high speed Internet connection, and improvements in computer processing power and graphics, there has been a rapid

[1] "Persistent" is used to describe the fact that virtual worlds are active 24 hours per day, every day, where any changes made to the environment cannot be undone, and where events occur even when the individual is not present (Castronova & Falk, 2009). This compares to conventional video games which are only active when the user runs the gaming programme, and where changes may be undone, or the game restarted.

increase in these worlds and the number of people who use them. According to the latest freely available data from consultants KZero, by 2011 there were approximately 300 worlds (KZero, 2011), while the number of virtual world accounts in 4th Quarter 2011 were 1,772 million, a growth of 428% in two years (KZero, 2012).[2]

A survey of virtual worlds by Messinger et al. (2009) identifies five main types: education-based (e.g. design and architecture in Active Worlds), theme-based (e.g. music in vSide), community specific (e.g. the South Korean community in cyworld), children focused (e.g. Club Penguin) and self-determined virtual worlds. The survey defines the self-determined category as comprised of virtual worlds that do not have a particular purpose; they target various aspects of the population and operate on a variety of profit-models (Messinger et al., 2009). In particular, they are used to augment the social and business lives of their users, and hence they replicate social aspects of the physical world, including commerce, communities and relationships (Boellstorff, 2008). There are several worlds in this category, but one of the most prominent is Second Life, with its large population of 42.28 million accounts,[3] 1.05 million visitors per month (Au, 2011), and a variety of media coverage (e.g. Keegan, 2010; Morris, 2008).

The experience of being a person in contemporary society has been characterised as a "Virtual Self", "connected to the world and to others through electronic means such as the Internet, television, and cell phones" (Agger, 2004, p.1). Virtual worlds throw such experience into sharp relief: their graphical representations of the physical world and their focus on the avatar[4] as a representation of the person (Childs, 2011) provide environments where individuals interact with one another, simultaneously experimenting with identity, developing creative skills, forming groups and communities, participating in education and engaging in economic activity (Boellstorff, 2008). They are places where people use the Internet to "reinvent themselves" (Peachey & Childs, 2011).

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[2] It is possible to have an account with more than one world, and for more than one account with each world; hence 1,772 million accounts is not equivalent to 1,722 million individuals.

[3] Source: http://secondlife.com/xmlhttp/secondlife.php, accessed June 7th, 2015. The number reflects accounts that are described as "in good standing". It should be noted that the Second Life Terms of Service stipulate that up to five accounts per household are permitted, meaning the same person may have up to five separate accounts; indeed it is estimated that approximately 50% of Second Life users with more than six months experience of it, have more than one account (Gilbert, Foss, & Murphy, 2011). Hence the number of accounts "in good standing" does not necessarily indicate an accurate number of current users. For more information on Second Life regulations on number of accounts and the terms and conditions relating to them, see http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Linden_Lab_Official:_Alt_account_policies.

[4] The term "avatar" has its origins in the Hindi tradition of "avatrârah", the manifestation of deities from heaven on Earth. More recently, it has come to also mean "a graphical representation of a user within the environment which is under his or her direct control" (Allbeck & Badler, 2002, p.313). Notably, Stephenson (1992), in his novel *Snow Crash*, uses it to describe the virtual simulation of humans in the "Metaverse", his fictional application of the Internet.

Hence, virtual worlds provide an emerging environment for the Self, of a unique form and on an increasing scale. There is potential for a social psychological approach that seeks to understand how these opportunities are being adopted, and how the Self, manifested in virtual worlds, is being experienced.

1.3. Defining the terms

Phenomena associated with computer technology have multiple definitions, as they emerge and develop. With respect to the thesis, this impacts particularly on the core concepts of "virtual world" and "Virtual Self".

For present purposes, **"virtual world"** ***is used to reference computer-generated three dimensional environments used by many people simultaneously through avatars***. This usage is well established: such environments often describe their offering as such,[5] while specialist journals in the field use the term as their reference.[6] However, a number of other terms are used synonymously, for example, "synthetic world" (e.g. Castronova, 2005), "Metaverse" (e.g. Stephenson, 1992), "metaworld" (e.g. Wallace, 1999), "immersive virtual environment" (e.g. Blascovich, 2002), and "Virtual Reality" (e.g. Heim, 1995). While for consistency this document will only use the term "virtual world", it will also use the term "inworld" to describe events that occur within virtual worlds (an expression commonly used by virtual world users), and "virtual environment" to refer to the variety of virtual worlds, social networking sites, chat rooms, bulletin boards, online games, MUDs, blogs, fora, etc., as a whole, that populate Cyberspace. As a contrast to virtual world and virtual environment, the term **"physical world"** ***is used in the thesis to connote "real life".*** While "real life" is sometimes used by virtual world users and occasionally in academic literature (e.g. Vasalou, Joinson, Banzinger, Goldie, & Pitt, 2008), the expression can imply that experiences and events in virtual worlds are inauthentic. While other expressions are used, such as "actual world" (Boellstorff, 2008), or "material world" (McLeod & Leshed, 2011), the term "physical world" (Peachey & Childs, 2011) is preferred since the definitions of actual and material are themselves not so clear cut.

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[5] For example, the home pages of Active Worlds (http://www.activeworlds.com/ accessed February 12th, 2012) and Kaneva (http://www.kaneva.com/ accessed February 12th, 2012) describe their offering as a "virtual world". It is interesting to note that others such as Second Life (https://secondlife.com/ accessed February 12th, 2012) use other terms, such as "your world". This alternative terminology emphasises user privacy, personal choice and empowerment, while avoiding connotations of inauthenticity and lesser validity that the "virtual" prefix may connote. Is

[6] Examples include *Journal of Virtual Worlds Researc*h and *Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds*.

With respect to "Virtual Self", as Section 1.2 indicates, this term has been used to describe the Self that is experienced through television, computers, mobile phones and other digital devices (Agger, 2004). However, it is often used in literature to more specifically refer to the Self experienced and represented in virtual worlds and other virtual environments (e.g. Bailenson, Beall, Blascovitch, Raimundo, & Weisbuch, 2001; Bessiere, Seay, & Kiesler, 2007; Lawson, 2000). Other terms are also used, such as "cyberself" (e.g. Robinson, 2007; Valcheva, 2009), as well as it being common to refer to the Self in context without any adjective (e.g. "the self in virtual reality" in Turkle, 1994). Here **"Virtual Self"** ***refers to the Self in virtual environments, including virtual worlds, but the Self in context (e.g. "the Self in virtual worlds") is also referenced.***

Additionally, the thesis employs a number of terms to indicate those who use virtual worlds and other environments. **"User"** refers to anyone who holds an account and uses the world or environment programme. **"Resident"** is a term commonly used in Second Life referring to someone who is active inworld; in the thesis, the term is similarly employed specifically when referencing someone engaging in activity inworld. **"Player"** is used commonly in the context of games, but here is used to refer to users who employ Second Life or another virtual environment for a specific purpose, irrespective of it is for gaming. Finally, **"avatar"** references the graphical representation of the user, not the user *per se*, while **"participant"** indicates any user who has participated in the present research.

1.4. The research context: towards a social psychological understanding of the Virtual Self in virtual worlds

A tradition is emerging that seeks to understand the impact of computing and digital technology and the opportunities they allow on the experience of Self. In this vein, a discipline of Cyberpsychology is being established, and concerns a wide range of technologies and environments (from Virtual Reality to Internet chat rooms), phenomena (from identity theft to Human-Computer Interfacing), and research techniques (from experiments on avatars in virtual worlds to "netnographies" of online communities).

Research designed to specifically investigate virtual world experience is being conducted as a more recent aspect of this tradition. It particularly emphasises the functional aspects, such as the role in education (e.g. Peachey, Gillen, Livingstone, & Smith-Robbins, 2010), and on experimental approaches that test the technological

aspects of virtual worlds, such as avatar choice for Self-representation (Bailenson, Blascovich, & Guadagno, 2008), or avatar impact on behaviour (Yee, Bailenson, & Ducheneaut, 2009). However, research is also emerging that focuses on the virtual worlds' user, and the environments they inhabit, rather than the technology; examples include exploring aspects of communication (Cole & Griffiths, 2007), motivations for using virtual worlds (Yee, 2006a), and the phenomenological experience of using an avatar (Veerapen, 2011).

Following such examples, the present research seeks to place the users of virtual worlds centre stage, and hence present a social psychological perspective. Brivio, Ibarra & Galimberti (2010) have outlined such an approach, which they describe as a "Social Psychology of Cyberplaces"; they emphasise the interaction of actors, artefacts and processes within locations in Cyberspace. This approach has its basis in theories that consider the individual in context (Nardi, 1996b), e.g. Activity Theory, Situated Action Theory and the Distributed Cognition approach, while having commonalities with other approaches that conceptualise the Self, including the Symbolic Interactionist theories of Mead (1956) and Goffman (1959). As such, it indicates how to consider the impact of virtual worlds on experience of the Self.

Currently there are three levels of theoretical and methodological appraisal of the Virtual Self in virtual worlds: existing theories of the Self and the contemporary experience of it; theories and findings with respect to virtual environments generally; theories and findings with respect to virtual worlds specifically. There is much scope for a deeper understanding of the experience of being a Virtual Self in virtual worlds, and for exploration of the relevance of existing findings and theories with respect to the Self generally and in virtual worlds specifically. Hence the present research develops a virtual world user-centric social psychological approach from which to address its key concern: the impact of experience of virtual worlds on the experience of Self.

1.5. The aims and scope of the research

The aims and scope of the research are reflected in the thesis topic "Virtual Selves in Virtual Worlds: Towards the Development of a Social Psychological Understanding of the Self in Contemporary Society". There are three aspects to the topic. "Virtual Selves in Virtual Worlds" reflects the specific objective of seeking to understand the impact that experience of virtual worlds has on experience of the Self. "Towards the Development of a Social Psychological Understanding of ..." highlights the aim of

contributing towards a social psychological approach in considering virtual worlds, one that focuses on the user and their perspective, rather than isolating various aspects of the virtual world technology that other approaches may take. "... the Self in Contemporary Society" highlights a broader objective of contributing to a wider understanding of how the Self can be conceptualised in contemporary society. Virtual worlds are a phenomenon with increasing penetration, and research that contributes to the understanding of Self-experience in such environments will be contributing to an understanding of the Self experienced as a whole.

1.6. The overall research question

The virtual world phenomenon represents an emerging environment for experiencing the Self. While there is some understanding of the role of the Internet in offering opportunities for new forms of Self-expression and representation, there are aspects of Virtual Self that are less well catalogued, including the experience of Self in virtual worlds. Previous research conducted by the author (Evans, 2011) hints at the broad range of subjective experiences that constitute Self in Second Life: it indicates that the Self in Second Life is both similar and different to that in the physical world, users of Second Life feel some relationship to their avatar, and social interactions within Second Life have an impact on how the Self is experienced. It also suggests the richness of subjective experience within Second Life and how, by taking the perspective of its users, there is the potential for a deeper understanding of the Virtual Self and all aspects of experience within virtual worlds.

Hence, the present research seeks to address the question:

> What is the experience of the Self in virtual worlds?

How this question should be approached, in terms of conceptualising "experience of the Self" and the methods used, and the outcome of the designated approach, is the subject of the remainder of the document.

1.7. The approach of the thesis

The thesis presents the theoretical and methodological context for addressing the research question, detailed findings, and an evaluation of those findings.

Chapter 2 undertakes a literature review in order to provide the theoretical and methodological context. In particular, it highlights the historical nature of the Virtual

Self and virtual worlds, the implications of technology for experience of the Self, and how the Self can be considered to be emerging as a product of interaction with others and the environment. It provides an overview of relevant research that considers experience of the Self in virtual environments, and through this identifies the need for research that emphasises the perspective of virtual worlds' users.

Chapter 3 develops the methodological approach by considering the range of subsidiary questions that arise from the need to address the research question. In focusing on the virtual world user perspective, it derives a digital ethnographic approach comprising specific research for each subsidiary question, providing an overview of the research and analytic techniques used.

Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 each address a subsidiary question. Each chapter provides an overview of context, a summary of the relevant research, a detailed analysis of findings, and a discussion of the findings and how they relate to the literature. From these chapters, findings emerge that facilitate: an understanding of how the Self is represented in virtual worlds; a Player Taxonomy that overviews the range and forms of activity that virtual world residents engage in; a rudimentary Virtual Self Processes Model indicating how Self emerges through reflection and interaction at a number of levels; an understanding of the experience of Self where the worlds inhabited by the virtual world user intersect; and a Matrix of Player Timelines which facilitates an understanding of the trajectories of Self in relation to virtual worlds.

Chapter 9 synthesises the findings in the previous chapters, and indicates their contribution to research and understandings of the Virtual Self, by highlighting the common themes and relating them to the literature. It also provides an evaluation of the techniques used, in terms of the extent to which they achieve research objectives, and indicates how the findings and research approach act as a foundation for further research.

The thesis concludes with an overview of the research findings and their contribution to our understanding of the experience of Self in contemporary society. An Appendix is also provided, which includes a glossary and supporting documentation.

Finally, it must be noted that the main body of the thesis and its Appendix makes extensive use of participant quotes. During the course of research, participants have shared many confidential matters regarding both their “virtual” and “real” lives. ***Hence, any facts, names, incidences, etc., that may inadvertently reveal participant identities have been changed or disguised.***

2. Virtual Selves and virtual worlds in context

2.1. Introduction

Chapter 1 outlined how the growth in virtual worlds and other virtual environments has offered new opportunities for Self-experience, expression, and presentation. While there is some understanding of these phenomena, there is scope for developing a deeper appreciation of how experiences in virtual worlds specifically may impact on experience of the Self. Hence, the overall research question has been developed:

> What is the experience of the Self in virtual worlds?

To begin addressing this question, the present chapter focuses on the core concepts of virtual selves and virtual worlds.

By way of context and in order to clearly delineate the field of research, the chapter begins with an outline of the history of virtual worlds, a discussion on how the Self can be defined and conceptualised, and an overview of the potential impact that contemporary technology may be having on the Self. The chapter then provides a theoretical orientation by outlining the Symbolic Interactionist theories and the theories that emphasise the individual in context, and by overviewing research that explores the experience of Self in virtual environments. The final sections of the chapter outline how a social psychological approach can be used as a foundation for addressing the research question, and discuss how the broad question can be operationalised as a series of subsidiary questions.

2.2. The long and multiple histories of the Virtual Self

While the concept of virtual worlds employed for the present research is based in current computer and digital technology, the history of virtual worlds, and hence the history of Self in virtual worlds, is long and multiple. Consideration of the multiple histories of virtual worlds illuminates the extent to which there may be continuities in the experience of the Self in contemporary society with that in historical contexts.

The first history of virtual worlds is a technological one, which has concurrent evolutionary strands of video gaming and the Internet. In this history, virtual worlds as computer-generated spaces used simultaneously by many people, began with the inception of the Internet in 1983 (Fornäs, Klein, Ladendorf, Sundén, & Sveningsson,

2002) and the text-based environments that rapidly emerged. Such environments included asynchronous Bulletin Board Systems where people interacted via the posting of messages for others to respond to, and synchronous Internet Relay Chats and Multi-User Dungeons. Through this mix, users interacted, maintained communities, engaged in Role Playing games, created fantasy worlds, and conducted close personal relationships, through which they explored aspects of Self and identity (Markham, 1998; Rheingold, 2000; Turkle, 1994, 1995). While the first graphical virtual world, Lucasfilm's Habitat, also emerged at this time (Britt, 2008; Yakal, 1986), they did not become prominent until computer graphics and processing power were enhanced and high-speed Internet connection more widespread. With this, Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games emerged which, although fantasy and combat based in purpose, featured relationship and community building as a by-product, together with sophisticated social structures including education, religion, and economies (e.g. Bainbridge, 2010). Virtual worlds having a pure socialising purpose became prominent with the adaptation of the "open-ended"[7] computer game The Sims to the Internet in the form of The Sims Online in 2002, and the launch of Second Life in 2003, following which emerged the plethora of virtual worlds with multiple objectives that exist currently.

However, there is another history which stems from recognising that besides a technological definition, virtual worlds can be defined as being symbolic spaces (Boellstorff, 2008). Symbols "open up imaginary worlds that tend to be virtual worlds by including traits that imitate real social worlds" (Fornäs et al., 2002, p.30). Considered in this way, virtual worlds have been present in human culture since prehistory and the use of symbols in cave paintings (Heim, 1995). By defining virtual worlds as "symbolic spaces that represent imaginary and social worlds", their potential goes beyond contemporary technology. History and contemporary society becomes full of examples, particularly relating to the notion of "imagined community", community that situates only in the minds of its members because physically meeting and knowing every other member is impossible (Anderson, 2006). One example is the Republic of Letters, the community of intellectuals in Renaissance Europe and America maintained by written correspondence: it was symbolic, transcended national borders, had no formal structure, and "existed only in the minds of its members" (Goldgar, 1995, p.2), such characteristics that also define the computer-generated virtual worlds of today. Other examples include the invention of print-media and its facilitation of the "imagined community" of the modern nation-state (Anderson, 2006), and the

[7] "Open-ended" in this sense indicates no pre-determined objective, unlike most conventional games.

telegraph, whose facilitation of interaction between interlocutors occurs in the symbolic space between telephones (Sterling, 1992).

Hence the Virtual Self of contemporary times has many historical trajectories and is not necessarily a recent phenomenon. While current definitions of Virtual Self relate to the mediation by electronic technology, ***human experience has always been "virtual" to some extent***. This presents implications for understanding the impact of experience in virtual worlds on the experience of being a Virtual Self, suggesting there may be continuities of experience across history, as well as discontinuities.

2.3. Defining the Self: the Self , identity and being virtual

The present research has its focus on the role of experience in virtual worlds on experience of Self. While the Self as expressed and experienced in virtual environments has already been the topic of research for some years, these endeavours have sometimes been guilty of confusing Self with identity, or treating them both as the same thing. For example, the investigation of identity exploration by Bessiere et al. (2007) is concerned with identity exploration in the MMORPG World of Warcraft, but presents its findings in terms of "actual", "ideal" and "virtual" Self.

In seeking to define Self, Reber & Reber offer a number of notions such as "inner agent", "inner witness of events" and "personal conception" (Reber & Reber, 2001). However, given the potential for confusion, it is useful to also consider the definition of identity, and the relationship it has with Self. Duveen (2001) defines identity as "how people come to have a sense of who they are through a recognition of their position with the symbolic space of their culture" (p.258). Since this refers to an entity that people "are", it implies that entity is the Self and that the Self and identity are separate, albeit connected. There are contrary views on what this connection is. In his use of the phrase "Self-identity" in his treatise on the characteristics of Self in late modernity, Giddens (1991) indicates that the Self possesses identity. Meanwhile, from the perspective of Social Identity Theory, identity is a subset of the Self, insomuch that it is "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of a social group (or groups)" (Tajfel, 1981, p.255). This notion is underscored by Manders-Huit (2010), who posits that identity informs the Self, highlighting its two aspects, nominal (attributes fixed by society) and self-informative (the conceptualisation of the Self). These imply that Self emerges first and identity is one of its aspects, and indeed Callero (2003) suggests Self is the precursor to identity, arguing that it is transhistorical and universal, while identities are not. Others take the converse

view, seeing identity as the precursor to the Self: Deschamps (1982) argues that the sense of being a Self is a form of symbolic capital that arises from identity construction. While aspects of identity, such as being a member of a particular group, might contribute to a person's sense of Self, the present focus is on how the experience of being in a virtual world impacts on the experience of being a person, an "inner agent" or "inner witness" in that world, i.e. the Virtual Self.

With respect to consideration of a Virtual Self, it is important to note that the term "virtual" has become associated with Cartesian mind-body separation (Boellstorff, 2008) as well as commonly indicating something that is "almost as described, but not completely or according to strict definition" ("Oxford Dictionaries Online," 2011). It has become practice for the prefix to be used with many phenomena associated with the Internet and Cyberspace (e.g. "virtual meeting", "virtual research", "virtual community" etc.), and used to mean "near substitutes" (Poster, 1995, p.85). While in this thesis it is used in relation to the Self, this is not to indicate that it any less authentic or valid than, or a substitute for, the Self in the physical world, only to indicate that it is the Self that is located and experienced in a setting that is "virtual", i.e. online, accessed through the Internet, located in Cyberspace.

2.4. Contemporary technologies: implications for the Self

It is claimed that there are revolutionary changes in society accompanying the introduction of New Technologies. In the first instance, Toffler (1980) describes contemporary society as experiencing a revolutionary "Third Wave", a transformation due to New Technologies as significant as the transformations heralded by the introduction of agriculture (the "first wave") and the Industrial Revolution (the "second wave"). Meanwhile, Castells (2002) characterises society as in the midst of an Information Age where knowledge production and transference is a significant activity facilitated by Information and Communication Technologies, and where information networks are facilitated by the Internet. These New Technologies are not passive media for information; they transform human communication and characteristics. However, the ability for societal changes to impact on the experience of Self in this way is not new; for example, the change from a feudal to merchant culture in the middle ages was accompanied by long distance communication and dependence on documentation for transactions, a transfer from face-to-face communication and the spoken word (Poster, 1995). Nevertheless, there are claims that contemporary New Technologies are leading to unprecedented forms of change.

In characterising these changes, there has been an instinct to present them as detrimental, emphasising the mediating and multiplicative functions that New Technologies serve in Self-experience. They are seen as increasingly acting as the conduit of human experience (Meyrowitz, 1985; Williams, 1997), with emotional experience gained through the Internet, films, TV and other media, rather than directly with other humans. They are also seen as multiplying the range of influences in experience; for example, the contemporary Self is characterised by Gergen (1991) as "saturated" by the "multiple voices" that result from the complexities and scale of information available from New Technologies. For him, "technologies of saturation" incur a "continuous motion" of "significant others" which manifest a Self characterised by multiple disconnected relationships and roles. He goes so far as to claim that this Self is unknowable and inauthentic to the extent that it "... becomes no Self at all" (Gergen, 1991, p.7). However, these mediating and multiplicative effects have potential to go beyond the impact that increased information, responsibilities, relationships and social roles can have. Electronic communication of all forms open up opportunities for experimenting with identity because all the conventional social cues (gender, age, etc.) are removed (Poster, 1990). This removal and the accompanying anonymity removes inhibitions, described as the "online disinhibition effect" (Suler, 2004), and promotes freedom of expression and identity exploration (e.g. Junglas, Johnson, Steel, Abraham, & Loughlin, 2007; Turkle, 1995). However, at the same time it may reinforce group identity, and hence group influence, stereotyping and discrimination (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998), or lead individuals to do and say things that they would never in the physical world. Poster (1990) conceptualises these sorts of phenomena as a change from a modern society characterised by modes of production and rational, autonomous, centred, stable individuals, to a "postmodern" society characterised by modes of information and unstable, multiple, diffuse individuals.

Such claims are contested. In the first instance, it is not necessarily agreed that the contemporary age can be characterised as postmodern. Giddens in particular takes an alternative view (1990, 1991), claiming that this characterisation emphasises discontinuities and neglects continuities in human experience. He offers an alternative, a view of Self in "late modernity" or "radicalised modernity" where it is more than the passive "site of intersecting forces" (Giddens, 1990, p.150) but is an active "reflexive project", understood by an individual in terms of their life story or trajectory. Hence, any mediatory or multiplicative effects of New Technology in the experience of Self need not necessarily have negative connotations. While Turkle highlights the risks involved with experiences mediated via virtual environments due to potential neglect

of "real life" (Turkle, 1995, 2011), she also recognises how technology allows its users to be "masters of self-presentation and self-creation" (Turkle, 1996, p.158).

The drive to explain how technology may be changing experience of Self, for good or bad, assumes that changes are indeed happening and that these may have negative influences. However, any conceptions of the Self are culturally and historically situated; the assumption of a bounded, unique, integrated Self that is organised into a distinct whole that has been transformed by contemporary society to one that is more multiple and diffuse, is a concept of Self peculiar to the West (Geertz, 1983), having its basis in the emergence of Cartesian mind-body dualism (Bolter, 1996; C. Taylor, 1975). Moreover, the assumption that technology has negative influences may be too deterministic, and neglect the degree to which social and technical structures are co-constructed (Kim, 2000). Hence, ***the objective of the present research to explore the role of virtual world experience in experience of the Self can potentially reconsider claims of negative influences of technological change through a lens informed by its findings.***

2.5. The emergence of the Self through interaction, performance, and activity

The previous sections have indicated how the concept of virtual worlds has potential multiple histories, and the role New Technologies may have in the experience of the Self in contemporary society. To begin to gain a deeper understanding of the potential implications of experience in virtual worlds for experience of the Self, it is necessary to understand how the Self itself may emerge and the role of context in its emergence. To this end, this section considers existing understandings of the Self, focusing on theories of Symbolic Interaction and the individual in context, and how they may illuminate understandings of the Virtual Self. By taking such an overview it is possible to begin to devise an approach for addressing the overall research question "What is the experience of the Self in virtual worlds?"

2.5.1. Symbolic Interaction: Self emerging through interaction and performance

Theories of Symbolic Interaction focus on the everyday social interactions that occur in social worlds. The approach has a number of antecedents. In the first instance,

James' conception of the Self sees it as comprised of a subjective I and an objective Me (James, 1890), "the Self as knower" and "the Self as known", in constant dialogue with one another as decisions are made about the kind of Self to be (Baressi, 2002). Meanwhile, Cooley's "looking-glass Self" concept (Cooley, 1902), sees the Self as imagining how it appears to others (a "Generalised Other") and developing an emotional response to their judgement (Robinson, 2007). These approaches conceive the Self as the sum of many parts, emerging from a dialogical process between Self and Other, and provide basis for the conceptualisations of the Self offered by Mead and Goffman in particular.

For Mead, the emergence of Self is an intrinsically social process (Mead, 1956). Unlike James and Cooley who emphasise an emotional aspect to the process of "Selfing" (Robinson, 2007), Mead takes a social behaviourist view and proposes a Self that is purely the result of interaction, the "conversation of gestures": through this interaction, one adopts the perspective of the Other or "Generalised Other", becoming an object of observation to oneself and hence Self-aware. The I/Me distinction arises during this process, the Self acquiring awareness of itself as itself (I), while gaining awareness of itself as the object of its own regard (Me). Central to the emergence of Self is reflexivity, turning back on oneself to observe from the Other's point of view. Hence from multiple relationships and interactions emerge multiple selves, for "we divide ourselves up in all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances" (Mead, 1962, p.142).

For Goffman (1959), interaction in social environments and the accompanying reflexivity are also fundamental to the emergence of Self, which he elaborates upon using theatrical metaphors. For him, presentation of the Self is a salient part of everyday life, and involves the strategic management of information given intentionally or given off unintentionally to present a credible image to other interactants (Papacharissi, 2002); hence, the Self is likened to an actor on a stage, using scripts and props to portray convincing performances. From this perspective the Self is comprised of myriad aspects, employing other Selves to stage interactions, and with roles assumed and performed depending on the setting provided by social context. As with Mead, a sense of Self arises in this interaction with others in a social process; in this case from "an awareness of the multiplicity of roles that are performed in various situated contexts" (Elliot, 2001, p.31).

These approaches indicate a Self that is by no means self-contained and static, but one that internalises the external world, anticipating the views of the Other and acting upon them, and resulting in a Self that changes over time and context. Hence, to some extent a multiple, diffuse Self is intrinsic, not just peculiar to contemporary society.

However, while the Symbolic Interactionist view may suggest that the boundaries of Self are somewhat "leaky" and transmutable, it nevertheless assumes that it is bounded by physical embodiment. Mead in particular views the bodily interaction through the "conversation of gestures" as crucial, for as Berger and Luckmann (1966) claim, "a man's experience of himself always hovers in balance between being and having a body" (p.68). In this sense, both "organismic development" and social context as mediated by the "Generalised Other" are the formula for the emergence of Self. While Goffman does not specifically emphasise the role of bodily interaction in his approach, he nevertheless assumes its primacy when he states "presumably the telephone and the mails provide reduced versions of the primordial real thing" (1983, p.2). This emphasis on physical interaction and the location of the theories in a time before New Technology, suggest there may be a limited role for these classical theories in contemporary understandings of the Self. The scale and range of interactions and social settings are far beyond what these theories can potentially accommodate: the contemporary environment provides not just Generalised Others but "generalised elsewheres" (Meyrowitz, 1989).

2.5.2. The individual in context: Self emerging through activity

According to Nardi, the context in which the individual is situated is particularly key to understanding human experience, especially in the field of Human-Computer Interaction (Nardi, 1996a, 1996b). She considers three specific approaches: Activity Theory (AT), Situated Action Theory (SAT) and Distributed Cognition. Activity Theory concerns how every activity is comprised of a subject (the people engaged in the activity), an object (or objective) and motivations towards it, and actions, goal-oriented processes towards achieving the objective. Situated Action Theory (e.g. Lave, 1988; Suchman, 2007) emphasises how all activity and practice is contingent on the given situation, rather than being necessarily dependent on a pre-organised rational plan, social relations or cultural knowledge; it is an emergent property of interactions between actors and the environment in particular settings. Distributed Cognition (e.g. Hollan & Hutchins, 2009) focuses on the cognitive system, which it asserts goes beyond purely processes within the individual but is composed of individuals and artefacts they use.

These approaches have in common the notion that cognition and knowledge are not "in the head" and context independent, but embedded and interwoven with context. They arise through moment to moment actions and interactions between Self, Other

and artefacts in particular situations and environments (Nardi, 1996b). In recent years such approaches have been useful in technology design, on the premise that it is not possible to devise best technological solutions by modelling people as individuals with no access to other people or artefacts. Besides applications to technology they also have particular implications for the Self: they each position the Self as emerging from social practices, but have differing approaches to the conceptualisation of people (Nardi, 1996b). While SAT envisages them as "reactive ciphers" (p.88), with no self-generated agendas, and Distributed Cognition as no conceptually different to artefacts in the cognitive system, AT presents people as having conscious motivations towards self-generated goals. As originally formulated by Rubenstein, AT considers the Self (or Psyche, in classical AT parlance) as the product of activity and interaction with the environment (Mironenko, 2013), hence from its perspective "in essence, we are what we do" (Nardi, 1996b, p.88). Thus Activity Theory of all the theories that consider the individual in context is the most useful.

One approach, Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, has roots in the work of Vygotsky, Leontiev and Luria in the 1920s and 1930s, and plays a particular role in illuminating the relationship between context, action and the emergence of Self (Stetskenko & Arievitch, 2004). While the approach acknowledges the sociocultural origin and nature of individual psychological processes such as cognition, emotion and the Self, its basic premise is that every living organism is connected with the environment and every other organism within a dynamic system. It is only through complex exchanges and regulations between organisms and environments that open-ended and ongoing psychological processes emerge. Through collaborative practice, and with the aid of tools in socially and historically specific cultural contexts, people change and create their environment, and hence change themselves and gain Self-knowledge. From this perspective, the Self does not evolve and exist in individual heads: intra-psychological processes emerge with interactional intersubjective processes from "collective practical involvements of humans in the world around them" (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004, p.484). This happens in a two-fold transition process: the transition from the world into practical goal-oriented activity, and the transition from activity to the subjective product (the Self). Moreover, besides the Self emerging from activity, it can be a "leading activity" in its own right (what Giddens, 1990, might call a project), hence positioning the Self as constituted by what we do. This assessment of the Self as emerging through activity with others, mediated by tools in particular contexts, presents the Self as simultaneously social and individual.

2.5.3. The interaction, performance and activity of the Virtual Self

2.5.3.1. A common view of Self between the theories of Symbolic Interaction and the individual in context

Although the theories of the Self presented by Symbolic Interactionists have their basis in a theoretical setting unlike those which consider the individual in context, they have in common the intrinsic role of social environment. For Symbolic Interaction theories and the theories presenting the individual in context, the Self is not merely influenced by the environment, it emerges from the environment. For both approaches, without the environment there can be no Self, since they envisage the Self arising as a result of the momentary everyday interactions that occur between the person and other persons, and the person and their environments. Both also see the mediating role of tools or artefacts as key in the emergence of Self, whether it is Goffman's notion of the actor's use of props to present a role acceptable to others, or Activity Theory's concept of the Self enacted using tools that provide cultural knowledge: through these mediating tools and interactions Self-knowledge arises. Moreover, both approaches emphasise that as the momentary everyday interactions are a lifelong process so is the Self. Emerging from reflexivity, in the case of Symbolic Interaction, and the achievement of goals in the case of Activity Theory, the Self is never accomplished but always in a state of becoming.

2.5.3.2. Applications to the Virtual Self

Despite the origins of both approaches before the emergence of New Technology in the early twentieth century, they offer foundations from which to begin to understand the experience of Self in a contemporary society that includes virtual environments. Their vision of a Self embedded in context helps illuminate how the Self in contemporary settings is not what Gergen described as "no self at all" (1991, p.7), but a Self that continues to emerge from multiple interactions with Others and multiple environments, mediated by the cultural tools and symbols offered by New Technology. The application of these approaches to understand the experience of Virtual Self has begun, albeit in a limited sense and with scope for further application.

With respect to Symbolic Interaction theories, while they emphasise physical embodiment and interaction, their same principles may yet be applied to experience in

Cyberspace. In the first instance, this is because even in its absence, the physical body continues to be used as a reference point in everyday virtual life (Boler, 2002; Markham, 1998), and hence there continues to be an embodied context for Self-Other-environment interactions. Moreover, in many virtual environments, Self is framed within a different form of embodiment, a body that is produced through an avatar, iconography or text (e.g. Robinson, 2007; Taylor, 2002). However, Symbolic Interaction approaches can also be applied where no obvious form of embodiment occurs: much of the research to date applying Symbolic Interaction to virtual environments has been with respect to the interactions with others on blogs, diaries, social networking sites, etc. (e.g. the analysis of home pages conducted by Papacharissi, 2002).

With respect to Activity Theory, its application has been used primarily in technology design, with applications to understanding experience still nascent. Nevertheless, the emphasis placed by theories considering the individual in context on the momentary interactions between people, others and ever-changing environments, has been recognised as offering potential to illuminate psychological phenomena with respect to computer-mediated communication (CMC) and Cyberspace (Brivio et al., 2010; Galimberti & Riva, 2001; Riva & Galimberti, 1997). This is because they offer a way in which to understand the role of New Technology in psychological experience without over-emphasising the technology itself; rather than envisaging technology as a static fixed environment that impacts on the user and hence the Self, they consider it as an environment with which the user interacts, and through which both user and environment are continually changed.

Hence, it can be seen that the Symbolic Interaction and individual in context theories each offer insights into how the Self emerges through the momentary interactions between Self, Others and environment, mediated by symbols and tools. They potentially illuminate the experience of the Virtual Self, by indicating that it is a Self that emerges through action, interaction and performance in virtual environments. This suggests that in order to address the overall research question "What is the experience of the Self in virtual worlds?" we need to consider the day-to-day activities of people, presentation of Self in everyday life, and the interactions that occur between Self, Other and environment.

2.6. The performance, activity and interaction of the Virtual Self: research to date

The intrinsic interactional nature of the emergence of the Self is indicated by the theories of Symbolic Interaction and those that place the individual in context, and highlights how presentation of Self, day-to-day activities and interactions between Self, Other and environment, are all ways in which Virtual Self experience can be considered. To date, evaluation of the experience of Virtual Self has been with respect to particular aspects of being a person online. For present purposes, research related to these aspects and included here is divided into the categories Performance, Activity and Interaction. This is not meant to suggest that previous research has necessarily been conducted with these aspects in mind; however, by categorising them thus, it indicates their contribution to the understandings of Self outlined by the Symbolic Interaction and individual in context approaches considered above.

2.6.1. Performance of the Virtual Self

The performance of the Self online has been the subject of extensive research. This may be because of concerns arising from the fact that the anonymity provided by virtual environments and the separation of the Self from a physical body allows Role Play and Self-experimentation in ways not possible in the physical world (Junglas et al., 2007; Turkle, 1995). In virtual worlds the avatar is the crucial medium through which the Self is performed since it is the representation of the person (Childs, 2011). There are a number of aspects to this performance, which have been considered in relation to virtual worlds specifically, and virtual environments generally. These include presence, Self-representation, Role Play, and the experience of using an avatar.

2.6.1.1. Presence: definitions, and research concerning the role of the Other

While "presence" is not concerned with the outward performance of Self, it is concerned with the situation of the Self in virtual environments: it is the term used to describe the sense of "being there", the subjective experience of being in one place even when situated in another (Heeter, 1992). Originating in the term "telepresence" used to describe the experience of using Virtual Reality technology and remote robots (Huang & Alessi, 1999), "presence" has also come to describe the experience of being in virtual environments, including virtual worlds. While its characteristics are subject

to debate (e.g. Lee, 2004), it essentially has three aspects: "personal" (the sense of being physically present), "environmental" (the extent to which the environment reacts to the person) and "social" (the existence of others in the environment) (Heeter, 1992). In particular, "self-presence" (Biocca, 1997) is the mental model people have of themselves in a virtual world in terms of their body, physiological states, emotional states, perceived traits, and identity (Ratan & Hasler, 2009).

Research in the realm of presence most often takes an experimental approach, involving specially constructed environments in existing virtual worlds, computer displays, or the physical world, within which to explore the components of, and influences on, presence using self-presence questionnaires to assess the experience (e.g. Ratan & Hasler, 2009; Witmer & Singer, 1998). Although not specifically considering the actual experience of being in virtual worlds *per se*, such research is beginning to uncover the role of the avatar and the Other in the experience of presence. For example, in terms of the avatar, Nowak & Biocca (2003) use a computer generated virtual environment that reveals that the more realistic the avatar with whom the participant interacts the greater the sense of presence, while a study by Bailenson, Yee, Merget, & Schroeder (2006) indicates that in a dyadic interaction using videoconferencing the sense of presence is greater, but self-disclosure is less, than if using an avatar. Such findings suggest that ***while avatar realism increases presence, a degree of anonymity or separation from the physical world promotes personal involvement with another person.*** Indeed the study by Bailenson et al. suggests the most self-disclosure occurs in text-only environments. Hence this instance underlines the role of the Other in the experience of presence, and implies that performance in terms of self-disclosure is to some degree dependent on the extent of presence.

2.6.1.2. Self-representation: appearance, behaviour and presentation in virtual worlds and other virtual environments

Within virtual worlds the avatar plays a prominent role in Self-representation. Bailenson et al. (2006) describe the avatar as "a digital representation of a human utilised in immersive virtual environments" (p.361). While designed to represent humans, avatars are not necessarily human in design themselves; one survey reported by Au (2010) indicates that over half (56 per cent) of Second Life users prefer to use a "non-realistic" avatar (i.e. not based on their physical world Self or using contemporary "realistic" styles and fashion).

Research in this area considers reasons for avatar choice, and the relationship between the appearance and behaviour of the avatar and that of its user in the physical

world. A "think aloud" experiment conducted by Vasalou et al. (2008) using the avatar function available through Yahoo! Avatars indicates that while some experiment, on the whole people choose avatars that bear a resemblance of themselves in physical life. However, approaches with more ecological validity and involving research among virtual world residents in naturalistic settings suggest a more complex scenario. Research conducted by Ducheneaut, Wen, Yee, & Wadley (2009) using questionnaires in three virtual worlds, Second Life, World of Warcraft and Maple Story, suggests that in fact the avatars people create tend to be a leaner, younger version of themselves, and are used in ways that exhibit more idealised personality and social-emotional characteristics. Similar research conducted by Gilbert, Foss, & Murphy (2011), but exclusively in Second Life, supports these findings, indicating that avatars tend to be more extraverted, agreeable, socially connected, and satisfied than the person in the physical world. It also indicates that amongst men in particular, using avatars of the opposite sex is prominent: 11 per cent of their male sample had primary avatars (the avatar created first) as female. Indeed, the fact that people can have more than one username or account with a particular virtual environment gives potential for greater experimentation with respect to avatars; for example the research conducted by Gilbert et al. also showed that a third of their male participants had an "alt" (alternative avatar) that was female. Their research suggests that ***the primary avatar tends to exhibit stable and persistent personality traits, and is used as a way of extending the physical self into the virtual world, whereas alts tend to be even more anonymous and used for pragmatic purposes*** (such as creating).

While research concerning representation in virtual worlds emphasises avatar appearance, representation of the Self also occurs in non-graphical virtual environments such as blogs, Social Networking Sites, homepages and fora. For example, the research by Papacharissi (2002) employs Goffman's approach (1959) combined with content analysis to show that with the various elements available to them (text, photographs, URL links etc.), people use homepages to present a particular "slice" of themselves. Meanwhile questionnaire research among bloggers conducted by Brivio et al. (2010) indicates the extent to which they experiment with aspects of presentation such as username in response to reader feedback. While such examples may not be concerned with virtual worlds *per se*, they offer some resonance, since usernames and profiles which contain text and other content are an aspect of virtual worlds' participation as prominent as the avatar itself.

2.6.1.3. Role Play: experimenting with Self

A particular aspect of virtual worlds where performance of the Self is paramount is that of Role Play; this involves creating appearances, personas and behaviour patterns to enact a character. Research such as that conducted by Ducheneaut et al. (2009), which indicates that people tend to choose an avatar that is younger and more slender than the person they are in the physical world, suggests that to some extent Role Play permeates all experiences within virtual worlds. In part this is due to virtual worlds having a multiple history that includes video games, MUDs and MMORPGs where Role Play is intrinsic. However, formal Role Play, conducted within specific guidelines regarding characterisation and setting, also occurs both within designated areas of virtual worlds (science fiction, ancient civilisation, or Victorian themed areas in Second Life, for example) or as specifically themed virtual worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft).

While formal Role Play may adhere to strict guidelines, there is nevertheless scope for experimentation: Turkle's observations of, and interviews with, Role Players in textual MUDs (Turkle, 1995) indicate that it allows people to experiment with identity, behaviours and attitudes not necessarily possible in the physical world. This is supported by Bessiere et al. (2007) who use a survey method among players of World of Warcraft to demonstrate the relationship between what they term the "actual Self", the "ideal Self" and the Virtual Self. They find that players, particularly if they are more depressed or have lower self-esteem, create characters more similar to what they consider to be their "ideal Self", and that has more favourable attributes than their "actual Self".

2.6.1.4. The avatar: the medium for virtual world participation and an entity in its own right

While there is research that considers how avatars act as representations of their users, the relationship between the user and their avatar, and the experience of the avatar as an entity in its own right, has also been the topic of research.

In the first instance, the relationship between a user and their avatar may be relatively simple: in interviews with Second Life fashion designers, research conducted by Liao (2011) indicates that for some users the avatar is merely a doll to be played with and dressed up. Other research suggests that there may be more complex relationships between the user and their avatar. For example, the phenomenological analysis conducted by Veerapen (2011), indicates that the avatar is both separate to the user while at the same time being a part of them, an extension or prosthesis of their

being. Her findings suggest interesting parallels with the Meadian approach of the Self as reflecting back on itself from the viewpoint of the Other (Mead, 1956); in this case the Virtual Self in the virtual world is reflected upon by the Self in the physical world, so the user becomes the Other to themselves as experienced through the avatar. Other research positions the avatar as the embodiment of the Self in virtual worlds. From interviews conducted as part of an ethnographic study of the Dreamscape virtual world, Taylor (2002) suggests that all activity conducted using an avatar is embodied. Direct use of avatars is made in positioning and proximity in relation to other avatars in the context of friendship, privacy or confrontation, or to experiment with gender, for example.

Some research shows that the avatar is the converse of a passive doll, and can in fact demonstrate influence on behaviour and perceived self-attributes. In the first instance, the avatar shape and appearance can have an effect on the behaviour of the person operating the avatar, and the behaviour of surrounding avatars. Research monitoring the behaviour of avatars in World of Warcraft conducted by Yee et al. (2009) indicates that avatar height and attractiveness influences game performance, and infers that users of tall attractive avatars become, and are expected to be, better game players. Moreover, the work conducted by Taylor (2002) also indicates that many virtual world users feel that ***their avatar is almost autonomous and behaves in unforeseen ways; this is seen as an unexpected product of the avatar being perceived, and interacted with, by others.***

2.6.2. Activity of the Virtual Self

While avatars may have a key role in the behaviour it is used for and inspires, behaviour and activities in virtual environments ultimately depend on the users' motivations; as noted by Wallace, "the most important mediator of behaviour in these different Internet environments is the purpose of the people who visit or inhabit them" (Wallace, 1999, p.9). Hence analysis of motivations, behaviour and activities in virtual environments can provide insight into the role that they play in the experience of the Virtual Self. This section presents an overview of typologies that have been constructed with respect to motivations, behaviour and activities in virtual environments. Typology approaches are useful since, besides indicating the kinds of activities that occur in virtual worlds, they provide an outline of the typical types of player.

Potentially the longest standing and most well-known of virtual environment user typologies is Bartle's Player Types (1986). Bartle suggests four types, derived from analysis of a discussion regarding a particular MUD, which arose as a result of the question "What do people want out of a MUD?" The typology is outlined in Figure 2.1, and comprises: Socialiser, Achiever, Killer and Explorer. Bartle indicates that these groups act to inhibit one another; hence, for example, a player cannot simultaneously be a Socialiser and an Achiever.

Figure 2.1. Bartle's Player Types (based on Bartle, 1986).

Player Type	Description
Socialiser	Use the game's communicative facilities, and apply the role-playing that these engender, as a context in which to converse (and otherwise interact) with their fellow players.
Achiever	Give themselves game-related goals and vigorously set out to achieve them. This usually means accumulating and disposing of large quantities of high value treasure, or cutting a swathe through monsters.
Killer	Use the tools provided by the game to cause distress to other players. Where permitted, this usually involves acquiring some weapon and applying it enthusiastically to the persona of another player in the game world.
Explorer	Try to find out as much as they can about the virtual world. Although initially this means mapping its topology (i.e. exploring the MUD's breadth), later it advances to experimentation with its physics (i.e. exploring the MUD's depth).

In order to establish some empirical substantiation for Bartle's typology, Yee (2006a) uses it as the basis for a questionnaire survey among MMORPG players. His factor analysis of the resulting data indicates that there are ten subcomponents to participation in online games which in turn can be clustered into three main components: Achievement, Social and Immersion. The subcomponent details are provided in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2. Yee's subcomponents to participation in online games, revealed by factor analysis (based on Yee, 2006a, p.773-774).

Achievement	Social	Immersion
Advancement: the desire to gain power, progress rapidly, and accumulate in-game symbols of wealth or status.	Socialising: having an interest in helping and chatting with other players.	Discovery: finding and knowing things that most other players don't know about.
Mechanics: having an interest in analysing rules and system in order to optimise character performance.	Relationship: the desire to form long-term meaningful relationships with others.	Role Playing: creating a persona with a background story and interacting with other players to create an improvised story.
Competition: the desire to challenge and compete with others.	Teamwork: deriving satisfaction from being part of a group effort.	Customisation: having an interest in customising the appearance of their character.
		Escapism: using the online environment to avoid thinking about real life problems.

While Yee's analysis presents similar types of game playing, it indicates that Bartle's assumption that motivations inhibit one another may be mistaken: for example, it indicates that a player scoring high on achievement may also score high on social.

Also in the context of MUD users, Utz (2000) has constructed a typology based on a questionnaire investigating online friendships, MUD use and attitude towards MUDding, sociability, and scepticism towards CMC. Using a cluster analysis on the results, she produces a typology consisting of four types: Role Player, Game Player, Involved and Sceptic. The typology is outlined in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3. Utz's types of MUDders (based on Cole & Griffiths, 2007; Utz, 2000).

Type of MUDder	Description
Role Player	Interested in playing roles.
Game Player	Interested in having adventures and playing games.
Involved	Interested either in online meetings with virtual partners and in chatting with them or in development of virtual environments
Sceptic	Disinterested in most of the features of MUDs, playing for less time per week, and refusing to identify themselves with any group of those playing MUDs.

The analysis conducted by Utz indicates that the groups are not necessarily discrete; for example Sceptics score highly on both scepticism and Role Play measures.

The typologies considered here have been with reference to online game players, and hence may have limited application to more open-ended or self-determined virtual worlds. However, to our knowledge no similar typologies exist for the self-determined variant.

2.6.3. Interaction of the Virtual Self

Interactions with other users and their environment are both the basis from which the Self emerges and an important aspect of presence in virtual environments. Four aspects of Virtual Self interactions are considered here: the impact of technology; communication processes; the form and characteristics of social relationships; the evolution of usage over time.

2.6.3.1. The impact of technology: reduced social cues

The fact that virtual environments are accessed and experienced through specific technology is seen to impact on how people interact and the result of those interactions, in particular the reduced cues that characterise it (anonymity, emphasis on text, the mediation through avatars, etc.). One view is the Cues-Filtered Out Theory

(Kim, 2000) which posits that the lack of cues in CMC encourages anti-normative and uninhibited behaviour, so people can express themselves more freely. For example, in their study of email communication in a Fortune 500 organisation, Sproull & Kiesler (1986) find that decreased social context cues has a deregulating effect on communication, and that more information is passed through electronic communication than any other medium. Hence, freedom from social cues leads to liberation from the social dynamics relating to status, appearance, age, gender, and race, which may normally occur in face-to-face (FtF) interaction, but simultaneously leads to fewer socioemotional bonds.

Another view is offered by the Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects (Postmes et al., 1998; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995), which indicates that anonymity actually reinforces existing social boundaries. This model, based on experimental studies of online discussion groups, indicates people accept in-group norms and identity, and reject out-group norms and identity, leading to increased stereotyping and bias between groups. Meanwhile, contrary to the notion that CMC leads to reduced social bonds, Walther (1996) adopts a Social Information Processing perspective to argue that they are actually increased. Using longitudinal comparisons between groups meeting FtF and using CMC, he indicates that the technology is not inherently impersonal but "hyperpersonal": interlocutors are simultaneously presenting a socially favourable image of themselves while idealizing the image of the Other. However, more recent work indicates the impact of reduced social cues on trust. Based on interviews with chat room and virtual world users, Henderson & Gilding (2004) highlight how the anonymity and lack of social cues leads to a high lack of trust, and hence users maintain pseudonymous identities, distrust Internet friendships, and maintain separation between online and offline worlds.

2.6.3.2. Communication processes: technological mediation and constraints

The nature of the technology means that CMC has characteristics not necessarily present in FtF communication. While FtF communication occurs in a "co-operative environment constantly regulated by mutual adjustment and correction" (Riva, 2002, p.581), CMC imposes special conditions that reduce co-operation potential: not just reduced social cues, but the ability to use the technology itself. Based on textual virtual environments, research conducted using the Social Information Processing perspective (e.g. Riva, 2002; Walther, 1996) indicates that these special conditions are overcome through a number of factors: relational motivators (i.e. a motivation to relate with interlocutors); communicating over time to build up familiarity with technology and

other users; message encoding (i.e. being able to convey content within constraints of the medium); message decoding and impression formation; and using knowledge-generation strategies (e.g. interrogation and disclosure, deception detection). A particular aspect of message encoding and decoding is the conveying of emotion; in her analysis of online friendships using questionnaires among MUD users, Utz (2000) identifies three forms of emotional expression: emoticons (graphic representations of facial expressions), social verbs (i.e. feelings e.g. smile, hug, sigh) and emotes (narrative descriptions of non-verbal behaviour).

Meanwhile, although the dependence on text in virtual environments imposes constraints, more recent research indicates that when communication is mediated via an avatar, conventional nonverbal social norms continue to persist. For example, using results arising from their observational study of avatars in Second Life, Yee, Bailenson, Urbanek, Chang, & Merget (2007) show that established gender norms in interpersonal distance and eye gaze transfer into virtual environments: male-male dyads have larger interpersonal distance, and maintain less eye contact, than female-female.

2.6.3.3. Online relationships: their role and comparisons with the physical world

Despite CMC imposing conditions upon interlocutors, there is extensive evidence for the development of interpersonal relationships of various forms, including community participation, platonic friendships, and sexual relationships. The Interpersonal Relationships Questionnaire conducted among users of chat rooms by Peris et al. (2002) indicates that relationships developed online are seen as healthy and a complement to FtF relationships, while findings from an online questionnaire among MMORPG players, conducted by Cole & Griffiths (2007) indicates that although the focus of MMORPG virtual worlds is game-play, the social element is an important aspect of the experience, and leads to life-long friendships and romantic partnerships that sometimes extend into the physical world. Moreover, relationships are not just built and maintained between people who have met online; in his survey of MMORPG users, Yee (2006b) finds that many players participate with a family member or romantic partner.

Other research seeks to explore how relationships conducted in virtual environments compare to those in the physical world. For example, a questionnaire administered among Second Life users by Yi, Weiquan, & Yan (2010) indicates that the closeness of a relationship conducted in a virtual world is similar to that in the physical world, and is attributable to perceived needs fulfilment, relationships

irreplaceableness and resource investment. Another questionnaire administered among users of Second Life by Gilbert, Murphy, & Ávalos (2011) indicates that a majority of participants, who are in intimate relationships conducted within Second Life, see their relationships as real and genuine, and not a form or Role Play or game-play. However, the same research indicates that, in cases where people have intimate relationships in both Second Life and the physical world, people tend to report more idealised personality traits for their virtual world partner, with the virtual relationship an emotional competitor to that in the physical world.

2.6.3.4. Evolution of online involvement over time

Changes over time give insight into behaviour (Bailenson & Yee, 2006), but there are few empirical studies in virtual environments that track residents to observe changes in usage of and interactions in virtual environments. There are numerous examples of ethnographical research of chat rooms and MUDs (e.g. Markham, 1998) and virtual worlds (e.g. Bainbridge, 2010; Boellstorff, 2008), which implicitly consider their research fields over extended periods, but do not necessarily explicitly consider the changes in experience over that time.

One example of a specifically longitudinal experiment is conducted by Harris, Bailenson, Nielsen, & Yee (2009). Employing a tracking object attached to avatars in Second Life that measures a number of variables including movement, action and chat, the researchers have monitored participants (all of whom had not used Second Life previously) over a six week period. The study indicates over time people make more friends, join more groups and spend more time in populated areas. It also indicates that simultaneously they become more stable and less experimental, spending more time in one location, and conducting activities that involve less chat.

2.7. Developing a social psychological approach for the present research

In order to begin the task of devising a strategy for addressing the research question, this section considers the research approaches hitherto, and provides an outline of a social psychological approach for considering the Virtual Self, the Social Psychology of Cyberplaces.

2.7.1. Summarising the approaches conducted to date, and identifying the opportunities

The theoretical and research approaches to conceptualising the development and experience of aspects of the Virtual Self are wide-ranging. Figure 2.4 provides an overview of the findings discussed in Section 2.6, and includes 27 unique pieces of research. The approaches taken by the research can be categorised in several ways.

In the first instance, they can be categorised in terms of the kind of data they elicit, hence there are approaches that produce data that is quantitative, qualitative or a mixture of both. A large proportion of research considered here aims to understand the extent to which particular phenomena occur in virtual environments and the relationships between the phenomena, and hence take a quantitative approach (e.g. Bessiere et al., 2007; Gilbert, Foss, et al., 2011; Utz, 2000). Others are more concerned with the range of phenomena and how it is experienced, and so use qualitative techniques (e.g. Turkle, 1995).

The research can also be categorised according to the extent they use experimental techniques or access actual virtual environment phenomena "in the field". A small proportion of the research seeks to model or replicate phenomena occurring in virtual environments generally; these use experimental or quasi-experimental techniques and create bespoke virtual environments (e.g. Nowak & Biocca, 2003) or situations (e.g. Harris et al., 2009; Postmes et al., 1998). However, the majority is conducted among residents of virtual environments or observing behaviour in existing virtual environments, i.e. chat rooms, MUDs and virtual worlds.

Research can also be categorised in terms of the perspective it takes with respect to virtual environment users. A minority take a purely outsider approach and conduct research on behaviour with no reference to the experience of the user (e.g. Yee et al., 2009). The vast majority are concerned with the experience of the user, but take a questionnaire approach circumscribing and measuring the user experience in ways imposed by the researcher, i.e. an outsider perspective (e.g. Yee, 2006b). However, a minority adopts a "pure" insider perspective, conducting interviews that access virtual environment users' experience in ways determined by the user and/or with the researcher acting as a participant in a specific environment (e.g. Taylor, 2002; Veerapen, 2011). The approaches can also be catalogued in terms of the environment they focus on. The majority focus on synchronous, such as MUDs and MMORPGs (e.g. Utz, 2000; Yee et al., 2009), with some examples of research in virtual worlds, in particular Second Life (e.g. Gilbert, Foss, et al., 2011).

This analysis indicates the range of perspectives possible in addressing the present research question. In particular, it indicates that while the insider perspective of experience is often the focus of consideration, it may be structured in ways imposed by the researcher. Moreover, they often adopt a deductive approach, testing hypotheses developed from previous research or existing theories. Given the focus of the present research is the experience of the Virtual Self, ***an approach is sought that puts the virtual world user and the insider perspective at the heart of the research programme, rather than a perspective imposed from the outside.***

2.7.2. Social Psychology of Cyberplaces

An approach that puts the user of virtual environments at the centre of analysis is developed by Riva & Galimberti (1997, 2001) and Brivio et al. (2010), the Social Psychology of Cyberplaces. It is based on the premise that CMC users are not merely technology users but social actors with their own aims and autonomy in situations. This approach proposes that it is insufficient to consider the phenomenon of Cyberspace as a whole, because the Internet is comprised of myriad non-fixed worlds characterised by specific tools, languages and practices which mediate the users' experience (Brivio et al., 2010). It emphasises the mediated interactions of the user in the context of the social worlds they inhabit in Cyberspace, i.e. Cyberplaces (Waskul, 2003). In particular, it integrates three theoretical realms and three levels of analysis: the three theoretical realms are the actors in mediated interactions, the objects or artefacts that mediate, and the interactions themselves, while the levels of analysis are the general social context, everyday situations, and interaction with the environment.

In essence, this approach draws mainly upon the theories that consider the individual in context; however, as already highlighted, these approaches have in common with Symbolic Interaction the emphasis on the Self as emerging from the moment-to-moment activities and interactions with Others, through the mediation of tools, in particular contexts. This suggests that the Social Psychology of Cyberplaces approach can be fruitfully augmented by Symbolic Interactionist approaches, and still closely adhere to its core premise. It also re-emphasises that ***addressing the present research question by focussing on user perspective and experience needs to encompass the role of performance of the Self, day-to-day activities and interactions between Self, Other and environment.***

Figure 2.4. Overview of research discussed in Section 2.6, including aspect of Self addressed, theorist, finding, methodological technique and the overall approach taken

Aspect of Virtual Self	Theorist	Finding	Methodological technique	Approach
Presence	Nowak & Biocca (2003)	Avatar realism increases presence	Simulated environment	Experimental, outsider
	Bailenson et al. (2006)	Self-disclosure with anonymity	Video-conferencing	Experimental, outsider
Self-representation	Vasalou et al. (2008)	Avatars resemble physical Self	Yahoo! Avatar "think aloud" experiment	Experimental, insider
	Ducheneaut et al. (2009)	Avatars as idealised version of Self	Questionnaire among virtual world users	Quantitative
	Gilbert, Foss, et al. (2011)	Experimentation with alts	Questionnaire among Second Life users	Quantitative
	Papacharissi (2002)	Presentation of Self through homepages	Content analysis of homepages	Quantitative
	Brivio et al. (2010)	Self-presentation responds to others' feedback	Questionnaires among bloggers	Quantitative and qualitative
Role Play	Turkle (1995)	People experiment with identity, behaviour and attitudes	Observations of and interviews with textual MUD users	Qualitative, inductive, ethnographical
	Bessiere et al. (2007)	Characters are close to ideal Self	Survey among players of World of Warcraft	Quantitative
Avatar	Liao (2011)	Range of avatar relationships from doll to connected to the physical world Self	Interviews among Second Life fashion bloggers	Qualitative
	Veerapen (2011)	Avatar as simultaneously separate but part of the Self	Reflexive analysis of avatar usage in Second life	Qualitative, phenomenological, insider
	Taylor (2002)	Avatar as embodiment for activity, avatar as autonomous	Interviews among users of Dreamscape	Qualitative, participant observation, insider
	Yee et al. (2009)	Avatar appearance influences game-playing ability	Behavioural monitoring in World of Warcraft	Observation, quantitative, outsider
Activities	Bartle (1986)	Four types of MUD player	Analysis of MUD chat discussion	Qualitative, insider
	Yee (2006a)	Ten subcomponents of MMORPG participation	Factor analysis of questionnaires among MMORPG players	Quantitative
	Utz (2000)	Four types of MUD player	Cluster analysis of questionnaires among MUD users	Quantitative

Aspect of Virtual Self	Theorist	Finding	Methodological technique	Approach
Technology	Sproull & Kiesler (1986)	Decreased social context deregulates communication, liberation from social dynamics	Questionnaires on email content in a Fortune 500 company	Quantitative
	Postmes et al. (1998)	Anonymity and reduced social cues shifts salience from the individual to group	Experiments using online discussion groups	Experimental, outsider
	Walther (1996)	Online communications are hyperpersonal	Longitudinal comparisons between FtF and CMC group meetings using observations	Quantitative
	Henderson & Gilding (2004)	Anonymity leads to lack of trust	Interviews with chat room virtual world users	Qualitative
Communication processes	Walther (1996)	Conditions imposed by CMC overcome through specific factors	Longitudinal comparisons between FtF and CMC group meetings using observations	Quantitative
	Utz (2000)	Encoding and decoding of messages and intent through specific practices	Cluster analysis of questionnaires among MUD users	Quantitative
	Yee et al. (2007)	FtF NVB social norms transfer to avatar interactions	Observations of behaviour in Second Life	Quantitative, outsider
Online relationships	Peris et al. (2002)	Online relationships as healthy and complementing FtF relationships	Questionnaire among chat room users	Quantitative
	Cole & Griffiths (2007)	Socialising important in game-play, leading to friendships and romantic relationships	Online questionnaire among MMORPG users	Quantitative
	Yee (2006b)	Participation in MMORPGs occurs with family members and romantic partners	Questionnaire among MMORPG users	Quantitative
	Yi et al. (2010)	Relationship closeness in virtual worlds dependent on similar factors as in physical world	Questionnaire among Second Life users	Quantitative
	Gilbert, Murphy, et al. (2011)	Virtual relationships are real and genuine, but idealised and an emotional threat to physical world relationships	Questionnaire among Second Life users	Quantitative
Evolution of online involvement	Harris et al. (2009)	People stabilise in their usage over time	Behavioural monitoring using an object attached to Second Life avatars	Quasi-experimental, quantitative

2.8. Conceptualising experience of the Self for the present research: the development of subsidiary research questions

The broad question that the present research seeks to address is:

> What is the experience of the Self in virtual worlds?

In order to develop an approach to addressing this question it is necessary to conceptualise "experience of the Self".

The discussion thusfar indicates that there are potentially a number of aspects of experience in virtual worlds that comprise experience of the Self and hence require investigation. The first aspect is the **presentation of the Self** in virtual worlds, specifically the avatar, username and profiles: research to date lacks the insider perspective on the choices people make and the meanings that these elements hold for them. The second aspect is the **activities undertaken** in virtual worlds: while typologies for game-specific environments exist, more work is needed to catalogue the kinds of activities and motivations that users of virtual worlds have. The third aspect is the **experience of being a virtual world user**, their interaction with the environment and others in the environment, and the processes that occur: while some research exists concerning how people interact with others, the role of socialising and relationships, much of it is from quantitative research concerning non-virtual worlds, or considers elements in isolation, meaning that the insider perspective of experience in virtual worlds is lacking. Another key aspect of Virtual Self experience is the **relationship between the various social worlds inhabited**: the Social Psychology of Cyberplaces approach advocates the importance of location of the Self in Cyberspace, but more information on how experience of and in physical and virtual social worlds impinge on one another and experience of Self is required. The final key aspect of Virtual Self experience is the **evolution of virtual world involvement**: as already indicated longitudinal research is lacking even though information on the changing involvement with virtual worlds over time can provide insight into the experience of Self.

Hence, in the light of the discussion thusfar and for the purpose of addressing the broad research question, a number of subsidiary questions must be addressed:

> How is the Self represented in virtual worlds?
> What are the activities undertaken in virtual worlds?
> What are the processes involved in being a Virtual Self in virtual worlds?
> In what ways do physical and virtual worlds interact with each other and the experience of Self?
> What is the trajectory of experience of the Virtual Self in virtual worlds?

2.9. Conclusions

This chapter has provided a theoretical context for the present research programme. It has highlighted the multiple historical nature of the Virtual Self and how the experience of being virtual is not necessarily confined to the recent past; the key component in virtual experience is interaction with and through symbolic spaces which exist in many forms and through time. It has also presented how the Self is a product of interaction with others and the environment in which it is situated, and mediated by cultural tools and symbols, by outlining theories of Symbolic Interaction and those that focus on the individual in context. It has outlined how these approaches may be applied to the Self in virtual environments, before going on to analyse research with respect to the Self conducted thusfar. By categorising existing research in terms of Performance, Activity and Interaction, and examining its theoretical and methodological approaches, the chapter has identified ***a need for an insider perspective and user-centric approach*** to considering virtual worlds specifically. Using these findings and the Social Psychology of Cyberplaces as a guide, the chapter has outlined how in addressing the broad research question it is necessary to consider how the Virtual Self is represented, activities undertaken, processes that occur, the trajectory of involvement, and the social worlds inhabited, within the context of virtual worlds.

3.Developing methodological approaches

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter indicates that there is potential for developing a deeper understanding of the role of virtual worlds through the lens of social psychology, emphasising the user of these worlds. It highlights how the overall research question is:

> What is the experience of the Self in virtual worlds?

It also demonstrates that to address this question it is necessary to consider five subsidiary questions:

> How is the Self represented in virtual worlds?
> What are the activities undertaken in virtual worlds?
> What are the processes involved in being a Virtual Self in virtual worlds?
> In what ways do physical and virtual worlds interact with each other and the experience of Self?
> What is the trajectory of experience of the Virtual Self in virtual worlds?

This chapter develops the methodological approach for addressing these. It does this by: discussing the social psychological approach undertaken, the role of Second Life as the field of study, and of the researcher as a Second Life resident; summarising the programme of research and the methods used to address each subsidiary question; and providing a rationale and strategy for each method.

3.2.Developing a social psychological method for the present research

The review of research in Chapter 2 indicates that while for the most part historical analysis of aspects of the Self in virtual environments seeks to conceptualise the user's perspective, there is also a tendency to circumscribe that perspective from the outside, based on researcher hypotheses or expectations. This indicates there is opportunity for research to consider more the Virtual Self in ways emphasising the perspective of Virtual World users. Given an objective of understanding the experience of the user, and since "the ultimate goal of qualitative research is to understand those being studied from their perspective" (Gorman, Clayton, Rice-Lively, & Gorman, 2007, p.23), the methodological emphasis for the present research is qualitative in nature. More specifically, the approach is to "borrow" from the ethnographic tradition. The

remainder of this section outlines the ethnographic stance, the role of conducting research inworld, and the approach taken for this research.

3.2.1. The methodological basis for the present research: digital ethnography

Ethnography is essentially an anthropological method, but has been applied to other aspects of social science fields. It is an inherently open-ended practice, based on participation, observation and research reflexivity, exploratory and unstructured in nature, focusing on a small number of cases and interpretation of meanings, and involving a range of methods including participant-observation, interviews and documentary analysis (Kozinets, 2002; Hammersley &Atkinson, 2007). Chapter 2 outlines how the Internet and virtual environments in Cyberspace are sites of emerging social groups, cultures and communities with specific meanings and practices associated with them, which makes an ethnographical approach appropriate for developing an understanding of the Virtual Self.

Numerous ethnographies of virtual environments have been conducted, involving researcher immersion into the cultures of the environments which they are analysing; examples include Boellstorff's study of Second Life (Boellstorff, 2008) and Rheingold's analysis of the WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link) computer conferencing system (Rheingold, 2000). Such studies examine many aspects of the specific cultures they are concerned with, including issues of identity, community, economy, and relationships. An analysis of this scope is not the purpose of the present study however, but to focus specifically on the Virtual Self experience. Nevertheless, the general approach of immersion into the research field does provide the insight the present objectives require.

How ethnography is conceptualised in relation to the Internet, Cyberspace and virtual environments is diverse, and takes a number of guises (Dominguez et al., 2007). In the first instance, some researchers such as Boellstorff simply take the model of physical world ethnography and apply it to the specific virtual environment, with all research conducted within the virtual realm in question. Other approaches place ethnographies of virtual environments as a specific discipline, and give it labels such as "netnography" (Kozinets, 2002) or "cyberethnography" (Rybas & Gajjala, 2007). These approaches emphasise that conventional ethnography does not specifically account for virtual environments and that there is a need to foreground the specific factors that impact on the culture of virtual environments and conducting research in

them; these include the anonymity of users and the technological mediation of social interactions. A third approach, **"digital ethnography"**, does not consider cultures of virtual environments *per se*, but is concerned with the tools of ethnography and the opportunities that digital media offer for understanding human culture as a whole in context, and for extending the analysis beyond geographic and temporal boundaries (Hollan & Hutchins, 2009; Masten & Plowman, 2003; Murthy, 2008).

This third approach of digital ethnography provides the stance for the present research, since it assumes technology is a means to understanding the person in their environment, rather than the apparent focus on the environment itself of other ethnographic approaches. Hence, taking a digital ethnographical stance places the Self at the centre of the research. The present research seeks to be immersed in the field of study, i.e. virtual worlds, and hence research is conducted in the field, i.e. "inworld" in virtual world user terminology.

3.2.2. The role of researcher immersion and inworld research

The role of immersion and conducting research inworld in understanding virtual environment phenomena is of particular interest. In fact, sometimes it is appropriate to conduct research of virtual aspects using techniques and methodologies situated in the physical world. For example, among a range of techniques Turkle (1996, 2005, 2011) has conducted physical world interviews with users of virtual worlds, MUDs, MMORPGs, social networking sites and other virtual environments, as well as observing them as they participate. Although such research may allow considerable insight, it could be argued as adopting a purely outside perspective, since it depends upon the ability and willingness of virtual environment users to convey aspects of their lives to the researcher that are normally concealed from others, and that are situated in an environment the researcher may not be familiar with.

On the other hand, there are advantages to conducting research within the virtual environment itself (Henderson & Gilding, 2004). It allows interaction with participants in their "own territory" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), and offers ecological validity, since it investigates phenomena in the environments in which they occur. Moreover, it guarantees participant anonymity, given its reliance on usernames and avatars; this is important for participants maintaining separation between the physical and virtual worlds, or those who may find it easier to reveal personal information through "intermediation of screens and pseudonyms" (Rheingold, 2000, p.12). Inworld research gives access to participants irrespective of physical location or cultural

environment, impossible in the physical world without extensive travel and expense (Herbert, 2001). Nevertheless, there are also some disadvantages to researching inworld, in particular with respect to communication: since the interaction medium is the avatar, and is dependent on whatever technical constraints the virtual world has, it lacks the non-verbal cues available in face-to-face interactions (Herbert, 2001), and hence may offer a comparative shortfall in data.

A key issue for research conducted within virtual environments is the role of immersion. Everyday virtual life is constituted by practices within a technological framework particular to the world under consideration; it takes time to understand these practices and learn how to interact smoothly with others. Easy access to online communities make it tempting to practice "hit and run research" (Knobel, 2003, p.192), but this then leads to scathing and negative comments from community members, and a consequent reluctance to participate in other research, as well as a lack of insight into the phenomena under consideration. It is important that an inworld researcher pays attention to what Hine calls "self-presentation", establishing themselves as "a *bone fide* researcher and trustworthy recipient of confidences" (Hine, 2005, p.20). This means that time should be spent inworld before any formal research is conducted in order to be familiar with the environment being researched (Minocha, Tran, & Reeves, 2010). All of this emphasises the role of immersion in the research field.

3.2.3. The present research: the inductive approach of ethnography, but not grounded theory

Although the open-ended, exploratory, and hence inductive nature of ethnography lends it to a grounded theory approach, this is not the approach of the present research. In this particular case, there are many existing theories of how the Self emerges and conceptualisations of the experience of Self in virtual environments, and so a grounded theory approach is unnecessary. Nevertheless, more insight is needed into how these theories and conceptualisations may be applied or not to specific experience of virtual worlds. The approaches of Social Psychology of Cyberplaces, the theories of Symbolic Interaction, and those considering the individual in context, in combination with approaches from research conducted to date in various virtual environments, are used to inform the present research. These offer a framework within which to consider the experience of the Self, i.e. in terms of Self-representation, activity, processes, usage trajectory, and social worlds. Within this framework the research takes the inductive

approach of ethnography, and uses the findings that emerge to understand the experience of the Virtual Self in virtual worlds.

3.3. Focusing on Second Life as a case study

In line with the approach of Social Psychology of Cyberplaces and ethnographical practice, the present research places emphasis on the users of virtual worlds in the context of the social worlds they inhabit. Given the huge range of virtual worlds with various orientations and purposes (Messinger et al., 2009), the research focuses on just one, Second Life, and assumes that the experience of this particular world is representative of self-determined virtual worlds generally. This section provides a brief outline on Second Life, rationale for and evaluation of its choice as a focus for research, and contextual information about the role of the researcher as a Second Life user.

3.3.1. Second Life: an overview of the research setting

Second Life was created in 2003 by Linden Labs (LL), headed up by the founder, Philip Rosedale, as a by-product of designing haptic (touch) Virtual Reality technologies. It was used initially as a virtual environment for its employees before its potential for a public creative space was realised ("History of Second Life," 2012). Details of Second Life, its characteristics and history, have been well documented, including the ethnographic survey conducted by anthropologist Boellstorff (2008) and the analysis of its trajectory offered by Au (2008), in his role as Second Life's "in-house reporter". While it is not necessarily the virtual world with the largest number of users,[8] it has a wide variety of users who use it in a range of ways.[9] Boellstorff's ethnographic survey highlights how it is a place where people form communities, engage in close relationships with others, participate in educational activities, Role Playing and games, as well as it exhibiting a thriving economy with its own currency.[10]

[8] Habbo Hotel, a virtual world aimed at teenagers, is the virtual world with the largest number of users, with circa 243 million registered users and 10 million unique monthly visitors (http://www.sulake.com/habbo/ accessed February 13th, 2012).

[9] Data regarding Second Life user physical world demographics are not publicly available, although a report in 2007 claimed that the average age of users is 33 years old, with 59 per cent male, 35 per cent North American, and 54 per cent European (Hachmann, 2007).

[10] The Second Life currency is the Linden Dollar (L$). The value is determined by the rate of exchange on the LindeX, the service provided by Second Life for users to buy currency.

Second Life is notable for its emphasis on creativity as well as social interaction. With the exception of land, sea and sky, the majority of content within Second Life is created by its users, rather than being created by the creators of the worlds as is the norm with other virtual worlds. This has implications for users, since it provides additional freedoms of expression in terms of avatar appearance and behaviour, and environment creation.

The range of users and environments, combined with the emphasis on social interaction and creativity, make Second Life a popular option among virtual world researchers. The variety of users and environments mean there is a large pool of potential research participants, and a wide variety of experiences, age-groups, and physical world cultures, easily accessible in one place. The creative flexibility allows a range of research techniques, from experiments in research laboratories through to full immersion in a specific community. Hence, it has a proven track record among researchers and has arguably been the dominant setting for virtual world research (Peachey & Childs, 2011).

While these factors indicate that Second Life is an ideal candidate for conducting the present research, it has also been selected on the basis that it is representative of self-determined worlds generally. In fact it could be argued that these factors make Second Life atypical rather than typical of the phenomena: other virtual worlds do not necessarily offer the potential for personal expression and experience as Second Life, nor have so high a public profile. This means its users may be inherently more interested in exploring and reflecting upon aspects and experiences of Self than is typical of users of virtual environments or people in contemporary society generally, potentially leading to some bias in research findings. Nevertheless, the purpose of this research is to understand the experience of Self in contemporary society. The virtual worlds' ability to facilitate an experience of Self that is comparatively unconstrained and wide-ranging, makes Second Life a prime candidate as a research field for this purpose.

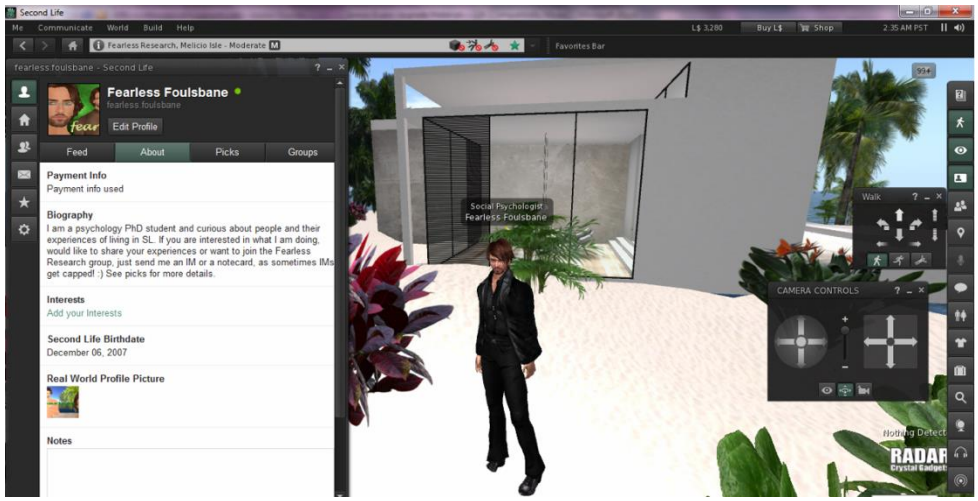
3.3.2. The role of the researcher as a Second Life resident

3.3.2.1. The implications of being a Second Life resident and researcher

The researcher has been resident in Second Life since December 2007 and has conducted research in Second Life previously (Evans, 2011). This means he is well versed in socially interacting with other residents, already familiar with rituals and

practices occurring in Second Life, and has experience of establishing research protocols specific to virtual worlds: the credentials of being a "*bone fide* researcher" (Hine, 2005) are established, and the researcher possesses an appreciation for the experiences of Virtual Self held by Second Life users. The researcher provides details on the research being conducted in the avatar profile (see Figure 3.1); these contribute towards credentials as a long-time resident and researcher, both of which are reassuring to participants and other users of Second Life.

Figure 3.1. An image of the researcher's profile, containing information about when the researcher's avatar was created and research interests.



However, there are potential disadvantages to conducting the research as an existing user of Second Life. These particularly stem from "going native", i.e. the loss of critical external perspective, and adoption of viewpoint shared in the field, when becoming immersed in it. The challenge of the researcher is to become immersed while maintaining the distance of a "professional stranger" (Flick, 2009) and a dialectical fuse of commitment and distance (Koepping, 1987, cited in Flick, 2009, p.229). In the present case, any risks that result from "going native", and hence bias in research outcomes, are offset in two main ways. Firstly, all analysis is inductive, with findings, themes, categories etc. emerging from the field, rather than imposing any researcher-led preconceptions upon data, with research debriefs supplied to participants for feedback in order to validate findings. Secondly, the research programme employs a range of methods and addresses a number of questions, which act in triangulation with each other.

3.3.2.2. Conducting research and managing participant relationships within Second Life

Two important aspects to managing this research project have been the establishment of a research location and managing ongoing participant relationships. For the purpose of conducting research, a research centre has been established: the Fearless Research Centre[11] is an island within Second life, leased and developed by the researcher for the purpose of conducting individual interviews and group discussions inworld. Visitors to the island receive information about the research and an invitation to become participants. Figure 3.2 provides a number of images of the centre, which includes various locations for discussion and conversation.

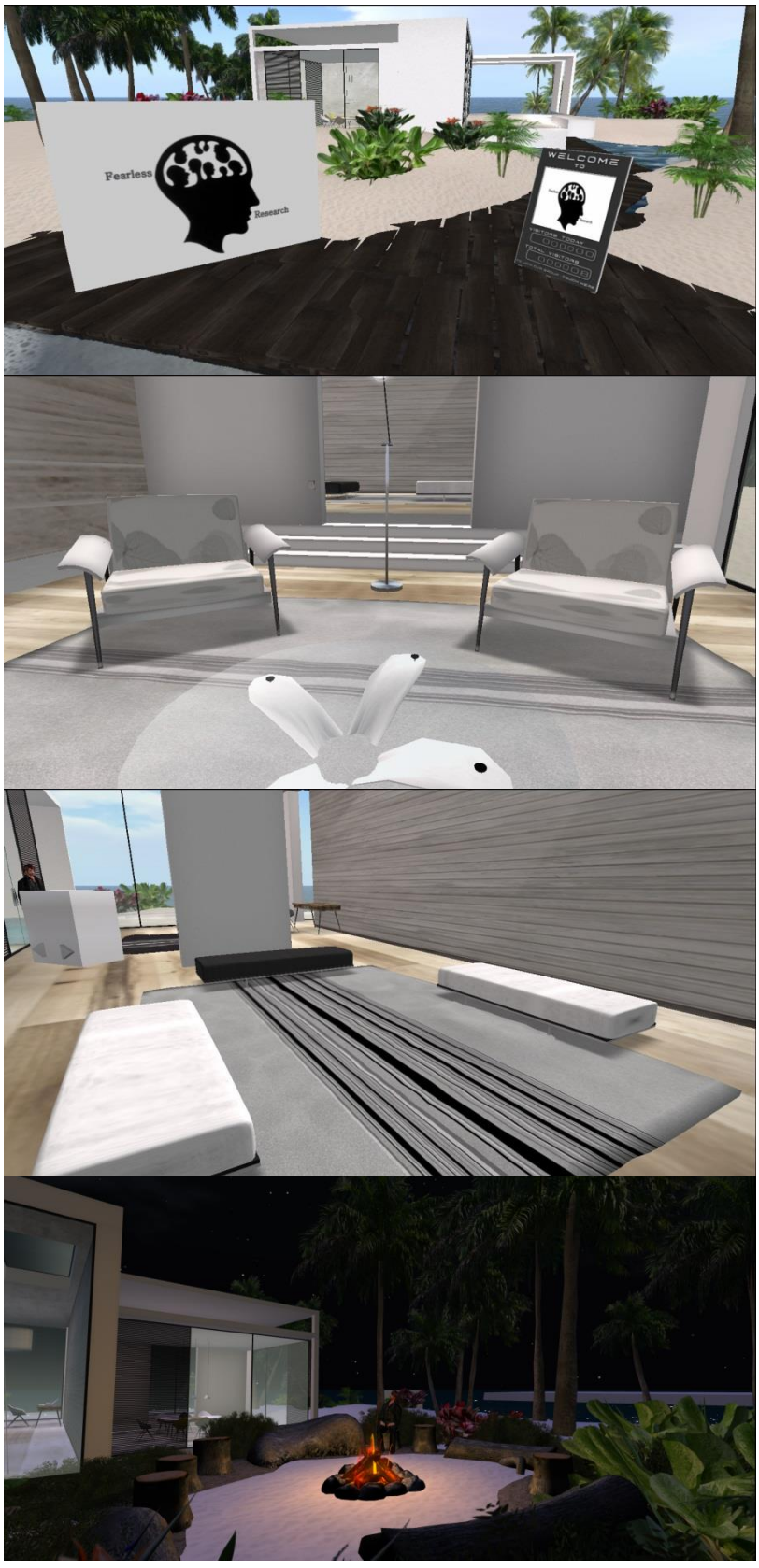
Given the number of research questions to be addressed and the large number of participants necessary, a Second Life community group dedicated to the research project has been created, members comprised of participants and interested parties. The Fearless Research group enables the researcher to cultivate ongoing contact with participants, maintains trustworthiness as a "*bone fide* researcher", and facilitates easy research debriefing and recruitment.

3.4.Developing methods for research with respect to Second Life

The present research seeks to address a range of questions with respect to experience regarding Second Life, in ways that emphasise the perspective of the experiencers. As indicated in Section 3.2, research conducted inworld is a key component to achieving this objective. This section details how the research gives particular emphasis to inworld individual interviews, with a secondary role played by inworld participant observations and group discussions, and interviews and observations conducted in the physical world.

[11] Named from the researcher's avatar, Fearless Foulsbane.

Figure 3.2. Images of the Fearless Research Centre, the location for the inworld interviews for the present research. Top to bottom: the landing point; interview area; informal seating; campfire.



3.4.1. Inworld interviews: research rationale and the role for triangulation

Gaskell (2000) indicates that **individual interviews** are appropriate when the research objective is the in-depth investigation of individual lifeworlds, where the topic concerns individual experience, is of a sensitive nature, or for which participants may be difficult to recruit. Given the current objective is to understand the range of personal experience of being a Virtual Self, and where indeed some of the topics arising may result in personal disclosures, individual interviews are appropriate for the present research. Employing individual interviews alone may be problematic, in that while they offer an intimate glimpse of the range of experiences that occur, those experiences and their meanings become apparent in the conversation that occurs between the two interlocutors, interviewer and interviewee. Likewise the themes that emerge in data analysis may be particular to the researcher or analyst. Hence there is a need for some kind of evaluation and verification.

Evaluation of qualitative research is a contentious issue, with a range of perspectives on its role and appropriateness (Steinke, 2004), from advocating similar criteria as quantitative research (i.e. objectivity, reliability and validity), on one hand, to rejecting any notion of evaluation against a fixed "truth" on the basis that all knowledge is socially constructed, on the other. The present research takes a middle position between these two, using methodological triangulation i.e. employing other research techniques to enhance understanding of the research problem at hand (Berg, 2001; Flick, 2009).

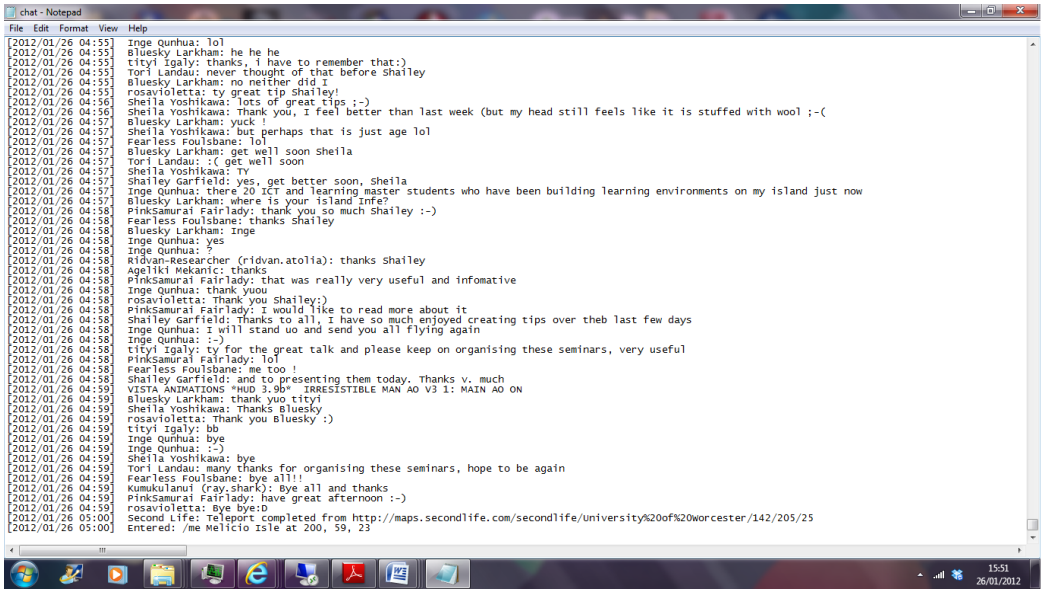
3.4.2. Secondary method: participant observation

Participant observation is particularly noted for its concern with meaning from the insider perspective, location in everyday situations, and case study format (Jorgenson, 1989). However, it is not a single method *per se*, but involves a range of methods, including document analysis, interviewing, field notes, and researcher diary keeping (Flick, 2009). For the present research, while some of these practices have been adhered to (e.g. interviewing), others (such as document analysis and field notes) have not. Hence, here "participant observation" is used to refer to the experience of being a Second Life resident, and the tacit knowledge of the practices, rituals and understandings that arises with that experience.

In the present research, participant observation also has methodological benefits. It allows the researcher to shape research questions, formulate interview discussion points, be adept in understanding and interpreting the responses given by participants in an interview context, and in adapting them to the wider experience of being a virtual world user. It also allows the researcher to verify some of the responses participants may give in an interview context, i.e. the extent to which the claims made "ring true" in the light of the researcher's own experience and observations in the field.

Second Life offers a facility for automatically downloading all onscreen text to the user's computer hard drive, a practice the researcher engages in (see Figure 3.3 for an example of downloaded text). Hence, while no formal note-taking or introspection has been undertaken, a "life log" exists for almost all interactions experienced by the researcher since becoming a user of the virtual world. Where appropriate, this log has been used to verify and supplement claims made by participants.

Figure 3.3. An example of text as downloaded from the Second Life programme. The excerpt is from an open meeting held for virtual world researchers.



3.4.3. Secondary method: Subjective Evidence-Based Ethnography (SEBE)

While interviewing and participant observation techniques are intended here to gain access to the inside perspective of the virtual world user, they nevertheless provide evidence filtered through the lens of the researcher's own objectives and interests: in interviews and discussions, the evidence elicited is reported experience, as prompted and constrained by the researcher's questions, while observations are dependent upon

the researcher's own ability to interpret what is observed. In particular, qualitative techniques elicit data that is the result of an interaction between the researcher and the data source, and so data is constructed in a manner that is dependent on the position and skills of the researcher (Lahlou, 2011). **Subjective Evidence-Based Ethnography (SEBE)** is intended to allow the outsider direct access to the experience of the insider. The method involves first-person audio-visual recording with a Subcam (a miniature video-camera worn at eye level) followed by confronting participants with the recordings to collect their subjective experience (Lahlou, 1999, 2011; Lahlou, Le Bellu, & Boesen-Mariani, 2015).

In the present research a Subcam has been used to record a participant's typical Second Life usage, capturing inworld activity and the physical world context in which it is framed, and then employed as a device to elicit the first-hand experience of being a person using Second Life. This procedure offers a two-fold benefit: it allows direct access to the insider perspective and experience "as it happens", as well as triangulation with other aspects of the research programme, since its findings can be used to verify those that have been elicited through interviews, group discussions and researcher observation.

3.4.4. Secondary method: inworld focus group discussions

Gaskell (2000) suggests **focus group discussions** are beneficial since they are useful for relatively unfamiliar and hypothetical issues, allow the observation of consensus-making and disagreement, and permit exploration of a range of attitudes and behaviours. As such, they can go beyond fact and opinion finding, they can also be used to access group meanings, processes and norms (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001). Hence, they serve a different purpose to the individual interviews, SEBE procedures, and participant observation. The objective of these other methods is to access the perspective of the participant, and inherent in this is the potential for a range of perspectives given the individual experience of participants. Consequently, focus groups allow exploration and verification of themes emerging from individual interviews, while facilitating the observation of meaning making with respect to the phenomena in question.

The group discussions for the present research have been held among a variety of Second Life users, across all experience ranges and interests. These provide a direct context to the individual interviews, and provide an overview of the experiences of

Virtual Self and their meanings, roles and implications, as discussed and negotiated by those that have them.

3.5. Developing a programme of research: specific approaches for specific questions

The research detailed here involves a comprehensive programme which uses methods specific to addressing each subsidiary question. Figure 3.4 summarises the programme; it includes the methods used for addressing each question, numbers of participants and procedures, and volume of data. The remainder of this chapter provides methodological rationale and programme detail, with subsequent chapters 4-8 detailing the specific approach and findings for each question.

3.5.1. How is the Self represented in virtual worlds?

This subsidiary question concerns how users of Second Life use their avatar, username and profile to represent themselves, its objective to understand the range of choices that are made, the influences on those choices, and how the choices may change over time. To this end, the basis for addressing this question is individual interviews, conducted in Second Life. The interviews comprise three elements, discussions regarding username choice, user profile and avatar appearance. Data includes that emerging directly from the interview and participants' photo collections. The outcome of the research is a description of the **milestones** characterising the representation of the Self in virtual worlds.

3.5.2. What are the activities undertaken in virtual worlds?

This question is based in the notion that the Self emerges from goal-oriented activity, and so by cataloguing activities and hence motivations of Second Life users, insight is gained into experience of the Virtual Self. The research is based in observations made by the researcher over time spent in Second Life, together with findings from inworld individual interviews and discussions, and SEBE procedures in the physical world. The

Figure 3.4. Research programme summary.

Question	Research methods	No. of participants (N)	No. of procedures[12]	Data collection instruments	Volume	Analytic methods	Research outcome
How is the Self represented in virtual worlds?	Inworld individual interviews	15	15	Downloaded text	7771 lines	Thematic analysis	Milestones of Virtual Self representation
				Participant photographs	128		
				Participant profiles	15		
What are the activities undertaken in virtual worlds?	Inworld individual interviews[13]	60	87	Downloaded text	39,010 lines	Categorising of activities	Player Taxonomy
	Inworld group discussions	10	2	Downloaded text	1829 lines		
	Physical world SEBE procedures	3	3	Audio/Subcam/Video/Screen capture recordings	172 mins visual, 3928 lines of audio transcript		
	Inworld participant observation	-	-	Downloaded text	357,555 lines of text		
What are the processes involved in being a Virtual Self in virtual worlds?	Inworld individual interviews	20	20	Downloaded text	8248 lines	Thematic analysis	Virtual Self Processes Model
In what ways do physical and virtual worlds interact with each other and the experience of Self?	Physical world SEBE procedure	3	3	Audio recordings	3928 lines of transcript	Thematic analysis	Key themes constituting Self at virtual-physical world intersection
				Subcam recordings	172 minutes		
				Video recordings	172 minutes		
				Screen capture	172 minutes		
What is the trajectory of experience of the Virtual Self in virtual worlds?	Inworld individual interviews	12	24, across a two-year interval	Downloaded text	10875 lines	Comparison of Thematic Analyses and biographies	Matrix of Player Timelines
				Participant biographies	12		

[12] In some cases, multiple sessions were held with the same participant for a single procedure, due to time constraints; for the sake of continuity these are classed as one procedure.
[13] Includes interviews detailed in Evans (2011).

outcome of this research is a **Player Taxonomy** that catalogues Second Life player motivations and activities.

3.5.3. What are the processes involved in being a Virtual Self in virtual worlds?

This question aims to understand the variety of experiences that comprise being a person in Second Life including the role of technology, the avatar, other virtual worlds and the physical world, and relationships with others, from the insider perspective. Individual interviews conducted within Second Life are used to access these experiences; they allow insight into their range, and the multiple processes that occur. The outcome of this research is a **Virtual Self Processes Model**.

3.5.4. In what ways do physical and virtual worlds interact with each other and the experience of Self?

This subsidiary question concerns understanding the experience of simultaneous location in multiple social worlds, the physical world and virtual worlds, and how these worlds interact to form an experience of Self. To some extent, this aspect is covered by the question regarding Virtual Self processes, since among the processes it considers is the location of the Self in multiple worlds, and the interactions between them. However, the SEBE procedure enables first-hand observation and inquiry into the virtual and physical worlds' intersection, and the findings from this strand can be used to substantiate and enhance findings from inworld interviews concerning processes. The outcome of the research is an overview of the key themes that constitute experience of Self at the intersection of virtual and physical worlds.

3.5.5. What is the trajectory of experience of the Virtual Self in virtual worlds?

This question aims to understand how usage of and involvement in Second Life changes over time, and the range of outcomes that occur throughout experience of the virtual world. While other aspects of the research programme are cross-sectional,

offering an understanding of Virtual Self at any one time, this question employs a longitudinal approach to provide insight into Virtual Self development across time. The study comprises two sets of individual interviews among a cohort of twelve Second Life users spanning a two-year interval. The outcome for the research is a **Matrix of Player Timelines**, outlining the phases of development characterising Second Life player experience according to salient themes emerging through the research, and the variety of possible outcomes.

3.6. Ethical practice in Second Life

The research programme makes extensive use of methodological techniques applied inworld within the realm of Second Life itself, rather than in the physical world. This approach brings with it specific ethical considerations that need to be applied, particularly concerning the anonymity of Second Life users, maintaining confidentiality, and informed consent.

Chapter 2 outlines how virtual environments tend to be anonymous in nature, and that users often wish to keep their virtual lives separate from the physical world. For research this can be problematic because it makes it impossible to verify if participants are members of vulnerable groups (are children, or have learning difficulties, for example) and hence ensure their interests are respected. In the case of Second Life, there is a "terms of service agreement" that stipulates resident behaviour and who is allowed to use it,[14] but nevertheless it is possible for users to conceal their physical world status if they wish to. In theory, it is possible to require physical world identification as a prerequisite for research participation, but this is likely to act as a deterrent given the value of anonymity and privacy in Second Life. For present purposes, participants have been requested to "self-verify" and confirm in written text that they are adults in the physical world. The focus of the present research is the experience of the person within Second Life, and hence access to someone's insider perspective is prioritised over knowledge of their name, gender or location in the physical world.[15]

With respect to confidentiality, the Ethics Committee of the British Psychological Society (2009) stress its importance, with strict guidelines on how this should be

[14] For example, according to its Terms of Service ("Second Life Terms of Service," 2010), Second Life is not open to individuals under the age of 13, with strict regulations on the basis upon which 13 to 17 year olds are allowed.

[15] During the course of interviewing such physical world information can emerge and adds texture to findings. However, for present purposes such information is not paramount to understanding the Virtual Self experience. Future research may deign it more important.

managed. The anonymity afforded by Second Life suggests that confidentiality is a by-product of conducting research among anonymous participants. However, while the avatar name may be private from the physical world, it is still known among other users of Second Life. In recognition of this, all data emerging from discussions with participants included here is anonymised and confidentiality maintained.

With respect to informed consent, three aspects are relevant to the present research. First, for interviews, group discussions and questionnaires, protocols established for research conducted in the physical world have been applied, following procedures established by Boellstorff (2008) and adapted for previous research (Evans, 2011). They include provision of information about the research, the right to withdraw or refuse to answer any question, and a debrief of findings (which is also used as control method for the qualitative research approach, as discussed in Section 3.3). Consent in this case is given by confirming in text their agreement to participate in the research. Second, for research concerning participant observation, while observation of general behaviour is included, no specific examples are included in the reporting of findings without participant consent. Thirdly, where the SEBE procedure has been conducted, participants may interact with other residents, so specific protocols have been developed to ensure interactants are informed that they may be observed or their interactions recorded. In this case, the participant wears a tag attached to their avatar which describes them as "recording", with more information available in the avatar profile, and any person with whom the participant privately converses is informed that their conversation is recorded. More details are provided in the relevant chapters and Section 3.7.

3.7. Methodological procedures

Individual interviews conducted inworld within Second Life represent the core method for addressing the research question and its subsidiaries, with participant observation, SEBE procedures, and group discussions acting as secondary methods that offer triangulation with, and confirmation of findings from, interviews. This section provides detail of methodological and analytical procedures that are common across the programme, with detail pertinent to each subsidiary question provided in the relevant chapters.

3.7.1. Interviews and discussions inworld: materials and methods for data collection

3.7.1.1. Textual interviews: rationale

While Second Life provides a "voice" facility, interviews and discussions conducted inworld were conducted in text, for a number of reasons. First, the default communication is text: upon installing the programme the voice facility must be enabled from within Second Life. Second, there are advantages from a participant perspective. Not all users have English as a first language, while others have speaking or hearing difficulties, and hence feel more comfortable using text within Second Life. Others use text to protect physical life information, such as gender, age or nationality, or prefer to maintain a boundary between Second Life and "real life". As one participant in the present research programme put it:

> My voice is part of my RL.[16] (A)

Hence, using text allows the maximum willing number of participants. Third, there are data collection benefits. As discussed in relation to participant observation, Second Life offers the option to automatically download all onscreen text to the user's computer hard drive, including date-stamps representing when the text occurred. This means that textual interviews can be downloaded and used as the basis for transcripts.

However, there are some disadvantages in using text. In the first instance, the amount of data produced during an interview will depend on the participant's typing speed. Moreover, it excludes tone of voice and body language, meaning some information might be missing from text-only interviews. Similarly, a degree of self-editing might occur during text-only conversations if only to save the number of words to be typed, and hence responses to questions may be more truncated and contain less information than in voice discussions. Nevertheless, for this research textual interviews alone have been used to encourage comparable interview experience across participants, while avoiding any participant problems with respect to voice.

In the case of individual interviews, these were conducted in Instant Message, which allowed the conversation to be downloaded to a dedicated file allowing for ease of data collection. Group discussions were conducted in "open chat". While a group Instant Message could have been created for the purpose which would allow for ease of data collection as with individual interviews, in practice they can be subject to "lag" which makes fluid discussion difficult.

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[16] RL is the commonly used expression for "real life".

3.7.1.2. Sampling: recruitment, controls and procedures

A number of sampling techniques have been used. As a general principle no recruitment controls have been exercised, since primarily the purpose of the research is to gain insight into the variety of experience among Second Life users, and recruitment controls may have placed some inhibition on the range of experience revealed.[17]

For the purpose of recruiting new participants, the core technique has been to recruit from a special interest group New Citizens Inc (NCI). The purpose of this group is to help its members use Second Life: it acts as a self-help forum and offers classes on technical and social aspects of using the virtual world. This group has been chosen since it has a large number of members (12,402 at time of research[18]), and represents a wide spread of interests and experience levels, meaning that the members have a variety of experience and opinion. With permission from group moderators, recruitment from the NCI group was made via group Instant Message, with the text used varying slightly depending on the objectives: three different messages were devised for general recruitment, recruitment for group discussions and to recruit newer users of Second Life. Copies of the text used in the messages are in the Appendix.

Opportunity recruitment has also occurred. For example, some people contacted the researcher to volunteer following discussions on the Second Life Research Listserv (SLRL) email list. This listserv is used to announce forthcoming academic conferences, make calls for papers for publication, publicise research projects conducted within Second Life, and offer advice. Others volunteered for research following discussions in the aforementioned NCI group Instant Message forum that were unrelated to any recruitment.

Referrals and repeat participation have also played a role. A number of participants either prompted friends to volunteer, or advised the researcher of friends who were interested. Moreover, given the number of subsidiary questions, repeated participation was invaluable since it facilitated in-depth knowledge of particular users' experience, as well encouraging trust in the researcher as a confidante of that experience; "trust" was particularly valuable in recruitment for the SEBE procedures, where all participants had previously participated in at least two other elements of the research

[17] In any case, controls exercised for inworld research (particularly using text) are prone to problems. It is difficult to use physical world characteristics (e.g. age, gender, location) as a control since the anonymity afforded by virtual worlds makes it easy to conceal or disguise them. Using virtual world corollaries (e.g. avatar age or gender) is not necessarily useful either: participants may have more than one avatar of different ages, use more than one avatar to participate, may be using an avatar of a different gender to their physical world gender, have multiple avatars of different genders, or not identify inworld as a gender at all. Should inworld recruitment controls be exercised, it is more useful to employ other discriminators, based on activity or group membership for example.

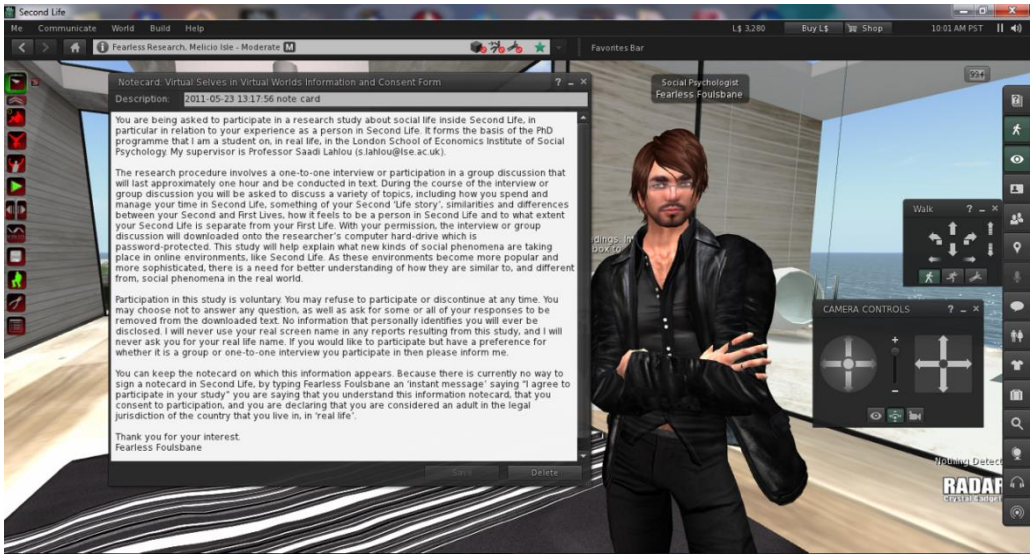
[18] Measured on January 26th, 2012.

programme (further discussed in Chapter 7). Of the thirty-six participants in the five specific research exercises conducted for the programme, one person participated in four, six in three, nine in two, and twenty in one alone.

3.7.1.3. Ethical considerations: informed consent

Any Second Life resident expressing interest in becoming a participant was given an Information and Consent Notecard. This provided them with information about the research programme, including objectives, the name of the institution, and the supervisor of the research. The notecard also informed the participant that by sending an Instant Message to the researcher that states "I agree to participate in your study", they were indicating their consent to participate and that they were considered an adult in the country they reside in, in the physical world. Figure 3.5 demonstrates how the notecard appears inworld, with full text in the Appendix.

Figure 3.5. The Information and Consent Notecard as it appears in Second Life.



By way of debrief, summaries of research findings were provided via notecard sent to participants inworld.

3.7.1.4. Research timetable

The formal research programme spanned the period May 11th, 2011 to November 16th, 2012. Figure 3.6 provides an overview of the research timetable, and includes research from which findings of the first tranche of longitudinal research were drawn.

Figure 3.6. Overview of the research timetable. Includes research detailed in Evans (2011), used for first tranche of Longitudinal research (in italics).

Research element	Commenced	Concluded	No. of participants
Second Life Self interviews	*March 3rd, 2009*	*April 19th, 2009*	*40*
Representation interviews	June 6th, 2011	Aug. 23rd, 2011	15
Virtual Self processes interviews	June 13th, 2011	Nov. 4th, 2011	20
Longitudinal interviews (second tranche)	May 11th, 2011	Nov. 4th, 2011	12
Group discussions	Nov. 23rd, 2011	Aug. 1st, 2012	2 (x5 participants)
SEBE procedures	June 7th, 2012	Nov. 16th, 2012	3

The table excludes participant observation conducted since the researcher joined Second Life in December 2007.

All interviews and discussions were planned for one hour duration, with SEBE procedures planned for three hours. If the interviews extended much beyond the planned period then the researcher consulted with the participant for their approval to continue or arrange an additional interview. All inworld interviews and discussions, apart from one which occurred in the participant's own home in Second Life, were held at the Fearless Research Centre. SEBE procedures occurred in a number of physical world locations: one occurred in participant's home, one in a hotel, and another in the participant's workplace (details in Chapter 7).

3.7.1.5. Materials: electronic equipment and computer software

For research conducted inworld, the researcher's personal laptop was used: the model was Acer Aspire 5742G, the graphics card was NVIDIA GeForce GT 420M. To access Second Life both the official Second Life Viewer and the Third Party Viewer Firestorm were used on separate occasions.[19]

3.7.1.6. Interview procedure

In essence all inworld individual interviews adopted the same procedure. The interview commenced with a welcome and thanks for participating and, in the case of individual interviews, sought permission for the interview to be conducted in Instant Message. For new participants, the researcher checked they were an adult, reminded them of their right to refuse to answer any question or withdraw at any point, advised them of arrangements should either researcher or participant crash, and requested they confirm

[19] The official Second Life Viewer is provided for download at https://secondlife.com/support/downloads/. Third Party Viewers are not developed or distributed by Linden Lab, but those that comply with Second Life Third Party Viewer policy and Terms Of Service are permitted to be used to access the virtual world. See http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Third_Party_Viewer_Directory for a list of approved Third Party Viewers, and http://www.firestormviewer.org/ for more information about the Firestorm Viewer used by the researcher.

their consent to participate. Also with consent, a snapshot of each participant and group discussion was taken. Procedures for group discussions and SEBE were slightly different and are discussed in Sections 3.8 and 7.3. If the participant participated in more than one interview, or aspect of the programme, they were reminded of their participation rights at the start of each new session.

For all aspects of the research, a topic guide has been used to provide "an easy and comfortable framework for a discussion" (Gaskell, 2000, p.40). All topic guides and example interview transcripts are included in the Appendix.

3.7.2. Analytical methods: Thematic Analysis

A Thematic Analysis method has been used in assessing the data yielded from the research programme. Thematic Analysis has been described as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data." (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). This means it is highly appropriate for the present research which has provided data covering a wide range of topics to be analysed in such a way that the processes involved in the Virtual Self experience are revealed. By taking an inductive approach, i.e. deriving the themes "bottom up" from the data itself, without imposing any predetermined thematic framework as would be applied in a theoretical Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the processes are uncovered. This method thus encourages the revelation of the virtual world user perspective rather than the imposition of a predetermined viewpoint from outside.

The procedure outlined by Attride-Sterling (2001) is used for the analysis. This means that the data is classified into Basic Themes based on semantic meanings, which are then used to construct a hierarchy of Organising Themes, i.e. clusters of Basic Themes with common abstract principles. These are then grouped into Global Themes based on the main underlying themes. Thematic Networks are then constructed which conceptualise the relationships between the hierarchies and the Basic, Organising and Global Themes of which they are comprised. In this research, the procedure is conducted with the assistance of Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software; the specific programme used is NVivo (versions 8, 9, 10). The emerging full coding frameworks for all analyses are in the Appendix, including supporting evidence for all Basic Themes.

3.8. Group discussions in the present context

Individual interviews, SEBE procedures and participant interviews have the objective of accessing the insider perspective, a perspective that can have as much variety as the number of virtual world users there are. Group discussions serve another purpose: rather than providing access to an insider perspective of virtual world users' experiences of the Self as such, they can provide access to how users jointly construe the meaning of that experience, how users may (or may not) share their personal experience with others, and provide each other with explanations and validations for their experience. In this way, group discussions provide witness to joint meaning making, and offer validation and triangulation with experiences of the Self illuminated across all aspects of the research programme. Consequently, the approach for using group research findings in the research programme varies from other research techniques used. Rather than presenting findings and any emerging themes in a single chapter, group discussion findings are revealed throughout all chapters, where they are used to confirm or refute those emerging in direct response to specific subsidiary questions. This section provides an overview of the approach and techniques used in conducting the group discussions, in advance of any contribution they make towards findings in subsequent chapters.

3.8.1. Materials and methods for group discussion data collection and analysis

3.8.1.1. Sample

Ten participants were recruited, seven of whom also participated in other elements of the research programme; nine were originally recruited from the NCI special interest group, with one opportunity recruitment from the SLRL email list.

3.8.1.2. Interview times, location and procedure

Two group discussions were conducted on November 23rd, 2011, and August 1st, 2012, with five participants in each. By way of informed consent, each participant was sent an Information and Consent Notecard, and requested to send an Instant Message containing the statement "I agree to participate in your study", as detailed in Section 3.7. The interviews were one hour duration and conducted at the Fearless Research

Centre. Discussion was conducted using text in “open chat”, also outlined in Section 3.7. In order to facilitate a conversation flow, “ground rules” were constructed and provided on a notecard. The “rules” were designed to provide participants with instructions for minimising disruption from other users and problems with the Second Life programme, as well as to remind them of their right to withdraw at any time, and the necessity for mutual respect during discussion. Each group discussion commenced with each participant being given a copy of the notecard, with the request to signify once they had read and understood. The text in the notecard is provided in the Appendix, while Figure 3.7 provides an example of one of the group discussions.

Figure 3.7. An example of a group discussion, conducted at the Fearless Research Centre.

3.8.1.3. Topic guide design and data collection

The topic guide was designed to explore a number of areas of interest across all aspects of the research programme, with the purpose of stimulating discussion on the experience of being a person in physical and virtual life. Hence it concerned the experience of joining and using Second Life, the purpose it serves, the sense of change participants may have experienced in themselves and the virtual world, and their relationships with other people. Given the nature of the semi-structured method, the flow of the discussion varied across the interviews depending on the input from individual participants, and the rapport that developed between them. The topic guide is illustrated in the Appendix.

The data from the interviews comprises text that appeared on screen as the discussion progressed, a copy of which was downloaded automatically to the

researcher's hard drive, as described in Section 3.7. An example interview transcript is included in the Appendix.

3.8.2. Summary of the analysis of group discussions

The Thematic Analysis method has been used in analysing the data, as outlined in Section 3.7. This results in a Thematic Network comprising a single Global Theme of "Experience of Virtual Self", six Organising Themes, and 31 basic themes. The Organising Themes are: "Activity in Second Life"; "Being a person in Second Life"; "Interacting with others"; "Social structures of Second Life"; "Status of Second Life"; and "Using Second Life". While the findings are used in remaining chapters in relation to addressing subsidiary research questions, it is useful to summarise the Organising Themes here.

3.8.2.1. Activity in Second Life

This theme relates to the types of activity that participants engage in within the virtual world. During the interviews, participants discussed the extent to which they explored within Second Life, the value of creativity (theirs and that of other users), and the role of education in their everyday experience of the virtual world.

3.8.2.2. Being a person in Second Life

This theme relates to the experience of using Second Life as mediated by an avatar, both in terms of appearance and behaviour. Discussions included the relationship between avatar appearance and behaviour and that in the physical world, the extent to which roles are played in Second Life, and how the virtual world is used to engage in behaviour that is harmful and deceptive to others.

3.8.2.3. Interacting with others

This theme relates to the experience of relating to other users. Included in the discussions was the nature of communications in Second Life, the extent to which the virtual world is used for emotional and romantic experiences, the value of friendship, and the characteristics and role of socialising in the virtual world.

3.8.2.4. Social structures of Second Life

This theme relates the culture of Second Life in terms of the social structures by which it is arranged. Discussions concerning this theme included the role of economics in terms of profiting from using the virtual world, the extent to which there exists inter-community prejudice in Second Life, the extent to which culture in the physical and virtual worlds may be considered the same, and the rate of social change in Second Life.

3.8.2.5. Status of Second Life

This theme relates the characteristics of Second Life and perceptions of it. Discussions included the unique proposition of Second Life, the purpose that it serves in participants' lives, its creative potential, the extent to which it would be missed should it cease to exist, as well as the perceptions that non-users have of the virtual world, and the extent to which it can be defined as a "game".

3.8.2.6. Using Second Life

This theme relates the experience of using the virtual world and the purposes for which it is used. Discussions included the experience of being a new user and starting a new account, the experience of using the interface and being present in Second Life, and the extent to which participants manage their time using it and keep the virtual and physical lives separate.

3.8.3. Characteristics of group discussions in virtual worlds

To conclude this section, it is informative to consider the characteristics of group discussion in virtual worlds. There are a number of aspects to this, which concern the experience of both being a researcher moderating the discussion that occurs, and being a participant in it. Since the interviews were conducted in text in "open chat", it was not uncommon for topics of discussion to overlap. This is because while some Third Party Viewers provide an option to see "speech bubbles" appear above avatars whose users are preparing text, unless interlocutors are using such an option they are unaware

that others are in the act of communicating.[20] In this case, the researcher used the Firestorm Viewer, which offers the facility for observing such preparatory "bubbles", and hence was able to ensure that he did not interrupt any contribution that was in the process of being prepared. Moreover, the social nature of the virtual world means that, even with the "ground rules" established, interviews with multiple participants can appear "unruly", since interlocutors continually engage in "banter" i.e. share experience, tease one another, and make jokes. Given these two aspects of group discussions, the discussion that emerges from a question posed by the moderator does not appear in a linear fashion but is interspersed with observations and comments that appear unrelated, or are related to the previous topic. Such overlap in topics means that a moderator must be alert to how topics ebb and flow, and the extent to which comments made refer to a contribution earlier in the discussion. During the interview itself, the moderator does this "on the fly"; it is not uncommon for interlocutors to "scroll up" through "open chat" text to check the conversation flow, and to ensure nothing is missed or misunderstood, and the researcher engaged in this practice during the interviews. Once the transcripts are analysed, it becomes possible to ascertain how topics interweave. Figure 3.8 provides an excerpt from a downloaded transcript, which includes the discussion in one interview following the first two questions, concerning how the participants first started using Second Life and expectations of it. It demonstrates not only the interweaving of topics and the "banter" between participants, but also the different styles of communication, errors and self-correction that occur in what participants type.

An example of topic interweaving and "banter" is demonstrated where Participant "AM" contributes when she first joined but now uses a different avatar, it inspires other participants to share their experience of using alts, in between stating the circumstances of their first using Second Life, and teasing "AM" about her "age". In this way, the excerpt also reveals how participants affirm each other's experiences and in collaboration together establish that the use of alts is common. These participants met only a few minutes previously, but were already engaging in complex discussion patterns, responding to questions, and interacting with each other. Such interaction substantiates the social nature of the virtual world experience.

[20] While the Official Viewer provides the option to see "open chat" text from users in the form of "speech bubbles", it does not provide an option to see if such text is being prepared. Both options are only available through Third Party Viewers.

Figure 3.8. An example of the discussion format that occurs during textual inworld group discussions. (I denotes Interviewer, other initials denote the participants)

```
I: just to kick off and people say how they first came to SL?
I: can*
M4: My sister dragged me here *giggles*
SF: I was out of work, panicking, and my dh told me to check out SL.
He's regretted that a few time. ãƒ„
AM: a friend introduced me to sl
HV: I met Linden in 2005 in California at a Commonwealth Club event in
San Fran
SF: he has been inworld twice, read about Second Lifeâ„¢ in a magazine.
NR: A friend.
HV: but didn't do anything again until 2009 when I loved back to Hong
Kong and realized my university had an entire SL virtual campus
HV: loved = moved
I: ã‹¡
SF: very cool, HV
HV: =-)
I: when you came here did you have any expectations of what it would be
like?
AM: I joined in 2006 but deletted that av and started again in febuary
2007
SF: dang, you'
SF: ryou are old
M4: no, not really, I didn't know what to expect, except that it would
be a different and probably very fun experience ^-^
SF: SF ducks
I: lol
HV: I thought about deleting my initial avi... but grew attached to
him... now I have three... HV is actually number 3...
SF: I had no clue, or expectations
NR: No - I came in world to attend my RL's friends opening of a coffee
shop. This is my number two avi.
SF: I was so overwhelmed just trying to walk.
NR: Same here SF.
M4: *chuckles* I know what you mean SF, I knocked myself unconcious
falling down the stairs on my 3rd day xD
SF: I found NCI, got help from a couple of great people
HV: I stayed away from SL initially mainly because of the talks in 2005
at the Commonwealth Club... people were saying that a lot of residents
join to have virtual sex
HV: and I couldn't quite wrap my ahead around that concept
SF: we became friends, eventually meeting in RL. A wonderful
experience.
SF: HV....you and me both.
HV: ;-)
```

As well as the characteristics of the discussion process itself, the excerpt demonstrates how in response to questions on joining Second Life and expectations of it, participants quickly reveal a number of aspects of experience in the virtual world, which can be then used to substantiate and contribute to other aspects of the research programme. These include: the social nature of experience (“my sister dragged me here”, “a friend introduced me”); the expectations that experience in the virtual world is short lived (“dang, you are old”); the use of multiple avatars (“I joined in 2006 but deleted that av and started again in February 2007”, “I thought about deleting my initial avi ... but grew attached to him ... and now I have three...”); the struggle with the

technology (“I was so overwhelmed just trying to walk”) ; and the role of relationships (“we became friends, eventually meeting in RL”, “people were saying a lot of residents join to have virtual sex”).

3.9. Conclusions

This chapter has outlined the approach of the present research, situating it in the tradition of digital ethnography. It places the virtual world user as the focus of the research, and emphasises how immersion into the user’s environment enables the research to access the insider perspective. By conceptualising the experience of the Virtual Self in terms of representation, activity, processes, social worlds, and trajectory, a programme of research addressing each of these areas facilitates an overall understanding of what that experience is.

4. Who is the Self in virtual worlds? Representation and performance

4.1. Introduction: the research question and its purpose

Chapter 2 outlines how one aspect of addressing the overall research question "What is the experience of the Self in virtual worlds?" is to begin by addressing:

> How is the Self represented in virtual worlds?

The purpose of this chapter is to understand how users of virtual worlds employ the tools and opportunities available to them to represent and perform the Self.

4.2. Conceptualising representation of the Self in virtual worlds

4.2.1. Representation in virtual environments generally

Previous research in this aspect of virtual worlds has been concerned with the avatar and its appearance (e.g. Ducheneaut et al., 2009; Gilbert, Foss, et al., 2011) since, as Childs (2011) claims, it is the representation of the person. However, as noted in Chapter 2, representation of the Self online does not just involve how it may be embodied in virtual realms, but how people use elements such as text and photographs that are available (Papacharissi, 2002), or experimentation with usernames (Brivio et al., 2010). In virtual worlds many different tools and opportunities are available for representing the Self besides the avatar; for example, users of Second Life employ their name and profile, as well as avatar, to present themselves in specific ways.

While the research here concerns findings within Second Life, all virtual environments offer their users similar opportunities of representation: they must provide a name by which they will be known, have the opportunity to offer information about themselves in their profile records, and provide some kind of graphical image of themselves. For example, while Twitter provides a more graphically rudimentary environment than Second Life, its users must also provide a name, biography and a profile picture (commonly known as an "avi" or avatar) to represent themselves. Thus, while Second Life is the specific focus here, any findings may be applied to other virtual environments.

The present subsidiary question aims to understand how users of Second Life use their avatar, username and profile to represent themselves. The objective is to understand the range of choices that are made, the influences on those choices, and how the choices may change over time.

4.2.2. Representation in Second Life specifically

In order to provide context for research, this section considers how the specific elements of representation in Second Life are realised.

4.2.2.1. Choosing a name

The procedure for selecting an account name depends on when the Second Life account was created. Prior to June 2010, a new applicant creating a Second Life account initially set up a permanent username, including a surname to be chosen from a predetermined list in combination with a forename created by the applicant, which was then displayed above the avatar in Second Life. Since then, there are two names: a permanent username, created upon setting up an account comprising a single name created by the applicant; and a display name, freely chosen and changeable by the user, displayed above the avatar and in inworld communication, but with a default identical to the username. This means that since 2010 Second Life users may choose a display name that is identical to their name in the physical world or names they use in other virtual worlds and environments, if they wish.

4.2.2.2. Avatar and avatar appearance

On setting up an account with Second Life, a choice of ready-made avatars is given from a range of both human and non-human appearances (see Figure 4.1 for examples). The range and quality of choice has evolved over time. Once regularly using the virtual world, it is common practice to edit one's avatar, by buying shapes, skins, hair, eyes and other accessories from merchants within Second Life, or by making the accessories and adjusting the avatar shape oneself.[21]

[21] For more information about avatars in Second Life, see the website http://secondlife.com/whatis/avatar/.

Figure 4.1. Examples of the choice of ready-made avatars available when setting up a new Second Life account. Retrieved November 11th, 2013 from https://join.secondlife.com/?lang=en-US,

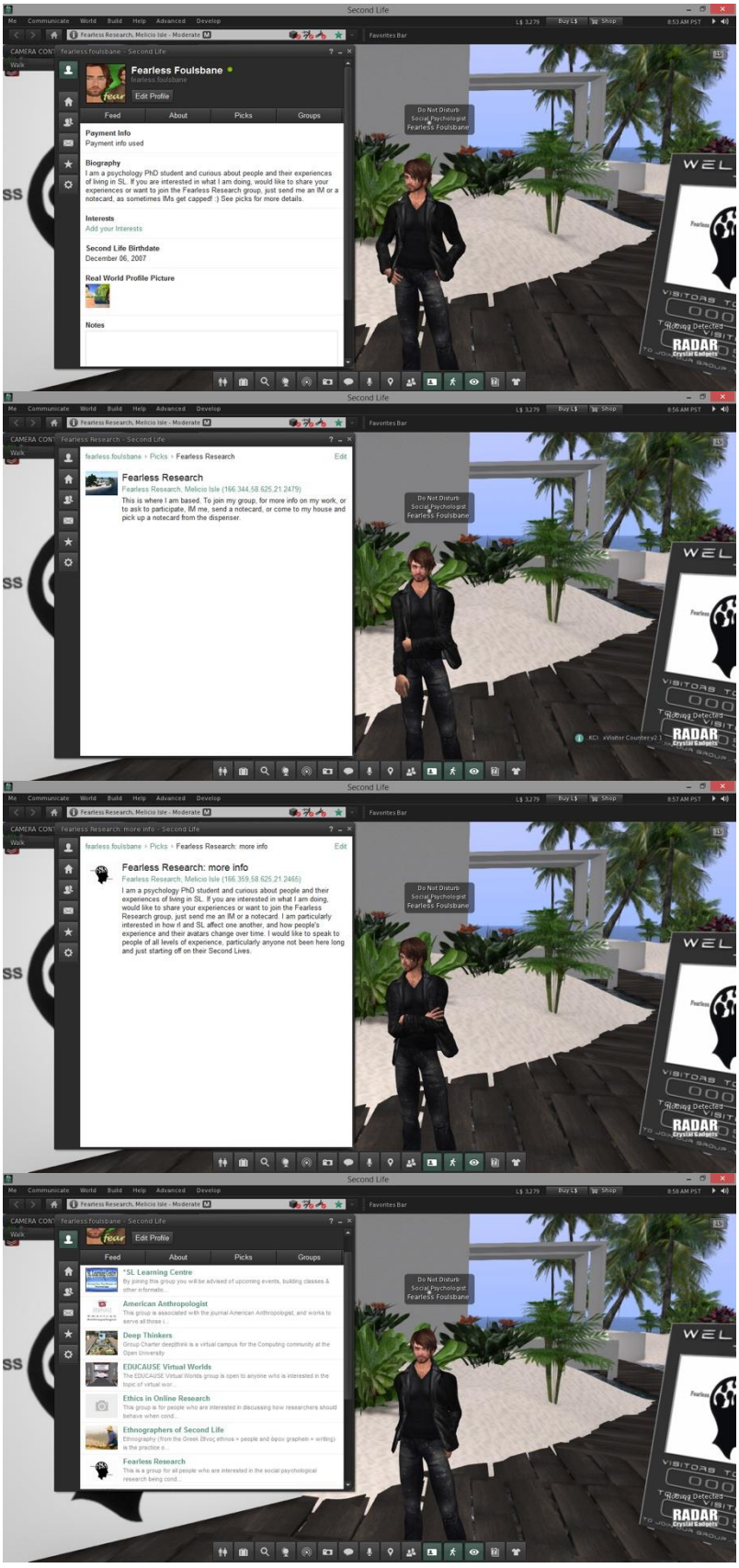
4.2.2.3. User profiles

Profiles are made available in several ways, including conducting a search on the Second Life website or the interface inworld, or by clicking on an avatar inworld whereby an option is presented to see its profile. The appearance of the profile varies according to which Viewer is used, but essentially contains space for the user to provide a Second Life biography and photograph, information on interests, "real life" details and photograph, and "picks", used to provide information on places, people or sentiments that the user wishes to promote or highlight. There is also information that is provided automatically, e.g. if the user has payment information logged with Second Life, and the name of their Second Life partner, if they have one. Examples of the user profile as it appears inworld are shown in Figure 4.2.

4.3.Methodology in understanding representation of the Self in Second Life

In accordance with the intention of gaining the insider perspective on how the Self is represented in virtual worlds, the method is individual interviews conducted in Second Life. While Chapter 3 outlines general principles, this section highlights aspects specific to addressing the subsidiary question.

Figure 4.2. Examples of the Second Life profile as it appears inworld.



4.3.1. Materials and methods for data collection and analysis

4.3.1.1. Sample

Fifteen participants were recruited, all of whom had participated in other elements of the research programme. Ten were recruited for the processes aspect (see Chapter 6), while five were longitudinal participants (Chapter 8). The only control exerted was that participants had more than one year's experience of using Second Life, to ensure sufficient experience of profile and avatar usage for fruitful discussion.

4.3.1.2. Interview times and locations

All interviews were conducted at the Fearless Research Centre, over the period June 6th to August 23rd, 2011. The interviews were scheduled to be one interview of hour duration, but on occasion this was extended to two or three interviews, depending on the complexity of the participant's experience.

4.3.1.3. Interview procedure

The interview commenced with the informed consent procedures outlined in Section 3.7, and with consent, a snapshot of each participant was taken. Examples are in Figure 4.3.

The interview comprised three elements. The first was a discussion about username choice, influences, and rationale. The second element was a discussion on the appearance of their avatar and how it has changed over time. The basis for this element was user photo collections. The Second Life programme includes a photo-taking facility, which allows the user to take a snapshot and save it to their Second Life inventory for a small fee (currently 10L$, approximately £0.03), or to their computer hard drive free of charge. Prior to interview each participant was asked to provide a range of photographs taken over their time in Second Life, which were used to uncover the rationale for avatar choices and how the choice was put into practice. The third element was a discussion regarding user profiles, their role, and choices regarding what to include in them. A fourth element was planned concerning the role of avatars in other virtual environments, but it transpired that, with the exception of one participant, none had extensive experience of any environment other than Second Life.

Figure 4.3. Examples of participants in the individual interview situation. In the present analysis these are the participants identified as L, M1, M3 and SF.

4.3.1.4. Topic guide design

The interview was supported by a topic guide. This provided a loose framework for discussion, which varied depending upon the responses and experiences of the participant. One unforeseen consequence of the use of photographs as a discussion stimulant was their ability to evoke memories of the scene being captured and other experiences in Second Life unrelated to avatar appearance. Such digressions in fact provided insight not only into the role of avatars in Self-representation, but the use of photography in promoting that representation.

4.3.1.5. Data collection

Data includes transcripts of textual interviews, images of participant profiles, and copies of participant photo collections.

4.3.1.6. Analytic method

Attride-Sterling's Thematic Analysis procedure (2001) outlined in Section 3.7 has been used. No detailed analysis of the pictures provided by participants has been conducted, since they were a prompt for discussion rather than the object of analysis.

4.4. Thematic Analysis: common themes in representation of the Self in Second Life

4.4.1. A summary of the findings

The Thematic Analysis derives 158 Basic Themes, which can be clustered into 27 Organising Themes, in turn grouped into four Global Themes. The four Global Themes revolve around the notion that representation of the Self in virtual worlds is a set of activities. Figure 4.4 provides an overview of the Organising Themes by Global Theme and the number of Basic Themes.

Figure 4.4. Summary of Organising Themes by Global Theme and number of Basic Themes by Organising Theme, for Representation of the Self.

Global Theme	Organising Theme	Number of Basic Themes
Personal Activity	Aesthetics	8
	Beginnings	5
	Individuality	3
	Naming myself	6
	New experiences	4
	Personality and character	4
	Reflexivity	3
	User-avatar relationship	10
	Virtual experience	7
Social Activity	Being in context	4
	Displaying Self	10
	Interactions with others	5
	Influencing others	5
	Impact of relationships	7
	Informing and informed	6
	Making statements	4
	Privacy, openness and trust	3
	Reading and speaking between the lines	11
Practical Activity	Avatar construction	7
	Decision strategies	4
	Finance	5
	Pictures as a record	7
Multiple Activity	Avatars and alts	8
	Continuity	4
	Experimentation	3
	RL-SL relation	9
	Transition	6

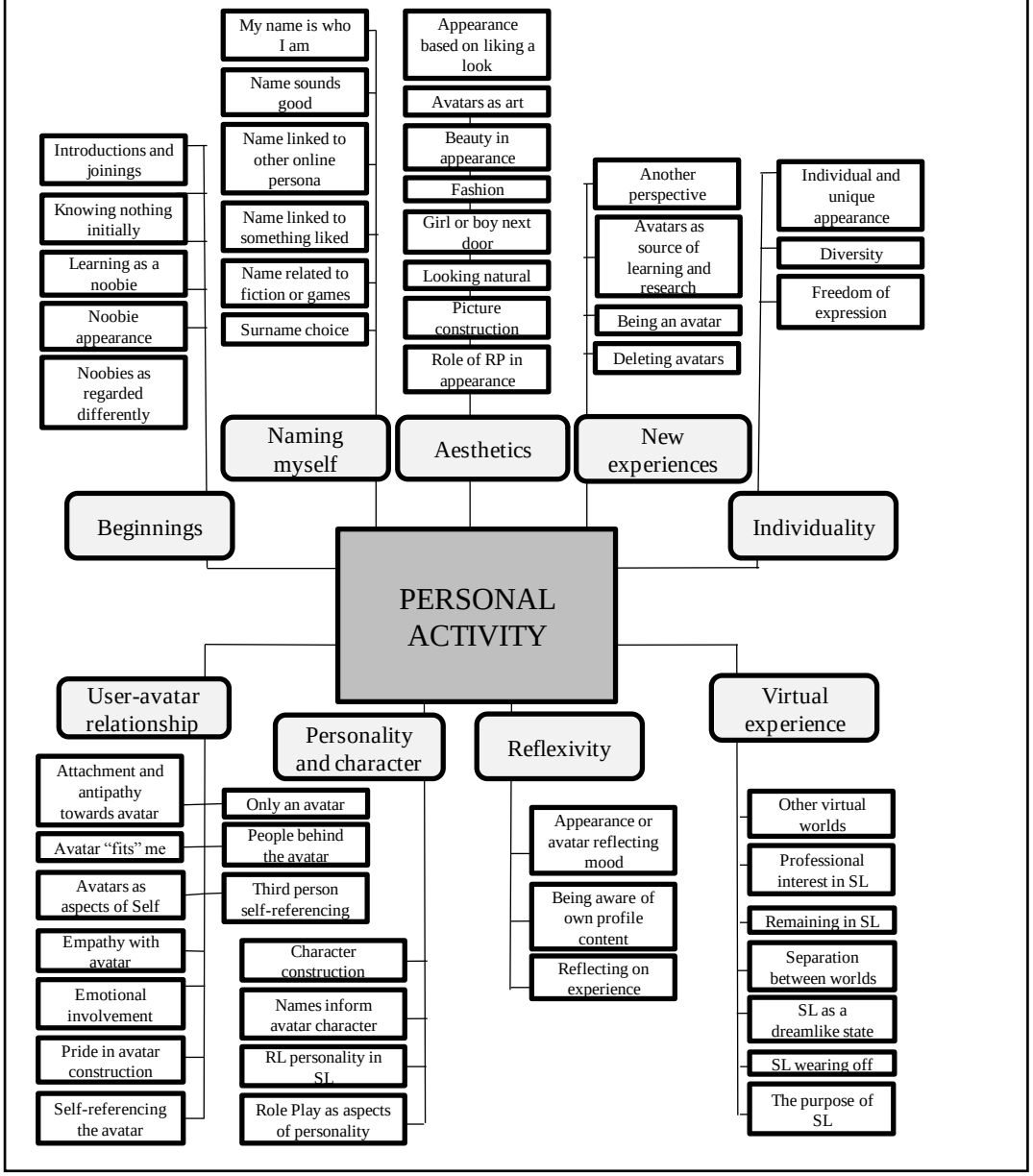
"Personal Activity" is constituted by themes that reflect **the personal aspects of representation**, including the initial experience of "becoming" an avatar, the relationship between the user and their avatar, and the types of representation decisions that are made. On the other hand, the "Social Activity" Global Theme emphasises how representation is not just a personal experience, and illuminates those **aspects of representation that are influenced by the milieu in which the user is situated**, and the role that other people have in the decisions and experience of representation of the Self. "Practical Activity" is constituted by themes that emphasise the **detailed decisions** that are made regarding representation, including financial considerations. Finally, the "Multiple Activity" Global Theme emphasises how **the act of representation is not singular or static**, but is ever-changing, involving the representation of multiple Selves, physical and virtual. The following sections provide summaries of the Thematic Analyses and networks by Global Theme.

4.4.2. Thematic Analyses and networks summarised by Global Theme

4.4.2.1. Representation of the Self as a Personal Activity

Figure 4.5 illustrates the Thematic Network representing the cluster of Organising and corresponding Basic Themes that constitute the Global Theme of "Representation of the Self as a Personal Activity".

Figure 4.5. The Thematic Network that represents the "Personal Activity" Global Theme, and the Organising and corresponding Basic Themes that constitute it.



One aspect of this Global Theme concerns representation at the **beginning** when joining Second Life. A "noobie" has a lot to learn, often having no knowledge of how Second Life works or the possibilities it offers in terms of how their avatar may appear. They soon become aware, either through their own observation or through comments from other residents, that "noobies" look and behave differently to everyone else in Second Life. In most cases the Second Life ready-made avatar they selected on setting up an account is replaced by a new one acquired inworld, or is modified to their own taste. There is pressure to change the avatar as soon as the new user arrives in Second Life, since they often have a sense that "noobies" are treated as inferior to others and not fully engaged with by other more experienced residents, merely based on their appearance. As one participant indicates:

> [People] treat you differently based on what you look like. Before ... when I looked like a noob most did not want to chat or have much to do with me. Once my appearance changed and I looked good and my profile was full ... [people] then began to IM me ... and seemed nicer to me. *Why was that?* I think several reasons ... one being ... the time it takes to explain things to a noob ... it can be time consuming and I think it's just like RL, you think differently of [people] based on their experience. It's sad but true. A good looking person ... gets more respect. It's the same in SL. (LE)

When joining Second Life, users must also **name their avatar**. Some choose a name simply because they like the sound of it, give their avatar a name that is the same or similar as the physical world, or that has positive connotations for them, such as a character from a book or game. Some users select a name they already use in other virtual environments and worlds, as explained by one participant:

> The truth is I always [choose the same name] everywhere in the world net ... chat rooms and any website I need to apply a nickname. (M2)

Representation in Second Life also involves **aesthetic qualitative judgements**, with regard to avatar appearance. These depend on the user's personal tastes or appreciation for a particular genre, especially if they are involved in Role Play within Second Life. For some, the key criterion is that their avatar appears like a regular, everyday type of person, realistic, natural, and not exaggerated or non-human in any way. Despite recognition by participants that Second Life can provide an opportunity to appear more "beautiful" than in the physical world, not all are interested in this. Nevertheless, no matter what its form, an avatar can be considered a work of art, as one person indicates:

> In many cases ... an avi is what we wish to be ... if RL were perfect ... and we could change it. Also how artistic a person is ... what they "see" ... an avi is an artistic reflection. Also ... how often they change their avi, I know some who change constantly whereas I never change. (LE)

Each person's experience of creating and using an avatar is **individual** to them. One of the key characteristics of Second Life is that its users are able to appear however they please; unlike other games, or even the physical world, there are no "rules" or

constraints on appearance once a person is inworld. The apparent lack of rules allows people to satisfy their desire to create avatars that are unique:

> *Did you know how you wanted to look when you first came to SL?* Not really, other than unique ... as I saw others I knew what I didn't want to look like ... but I didn't want to be the typical long, long hair, blonde, big boobs, I was attempting to have some kind of uniqueness but so much that I would be "plain". (M3)

Another personal aspect of representation concerns how the avatar may be a conduit to **new experiences** not necessarily possible to participants in the physical world. For example, using an avatar in Second Life can be a direct source of education in a number of ways, from non-English speakers learning the commonly used English language to interact with others, through to participants in Role Play conducting research to facilitate an authentic performance. One particular new experience commonplace in Second Life is using the avatar to gain the perspective from being another gender. Sometimes this is driven by curiosity, while other times it becomes an intrinsic part of a user's Second Life experience, and a means to understand aspects of themselves and of being a person, that would not be accessible otherwise. One participant explains:

> [My female alt] is an instrument of awareness ... the perspective of the woman here is very different from that of a man ... as a noob, there were all sorts of vulture like characters that she had to put up with ... I wanted more than anything to understand the woman's perspective ... I could interact as a woman ... and could learn about how men attempt to get what they want ... she is like my "insider" in the world of women ... [she] is the proverbial "fly on the wall" ... experiencing things that men should not know about ... or maybe cannot be bothered with ... (K)

Virtual worlds offer a **range of experience** and hence contexts for how users represent themselves. A key factor in using Second Life is the purpose it serves for the user. In particular it often fulfils something lacking in their lives, and may provide a role to play, as one participant explains:

> Others are top models, table dancers, escort cuties, fashion designers, business women … I'm an Auntie … when I wear Victorian robe or an Ancient Egyptian robe, I look different in SL as well. My look is determined [by] what I want and what I actually incorporate at SL. My role as to say, though I'm actually not a Role Player. I'm a learning and working being … so a certain "Blue Stockings" look seems appropriate for me. (A)

Moreover, the world of Second Life is sometimes seen as being separate to that of the physical world, with the same participant even describing it as being like a dream:

> My profile shows a poem by Edgar Allen Poe. It came to my mind within the first days of SL. "All that we see or seem. Is but a dream within a dream" … it describes perfectly how SL appears to me. Nothing is forever here. Like in RL. But this world is ten times faster changing. And we are dreams within a dream … it is this mixture of a more or less hyperreal projection of SL environments and fairylands. And you can TP between these different environments with two mouseclicks. This is similar to a dream. You rarely have just one dream per night. But you can just remember some snippets the next morning – or nothing. (A)

Another aspect concerns the experience of using an avatar. In the first instance, this relates to participant notions regarding the **personality** or ranges of personality they

and their avatars possess in Second Life, and the extent to which they are the same or different to that in the physical world. For some, there is no difference between the kind of person they are in Second Life and the physical world:

> I think that is a part of my RL personality, you know ... some people are "like" themselves here ... and some people are complete "fantasy" here ... so I am very much like my RL self. (DT)

While Role Play can impact on the type of person a user can appear to be, some argue that these roles are just aspects of their physical world personality being made manifest:

> I think I use my roles to help people ... Each role has a part of me ... I like to help people with being developing their soul. (S4)

For others however, it is not so clear-cut, with the avatar being seen to have a different character and personality to the physical world. One particular participant with a number of alts sees each one as having a distinct personality, a character consciously created by him for a specific purpose:

> When I did learn how to construct a character … creating an individual and original shape and appearance … took me a couple of weeks to find myself in [the female alt] … I guess she is an enigma to me … because now … I feel very comfortable when I am her … but she is a cold player … with no interest in emotional intimacy … [The old male alt] is a crusty [old] bugger … elegant in his own way … but a bit short with others who [may] toy with him or waste his time … I think [he] is the old man in me … a curmudgeon of sorts … *How old is [the young male alt]?* Not sure … maybe just out of school. I think of [him] as Siddhartha just coming out of the palace … and discovering that the real world can be a very disturbing place … [the old male alt] already knows this … and makes his judgments accordingly … (K)

This aspect also concerns the extent to which **users relate to their avatar** and the avatars of others in Second Life. Some participants claim to develop some kind of attachment to their avatar, and feel uncomfortable if they make changes to it, even feeling pride in their creation:

> I think I have grown attached to [LE] ... almost as a third person outside of myself ... [when I was dressed up as a noob] it wasn't anything to me really ... the avi was just a tool to move around the game ... Then a few months later ... found new eyes ... and hair ... and haven't changed since ... In the end I was ... and still am ... proud of what [my avatar] looks like. I have never seen anyone come close to looking like [her] and I get compliments all the time on her. (LE)

This attachment is such that there are times when the user feels empathy for situations that the avatar is in, with the avatar acting as a conduit for immersion into the virtual world. Some users feel the avatar reflects different aspects of themselves, just as we show different aspects of personality in the physical world; as one participant describes:

> *How did you decide how you wanted to look?* Just thought of who I am in a three dimensional way ... like now for instance, this is you, your professional side, this me is my [participating] side but this being, so I am still me just sitting in a different seat. When you go out with your friends, you are different persona to as you are now, right? ... So now we are seeing maybe our second dimension ... *An aspect of ourselves?* Exactly. (AM)

Hence, while it may be "only an avatar", it is common to refer to it as being the same Self, albeit a different Self, that is using it. For example, the same participant makes the casual remark, when discussing the frequency she uses an alt:

> Only rarely, just pass items to this me. (AM, author's own underlined emphasis)

A final aspect of this Global Theme concerns the extent to which participants **reflect** on and engage with their own experience in Second Life, and to which it influences how they represent themselves there. Indeed it is not uncommon for people to spend time considering their experience and the meaning of being in Second Life:

> I think about this stuff almost constantly ... trying to figure out what it means ... there is not a parallel experience in [RL] ... (K)

Participants recognise that their avatars, how they appear, or which one of their alts they use, are a mirror of their mood. To avoid hurting others, self-awareness and avoidance or diversionary tactics are sometimes adopted, as one participant explains:

> [One of my alts] is my "leave me the hell alone avie". I am usually very bitchy at times when she's in ... but not always. I allow myself that. With [my main avatar] ... I try to maintain my self-control at all times. I remove myself rather than lash out at people. (SF)

While the mood a person is in, and hence their avatar, can have impact on others around them in Second Life, so can other forms of representation, such as their profile:

> It is way too easy to misunderstand and I think some aren't even aware. That when you something gushy about one person ... another person may get hurt ... we are sort of reckless ☺ Or so focused on our current situation ... we forget about the others ... who may be still checking things out. *Do you mind that people might be scrutinising your profile?* I don't mind ... but I find myself trying to be careful what I put there. (DT)

4.4.2.2. Representation of the Self as a Social Activity

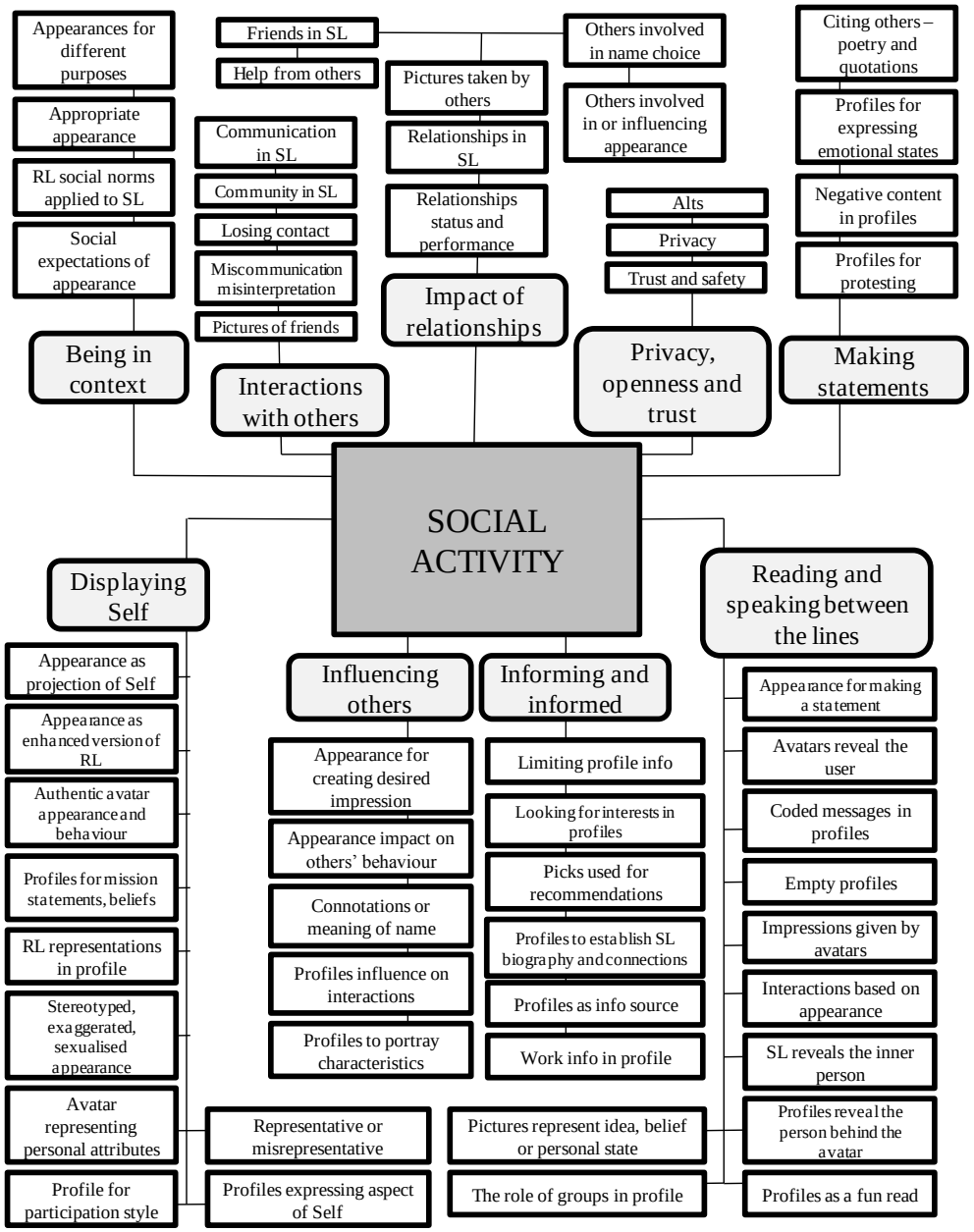
Figure 4.6 illustrates the Thematic Network representing the cluster of Organising and corresponding Basic Themes that constitute the Global Theme of "Representation of the Self as a Social Activity".

One aspect of this Global Theme is concerned with the extent to which the social environments, both in the physical and virtual world, influence the choices that users make in representing themselves in Second Life. In the first instance, the **context** provided by Second Life can have a direct influence on the appearance taken by avatars, such as when participating in Role Play. Even more general environments and occasions can inspire users to change their avatar appearance to suit, depending on the purpose, such as going dancing or just "hanging out". However, despite the apparent lack of rules indicated in the "Personal Activity" Global Theme, there are social norms that have influence. These may be applied in such subtle and undetected ways that there is no consensus on the extent to which they exist. One participant offers an

apparent contradiction, concurring with the notion that there are no rules, while simultaneously explaining the types of appearance that are the social norm:

> You, of course, mean unstated [rules about how people should look in SL] ... an unspoken societal rule. There are none that I can see ... anything goes. Otherwise, you wouldn't have sooooo many long-hair, ridiculous cleavage women ... as a woman, I can say that society puts so much emphasis on being and retaining beauty, that it is understandable why so many choose to look the way they do. But honestly, I hate that look. Even in RL. (M3)

Figure 4.6. The Thematic Network that represents the "Social Activity" Global Theme, and the Organising and corresponding Basic Themes that constitute it.



Another aspect of this theme concerns the role of other users. In the first instance this relates to the **interactions with others** in the experience of representation. Many of the photographs shared by participants for the purpose of the present research

contained other avatars, not just that of the participant. The avatar is an important part of this interaction, not just because it is a medium for communication, but can be a communication in itself:

> My idea about avatars is that they are a very important means of communication, especially in the first moments of an encounter. Not different to RL, but more important. SL is mainly a visual determined world. So other impressions, like e.g. the sound of a voice, the gestures, mimics, smell is not present. You have to rely and to focus on the "image" of the other self condensed in someone's avatar … (A)

Relationships with others have direct and indirect roles in how Second Life users represent themselves. Close relationships with others are a key aspect of the Second Life experience, and in the first instance these people help or influence users' decisions regarding the avatar, particularly when getting started in Second Life. Other users also have a role in how someone may represent themselves in their profile; for example, it is common for people to include pictures of friends in their profiles, or use their profile to highlight their relationships: they include the names and pictures of friends and partners, as well as the status of those relationships, good and bad. One participant explains her own experience:

> In recent months, I've been putting quotes from songs or some such poetic blurb. It is in direct response to recent SL heartbreak. I guess it is an SL equivalent to venting pain. But the current SL blurb is actually showing progress away from the heartbreak. (M3)

The **anonymity** that users have in Second Life also influences acts of representation. It encourages participants to be cautious with what they share with others, including their physical world identity and their use of alts, since ultimately they do not know what others will do with such information or who these others might be, as explained by one participant:

> *Is there any reason you haven't told the [friend] who doesn't [know about the other alts]?* Perhaps because she has recently met me ... and I am not certain yet "who" she is ... *Might she be someone else?* Stranger things have happened in SL ... I tend not to be terribly trusting ... (K, speaking as his female alt)

While people may take measures to maintain privacy, Second Life is an online world with socialising at its core, and so some participants believe such privacy is a myth. Users become adept at reading signs and interpreting other people's behaviour, and so even acts of concealment tell others something about oneself, as one participant describes:

> *If someone hides groups,*[22] *what can it tell you about their minds?* That they kind of hide parts of themselves, or that they keep it like me in a way, that they won't give everything to other people on the first shot, they separate things for strangers and friends/(virtual) family. (M1)

[22] The default is for Second Life user profiles to include all groups the user is a member of, although it is possible to hide any or all of the groups if one wishes.

Another aspect of this Global Theme concerns how representation is actively used to communicate to others. People use their profiles in overt ways to **make statements**, use their profiles for expressing their thoughts, feelings and opinions. For example, it is common for people to use quotations from poetry, songs or other literature to sum up an experience, or to include other text and pictures, to evoke responses from others:

> *Do you find it helpful to put those blurbs?* In a psychological sense, I guess so. It's really only for my benefit, isn't it? Doubtful he'll read it. And I guess a way of telling strangers that something is going on here. *Maybe others will though and feel supportive.* Or be intrigued and a new friendship might develop, from kindred souls, perhaps. (M3)

To some extent the avatar and profile are **acts of display**, publicising, and reflective of, the type of person the user is. Profiles can be used to show a part of the person's personality, aspects of their life in the physical world that they want to share with others, or their personal rules on how they wish to participate in Second Life. As such, they can also be used to make specific statements that indicate the user's beliefs or causes they have sympathy with:

> [Discussing an entry in her profile picks that states "the purpose of argument should not be VICTORY but progress"] [The] argument [entry] is hopefully letting people know that means, putting a positive side to it ... some do not know what a real argument is, they think it is for winning a situation. *These statements about argument and love you have, I guess these are all things you want to stand for?* Exactly, and hope for others to learn. (AM)

As with the profile, some participants see the avatar as also reflecting the attributes of the person using it, a projection of their own self-image:

> *Do you think your avatar represents you?* Physically, a perfect me, psychologically, I am the same I think ... *Do you think you can tell what someone is like by looking at their avi?* Oh I think so ... one can put attention to what he wants to be, or what he is. For example, you ... you are clever, so you put [on glasses]. Glasses looks like a wiseman. An intellectual. Hm, you are shy. You are in black, so you do not like to be in the middle point. (S5)

This does not necessarily mean avatar appearance is identical to that in the physical world: the avatar may be an enhanced version of the "real me", or a stereotyped, exaggerated or sexualised version. Nevertheless, despite the opportunities for Role Play, experimentation, and change from the physical world, authenticity in terms of appearance and behaviour is still important to some users:

> *What makes her a convincing female av?* … in my opinion … the way she is made … the profile she creates … and the way she behaves … *What makes her profile convincing do you think?* The care with which it is assembled … one of the most obvious give-aways of a male playing a female is that there is absolutely NOTHING in the profile … I have not found anyone yet who doubts that [my female alt] is not genuine … but many believe she is an older woman in RL … and relatively conservative … (K, as his female alt)

A person's profile and avatar may be constructed to **influence**, and elicit some kind of response from, other residents. Even the avatar name may have connotations that the user desires to be associated with, as one participant describes:

> I wanted a wholesome name and her name means truth, honest, purity, depending on where it is used. (AM)

With respect to the avatar, to some extent it is created with its impression on other people in mind. Hence the avatar appearance can cause others to behave differently towards the user, in both foreseen and unforeseen ways, as one participant who uses various avatar appearances in her position as an adviser to other residents:

> ... I was fascinated with the different reactions I would get with various avies … If I was helping with [my fairy avi] people treated me as if I was a child … she is as short as you can go in the slider scale [the instrument used to change avatar physical characteristics] without scripts … and very skinny … and when I was a Tiny [a very small avatar] I was walked over by noobs. I was a helper then, and greeting new residents. Their reactions tend to be what they would be in RL … [they] would ignore me. (SF)

Likewise, the profiles are consciously constructed to portray what the user sees as desirable characteristics, for example. They can influence the decisions that others make, on if they decide to interact, or even avoid, someone:

> *Are there things you expect to see when you look at profiles?* Maybe just a hint of what that person is interested in in SL ... that might influence if I talk to you. I mean contact you first ... if someone IMs me ... I will talk to them ... I will reply ... but yes, I would probably pull up their profile out of curiosity ... to see what they have there ... So I will talk to someone ... As sometimes ... they are seeing something in my profile or pics ... they want to know about. (DT)

A final aspect concerns how users actively interpret avatars and their profiles. Users seek to inform others of their personal lives, and in turn **keep themselves informed** of the personal lives of others, as well as events, occasions and venues within Second Life that might be of interest. The main conduit for such information is the profile:

> *When you look at someone else's profile, what do you look for?* I always tell someone who ask about myself to check my profile, to know the answer ... usually I don't see the profile until I feel this I [am with] is really interesting. Looking in First Life page. Of course their pic. (M2)

One of the main functions of the profile is to establish someone's biography and connections. It is common to use its various sections to record important events in a user's Second Life and to promote the close relationships and friendships they have established there, almost like a diary, as one participant observes:

> Yeah ... it is "public" information ... though I think some people use it like a diary ☺ (DT)

To some extent users **communicate "between the lines"**: they make interpretations from the appearance of other avatars and their profiles, as well as offering "coded" messages of their own for others to decipher. One participant describes how he uses the appearance he has at the interview, as a statement for others to interpret:

> ... it's mostly a mood thing today, I love red and black as colours which is really good combined in that outfit, still having a touch of gothic as I am and feel like ... So in a way like "hell yes I can be offending when u get bad on me" and kind of being straight with what I say what I still mean then. (M1)

Indeed judging others and making interpretations of their characteristics simply based on appearance, is common:

> People treat you differently based on what you look like ... Once my appearance changed and I looked good and my profile was full … people then began to IM me … and seemed nicer to me. … I think it's just like RL, you think differently of people based on their appearance. It's sad but true. A good looking person … gets more respect. It's the same in SL. (LE)

The profile is also a site for interpretations, where readers sometimes read more than what the author intended. In the first instance, their content can reveal the kind of person to whom the avatar belongs:

> ... it's a good clue to see what other people's intentions are like, the description, in which groups they are and if they hide or not hide groups. That's a great peek into their minds though. (M1)

Hence, it is not only profile text that reveals something about users; the groups they are members of, the pictures they include, or even the fact a profile has no content, all offer the reader clues to the type of person whose profile it is:

> *How important is the profile?* Very important I think. An empty profile to me ... based on the age of the avi .., can tell a lot of a person. An empty profile suggests they are an alt. Or trying to hide. Even shy people say a lot in profiles. (LE)

Ultimately some believe Second Life can be very revealing, to the extent of revealing the real person inside in ways that interactions with people in the physical world cannot:

> *What does SL reveal?* Well I think that because we don't have the other illusions of RL we might be more inclined to pay more attention to the written word. And what people are actually saying. To see people's spirit. Everyone can be beautiful here ... because of the illusions of RL have been taken away, we can see their inner self more clearly … about how they feel. Not always. But more so than you might get from a conversation in a library or something. (L)

4.4.2.3. Representation of the Self as a Practical Activity

Figure 4.7 illustrates the Thematic Network that represents the cluster of Organising and corresponding Basic Themes constituting the Global Theme of "Representation of the Self as a Practical Activity".

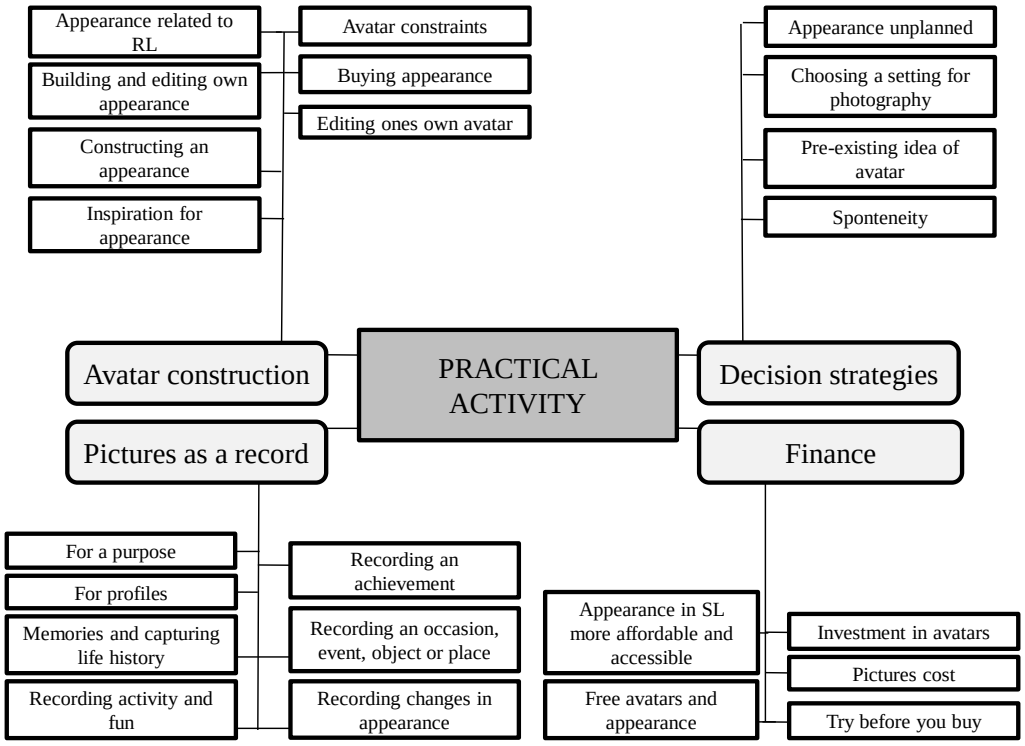
One aspect of this Global Theme concerns the different **decision strategies** that users employ with respect to the avatar appearance and how it is represented. On first joining the virtual world, some already have a pre-existing idea of what kind of avatar they would like, or at least a germ of an idea that they realise Second Life is able to fulfil; for example one person who Role Plays pirates indicates:

> I've always liked pirates. Pretty much. They'd always find a way in my work, even if it didn't call for it. (BM)

However, some have no pre-conceptions regarding their appearance and other aspects of representation. Hence, some avatars have a more chaotic evolution:

> I remember going through that place when you join ... they try to show you the basics. I don't know why I chose the avi I did ... It didn't really concern me at the time what I looked like. I didn't think it important. *Did it become important?* Yes it did. (LE)

Figure 4.7. The Thematic Network that represents the "Practical Activity" Global Theme, and the Organising and corresponding Basic Themes that constitute it.



Another aspect concerns the practical aspects of **avatar construction**, the inspiration for its appearance, and the construction process itself. In terms of avatar appearance, experience or appearance in the physical world is a common starting point, as one participant explains:

> Much of my taste is the same ... but I wouldn't wear a really short skirt in [RL]. Not without tights or anything anyway. Took me ages to take that step ... the face I tried to make like the real me. I often wear dark eyeliner ... made the eye shape a bit like mine, etc. ... (L)

In other cases, some aspect of Second Life may inspire a look, for example an outfit seen in a retail outlet, or the discovery of a particular type of avatar, as one participant found:

> *Where did the inspiration come from for this appearance?* Hmmm, I'd say at first I was simply a red haired pirate woman .... then I found the kid av three days into, found an orphanage that gave out better ones. And then [BM} and her back story began. (BM)

In Second Life, it is possible to make one's own clothes and create other aspects of avatar appearance, amend items that other people have created, or purchase from the many retail outlets in Second Life; hence avatars are commonly a mixture of all three. Some create aspects of appearance because buying items "off the rack" can be a costly process, while others take pleasure in it:

> *Do you make all your own stuff?* No, actually I don't which is the strange thing. I tried a bit back then, but bought clothes are much better. I just thought it was fun to try. Sometimes I will add something in. Like leggings. (L)

It is also common for users to custom their avatar shape, sometimes frequently, making adjustments as their tastes change or as new alts are created. However, there are some technical constraints; in particular the graphics capabilities of the user's computer can be low, and so what the avatar's user might see is not the same as others:

> Not found my first avi ... the one you get when new, that I doctored, scary stuff ☺ ... well very new. And my graphics card was not good. So now I see it is scary, bless her. (H)

Another practical aspect of representation is the **financial cost** of avatar appearance and representation in Second Life. Financing one's Second Life is a concern for many, and while it is possible to buy every aspect of one's avatar from retail outlets inworld, many users try to minimise financial burden by acquiring items at little or no cost, especially when they first join. Nevertheless, as one participant observes, even if one has to pay for appearance, it is still more affordable than in the physical world:

> *Do you have a similar sense of style in RL?* Yes but not the money to get it though LOL … well, if you look at the prices: an outfit like that would cost me 1000 Euros, money that I don't have or need to spend for other things ATM. Unless I do it on my own, but therefore I'd need a machine to get the patches together which I don't own. (M1)

Taking photographs for the sake of the profile also requires investment, either the nominal fee that Second Life charges for each downloaded picture, or the cost of paying a "professional" to make an image. Ultimately, creating and maintaining an avatar takes investment in time, money and effort, which is lost if a person has to end the account for whatever reason, as this participant grieves when recalling past experiences in Second Life:

> All the money spent on them, all the lost work, also the cheating and griefing. (AM)

In relation to **photographs** in Second Life, there are various reasons people take them. It is common for users to take photographs of their avatar (hence the feasibility in using them in the present research); as explained by one participant, a key reason for this is for use in profiles, in order to represent an aspect of the user in some way:

> This was how I made her, the look was taken for her profile … *What was the reason for this pic?* To represent my water side. *What did you do with it? Put it on your profile?* Yes, but took it out after a while. (AM)

Another reason is for recording changes in appearance:

> *What made you have this [alt] photo taken?* Just for reference of my look at the time. *Oh, do you try and keep a catalogue?* Yes I do. (AM)

More generally, photographs are taken on everyday occasions, to record some kind of activity or event, object, or place that someone came across in their Second Life explorations. They are also taken for a specific purpose, to record an achievement, or an aspect of Second Life they particularly appreciate, for example. Whatever the reason for their being taken, photographs are reminders of past events and

circumstances, and can be used to capture memories and relive the past, as one participant describes:

> *What's it like seeing you this long ago.* Nice memories :)) Was very happy time and fun … *How come you took the pic?* … I take a lot of pictures, have about 5 boxes full in inventory. My life in SL, sort of :)) … Some are in those rotating frames, and I put those out sometimes and remember good times :)) as do my friends that are still around. (H)

4.4.2.4. Representation of the Self as a Multiple Activity

Figure 4.8 illustrates the Thematic Network representing the cluster of Organising and corresponding Basic Themes that constitute the Global Theme of "Representation of the Self as a Multiple Activity".

One aspect of this Global Theme concerns the role and implications of **multiple avatars and alts** in a person's Second Life experience, and how appearance can change according to circumstance. Alts serve a range of purposes; they may be used to separate out leisure from business pursuits, for storing money or inventory, for exploring or building, to have virtual sex without ramifications on the main avatar, or simply to have "time off". One participant, with several alts who vary in age and gender, explains the various roles his avatars play:

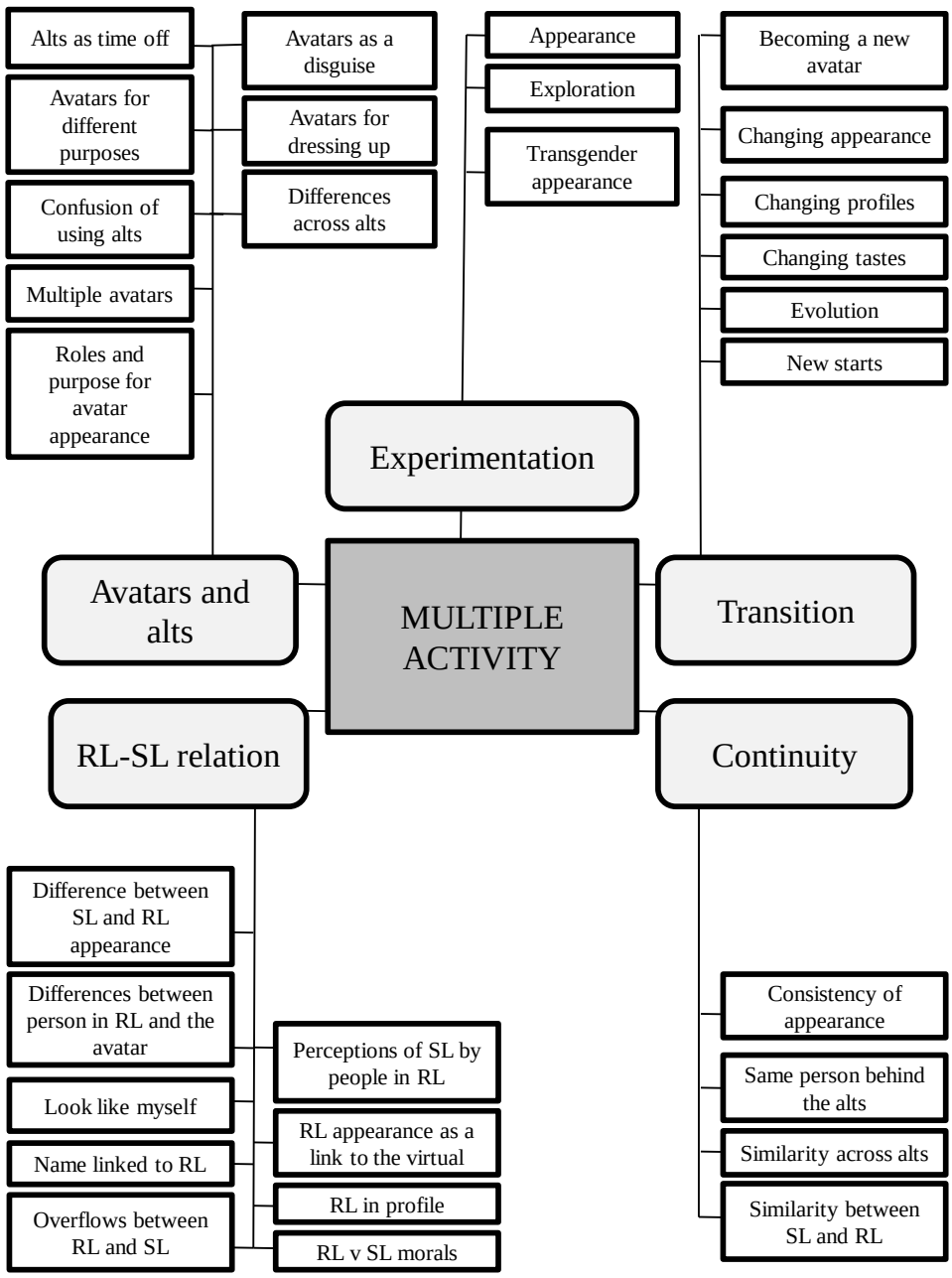
> [K] became almost immediately domesticated … so [the older male alt] was "time off" from that relationship … he was to explore … anonymously … by himself … but [the young male alt] has taken that youthful place … like [K], [the older male alt] "hides" his age … [the older male alt] also represents a spiritual side of me … a traveller … one who is curious, observes, and is free to move around … [the younger male alt] asks a lot of irritating questions … ☺ I suppose that is me drilling down into the character of others … ☺ … *Do you log on them depending on mood? ...* Yeah …. *So when you feel grumpy do you log on as [the older male alt]?* It is based on mood and whether I have the time in RL to devote to SL … [the older male alt] when I want to see somebody particular or when I wish to be alone. *[The younger male alt]?* Mostly when I want to wander and explore by myself … ☺ *[The female alt]? ...* [The female alt] … hmmm … that is a good question …. I am not sure … hehe … bit likely when I "I feel pretty, oh so pretty …" 8D … *When do you log on as [K]?* With commitments … like a wedding I attended yesterday … (K)

The alts themselves vary in the differences and similarities between them, both in terms of appearance, and the sense of attitude, mood and personality that the user associates with them. The same participant believes his range of avatars reflects the different aspects of his personality, with his main avatar being the "personality in charge", the aspect of his personality that gives him a sense of order and cohesiveness:

> ... [the three other avatars]are subordinate to [K] … I read at one point that – quite apart from virtual world considerations – we are a collection of personalities … I began to develop a theory off of that … that our alts can represent forms of those personalities … we will always be OK if only one those personalities are in charge … but there will be reigning chaos if it is not clear which is in charge … [the young male alt] is the young one … and I remember being [him] when I was young … suspicious, idealistic, curious, shy, inwardly reflective … [the older male alt] is the old gruff character … seen it all … keeps to himself as he knows better than to trust anyone … at times cynical … mostly quiet and watching from the side … discouraging interpersonal depth … [the female alt] is an enigma … I suppose there is a bit of RP going on here … [K] has a time and a place … [the older male alt] and [young male alt] have no commitments … I think of [K] as the

> anchor … the "whole" … [the older male alt] and [the young male alt] are aspects of [K]. (K)

Figure 4.8. The Thematic Network that represents the "Multiple Activity" Global Theme, and the Organising and corresponding Basic Themes that constitute it.



Another aspect of multiplicity concerns how users try new ideas with respect to their avatar. Phases of **experimentation** with appearance are common, particularly when first joining the virtual world, and between phases of more stable appearance:

> I went through a stage after Christmas of my first year of trying loads of different hair, and eventually settled on this one … (L)

Sometimes people settle down to one particular form of avatar appearance and return to it, even after experimentation, particularly as the person becomes more experienced in Second Life:

> *Why did you experiment with changing a year ago?* I thought I could do it again, and the avi did look good ... but oddly ... it wasn't "me" ... it didn't fit my personality. So I wore it only a couple of days ... and went back to what I felt comfortable in. (LE)

Some users also experiment with appearing as a different gender, creating specific accounts for the purpose. Of the participants in this sample, none did it because they felt transgendered in the physical world, more it was a sense of curiosity, seeking to "see how the other half lived", as one describes:

> When I first created [the alt] I made the male version … so the male one I just made to see what it was all about … (L)

Another aspect of this Global Theme concerns how a person's experience of Second Life is one of **transition** and continual change. At its most basic, all the participants had experienced change in their appearance to one extent or another, either a day to day change, as the mood strikes, or an evolution as tastes evolve. For some, the change in taste arises hand-in-hand with experience of possibilities in Second Life, and a new perception of what they think is desirable from when they first joined the virtual world. It is common for users to have a sense of evolution that they and their avatar have changed over time, not only in terms of appearance but the experience of using the avatar and Second Life:

> Evolving again into the current me … *Has [L] changed over time?* Inside as opposed to experience? *Yes. And how it feels to be her.* Probably yes. More confident I think, as time goes on, and not worrying so much about rights and wrongs. But basically she is still me. (L)

Amendments and revisions are also part and parcel of managing the Second Life profile. Sometimes these changes are due to experiences within Second Life, reflecting changes in relationships one wishes to display or how one wishes to interact with others, for example:

> ... and then too ... the experiences ... I think I see a difference in what someone puts ... after they have had some time to interact with others ... so you see the "there is a RL person behind this avatar" or the clear boundary expression "I do NOT .. whatever". (DT)

Some Second Life users have a particularly complex experience of change and transition; for example this participant, who has had to create a series of new avatars and alts due to "griefing" (abuse, stalking and other negative behaviour) from other residents and inworld relationship partners:

> She was named liked that because the guy I was friends with, and at that time [the previous avatar] was being griefed by the partner's alt's partner LOL, sounds confusing, anyway I though OK if this other guy wants her to be called [another version of the previous avatar's name] not a problem, thought it would look too obvious if it was [the same avatar name] … She happened before I ended it with [my SL partner], again because of his infidelity, I was griefed so [the next avatar] was made … *Can you remind me of the*

> *problem with that avatar … was she being griefed as well?* Yes, she was, so another [avatar with the same first name] was made. (AM)

Another aspect of Second Life's multiple nature is its **relation to life in the physical world**, how the physical world is often the reference point for how people experience and manage their Second Life, and the extent to which the two worlds and two lives can be compared and contrasted. Participants often describe the differences between Second Life and its physical counterpart, both in terms of appearance and the type of person that they manifest. For many users, the point of Second Life is to be different to how one is in the physical world, and such differences are not necessarily disconcerting:

> *You are blonde in RL but [LE] is dark in SL … is that for any particular reason?* Yes, [LE] was blonde too … even after the change … one day … for fun … at a new hair place … I decide to see what red would look like. As it turns out, this colour hair fits the skin tone much better … *It doesn't feel odd after being blonde?* Ya know … it never did … when I found this hair … I loved it immediately. (LE)

On the other hand however, it is not unusual for the avatar to reflect the physical world, for example, some aspect of the avatar appearance may resemble that in the physical world or how one thinks one looks, or the name have links to the physical world:

> My RL name is [a long version of DT's first name] … and at that point – I did not belong to any other social networks or online stuff … so I wasn't really concerned with "anonymity" or any of that stuff … and I am half Japanese – so out of the last names available at the time [DT's surname] was appealing. So my name is a reflection of me ☺ (DT)

Indeed, as one participant observes, such links may give a person security in the strange situations presented by virtual worlds:

> I'm not literally a translation of my RL look, but quite close. Maybe it gives me a certain feeling of intimacy in this strange world. (A)

Another counterpoint with the physical world is the extent to which life there is shared with others in Second Life. One aspect of this is that there is a specific "First Life" section in the Second Life profile, which users are free to use if and how they please. Participants sometimes use these to show some part of their physical world Self or life, or use it as a reference point when making decisions on if and how to interact with another resident:

> *Is it better for someone to put something in First Life than nothing at all?* No. I do like to see where they are from if I can. That's all I need to know really. Think it may be a safety thing … too close to home may scare me :)) (H)

Indeed it is not uncommon for some aspects of "First Life" to impact on Second Life in unexpected ways, such as participant "DT" whose avatar name is similar to that in the physical world; she discovered that other residents can appear more intimate than they

intend, by simply using her name, and so in this sense she had shared an aspect of her physical world, without others realising:

> I didn't realise at the time … that when chatting … when someone calls me [DT's first name] … it probably comes across as much more personal to me even if unintentionally … *How does that feel?* Well sometimes I have to remember that the person may not really know that ☺ (DT)

A final aspect considers how, despite the multiple nature of virtual world experience, there are aspects of **consistency and continuity**. In terms of appearance, while it is common to change and evolve over time, participants often highlight the consistencies in how their avatar looks. Others indicate that despite possessing a range of alts, there are often consistencies across all their avatars, maybe a specific detail that all share, as one participant highlights:

> All are female … notice the tat on the shoulder … those are a rather new feature, all of mine have them. (SF)

Ultimately, as the same participant remarks, no matter how avatars look or what avatar is used, the same person is behind:

> My alts are all me. (SF)

4.5. Summary of the analysis and relating it to the research question

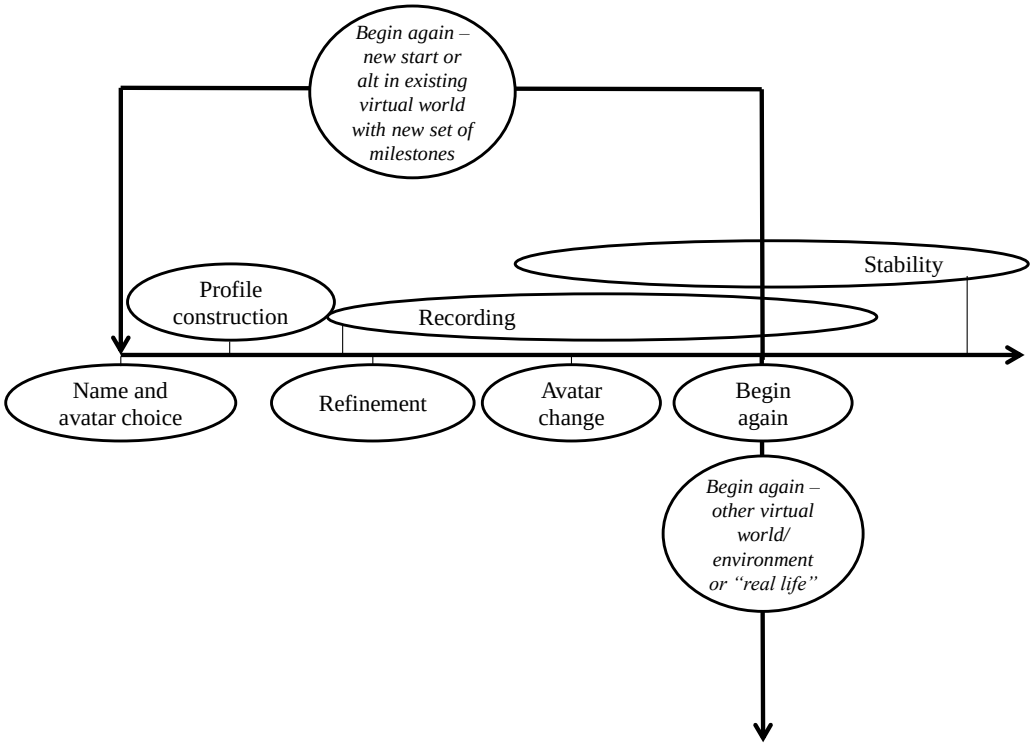
This section provides a description of the findings in terms of how they relate to the present subsidiary research question:

> How is the Self represented in virtual worlds?

The Thematic Analysis indicates that representation of the Self is comprised of a range of activities: personal, social, practical and multiple. While these activities can be used to address this subsidiary question, the question also demands that "how" the Self is represented must be understood. It is useful to think of "How?" in this sense as meaning that a range of aspects must be considered, including the form that avatar name, appearance and profile take, how they emerge, and how they may transform over time. The themes arising from the research illuminate these considerations. In particular, the research indicates that in Second Life the whole representation of the Self experience passes through a number of **milestones**, the extent to which each of the activities identified in the Thematic Analysis occurs varying at each one. The following sections outline these milestones and their relation to the Thematic Analysis. The order of the sections is not meant to necessarily suggest a set order in which they occur (although the order presented here may be typical), or even that a user's personal

experience includes all these milestones. Figure 4.9 provides an overview of these milestones, in the form of a potential timeline, and indicates how the milestones may reapply as new avatars are created, or may be abandoned as the user ceases using.

Figure 4.9. Potential timeline of milestones that occur in relation to representation of the Self in virtual worlds.



4.5.1. Name and avatar choice

The first milestone in avatar usage is the choice of name and avatar form that the user decides upon when setting up a Second Life account, whether this is the first time the user has engaged in this process or not.

If this is the first time a person has created an avatar in Second Life, many decisions made will be in response to personal criteria. The name in particular is important to some because it will be with them in some form throughout the course of the avatar's existence. Hence decisions include choosing a name that is liked for some reason; sometimes new users choose names that they already use in other virtual environments or they decide upon a name linked to the physical world. The choice of avatar they make for the first time from the options presented on setting up an account is likely to be a personal one also, reflecting their own tastes and the fact they may have little knowledge of the possibilities inworld. Some of the choices already reflect the inherent

multiple nature of virtual world experience, in particular the extent to which it will be separate to the life conducted in the physical world. Choices include the extent to which their avatar choice resembles their appearance in the physical world, or something entirely different. From a practical viewpoint, decisions are often unplanned and spontaneous, although some take their time in making these decisions because they believe it is of some import to the rest of their Second Life experience.

For those creating an additional Second Life account, the complexion of the decisions and choices differs, as discussed in Section 4.5.7.

4.5.2. Profile construction

The second milestone typically occurs soon after arrival in Second Life, when users decide how to complete their profile. The inherent nature of profiles is that they are a social activity, intended for consumption by others; indeed, they are fundamental to users' decisions on if and how they should interact with other users. In the first instance, they must decide whether to complete a profile, since it is not compulsory. Many decide to complete at least the Second Life section of the profile; while not unusual to see a new avatar with an empty or near-empty profile, experienced Second Life users assume in the case of an avatar that has existed for any length of time, this means that they are an alt (discussed in Section 4.5.6).

As well as being intrinsically social, to some extent the profile also reflects the multiple nature of being active in virtual worlds, since it has a specific section for sharing "first life" information, and so a user must decide whether to complete this section, and if so, what with. Meanwhile, a practical aspect of profile completion is providing an avatar portrait picture, the key choice being whether it should be a self-portrait, which costs the price of a download, or a professional portrait, costing considerably more. Ultimately, they need to maintain self-awareness of what they include in the profile, how it appears to others, the impression it gives, and what others may or may not do once they read it.

4.5.3. Recording

The third milestone occurs when users begin to take photographs. While the process is personal, since the user is taking the pictures that they want and to their taste, it is more a practical activity since it occurs for specific reasons: to record the avatar appearance,

and changes in it, or to record events, for example. It is also a social activity since the photographs often include others, or capture social situations users find themselves in. Another social aspect of photographs is their presence the profile, as a Second Life portrait or in “Picks” section.

4.5.4. Refinement

The fourth milestone occurs once the new user has become more established and is using Second Life more frequently, and refers to the process of making series of changes to the avatar and its profile. The full range of activities that emerges from the Thematic Analysis is prevalent during this process of refinement.

Refinements happen on a personal level as the user begins to feel more established in Second Life. Some see their avatar as a character, and as experiences occur they develop the character of the avatar, adjusting its appearance and profile accordingly. Some become engaged with more overt Role Play which necessitates amendments to adhere to the rules of the Role Play they are engaged in. Others simply realise the opportunities that exist to change their avatar and begin to experiment.

The social environment plays a significant part in the act of, and motivation for, refinement. This begins soon after joining, as they begin to see their avatar through other users’ eyes and realise that they behave and appear differently to those with more experience. As users make refinements, the social norms of the physical world are often applied, and their personal tastes guide how they amend their avatar. However, some users are influenced by the trends they see in Second Life and begin to adhere to the social norms there, experimenting with shape and appearance to emphasise masculinity or femininity for example. As they become immersed in Second Life and are exposed to the variety of social milieu, it is common for users to adapt their avatar to whatever context they are in, being in a sim of a particular genre or era, for example. Social influences also extent to the content that users put into their profiles. As they have interactions, relationships and other social experiences, it is not uncommon for people to change their profiles in response, to publicise their friendships, or to state how they wish to engage with others, for example.

The practical aspects of representation underpin the act of refinement since in order to make any amendments users need to learn how to edit their avatar, and gather ideas on how they would like their avatar to appear. In some ways this links back to the role of the social environment, since other users and the various milieu the user is involved in help in achieving these.

Ultimately, this whole process of refinement is another example of the extent to which experience in Second Life is multiple in nature, with the user and their avatar evolving and changing. On a continual basis, users make decisions about what aspects they wish to amend and those they wish to maintain.

4.5.5. Avatar change

A common milestone for users to experience is avatar change. In comparison to the refinements outlined above, this refers to a wholesale "makeover", involving simultaneous changes in skin, shape, hair and wardrobe. This sometimes coincides with other changes, a failed virtual relationship for example, and can also involve an overhauling of the avatar profile to include the new avatar appearance and any changes in their Second Life lifestyle. There are a number of aspects to this milestone, across the range of activities emerging from the Thematic Analysis.

To some extent the prevailing theme in this milestone is personal activity. At its most fundamental, the user is making personal choices regarding their new avatar appearance. It is sometimes the case that they wish to exploit the freedom of expression possible in Second Life and create an avatar more in line with their own personal taste and view. Having had more experience in Second Life, other users develop their own sense of Second Life style, and wish to create an avatar that more accurately reflects what they believe to be these unique aspects of themselves. In some cases the changes reflect an antipathy that may have arisen in relation to the avatar; perhaps the user is bored with the avatar appearance, or it has connotations to a bad experience, for example. Sometimes the user is engaging in a thought process of "it's only an avatar" and that, unlike the physical world where wholesale changes are not necessarily possible or easy, it is a relatively simple to task to change appearance.

Social aspects of representation in Second Life also play a part in this milestone. Users commonly seek the advice of others in terms of what amendments to their avatar or profile could be made, or where to acquire various aspects of an avatar. They may also consider how they wish the avatar to appear to others, since it influences how the kind of person they are perceived to be, and how others may choose to interact (or not); some users may wish to create an avatar that is more sexually desirable, for example.

From a practical viewpoint, a key consideration may be cost, since a wholesale change might necessitate financial outlay for purchasing the various avatar elements from retail outlets inworld. Other practical aspects include the process of inspiration

and idea gathering, and the fact that constraints on avatar representation may have changed (for example, the availability of "mesh" may inspire a change to a "mesh avatar"[23]).

As with other milestones, the multiple nature of representation in virtual worlds is evident here, since a person in Second Life is in continual change and not static. However, in some cases these wholesale changes are an experiment, as the user seeks to find an avatar appearance they prefer, or as they realise they were happier as they were.

4.5.6. Begin again

This milestone is in some ways related to the "Avatar change" milestone described above. Rather than revamping their current avatar, in some cases users decide to create a new account and avatar. Although not all users experience this milestone, it is nevertheless a relatively common experience, and is referred to by several research participants. There are three aspects to this milestone.

4.5.6.1. What form of new account: a new start or alt?

Initially, the user decides whether they truly want to begin their Second Life experience anew, and delete or abandon their old account, or if they require an alt, an account that they maintain concurrently with their original account. Their motivations for how they proceed reflect a number of personal and social aspects. From a personal viewpoint, sometimes a new account is created for relatively prosaic reasons, such as the user took a break and lost account details, while other users want to begin afresh. In some cases, the motivation for creating a new account depends on the social environment that the user has experienced: a common reason for creating an alt that is maintained alongside the original account is to give the user privacy and space to engage in activities without interruption by Second Life friends and contacts. Another reason for creating a new account is because social relationships relating to the existing account have ended poorly or continue to play out, from which the user wants to escape, such as being "stalked" by another user.

The key aspect of creating a new account is that it is fundamentally multiplicative. In the first instance, it is not uncommon for the same user to maintain different

[23] "Mesh" refers to objects (avatars, clothing, furniture, etc.) constructed using proprietary computer programming tools, and imported into the Second Life programme for use in the virtual world.

experiences and relationships across a number of avatars, with each having its own profile. Secondly, a separate or new account allows the user to have different experiences from what they currently enjoy and that may not be realistically possible with one account. It is not uncommon for users to have a number of avatars for different purposes, such as for building, exploring etc., or to experience a range of concurrent relationships (sometimes sexual). However, while creation of a new account is common, it is not unusual for alts to become relatively unused, or to be restricted in how often they are used; maintaining an avatar is costly, both financially and in terms of time and effort, and for that reason some users are reluctant to invest to the same degree in an alt, or to give up a previous avatar and lose the investment.

4.5.6.2. A new set of milestones

Just as creating the first avatar account instigates a set of commonly experienced milestones, creating further accounts instigate more similar milestones. The milestones previously described may all apply to each new avatar account, albeit with some differences. These differences occur mainly at the initial stage, where decisions are made regarding the avatar name and appearance, and the construction of a profile for the account. In terms of the name and appearance, it is not uncommon for users to develop an avatar that is in response to their other avatar accounts (a similar name for example). However, they may create an avatar that is completely different in order to facilitate a complete break from experiences with their other avatars, and to escape the scrutiny of other users with whom they may already be familiar. With respect to creating a profile, while some users may decide not to complete one since they view the account as “only” an alt, experienced users can interpret an empty profile as belonging to an alt; hence, if the user of an alt wishes to appear as an authentic Second Life resident they complete the profile.

4.5.6.3. Begin again elsewhere?

One choice most likely occurring to all users is that they decide to leave Second Life altogether, either to use another virtual world or to devote more time to “real life”. The reason for this choice is similar to starting a new avatar, i.e. there is antipathy towards their Second Life experience for some reason, or they are no longer satisfied with their experiences in the virtual world.

4.5.7. Stability

It is common for Second Life users to enter into periods of stability, where little or no changes are made to their avatar or profile. The main theme at this stage revolves around the personal nature of representation in Second Life. It is common for users to become attached to their avatar, such that any radical changes to it are difficult to contemplate, or even for experiments to be discarded in favour of returning to the established avatar appearance. With time, users find an avatar appearance they find agreeable, both a representation of the person they are and would wish to be. They can experience empathy with their avatar, feeling that it is the vehicle for relationships and experiences that they would not otherwise have. The avatar may be seen as both part of, and separate from, their concept of Self. It is something they have invested time and effort in, and some users indeed feel proud of their investment and the avatar they have created, hence the reluctance or lack of desire to make any radical changes. However, hindrance to change, or motivation for stability, may be social in nature too, with the relationships people have with other users acting as an influence: friends may advise that a new appearance does not "suit" them, or a loved one may prefer an existing appearance over a new one, for example. Ultimately this milestone, like the others, reflects the multiplicative nature of representation in Second Life, but regarding the potential for consistency as well as change.

4.6. Evaluation of the analysis and discussion of findings

The present research seeks to understand how the Self is represented in virtual worlds, with particular reference to avatar appearance, name and profile. It uncovers themes that indicate ***representation of the Self in virtual worlds is comprised of activities on a number of levels, personal, social, practical and multiple***. These themes illuminate representation of the Self in virtual worlds as it emerges over time. The findings can be related back to existing literature, and other aspects of the research programme, in a number of ways.

4.6.1. Representation of the Self as reflexive

The Symbolic Interaction theories (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1956, 1962) emphasise how the Self emerges upon reflecting on itself. While for Mead Self emerges as an outcome

of perceiving oneself from the perspective of the Other or "Generalised Other", Goffman sees Self arising as a result of being aware of the multiple roles played in various contexts (Elliot, 2001). The research supports these notions of reflexivity and adopting the perspective of the Other in a number of ways. The perspective of other users acts as a benchmark for how an avatar should appear and act, particularly when a person first joins Second Life, since others may point out improvements they could make. Moreover, users purposefully design their avatars and profiles with a view on how they appear to others and the kind of interactions they will encourage. In terms of awareness of the number of roles that a person may play, this is particularly explicit in Second Life, with its potential for Role Play and multiple avatars serving different purposes in different situations. This means users become very adept at realising the purpose of, and roles for, their avatars, and the potential for them to be reflecting different aspects of their own personality.

However, it can be argued that a key aspect of the reflexive process in Second Life is that the avatar is a separate entity from the one reflecting. The relationship between the avatar and their user is complex, it is simultaneously the same and separate from them. This is evident where in interviews for the present research it was common for participants to refer to the avatar in both first person and third person, to refer to separate avatars as "this me" and "that me". This indicates that the Symbolic Interactionist view of reflexivity can be applied to the Virtual Self with added twists, the Self that reflects is adopting the viewpoint of an Other that includes itself. Moreover, in the physical world there are more limited choices over how the Self may be expressed, hence, using the vernacular coined by James (1890), the potential "distance" between the "I" (the Self as knower) and the "me" (the Self as known) which comprise the Self is smaller than that experienced in a virtual world. Ultimately, ***reflexivity occurs as users adopt the perspective of the Other, creating avatars and designing profiles that encourage desired interactions.***

4.6.2. Representation of the Self as interaction and performance

The Symbolic Interaction theories which emphasise the role of everyday interaction in the emergence of Self may be extended to experience within virtual worlds. For Mead (1962), it is through the minutiae of one interacting with another that a person becomes Self-aware, while Goffman (1959) emphasises the extent to which Self-awareness arises upon giving a convincing performance in the face of others in myriad circumstances and contexts, and managing information given and given off in that

performance. Representation in the form of the avatar appearance and profile is fundamental in if interactions occur between virtual world users, and the form they take.

In terms of context, users adapt their avatar according to situation in order to adhere to the social norms of the environment: in essence they seek to provide a credible performance in that situation through the use of appropriate props and scripts, in line with Goffman's theatrical metaphor. Both the avatar and profile are used to make an impression on others: profiles may be used to make statements about the type of Second Life participant a user may wish to be, for example, while by presenting an avatar with a particular type of appearance a user can give other users an impression of the type of person they are (an intellectual, disabled in the physical world, etc.). This is because a user's avatar and profile are actively used by others to gain knowledge of what type of person that user might be. Moreover, what is excluded from the profile is as informative as what is included, and avatar appearance can be used to interpret the type of person who is using it. While a user may seek to keep aspects of the physical world private from Second Life, or to disguise or experiment with aspects of their personality, others are in fact adept in "reading between the lines", in discerning information given off to ascertain for themselves aspects the user is seeking to conceal or change. Hence ***virtual world users interpret the information given and given off by others' avatar appearance and profiles, using it to decide how and if to interact.***

4.6.3. Representation of the Self as activity

Activity Theory posits that an activity is comprised of a subject, an object with motivations towards it, and goal-oriented processes towards the object. In particular, Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (C.H.A.T.) emphasises how Self-awareness arises through collaborative practice with aid of tools in socially and historically specific contexts, while Situated Action Theory (S.A.T.) proposes that any activity is an emergent actor-environment property, and is not contingent on any rational planning or cultural knowledge (Lave, 1988; Nardi, 1996b; Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004; Suchman, 2007). Considered in this way, representation of the Self in virtual worlds is indeed an activity. A subject, in this case the virtual world user, has the objective of creating a name, avatar and profile with the motivation of achieving their social and virtual environment. The user sets goals which vary across time, which include creating an avatar appearance, acquiring accessories that allow it move and behave in a

desired fashion, creating a profile that contains the information they wish to share, and a name that they feel comfortable with.

However, representation of the Self in virtual worlds is complex, and comprised of different levels. In the first instance, there is the level of the individual, the activity of creating and using an avatar in Second Life, and making decisions on the form of that experience. There is the level of the social, the activities of representation that are in response to, or in conjunction with, the social environment. Another level is comprised of practical activities, the detailed process of avatar construction, and what is enabled and constrained by the virtual world in that construction. The final level may be described as being multiple, comprised of those activities which are concerned with the extent to which a user's representation of the Self in a virtual world changes over time, or takes the form of different representations simultaneously. In line with Situated Action Theory, these levels indicate that representation of the Self in virtual worlds is not necessarily pre-determined, rational and static, nor the sole responsibility of the user. Instead, it emerges through social interactions and experiences, changing over time and occurring in multiple ways simultaneously. However, while S.A.T. suggests that virtual world users would be reactive with no self-generated agenda, in fact users make conscious choices and decisions with respect to the various aspects of representation construction. ***Both individually and together with other users, they use the tools of the virtual world and information available to them to create representations, even if these representations change and vary over time and situation, or are applied to a variety of different avatars simultaneously***.

4.6.4. Representation of the Self as appearance, behaviour and presentation in virtual worlds

Existing literature with respect to virtual worlds tends to emphasise avatar appearance, and offer comparisons of it to the appearance of the user in the physical world through quantitative and experimental methods: Vasalou et al. (2008) suggests people choose avatars similar to their physical world appearance, while Ducheneaut et al. (2009) proposes that users create more idealised versions of their physical world person, and Gilbert, Foss, et al. (2011) support the notion of a more idealised version of the physical world person, highlighting the role of experimentation with alternative avatars. By using qualitative techniques, the research conducted here supports both the importance of the avatar and the variety of findings the literature seems suggests, while indicating the complexities of avatar construction. Virtual world users create avatars

that have characteristics that are both similar and different to those they possess in the physical world, and the use of alts is common. Avatars are used to explore or reflect different aspects of a user's personality, as well as experimenting with appearance and behaviours not possible in the physical world.

The emphasis of existing literature concerning virtual worlds on the avatar means other aspects of representation have been underplayed. The present research underlines how, as well as avatar appearance, the avatar profile plays a key role in representation, in particular in the extent to which other users use profiles for information and to make interaction decisions. Hence, the findings here have some commonality with research that has focused on other virtual environments such as social networking sites and blogs, which illuminate the role that text and images play in representation of the Self. The research on other forms of virtual environment indicate how people use them to present aspects of themselves and to demonstrate the type of person they are, as well as experimenting with different formats and ways of doing this (Brivio et al., 2010; Papacharissi, 2002). From the present research, it is common for virtual world users to employ their profile to share aspects of their virtual lives and to demonstrate the type of person they are, who they know, what they enjoy doing, and how they prefer to interact with others. Just as social networking sites and blogs may be used and interpreted to reveal the nature of the person to whom they belong, so the avatar profile is used to ascertain the personality of its user. ***Hence in virtual worlds it is the avatar in combination with its name and profile that provide representation of the Self.***

4.6.5. The avatar as a representation of the Self

The group discussions described in Section 3.8 augment the findings from the present research by demonstrating how users of Second Life construe the meaning of avatar appearance and behaviour. A discussion in one group, illustrated in Figure 4.10, centred on the inability of the avatar to truly represent the type of person one is. It suggests that while the avatar reflects the importance of appearance in the physical world and can be used to create an idealised version of what one looks like, or to play a younger age group, it is less possible to create an avatar that is an accurate reflection of who a person may consider themselves to be in the physical world. In this sense ***what is represented is an imperfect version of the user's own vision.***

Figure 4.10. Group discussion excerpt illustrating the range of views Second Life users possess regarding the extent to which the avatar appearance and behaviour represents the Self.

```
I: what do you all think when you look at your avis?
SF: I wish I did, HV
AM: lol wish it was yester year
M4: but I have another avatar that people say looks EXACTLY like me--if i were thinner
lol
I: lol
HV: lol
SF: I wish the avies could be made to look older
SF: you can look like a child
AM: they can be
SF: but adult avies are perpetually 26
HV: when I look at my avi... honestly... I think damn, now that's how I'd to be walking
around in first life
HV: lol
I: lol
M4: they can SF but I agree its hard, I had to really search for attractive Mature
skins when I created my Dad's avatar (it was a gift)
SF: I think my avie doesn't have issues keeping the tummy flat. :/
HV: it's ostly the height for me...
AM: are our rl looks so important
SF: ãƒ„ neat, M
HV: I'm only 5'7 in first life
SF: the look of an avie can dictate how others respond to you.
SF: I deal with a lot of guests and newcomers
HV: just 2 or 3 inches off H's height and I would never want again
HV: lol
AM: well they are shallow
NR: i tried with my alt to make it look close to me...but nope
SF: In those instances, I dress my avie like she is today, not in my usual attire.
M4: My Dad just didn't feel comfortable looking 26, just like I didn't feel comfortable
being 6 ft, my avatar and I are both 5'3" NOW :)
```

However, it also reinforces the notion that users of Second Life create avatar appearances designed to influence how others respond to them: participant “SF” describes how she dresses her avatar more conservatively when she meets newcomers to the virtual world. Hence there is support for applying to virtual worlds Goffman’s notion that the Self is performed in order to give an authentic impression to others (Goffman, 1959).

4.6.6. Representation of the Self as evolutionary

The research conducted by Harris et al. (2009) indicates that activities and behaviour in virtual worlds change over time. While other aspects of the research programme seek to consider this further, the aspect detailed here provides insight into the extent to which change happens in relation to representation of the Self. ***The ways in which a user represents themselves through their avatar, profile and display name, is not static but always changing, reflecting changes in the user’s experiences, tastes, and influences***.

4.7. Conclusions: towards an understanding of the Virtual Self in virtual worlds

This chapter has outlined the overall approach to addressing the subsidiary research question:

> How is the Self represented in virtual worlds?

Using individual interviews conducted within Second Life, and participants' own photographs and account profiles as prompts for discussion, the research has investigated three key aspects of representation: avatar name, appearance, and profile.

It indicates that representation of the Self in virtual worlds has four levels of activity: personal, social, practical and multiple. Hence ***it is constructed both individually and as a joint enterprise between virtual users, it is enabled and constrained by the virtual world environment, and it is continuous and ongoing, sometimes across a number of avatars and social environments.***

The chapter illustrates the extent to which these activity levels come in to play across commonly experienced **milestones of representation** in virtual worlds. These include: choosing a name and avatar; constructing a profile; recording virtual world experience; refining the avatar and profile; wholesale change of the avatar and how the Self is represented; creating a new account to either run concurrently with existing accounts or to begin afresh; and achieving stability in representing the Self. These milestones indicate that ***a person's experience of Self in virtual worlds has a form of trajectory***, a suggestion further explored in Chapter 8.

The findings both support and elaborate upon existing literature in ways appropriate to virtual worlds' usage. They indicate the role of **reflexivity** in representation, with virtual world users adopting the perspective of the Other, separate from the entity reflected upon. They indicate the extent to which the Self is **performed** and in a variety of ways according to the context the avatar is in, and how impressions are both given intentionally and given off unintentionally. They reflect that representation of the Self in virtual worlds is an **activity** comprised of a number of levels, with the virtual world user constructing the avatar appearance, profile and name both independently and through the influence of others, using whatever knowledge and tools available to achieve the desired form of inworld representation.

The chapter indicates that representation in virtual worlds embraces the avatar form, text and images, and through these users both reflect, enhance and deviate from aspects of their experience in the physical world. ***Although sometimes an imperfect***

version of what the user wishes to offer, this leads other users to interact with them in particular ways.

5. What does the Second Life resident do? Developing a Player Taxonomy

5.1. Introduction: the research question and its purpose

Chapter 2 outlines how in order to address the overall research question "What is the experience of the Self in virtual worlds?" it is necessary to explore activities undertaken and consider the subsidiary research question:

> What are the activities undertaken in being a Virtual Self in virtual worlds?

The purpose of this chapter is to develop a Player Taxonomy which categorises the activities of virtual worlds' users, and consequently provides insight into motivations for virtual world participation.

5.2. Conceptualising the variety of online users

Two aspects of the literature review in Chapter 2 inform the approach in addressing this subsidiary research question. In the first instance, approaches that consider the individual in context, in particular Activity Theory, emphasise the role of activity in the emergence of Self. The Self is not seen as being in the heads of individuals but as the result of a "two-fold" transition: from the world into goal-oriented activity and from the activity to the subjective product, i.e. the Self. Hence, understanding of the activities undertaken by individuals in virtual worlds offers insight into the Self-making process that occurs in virtual worlds.

In the second instance, there are examples of typologies constructed by other researchers in an effort to categorise people who use virtual environments, particularly those which are game-playing: Bartle's MUD Player Types (Bartle, 1986), Utz's MUD player typology (Utz, 2000), and Yee's Factor Analysis of MMORPG players (Yee, 2006a). These existing typologies are useful because they indicate findings of relevance to non-gaming environments. They highlight the role of socialising (Bartle's "Socialiser", Yee's "Social" subcomponents, Utz's "Involved" type), arguably a common factor across all virtual environments. They also include classifications that are specific to game-playing environments but potentially relevant to other virtual environments; for example, all three indicate a role for immersion into the game

through exploration and Role Playing (Bartle's "Explorer", Yee's "Immersion" subcomponents, Utz's "Role Player" type). Some of the emphasis in current typologies is on activities and motivations initially appearing irrelevant to self-determined worlds, for example those relating to the game context itself, such playing (Utz's "Game Player") and progressing through the game and achieving goals (Bartle's "Achiever", Yee's "Achievement"). In fact, the individual in context theories consider progression and achievement of goals an important aspect of Self, and hence such categorisations could have application to self-determined worlds albeit with different interpretations. While the progression and goals within a game playing environment are externally set by the game structure and hence by the game creators, in self-determined virtual worlds progression is open-ended and the goals are set by the worlds' users. In both instances achievement brings status and esteem to a player and their avatar. However, while existing typologies may be relevant, a Player Taxonomy specifically considering users of Second Life can provide insight into the activities and motivations that are particular to it and potentially to other self-determined worlds.

5.3. Methods in developing a Player Taxonomy

Existing typologies use a range of methods: Bartle (1986) conducts a qualitative analysis of a discussion that took place in a specific MUD in response to the question "What do people want out of a MUD?"; Yee (2006a) takes a distinctly quantitative approach, conducting a factor analysis of data arising from a questionnaire among MMORPG users; Utz (2000) conducts a questionnaire to investigate friendships in MUDs and from that uses a cluster analysis to construct a typology of MUD player.

The Player Taxonomy here coincides with the approach by Bartle, and offers a qualitative analysis of the types of activity and motivations that characterise users of Second Life. It is constructed inductively, emerging from observations made as a Second Life resident for a number of years, together with evidence drawn from inworld individual interviews, inworld group discussions and physical world SEBE procedures. The nature of activity in Second Life is that it permeates all aspects of experience, and hence the Player Taxonomy is based on a range of various pieces of research not necessarily designed to illuminate activity but illuminates nevertheless. For example, research that may be intended to understand how virtual world users' experience changes over time by necessity uncovers activities undertaken in that experience. Hence, evidence has been drawn from research conducted for the purpose of addressing subsidiary questions relating to representation, Virtual Self processes,

trajectory and relationship with the physical world, combined with research conducted previously exploring experience of Self in Second Life (Evans, 2011).

5.3.1. Materials and methods for data collection and analysis

The Player Taxonomy is based on data arising from the current research programme and the research detailed in Evans (2011): 87 inworld interviews, two inworld discussion groups and three physical world SEBE procedures, conducted over the period March 3rd, 2009 to November 16th, 2012, underpinned by observations made in Second Life during the same period. In total there were 64 different participants, 48 recruited from the New Citizens Inc. help group, seven referrals, seven opportunity recruits and two from other Second Life groups. Of the inworld procedures, 48 were conducted in the Fearless Research Centre, 38 at the author's Second Life residence and three in participants' Second Life residences, all planned to be one hour duration. Of the SEBE procedures, one occurred in the participant's home, one in a hotel and another in the participant's workplace, all planned to be three hours duration.

The general principles for sampling and research procedure are outlined in Section 3.7, with specifics for each subsidiary question in Chapters 4, 6, 7, and 8.

5.4. Summary of the analysis: developing the Player Taxonomy

The Player Taxonomy is a catalogue of the types of users or "players" within Second Life, based on the experience a person may seek, motivations for using the virtual world, and their relationship with Second Life itself. An avatar is used to engage in activities inworld, with some users employing multiple avatars according to what activity they engage in, and others feeling that activity to some degree is the possession of their avatar (see Chapter 6). However, this section is concerned with the range and types of activity engaged in, irrespective of the avatar that engages, and reveals motivations for that activity. Hence ***the taxonomy categorises the virtual world user, not the avatar.***

This section provides an overview of the Taxonomy, including a description of each category, the activity they represent, and some evidence.

5.4.1. The Player Taxonomy

The Taxonomy is not intended to offer an indication of the extent to which these player categorisations apply across all users, nor are the types mutually exclusive: a user may belong to any or all of these categories. There are six categories of "player" in Second Life, which have been defined in terms of the activities they undertake: "Extensionist", "Experimenter", "Gamer", "Resource User", "Alternative Seeker", and "Cynic".

5.4.1.1. Extensionist

This label is given to those undertaking activities in Second Life that are similar to those in the physical world. These include socialising, shopping, nightclubbing, travelling and exploring:

> [I] chat with friends, meet people, hang out in sexual sims, go dancing, mingle, interact, take pictures, flirt, have sex … for me the SL experience is about community and socialization. (C1)

This makes Second Life a place to pass the time and have fun, especially if bored in the physical world, as one participant states:

> I do [SL] for fun. (S)

While these are activities possible in the physical world, they may not be necessarily available. For example, some people are shy and find it easier to communicate in Second Life:

> SL gives me the freedom to speak without my social awkwardness getting in the way. (S2)

5.4.1.2. Experimenter

This label is given to those who engage in activities in Second Life that play with identity. This identity play can be relatively "low key" and involve the adaptation of a new persona, i.e. behaving in ways or doing things that one would never do in the physical world:

> I try things out, ideas, behaviours, activities before I do them in RL. No one knows me here, so I can't embarrass myself. ☺ (M5)

In other cases, experimentation is a deliberate adoption of a new identity; for example using a gender different to the one they have in the physical world, or Role Playing being a child or non-human:

> I'm male, as are many programmers who come here. [The participant is man using a female child elf avatar] (PS)

> On rare occasions I'm a ferret, but I generally play a kid. [The participant is a woman using a female child pirate avatar] (BM)

> Well in a certain way [I did Role Play from the start] because I am being a man … so that's Role Play. [The participant is a woman using a male avatar] (N)

5.4.1.3. Gamer

This label is given to those who use Second Life as a game. For those who are not in this category, and who believe Second Life is not a game, the distinction is very important. They see "Gamers" as not recognising the psychological ramifications for themselves or others of their behaviour in Second Life:

> I think there are two types of people in SL. Those who are themselves and retain their own character and treat others as if they are too. And those that think it's a game and forget that here are other people behind the av. (RW)

There are two kinds of activity related to this. First there is "overt gaming", which involves Role Play, combat, vampirism, for example:

> I became a vamp in my third day in SL lol … I didn't know what is that … do now lol but I change my clan lol. (M2)

A more negative aspect is the kind of activity that involves "covert gaming", e.g. "mind games", intentional deception, manipulation of others' behaviour for amusement, causing emotional pain to others, and using multiple avatars with separate lives. Sometimes this covert gaming is not intentional but a matter of circumstance:

> I was exploring and discovering this world, trying not to have friendship because I was not real. But with time friendship arrives and my ethical doubts start … I'm an affective person, so I feel some SL friends like friends and I start to be concerned because in a way I was lying. *[The participant is female who initially used a male avatar when she joined Second Life.]* (N)

While research participants do not necessarily admit to covert gaming themselves they offer many examples of covert gaming behaviour, as this participant describes:

> Well here one has to be very aware of what people tell you and here there are many that think they can lie and get away with it that makes me so sad..... I think of those here that are not as aware as they should be and they fall for the lies, putting them in a very vulnerable position (KM)

5.4.1.4. Resource User

This label is given to those who engage in activities in Second Life that further their self-development. Experiences in Second Life can help generally improve a person's self-esteem:

> SL has also boosted my own confidence, and it carried over into RL … I am more likely to dress how I feel, than worry about whether others think of me. Oddly, it has also resulted in me working out what I want to be when I grow up. (CK)

Specifically, people undertake a number of activities that develop skills in using Second Life. Some are involved in formal classes, while others engage in creative and entrepreneurial ventures and discover creative and business skills:

> [SL gives me freedom] to start things what I can't do in RL, like designing and having a company, see other (rebuild) places where I can't get in RL because too far away and to be able to cover my creativeness. (M1)

Activities that provide education as a by-product are also common:

> I dropped history lessons on high school …so I needed to learn all from "the Great Library" … in Role Play we call Internet the Great Library (of Alexandria) … SL has given me the opportunity to learn more about history, to learn more about how people react on certain situations. (S4)

5.4.1.5. Alternative Seeker

This label is given to those who do activities in Second Life that replicate aspects of life that may be missing or deficient in the physical world. Typically these are related to relationships; users construct family networks, sometimes to recreate a scenario that they themselves have not experienced in the physical world:

> My child AV .....she has had a great family. Very loving and there for her. [She] is very carefree. It's not how my RL was. (MT)

Others engage in intimate or sexual relationships that may be lacking or less possible in the physical world:

> I realized that there is a lot inside me that is not satisfied or even touched in RL … The relationship I had in RL lasted for about six years. We always got along very good, didn't argue – he has been my best friend as is still a good friend of mine. But now I think it has been not intense enough for me. It felt like paddling on the surface. (S5)

5.4.1.6. Cynic

This label is given to those for whom Second Life has "worn out", or they feel negative towards it. They may see it as an illusion and not as wonderful as they thought, as having served the purpose it held for them, they may be tired of the hurt that other people can cause, or merely find it boring. One participant explains her experience:

> SL is fascinating and overwhelmingly exciting when you are new. Then you begin to realize that there is more shopping than you care to see...it's hard to trust people really...(or so has been my experience) and I think people are generally shocked to find that they can be hurt emotionally through their interactions in here. Then SL becomes, not so great (FW)

However, they often continue to engage in activities in Second Life, if only occasionally, or may take breaks from using it. These activities mainly involve contacting people they wish to keep in touch with:

> My last time online here was in early February, this year. *Have you been away from SL?* Since then, yes. *When did you come back?* I had some long breaks from here ... I miss my close friends only. And some nice places. (Y)

5.5.Evaluation of the analysis and discussion of findings

This chapter seeks to understand the activities that are undertaken in virtual worlds, informed by two aspects of literature: approaches that emphasise activity in experience of Self, and those that classify virtual environment users in terms of activities. Figure 5.1 provides a tabulated summary of the Player Taxonomy that arises from the present research and as described in this chapter.

Figure 5.1. Player Taxonomy, based on the experience sought in, motivations for using, and relationship with, Second Life.

"Player" category	Definition	Potential activities
Extensionist	Use Second Life for activities similar to, but not necessarily possible for the user in, the physical world.	Socialising, shopping, dancing, travelling, exploring.
Experimenter	Use Second Life as a place to privately play with identity.	Assuming a new persona, Role Playing.
Gamer	Perceive Second Life as a conventional game, with little or no recognition of any psychological ramifications for themselves or others.	"Overt" gaming (Role Play, combat, vampirism, etc.) and "covert" gaming ("mind games", deception, multiple avatars with separate lives).
Resource User	Use Second Life for furthering self-development.	Education, entrepreneurism, working, creation and building, developing personal and social skills.
Alternative Seeker	Replicate aspects of life missing or apparently deficient in the physical world.	Relationships, sex, family construction.
Cynic	Second Life has served its purpose, "worn out" or has negative connotations for the user.	Rarely use Second Life, or use it for keeping in touch with friends.

The remainder of this section considers the ways in which the Taxonomy relates to the existing literature.

5.5.1. Activities of the Self as context and method

In the first instance, the Player Taxonomy compares to existing typologies in terms of the context in which it occurs and the methods used in its construction. All three previous approaches are constructed in the context of gaming, indeed the three approaches are in some sense related, with Bartle (1986) and Utz (2000) researching the same environment (MUDs), and Yee (2006a) seeking to build on Bartle's work using MMORPGs. Arguably, these analyses are relatively constrained in what they can illuminate, since games tend to have externally designed environments and goals, with specific strata that players of these game become members of as they progress in experience. The present study occurs in Second Life, which has many more social contexts, and with no externally constructed goals, environments, or strata.

Nevertheless, the Player Taxonomy indicates that gaming is a key facet of experience for some Second Life users: not only the "overt" and "official" games that users engage in, but the "covert" form, where the virtual world is used by some as something akin to their own personal gaming environment to manipulate other users with low perceived risk or repercussions as an outcome.

Bartle's initial work in this area arose from qualitative analysis of an online discussion, while both Yee and Utz subsequently applied statistical techniques to data arising from questionnaires in order to create classifications. Bartle's approach, while qualitative and hence able to provide nuance to gaming preferences, is based on a single online discussion thread among a specific stratum of players ("wizards" of a particular MUD), while the quantitative work by Yee and Utz is limited on insight into possible motivations. In contrast to these, the Player Taxonomy emerges inductively from observation and evidence from a wide range of interviews and group discussions, and thus able to provide extensive insight regarding activities and motivations for using from the perspective of the virtual world user.

5.5.2. Activities of the Self as social, immersive, and goal achievement

Given their gaming context, the existing typologies emphasise specific aspects of game environments and structure: Bartle highlights achieving, killing, socialising, and exploring; Yee indicates key roles for achieving, socialising, and immersion; and Utz emphasises Role Playing, game playing, meeting with others, and the sceptical behaviour of lighter users. Nevertheless, the Player Taxonomy indicates some commonalities between the users of gaming virtual environments and more open, self-determined worlds, such as Second Life.

A common aspect across existing typologies is the role of social activities and relationships. Unsurprisingly, given Second Life's remit as a social platform, these aspects are reinforced in the Player Taxonomy. However, the Taxonomy places social activities and relationships in the context of broader motivations, and indicates how they thread through all aspects of virtual world experiences; socialising is not necessarily an end in itself but an outcome of the motivations for using the virtual world. Those players extending their physical activities into Second Life experience have socialising as part of this, while others, motivated by experimenting in, or using the resources of, the virtual world experience new social relationships as a by-product. Some players are motivated by experiencing new interaction forms, rather than

socialising *per se*: some seek alternative relationships not usually available to them, while the "covert gamers" are motivated by controlling their social environment, and hence interact with others to achieve that goal. There are a proportion of residents who are motivated by socialising in itself, but in the sense that the virtual world enables them to socialise with people they care about; this particularly applies those who are now cynical about Second Life but continue to use it to keep in touch with others.

The existing typologies highlight the role of activities that immerse the gamer into the gaming environment. Yee specifies these as including Role Playing, discovering facts about the game, customising avatar appearance and using the game to escape from physical world problems, and while Bartle and Utz do not label these activities as immersive as such, they too include aspects such as exploring and Role Playing. The present Taxonomy also indicates the potential for activities that enable to the user to become much more involved with Second Life; however again, these activities are not necessarily an end in themselves. Hence, while Second Life users may engage in immersing activities such as Role Playing or exploring the various environments created within the virtual world, it is with the objective of experimenting with forms of identity or accessing environments not possible in the physical world, rather than becoming immersed *per se*. In the case of games, many immersing activities are engaged in with the specific purpose of becoming a "better player" than others. However, in the case of a self-determined world such as Second Life, while some users do aim to become immersed and hence a "better player" in the sense of possessing knowledge of the virtual world and obtaining most benefit from the experience, for many players the immersion is a by-product of engaging in activities satisfying other needs.

The focus of the existing typologies on games naturally emphasise activities that achieve goals, in particular game advancement through power, status symbols, and competition with others. While Second Life does not have a conventional gaming model, achievement is a key facet of the activities occurring there; however, as with socialising and immersion, activities that give users a sense of achievement are not necessarily engaged in with achievement as the end goal. In particular, those engaging in "resource using" activities, such as taking classes, developing a business, or creating sims, may gain a sense of achievement, or accumulate power, status, and influence, although it is not necessarily the case such activities were initially engaged in with these in mind.

5.5.3. The Self as emerging through activity

The theories that consider the individual in context emphasise the role of activity in the emergence of Self. These approaches would suggest that in setting goals in Second Life, and engaging in activities towards those goals, the sense of Self in relation to the virtual world emerges. The Player Taxonomy indicates that for users of self-determined worlds such as Second Life this is the case. There are two aspects of the Taxonomy that relate activity to emergence of Self. In the first instance, it indicates how a person's motivations and understandings of Second Life, their goals, guide the activities they undertake. Secondly, in undertaking those activities there are implications for their experience of Self. Hence, for example a person using Second Life with the objective of developing a business engages in entrepreneurial activity: they may acquire retail space, create items to sell, build a social network of potential customers, etc. In undertaking the entrepreneurial activity, the person gains appropriate skills and knowledge of how to develop their chosen business in Second Life; from acquiring these skills and working towards the goal of developing the business, their sense of the type of person they are in Second Life emerges.

5.6. Conclusions: towards an understanding of the Virtual Self in virtual worlds

This chapter has outlined the overall approach to addressing the subsidiary research question:

> What are the activities undertaken in virtual worlds?

Using evidence from interviews, group discussions and observations conducted in Second Life, and physical world SEBE procedures, a Player Taxonomy has been created which classifies users of Second Life as members of six "player types": **"Extensionist"**, **"Experimenter"**, **"Gamer"**, **"Resource User"**, **"Alternative Seeker"** and **"Cynic"**.

The Player Taxonomy builds upon and enhances existing typologies by considering the role of activity in virtual worlds that are self-determined, rather than the gaming environments existing typologies are based upon, and by depending on methods that capture motivations for activity and the nuanced differences between users. It indicates that in line with existing typologies, key aspects of activity are the capacity to be social, immersive and goal achieving. However, it also indicates that activity is not an

end in itself, but that ***users engage in activity that reflects their motivations*** for using Second Life; in some cases these motivations reflect an aspect of the physical world that may be deficient. In this way, ***the Taxonomy can be used to support and illustrate the individual in context approach where the Self emerges from setting goals and engaging in activity to achieve them***.

6. What is the experience of Self in Second Life? Identifying the processes

6.1. Introduction: the research question and its purpose

Chapter 2 outlines how to consider the overall research question "What is the experience of the Self in virtual worlds?" it is in part necessary to address the subsidiary research question:

> What are the processes involved in being a Virtual Self in virtual worlds?

This subsidiary question to some extent provides a focal point for the whole research programme, since its objective is to understand processes that in turn may relate to aspects of representation, activity, personal history, and experiences concerning the intersection between physical and virtual worlds, all of which are topics for the other subsidiary questions.

6.1.1. Designing the subsidiary research question: "What are the processes involved in being a Virtual Self in virtual worlds?"

The purpose of the subsidiary question addressed in this chapter is to provide insight into the series of actions, operations, changes and steps that produce and comprise the experience of being a Virtual Self in virtual worlds. To this end the research design for this subsidiary research question must explore aspects of being a person in virtual worlds and from the exploration uncover how these aspects relate to one another and together construct and form the experience of being a Self.

6.2. Methodology in identifying processes in being a Virtual Self in Second Life

In line with the objectives of the whole research programme of seeking the insider perspective, the basis for addressing the subsidiary question is individual interviews conducted in Second Life. While the principles common across the research

programme are outlined in Section 3.7, this section highlights the aspects specific to addressing this subsidiary question.

6.2.1. Materials and methods for data collection and analysis

6.2.1.1. Sample

Twenty participants were recruited from a number of sources: twelve were from the special interest group New Citizens Inc. (NCI); two were opportunity recruitments who contacted the researcher following a discussion taking place through the SLRL (Second Life Research Listserv) email list; a third opportunity recruitment took place following a discussion in the NCI group Instant Message; and the remaining five participants were referrals from other participants.[24]

6.2.1.2. Interview times and locations

Twenty individual interviews were conducted over the period June 13th to November 4th, 2011, and were planned to last one hour. All individual interviews, apart from one which occurred in the participant's own home in Second Life, took place at the Fearless Research Centre.

6.2.1.3. Interview procedure

Each interview commenced with the informed consent procedures outlined in Section 3.7, with a snapshot of each participant taken (see Figure 6.1 for examples).

6.2.1.4. Topic guide design

The topic guide addressed a number of areas: usage of other virtual environments; introduction to Second Life; time spent online; using the avatar; consistency of Self with the physical world; freedom and obligation; other people.

[24] Details of the NCI Second Life group, and the SLRL email list, are provided in Section 3.7.

Figure 6.1. Examples of participants in the individual interview situation. In the present analysis these are the participants identified as S4, N, S2 and S5.

A slightly different topic guide was used depending on if the participant was a regular user of other virtual environments besides Second Life, in order to explore further the experience of being in multiple virtual worlds. In the event, only one person was a current regular user of other virtual worlds and one other had past experience of using multiple worlds.

6.2.1.5. Data collection

Data is comprised of the transcripts of the textual interviews.

6.2.1.6. Analytic method

A Thematic Analysis method has been used in analysing the data yielded from the present research, as outlined in Section 3.7.

6.3. Thematic Analysis: common themes in Virtual Self processes

6.3.1. A summary of the findings

The Thematic Analysis derives 174 Basic Themes, which can be clustered into 27 Organising Themes, which in turn can be clustered into five Global Themes. The **"Virtual World Reflection"** Global Theme is constituted by themes encompassing participant experience and their viewpoints of the Second Life virtual world itself. **"Virtual Self Reflection"** is constituted by themes that consider aspects of being a Second Life user, including using an avatar, the experience of being a person in Second Life, and how experience changes over time. **"Virtual Self – Virtual Other Interaction"** comprises themes that concern the relationships and interactions that occur between Second Life users, including the nature of communication and relationships, and the role of others in Self-perception**. "Virtual Self – Virtual World Interaction"** is constituted by themes reflecting the relationship that participants have with virtual worlds, including learning the user interface operations, and managing the amount of time spent online. **"Worlds Interaction"** comprises themes concerning participants' experiences of worlds other than Second Life, and the relationship

between virtual worlds and the physical world. Figure 6.2 provides a summary of Organising Themes by Global Theme and the number of Basic Themes.

Figure 6.2. Summary of Organising Themes by Global Theme and number of Basic Themes by Organising Theme, for Virtual Self Processes.

Global Theme	Organising Theme	Number of Basic Themes
Virtual World Reflection	Activities	5
	Technology	4
	The nature of SL	7
	The purpose of SL	7
	The world of SL	10
Virtual Self Reflection	Appearance	5
	Avatar experience	6
	Being a person in SL	8
	Doing my own thing	5
	Evolution	7
	Multiple experience	8
	Satisfaction	3
Virtual Self – Virtual Other Interaction	Emotions and feelings	10
	Interactions	10
	Negative behaviour	4
	Relationships	8
	Reputations and reactions	6
Virtual Self – Virtual World Interaction	Being online	4
	Keeping a distance	6
	New to SL	10
	Reduction	4
	Relationship with SL	3
	SL takes over	10
Worlds Interaction	Balancing worlds	4
	Bleed-through	5
	RL-SL relationship	9
	Virtual worldliness	6

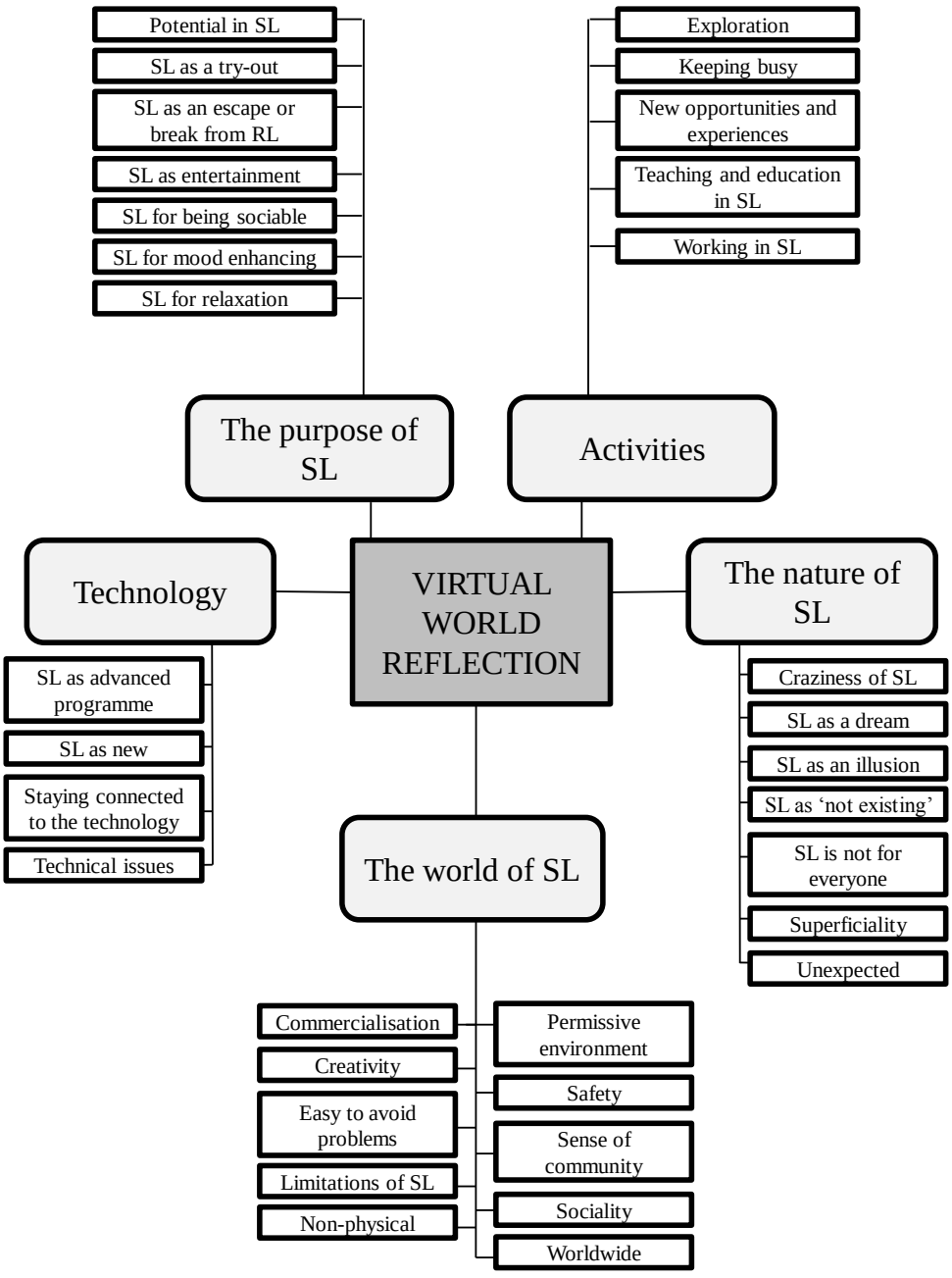
The following sections provide summaries of the Thematic Analyses and networks by Global Theme.

6.3.2. Thematic Analyses and networks summarised by Global Theme

6.3.2.1. Virtual World Reflection

Figure 6.3 illustrates the Thematic Network representing the cluster of Organising and corresponding Basic Themes that constitute the Global Theme of "Virtual World Reflection".

Figure 6.3. The Thematic Network that represents the "Virtual World Reflection" Global Theme, and the Organising and corresponding Basic Themes that constitute it.



One aspect of users' experience concerns the **purpose** participants give for using Second Life, and **activities** they engage in. Second Life was initially conceived as a social platform, open ended in nature. For participants, socialising ranges from conventional conversation through to sexual interaction. Some participants claim the social aspect of Second Life fulfils a need in the physical world:

> … I became more of a socialiser, looking to establish new friendships … it has reactivated and fulfilled my need for socialization. (M3)

Participants also express the view that Second Life is a place for entertainment, a place to relax, to lift one's mood and as a break from events in the physical world. However, some indicate a more significant role: as a place of potential, where behaviours, ideas and attitudes can be tried out, without risk of making a mistake or feeling foolish:

> … I think for me it's more a place where I try things out, ideas, behaviours, activities before I do them in RL. No one knows me here, so I can't embarrass myself ☺ (M5)

Besides socialisation, there are a range of other activities that participants participate in. Exploration is a key aspect of Second Life, both in terms of geographical, exploring the sims that residents have created, and social, exploring different types of venues and activities available. Sometimes exploration is an extension of an interest users have in the physical world, particularly since there are virtual recreations of physical world locations (London and Paris, for example):

> … I'm very curious so I love to explore … I like to travel in RL … I used to be a flight attendant. You can anywhere you want, almost, in SL. (S1)

Working is another activity participants participate in. Some, knowing Second Life by reputation, come to the virtual world with the purpose of gaining employment, and are well-informed on what types of work would be acceptable to them. Teaching and education is another aspect of Second Life that participants participate in, both in terms of how Second Life "works", i.e. the programme itself and social etiquette, as well as educational schemes relating to the physical world. Indeed, some believe that Second Life has a significant role to play in this area:

> I think the opportunities for teaching and learning in SL are still abundant, and I would like to see more. (T)

However, rather than for a specific activity, the virtual world is sometimes used to occupy time when someone is bored or if they have more time on their hands than usual:

> A lack of things to do [keeps me coming to SL], no job, no car. I can at least hang out with people here to keep myself from going crazy. (S2)

Other aspects of this Global Theme relate to the characteristics of Second Life as virtual world. In the first instance, its **technology** (i.e. three dimensional computer graphics accessed online with data stored remotely on servers) has a role in experience,

acting as interface between the user and usage of Second Life. This interface seems particularly prominent when they first use Second Life, when it something to be learned. The technology itself can be a reason to try Second Life out, because it is a new kind of idea they aren't used to, or more advanced than other virtual environments that they may have used previously:

> *What was it that interested you … when you heard about it?* Just becoz something it's new thing I never tried. (M3)

However, Second Life never ceases to remind participants that their experience is dependent on technology. For example, even if they are adept in using the Second Life programme, sometimes it is overhauled, meaning existing skills need to be relearned:

> Well, I wish they hadn't changed SL Viewer 2 so radically. It's not as user friendly ... If I had started SL after Viewer 2, I'm not sure I would have kept using it, but that's hard to say. (S1)

The complex nature of the technology can mean that technical problems are an ongoing part of the everyday experience, as one participant comments regarding "lag":

> Lag [is the worst thing about SL]. (L)

Secondly, there are opportunities provided by the **non-physical characteristics** of Second Life, in particular it provides an intrinsically social environment, with users from all over the world. It allows people with common attitudes and interests to meet, but who would not otherwise be able to, and without leaving their own home:

> SL gives me the freedom to get out and "see the world" so to speak without my social awkwardness getting in the way. I can make more friends here, see more things and even learn more here than I can within the confines of my own home XD. (S2)

Moreover, the ability to find likeminded people means Second Life offers the opportunity to experience a bond with others:

> … [I] connected with a huge community like here was quite ideal for me … so SL is just more extended and has a huge community behind, that's way more interesting. (M1)

Meanwhile, the worldwide nature of the Second Life user can be a source of excitement for participants as well as offering the opportunity to learn first-hand about how people in other cultures live:

> … it was the primary learning about SL … just to know other people from around countries and what's the traditions and how people live elsewhere. That's a point that interests me a lot too … well e.g. people in Asia, how they manage their life, what their traditions are, the behaviour of families are different to Europeans as an example. (M1)

The fact that Second Life is a virtual experience has the benefit that interactions occur are in physical safety, which means experiences can be had without the risk of physical harm, and any problems with other people or situations in Second Life can be easily avoided:

> … Also the excitement [keeps me coming back to SL], the vibe I get from meeting people here, while in the safety of my own home. (C1)

However, this may lead people to take risks, or engage in behaviour that they might not otherwise, meaning Second Life can offer a permissive environment where "anything goes", particularly with regard to sexual behaviour:

> You can do taboo things in SL that you would never do in RL. I've met a few people who have told me that. (S1)

Creativity is a prominent aspect of Second Life. There are many examples of this: making items such as clothes and furniture, designing and creating buildings, landscaping Second Life environments, participating in musical, theatrical and dance performances, or creating characterisations for Role Play. Many enjoy and gain benefit from this facet of Second Life:

> [SL] is amazing. You can do things. [It] is creative. I like to create characters and play them. (N)

Moreover, participants sometimes find through using the virtual world, they have a talent for creation and design that they did not realise they had or is easier to express than in the physical world:

> [SL gives me freedom] to start things what I can't do in RL, like designing … and be able to cover my creativeness. (M1)

Ultimately, the non-physical characteristic of SL means it has limitations; relationships and opportunities can only go so far and only occasionally extend into the physical world. For some participants this means that Second Life can have a built-in expiry date:

> Maybe it's like this: it can be good for a certain period – to try out new things which can absolutely affect your RL positively. But you need to get rid of it afterwards, otherwise it will affect your RL in a negative way … you can't compare SL to RL relationships of course. There are a lot of limitations. (S5)

Finally, **the nature of Second Life** holds particular meanings for participants. In the first instance, it is a place where the unexpected happens: many participants have limited previous experience of virtual environments and hence know not what to expect when they first arrive. Even those who have used chat rooms or other games or virtual worlds are not always prepared for the experience. This unexpected-ness of Second Life can be a continual draw encouraging people to return again and again:

> *What keeps you coming to SL?* … the thought that something new and interesting might happen, a good discussion, a hot affair, a new experience. (L)

Sometimes the unexpected turn of events can seem so strange as to be illogical or "crazy" compared to what happens and is expected in the physical world:

> … you will think I'm mad lol … but he [my avatar] knows someone omg and he is falled in a SL love … I love my RL life but I have another … I know is a foolish, but I do ^^ … a madness I mean … well is not a usual thing. (N)

This can make them feel that people in the physical world will think they themselves are "crazy", leading them to make Second Life a secret place:

> You are part of a hidden world … you cannot talk with your RL about it. They think you are crazy. (S4)

The virtual world is a place where anything is possible and coupled with the illogical and non-existing aspects of it, leads it to be a place where dreams become reality:

> [I am] Female … wife and mother ^^ … and dreamer lol … This is like a dream where you can come back when you want …. (N)

However, the enacting of dreams is not without consequence; activities and behaviour one person may think is wonderful, may not be the same for another:

> You have to pay for your dreams. *Is SL a place of dreams?* … yes, definitely. Of dreams and of nightmares … the dreams of some people are the nightmares of other people. (A)

Hence, it is important to recognise that fundamentally Second Life has its limits. While it is an enjoyable place to be and has benefits, it doesn't necessarily offer the breadth and scope of opportunity that some believe; rather than a dream, it might be an illusion, as one participant describes:

> I think it is stupid, and an illusion – but out of this illusion I learned a lot. Maybe I think that other people don't get this, that they live in this illusion without ever realizing that it is one. I often think "Open your eyes guys! See what it is." (S5)

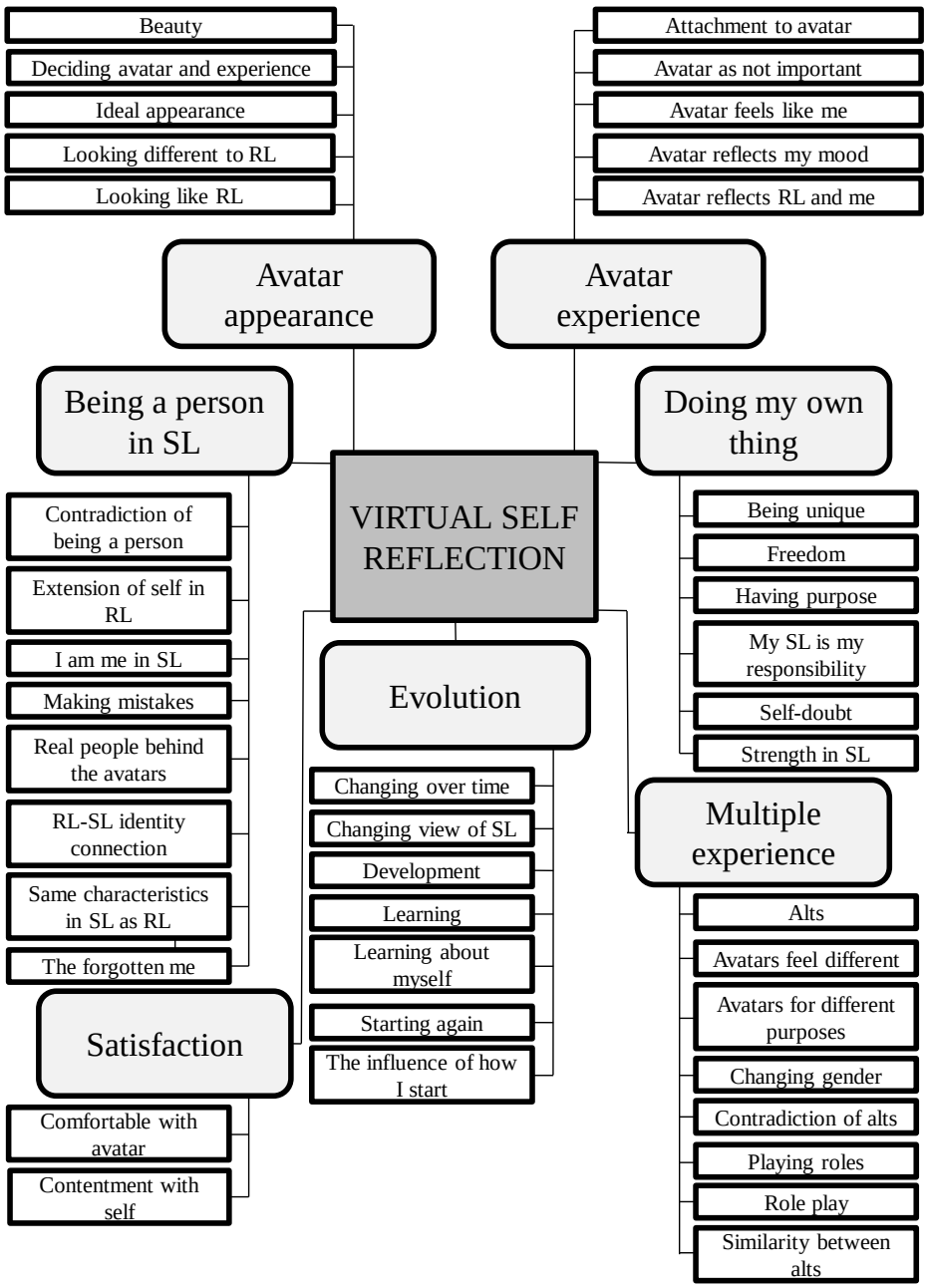
6.3.2.2. Virtual Self Reflection

Figure 6.4 illustrates the Thematic Network representing the cluster of Organising and corresponding Basic Themes constituting the Global Theme of "Virtual Self Reflection".

An aspect of this Global Theme concerns **avatar appearance** and the **experience** of using it. The role of appearance in Second Life is as important as in the physical world, but the process of deciding and implementing it varies according to person. For some there is no conscious plan of how they want their avatar to appear, it evolves over time due to circumstance or haphazard events. Some participants have a notion, albeit vague, of wanting to look attractive, while others make a more conscious decision about how they want their avatar to appear, sometimes choosing an avatar completely different to how they might appear in the physical world. The role of "beauty" in avatar appearance is recognised by some participants, as is how an avatar can be used to represent some kind of idealisation of how a person should appear. However, for some it is important to be authentic in some way, to create an avatar that is similar to how they see themselves in the physical world:

> I wanted something that was close to my own look. OK, I'm not a 2,70m tall piece of hunk meat ;) … but at the time I created the avatar, I shaved my head, had a goatee, have blue eyes. Am male, etc. So I just did a sort of "improved" me … (C1)

Figure 6.4. The Thematic Network that represents the "Virtual Self Reflection" Global Theme, and the Organising and corresponding Basic Themes that constitute it.



In terms of the experience of using an avatar, in the first instance participants can claim to develop a sense of attachment to it. This means that after having the same avatar appearance for a while, some participants do not make very radical changes to it, the avatar representing their time, history and experience in Second Life:

> I like her [the avatar] a lot. "We" did a lot of stuff together … if something would kill my SL account I would be very sad because of [the avatar] herself. (S5)

For some this attachment may grow out of a degree of identification with the avatar as being the same person as themselves:

> I think it's me. I am happy to see her [the avatar]. Or me ... it doesn't fully look like me but I have had it so long it feels like me. The me in SL. Which is mostly like the RL me. (L)

Certainly for many, the experiences they have using their avatar is a reflection of their experience in the physical world, their appearance, personality, tastes, or mood. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for participants to think of their avatars as having a life of their own, sometimes determining their own behaviour or having experiences not intended by the person using them. In this way, the avatars may be likened to characters created by an author for a novel, and being a separate entity in their own right, as one participant describes:

> … I find that avis are like characters in a novel, you can create them but then they create themselves, it's like they have a mind of their own … I find that avis "speak" to me and though I may start with a germ of an idea after a while they start collecting skins and clothes in their wardrobe and telling me who they want to be, like how you might create a fictional character in a book, you may start with an idea but after a while the character writes for itself. (M3)

However, others emphasise that ultimately the avatar is merely a tool for Self-expression and with a little effort everyone in Second Life can have an avatar that looks beautiful; what is important and makes a person unique is the type of person they are:

> … it is easy to be handsome here for 100 euro, you are very cute. So everybody is cute. So what differs us is our soul, here. (S4)

Another aspect concerns the experience of being **a person in a virtual world**, i.e. participants' experience of personality, Self-concept, personal traits, characteristics and identity, and the relationship of these to the physical world. Participants often claim that "I am me" in Second Life, the person in Second Life is in essence the same person that is in the physical world, as one explains:

> … and the more time I spend on an avi, the more of "me" comes through … Fun, funny, kind, caring, strong spirited, and a little hot headed at times, can be impulsive, creative, etc. Things I've been told by friends …….. I am just myself. (S3)

The evidence given for this is the consistencies of appearance, behaviour and/or personality across Second Life and the physical world. This consistency may be experienced even if engaged in Role Play:

> *Are you in character all the time?...* that is hard to say because the characters have the same characteristics as my RL. (S4)

For some, having an avatar means that the person they are in Second Life is an extension of themselves in the physical world. While they might be comfortable with their avatar, it is separate from them and means that they have the opportunity to behave differently to, and have experiences that do not happen in, the physical world:

> I'm not a 1:1 copy of my RL ego, but an extension … As I already said: In RL I never would have dared to programme things. Or create fashion. (A)

The avatar becomes a representative of the person in the physical world, connected to their physical world identity, reinforcing the point that behind all the other avatars, there is a "real" person. However, being a person in Second Life is the same as being a person in the physical world, making mistakes and decisions that can be regretted, as one participant explains:

> I came to understand that I can admit to a fault … I can readily accept that responsibility … almost immediately … (K)

To some extent participants express **satisfaction** with the kind of person they are in Second Life. Some claim they do not need to experiment in Second Life, and feel content with "who they are", comfortable with the type of person they appear to be in Second Life in terms of their avatar. This can mean an avatar that has appearance and attributes similar to the physical world, as one participant explains:

> I actually created [C1] with that idea [of being the same in SL as in RL] in mind ... I didn't want to spend too much time contemplating being "original" or "out of this world" or "cool". I thought consciously "I'm going to be out there. So might as well be someone I'm comfortable being". (C1)

However, participants also observe Second Life provides an opportunity for **empowerment and freedom of expression**, as well as a sense of purpose and responsibility. Some participants see Second Life as giving them the ability to have desired characteristics, without ramifications, more so than is possible in the physical world:

> More importantly, I feel freer to be myself in SL. Or to be "bolder". I'm still me, quintessentially so. (C1)

In this way, participants can have a sense of empowerment to take responsibility for what happens to them and to deal with situations they might have more difficulty with in the physical world:

> I am more straightforward cos I don't know them. I don't have to see their eyes or meet them in RL ☺ (H)

The freedom that Second Life gives can also be used to express oneself in such a way that reinforces the individual nature of being a person, and to engage in activities that give a sense of fulfilment and purpose. Nevertheless, there are others who seem less confident and recognise there are some aspects of their personality in Second Life that have been transferred from the physical world, which that they are less happy with:

> I wanted people around me as I don't like to be alone … but though I have only few friends they are busy … I want to sing but maybe no one like, it's sorta like RL … (D)

A final aspect of this theme indicates the multiple nature of personal experience. In the first instance there is ongoing **evolution** within the virtual world, in terms of experiences within and opinions of Second Life, and those occurring to them as individuals. Change in Second Life is a common experience and it takes many forms:

it may involve a change of avatar or activity, the departure of friends from Second Life, the arrival of new residents, the amount of time one spends online, or a change in the Second Life programme itself. These changes are seen as one of the benefits of Second Life and sometimes actively sought, as suggested by one participant:

> Change [is the best thing about SL] … SL is ever changing … and there is a lesson to be learned every time I log on … (K)

Some participants observe that the experiences they have when first joining Second Life shape those occurring later. Indeed, on joining Second Life, it is common to find that many changes and developments happen quickly, with the meeting of new people and having experiences that have not been had before:

> Well it just kept expanding in all directions. I kept learning and making friends and having interesting experiences. (S3)

In terms of change related to self-development, Second Life provides an environment for learning and education, as noted in the "Virtual World Reflection" Global Theme; one participant, a keen Role Player, describes:

> I dropped history lessons on high school …so I needed to learn all from "the Great Library" … in Role Play we call Internet the Great Library (of Alexandria)*[the participant Role Plays Ancient Greece]* … SL has given me the opportunity to learn more about history, to learn more about how people react on certain situations. (S4)

It also provides an environment for change that results from learning about aspects of the Self and personality that hitherto had remained unexplored in the physical world:

> You can learn here in a very effective way. Not only skills, but about yourself as well. It is like a mirror. (A)

For some, part of the change process involves starting afresh in Second Life. This might mean having a new account and a new avatar, or taking a long break and finding new activities and meeting new people. However, some participants also find their opinion of Second Life changes over time and experience, and it is not uncommon to find participants deciding they would rather spend less time in Second Life:

> My opinion of SL changed a lot. Now I'm not doing anything really here, I don't feel like a true resident anymore, although I'm still online now and then … it feels like the illusion has gone, that I realized what SL really is – an online game, with avs etc. (S5)

Second Life also offers the potential for **multiple experiences** of more than one type of Self, through the opportunity to create multiple avatars, Role Playing, and express a gender differing from the physical world. Having alternative avatars is a relatively common experience, with participants often using a second or third avatar. Alts are created for a number of reasons: sometimes people want to "begin again" as described above; other times, people are curious to experience having another avatar with different characteristics:

> … people kept talking about [alts] and some people I knew had more than one. And I suddenly started to wonder who was who. When I made an alt I made it as a man just to see what it would be like. (L)

After experimentation with an alt, some will focus on one avatar and perhaps use alts for more prosaic purposes, such as storing items in the alt's inventory. For other users alts become an intrinsic part of their experience, used according to purpose. Some will have little difference between alts, while others have alts with different appearances, behaviours and experiences to each other, as well "feeling" different. Some of the differences between alts reveal complex aspects of the user's personality; one participant, a female in the physical world, uses three alts: a dominant male, a dominant female and a submissive male. As she explains:

> Me and she *[the male avatar the participant used in the interview and a female alt]*, we are a little dominant☺. The other boy *[a third, male, alt]* plays a slave role ^^ … I never guess I was so dominant lol … mmhh I'm sweet and pleasant on RL … [the male slave avi] isn't dominant … I needed a time for understand this. Finally I did. When I started to play the Mistress, I can be a slave like man. But don't like at all being a woman … I don't like play slave woman … but I can play a slave man … I like to see his body submitted I guess. (N)

Playing roles is also an aspect of the multiple experience of Second Life. Some participants become active in Role Play scenarios, either as an intention when joining Second Life, or after being exposed to them after joining. Some Role Play situations can be very complex and highly organised, having clear published rules regarding the kind of behaviour and attitude that Role Players are expected to assume. Some people also create characters for themselves who they then enact on an individual basis, whenever they feel like it. Even if not engaged in strict Role Play scenarios as such, some participants indicate there are roles to be played in Second Life, just as there are in the physical world. However, a difference is indicated in that the roles in Second Life may be played through personal choice, while those in the physical world may be imposed by circumstance:

> SL is supposed to be the one for Role Play … I have roles that either I choose and can't get out of easily or have been given to me. In RL that is … Parent, manager, wife, employee … there are roles in SL but mostly you can choose them. (L)

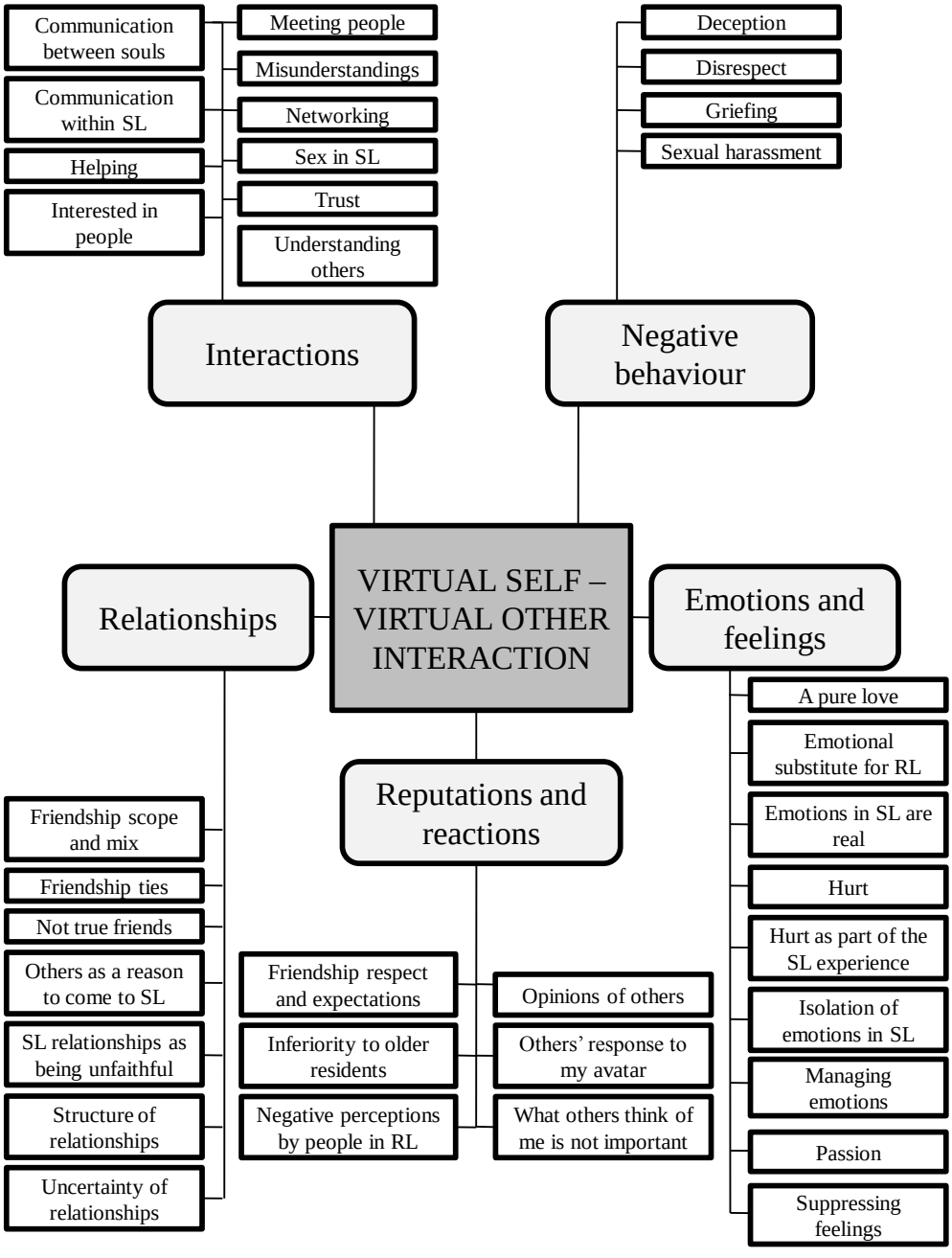
In particular, a common type of playing a role in Second Life is the use of avatars to experience being a gender different to their gender in the physical world. Some participants experience this first-hand:

> I think many, if not most, users tend to live in SL through their avatars … in a number of respects, those avatars are idealised manifestations of who the user would like to be … or perhaps who they believe they are (but aren't) … I have even developed a theory that males who create female avatars are, in fact, attempting to create the "woman of their dreams" … and the same for women who create male avis … ☺ *[This male participant has a number of alts, one of which is female.]* (K)

6.3.2.3. Virtual Self – Virtual Other Interaction

Figure 6.5 illustrates the Thematic Network representing the cluster of Organising and corresponding Basic Themes that constitute the Global Theme of "Virtual Self – Virtual Other Interaction".

Figure 6.5. The Thematic Network that represents the "Virtual Self – Virtual Other Interaction" Global Theme, and the Organising and corresponding Basic Themes that constitute it.



An aspect of this Global Theme concerns participants' observations regarding the nature and characteristics of **interaction** with others in Second Life. Interactions in

Second Life are between people who generally never meet physically, and who depend on mostly the written word for communication. Linking to the "Virtual World Reflection" Global Theme, interactions with others, meeting new people and networking, are seen as among the main reasons for coming to Second Life, as well as its best feature. This may be in part due to users' underlying interest in others, their experience, and motives for what they do in Second Life:

> It's still interesting to see what people are doing here. How they create, live, compete. (S5)

Many participants enjoy helping others enhance their experience of Second Life. This can be either in a formal capacity through one of the "help" facilities, or in how they conduct themselves generally (even if it doesn't always feel their efforts to be helpful are rewarded). As one participant highlights:

> I'm good to people and like making friends … I like to help others but don't get in return. (D)

One facet of communication in Second Life is that although the avatar is the basis of interaction, there is lack of a physical body. This can lead to participants to feel that they communicate with the "souls" of others, the person inside the physical body:

> … a total new thing was there for me. Socialising without knowing the other, just knowing the "soul". (S4)

The anonymity that results from a lack of physical body combined with the dependence on text offer a two-edged sword. While it can be a reason to doubt the sincerity of interactions with others, it can also provide an opportunity to be open and truthful, with the written word having more credibility, as one participant explains:

> … I think that SL actually returns us to an older way of getting to know someone, by writing … and in these avs we have some sense of anonymity so we can be freer to open up. We can more easily talk to someone because we are not turned off or away by their "looks" … I suppose [it is easier to be hurt in SL than in RL] in that one believes what someone writes … anything in writing has more credence vs. oral, right? I mean that's a RL presumption. So I suppose I take someone's writing to heart here, as I would in RL. *Like it's proof of something?* And here one can pull it up from the log, and say, here … look! Yes … the old adage … it's in black and white. Though I'm old enough to know that people can lie in chat just as easily as they can in voice or to your face. Maybe even more easily. (M3)

Furthermore, the nature of interaction in Second Life means that unintentional misunderstandings and miscommunications can occur, and lead to the belief that physical world interactions are more dependable:

> My personal opinion is that in a virtual world, we miss the physical cues that come with body language etc. and that leads to misunderstanding (C2)

However, there are **negative implications** that lead from Second Life being comprised of interactions between people who are unknown to one another in the physical world and without a physical body. One of the implications for some participants is that Second Life is characterised by a basic disrespect for one another, even if it is as

simple as the ability to not give an interlocutor full attention while in conversation with them. As one participant explains:

> Well the worst [thing about SL] is those trolls and misbehaving kids running into SL lately … the environment of SL [has changed], that's surely a positive thing but on the other end those new people in SL, mainly kids which don't have the attention to see that others are humans too and disrespect many others or are cussing and yelling around, still having no behaviour or respect for others. (M1)

Deception is another common form of negative behaviour, enacted purposefully to harm, to deceive about relationship status, or obtain currency. However, it is also common for people to deceive others in order to protect physical world information, even if it is not with the intention to purposefully hurt others:

> I was exploring and discovering this world, trying not to have friendships because I was not real. But with time friendship arrives and my ethical doubts start … I'm an affective person, so I feel some SL friends like friends and I start to be concerned because in a way I was lying. What a mess. … *Did you create her [the female alt] so you wouldn't have to lie?* Mmhh yes. For me was not a lie, was another life, different … *[The participant is female who initially used a male avatar when she joined Second Life.]* (N)

Another common form of negative behaviour is "griefing", the purposeful disruption of others' experience. Griefing is generally seen as detrimental to people's experience of Second Life, particularly those who have recently joined Second Life and may be deterred from returning. Moreover, addressing "griefers" is a particular challenge for those who they attack, although paradoxically one they can sometimes relish:

> I really enjoyed fighting a griefer that regularly came here, that was fun cause he was very tricky … I loved being there right on top of him as soon as he came in. (M3)

Sexual harassment is another form of negative virtual world behaviour. Sexual interactions are a common experience, although the anonymous nature of Second Life means that people may seek to enforce their sexual desires on others. For those who are the target of such attentions the experience is as bad as if it occurred in the physical world:

> … I don't like to be sexually harassed, it feels like an actual assault. It's funny you can't be a victim of any violent crime here, but is still very upsetting to be harassed. (M4)

Another aspect of this Global Theme concerns the **relationships** that build between users, and their outcomes. In the first instance, participants make observations regarding the range and characteristics of relationships that occur within Second Life. Commonly they have an extensive number of contacts on their "Friend List". Usually, a core of these is close friends with whom they have regular contact, but a large number are typically people with whom there have been only one or two (sometimes intense) interactions:

> I have probably near 100 contacts in my list. Don't know if that's "many" by SL standards but I talk mostly to half a dozen people regularly. The rest are either friends who are not there that often. Or "one-night stands" ☺ not necessarily the sexual kind :D (C1)

While the contact list may be largely made of casual acquaintances, friendships in Second Life can nevertheless involve strong bonds, which can endure for years. Indeed the establishment of friendship ties can be a deciding factor in if people decide to continue using Second Life when they first join, and continue returning as the years pass:

> … I think it's the friendships I made here over the time [that keep me coming to SL]. (M1)

Even users who resist friendships in order to keep personal physical world information private may engage in relationships:

> … I try not to have many deep friendships like man. There is a couple of friends of me. I talk to him and I tell if they care about my RL. They say no. They say doesn't mind if you are guy or girl ☺ (N) *[The participant is female but often uses a male avatar].*

Moreover, the bonds that are formed in Second Life may be so strong, that those who engage in romantic relationships may feel that they are being unfaithful to those with whom they are attached in the physical world:

> While I've been in SL I tried out being with other people. I think it has been some kind of cheating, not physical, but emotional. (S5)

However, some participants discuss how friendships and relationships in Second Life are in fact intrinsically flawed in that they are not long lasting or as strong as those in the physical world, and may not even be considered as "true" or "real":

> … I often wonder to what extent they are really friendships … in some cases, I get the sense that some are only collecting names for a list and that that somehow is comforting … in other cases, I get a sense that I am a future reference and that I shall be called upon when somebody wishes to "begin again" … not really sure what friendship in SL means, really. (K)

Whatever the characteristics may be of relationships that are formed in Second Life, the virtual world is sometimes also seen as an effective method for maintaining relationships that have been formed in the physical world:

> *You mentioned earlier you have family and a friend in SL … did you introduce them to SL?* Yes ☺ … *Do you meet them in SL?* Oh yes ☺ go out with them dancing, shopping. *How does it feel to interact with them via your avatars?* Great, it's so much fun. Like my husband, we at home … and bored so we go to see live act and dance ☺ (H)

There is also degree of **affect** that is associated with relationships in Second Life. For some participants emotional bonds in Second Life are seen as unique because they are not dependent on a physical body and are between people who do not necessarily know each other in the physical world:

> … How to "love" friend without knowing them …"The bond of the flesh is lust, the bond of the soul is love". (S4)

However, despite this unique characteristic, participants see the emotions as being as "real", valid, and powerful as those experienced in the physical world:

> … I fundamentally believe emotions and feelings are real, regardless of SL or RL. If I have a friend, and that friend does something that hurts me, then it hurts. I am upset about something here, then it's true feelings. (C1)

Indeed, for some participants the strength of emotion is very strong. Sometimes this is in contrast to their situation in the physical world, offering them emotional experience that may be otherwise lacking:

> When I came to SL, I had a relationship in RL, but it hasn't been that good anymore. Maybe that's been a point why I came to SL, because I haven't been that satisfied. I don't mean satisfied in a sexual way, but emotional whatever. (S5)

Painful emotions in Second Life are also a common experience among participants, in the context of both platonic and romantic relationships. They are seen by some as an inevitable part of the Second Life experience, potentially because its non-physical and anonymous nature allows people to be more open with others:

> [It's] as easy to get hurt [in SL as] in RL. But I think generally, people in SL are more open to each other … because you are anonymous. It is easy to say your secrets to a trusted stranger than to your friends, your RL friends. (S4)

The power of the emotional experience in Second Life is such that some participants may suppress their emotions or seek to control their impact. Others try to keep emotional experience in Second Life separate from the physical world, although this in itself can be a painful experience:

> … awful when you have heartache, because there is nobody to share it with apart from your SL friends. (L)

However, for some, the emotional experience of Second Life can be something that they "grow out of" so that even if there were intense emotional experiences in the past, it is no longer the case:

> *Do things upset you in SL ever?* Not now. We have had situations in the past where we have felt close. There has been considerable concern for some of the friends, and also times of felt betrayal. We've seen situations with marriage, divorce, serious illness, death and difficulties due to the way people were. Yes, some times of concern. (T)

A final aspect of this Theme concerns the **role and implications of the opinions of others**, in relation to aspects of the virtual world experience. For some participants, their experience of Second Life is in the context of perceptions of other people in the "outside world". For some participants, this perception is a negative one, which can influence how much information about their Second Life they share with people in the physical world:

> *What about your SL would have embarrassed you?* ... I did a lot of boring stuff, nothing interesting for others but the fact that I have relationships with other "avatars" in SL – I didn't want that made public ... (I don't talk about RL sex in RL as well.) (S5)

To some extent the opinions and respect of, and for, other people in Second Life also play a valued role. Opinions can depend on whom the other person is, what kind of relationship they intend, and even the appearance of one's avatar:

> I've no particular motive in my avi's appearance. At one point I was black as well as quite tall and blonde … but I haven't tried to reflect a RL appearance, or an idea … people respond to you differently. This avi is a bit more attractive than the last and you notice that your looks reflect how people respond to you. (C2)

However, while users may value the opinions of friends, on the whole the opinion of others is not important, as one participant describes:

> *Do you mind what other people think of you?* No, only if it's some important person but I can't change myself. If they like me, they will like how I'm. So what they think, this is never going to change me, that's why I don't care. (M2)

Indeed for some the benefit of Second Life is that they do not feel the need to be concerned about others may think of them, whereas they may do in the physical world:

> *Is it important what people in SL think of you?* Not really, maybe that's part of the appeal. ☺ (M4)

6.3.2.4. Virtual Self – Virtual World Interaction

Figure 6.6 illustrates the Thematic Network representing the cluster of Organising and corresponding Basic Themes that constitute the Global Theme of "Virtual Self – Virtual World Interaction".

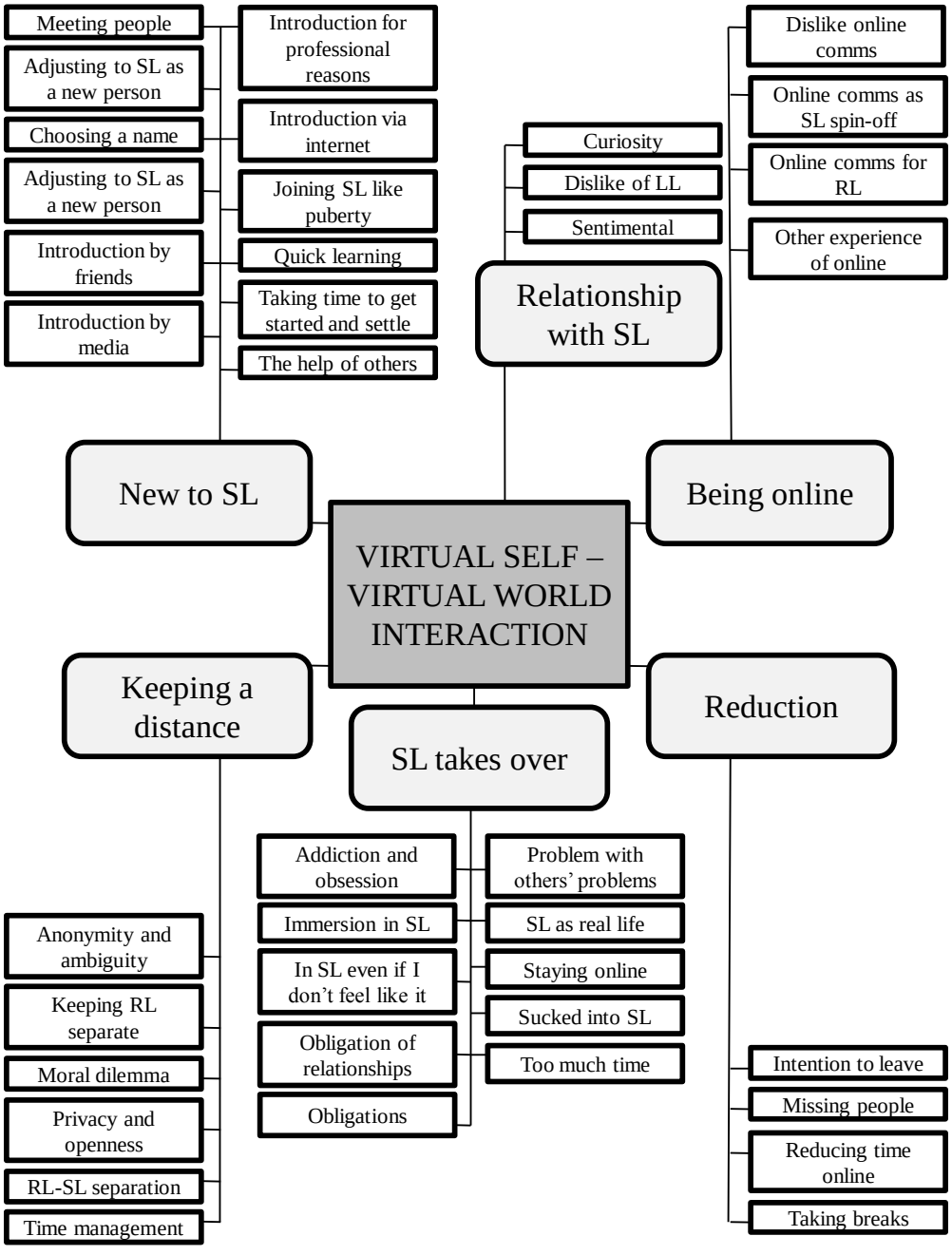
One aspect of this Theme concerns the experience of being a **new resident** in Second Life and learning to use the programme. As highlighted in Chapter 4, a new user must choose a name and avatar. For some, the name used in Second Life holds some significance for them in the physical world, while for others it bears some relationship to a username that they use in other virtual environments. Some participants find becoming a Second Life resident relatively simple, while others take more time in the initial period of adjustment to the particular environment Second Life offers. Sometimes there is hesitancy regarding whether they can or should use Second Life, either because of technical difficulties or they do not feel comfortable with the other residents:

> *Did it take you long to find your feet in SL?* Hmmmm … technically …? No … socially … ? Yeah, that took me a while … the technical side was not difficult as I have been a programmer for some time ... and have done a lot of work in design … prims and textures and scripts are easy … the social side was a struggle … and still is … (K)

Participants recognise that there is a lot to learn and need help, even with past experience of other virtual worlds and environments. However, as indicated in the "Virtual Self – Virtual Other Interaction" Global Theme, people gain enjoyment from offering assistance to others who need it, and this is particularly true with respect to new residents. The help can come informally from friends or from groups and organisations specifically set up to assist people with aspects of adjusting to Second Life. One of the participants observes that the process of joining Second Life can be compared to the intense and emotional experience of puberty:

> Can I tell you something that I think joining SL is like? … Well it's like going through puberty. You join and suddenly the world is new and exciting. You are sexually attractive and others are attracted to you. You just want to go out and enjoy it all. I have wondered so many times if this is the experience of others and why it is so … it fascinates me ... *Emotions run high.* YES. *Is that what you found?* Absolutely. (L)

Figure 6.6. The Thematic Network that represents the "Virtual Self – Virtual World Interaction" Global Theme, and the Organising and corresponding Basic Themes that constitute it.



Another aspect of this Theme concerns participants' experiences of **being online** using environments other than Second Life, social networking sites, messenger services, or other virtual worlds, for example. Some users show an active dislike for

social networking media and other online environments, seeing it as too invasive, as one participant describes:

> I hate Facebook, I don't like online communities in general. I have an account with five (?) friends, cause they forced me to create one. I have a fake name and no photo … "Hate" is too harsh … I don't get the sense of it. I don't want to publish any private information or pictures and if I want to share "important information" about myself, I prefer talking about them. (S3)

Others are quite adept in using virtual environments and have other experience besides that of, and prior to, Second Life, and are active social media users. For some participants, Second Life is a hub of other online activity, with their avatar playing host to a range of other online communications tools for the purpose of staying in touch with Second Life contacts:

> I sometimes "overflow" from SL to other tools. When I meet people I like, we sometimes use other tools to stay I touch, even when not using SL. (C1)

For others, social media are restricted for communicating with people in the physical world, or for those met in Second Life who have crossed over to friendship in "real life":

> … I use FB, Skype (but rarely), Yahoo IM (also rarely) and I have MSN Messenger, but use that even less … [it is for] RL although I have two friends from SL on FB … and maybe one or two group friends. (S1)

One aspect of this Theme concerns with how participants interact with the programme as they become more experienced. In the first instance, this includes participants' **relationship with Second Life**, in particular their opinions and how they feel about it. For some participants, an ongoing characteristic of their relationship with Second Life is the sense of curiosity that it plants within them, even those who are well versed in virtual environments or the capabilities of technology:

> … I was primarily interested in the concept of a virtual world, mainly because of some professional curiosity – I do some work in geographic information systems. (C2)

Participants who have been using Second Life for a while may hold an affectionate attachment to it, with it representing good memories and sentimental value:

> I had a break for a couple of months, then I begin to log in from time to time. I am a very .. I don't know the English word. I like memories. *Sentimental?* And I have a lot of good memories with SL. Yes ☺ … I think she [the avatar] is one of the reasons I still come back, I am sentimental about her. (S5)

However, no matter how participants may feel about the Second Life programme itself, some express a negative attitude towards Linden Labs, usually due to their perceived inadequacy in managing the world:

> … Yeah they do a pretty good job of letting people do whatever they really want here. I just don't like LL as a group. I like their work, but not them … I've lost two accounts to them really … One as because according to them, I stole my own account and was "denying use to the original owner" and the second time, I was hacked, reported it and they sided with the hacker who changed all the data. (S2)

Another facet of the relationship is the experience of **being immersed** in Second Life and how there are attractions and pulls towards spending increasing amounts of time in it. For some, a unique aspect of Second Life is the sensation of being in the virtual world, as if it is a physical place that they inhabit, which in part is due to the complex mix of graphics and social interaction:

> It's still interesting to see what people are doing here, how they create, live, compete ... Before I had my SL break I always felt like being INSIDE SL, being a true part of it. (S5)

For some participants, one outcome of this immersion is the loss of time, such that hours pass quickly, with "too much time" spent in Second Life:

> Sooner or later, everybody who is a frequent user is Lord or Lady of the Eye Rings, at least for a certain phase. ... *what is the Lord of the Eye Rings?* Don't you know Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings"? *Yes. Ooh you mean SL is like the ring?* So we are then Linden's "Lord/Lady of the Eye Rings". *Drawing you in.* The next morning after another too short night … (A)

Moreover the immersion can be such that Second Life itself feels like it is "real life", as one participant observes of a friend:

> … to her, she said, it was her real life … the person she was "meant to be". It was the only time she was happy. I thought "wow how creative she is, build herself a second life". (S3)

In particular, several participants observe the risk of others, if not themselves, being "addicted" to Second Life, due the sense of social engagement and personal fulfilment it gives, as one participant highlights:

> Maybe it's been the people I have been addicted to. When I got rid of my "close relationships" here, I got less and less addicted and interested in SL itself. And now it doesn't play an important role in my life anymore. (S5)

Such is the attraction to Second Life that some participants are online more or less continuously, sometimes fully participating, other times being logged on and regularly checking what is happening, or using a text-only version of Second Life so conversations with other residents can be had:

> … I am mostly logged in, but not always doing something in here … then RL comes up, like cleaning my apartment, cooking, RL friendships and those stuff … so RL at all and peeking in in between … I have friends here who need someone to listen and mostly get back on me then so I'm kind of available and see can reply faster than checking mails first what I prolly do twice a day. (M1)

For some, the pull to be in Second Life may be due to the various responsibilities and obligations they feel in Second Life, friendships, jobs, etc. For others there is also the sensation that other people are actively acting to immerse them into their Second Life experience and enforce responsibility upon them:

> Mostly [the kind of things that bother me in SL is] … I think when folks bring their RL in and share it with me without my asking about it … I can be as compassionate as the next person … but I do not come here with the expressed purpose of absorbing the ills of others' RL … I will help – listen and advise as necessary – people with whom I have a real friendship … (K)

However, others recognise that any obligations in Second Life are there by choice, and make a conscious effort to avoid it:

> … I have seen a lot of that [people having jobs, groups, friendships they need to support or come online even if they don't want to], particularly when people partner. … I don't [have obligations]. I have had friends that seemed to be very needy for time and attention, and I always found myself feeling pressured so avoided. (T)

In response to the pull of Second Life, participants comment on **reducing time** spent online generally and in Second Life specifically. Some participants have spent periods of time absent and taking breaks from the virtual world; indeed one participant returned specifically to participate in the present research:

> My last time online here was in early February, this year. *Have you been away from SL?* Since then, yes. *When did you come back?* I had some long breaks from here. The day we've talk in that group *[New Citizens Inc., where the participant was recruited]* … 5 mins before your message *[the message sent requesting research participants]*… your message was the first. (Y)

Some of the participants also speak of their considering leaving Second Life altogether, which is sometimes part of a widespread reduction of other online social media generally:

> I used to Facebook but I've pretty much given up, I do Skype for school related stuff, I don't used any other social networking, although I'm probably going to go to LinkedIn soon, oh and I used to Livejournal but I don't anymore. (M4)

However, reducing time in Second Life, or leaving it altogether, may have effects on others, as has been experienced by participants themselves:

> … I'd say losing friends [is the worst thing about SL]. Sometimes people you like just go away, no news, etc. So that's not much fun … it's sort of melancholy, nostalgia, sometimes a little bit of protectiveness, when you know it's about someone who was in a difficult situation and you'd like to know s/he is ok. (C1)

Another technique for resisting the pull of Second Life concerns establishing **boundaries** between what occurs in Second Life and their lives in the physical world. While participants' experiences in Second Life are no less authentic than those in the physical world, for some the separation between Second Life and "real life" is important and prevents the virtual world from impacting on the physical:

> If I am upset about something here, then it's true feelings BUT I rarely let it affect me in RL in the sense that I try to avoid drama spilling over in my RL. I don't make or organise my days and behaviour according to SL. (C1)

Management of time spent in Second Life is a key factor in keeping the two worlds separate. Some people exercise no set time management style, and their time in Second Life can vary tremendously. Others recognise the importance of time management, in order to maintain a balance in their lives:

> *You have worked out how much time to spend in SL? You have all your times on your profile.* Yes, else I will be a stranger for RL lol. *Is that something you did from the start?* No About 1½ years ago, I set up a timetable … so that I won't become a stranger to my friends and family. (S4)

When in Second Life itself participants may exercise discretion on how much information about their physical world circumstances they give to others, in order to maintain the boundaries between it and the physical world. This might mean not sharing personal details, not encouraging contact outside of Second Life or using only text, not voice, for example. Indeed for several participants, the notion of privacy is important to them, including the notion of Second Life being a world private for them:

> My closest people do [know about my SL] but most people don't, I find that people who don't do any kind of virtual gaming just don't "get it" and I have to admit, most of what happens here sounds pretty silly when you try to tell someone about it, so I just keep it to myself. I like that SL is a private world anyway, that's sorta the point. (M4)

Anonymity also provides a separation between Second Life and the physical world, and offers participants the confidence to do things they would not necessarily have the confidence to do in the physical world. This includes exploration of aspects of self, opening up to emotional experience and confrontation of difficult situations. However, some believe anonymity only is appealing for those who intend to be a different person to what they may be in the physical world:

> [SL gives me] the ability to be anonymous I suppose. Or at least more so here. *Is that appealing?* Yes and no. I think I tend to gravitate towards who I am and the idea of behaving differently, or being a different person here simply because of anonymity, doesn't have a lot of appeal for me … the appeal is transient. You can say or act in a particular way I guess and feel protected by your anonymity but it doesn't appeal to me much. (C2)

Meanwhile others recognise that the separation of Second Life and the physical world can cause ethical and moral issues, because it may mean keeping secrets from people in the physical world, as well as in the virtual one:

> For a while I was torn about the morals but I have gone through that and in my particular circumstances I think I am not going to beat myself up about it. It's better than the alternatives. (L)

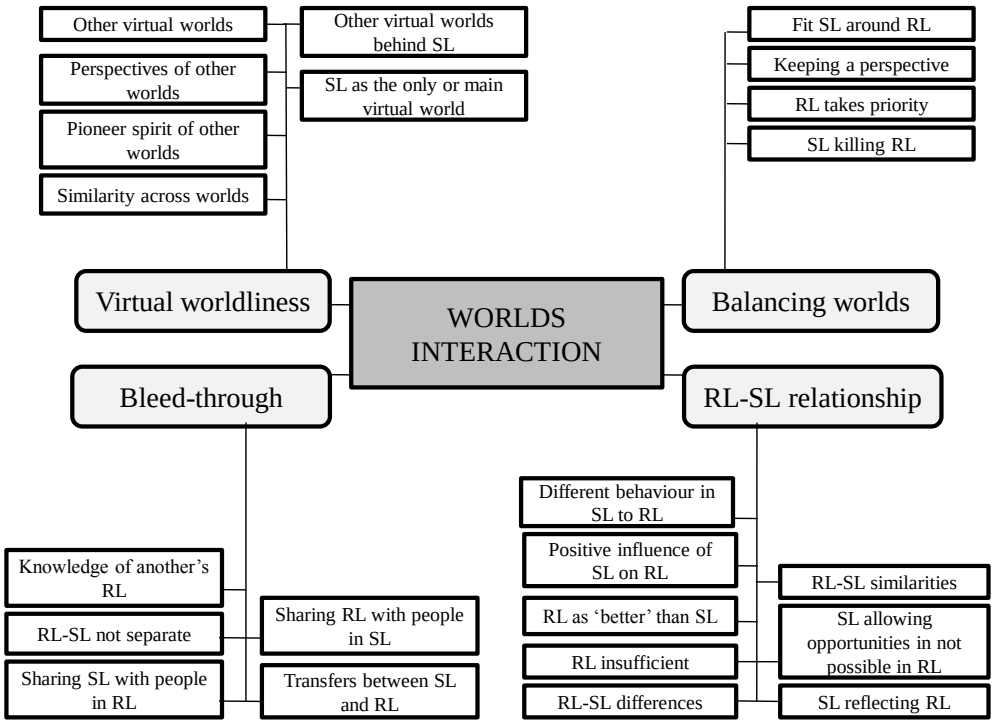
6.3.2.5. Worlds Interaction

Figure 6.7 illustrates the Thematic Network that represents the cluster of Organising and corresponding Basic Themes constituting the Global Theme of "Worlds Interaction".

An aspect of this Global Theme relates to participants' observations with respect to **using other virtual worlds**, including evaluation of them in relation to Second Life. For some of the participants Second Life is the only virtual world they have ever used, while some have tried other worlds but use Second Life almost exclusively, and others have used other worlds although mostly only for a limited time. Part of the emphasis on Second Life usage is because there is a perception that other virtual worlds are technically and socially behind Second Life, as one participant explains:

> I tried Inworldz and Blue Mars … Inworldz is way behind SL and in Blue Mars I didn't like the fact that you couldn't create as you do in SL. And actually both were pretty empty. (L)

Figure 6.7. The Thematic Network that represents the "Worlds Interaction" Global Theme, and the Organising and corresponding Basic Themes that constitute it.



Those who are very familiar with other virtual worlds can recognise that they have advantages over Second Life, despite their inferior technology and user numbers. The fact that there are few users means that the worlds may feel more intimate and friendly, so that the interpersonal connections feel of greater value:

> … Jokaydia is growing. They are mostly from Australia and that is good for me, to see other perspectives. OS Grid is comprised of many educators but they are very independent, run their own sims. It is a little more difficult to connect, but rewarding. (B)

Moreover, these worlds may enable the users to recapture the "pioneer spirit" that early users of Second Life may have experienced, and to some participants this is a rewarding experience:

> From SL I went over to Inworldz.com. Explored there for a while … Inworldz, I discovered was like SL was when SL first started 6 or so years ago … probably longer. So, I got to see what SL would have been like had I joined earlier … Once I got to Inworldz, I found the people much different, a totally different vibe. I felt more like a pioneer in a new world. Things did/do not run as smooth. You crash and freeze a lot. (S3)

The single participant who is currently active regularly across different worlds maintains continuity of characteristics, personality and behaviours across this world, although it may be in part due their maintaining a presence in several worlds for principally professional reasons:

> … I use a generic [avatar] here in SL for library work ... *Do they all look similar?* Yes they do in a sense. *And do they have the same name?* In Second Life I am [B]. In OS grid, Reaction grid and Jokaydia, I am *[the same name]* ... I think my ability to help people comes through. I think my friendliness and curiosity comes through, no matter what world or what avatar. Sometimes my impatience with hurtful people comes through too. (B)

Another aspect of this Theme concerns the relationship between Second Life and "real life". In the first instance, this relates to the **emphasis that participants place between the physical world and the virtual world** of Second Life. It is common for participants to claim that the obligations, events and people in the physical world are a priority over those in Second Life. Similar to the role of time management in the "Virtual Self – Virtual World Interaction" Global Theme, the priority of the physical world can be ensured through managing how much time is spent in Second Life. In practice this may mean using the virtual world when obligations and commitments in the physical world are fulfilled. The criteria for balancing the emphasis between worlds are not just based on time spent in one world over another, but the amount of time and effort spent concerned with issues arising that are not related to the physical world. With respect to Second Life, some participants claim to keep a perspective of what happens there, to ensure that its impact on the physical world is managed:

> I wouldn't really take many things to heart since it's not something that happens IRL … I've gone through enough crap in my life to get a firm understanding of how to deal with stress. (S2)

However, other participants have had the personal experience of Second Life taking priority over, and ultimately reducing, involvement in life in the physical world:

> … I think my eyes have been squared … and I didn't sleep much ☺ I don't regret it at all, but I'm glad it's over … because it killed my RL time. (S5)

To some extent, participants claim that aspects of Second Life **"bleed through"**, i.e. may transfer to the physical world, and vice versa. It is not unusual for them to highlight the "leakage" that can occur between Second Life and the physical world. Relating to the "Virtual Self – Virtual World Interaction" Global Theme, some of this leakage is the flow of information about one world to social contacts within another. On the whole, in Second Life, participants only share a limited amount of physical world information, even with those with whom they have a close relationship, as one participant states:

> Only my most trusted friends know me IRL, and we don't even know each other's cell number XD We may have seen each other over webcam, talked a lot on voice or even dated (which is extremely rare) but in all I keep things to a need to know basis. (S2)

For some participants however, a certain amount of transfer of information about the physical world is essential for good relationships in Second Life:

> It is obviously a comfort level. Some will show pictures and use voice. Others don't. Relationships can, and have, developed through text based, but it varies … there are a lot

> of relationships that occur in many ways. I have a difficult time just maintaining much with an anonymous avatar. (T)

The amount of information about Second Life shared with people in the physical world also represents a leakage between worlds. Some people are quite open with physical world contacts about their use of virtual worlds, while others are more circumspect, sharing more limited amount of information, mostly to close friends:

> My closest people do [know about my SL] but most people don't, I find that people who don't do any kind of virtual gaming just don't "get it" and I have to admit, most of what happens here sounds pretty silly when you try to tell someone about it, so I just keep it to myself. I like that SL is a private world anyway, that's sorta the point. (M4)

This "bleed through" is not restricted to information. Participants sometimes discuss how experiences and relationships can also transfer between worlds, for example how relationships formed in Second Life become transformed into relationships in the physical world:

> A couple of months later I met someone here in SL, we directly had a "link" to each other and we took it over to RL step by step. We're now together in RL for around one year, and since we began to have contact in RL, our SL got less and less. (S5)

Others find that experiences in Second Life can lead to personal development in the physical world:

> In SL I am totally different than I was at first here. I have more confidence here now. *In RL?* Well yes that too. Cos I am doing a degree. Would never have tried that before. *You mentioned this when we first spoke … are you doing your degree because of SL?* Yes I wanted to learn all this. (H)

For others, it is a matter of "who they are" in the physical world informs and shapes their experience and interactions in the virtual world:

> … in some cases being a librarian bleeds through conversations. Such as the dragon sim. People will say, are you really a librarian? And then you are talking in the dragon avatar but you are drawing on your experiences as a librarian. (B)

However, for some participants leakage between the virtual and physical worlds is a non-issue, for they believe that they are not separate. For them it is not possible to isolate the type of person one is, and the impact of events, experiences and relationships, between Second Life and the physical world:

> When it comes to developing relationships with people, I have been 'me'. I have been criticized for not Role Playing. I don't see the complete RL/SL separation that others are able to maintain. (T)

A final facet of the relationship between the physical and virtual worlds involves the **comparisons** that participants make between them. This includes the precedence that one realm may take over the other. Some participants highlight that in comparison to life in the physical world, Second Life is inferior, both in terms of its physical characteristics and its quality:

> I think it was the recognition that as intriguing as this place can be … it isn't a match for RL. And also a recognition that I have to balance out my life … I have a job and a RL

> personal life, and I need to attend to those as well. And basically the novelty wore off. (C2)

Others, while not necessarily offering an observation that the physical world is superior, highlight how their Second Life is a reflection or recreation of their experiences in the physical world:

> When I first separated from [the original avatar] and created [S3], it was because [the original]'s SL life was starting to mimic my real life too much. I couldn't believe it … I created the same boring life in SL that I had in RL. *[The participant has two avatars, an original avatar and the one used to participate in the research.]* (S3)

Another comparison is made regarding the characteristics of their lives in the two realms. Participants highlight their similarities due to the fact that interactions in both are between "real people":

> In some ways [SL and RL are similar] … since you interact with real persons behind the avatars. Even when they prefer to change gender, shape or even to prefer appearing as a plush puppet. (A)

While some participants highlight that any similarities between the characteristics of their Second Life and life in the physical world are intentional:

> There are some things I consciously WON'T do in SL because I would NEVER do them in RL. I don't think it's a good idea to practice something you don't like, because it becomes part of you. (M4)

For others there are significant differences between the physical and the virtual, from the relatively obvious (e.g. being able to fly, safety from physical harm, etc.), to the life experiences the virtual world offers. The potential differences are not always immediately obvious, it is a realisation that evolves over time:

> *How long did it take you to realise you could be different here in SL?* I'm not sure if I ever had this thought. What I did was natural, without thinking about the reasons. I had an idea, or wanted to do something – so I did. (S4)

In this vein, some participants indicate that aspects of their life in the physical world are not satisfied sufficiently and that Second Life provides environments that address the deficiencies, particularly in relation to relationships or sexual activity with others:

> I realized that there is a lot inside me that is not satisfied or even touched in RL … The relationship I had in RL lasted for about six years. We always got along very good, didn't argue – he has been my best friend as is still a good friend of mine. But now I think it has been not intense enough for me. It felt like paddling on the surface. (S5)

In particular, Second Life may offer participants opportunities to do things that they cannot necessarily do in the physical world:

> … I think [what I like most about SL is] to be able to talk with people all over the world and the freedom here … so starting things what I can't do in RL, like designing and having a company, see other (rebuild) places where I can't get in RL because too far away. (M1)

One of the participants observes that the point of being in Second Life is to find the fulfilment that the physical world is not offering:

> I think if your life is great and full … why join SL? If you have everything you want in RL, then why would you waste your time in SL? ... You take someone in RL who is in a wheelchair, and can walk and dance in SL, etc. (S3)

Ultimately, experiences in Second Life can have a positive effect on their life in the physical world, as one participant explains:

> You know it's a strange thing and I am not sure now how much changing jobs has to do with it as that came at the same time. But I am so much more chilled since I came to SL. Before, my head was full of must pay this bill, or organise that trip or fix that in the house or do that at work. Worrying about this and that. And now my head is full of nice SL things. Not all of it of course. (L)

6.4. Summary of the analysis and relating it to the research question

This section provides a description of the findings in terms of how they relate to the subsidiary question:

> What are the processes involved in being a Virtual Self in virtual worlds?

The Thematic Analysis indicates that there are a number of processes that contribute to the experience of Virtual Self in virtual worlds. These are processes in relation to: Self-reflection and reflection on the virtual world in which the Self is situated; interactions between Self and Other; interactions between Self and virtual world; and interactions between the virtual and physical worlds inhabited by the Self. This section provides a summary of each of these processes as revealed by the Thematic Analysis and uses them to construct a rudimentary model for the processes involved in being a Virtual Self in a virtual world.

6.4.1. Processes relating to reflection on the virtual world

These are processes relating to ***users' opinions and perceptions of the virtual world, and their experiences of using it***, from which their experience of Virtual Self emerges. Experience of the Virtual Self is dependent on the purpose the individual believes the virtual world has, which then influences the types of activity they do. In the case of Second Life, the range of activities and environments it offers mean that it serves a variety of purposes, and people engage in activities accordingly. For example, those who see it as a place for socialising and having fun, spend time meeting people at clubs and various venues, while those who want to use it for Role Play find the groups and sims (or create their own) that are relevant for the kind of Role Play in which they are interested. Besides being places to "play", virtual worlds are places where people can

experiment with behaviours, attitudes and ideas that they feel they cannot necessarily in the physical world. Beliefs on the purpose of a virtual world are not discrete, and the same person may use a virtual world for a variety of purposes and activities. Hence, a person using Second Life for fun and socialising, may be at the same time trying relationships they would not have in the physical world.[25]

The experience of the Virtual Self, while related to the individual's beliefs on the virtual world's purposes and the activities they pursue, occurs within the technological and social contexts offered by the virtual world. Second Life provides a technologically advanced, permissive but safe environment, where almost "anything goes" and the harm and rejection that may be evident in the physical world are not as potent in the virtual one. However at the same time, ***Second Life constrains what is possible***. This is because how it is experienced depends on the capabilities of the Linden Lab servers and the user's computer and/or Internet connection, or the simple fact that it is not a physical place.[26]

6.4.2. Processes relating to Self-reflection

These are processes relating to ***being a virtual world user***, from which their experience of Virtual Self emerges. With respect to Self-reflection, experience of the Virtual Self is mediated through the avatar, and hence is reflected in and reflective of the avatar, which in turn is linked to the purpose the virtual world has for the user. In the case of Second Life, some use it to "be themselves" or at the most, an extension of the kind of person they are in the physical world, having an avatar with similar appearance and conducting themselves in the same way they would in the physical world. Others recognise how Second Life can be used to behave differently, to have experiences and explore aspects of Self not necessarily possible in the physical world, and hence use and adapt their avatar accordingly. The "anything goes" environments of virtual worlds give people freedom of expression and empowerment to behave in new ways. Experiences in virtual worlds are associated with the avatar, and as such people may become closely attached to the avatars they use and identify with them. Although avatars are used to create characters in Role Play, the people who create such characters are also sometimes just "being themselves", having the same characteristics they might have in the physical world. On the other hand, people who are not intending to use virtual worlds for Role Play sometimes find avatars develop lives and

[25] This relates to the Player Taxonomy, constructed in Chapter 5.
[26] This relates to findings in Chapter 7.

behaviours of their own. There recurs the notion that ***Second Life is a place to experiment with Self and identity, people use it to improve themselves and to become the person they wish to be***.

However, the experience of being a Virtual Self through the mediation of the avatar is within a shifting, unstable, and multiple context. In the case of Second Life, change and development is part of the everyday experience, including meeting new people, engaging in new activities and groups, experiencing technical updates, personal development opportunities and realisations. If the experience isn't satisfactory, people can leave just as easily as they joined, but sometimes they choose to "begin again", leaving their old Second Life behind and beginning a new one with a new account and new username.[27] Although some alts are very similar to each other, people often use alts to explore other aspects of themselves, play different characters, or have different lives. Ultimately, ***while users of virtual worlds become adept at managing these shifting and multiple opportunities for their own advantage at the same time, they provide an uncertain context for others who interact with them***.

6.4.3. Processes relating to interactions between Self and Other in the virtual world

The experience of the Virtual Self is in part dependent on processes relating to the ***interactions that occur between individuals***. In the case of Second Life, one of its purposes is socialising; hence interaction, communication and involvement with others are intrinsic elements of the Virtual Self experience. There are two aspects to this: how interactions indirectly, and how they directly shape, Virtual Self experience.

In terms of indirect influence, the nature of interactions in Second Life provides a particular context for experiencing the Self. The dependency on non-physical anonymous avatars gives interactions in virtual worlds a slippery complexion: there are misunderstandings, deceit and disrespect. However, at the same time it encourages open communication. In the safe and permissive environment of a virtual world, people feel free to explore, reveal and satisfy aspects of themselves in emotionally-charged relationships with others. The strength of relationship bonds encourage immersion and involvement in the virtual realm to such an extent that they might displace the bonds held in the physical world and encourage participation in virtual worlds when a person might otherwise leave. However, if a person tries to manage and

[27] This is discussed further in Chapters 4 and 8.

control the impact these bonds may have on their physical world experience, there can be a disconnection between the Self in the physical world and the Self in the virtual world.

In terms of the direct influence of Self-Other interactions, this relates to the influence that others' viewpoints have on how the experience of Virtual Self is managed. Virtual world experience is in the context of life led in the physical world, and how much time is spent in the virtual realm, in what kind of activities, and how much information is shared with those in the physical world, depends to some extent on the opinions those in the physical world hold of virtual worlds, or what the virtual world user imagines that opinion to be. The opinion and respect of others in virtual worlds is also important to some degree, although the extent of others' power to influence depends on who these others are. Moreover, in Second Life there are no preformed institutions or communities that a person is "born into" and which shape identity and behaviour, as there is in the physical world (age, social class, religion, family, neighbourhood, etc.), and while a user might replicate these in the virtual world, they may leave them at any time should any constraints and obligations they impose on experience become deemed excessive. Hence, ***the freedom given by its non-physical anonymous "anything goes" environment means other people's opinion and influence has its limits***.

6.4.4. Processes relating to interactions between the Self and virtual world

These are processes relating to ***the relationship the virtual world's users have with it, the extent to which they use it, and how they interact with its programme***. With respect to the processes relating to Self-world interaction, the experience of Virtual Self is in part dependent on the relationship a person has with the virtual world, and the extent of their involvement. In the case of Second Life, it is not uncommon for people to have little experience of other virtual environments, or even have a positive dislike for other online social media. Hence, they have to develop strategies for unfamiliar tasks related to being a virtual environment user, such as choosing a name and avatar, as well as learning technical aspects of the programme.

For some people, with prolonged use of virtual worlds, involvement deepens and the perceived benefits, such as the opportunity to fulfil unsatisfied aspects of the Self, the gratifying emotional involvement with others, in combination with obligations and commitments to others in the virtual world, act as an ever-strengthening pull. The

Virtual Self may become very well developed, and as involvement with the virtual world deepens, time in the physical world may be reduced and become less important. Others, having experienced some of the power of virtual worlds to immerse, develop strategies to resist the pull and maintain boundaries between what is experienced in the virtual world and the physical. In the case of Second Life, while its non-physical anonymous "anything goes" environment encourages involvement and immersion, it also allows a separation of the physical world from the virtual, ***allowing people to manage the depth of their involvement by keeping aspects of their physical world private***.

6.4.5. Processes relating to interactions between worlds, physical and virtual, inhabited by the Self

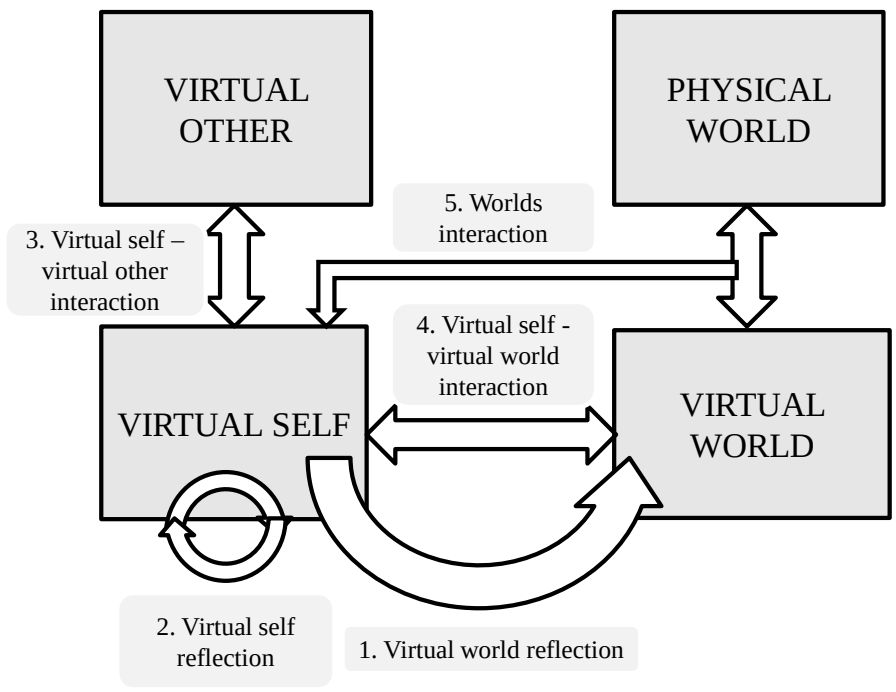
These are processes relating to how ***the experiences in physical and virtual worlds relate to and influence each other***. With respect to the processes relating to the various worlds interactions, the experience of Virtual Self depends on the balance and transferences that occur between the environments a person is situated in. In the case of Second Life, it seems to command a certain amount of loyalty and exclusivity among its users. The majority of research participants only use Second Life, preferring its more advanced technology, flexibility, and socialising opportunities. This means for them the main influence on experience is the relationship that occurs between Second Life and the physical world.

Despite the ability of virtual worlds to prioritise themselves through their immersive qualities, the common claim is that "real life comes first". Hence, people may try to fit time in virtual worlds around obligations in the physical world. They may also try to take a distanced perspective on the events that occur in them, as well as create boundaries around the worlds, by limiting information flow between them. Nevertheless it is not unusual for people to think they spend too much time online, particularly those with less physical world commitments. Moreover, despite best efforts to prioritise the physical, there may be transferences and influences between worlds, not of all of which are bad. Situations and behaviours experienced in the physical world may be replicated in the virtual, while virtual worlds offer opportunities and satisfy aspects of Self the physical world cannot. This indicates that ***no matter how much people strive to maintain separations between the Self in the physical and virtual worlds, blurrings are almost inevitable***.

6.4.6. A rudimentary model for processes involved in being a Virtual Self

This analysis indicates that the experience of Virtual Self is dependent upon a number of processes in the form of reflections and interactions, and suggests a rudimentary **Virtual Self Processes Model** as outlined in Figure 6.8. It is comprised of the Virtual Self, Virtual Other, the virtual world where the Self is situated, and the physical world. Unidirectional arrow (1) illustrates the experience of being in the virtual world and the role it has for them. Circular arrow (2) illustrates the Self-reflexive process that occurs while being in virtual worlds involving avatar choice and behaviour, and hence producing experience of Self. Bidirectional arrow (3) illustrates the interactions that occur between the Self and others, and hence encourage and influence particular experiences of the Self. Bidirectional arrow (4) illustrates the interactions that occur between the Self and virtual world, including immersion and time management. The combined unidirectional and bidirectional arrows (5) illustrate the interactions that occur between physical and virtual worlds, and how the transferences between them produce experience of Self.

Figure 6.8. The Virtual Self Processes Model: a rudimentary model illustrating the processes that are involved in being a Virtual Self.



6.5. Evaluation of the analysis and discussion of findings

The experience of a Virtual Self in a virtual world emerges from: reflection on the virtual world in question and reflection upon the Self with the avatar as mediator; interactions between the Self, others, and the virtual world; interactions between the physical and virtual worlds that the Self is located in. This relates to existing literature in a number of ways.

6.5.1. The Self in virtual worlds' social contexts

In the first instance, the theories of Symbolic Interaction (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1956, 1962) and those emphasising the individual in context (e.g. the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory discussed by Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004) indicate how the Self emerges from social context, and is not just a product of individual psychological processes. The present research reinforces this, while indicating how virtual worlds offer context unlike those in the physical world. In particular the social context is unstable: people come and go or are not the people one thought they were, and the mediation of the context by technology means it is subject to change, or may even be withdrawn. The context is also safe and permissive: its separation from the physical world means that a person can behave in ways they would not necessarily do in other circumstances. There are multiple contexts, such that influences and transferences between the virtual and physical worlds have implications for the Self that is experienced in the virtual world.

The findings from the present research are also substantiated by the group discussions described in Section 3.8. The excerpt illustrated in Figure 6.9 indicates that Second Life users believe the separation between the virtual and physical worlds are important to escape preconceptions and to facilitate freedom of expression, and that they are empowered to create whoever they wish to be. However, the group discussions also reveal that a separation between the virtual and the physical is not always possible. The discussion in the excerpt illustrated in Figure 6.10 indicates that no matter how much a virtual world user may manage the information flow from the physical world to the virtual, there is always a chance that some aspect of "real life" will slip through.

Figure 6.9. An excerpt from a group discussion, highlighting the role of creating a separation between the physical and virtual worlds.

```
I: is that independence important?
M5: /me nods. Very.
L: yes
I: why?
H: yes
M5: No preconceptions. You are who you choose to create abd be.
M5: and* be
```

Figure 6.10. An excerpt from a group discussion, highlighting the extent to which information from the physical world may "leak" into the virtual.

```
I: do you think rl leaks through somehow? can it be kept separate?
M1: nope
H: not really
LE: the closer you become to ppl here..yes it does
H: this is why it is important
A: I, point is that *you* can decide what and how much you reveal of your
RL
M5: as peronality of yourself theres always leaking something through,
noone cant play 100% another role
LE: exactly
M5: I think we can't help but let it leak through a little -- especially
with first avis. But I've made characters that are nothing like me. M5
will always be a little like me, because she was my first, before I
learned to separate rl and sl.
H: I still can not do that:)
I: what happens when someone asks where are you from, or how old are you?
LE: it is our personalities which will be revealed..over time..
A: I myself show a lot of my RL traits and characteristics here. I'm
really a bad role player this way
H: I tell them
H: but not my age hehehehehe
LE: but that doesnt mean i pass out my rl phone number and address
I: lol H
M5: if their appearantly nice and behaving people i can tell them :)
H: or me:)
```

6.5.2. The Self in virtual worlds as a reflexive process

Both the Symbolic Interaction approaches of Mead (1956, 1962) and Goffman (1959), and the approach of Giddens (1990, 1991), emphasise reflexivity of the Self. For Mead, the Self emerges through the reflecting back on itself from the viewpoint of the Other, while for Giddens, the Self is a project reflected upon and understood in terms of its own trajectory. The present research reinforces the reflexive nature of the Self in virtual worlds in both of these senses. In the first sense, the user of virtual worlds reflects on themselves and their engagement with the virtual world as mediated by the avatar. Through the avatar and witnessing it on their computer screens, they are able to observe themselves in all virtual contexts at all times; whatever the purpose in using it and activities engaged in, ***the user can observe their avatar in all those activities, reflect upon the avatar and those activities and make adjustments according to what their objectives are***. In reflecting upon the avatar they are reflecting upon both themselves and a separate entity. In this way, the Model reinforces the indications from

both findings by Veerapen (2011) and in Chapter 4: as Mead emphasises how Self emerges through adopting the perspective of the Other, in virtual worlds the avatar allows the user to be their own Other, the Self that reflects is adopting the viewpoint of an Other that includes itself. In the second sense, the role of the avatar in virtual world participation also reiterates Giddens' vision of a Self that emerges through awareness of its own history: to some users the avatar represents the sum of their experiences in Second Life, as well as sometimes representing experience, and the type of person they wish to be, in the physical world.

6.5.3. The Self as emerging in virtual worlds through interaction

The Symbolic Interaction approach and the theories emphasising the individual in context see the Self as emerging through interactions with others and the environments they are in. For Mead (1962) it is through the "conversation of gestures", and for the individual in context theories it is the interaction with others and the environment through the mediation of artefacts and tools (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004). The present research reinforces the role of interaction in the emergence of Self, but indicates in a number of ways that interactions in Second Life have a particular complexion.

In the first instance, the virtual world user must interact with the world itself and how it is manifested via the interface on their computer screens. The fact that their ***experience is mediated by technology*** means the sense of Self that emerges in the virtual world is to some extent constrained or enabled by the technology employed. In the vernacular of Activity Theory, the virtual world may be argued to provide the environment from which Self emerges, but is also one of the mediating tools. This aspect of experience is illuminated further in Chapter 7, which discusses the experience of Self at the intersection of the virtual and physical worlds.

Secondly, there is a form of interaction between the user and their avatar, with the avatar as one of the mediating tools from which sense of Self emerges. It has already been highlighted here and in Chapter 4 how the avatar is to some extent a separate entity from the user. While it is the mediator of experience in a virtual world, the avatar is simultaneously "this me" and "that me", "me" and "not me". Hence users sometimes feel that the avatar has experiences of its own, demanding or inspiring behaviours or interactions with others that might not otherwise happen. From this, the user can grow attached or identify with their avatar as experience unfolds, and so ***the sense of Self emerging in virtual worlds to some extent may depend on the strength***

of association between the avatar, the activities and interactions it is used for, and the person who is using it.

Thirdly, a key interaction that occurs is that between one user and another. In this sense the virtual world programme is a tool that mediates the interactions between people. While Second Life allows users from across the physical world to interact, these interactions have a complexion that is determined by what the programme technology allows: in this case mainly text-based communication through avatars. In line with existing research that emphasises the freedom of expression and information transference possible in virtual environments and the "hyperpersonal" interactions it encourages (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986; Walther, 1996), the research here indicates how ***the relative anonymity and dependence on words to convey emotion and intent, means interactions can be highly emotionally charged and honest***. Interactions with others in virtual worlds gives access to experiences not otherwise possible, and arguably allows a new sense of Self to emerge that would not, if constrained to the physical.

Finally, the Self emerges in the interaction between worlds the user inhabits, in particular ***the tension between the physical and virtual realms***. The influence of events and experiences in one world can flow into another; for example, a person who learns a skill in the virtual world may use that skill to improve their situation in the physical world. Balancing commitments in one world with the desire to be in another, or maintaining a separation between worlds by keeping activities private, may all impact on the Self that is experienced and emerges. This aspect is also discussed further in Chapter 7, in its consideration of the experience of Self at the intersection of physical and virtual worlds, as well as in Chapter 8 in its discussion on how the tension between the physical and virtual worlds changes, and is managed, over time.

6.5.4. The Self as a performance in virtual worlds

Previous research relating to performance of Self in virtual environments indicates how, with the avatar as the medium and their representation, users become immersed into the environment, and use it to experiment with identity. The present research links back to this in a number of ways.

In the first instance, users gain a sense of presence in Second Life due to the mix of graphics and social interaction, but unlike research that suggest presence is deeper the more realistic the environment or avatars that users interact with (e.g. Nowak & Biocca, 2003), it indicates that ***the mere ability to have experiences in environments***

and with other people is sufficient. The role of others in presence and immersion is not a matter of passive interaction creating the sense of "being there": users of virtual worlds actively seek to draw one another into their personal virtual lives by sharing experiences and seeking relationships. However, to some extent the immersion is resisted, with users constantly reaffirming to one another and themselves that "RL comes first".

Secondly, there are some links and contrasts to Chapter 4's discussion on representation of the Virtual Self, and previous research in this area. In terms of avatar appearance, earlier research suggests people create avatars that bear some relation to, or an improved version of, the kind of person and appearance they have in the physical world (Ducheneaut et al., 2009; Vasalou et al., 2008). Here, this is supplemented by indications that there are some users for whom appearance and behaviour that is similar to "real life" is very important, in order to present an accurate and authentic image of the type of person they are. Hence, to some extent a resemblance to the physical world is common, even if it is an enhanced version or only for some aspects of the avatar. However, the creation of avatar appearance is a relatively haphazard affair, and to some extent can just evolve over time, depending on what is available and affordable, the advice users get from others, and a realisation of the opportunities for different types of avatar in Second Life.

An aspect of performance in virtual worlds also illuminated is that of Role Play. Existing research implies that ***to some extent Role Play permeates all virtual world experience***, because of a tendency to use avatars that are more idealised versions of themselves in the physical world (Ducheneaut et al., 2009). The research here shows that using an avatar gives some people the opportunity to engage in activities and behaviour that they might not otherwise. They may play social roles that they enjoy or find deficient in the physical world by engaging in activities and relationships that satisfy them (being a teacher, mother, etc.), or using avatars of a different gender to their "real life". While formal organised Role Play is common in Second Life, it is also common for users to create specific characters and persona just for themselves to use some or all of the time, to fulfil some aspect of their experience that is lacking, or for simple enjoyment.

The group interviews described in Section 3.8 also illuminate this aspect of experience. One of the discussions to emerge is the extent to which everyone who uses Second Life is Role Playing, and how the virtual world is used to assume or "try on" roles. Users may exhibit behaviour that varies from how they would usually behave, potentially reflecting a desire to hide their "real life" persona, as discussed in the excerpt in Figure 6.11.

Figure 6.11. An excerpt from a group discussion, highlighting the view that all users of Second Life are to some extent engaging in Role Play.

```
LE: people hide their real life selves in sl
A: more or less, yes
M5: /me smiles. H -- sometimes the person you are interacting
with is a character and resembles the real person in no way,
shape or form.
H: but if they are acting out their bad side then thats them
isnt it?
M1: some are I, some i have on my friendlist act pretty the
same as they do in rl, then i had costumers or met some others
who just lived their bad behaviour in sl which they couldnt in
rl because the have high rankings in their business or cant
because of their family
LE: exactly
H: just they haide it more in rl????
LE: "we are who we pretend to be"
A: I think it depends on the role you want to play (or SL made
you to play this role) here
I: i like that L
M5: It's not always "acting out your bad side." Sometimes it's
more like...trying on another skin. Not necessarily a bad one.
LE: We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about
what we pretend to be. Kurt Vonnegut
```

However, later on the same discussion highlights that this a contested view: some users prefer to believe that rather than assuming roles, people are displaying an aspect of themselves that is part of their personality, possibly because to ascribe behaviour to a Role Play disengages responsibility from the person who engages in it (Figure 6.12).

Figure 6.12. An excerpt from a group discussion, highlighting the view that the extent of Role Play in Second Life is exaggerated.

```
H: no no
H: acting your bad side is you silly
A: define "bad side"
I: do you think however you act its still "you", H?
H: ofcourse
M1: sure M5, just can state from my experience, surely theres
also those people who change themselves in a good way too but
didnt meet that many of those
H: I just find a bit of me thats inside and let it out?
A: "good" and "bad" is a matter of your personal values and
standpoints
H: agreed
A: for some, it is already "bad" to change your gender here
M5: lol Okay...for example, I create characters that are going
into a book. Creating those characters here, living in their
heads, their skins -- it helps me make them more real when it's
time to put them down on paper.
M1: maybe ive expressed it a bit wrong sry :)
H: well that is different
I: lol M1 dont be sorry, say it another way if you want
H: most just use the anonimity to act bad
H: they not doing a character
```

6.5.5. The Self as an activity in virtual worlds

The theories that emphasise the individual in context emphasise the role of activity in emergence of Self so "we are what we do" (Nardi, 1996b, p.88): in the setting of goals and engaging in activities towards achieving them, the sense of Self emerges. While a key purpose of Second Life is to meet and socialise with others, the present research indicates how a variety of activities are key in the experience of Self in Second Life; the activities a person engages in depends to some extent the purpose for which they use the virtual world, a point that is underlined in the Player Taxonomy described in Chapter 5.

This research indicates that users engage in a range of activities, some of which are not available or less possible in the physical world. In some cases, merely logging on and spending time in Second Life is an activity in itself, as an alternative to physical world obligations, or when someone needs something to occupy them. As in interactions with other users, activity in virtual worlds is mediated by the avatar; indeed in some cases, such as in Role Play, the avatar is not just a vehicle for activity it is a fundamental part of how that activity plays out. The dichotomous relationship between the user and their avatar means that while the avatar is the medium for the user's activities, in some ways the activity belongs to the avatar. While this happens particularly when engaging in Role Play, it can happen in more regular activities, when a user is engaging in an activity that would not otherwise do, but feel it is something the avatar would do. This notion is supported in one of the group discussions, when participants observe that avatars develop their own set of responsibilities and social connections (Figure 6.13).

Figure 6.13. An excerpt from a group discussion, highlighting the extent to which an avatar may develop its own set of responsibilities and social connections.

```
A: when you are *really* living here - I mean in the sense of being
Inworld more than just a few hours in a month, your avatar develops
its own networks of social relationships, tasks and demands
I: is this somehting that continually develops A?
M5: Which can sometimes be overwhelming, just like irl.
A: Oh yes, definitely
```

Activity in virtual worlds and its relationship to the Self is complex: while some activities provide a user with their own sense of Self, in other cases ***they may be building a picture of the Self that belongs only to the avatar in the virtual world and no relationship to the Self in "real life"***.

6.5.6. The Self as multiple and disconnected

Postmodern theories emphasise the multiple nature of contemporary experience and the opportunities that CMC and New Technologies allow for identity play and ultimately a disconnection from the Self (Poster, 1990). The Symbolic Interaction approaches emphasise also how the Self is multiple, depending on the interaction and circumstances of that interaction (e.g. Goffman, 1959). Chapter 4 underscores the multiplicity of experience in representation of the Self within virtual worlds, and these findings are further supported here in the exploration of more general experience of Self in virtual worlds. There is potential to experience more than one type of Self, with multiple avatars and multiple sets of behaviours, activities and experiences, while the nature of multiplicity is further revealed through the tensions between the physical and virtual worlds users inhabit: the user may engage in activities and exhibit personality traits that differ according to the world they inhabit, experiences in one world may impact on experience in another, and users make decisions on how much information about one world is shared with members of another.

However, the notion of disconnectedness may be exaggerated. Using Giddens' concept, the Self is not just one project but multiple (Giddens, 1991). Users of virtual worlds make a conscious effort to explore various and alternative aspects of their personality, and also become versed in managing the intersections, contradictions and separations that emerge between the worlds they inhabit. Virtual world users maintain the notion that ***the same person is using all the avatars, and that they are "themselves" both in Second Life generally and across all the avatars they use.*** Virtual world users employ this diversity to develop what they consider their Self to be, while recognising that the avatar may be a separate entity from themselves.

6.5.7. The Self as evolutionary

An aspect the present research highlights that is under-reported in existing literature is the experience of Self in virtual worlds over time. The longitudinal quasi-experimental study by Harris et al. (2009) indicates that activities and behaviour change over time, but the period it considered was short (six weeks) and, since it depended mainly on measurement by a tracking object attached to avatars, it lacks the virtual world user perspective. The current programme addresses this in Chapters 4, 5 and 8, by demonstrating the evolution of Self-representation, Second Life involvement, usage and perception over time. Supporting the discussion in other chapters, evolution in

Second Life is a common experience. There are a variety of forms in which change and evolution occurs, not just in types of activity, but changes in social circles, the programme itself, and time spent in the world. Such ***changes are sought for and valued***, since it maintains interest and involvement in the virtual world at a high level.

6.6. Conclusions: towards an understanding of the Virtual Self in virtual worlds

This chapter has outlined the overall approach to addressing the subsidiary research question:

What are the processes involved in being a Virtual Self in virtual worlds?

While working within the overall research approach of digital ethnography of Second Life, the question is addressed with an inductive approach to understanding the insider perspective of the Second Life user, using individual interviews. The interviews explore aspects of experience in the virtual world, including the role of technology, the avatar, relationships with others, and the relationships between worlds they inhabit. Using the themes emerging from the interviews a rudimentary **Virtual Self Processes Model** has been constructed that indicate a range of processes. These include: reflection on the virtual world and the Self; interactions between the Self and others, and the Self and the virtual world; interactions between the physical world and the virtual worlds the Self is located in.

The model indicates commonality with the theories of the Self which emphasise the emergence of Self in the context of interactions between Self, Other and environment. However, it also highlights the particular nature of the environment provided by Second Life for such interactions. Firstly, it reinforces the role of **social context** for emergence of Self, while emphasising that those provided by virtual worlds are safe and permissive, albeit with unstable characteristics. Secondly, it affirms the **reflexive** nature of Self; in particular it indicates that the mediation of experience by avatars in virtual worlds enables the user to be the Other to themselves, as well as providing an embodiment of their history, from which a sense of the Self in virtual worlds emerges. The model also indicates how the Self emerges through **interaction**, but in this case specific interaction between the user, others, their avatar and the virtual world itself, as well as the interaction between the physical and virtual worlds they inhabit. It also underlines the role of **performance**, and how a user's sense of Self in virtual worlds emerges through actively immersing themselves into the

worlds and using their avatars to perform roles may reflect aspects of their personality or experience lacking in "real life". It illuminates the role of the **avatar** in its ability to sometimes and somehow develop a life of its own, encouraging an aspect of Self that belongs only in the virtual world. The model illustrates the postmodern concern for **multiplicity** through the virtual world user's ability to use many avatars in a variety of worlds, while indicating that rather than feeling disconnected, ***users hold onto the notion of a single agentic Self***, actively maintaining the priority of the physical world over others. Moreover, the experience in virtual worlds is not static, but typified by change and **evolution** in sense of Self, the social environment and level of involvement.

The analysis presented here acts as a lynchpin and foundation to other aspects of the research programme. It provides both insight into, and verification of other findings regarding, representation of the Self, activity, location in multiple worlds and trajectory of experience.

7. Where is the Second Life resident? At the intersection of worlds

7.1. Introduction: the research question and its purpose

Chapter 2 outlines how in order to address the overall research question "What is the experience of the Self in virtual worlds?" it is in part necessary to explore the intersection of social worlds inhabited by virtual world users, and address the subsidiary research question:

> In what ways do physical and virtual worlds interact with each other and the experience of Self?

This question arises as an extension of the work outlined by Riva & Galimberti (1997, 2001) and Brivio et al. (2010) which they term Social Psychology of Cyberplaces. Unlike the postmodern approach which considers the characteristics of technology usage and its implications as a whole, this approach emphasises the agentic nature of users of technology generally and CMC specifically, and is based on the premise that they are social actors with their own objectives and autonomy in situations. Rather than consider Cyberspace as a whole, the approach emphasises that to understand social psychological phenomena related to Internet usage it is necessary to consider the mediated interactions of users of CMC in the context of "Cyberplaces", i.e. the social worlds they inhabit in Cyberspace (Waskul, 2003). However, while this is enlightening, this focus may neglect how the worlds that social actors inhabit intersect, influence and interact with each other. This chapter seeks to explore the time and place at which the specific intersections, influences and interactions of the virtual and physical worlds occur directly, i.e. ***when the virtual world user is actively using the virtual world***.

7.2. Developing the research approach

7.2.1. Findings from other aspects of the research programme

The research outlined in Chapters 4 and 6 has already suggested that to some extent the Self that is experienced in virtual worlds emerges from the intersection of worlds, in particular the virtual world and physical world. Chapter 4 indicates the extent to which

representation of the Virtual Self is a multiple activity, with links and intersections between the physical and virtual worlds: in some cases the avatar name and appearance has some relation to that in the physical world, a similarity that can bring ontological security; it is common to reveal physical world information in the virtual world profile; and expected perceptions by those in the physical world influences the extent to which virtual world information is revealed to them by users. The Virtual Self Processes Model outlined in Chapter 6 indicates how sense of Self in a virtual world to some extent emerges from the interactions between the various virtual worlds and the physical world that the user inhabits. In particular, there is a continual tension between the physical and virtual worlds in: the extent to which time in Second Life diminishes time in the physical world; comparisons on quality of life in the virtual world and the physical; the extent to which experience in Second Life is similar to the physical world; and the amount of "bleed through" of information between worlds. However, there are some aspects that the research detailed in other Chapters is less able to reveal. This includes the physical environment of the virtual world user when inworld, the experience of transitioning from one world to another, and the management of the interface used to access the virtual world; these are all aspects of which more would be revealed with access to experience "as it happens".

7.2.2. Beyond reported experience, towards direct experience

As discussed in Chapter 3, the research programme generally is designed with the objective of prioritising the virtual world user perspective, and for the most part employs individual interviews conducted in Second Life to achieve this. This allows access the private experience of users that might otherwise be difficult, and in the environment within which the experience occurs. However, one possible disadvantage is that these interviews actually access reported experience, not the experience itself. There are some aspects of user experience of Self in virtual worlds that would be useful to capture "as it happens". Exploring the relationship between worlds in which the virtual world user inhabits is one of these. An approach to this is Subjective Evidence-Based Ethnography (SEBE).

As outlined in Chapter 3, the SEBE approach is intended to allow the outsider direct access to insider experience and hence its description and analysis. It does this by first-person audio-visual recording with a Subcam followed by confronting participants with the recordings to collect their subjective experience. In the present research, the objective of this is to capture and reveal the first person perspective of typical Second

Life experience, the physical environment in which that experience occurs, and habits when using the virtual world, thus observing how the physical and virtual worlds intersect "as it happens". Consequently, ***the research aim is to observe the participant's typical use of Second Life in as naturalistic a setting as possible, while still being able to collect data and achieve research objectives***.

7.2.3. Transition from research in the virtual world to the physical: establishing researcher-participant trust

While the SEBE procedure is based in the principle of first-person recording of experience "as it happens", all other aspects of the research programme are conducted within the virtual world. As outlined in Section 3.2, inworld research is advantageous to the researcher since it allows interaction with the participant in their "own territory" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), while advantageous to the virtual world users since it allows them to participate in research while maintaining anonymity and a separation between physical and virtual worlds should they desire. However, ***the use of SEBE methodology necessitates going outside of the virtual sphere and accessing participant experience in the physical***.

Research discussed in Chapters 4 and 6 highlights the value that users of virtual worlds place on privacy, trust, and maintaining a separation between Second Life and "real life". Research concerning representation of the Self (Chapter 4) indicates that the anonymity in virtual worlds encourages users to be cautious regarding what information they share with others, while the research developed for the Virtual Self Processes Model (Chapter 6) indicates that a user's own anonymity is an important part of their virtual experience allowing them to explore aspects of Self not necessarily possible in the physical world. Participation in research in the physical world means the virtual world user must cede this anonymity, which in turn requires trust in the researcher.

An approach is used for the research programme that intrinsically encourages trust. As discussed in Chapter 3, the researcher's Second Life profile provides a summary of the research programme and where it is conducted, and a group has also been set up to cultivate ongoing relationships with existing participants and with any interested parties. This group has been used as a participant pool for research, providing a number of Second Life users who are repeat participants, hence familiar with the researcher and his objectives. ***These practices have "established [the researcher] as a bone fide researcher and trustworthy recipient of confidences" (Hine, 2005, p.20)***

and enabled relationships based in reciprocal researcher-participant trust to be developed, despite having hitherto no face-to-face interaction.

7.3. Methodology in understanding the virtual – physical worlds relationship

While general principles of the overall research programme are outlined in Chapter 3, this section highlights the aspects specific to addressing the subsidiary question. To the author's knowledge the SEBE approach has not previously been employed for the purpose of conducting research with respect to virtual worlds' phenomena. Lahlou (2011) provides detailed protocol in relation to the SEBE procedure in the physical world, and its analysis. Given the nature and topic of the present research (i.e. usage of a virtual world accessed by individuals via computers in their own home), the procedure has been adapted where appropriate.

7.3.1. Materials and methods for data collection and analysis

7.3.1.1. Sample

Given the necessity to conduct research in the physical world and for the sake of financial economy, participants were recruited from the United Kingdom, where the researcher is based. While attempts were made to recruit participants from existing avenues which had been used successfully previously, such as the Second Life NCI group and the Second Life Research Listserv described in Section 3.7, these avenues were not successful, presumably for the reasons of privacy and trust, combined with the U.K. residency restriction. However, three participants were recruited from the pool of past participants and interested parties who were members of the Fearless Research Group.

As detailed above, reciprocal trust is an important component in transferring research relationships from the virtual to physical world. In the present case, one participant was a fellow researcher in virtual worlds and known to the researcher through conference attendance, while the other two were participants in several aspects of the research programme. Hence, in all cases both researcher and participant were known to one another and had developed sufficient mutual trust for a physical world research confrontation.

Efforts were made to increase the sample, but this proved impossible within the timescale of the research programme, given the geographical constraints, the issue of trust and privacy discussed, and the time commitment (the procedure has minimum three hour duration, as outlined below). In the event, the wealth of data provided from the three SEBE procedures proved sufficient for present purposes.

7.3.1.2. SEBE procedure times and locations

The three procedures were conducted over the period June 21st to November 16th 2012, and were planned to last three hours. However, two of the procedures exceeded the allotted time and were spread over two sessions.

Given the intention to capture the intersection between the virtual and physical worlds as typically experienced by the participant, it was planned that the location would be where they were most likely to engage with Second Life. In the event, one procedure was located in the participant's workplace in London, one in the participant's home in the Midlands, and one in a hotel meeting room in the South West. In the third case, the participant had had no previous experience of meeting fellow Second Life users in the physical world, and so had concerns regarding personal safety; hence it was mutually agreed that the procedure be conducted in the neutral public space of a hotel convenient to the participant.[28]

7.3.1.3. Informed consent and ethical considerations: the privacy rights of virtual world users

In advance of the procedure, participants were sent a copy of the consent form in order to acquaint themselves with the detail, and to address any questions or concerns (see the Appendix). Participants signed the consent form in the presence of the researcher at the beginning of the procedure.

However, in addition to participant consent, the research also raises the issue of informed consent of virtual world users who are not participants: in a typical Second Life usage session, it would have been likely that participants interact with other users, who hence have their activity captured as part of the procedure. The Second Life Terms of Service prioritise the privacy rights of all residents, with violations of these rights including: disclosing personal information about another resident; remote monitoring of conversations; and disclosing private Second Life conversations

[28] It is significant that despite such concerns this participant wished to participate, endorsing the degree of trust it is possible to develop between researcher and participant through purely inworld interactions.

("Linden Lab Official: Residents' privacy rights," 2012). In order to offset any potential violations, two specific protocols were established, and in advance of the procedure participants were given instructions inworld that put the protocols into effect. The first protocol was designed to inform other residents of the research being conducted and their potential inclusion in it, should they encounter the participant in a public space within Second Life. To achieve this, the participant was invited to join the Fearless Research Second Life group, if they weren't already a member, following which they were given the group tag "Recording see picks". By attaching this tag to their avatar during the procedure, they were directing any other user seeing the tag to read the "Picks" section of the participant's profile.[29] Participants were then asked to create a new entry entitled "Recording see picks" in the "Picks" section of their profile, and given a notecard inworld that contained the following text to be copied and pasted into the entry:

> I am being observed in RL by Fearless Foulsbane and my session in SL recorded for the purpose of PhD research concerning the relationship between SL and RL. The research is conducted in accordance with Second Life Community Standards and ethical guidelines established by the British Psychological Society, and is approved by the university Ethics Committee. All information collected is confidential and all reported findings are anonymised. By continuing to interact with me, you indicate your consent to be recorded. If you have any questions about this research, please IM Fearless Foulsbane.

The second protocol was designed to inform anyone who sent a private Instant Message to the participant of the research of their potential inclusion in it. Participants were instructed that on receipt of communication from another user they were to post the following message in return:

> My interactions are being recorded for the purpose of PhD research concerning the relationship between SL and RL. The research is conducted in accordance with Second Life Community Standards and ethical guidelines established by the British Psychological Society, and is approved by the university Ethics Committee. All information collected is confidential and all reported findings are anonymised. By continuing to interact with me, you indicate your consent to be recorded. If you have any questions about this research, please IM Fearless Foulsbane.

Participants were given a second notecard inworld that contained this text, which they copied and pasted into the Instant Message text field as necessary.

[29] In Second Life, group administrators are able to give group members specific titles and roles within the group. When a member of a particular group gives that group "active status", the title given to them by the administrator appears above the avatar display names and usernames, above the avatar itself. This is commonly known as a "group tag" in Second Life. The tag is limited to twenty characters.

7.3.1.4. The SEBE procedure structure

For present purposes the SEBE approach comprised a preliminary stage prior to the procedure, conducted inworld, and three stages in the procedure itself, in the physical world. This section details the structure and the objectives of each stage.

SEBE procedure preliminary stage

This stage comprised an inworld individual interview with any SEBE participant who had not already had one; they were one hour in duration, conducted at the Fearless Research Centre, and used the discussion guide employed in preparing the Virtual Selves Processes Model, described in Chapter 6. The objective was threefold: to familiarise new participants with the researcher's work and hence develop the mutual trust discussed above; to provide additional data for developing the Model; and provide supplementary background information about the participant's experience of Self in Second Life, should it prove relevant during the SEBE procedure. In the event, only one SEBE participant was required for this stage since the remainder had already participated in other aspects of the research programme.

SEBE procedure stage one

This stage comprised a physical world interview of approximately 30 minutes duration, discussing when they typically used Second Life, where (the location, the room, the situation in the room, etc.), and what they typically did. The main objective of this stage was as a "warm up" activity to ease overall proceedings, but it also provided the researcher context for how the participant might use Second Life and their current frame of mind. This stage was audio recorded.

SEBE procedure stage two

This stage comprised the participant engaging in typical Second Life usage, approximately one hour duration. The activity was recorded in three ways: conventional video camera; the first person viewpoint using a Subcam; and computer screen capture, using a screen capture programme. While the core aspect of the procedure was the Subcam recording, the other two recording methods provided context of physical and virtual surroundings for the activity. Given the objective of the

procedure was to record typical Second Life usage, the participant was given no guidelines on what activities to engage in.

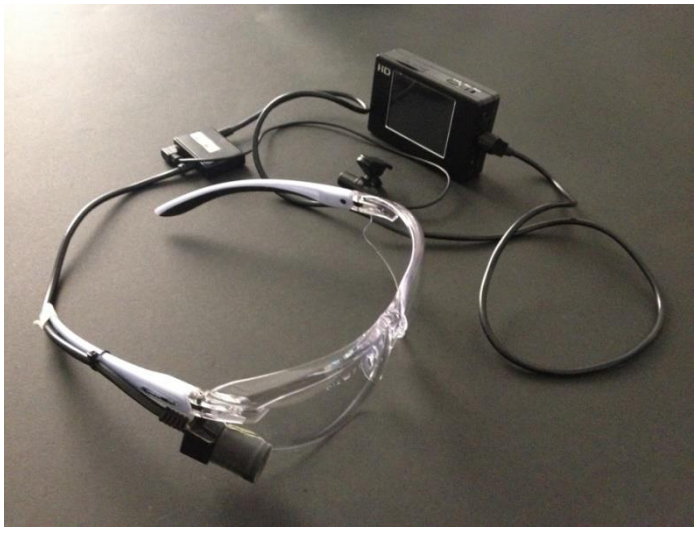
SEBE procedure stage three

This stage comprised participant and researcher viewing the Subcam recording together, with the recording being used as a prompt for discussion. The interview was open-ended with no topic guide, unlike other aspects of the research programme. Instead, the interview was a conversation format, with the researcher continually monitoring the recording and asking the participant to describe their activity, their motivations for and experience of doing it, and their thoughts on viewing the playback, hence encouraging the participant to "relive" the experience and share it with the researcher. This stage was video recorded, audio recorded, and recorded with the Subcam.

7.3.1.5. Materials: electronic equipment and computer software

Several pieces of electronic equipment were used for this research. The Subcam is of bespoke design, constructed by the London School of Economics Department of Social Psychology Technical Workshop and comprising goggles attached to which is a miniature camera, microphone and digital recorder (see Figure 7.1). Audio recordings were made using an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder WS-210S, and conventional video recordings with a Sony Handycam HDR-CX115. The researcher's personal computer laptop was used for all procedures, the model being Acer Aspire 5742G with the graphics card as NVIDIA GeForce GT 420M.

Figure 7.1. The Subcam used for the present SEBE procedure.



Four computer programmes were used during the sessions: three Second Life Viewers and one screen capture programme to record the session on screen as it occurred. In terms of Viewers, one of the participants used the official Second Life Viewer, one used the Third Party Viewer Phoenix, and the another the Third Party Viewer Firestorm. The screen capture programme used was Freez Screen Video Capture.[30] For present purposes, data collected from the audio recordings (pre and post virtual world usage) and the Subcam (virtual world usage) has been used for analysis. For post-session analysis, Windows Movie Maker was used to edit Subcam recordings.

7.3.1.6. The SEBE physical world procedure: implications for virtual world experience.

Each physical world procedure began with the researcher explaining the procedure, answering any questions, and the signing of informed consent by the participant. It is important to note that in relation to the second stage (the usage session) there were research requirements that impacted on the participant's experience. In the first instance, while the procedure seeks to capture Second Life experience "as it happens", and hence requires a naturalistic setting, data collection is important. Hence to facilitate on screen capture, participants were required to use the researcher's own laptop computer, which was pre-loaded with the screen capture software and the Second Life Viewer of the participant's choice. Secondly, there was a requirement for the participant to complete all the ethics protocol described above, in order to mitigate any concerns regarding violation of non-participants' privacy rights. These requirements meant that several minutes at the beginning of each session included participants orienting themselves within Second Life, acclimatising to the computer, and arranging the Viewer screen to their preference, as well as ensuring their avatar wore the research participation tag, and had put the appropriate text into the "Picks" section of their profile.

7.3.1.7. Data collection

The research yielded data from a relatively small number of participants but across a range of media. The main sources of data are the Subcam recordings of the usage sessions in stage two, and the audio recordings of the pre- and post-session interviews in stages one and three; the audio recordings have been manually transcribed (see the

[30] Freez Screen Video Capture is software available to download without charge at http://freez-screen-video-capture.en.softonic.com/. It captures all sound and movement within a prescribed area of the computer screen, and downloads it to a designated file on the computer hard drive.

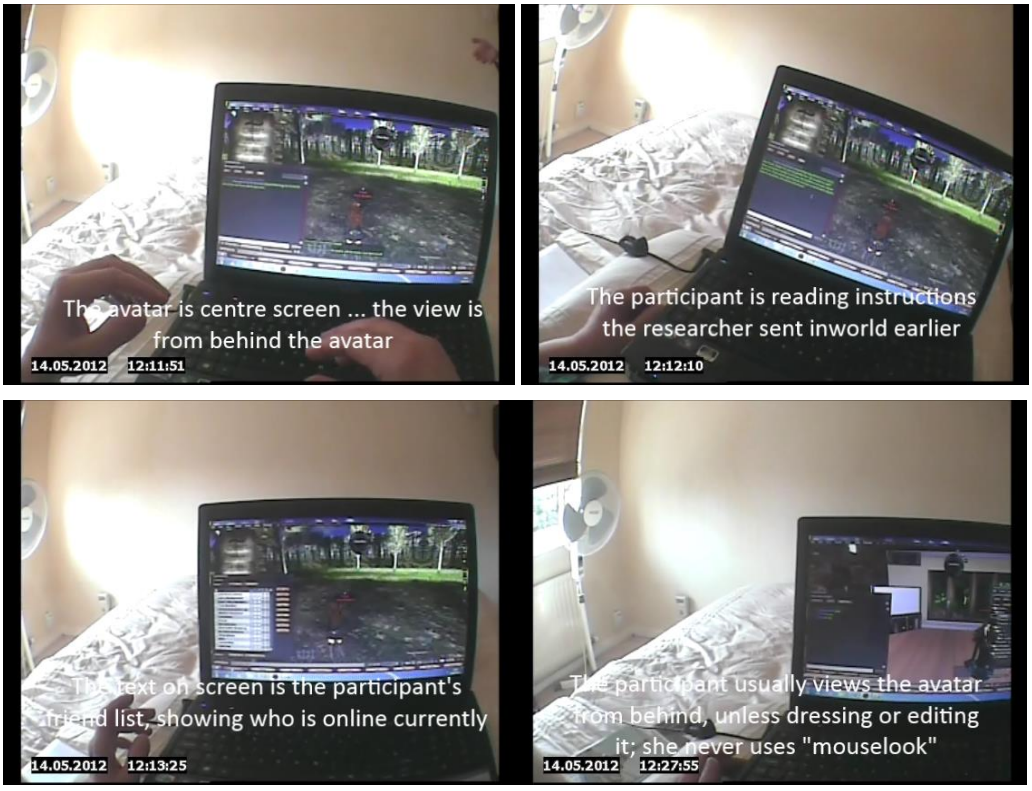
Appendix for an example). The conventional video recordings and screen capture recordings have been used as a secondary information source to enhance understanding from the stage two SEBE recordings and stage three audio recordings. For example, the images in Figure 7.2 illustrate how some detail of text and events occurring on screen less visible from the Subcam recording can be supplemented by the Freez recording.

Figure 7.2. An example of the same scene in Second Life as captured in the Subcam recording and the Freez Screen Video Capture: the participant takes a tour of an event in Second Life and receives information regarding the tour.

7.3.1.8. Analytic method

As with other aspects of the research programme an inductive Thematic Analysis method has been employed. In the case of the pre-session stage one interviews, the data arising from transcripts has been initially coded before inductively constructing a Thematic Network comprising Organising and Basic Themes. With respect to the usage session Subcam recordings, each one has been observed in conjunction with the corresponding audio recording of the post-session interview: the researcher observations and participant insights that emerged have then been edited onto each Subcam recording, and subsequently used to create initial codes (see Figure 7.3 for examples). The post-session interview transcripts have then been coded and combined with the codes arising from the Subcam recordings, in order to form the basis for inductively constructing a Thematic Network of Organising and Basic Themes.

Figure 7.3. An example of the data collection process employed for the Subcam recordings comprising SEBE procedure stage three: the notes edited onto the recording reflect a combination of researcher observations and participant insights emerging from the post-session interview.

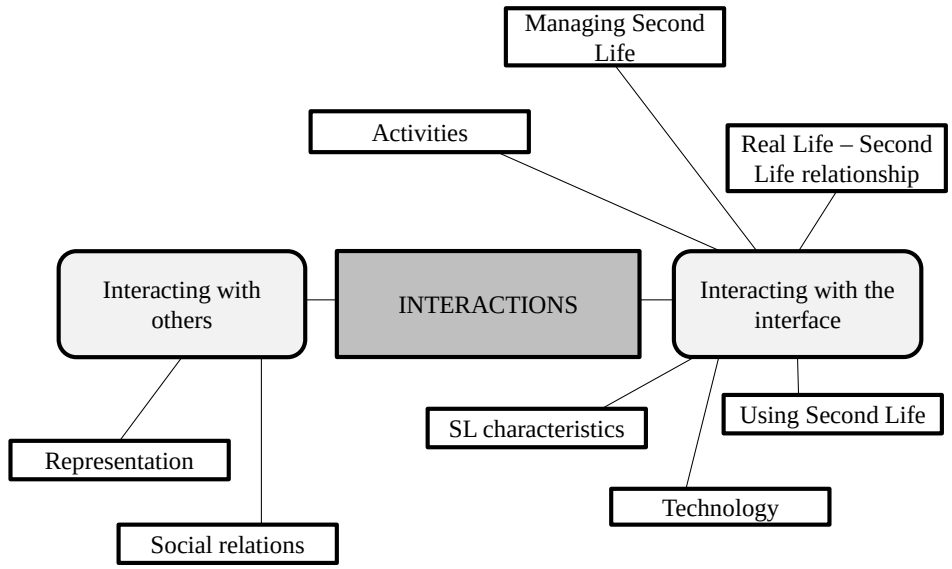


7.4. Thematic Analysis: common themes in Second Life usage from pre-session interviews

7.4.1. A summary of the findings

The Thematic Analysis derives 8 Basic Themes, which can be clustered into 2 Organising Themes, "Interacting with others" and "Interacting with the interface", which in turn can be clustered into a single Global Theme of "Interactions". Figure 7.4 provides an illustration of the network.

Figure 7.4. The Thematic Network arising from SEBE procedure stage one.



7.4.2. Summaries by Organising Theme

7.4.2.1. Interacting with others

This Organising Theme concerns aspects of Second Life usage relating to how participants interact with other Second Life users and the **representation** of themselves in the virtual world. With respect to appearance in Second Life, the research underlines how users are conscious of creating an appearance for their avatar

that is appropriate to the environment and circumstances they are in, as well as congruent with how they themselves wish to represent themselves, and be perceived, in the virtual world. In particular, an appropriate appearance in a professional setting in the virtual world may be just as important for presenting a credible image, as well as demonstrating respect to other people around you, as it is in the physical world. As participant "SG", says:

> What I do is, I normally, depending upon the audience, so if it's a casual conversation or an interview like in the Virtual World Education Round Table, where we are just sitting across with colleagues and talking across the round table, then I would, I'm normally quite professionally dressed, I think ... If I was going to be presenting where I am standing and it's a formal conference and event, then I would make sure that I had proper shoes, I have proper-, perhaps a blazer or a jacket, so I would make sure, as if I would do it in real life, as if I was going to Coventry to do a presentation.

Some Second Life users may find themselves in a dilemma, insomuch that while there may be certain trends in avatar appearance that many users adopt, they are not necessarily embraced by everyone since they compromise their own view on how they wish to be perceived by others, as described by participant "AM":

> The clothes, some of them, they're absolutely lovely, because have you noticed in Second Life, it's very hard for a woman to cover all her bits up ...What do you do Simon, you know? If you don't you've got your boobs hanging out. You know, everybody thinks, "Oh she's up for it." If you cover them up they, as you say, make a statement. Then they question you why and I'll say, "Well..."

However, representation of oneself to others may not be as crucial in Second Life as in the physical world, since the stakes are lower. As one participant explains, she is more confident and less concerned about how people perceive her in the virtual world because she feels that other users are focused on the avatar they see representing her and what she does in Second Life, hence much less of her is revealed. Physical world meetings are more threatening because interlocutors are able to see much more of her and her personal characteristics, which undermines her confidence:

> Exactly, so that, and I as I said, I'm not very open and confident in real life, in the first instance, it takes me some time to build up that tempo, that momentum, and I think that is another barrier for me. Whereas in Second Life I sit in a conference, I sit in an event in the corner or in the front, it doesn't really matter. In the real world, you would go out for a cup of tea with them, they would look at your badge from where you are, they would talk to you. All that adds to my worries, my internal worries, nobody bothers me, nobody is unkind to me, it is just my own inner way, it takes me time. Once the tempo builds up and I'm able to identify people and I'm able to talk to people and feel comfortable, then I feel alright.

Another aspect of Second Life usage illuminated is the nature of **social relations** between users. Meeting others, socialising and keeping in touch with friends, is a key purpose for using Second Life. Users have extensive lists of friends, although they may only be in regular contact with a few of them. As participant "L" indicates:

> … probably the first thing I'd do would look to see who was online, my friends, whether I feel like-, so, you will have, you will have loads of people on there, some of them you don't even talk to. ... That's how it ends up, you get these lists and there's only a few that-,

> so then I might drop them an IM and say hello, and then maybe meet up with some of them.

Nevertheless, meeting other users is a gratifying experience, even if this risks meeting some who have less savoury motives for using the virtual world. "AM" speaks of a fantasy region in Second Life she enjoys visiting:

> … they're avatars so they've got-, they're real people with an avatar they probably got from Grendel's and you get dragons and you get pet pterodactyls and it's amazing what you can do. Yes, occasionally you will come across someone that's there just to cause trouble. You know, think they're smart alecs. It's so lovely. It's worth taking the risk of meeting someone like that.

However, not all less satisfactory social situations in Second Life are due to intentional misbehaviour by other users. As "SG" explains, the courtesies that people extend to one another in the physical world are not always practiced in the virtual world, and yet can have ramifications because of the inconvenience caused to others by lack of consideration:

> … what really bothers me is that if I reach [an] event well in time, I'm five or ten minutes ahead of it, and then the organiser keeps delaying it, if it was supposed to start at nine o'clock in the evening, nine o'clock start is anyway very late for us in the UK. Then you keep waiting until 9:15, just to build up the crowd, then I feel that whoever made that effort in the audience to come early, you are not doing justice to them. I was there from 8:50, you've already wasted my twenty five minutes I could have probably done five or six emails and prepared for my next day at work and because the event would start late, I will sleep late. So in fact I am even thinking of giving up on our University events, because they start at 9:00, they start normally at 9:15 and it just doesn't suit me because the next day I feel very tired. I have a set pattern of sleeping and a set pattern of getting up in the morning and it upsets my plans … I feel the courtesies of real life are even more valid in Second Life.

7.4.2.2. Interacting with the interface

This Organising Theme concerns aspects of Second Life usage that concern how participants interact with the Second Life programme itself, both in terms of the experiences they have and the activities they engage in within the virtual world, the technology used to access it, managing how they use the programme, and the relationship between occurrences inworld and events and outcomes in the physical world.

In considering typical **activities**, participants give a range of examples, including shopping, socialising, Role Play and exploring. However, they also provide insights regarding to activity in Second Life and its relationship to **how time is managed** in the physical world. For example, at one extreme some activities are so absorbing that time passes very quickly and can act as an irresistible draw to using the virtual world for many hours in one sitting, as described by "AM":

> I get addicted, I must admit, to building and terraforming and landscaping especially. Oh, if I start landscaping, that's it, time just goes away ... I think, "Oh, I can't leave this. I need to get that", and then I'll start surfing on looking through the Marketplace, because I

> might need something and it takes me some time, because I know exactly what I want, but I don't really want to pay for it if that makes sense? I mean, you'd make Second Life very expensive if you did that. So, yes, but landscaping is my downfall. I'm ashamed to admit I went in one day at 6 am, the only time-, between 6 am and 1 am the next morning I only left to visit the bathroom, let the dog out, get a drink. I just got so into landscaping this sim I couldn't leave it until it was finished and that's really bad. I suppose that in away is an addiction or a compulsion, whatever …

"SG" describes the opposite extreme where time spent on activities in Second Life is tightly controlled. She organises her time and prepares for meetings in Second Life by visiting the meeting locations inworld, to ensure she knows what to expect at the meeting and that the programme settings are working at their optimum:

> Now, I have them in my diary, so those are the events that I never miss, educational events. If I'm presenting, let's say, then what I do is, I go in a little early, even if I'm attending, and if I don't know the place, and only a SLURL has been sent to me. I don't want it to be a panic at the last moment, that I reach home at 7:15, 7:30, as the event-, so I wouldn't want to look around for the place, what I do is, a day before or in the afternoon, I just go and check the location. Make a picture in my mind, where I am going to sit, where I can get some good pictures if I wanted to take a picture of the setting, and where I could hear better. So, I know you can always increase the volume, and you can do that, but I almost read it as if I'm going to be attending as in real life, and because the time is such a big constraint …

Indeed the participants use a variety of tactics to ensure that they do not spend what they perceive to be an excessive amount of time in the virtual world. For "AM", these include setting deadlines by which she must log off:

> Unless I'm talking seriously to someone and we're discussing a problem or something like that, an issue they have, whatever, or if I'm helping someone it may run over by half an hour or an hour it has done, but usually I think, "No, this is my cut-off time, I'm leaving." I say goodbye to everyone and I'll log off …

While "SG" will only use Second Life with a specific purpose in mind:

> I normally go in for a particular purpose, so if there's a lecture, there is the Virtual World Education Round Table this afternoon, this evening in fact.

Participant focus on time management indicates a **tension between experiences in the virtual and physical worlds**, with virtual world time being simultaneously beneficial to the user but inferior to the physical world. For example, "SG" describes how meetings in the physical world are more effective at building chemistry between people:

> So, that I won't have been able to do in the virtual world, there are certain things that when crucial decisions have to take place, or before virtual world meetings or projects have to start. Having this real world interaction in the first instance is crucial, now if I meet these people who came yesterday on Skype, or on the phone, or on email, it would be very good, because I have already established ... they were empathetic to my cause, they were good to it, they understood me, I could speak to them in a way that expressed, that how much I wanted them to be on board, how much I wanted their support, I couldn't have done it even if I had the most beautiful avatar. I couldn't have conveyed those emotions and those things which I did yesterday. Having done yesterday, now I feel quite happy, I mean the time was short.

However, later she explains how using Second Life has helped boost her confidence in the physical world:

> I think with age I may have matured also in real life, I don't know. Four or five years down the line, I was a bit more rigid on my own thoughts, that people should do this, must do this. I think over a period of time I feel, let them do it. Perhaps Second Life may have played a role in it, because as I told you the other day, I have much more fun here, I mean I'm much more relaxed here. If I'm attending a real life conference or a real life event, I'm conscious about the way I'm sitting, I'm conscious about the way I'm talking ... In real life I do tend to hide. I'm not so good, and I'm very conscious about, how people are perceiving me … I think because I'm not so worried about how people are perceiving me. How I look in real life, or how I sit in real life, they are just perceiving me on the basis of what my avatar is, and if they know me about my research they only have that lens in their mind.

In discussing how they typically use Second Life, participants reveal a number of the virtual world's **characteristics** in terms of how it is experienced and used. One is its immersive quality, how it can be used for specific projects which then become very absorbing for the user, as described by "L":

> Now and then I'll get a little project and it will just completely absorb me … It's completely absorbing, and if I'm doing one of those, I just really, really get into it.

Part of this immersion arises from routine. If a user gets in the habit of attending an event regularly, or meeting with a particular group of other users, this encourages them to use the virtual word more, as "L" also explains:

> Not long after I started, there was something like every Tuesday night, I'd be there every Tuesday night, at the Original Soul Rebels, there was this really nice bunch of people …

However, despite the potential routine, another characteristic of the Second Life experience is change. Sometimes this is due to the ebb and flow of the presence of other users which encourages new friendships to begin while old friendships fade, and sometimes it is due to change in physical world circumstances which disrupts a user's Second Life habit. "L" speaks wistfully about how a group of close friends she had in Second Life broke up, before explaining how a change in circumstance had recently impacted on her own Second Life usage:

> … but, I don't know, sometimes these things fall apart. So, after about a year, that went. Sometimes these things fall apart. So, after about a year, that went. ... Just a really, really nice bunch of people ... Just real life stuff, I think, got in the way. A couple of the DJs just decided they didn't want to be doing a regular slot each time. I think, you know, sometimes people get into all the drama don't they, and falling out - … There was a while, I was, sort of, logging on about 5 or 6 early evening, I did that a lot recently. As I say, you have just caught me at a real change point in my life. So I've separated from my husband and I've moved into this new house and everything, and I'm just working all around ... I don't know what I'm going to be doing ... I have absolutely no idea how it'll work.

Ultimately, **Second Life is a computer programme**. While it provides an immersive environment, it can itself disrupt the experience it provides through its many and regular technical problems, something "AM" is accustomed to:

> Do you remember, quite, about two or three months ago, they were doing maintenance on the main grid and someone made an error. It's never been the same since and they keep working on it, but friends lists get messed up, friends go out of your list and they think you've taken them out or you've taken yourself. You know, whatever. Like, "What have I done?" and blah blah. "No, you've done nothing, what do you mean?" "You're not in my friends list." I says, "Well, you're in mine."

7.5. Summaries of Second Life usage during the SEBE procedure

Before considering the themes arising from the SEBE procedure, it is useful to outline the physical world setting and activities engaged in during the Second Life usage session for each participant. This provides context for subsequent analysis.

7.5.1. Participant "SG"

This usage session occurred in a meeting room at the participant's workplace. The participant uses Second Life both at work and home, and is accustomed to using the virtual world in a public physical world setting. Hence in this case, the researcher was present in the room whilst the participant used Second Life. Additionally, it transpired that the workplace broadband bandwidth was restricted, which meant that the quality of graphics was poor; however, the participant is accustomed to this situation and has adapted to it over time. Figure 7.5 provides an image of the physical world setting of the usage session as seen from the participant's viewpoint.

Figure 7.5. The research setting from the viewpoint of participant "SG".

The session had four phases. The first comprised logging into Second Life and implementing the research protocol: the participant logged onto a sky platform that she uses to prepare her work and loaned to her by a friend. In the second phase the

participant inspected her employer's sim in preparation for a seminar planned for later that day. The third phase involved the participant visiting the sim belonging to another friend who had requested her opinion on some building and landscaping there; however, this was curtailed by the aforementioned restricted bandwidth which made it difficult for the participant to check her friend's work. For the fourth phase, the participant visited an exhibition, SL9B, built to celebrate Second Life's ninth anniversary. The participant experienced one "crash" during the session, following which she logged back in Second Life.

7.5.2. Participant "AM"

This usage session occurred at the participant's physical world home; she sat on her bed with the laptop on her lap. While she usually uses her home office computer to access Second Life, she occasionally uses her own laptop in her bedroom; hence the situation in which she used Second Life on this occasion was relatively typical. The researcher relocated to another room while the participant engaged in the session. Figure 7.6 provides an image of the physical world setting as seen from the participant's viewpoint.

Figure 7.6. The research setting from the viewpoint of participant "AM".

The session had three phases. The first phase comprised logging into Second Life and setting up the research protocol. In this instance, the participant logged into her Second Life home, a "skybox" situated several thousand metres above ground. This phase occupied several minutes: the participant made password errors and so was unable to log on; then time was spent adjusting the programme settings to the participant's preference; and then the participant added a "Pick" to their profile and made a "titler", i.e. a title appearing above her avatar to tell other users she was participating in research. The second phase comprised the participant engaging in chores around her Second Life home, in particular tending to and feeding virtual pets. During this phase one of her friends within Second Life sent her a message, which led to the third phase: the participant invited her friend to her home, and spent the rest of the usage session in conversation with her.

7.5.3. Participant "L"

To allay this participant's concerns regarding her personal safety, the research was conducted in the relatively public space of a meeting room in a hotel near to the participant's physical world home. The researcher remained present in the room whilst the usage session occurred. Figure 7.7 provides an image of the physical world setting as seen from the participant's viewpoint.

Figure 7.7. The research setting from the viewpoint of participant "L".

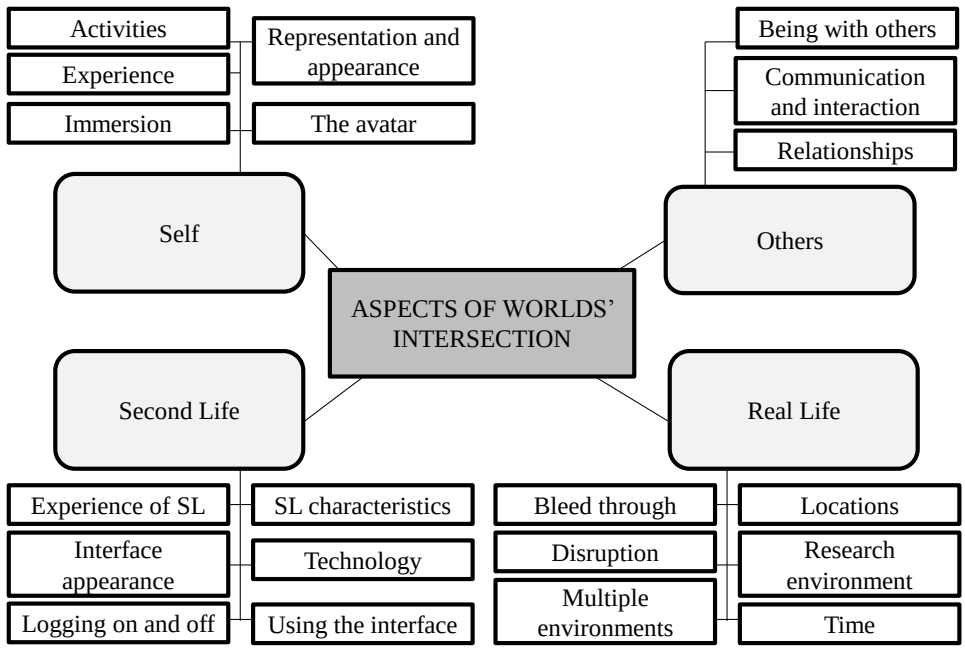
This session also comprised three phases. The first phase was formed by the participant logging into Second Life, amending the programme settings to her preference, and setting up the research protocol. In this instance, the participant logged into one of her homes in Second Life. The setting up of the research protocol took time as the participant adjusted to the unfamiliar programme settings on the laptop. The second phase involved the participant visiting a sim she sometimes attends to socialise and meet people. While there, a number of events happened simultaneously: she was amending settings, being privately contacted by friends who had become aware she was online, putting research protocol in place to inform them of the research, and engaging in a conversation with other users present at the sim, who had noticed her research participant status and were attempting to engage in conversation. The participant became overwhelmed by the number of simultaneous tasks, and decided to leave the sim. This led to the third phase of the session, with the participant returning to a second home, where she engaged in Instant Message conversations and took a boat ride around the island on which the home was situated.

7.6. Thematic Analysis: common themes in the intersection between Second Life and the physical world

7.6.1. A summary of the findings

The Thematic Analysis derives 20 Basic Themes, which can be clustered into 4 Organising Themes, “Self”, “Others”, “Second Life” and “Real Life”, characterising a single Global Theme of “Aspects of Worlds’ Intersection”. Figure 7.8 provides an illustration of the network. The remainder of this section summarises the Organising Themes and demonstrates that the Global Theme reflects how experience of physical-virtual world intersection is comprised of a number of aspects: the Self, Others, the virtual world, and the physical world.

Figure 7.8. The Thematic Network arising from SEBE procedure stages two and three.



7.6.2. Summaries by Organising Theme

7.6.2.1. Self

This Organising Theme concerns aspects of the intersection between the physical and virtual world related to **personal experiences**. In the first instance, personal experience is comprised of a range of **activities**. Each of the participants engaged in tasks during their usage session. "AM" fed and tended to their virtual pets, "SG" checked that a meeting space was set up correctly, and "L" spent time ensuring the Second Life Viewer settings were to her preference. One particular activity in the sessions involved chores relating to "citizenship" and "keeping up" with Second Life, especially exploring and attending events held in the virtual world. For example, during her session, participant "SG" purposefully explored the SL9B sim created to celebrate the ninth anniversary of Second Life and enjoyed the activity, despite the fact her low broadband connection meant that many of the exhibits appeared as grey objects:

> This is what I do at home also, or at work. If I spot something a bit interesting there, I first go and check up what's new … We are where the Linden Labs celebrations have been going on. Then you will notice here something which I will just take up now which I really like. I like those tours, where you can sit in something and they take you around and where a message keeps coming on as to where you are and I very much enjoy those … I've noticed and I run like a child and I stop it and it ...Then I sit on this, and then I'm very

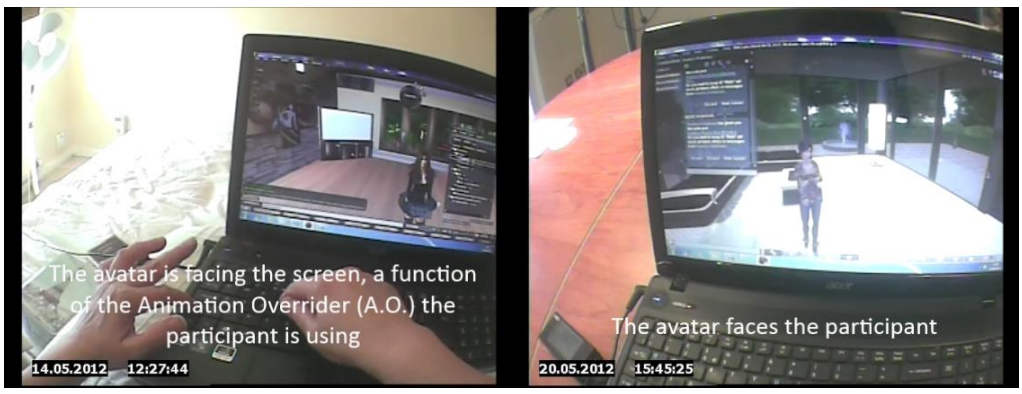
> happy now. It's asking me, did you want a notecard, do you want to go into speed mode, and then wherever now I pass by, it's like the contextual information will keep appearing ...

A second aspect of personal experience concerns **the avatar**, the participant relationship with it, and how they represent themselves in Second Life. During the usage sessions, the avatar was commonly at the centre of the screen, with all the participants conducting activity and interacting with others viewing the avatar from behind, as exemplified in Figure 7.9.

Figure 7.9. Examples of the avatar as it commonly appears onscreen during usage, viewed from behind.

There were exceptions to the "view from behind" rule: when changing the appearance of the avatar, or having the avatar static, the avatar was sometimes viewed from the front, as indicated in Figure 7.10.

Figure 7.10. Examples of the avatar viewed from the front, whilst being static or appearance change.



However, the avatar is not always the focus of attention onscreen; during the usage sessions it was common for the participants' avatars to be obscured by message boxes, inventory boxes, and Head Up Displays, or even ignored. During her session participant "L" spent some of the time simultaneously amending the programme settings, implementing research protocol, and interacting with other users, both in messages and located nearby. This resulted in a cluttered screen, with no view of the avatar, shown in Figure 7.11.

Figure 7.11. Examples of the avatar obscured from view.

How the avatar appears on screen, both in terms of its physical **appearance** and its behaviour also played a role in the usage sessions. These are not only for the benefit of others, but part of the personal experience of using the virtual world. For example, "L" spent some time in an Instant Message conversation, while sitting her avatar at a beach bar at her island home. As her avatar sat down she realised the pose was incorrect because the Animation Overrider, attached to the avatar to modify the avatar walking and standing animations, was preventing the animation in the stool from amending the avatar pose. Despite being alone in the sim, with only herself able to view the avatar she nevertheless amended the pose (see Figure 7.12).

Figure 7.12. Participant "L" seats her avatar on a barstool with the appropriate pose whilst in an Instant Message conversation, despite no other users present to witness the pose.

As she tries to explain later, it felt "wrong" to not be seated and seated appropriately:

> *You're sitting on your chair.*
>
> Yes, I realised I'm using my AO to sit on it. Oh, I turned it round.
>
> *You're doing that but you're all by yourself.*

> Yes.
>
> *Isn't that interesting? Well I think it's interesting.*
>
> Do you?
>
> *Yes.*
>
> I can't-, I need to be sitting looking at the bar. I don't know-, that's wrong.
>
> *It is wrong, isn't it?*
>
> Yes.[31]

The role of the physical appearance of the avatar in representing oneself in the virtual world is also indicated. For example, during her session, "SG" was changing the clothes the avatar wore while she engaged in the SL9B tour, in preparation for a meeting inworld later that day. As she explains, she wanted the avatar to appear different to a similar meeting attended previously:

> You'll notice in my session ... you will notice that I try to do two things at the same time in Second Life. While I was doing the tour which I was doing, I was also trying to change my clothes at the same time … and then I got a bit afraid, I said, I was trying just to change just the cardigan because there is an event today and the last time I went to the event I was wearing the same-, … I wanted to look different today, because I thought it doesn't look nice going in the same clothes every time so the last time they recorded me, so they know what I was wearing because it's all in the pictures and so on and the snapshots, and they've put it on the website as well.

The sessions also indicate the role of the avatar in **representing** the person inworld. "SG" explains that when she engages with other users in Second Life she is less self-conscious because they see the avatar, they cannot see her physical Self:

> In Second Life I'm sitting on the chair, just listening and concentrating, I'm only being assessed or looked at as what my profile and my appearance in Second Life says. I'm very happy of that. When it comes to the real world, sometimes I lack confidence. This is something to do with me, it is nothing-, I take time to get to know people … If you have lots of strangers in a room, it's very hard. I find it particularly hard.
>
> *In Second Life, for example, it's easier. What is it that makes it easier? Have you got more control over the way you are able to portray yourself?*
>
> That is one point. Also, I am not under that impression that people are looking at me.
>
> *Is it because they're looking at your avatar, but not looking at you?*
>
> That is right. In real life, people sitting around the room, I become conscious of myself. Whereas in the virtual world, I'm sitting comfortably, whatever I'm doing-,

Alternatively however, "AM" argues how rather than concealing the person, using Second Life reveals what is inside:

> Well, this is what I say. I don't think they lose their own identity, what I think is they bring out what is inside them, and that can be very dangerous.

A third area of this Theme concerns the degree of engagement with the virtual world that participants have. In particular, the sense of **immersion** that participants experience when using Second Life is in evidence, i.e. the extent to which they feel "there" and focused on the virtual world as opposed to the physical world around them. In the sessions each participant had a different experience. At one extreme, "SG" felt

[31] Text in italics denotes contributions by the researcher.

fully immersed in her experience of the SL9B tour; she describes her immersion as being "fully engrossed" with a building "sense of enjoyment":

> I am very much [physically in a massive area], and I, if I'm enjoying it fully and all the textures were coming as they come at home, and if I was engrossed fully in it, I just get fully immersed in it. I was really, really enjoying it. I know this is when I say fully immersed doesn't mean that I become unconscious of what is happening, but my sense of enjoyment is building up.

At the other extreme, "AM" indicates that she never experiences immersion, and that to feel "really there" in Second Life would be tantamount to a loss of reality:

> *When you're in your house, what does it feel like? Do you feel like you're there?*
>
> Well, you have to keep a grip on reality. You have to. I mean some people do. They go in there and they're actually physically, mentally in Second Life. I can't do that.
>
> *Do you feel like then you're just sitting with a computer on your lap messing around with a programme? I know that there's real people involved but do you know what I mean?*
>
> Yes and no. I realise that I'm sitting at a computer. I realise I'm using a three-, sorry, a two dimensional programme that is-, oh what do you call it? Its virtual world. I know that that's a virtual world. I can't get lost in myself.

For "L", while the usage session was not conducive to immersion, under normal circumstances it is something she experiences:

> *When you say immersion, what do you mean?*
>
> As in feeling totally there.
>
> *Is that how you-,*
>
> Yes, I do feel like that.
>
> *Do you feel like that tonight?*
>
> No, not particularly.
>
> *Is it because of all of this or because of all the other stuff you had to do?*
>
> I think it was because of the unfamiliarity. The settings weren't all quite there. No, I didn't feel like I was totally in there.
>
> *Did it make a difference me sitting over there?*
>
> I don't know, actually. That's my little beach place, more relaxing.
>
> *Is that how you felt when you got there?*
>
> Yes.

Related to immersion is the experience of being a person in the virtual world. Participants speak of the type of person they are and wish to be in Second Life, and the importance of being authentic, responsible, and ethical. For example "AM" discusses the extent to which users think Second Life is "real" and the implications of that:

> *What do you think causes people to begin to think it's real?*
>
> Because they haven't got a life.
>
> *It's nothing to do with the programme itself?*
>
> No.
>
> *The immersion, or the 3D-ness or anything like that?*
>
> No. I mean, at the moment it is only two-dimensional, but it will be three-dimensional very soon, I should imagine this is what's going to-,

3D glasses and all that kind of thing.

Yes. Well, I'm not sure how they're going to do it, because these tech guys are very, very clever. It's not the programme, it's the person itself. We cannot blame the programme for our actions, we can't. I mean, in reality I'm a very assertive person, but I think we need to have some assertion about us, we don't need to be dictorial or doctorial, we don't need anything like that.

The usage sessions indicate that a person in Second Life is a person in multiple locations. Using a virtual world does not necessarily mean they are transported to that world, rather they are situated in both the physical and the virtual. This is most evident, where the research experience coincides with the virtual experience. For example, as her session drew to a close and the researcher entered her bedroom to inform her of the time, "AM" was in discussion with a friend, the two avatars hugging in Second Life; for a period the participant was interacting with others in both the virtual and physical world (see Figure 7.13). After the session, the participant seeks to explain how she manages being in two locations simultaneously by allegorising it to how one manages every day conversation, with one's mind in two places simultaneously:

I'm just-, because I'm trying to figure all this out, and I'm kind of thinking, 'Ooh, isn't it strange?' You're sitting here, on the bed, with the laptop, and Harry is around, and I've just walked through the door, and you're also in here with your friend, giving her a cuddle. Where are you?

I'm with her. It's kind of like-, think about it this way, when you are talking to someone new, your mind is kind of in two different areas, really. You're talking to them, they say something the other part of your mind is trying to work out, and that is kind of how you have to do it. I mean, I think I said to you a couple of times, "Oh, wait a minute, I've got to answer", and I will re-read what she's said to make certain I answer her properly. She knew that you were there. I told her that I was talking to you occasionally. She said, "It's okay", and I copied over-, I think I showed you, didn't I? I copied over your statement to the IM, what should go in IM, and I also copied over to her what was in the profile-, my profile, but yes, it's kind of like, I will listen-, I can read what she's saying. I don't have to listen. You, I can listen to.

Figure 7.13. Participant "AM" hugs and talks to her friend in the virtual world, as she discusses terminating the usage session with the researcher.

7.6.2.2. Others

This concerns aspects relating to **experiences with other users**. The purpose of Second Life as a place where users meet each other was substantiated in the usage sessions; participants "AM" and "L" spent time communicating with other residents, and, although she spent the session alone, there were several instances where "SG" checked which of her friends were online:

> There are a few people that I don't intend to meet, I don't know about their real lives at all but they are good to me in Second Life. So if they're on I will just speak to them. So I look around if who's around in the friends, so that's why I was looking.

A particular experience of **being with others** in virtual worlds is in relation to their presence and non-presence. The fact that avatars are used to be with others, but that users can interact even when not in the same Second Life location, has its benefits and limitations. In the first instance, the "co-presence" one can experience with others can enhance sense of immersion, as "SG" explains:

> *For you, where does that immersion come from? Is it, you know, how realistic things look within the screen, or is it the interaction with other people?*
>
> I think it is four or five years now that I am going to Second Life, but the idea of being in such an environment where you can replicate both realism and non-realism. You can meet with people, have that sense of co-presence, which a Skype conversation, or Eliminate, or any other of those conferencing tools cannot give you, continues to amaze me.
>
> *A Skype conversation, to you, isn't as good as a conversation-, really?*
>
> I get tired in a Skype conversation. Half an hour is the most, and after an hour I would just not be able to do it ... If I had just one to one Skype conversation, I wouldn't have had-,
>
> *What is it that tires you then? Presumably that means interactions here aren't so tiring.*
>
> No, I can sit in Second Life for three hours in conference, I won't be tired. It is just that appearance of an avatar sitting next to one another, that sense of co-presence. If you were in another island talking to me while I was here, I wouldn't enjoy it.
>
> *You want to be with the other person.*
>
> I think the feeling of sitting across the table very much replicates, for me, that face to face experience. That is why it doesn't tire me. Even a face to face meeting would tire me, but because this is a virtual meeting happening, and you have your sitting in beautiful surroundings, which you normally wouldn't have in real life, all those things.

However, the dependence on technology and avatars for being with others has its drawbacks, and being in the same location as others does not necessarily mean that co-presence is occurring. During her usage session, "L" spent time in a location surrounded by other users, yet was engrossed in the task of setting up the research protocol, to the point of being oblivious to all else. Rather than being immersed in the Second Life space, she was immersed in the space provided by text boxes (Figure 7.14).

Figure 7.14. Participant "L" surrounded by others in the Second Life location but immersed in the text boxes on screen.

As she remarks after the session:

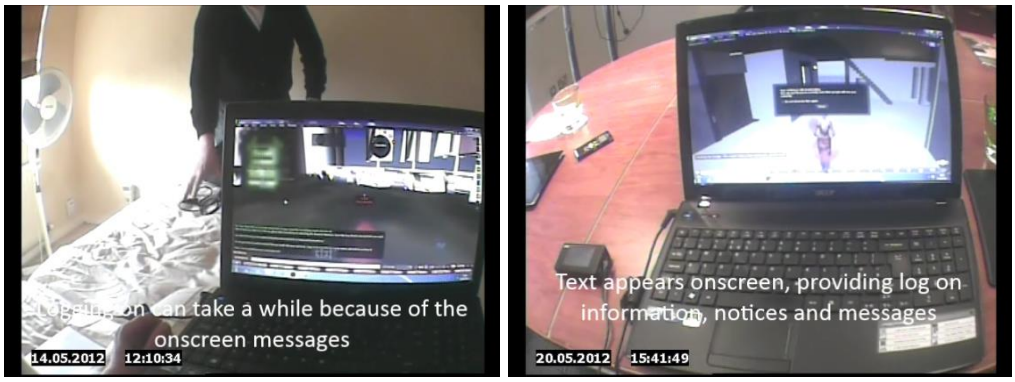
> I think [the others are] just standing around. I've no idea. I'm hardly paying any attention to what's going on there. It was a waste of time me being there, quite frankly.

Using avatars to interact has implications for how participants think of their friends when they are not in the same space. Users do not always know the physical world appearance of their virtual world friends, and residents can change their appearance or name on a regular basis if they so wish. "L" describes a friend with whom she conversed during the usage session:

> I've never seen a picture of [him]. I've no idea what he looks like ... So in my imaginings, I suppose every now and then maybe I do have an image of him. I don't know why, maybe slim and dark haired. I don't know why, he might be a bit gawky looking. I don't know, that's what I have in my mind. I don't know that I really conjure that up when I'm chatting to him, though. Probably-, that's a really hard question ... And it alternates, I sometimes see the avatar, I sometimes see the picture of them. It's just something else that's harder to describe, this feeling about a person that doesn't involve thinking about an image. I don't know, possibly.

Another facet of the experience of being with others is **the communicative act**. There is constant communication when one is using Second Life, with participants receiving a stream of group notices informing them of events and news, notifications from Second Life informing them of when contacts come online, messages from friends, etc., as well as the continual flow of text on the screen detailing nearby avatars, location information, and "open chat". Figure 7.15 illustrates how the communication began for participants from the moment they began to log on, sometimes delaying the actual process of entering Second Life.

Figure 7.15. Examples of how the stream of communication began from the moment participants logged into Second Life.



During the sessions, all participants used text rather than voice to communicate with others. As participant "SG" comments:

> If I have known somebody for a long time then I would use voice, or if I'm presenting, but if I don't know somebody very well, or if I feel that-, I get conscious of the voice, I try to use text … I don't know why I don't want to use voice much.

Because communication is often in text and anonymous there is a risk of deception. However, users become adept at evaluating the extent to which those with whom they interact are being truthful. Participant "AM" spends a considerable amount of time in Second Life giving personal advice and counselling to other users. As the following discussion with her reveals, users pay attention to what is not said as well as what is said:

> *How do you work out if someone is being honest with you?*
>
> It's what they don't say.
>
> *Right.*
>
> You have got to read what they say very, very carefully to spot what they're not saying, and it always comes out, the way they phrase things. They're sidestepping. They don't really answer you. Or what they say is totally unbelievable. Then, I've got a nice little trick, if you want to say, but a method. I remember an important question that I've asked, and I remember their answer, and I'll ask them the same question again but in a different way ... You'd be surprised-, when a liar, or someone that is not so much a liar but a romancer, kind of thing, you know-, surprised how they let this slip because they answer in a totally different way. They get so self-confident that-, in what they're saying that you're believing, they forget what you've asked them. Now, if it was the truth, even if they answered in a different way, it would still mean the same. You see? There are other little things. There are trigger words with people, as you know, that will either set them off or they'll go really quiet, because-, and-, but those, the trigger words you use, you've got to take from the whole context of the conversation. You think, "Hm, I wonder?" and it does work.

Moreover, while interactions are mediated by avatars with limited actions and body language, there are still opportunities for non-verbal communication. During her session "AM" invited a friend to visit her home in Second Life, and while visiting she gave her friend a hug. Later on, she described the value of such interactions; despite the fact they are "virtual" between avatars and mimicking something that occurs in the

physical world, such interactions indicate a depth of feeling that users can have for each other:

> *Are you having a hug?*
>
> I'm giving her a hug. She needed it.
>
> *Does it-, is it helpful to hug?*
>
> Oh my God, yes. It really is, because they-, even though they can't feel your arms around them, they know you care enough to give them a hug.
>
> *Right. So is it like a symbol, really? Or is it real*?
>
> It is real to them. It's like sometimes, I've got a friend, and if I need a hug, I'll say ... "I need a hug." "Come on sweetie", he says ... he came into Second Life just to be with me and see how things were, and he said, "Come over ... and let me give you a hug." He said, "You need that", and it's surprising how it helps, because I know he really cares … I don't say, "Come out of reality", but you know what I mean? Some of these people I'd love to be in real life and give them a hug.

A final aspect of communication at the worlds' intersection is the ongoing commentary that some users provide themselves with. Two of the participants gave extensive self-commentary during their sessions. The commentary "L" gave was particularly evident at the beginning of the session as she set up the research protocol and amended the Viewer settings; the researcher's presence in the room may have been a factor in this since much of the commentary concerned the adjustments she was making. On the other hand, the commentary "AM" gave began almost immediately and continued throughout, even when she was alone. Snapshots of such incidences are in Figure 7.16.

Figure 7.16. Examples of incidences where participant "AM" self-narrates her experience in Second Life: logging on, setting up research protocol, and in conversation with friends.

Later she explains it in terms of her verbal personality and, apart from a couple of incidences where she commented for the Subcam, this is her usual habit:

> *I can hear you chattering and I don't know whether I'm interrupting. So, you know, this talking, giving yourself a narrative while you're-, do you know when you're doing it?*
>
> Yes.
>
> *What service-, what purpose does it serve do you think?*
>
> I really don't know, but I'm a very verbal person as if you hadn't noticed! I'm a very verbal person it's like usually, sometimes you get the idiots who think and I say to myself, "I can't shut up. You're not making any sense."

Another facet of the worlds' intersection involving others is the nature of **relationships**. As described earlier, the participants' sessions were peppered with interactions and conversations with friends. Keeping track of friends within Second Life is relatively simple, since one can check their user profiles and their online status through the interface. All of the participants used these facilities during their usage sessions, examples in Figure 7.17.

Figure 7.17. Examples of using the Second Life interface to check friends' status.

The sessions demonstrate the pleasure that friendships bring to the participants. "L" had an extended conversation with someone whom she had known a long time, and as she describes:

> … that's like-, ages since we had a proper chat. That's really nice. It's a feeling, it's a nice, warm, comfortable-, it's someone I've known for maybe three years, really. It's lovely.

Meanwhile, although "SG" chose not to interact with friends she saw online, their presence gave her pleasure and reassurance:

> Here, what happened was that Real Life Education Group came up and I saw that there were so many people online so I felt happy.
>
> *Oh these are all people who are members of the group?*
>
> Members of the group were all online.
>
> *When you say made you feel happy, what do you mean and why?*

> It just makes me feel that there are so many educators at this time of the day, it was 2.14 in the US in the night, there are so many …

However, while there are times when emotional involvement and empathy is strong, as "AM" describes, it is important not to become immersed in the lives of others:

> *Do you yourself feel emotionally involved?*
>
> I do at times, because-, with these two, yes I do. I know the kind of life [my] poor [friend] has had, even with-, from a young girl, and I know the type of life [her partner] has had from a young man ... I know the type of life they've had. I know the stresses that they've been through, and it's awful. Yes, I do-, sometimes I do get emotional. It's like anyone else, when they tell me some of the stories, I do get emotional, because it's-, they're having their life taken off them, and they can't get it back how it should be. Yes, they could get bits back, but they never get the full life back, and that is sad. It does upset me, but I can't allow it-, that emotional state to linger with me, else I'd be no good helping them or anyone else.
>
> *No, yes. Well, I was going to ask you, you know, how do you stop yourself being, you know, immersed in their lives?*
>
> I never get immersed as such. I listen, yes. I get emotional sometimes, I mean, I've been sat at my computer crying sometimes, but you can't afford to get in there. You can't. If you get into that too deep, emotionally, you would be no good to them at all, no good to them at all.

The nature of relationships in Second Life is that they are bittersweet, because the likelihood is that they will never be realised in the physical world. This is reflected in another discussion with "AM", where she explains even though she may never meet any of her friends, what occurs is "real":

> *I was going to ask you-, just going to ask you that, because when you said that about me, you know, obviously we're in a situation where we have met each other and everything, but obviously you know people all over the world, and that's possibly, probably never going to happen.*
>
> No, it never will happen.
>
> *So how does that feel?*
>
> Well, it makes me stop to think, "Okay, well, I've got to show more caring, or more firmness, even", because firmness is a way of caring, not cruelty, and this is how I try to overcome that. So far it has worked, and people have said thank you for caring, even when I've been firm. You can overcome it, but it's like I always say, even with my actions towards those I'm trying to help, I have to keep a sense of reality. Never let go of reality. Never get so carried away that you forget that when we're talking, not when we're building or developing something as in, you know, a scene, but when you're talking to someone, that is real, and that's the only thing you should 100 per cent look at as real.

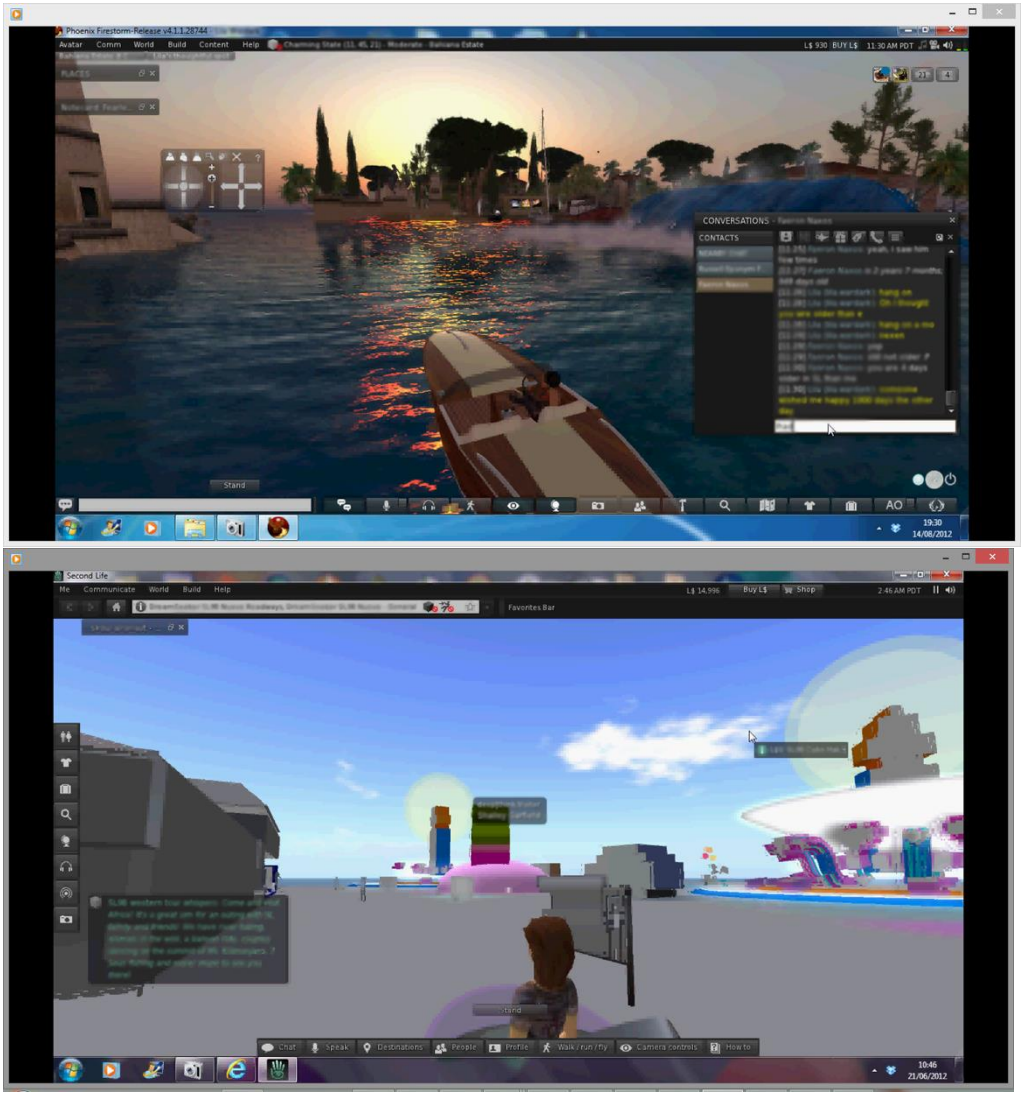
7.6.2.3. Second Life

This Theme concerns aspects related to the experience of using Second Life, in particular **the experience of using the technology** through which it is accessed. The importance of technology is demonstrated by the problems participants had in the sessions. Some of the problems were caused by the fact that all sessions were conducted using the researcher's laptop, so participants had to acclimatise to it and make amendments to how the Second Life interface appeared to them. "L" had particular problems, because she wanted the settings for her session to be exactly as

she was accustomed to, but at the same time was feeling "rusty" on how to make those settings possible. In her case, of the 90 minutes recorded usage time, approximately twenty were spent logging on, and setting up. Meanwhile, in the case of "SG", her experience was impacted on by poor Internet bandwidth, meaning that much of what she saw onscreen were grey, textureless shapes; Figure 7.18 provides a comparison between what "L" and "SG" saw on the screens and the extent to which the detail seen by the participants differed. Lack of computer processing power can cause problems, since Second Life provides a large amount of data that requires processing. During the sessions this was not an issue, but as "SG" explains, sometimes it is necessary to close all other programmes down in order to provide a smooth experience:

> I mean a couple of years before, Second Life used to drain the system, so I used to remember to switch off my mail, any other applications, check that everything else is switched off because then Second Life can run comfortably, because if Second Life is going to take all the power and I don't give it all the power then in the session I'll be logged out.

Figure 7.18. Second Life as seen by "L" and "SG". Note the difference in detail.

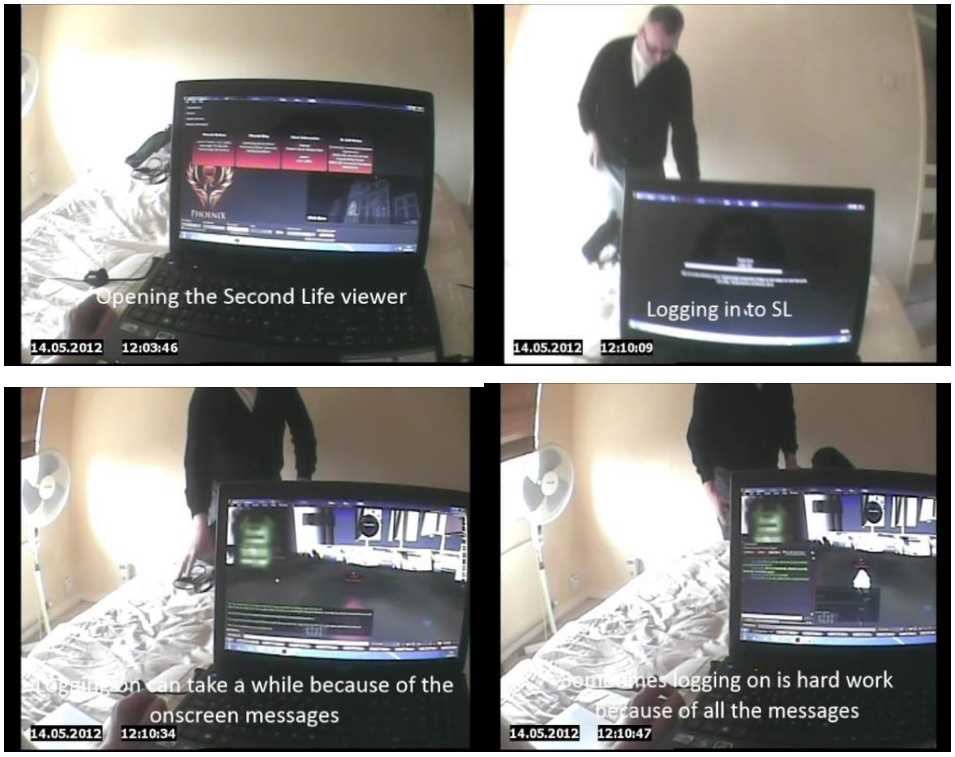


In terms of accessing Second Life, the usage sessions indicate the experience of **logging on and off**, and the extent to which there is any "transition" between the physical and virtual worlds. Logging on required the participants to launch the Viewer from a desktop icon, input username and password, and choose a log on location, before clicking the log on hot button on the Viewer launch screen. During the log on process, notifications appeared which provide links and information to events in Second Life or related information. Once the participants were logged on, any offline messages and information about their location appeared on screen, and their avatar and environment "rezzed". The process was not instantaneous: between launching the Viewer from the desktop icon to becoming a fully "rezzed" avatar took several minutes. Sometimes this was because the sessions were conducted on the researcher's laptop, and participants needed to remember their password, which would be stored on the computer they ordinarily used. "AM" explains that the amount of time to log on varies, and depends on circumstance:

> Sometimes I go straight in, but it's then because when I log in I usually have loads and loads of group notices, IMs and it takes a bit then for me to log in, but once all those are cleared, it's not too bad at all. Sometimes if SL's playing up I have to try about three times.

Figure 7.19 provides images of the log on screen as she entered Second Life.

Figure 7.19. The log on screen as "AM" enters Second Life.



In the sessions logging off was more cut and dried and only required the participant to close the screen. While "AM" delayed slightly to explain to a friend that she was logging off, "SG" and "L" exited without problems. "SG" later describes the logging on and off process that she experiences, the role of the log on screen, and the extent to which there is a transition between the physical and virtual worlds. While she uses the log on screen as an information source (the visit to SL9B later in her session was inspired by information presented on the log on screen), and sees the log on process as akin to opening any other computer application, her experiences in Second Life tend to stay with her after logging off:

> *What do you think of this home screen? Do you even see it?*
>
> I sometimes see it, yes. I pick up something, for example the Linden Labs birthday celebrations are going on. So I keep a look out because sometimes I feel that certain educational sides might be of interest to me and I would like to go and visit them.
>
> *At the moment-, this is logging in at the moment, isn't it? You know the bar and everything. Obviously at the moment we're talking, so it's kind of going on without you focusing on anything. Is anything going on in your mind normally when that's going on?*
>
> I look at these messages here. I keep my eye because I think that anything important or any new island or anything that Linden Labs is doing, I will take notice of it.
>
> *Do you ever click on them?*
>
> I sometimes do, yes ... Like today I saw something on Berlin so I immediately clicked in and went onto the island … and part of the Second Life Linden Lab birthday celebrations.
>
> *Is there anything changing as you're going from, whatever is going on, and I know this situation is different because we're chattering away, you don't feel like there's any kind of you becoming [SG] in Second Life or anything like that.*
>
> No, it's just like opening another application. So it isn't to do-,
>
> *Nothing mystical happening?*
>
> No.
>
> …
>
> [Watching the recording of the log off process] *You're saying, "I would normally log off now, as I've done my time and I've had enough", and I'm saying, "Okay, stop." When you log off, there's no, sort of, strange you're there then you're not sort of feeling?*
>
> No.
>
> *It's just the end.*
>
> Yes, that's it.
>
> *You don't have to, like, psych yourself up to, you know, I'm coming towards the end of my session now. Does your mind start thinking about what you've got to do after?*
>
> No. I feel very good about it. I mean, if I have presented myself, then what I would do is I would make sure that whoever asked me to be a friend, I've noted down their name so I know what the reference was in which they asked me to be a friend. Then I'll also make some reflective notes, so that if people have asked me questions, and if I have some observations, I make those notes. I'll give a proper ending to it. It's not that I switch it off, my activity is over, and I'm gone, I'd reflect a bit.

The sessions also indicate the importance of **the Viewer** in the experience of Second Life, both in terms of its appearance, how it is used, and the form it gives Second Life. In the first instance, the official Second Life Viewer and Third Party Viewers vary in how they present Second Life and how it can be interacted with; in the usage sessions,

each participant used a different Viewer from the others. After her session, "L" spoke of her preference for the Phoenix Viewer and its descendant Firestorm, while referring to the complaints from users when Second Life updated the official Viewer:

> I think that one of the reasons was because you get the music coming, what music is playing ... What was the other reason? I cannot now remember why I changed to Firestorm. I'd had Viewer 2, like, about a year or two ago. When other people was going, was it two or three? Whatever it was …
>
> *We're on three now but two is the one that everybody-*,
>
> It was two that everyone went (noise). So I just got used to that by then. So the Firestorm one was based on that, wasn't it? So that was it, so I thought I'd give it a go, I think.

As already noted, throughout their sessions participants received a constant stream of information, in the form of notices, messages, "open chat", and sim information. In addition, all of their actions and interactions with the virtual world instigated information and interaction choices, with the types and forms of interactions and actions possible provided by way of a plethora of avatar labels, pop-up menus and Head Up Displays.[32] Figure 7.20 provides a typical example of the Viewer as seen by "L" during her session as she conversed with friends in Instant Message, surrounded by other users who were conversing in "open chat". The image shows the Instant Message box on the right hand of the screen, with the participant's inventory box behind it. At the top of the screen is location and information, at the bottom a toolbar of programme "short cuts", and the text bottom left of screen is "open chat"; usually the display name and any active group memberships are detailed above each avatar, but the participant had chosen to switch these off.

Figure 7.20. An example of the appearance of "L"'s Viewer during her usage session.

[32] A Head Up Display is commonly referred to inworld by the acronym HUD. These are onscreen displays that provide information and allow interaction with the programme.

All participants spent time rearranging the Viewer throughout their sessions (see Figure 7.21 for examples), and later "AM" spoke of how she arranges the Viewer so that HUDs, notices, message boxes, etc. are as unintrusive as possible.

> *What about how the screen looks? I mean, I know you're having to use the way I suppose my default, how I have the screen, but your HUDs and things have come up? I mean, do you think about them anymore?*
>
> No. I usually close them down, but I've left them even though.
>
> *Do you even notice them though? That's what I suppose I-,*
>
> Well, when I close them down, no I don't. If they're open like that, yes I do. The AO, I've put it over to the right and I squash it down, but yes, I've left that up, because I've got to go and see to the meeroos, so yes, I've left that one up. Usually I close it right down so it's in narrow.

Figure 7.21. Examples of participants rearranging the screen during their sessions.

Using the Viewer, moving around, doing activities and interacting with others, was relatively automatic for the participants, including "L", once the settings were as she preferred. "AM" explains that using Second Life is "second nature", but later highlights how changes in the programme can cause upset among users:

> Well, I've been doing it for so long, it's second nature. I don't really have to think about it now, that one. I just know what to do and do it, but yes, sometimes I hit the shift key and I think, "Got the wrong icon there."
>
> ...
>
> I think we take things for granted, and we assume it's going to be the same. Even if we don't assume, we just don't think about it, because we're so used to doing it, it's just, like, second nature.

The sessions also demonstrate **the characteristics of the Second Life virtual world**. One of these is the extent to which it reflects reality for those who use it, and its pre-eminence over what occurs in the physical world. This is a topic that "AM" is particularly concerned with, since her experience of Second Life has been characterised by deceptive relationships and "griefing" from other users, as well as her efforts to counsel friends in Second Life. As she describes in this discussion, "reality" in Second Life is in the interactions with others, and for some people the virtual world and other virtual environments is all the life they have:

> The only thing that is real, totally real, is the conversations, the inter-reaction.
>
> *Even if it's-, I won't say "fake", but you know we were talking about people either deceiving or not, are-, even those are real? Even if they don't represent the truth?*
>
> If they're scheming, trying to fool you, yes, it's real. The only thing-,
>
> *Because the outcome is-,*
>
> Because of the outcome. They're intending to do it. They are trying to deceive you into believing something that is not genuine from them. The only thing, although it's still chat, that isn't real, is role play, because it's acting out like a film.
>
> …
>
> I-, to be honest with you, that-, it's a personal thing, really, when you think about it. I don't know, I'm not in their head, but I think they just take things too literally … I think they are searching for something that's real, and unfortunately when they're in one of these virtual things or, oh God, a chat room, that's life to them. I know that's sad. When they-, if they turn it, that's personal life. It's life, in a way, to me. When I go into Second Life, it's life to me because I talk to so many people with so many problems, but apart from that, no. This is not real. This is a virtual reality. The chatting is real, that is very, very real, because it's words in text coming from a real person. Would you not say when you read a book that it's real? You see? As I say, oh my God, Simon, so many people in SL, that's the only life they've got. Now this is so sad. I mean, I don't go in-, there are various reasons why I don't go into Second Life as much as I used to. It's because A, I was spending far too much time in there, B, it was giving me less and less time in reality, in a real setting.

For the participants themselves, the virtual world plays a more relaxing role, used for exploring and meeting other users. For example, "SG" describes how she can use Second Life to feel as if she has been on an "outing":

> I think with Second Life it gives me an outlet for, it gives me an outing, as if I've-, ... gone somewhere and had fun … Especially like the one I was doing today, and doing at home also. The day that I really feel that I've not gone out much and had a really, really work loaded day, then I'll go into Second Life, sit in some nice place near the water.

Related to Second Life's reflecting a "reality" for its users, is its ability to provide an alternative life and new opportunities. Again, this is a topic "AM" has strong feelings about, as she describes the range of experience within Second Life:

> … for some people it is their only life, and the only time they get to feel a person ... It's the only time they experience love, tenderness, caring, or they have a laugh without having any repercussions. If they make a mistake it's not the end of the world. It is totally sad. For others, I mean I put myself as an example, again it's the landscape and the terraforming, the building, I love it. It's the creating and making your environment look good. I love that. I couldn't do that in real life, so it is replacing something for me that I can't do in reality, but I never ever for one minute think it's real. It's real in as much as we are doing it, but it's not real as in touching it. We have to, but some people just have not got that. There again, you've got the other end of the scale, where people go in and they're living a life that they would love to live, but is probably a very, very obscure way of living, but that becomes a reality to them.

The sessions also reflect the characteristics of **experiencing Second Life**, in addition to the characteristics of the programme and the world itself. Despite Second Life having socialising as a key purpose, to some extent experiences in its realm are solitary. "AM" describes how she typically uses Second Life with only her dog for company, while "SG" discusses how she enjoys solitary experiences in both the physical and virtual world:

> I'm always on my own, yes.
>
> *Apart from-,*
>
> Well apart from, yes, [the dog] or if my son comes in he's got to ask me something or tell me something.
>
> …
>
> If there are people with me, what happens is it takes away my attention from the task. I think that is another reason perhaps why I so much enjoy Second Life, because it is very much an individual personalised experience.

The experience is in some ways a multiple one, with multi-tasking occurring throughout. As already highlighted "L" in particular conducted several tasks simultaneously, including messaging friends, adjusting programme settings and setting up research protocol, while later on she took a boat ride as she chatted to a friend in Instant Message. Likewise "SG" participated in the S9LB tour while changing her avatar appearance, and "AM" chatted to a friend in Instant Message, while setting up research protocol and taking care of virtual pets. While for "AM" it is something that comes easily, for "L" it is not her preference, since she feels other users know when she is not fully attending to them:

> *So, you're talking to me and moving around inside Second Life and talking out loud? Are you walking around in second pilot? Are you kind of trying to-, are you actively doing three things at the same time or what?*
>
> I'm so used to multitasking I can keep my mind on several things at a time, so I've gone in and I've checked the cats and make sure that they're all still in the house …
>
> …
>
> *Would you rather just have-, how do you try to-, well you're saying you're getting used to it now. What normally, what used to happen?*
>
> Well I can do two. I'd prefer just to chat to one person at one time but it's the usual thing if you've got a local going on and an Instant Message going on. If it gets to any more than two things, it all falls apart. (Laughter).
>
> *Is it all part of the immersion thing do you think? Trying to talk to two people and looking at what's going on on the screen in the thing, in the open, it's all a bit dissipatory effort really, isn't it really?*
>
> Yes, it's not as pleasurable. Then it's this case of not wanting to be rude to people either. Some people know, they can tell and they say, "I can tell you're talking to someone else. I'll talk to you later."
>
> *Do they get offended?*
>
> People do, yes. And I think probably I'm normally one of the people that will just talk to one person. I can tell when people are doing it to me and I'd rather do something else.

Multi-tasking also has its impact on the experience of other users and on the behaviour of avatars. During her session, "L" spent part of her time in a public space, but her attention was focussed on the messages she was receiving from friends, and making sure they were aware of her being a research participant. This meant that her avatar stood in one place not interacting with the other avatars, while others danced and conversed in "open chat". Not appearing present, appearing "AFK" or "busy" is something particular to virtual environments, and as discussed with "L" users quickly

become adept at reading its signs:

> *... you're standing around obviously just-, to everybody else you're just standing around. When you see somebody standing around, what do you think? Do you think they're IMing?*
>
> Yes, I think a lot of people just stand around. Either they're AFK or they're in IMs. Or they're doing something in Facebook or something.
>
> *So does that mean, like, when you see people looking like they're not doing anything, you kind of, have learned that that's not really the-, they are actually doing something, you just don't see it as being odd or anything?*
>
> ... It's not odd. That's just how it works in Second Life, isn't it?

7.6.2.4. Real Life

This concerns the extent to which **circumstances, experiences and events in the physical world impact on, and flow through, into the virtual world**. In the case of the usage sessions, and despite best intentions to capture typical experiences, the fact they were created specifically for observation and analysis in a physical world **research setting** had an impact on the experience of all the participants. All participants spent some of their session doing tasks and activities that were atypical, such as setting up research protocol and adjusting Viewer settings. Indeed, the fact the sessions occurred using the researcher's laptop, with its unfamiliar technology and settings, meant that all participants had an experience of Second Life disrupted from their norm, as "AM" explains:

> *You're sitting with this, my laptop on your lap, not in your computer room on your computer or not on your laptop? Does that interfere at all?*
>
> Yes, it's very disorientating at first.
>
> *Why? In what way?*
>
> The colours are different. The graphics are different. There's a different resolution, so it makes it-, I had to stop and think for a moment or two what was going on, if everything was okay. At first I thought, "Oh my god, something's wrong", and I thought, "Stupid, you're not on your own machine", you know.

For "L" the research environment had a number of consequences. In the first case, the usage session was conducted in a hotel meeting room, with the researcher present, so the physical environment of the experience was atypical. She had also been absent from Second Life for a few weeks which led to her feeling a little "rusty" and overwhelmed by the research protocol tasks and amending Viewer settings, particularly when she decided to go to a public sim she favoured, and then found she had to additionally respond to messages, open a URL for a personality test a friend sent her, and respond to queries from other users at the sim. As she says later:

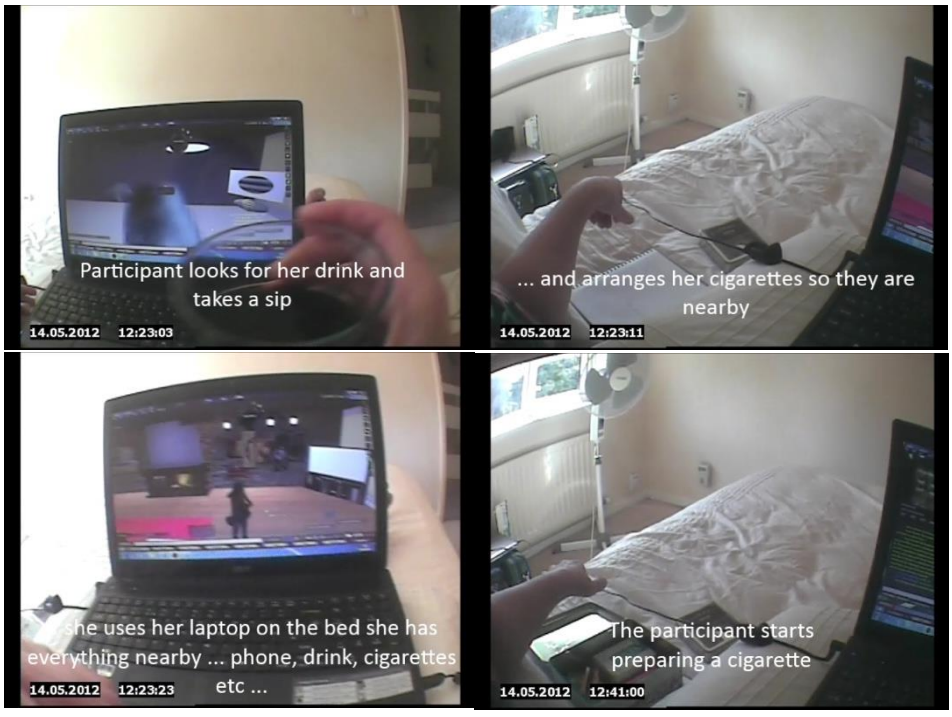
> So to me, this session was just a bit oh it's all coming at me. I find multitasking quite hard. I'm much better at it now. I can more or less normally manage two [IM conversations] on the go at once but I mean-,

On the other hand, "AM" felt comfortable and unimpeded in her experience by the research environment. This may have been due to her session taking place in her own home, and more extensive experience of participating in the researcher's programme, as discussed later:

> *You don't feel-, I mean this whole process of having to sit there with these spectacles on and knowing at least I was attempting to capture what you were doing online, did that feel odd?*
>
> No. I've got time to think about it and I know that this is for a certain purpose and I know everything's confidential and, okay, it sounds quite strange probably me saying this, but I've always enjoyed my participating in the project, your research work, always. It's lovely that you and I can interact and we help each other and I looked at this as a helping hand for you to test out your ideas. No, I've never been nervous or intimidated by being captured on camera or on a mic.

Another aspect of this Theme is the extent to which participants' general experience of Second Life was contingent on being **located in, and interacting with, multiple physical and virtual environments and situations**. In particular, the sessions indicate that while in a variety of environments and situations in Second Life, the participants were simultaneously interacting with the physical world, and being impacted by physical world circumstances. In the case of "AM", her usage session took place in her bedroom; she rested the laptop on her legs, with refreshments and a metal container of tobacco and cigarette papers on the bedside table, and her dog lying nearby. Throughout her session, she sipped a glass of water, and at one point prepared a cigarette, while interacting with one of her friends in Second Life, demonstrated in Figure 7.22.

Figure 7.22. "AM" taking refreshments and preparing a cigarette while using Second Life.



As she explains, the usage session occurred during a particular set of circumstances: her leg was in pain, the act of smoking distracts her from pain but she only smokes in her bedroom, and anything else she might have needed was nearby so removing any need to leave the bed.

> *You're looking around here? What are you doing? Oh, you're sorting out your drink?*
>
> I'm not sure if I had a drink or a cig-, yes, a drink. I think I was looking for the dog as well at one stage. Oh, the cigarettes.
>
> *Do you have to get all of yourself-, do you like to have everything, you know, normally?*
>
> Normally yes, if I'm on my laptop on the bed I get these here and I've got my phones here, so everything's at hand.
>
> *So that you can be here in Second Life and if you need a fag or have a drink you can just do it?*
>
> Yes, because it's painful when I get off the bed.
>
> …
>
> *Now, talk about minutiae now. Do you often have a fag while you're-, when you're in Second Life, have a cigarette or a smoke?*
>
> No. It's only in the bedroom, like, this bedroom. In my computer room, down here, anywhere else in the house, I never smoke.
>
> *Oh, so it's just-, okay.*
>
> Yes.
>
> *Does it add anything to it?*
>
> No.
>
> *I mean, it doesn't make you enjoy your session even more or anything?*
>
> I think what-, no, no, no. I think what it is-, I was really feeling poorly that day, and I was in a lot of pain with my leg, and I think I just smoke because of that. It takes my mind off the pain.

In the case of "SG", she did not interact with the environment in the same way as "AM", but on several occasions she looked up and around, either at the researcher, towards the door of the room the session occurred in, or the window; examples are in Figure 7.23.

Figure 7.23. "SG" looking around during her usage session.

After the session, she points out that when she is using Second Life she is often distracted by the "goings on" in the physical world around her, and that focusing just one task or objective at a time is difficult for her:

> Just as that gentleman came, two or three times you will notice in the recording that I looked out. It is not unusual, I do it at home also, because if my-, let's say this is my desk, I have a window here, so if I hear a noise, what is my neighbour up to, so I look out of the window.
>
> *So you're not so engrossed or immersed that everything else just you're oblivious to?*
>
> No, I'm very conscious of what is happening.
>
> …
>
> Yes, I was looking probably at you, as to what you're doing. It happens with me at home, also, I'll look outside the window or do something else, perhaps check my e-mail. I find it difficult to concentrate in one place all the time. Some people are good at it, but I'm not.

A third element of this Organising Theme is the extent to which aspects of life in the physical world **"bleed through"** to the virtual, and vice versa. In the usage sessions one of the forms this assumed was deep knowledge of other user's physical world lives and circumstances. For example, other users have shared their "real lives" with "AM" from early in her Second Life experience:

> The other one where you saw me typing, that was from [gives the physical world name of the user], he's the one I said was a wrestler.
>
> *Oh yes, yes.*
>
> All he types was, "I've only got two black eyes."
>
> *Do people very often talk to you just like that about something that's going on in-, I mean, are conversations very often about real life?*
>
> To be honest with you, more tell me their real life stories than don't.
>
> *From the start or quite early on?*
>
> Fairly early on. It was-, oh, perhaps started from about the end of 2007 to the beginning of 2008, but since-, you know, I stopped doing it, the counselling in there and then I get one-, oh [AM], when I made [AM], just stopped doing it. Then, "Oh [AM], I need this, I need that, I need the other. Oh what am I going to do?" blah blah blah. I started it again, but it became too much.

Other aspects of life in the physical world transferred to the virtual are users' personality and behavioural characteristics. "SG" explains that while in some ways she is able to be more self-confident in the virtual world, her traits are the same whether in "real life" or Second Life:

> If I don't know something very well, I would rather listen and understand, than to just speak for the sake of it. Those traits of real life I do carry in Second Life, so I am not an extrovert in Second Life, and I am not an introvert. There isn't a plus and a minus difference between me, so many of my personal traits I do carry in Second Life, but it just an extra bit of comfort, that your identity brings, that you don't have in real life.

This is something that particularly concerns "L". A friend had recently told her that she was thinking of creating a new avatar with a new personality, which had upset "L" to some extent, because she feels that her personality in Second Life is not manufactured, but authentic:

> I'm interested in this reality and illusion thing. A close friend of mine was saying, "I think I might just go and create a new personality and get a new avatar." I got really upset by it actually, I did ... It was like, well you're going to go and be a fake person or something? That's what it felt like to me.
>
> *Did you feel like she was going to get rid of you as well and that was offensive? Or did that not come into it?*
>
> He-, yes I did feel like that.
>
> *You were part of the fed up-ness.*
>
> Yes, I felt like that. I don't think that that's true but yes, I did feel like that. So then I was struggling in my mind with this-, well why does that not feel right? Of course people come and they do role play and they do things like that. So why doesn't that feel right?
>
> *Did you come to an answer?*
>
> Well in my profile I put that my avatar is designed but my personality is not.

Even in the context of the research experience there was an instance of "bleed through" between worlds. In this case, "L" had purchased identical boots in Second Life and the physical world and purposefully co-ordinated the appearance of her physical world and avatar selves, as the images in Figure 7.24 indicate.

Figure 7.24. "L" co-ordinates physical world and virtual world appearance for the purpose of the research experience.

7.7. Summary of the analysis and relating it to the research question

This section provides a description of the findings in terms of how they relate to the present subsidiary question:

> In what ways do physical and virtual worlds interact with each other and the experience of Self?

Two sets of themes emerged from this element of the research programme: pre-usage session themes from stage one, and usage session themes from stages two and three.

The Thematic Analysis from the pre-usage sessions provides an insight into the relationship that users have with Second Life and the extent to which it absorbs time they would otherwise spend in physical world activity. While some users successfully

manage their time and use the virtual world with specific purpose in mind, others become immersed into its social life or creative aspects. There is a dichotomy in the relationship between the physical and virtual worlds: while the virtual is seen as inferior to the physical world in terms of quality of experience and interactions, it provides benefits, such as relationships, new experiences, and personal growth.

The Thematic Analysis from the usage sessions indicates that the interaction between worlds and experience of Self is comprised of four aspects. The first concerns the personal experience of using and being in a virtual world, in particular the experience of using an avatar, the degree of immersion experienced, and the extent to which the physical world impacts on the virtual experience. To some extent users have a sense of **"being there"** in the virtual world, a sensory experience of being located in particular spaces and places of size and complexion, separate and different to their location in the physical world. In keeping with this, users create avatar appearances and engage in avatar behaviours and actions that are appropriate for their environments and locations they are in, even when there is no other person in the location to witness their appearance or behaviour. However, the sense of "being there" is mediated by technology, the virtual world interface that allows them to see their avatar, engage in activities and behaviours, and interact with other users: while user's experience in virtual worlds may be mediated by avatars, the experience also requires a variety of menus, HUDs, message boxes and other onscreen paraphernalia which may obscure the avatar or even mean that the avatar is ignored. Moreover, ***"being there" in the virtual world does not imply absence from "here" in the physical***: access to the virtual world though the computer screen means that at the same time as being fully engaged in an activity or conversation "there", the user can be engaging in activity and conversation "here".

The second aspect of interaction between worlds concerns the nature of relationships, communication and interaction between users. As with personal experience, part of this aspect is rooted in the nature of the technology and the avatar as **mediators of experience**. Using avatars allows relationships and contact with others in the virtual sphere that provide emotional benefits for users, equal to similar relationships in the physical world, enabling depth of communication and physical interaction, and facilitating the sense of immersion in the virtual world. Moreover, while virtual worlds are heavily dependent on textual communication to convey meaning and intent, users are adept at "reading between the lines" and using techniques to interpret the unsaid meanings and intentions of others. However, the dependence on the Viewer technology and avatars means that to some extent users are inaccessible to one another. A user's name, identity and appearance fluctuate, meaning

that a friend is not always recognisable, while anonymity conceals aspects such as age and sex usually apparent in physical interactions. Moreover, ***the presence of other avatars does not guarantee an immersive experience***, since their users may be away from the keyboard, or immersed in message boxes or other computer programmes, rather than immersed in the virtual world itself. In this sense the separation of the user in the physical world from their avatar in the virtual world, and the dependence on physical world technology for access to the virtual, intersect to provide a particular experience of relationships and interaction with other users.

As the first two aspects underline how personal experience and interactions with other users in virtual worlds are mediated by technology, the third aspect concerns the specific experience of interacting with that technology and the virtual world itself. This aspect indicates how in part immersion is facilitated by the fact that using the virtual world interface is an **automatic process** for its users. Moreover, immersion can be so deep that there is a tension between the physical and virtual world regarding the extent to which time spent, and activity in the virtual world, displaces that in the physical, and hence the extent to which it has pre-eminence, and reflects a primary "reality", over the physical world for its users. Despite this, users have to work hard to maintain the immersion, and it is easily disrupted by the interface, since it is dependent on quality of the Internet connection and computer graphics, as well as any technical problems Linden Labs may be experiencing; disruptions to the experience can include spontaneous logging offs, and slow or incomplete "rezzing". However, ***disruption of the immersion experience is to some extent inherent in the interface***, since to interact with and use the virtual world requires manipulating a myriad of onscreen HUDs, menus and text boxes, as well as managing the various flows of communication that seek users' attention.

The final aspect of the interaction between worlds and the experience of Self concerns the flow of circumstance between the physical and virtual worlds, and the **mutual influence** between them. In the first instance, the physical world setting can influence the flavour of experience within the virtual world, with its unfamiliar computer and programme settings shaping the activities users engage in and their frame of mind while using. This is because virtual world usage habitually occurs within particular physical world environments and the virtual world interface arranged in particular ways, so that any alteration in habitual physical settings changes the virtual experience. However, despite the strength of these habits, usage does adapt, so that if someone engages in Second Life in a different physical location, or there is some kind of change in their physical situation (e.g. a change in health), then a new set of habits are quickly established. Moreover, as already noted, location in the virtual

world does not imply absence from the physical, so that while interacting with the virtual world, users are simultaneously interacting with the physical. ***The flow between the physical and virtual worlds does not just include physical circumstance, but psychological*** too, including the sharing of physical world information between users, and transference of personality and behavioural characteristics between worlds.

7.8. Evaluation of the analysis and discussion of findings

The present research seeks to explore the ways in which the physical and virtual worlds interact with each other and experience of Self. These interactions are comprised of a number of aspects: personal experience, relationships and interactions between users, usage of the virtual world, and the flow of circumstance between the physical and virtual worlds. This can be related back to the existing literature in a number of ways, as well as to findings from other aspects of the research programme.

7.8.1. The Self at the intersection of worlds: emergence through interaction

The Self as emerging through interaction is fundamental to approaches within both the Symbolic Interaction and Activity Theory traditions: Symbolic Interaction considers the Self as emerging through everyday social interactions in particular settings, while the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory considers the Self as emerging through the interaction between Self, Other and artefacts in culturally-specific contexts (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1962; Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004). The present research extends this to consider the role of interactions at the point where the physical and virtual worlds intersect. In line with Symbolic Interaction approaches, it indicates experience of Self emerges in the virtual world through the social interactions with others, and that these interactions cement the Self into the virtual world, encouraging immersion and a sense of "being there". In this sense the "Generalised Other" is always present, guiding behaviour and appearance, even if no other users are. Moreover it indicates the role of the virtual world as a mediating tool, used in conjunction with other users for specific purposes, from which Self emerges. The Viewer provides the framework within which Second Life is experienced, and it is ***through interactions with others, and engaging in particular activities within the virtual world, that a user's sense of Self emerges***.

Other aspects of the present research programme have also indicated the role of interaction in the emergence of Self in virtual worlds. In particular, Chapter 6 outlines how the Self emerges in virtual worlds through interactions with the virtual world, between user and avatar, between users, and between worlds. The research here illuminates this variety of levels of interaction. In the first instance, interaction with the virtual world involves not only interaction with objects and avatars, or movement and travel across locations within the world itself, but interaction with the interface and technology providing access to the virtual world. Secondly, the interaction between the user and their avatar is also mediated by the available technology; while users can develop attachments to, and even identify with their avatars, they are fully cognisant of their position as someone in the physical world using an avatar in the virtual world. Finally, on the level of interaction between users, while immersion into the virtual world is dependent on interactions with others, the presence of other avatars is no guarantee of immersion or interaction.

7.8.2. The Self at the intersection of worlds: technology as a mediating tool

The role of the Viewer as "mediating tool" for the experience of Self has been highlighted. The notion of the Self as emerging through the mediation of tools and artefacts is present in both theories of Symbolic Interactionism and Activity Theory, particularly in the work of Goffman (1959) and the ideas of Stetsenko & Arievitch (2004). Indeed, the Self has been mediated through technological tools and artefacts through history (Anderson, 2006; Goldgar, 1995; Heim, 1995; Sterling, 1992), while if we consider virtual worlds to be symbolic spaces, then technology mediates at the intersection between the physical world and the symbolic spaces of virtual worlds (Boellstorff, 2008). Moreover, Chapter 6 highlights how the virtual world provides both environment from which the Self emerges, and also acts as a mediating tool.

This research extends these ideas, particularly indicating how the technology of Second Life allows for a particular experience of Self: while the user is simultaneously located in both the physical and virtual realms, ***technology acts as a bridge allowing access to Second Life, framing and allowing activity and interaction with the virtual world and its users*** in specific ways. In the first instance, the Second Life Viewer frames the virtual world within the two-dimensional space of the computer screen, with menus accessed through the mouse-clicking of toolbars, objects and avatars within the virtual world, allowing interactions with the virtual world and other users.

The nature of the Viewer is that it prescribes all interactions within a set framework, with the possible interactions defined by the Viewer and specific programmes created for use within the virtual world, in the same way as a person's physical body transcribes the physical environment through perception and representations and hence formatting possible action. Additionally, the Viewer is not a sole mediating tool; it acts in conjunction with the user's computer, their Internet Service Provider, and Second Life servers, since its ability to provide an experience for the Self depends on the quality of data the servers provide, the ability of the ISP to transmit that data, and the computer to convert it into graphics that represent the virtual world, none of which are constant across time or equivalent across all users. This means the Self experienced in virtual worlds is to some extent unstable and contradictory, depending on the ability of technology to deliver the experience at any given time.

In some ways this offers a support point to viewpoints claiming technology is detrimental to the experience of Self. Critics of the role of New Technologies as media for the Self emphasise their potential for creating a Self that is unknowable and unstable, since they allow their users to be "saturated" by information, responsibilities, relationships and social roles, as well as removing inhibitions and allowing a myriad of shifting identities (Gergen, 1991; Poster, 1990; Suler, 2004). Here, users do gain beneficial experiences less possible in the physical world, and consciously and actively engage in that experience, but at the same time ***technology does indeed incur a Self that is in some senses constrained, unstable, and unknowable but in ways not previously considered***: the experience of Self is dependent on the ability of computers, servers, programmes and Internet connection to deliver it, which are in themselves limited, unstable, and ever-changing.

However, the group discussions detailed in Section 3.8 add a subtlety to the findings, in that they indicate how users of virtual worlds manage technology in relation to their own capabilities and "comfort zones": in this way ***they are able to create a stable environment for their own experience***. This point is illustrated in the context of a discussion on changes, in the excerpt illustrated in Figure 7.25. This underlines how far from being subject to technology, users of it are agents in their own experience, adapting to it as they feel necessary and capable of.

Figure 7.25. An excerpt from a group discussion, highlighting how virtual world users manage the technological impact on their own experience.

```
A: maybe we should branch this question a bit
I: does it make much difference to your expereince of SL when the
technology chnages?
A: namely in "What has changed inworld in social and technical
matters?"
H: if the user interface changes I slow down a lot:(
I: yes thats a good way A
LE: yes..me too...until a few months ago..I still used the old sl
viewer..
A: and "How do you see SL's position in the context of Web 2.0
nowadays?"
LE: i had to learn sl all over again with a new viewer
I: is it difficult to adapt?
H: for me it is , it took so long to just learn the basics and even
now I dont know a lot
LE: not for me
M5: None whatsoever. I still use Phoenix so I can have the original
interface I'm familiar with. I like the new mesh looks, but my
experiences in world aren't really affected by the technology.
A: The viewer's evolution is synchronised with the development of SL
technical improvements
M5: changing* technology
```

7.8.3. The Self at the intersection of worlds: multiple and disconnected

Multiplicity is a recurring theme in the literature and the present research programme. Symbolic Interaction theories emphasise the extent to which the Self is multiple emerging from a variety of contexts and circumstances (e.g. Goffman, 1959), while postmodern theories emphasise how Self in contemporary society can be typified as being multiple and disconnected, because there are opportunities to adopt multiple and simultaneous identities, disconnected from each other and conventional identity cues (Poster, 1990). Other aspects of the research programme underscore the extent to which experience of Virtual Self is multiple, while indicating that rather than experiencing any kind of disconnect, virtual world users are adept at managing and exploring the variety of identities and senses of Self they may experience, and maintain the notion of a single agentic Self. However, here the Self as experienced in virtual worlds is to some degree both multiple and disconnected. Multiplicity arises from how the user is located simultaneously "there" in the virtual world and "here" in the physical world: while engaging with other users and activities in the virtual world, they are employing a physical tool, the Viewer, to facilitate that engagement, while being situated in a physical world environment, and interacting with it. Hence, a user can be simultaneously engaging in an activity and conversing with another user in the virtual

world, while viewing a URL on the Internet, taking a drink, and nursing an illness in the physical world. This simultaneous location in multiple worlds leads to disconnect: having a number of simultaneous tasks and environments to manage can mean that none of them are engaged in fully. It means while the user struggles to interact with the virtual world and other users in an effective and satisfying manner, the virtual world and other users are attempting to interact with an avatar that has been stranded by someone who is psychologically and physically disconnected from the virtual world; this ultimately means ***the user is potentially psychologically disconnected from all worlds***.

7.8.4. The Self in social worlds or at their intersection?

The research here arises from considering how users of CMC are social actors within the social worlds of Cyberspace, rather than merely users of Cyberspace as a whole (Brivio et al., 2010; Riva & Galimberti, 1997; Waskul, 2003). However, rather than emphasising the experience of Self within these worlds, it seeks to understand how the Self that emerges is at the intersection of these worlds, in particular that of the physical and the virtual. To consider social actors as within worlds may de-emphasise the extent to which worlds overlap and influence one another. A user of Second Life is not solely an actor within the virtual world, separate from what may be occurring in other worlds, but their experience of Self is one that emerges from being in simultaneous multiple physical and virtual locations, bridged by the physical interface of the Viewer: ***in this sense the user has become a "cyborg", with experience mediated by not just the biological body but through technology too***.

7.9. Conclusions: towards an understanding of the Virtual Self in virtual worlds

This chapter has outlined the overall approach to addressing the subsidiary research question:

> In what ways do physical and virtual worlds interact with each other and the experience of Self?

In particular, it has sought to consider the experience of Self at the point where the physical and virtual worlds intersect, i.e. the time and place where a person uses a virtual world, in this case Second Life. Employing a Subjective Evidence-Based

Ethnography (SEBE) technique to access the perspective of Second Life users, the research provides first-hand evidence of typical virtual world experience, and considers the ways in which aspects of the virtual and physical worlds combine to provide a particular experience of Self. The chapter indicates that the relationship between the physical and virtual worlds is dichotomous: the virtual is seen as inferior to the physical, and so a balance of time and effort spent between them is seen as essential; at the same time, the virtual offers benefits that users value, and aspects of it are compelling and immersing, so attempts to achieve a healthy balancing of worlds are not always successful. There are four levels to the interaction between worlds and the experience of Self: personal experience of using an **avatar** and "being there" in the virtual world; the nature of relationships and interaction **between users** and the role of technology in that; the experience of interacting with **the virtual world and the technology** that provides access to it; and the flow of experience and circumstance **between worlds**, and the mutual influence between them.

The findings both support and elaborate upon existing literature and other aspects of the research programme in a variety of ways. In line with approaches within the Symbolic Interaction and Activity Theory traditions, the Self in virtual worlds emerges through interaction with others, using mediating tools. Through social interactions and mediation of the avatar, users become immersed into the virtual world, with Self emerging within the framework provided by the virtual world interface. However, the presence of other avatars is no guarantee of immersion and emergence of Self; while an avatar may be present, their user may not. Technology is the mediating tool in the experience of Self in virtual worlds: the virtual world interface, the user's computer, Internet Service Provider and virtual world servers combine to provide the experience within which Self emerges. This leads to a cautionary note that postmodern critics of New Technologies may have sympathy with. Technology provides an environment for Self that takes a particular form and is unstable, so it permits a Self that in some ways is constrained, unstable and unknowable. Virtual world usage offers the potential for a Self that is multiple and disconnected: someone may be simultaneously located in and interacting with multiple physical and virtual environments, but not engaged fully in any, and hence psychologically disconnected from all worlds. Ultimately, to consider virtual world users as social actors in social worlds in the vein of some theorists is insufficient: there are ways in which those worlds intersect, overlap and influence each other. Hence, ***the experience of Self that emerges is one in multiple locations, bridged by technological mediation***. Ultimately, this might suggest that a user of virtual worlds has become a form of "cyborg", experience of Self mediated not just by the physical organic body but by technology also.

8. What is the history of the Self in Second Life? Developing a Matrix of Player Timelines

8.1. Introduction: the research question and its purpose

Chapter 2 outlines how in order to address the overall research question "What is the experience of the Self in virtual worlds?" the role of experience over time should be considered to address the subsidiary question:

> What is the trajectory of experience of the Virtual Self in virtual worlds?

This aspect of the research is in response to the observation that change and evolutions over time give insight into behaviour (Bailenson & Yee, 2006), but that there may be few empirical studies of virtual environment usage over time. The purpose of this chapter is to gain some understanding of how the experience of Self in Second Life may change over an extended period. It explores the extent to which changes in the experience of Self occurs and varies, and develops a schema that indicates ***typical trajectories of experience***, a "**Matrix of Player Timelines**".

8.2. Context for the present research: the role for longitudinal research

The previous chapters indicate ways in which the research programme highlights how the experience of virtual world users changes over time. Chapter 4 in particular discusses how the user's typical experience of representation is comprised of a number of milestones involving avatar choice, name, and profile that occur and re-occur during the lifetime of the virtual world user. While this provides insight, it is based on retrospective accounts provided by participants, rather than being captured as it occurs.

Longitudinal research is beneficial since it able to provide data on events and developments regarding a particular phenomenon as they occur over an extended period of time. However, as a technique it is relatively uncommon in all aspects of both quantitative and qualitative psychological research. In part, this is because it depends on a pool of individuals acting as research participants time after time over an extended period, which can be a laborious process (Bailenson & Yee, 2006), as well as requiring commitment and resources from the researcher (Flick, 2009). For these

reasons, there is also a lack of longitudinal research regarding virtual phenomena. While ethnographical studies of virtual environments have been conducted over extended periods of time (e.g. Bainbridge, 2010; Boellstorff, 2008; Markham, 1998), they do not necessarily examine the changes in experience over that time. There are some examples of experimental studies that conducted over relatively short periods: research conducted by Harris et al. (2009), used an avatar tracking object to monitor the behaviour of new users of Second Life during the first six weeks of their being residents. However, this particular research is somewhat problematic since the period of time it examines is relatively short, and while it gives insight into behaviour, it provides limited insight into the motives for that behaviour. Contrary to other studies, the present research does offer the opportunity to compare the experience of Self in virtual worlds over an extended period of time. Two years prior to the commencement of the present research programme, the researcher conducted research amongst Second Life users investigating the experience of Self in the virtual world (Evans, 2011). By re-recruiting participants in the earlier research it is possible to compare the experience of Self at two time-points separated by two years.

While the opportunity exists to compare participant experience of Self over an extended interval, such an approach is not technically longitudinal. Flick (2009) indicates that longitudinal research includes data collection at several time periods, with pre-determined research processes and purposeful sampling. The current situation does not meet such criteria, since it concerns only two time periods, the research at the first time-point was not devised with the intention of repeating, and sampling for the second time period was retrospectively determined by which of the participants were available to participate again. When devising the present research, it was planned to purposefully recruit relatively new users of Second Life and reinterview them a number of times during the course of the research period. In the event, recruiting participants willing to commit to, and be available for, an extended period of regular interviewing proved difficult. However, the approach detailed here of re-recruiting participants of previous research with an extended interval between research periods allows for a comparison in the experience of Self, and illuminates any transformation that may have occurred in that time period, that has not necessarily been provided in other research hitherto.

The remainder of this chapter outlines the approaches used for research at each period (or “tranche”), presents the findings at each tranche and comparisons between them, and develops the findings and comparisons to create a Matrix of Player Timelines.

8.3.Methodology in understanding the trajectory of experience of the Self in Second Life

In line with other aspects of the research programme, with the intention of gaining the insider perspective on how the Self is experienced in virtual worlds, the basis for addressing this question is individual interviews, conducted in Second Life. As already indicated, the format for this aspect of the research is to re-recruit participants from research conducted at an earlier period prior to the present programme. While general methodological principles common across the research programme are provided in Chapter 3, this section outlines the specific principles for the procedures applied to research conducted on the two occasions. While full details of the research conducted at first tranche are provided in Evans (2011), they are summarised in this section, where appropriate.

8.3.1. Materials and methods for data collection and analysis

8.3.1.1. Sample

Forty participants were recruited for the first tranche, twelve of which were re-recruited for the second. Those who participated in both tranches were initially recruited from the New Citizens Inc. special interest group, using an Instant Message announcement similar to those in Figure 3.5, with no sampling controls exercised. In order to re-recruit participants for the second tranche, all forty participants were sent a "Second Life Follow Up Research" notecard with an accompanying Instant Message requesting participants (see Appendix). Twenty replied, of whom twelve were eventually able to participate.

8.3.1.2. Interview times and locations

For the first tranche, interviews were conducted over the period March 4th to April 19th, 2009; one interview was conducted in the participant's Second Life home, the remainder in the researcher's Second Life home.[33] For the second tranche, interviews were conducted over the period May 11th to November 4th, 2011, with all interviews

[33] Research previous to the current research programme was conducted prior to the construction of space specifically for the purpose of inworld research.

occurring at the Fearless Research Centre. In both tranches, each interview was scheduled for one hour duration.

8.3.1.3. Interview procedure and topic guide design

Each interview commenced with the informed consent procedures outlined in Section 3.7. A topic guide was used for both sets of research. The first tranche was intended to capture aspects of experience of Self in Second Life at the time, with the guide structured as: arrival into Second Life; the balance between "real life" and Second Life; similarities and differences between "real life" and Second Life; the relationship with their avatar. The second tranche acted as a retrospective between the two research time periods, with the topic guide structured as: views on research findings from the previous tranche; changes in their views and experience of being a Second Life user; similarities and differences between "real life" and Second Life; reasons for using Second Life, their opinions of it, and other virtual environment usage.

8.3.1.4. Data collection

Data is comprised of the transcripts of the textual interviews.

8.3.1.5. Analytic method

Three techniques have been used in order to identify potential experiential pathways and inform the development of a Matrix of Player Timelines. First, using their interviews, brief biographies have been created for users who participated in both tranches, highlighting the individual experience trajectory. Secondly, Thematic Analysis has been used to assess the data yielded from both tranches of research, as outlined in Section 3.7. Thirdly, the findings at each tranche have been compared.

In order to compare tranches, broad guidelines provided by Farrall (2006) in his description of Qualitative Longitudinal Research have been used. He proposes an outline structure for how qualitative data collected among the same pool of participants over several time-points can be analysed and compared. He recommends such analysis should consider a number of factors: differences between findings between pairs of time periods; when changes occur; the "tipping points" or particular events that precede change; increases or decreases (in values, material possessions, etc.) over time; omissions in experience or reported events over time; contextual events and situations; the meaningfulness of changes to participants; the extent to which changes may be

substantive or symbolic. These factors have been used to inform the comparison of findings in this case. In particular, the process has been to: identify differences between the Thematic Networks; ascertain the timing of differences, "tipping points" and contexts using the biographies and interviews from which the Networks were derived; and consider the meaningfulness of any changes to the participants.

8.4. An overview of the participants

Since the objective of this chapter is to understand the trajectory of experience in virtual worlds, it is useful to consider biographies of participant experiences, providing context for the Thematic Networks arising.

Participant "AM" had a number of Second Life accounts during her time in the virtual world; when first acquainted with the researcher she was already using her third consecutive avatar, and her fifth by second tranche. While some were due to technical problems with her account, others were created to escape relationships with other users that had become emotionally harmful. These experiences had implications for how she conducted herself and the amount of trust she had in other users, although did not prevent her from entering into further romantic relationships with residents. The participant consistently spent several hours per day using Second Life: at first tranche approximately 10 hours per day, 15 at second. However, how she spent time changed: from mainly socialising and building at first tranche, two years later she spent time creating and landscaping, working in a club, and using her experiences and some training in the physical world to counsel other users.

Participant "BM" was an experienced gamer before using Second Life. She had always had an interest in comics and children's stories, and so when she came to Second Life she exploited the virtual world's ability to make those interests more tangible. Hence, the majority of her time in Second Life was taken up with Role Playing a child. She created a whole back story for the character, and created a number of other avatars as part of that story. When the researcher first met her she had recently created a father avatar for her child avatar, and at times played scenes with the two avatars together, using two different Viewers simultaneously; by the time of the second research tranche, she had created two more Role Play avatars, a toddler boy and teenage girl. In the two years between research tranches, her Second Life experience was relatively stable and consistent in terms of activities and time spent in the virtual world.

Participant “CK” experienced a number of changes in her Second Life during the period between interviews. At first tranche, she spent several hours each day in the virtual world, and while “CK” was the main avatar, she also used a number of other avatars that expressed various aspects of her personality. She was also in a close romantic relationship with another resident, who she had met in the virtual world while both married in “real life”. In the physical world she had begun a qualification in social care, inspired by her growing confidence in Second Life and the experience of helping residents with their problems. By second tranche, she had reduced Second Life usage considerably, and had achieved what she felt was an improved balance between her physical and virtual lives. She was using “CK” as her sole avatar, and had relatively recently ended the relationship in which she had been involved previously: she had realised that in some ways “real life” was continuing without her, and that she did not want to put her physical world family and relationships in jeopardy. Moreover, she had ended her course, and was working full time.

While “CK2” has experienced some changes during her time in Second Life, there were similarities in her situation at the two tranches. At the first interview, she was a final year undergraduate student, seeking to balance studies with a full Second Life. While she was single in “real life”, she had a romantic partner in the virtual world, with whom she communicated by telephone, although had never met face to face. At the second interview, she was a postgraduate student, partnered in Second Life, although now also with a partner in “real life”. In the period between interviews, she decided that her previous relationship in Second Life was not satisfactory and prevented her from committing to a physical world relationship; upon this she ended her virtual world relationship, committed to a physical world partnership and ceased using Second Life. However, she returned to using Second Life, and entered the partnership she had at the second interview. While she saw herself as the same person in the physical and virtual worlds, she kept the two environments separate: her “real life” partner was unaware of her Second Life, and she viewed her relationships in the virtual world as offering something she did not have in the physical.

The usage of Second Life by “DT” evolved over the period between tranches. During both periods the amount of time and when she used Second Life remained approximately the same at about two hours a day, when her physical world partner was asleep; however, her activities and who she spent time with in the virtual world had changed. At first tranche, “DT” engaged in a number of virtual relationships and friendships, spent time socialising, dancing and listening to live music performances, and regularly played “Tiny Empires”, an inworld strategic game, with a group of other residents. Her objective at this point was “fun without commitment”. At the second

tranche, many of her friends had ceased using Second Life, including those with whom she had played "Tiny Empires"; while she still enjoyed dancing and listening to music, all of her time was spent with a person with whom she had a relationship in the virtual world. As with other participants, while her physical world partner knew she had "game time" in Second Life, he had remained unaware of her activities inworld.

Participant "EZ" was introduced to Second Life through her physical world career, but quickly found herself captivated by the virtual world and began using it in her own private time, to such an extent that she fell in love with another resident, despite being twice divorced in the physical world and feeling cynical about intimate relationships. Such was her involvement, that at the time of the first interview she had recently created an alt for purely professional purposes in order to prevent her primary avatar from being overwhelmed by both personal and professional commitments and information. During the period between tranches her experience transformed considerably. In the first instance, while at second tranche her work still involved using Second Life, the amount of time spent inworld for that purpose had reduced, so that the majority of her usage was for personal reasons. She had also developed a number of close friendships which had translated into other virtual media and the physical world, so the amount of time using Second Life to be with friends had also reduced. Thirdly, her Second Life usage had led to personal development in the physical world: she felt her world view was continually challenged and enhanced; she had learned to be a better communicator; using an avatar that represented an idealised version of herself, encouraged her to lose a significant amount of weight; and the resulting boost in self-confidence led her to join a number of dating services and seek "real life" romance.

Participant "FW" joined Second Life after seeing a television article. Soon after joining she met another user who would eventually become her husband in the physical world. By the time of the first interview the couple had developed a business in Second Life, and were well known for owning a sim where other users could come and spend time and engage in activities. Following that interview, beside running the business, she became heavily involved in the "Tiny Empires" inworld game, during which time she became cynical about Second Life and its users: many of her best friends ceased to use Second Life, the people who still continued to use seemed disloyal, and the costs of the sim became prohibitive. She and her husband decided to leave Second Life, but at the time of the second interview had recently decided to begin using again and were in the process of rebuilding their sim. At the first interview she felt the stress of being a person well known in Second Life, that her behaviour and relationships were under scrutiny, and that people wished to exploit her. By the time of

the second interview, she had concluded that none of that mattered, and she would conduct herself just as she wished, without concern for others' opinions.

Participant "LE" came to the virtual world after a friend had told her about an online place where people lived other lives. By the time of the first interview, she had developed some inworld building and creative skills, making clothes and art, and had begun a private detective agency in Second Life, its purpose being to uncover deception undertaken by people using alts. At the time she felt addicted to Second Life, spending many hours a day in the virtual world. Some of the time was spent with her Second Life female partner: at the time, one of the purposes of the virtual world was to explore aspects of her sexuality. At the second interview she revealed that she was generally unhappy during that first interview, since she had discovered her Second Life partner had several alts, and felt she could not trust her. Shortly after the interview she ceased the partnership, and despite deciding to forgo relationships in the future, embarked on another relationship, but with a woman in whom she felt she could place her trust. During the interim she had begun developing graphic design skills in the physical world, and had taken steps to manage her time in the virtual world much more effectively. While comfortable and happy in her relationship, she had no plans to translate it to the physical world, since she and her partner lived in different countries and her view was that relationships in Second Life were ultimately destined to fail.

Participant "LM" was a relative newcomer to Second Life on first meeting, having been a user for just under three months. Her inauguration into the virtual world was intense, and in the period up to the first interview, she had spent many hours exploring, making friends, engaging in sexual activities, and generally trying to make the most of her experience. In terms of her avatar appearance, she purposefully created a curvaceous "overweight" avatar, reflective of her appearance in the physical world, and was in the process of developing a club and escort agency in Second Life that emphasised "curvy" women. At the second interview she revealed that the club lasted for over a year, and through which she had made several close friendships. Some of her relationships had crossed into "real life", and she had travelled abroad to visit one of her partners and his family. She had experienced one very emotionally intense relationship in Second Life, which was characterised by possessiveness and jealousy on the both parts, which she eventually ceased since she felt unable to cope with the strength of emotion. At second tranche, Second Life was losing its charm for her: she had taken classes in the virtual world, wanting to develop social and creative skills, which she now felt she had.

Participant "MT" learned about Second Life on an online forum and joined it at a time when her computer was not technically capable of providing an optimum delivery

of the virtual world. Hence, for a long time she focused on developing friendships, until eventually she was able to explore other aspects of Second Life. By first tranche, she had been a user for over two years, and had developed a number of avatars representing herself at different ages, as well as owning a themed nightclub. She openly admitted at the time that her "real life" was non-existent, and spent most of it caring for her husband and elderly mother, so Second Life provided alternative lifestyles for her. In the interim between interviews, she engaged in a relationship with a woman in Second Life for several months, but during that time and subsequently, the virtual world began to lose some of its appeal: at the time of the second interview, she often felt at a loss as what to do there. The virtual world had helped her realise aspects of personality, including her sexuality; however, she was still in need of an alternative to her physical world life, and it appeared that the virtual world was not necessarily fulfilling that need.

Participant "PS" was a computer technician in the physical world at the time of the first interview, and a long time user of the Internet and the ARPANet that preceded it. In the physical world "PS" was male, but in Second Life was represented as a female in many forms, including human adult, elf child, and wolf. Initially her involvement in Second Life was due to technical interest, but she soon began exploring aspects of the virtual world, including dating, Role Play and creativity. In the physical world, she was disabled, and while sometimes she represented her disability in Second Life, often she did not. In the period between interviews, she became a "househusband" in the physical world, caring for her family. By second tranche, she had become heavily involved in the NCI group in Second Life assisting new users, and more involved in activism in the physical world, using her Second Life identity in a number of online fora. She believed her time in Second Life had helped develop her confidence and ability to express her views, particularly since her role as a "househusband" was largely unheard of (nor acceptable) in the region in which she lived.

Finally, participant "SF" was introduced to Second Life via a business magazine article. Upon joining the virtual world, she soon became involved in creation, scripting, and taking classes, and by the first interview helped new users through the NCI group. At the initial meeting she described how Second Life gave her access to discussion and intellectual stimulation she couldn't have in the physical world. She was married in the physical world, and while she had unsuccessfully tried to encourage her husband to become a Second Life user, she used an alt to enjoy a close platonic relationship with another male resident. By the time of the second interview, her marriage was under a lot of strain, due to problems with the economy and the business they ran in the physical world. She found solace with her friends in Second Life, some of whom she

had gone on to meet in the physical world, and her male companion in the virtual world was particularly supportive.

8.5. Thematic Analyses: a review of common themes in the experience of Self in Second Life at first and second tranche

This section provides a summary of the themes emerging from the analysis of data from the two tranches of research.

8.5.1. An overview of the findings at first and second tranche

First tranche findings are detailed in Evans (2011), provided in the Appendix. The analysis reveals 75 Basic Themes which can be clustered into 14 Organising Themes, and four Global Themes. The Global Theme **"The Second Life Experience"** concerns how aspects of Second Life influence the sense of Self in the virtual world. A key aspect of this theme is the extent to which Second Life is a "game"; while some participants did engage in Role Play, or play games within the virtual world, the main sentiment was that there are ***"real people behind the avatar"***. The Global Theme **"The Real Life – Second Life Relation"** concerns participants' views and experiences of how the physical and virtual worlds compared to one another, and any influences between them. While it was generally believed there is a separation between the physical and virtual worlds, and that "First Life" takes priority over Second Life, Second Life is compulsive, meaning it is sometimes difficult to balance with the physical world. However, there were also positive benefits to the virtual world, with participants describing how it helped them cope with and overcome physical world sickness and disability, to improve personal skills, and explore new attitudes and behaviour patterns. The **"Relationships with Others"** Global Theme encapsulates the range of relationships, and the role of them and social interactions in the experience of the Self in Second Life. Despite the risks from anonymity, participants had formed close friendships, and familial and sexual relationships, and experienced intense "real life" emotions, all of which were seen as a valuable aspect of Second Life. The final Global Theme **"The Second Life Self"** relates specifically to the experience of being a person in Second Life, in particular the experience of using an avatar, the degree of stability and change in the virtual world, and the extent to which there is similarity

between the person participants felt themselves to be in Second Life compared to "real life". Participants' experience was typified by ***change, evolution and exploration***; in particular, the ability to create a number of avatars, allowed them to explore aspects of themselves not possible in the physical world, such as another gender. Even at this earlier time-point, the range of experiences participants had led them to feel they had evolved, not just in the virtual world but the physical also; in this sense many participants felt their time in Second Life had a sense of history.

From the second research tranche emerges 96 Basic Themes, which can be clustered into 21 Organising Themes and four Global Themes. The Global Theme **"The Second Life Experience"** represents perceptions of Second Life and the experience of using it, including its purpose, lessons learnt from using it and the extent to which participants continue to use the virtual world two years after the first tranche. **"Second Life in a Wider Context"** is concerned with how the virtual world compares and contrasts with the physical world and other virtual worlds, and the role it plays in relation to those worlds. The Global Theme **"Relationships with Others"** concerns aspects of relationships and interactions with other users, including how they compare to those in the physical world and the extent to which the outcome of relationships is negative as well as positive. **"The Self in Virtual Worlds"** comprises themes reflecting the experience of being a person in Second Life, including the use of avatars, the characteristics of being a Second Life user, the experience of changing over time, and having responsibility for the outcomes that occur in the virtual world.

Figure 8.1 provides overviews of Organising Themes by Global Theme at both tranches, indicating there are both similarities and differences in the structure and content of the themes to emerge. In particular, while two of the Global Themes are concerned with similar topics (experience of Second Life and relationships with others), the remaining two indicate a broadening in how experience of Second Life and the Self are considered over time (from Second Life in comparison to "real life" to its location in multiple environments, and from the experience of Self as mediated by an avatar to the experience of Self in virtual realms generally). These are fully compared and contrasted in the following Section 8.6. The remainder of this section provides detail of the second tranche findings.

Figure 8.1. Overview comparison of Organising Themes by Global Theme and number of Basic Themes by Organising Theme, for the first and second tranches.

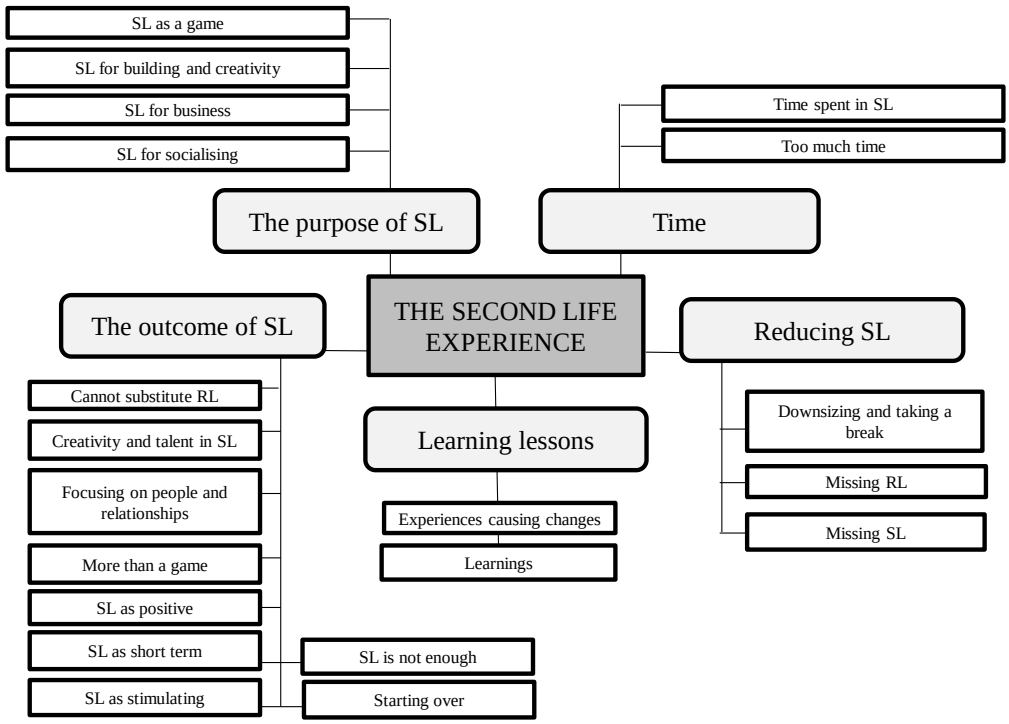
First tranche			**Second tranche**		
Global Theme	Organising Theme	No. of Basic Themes	Global Theme	Organising Theme	No. of Basic Themes
The Second Life Experience	Introduction to Second Life	5	The Second Life Experience	Learning lessons	2
	Second Life as a game	4		Reducing Second Life	3
	Second Life as a place for activities	3		The outcome of Second Life	9
	Socialisation	6		The purpose of Second Life	4
				Time	2
The Real Life – Second Life Relation	Real Life – Second Life division	9	Second Life in a Wider Context	Evolution	6
	Real Life – Second Life mutual influences	5		Real Life – Second Life relation	6
	Real Life – Second Life time relation	5		Second Life as private space	3
	Second Life as a place in its own right	3		Second Life as separate	6
				Transferences	6
				Virtual worlds	6
Relationships with Others	Everyday relationships	4	Relationships with Others	Aspects of Second Life relationships	10
	Intimate relationships	6		Interacting with others	5
	Social interaction	3		Negative experience	4
The Second Life Self	Avatar and Real Life Self relations	8	The Self in Virtual Worlds	Being your own person	4
	Real Life v Second Life Self relationship	6		Consistency of Self	3
	Stability and instability of Second Life Self	8		Developing Self	4
				Representation and behaviour	6
				The avatar	6

8.5.2. Thematic Analyses and networks summarised by Global Theme at second tranche

8.5.2.1. The Second Life Experience

Figure 8.2 illustrates the Thematic Network that represents the Global Theme of "The Second Life Experience". This theme comprises **participant perceptions of using the virtual world** and their opinions of it.

Figure 8.2. The Thematic Network that represents "The Second Life Experience" Global Theme, and the Organising and corresponding Basic Themes that constitute it.



One aspect of the Theme concerns **the ways in which participants use Second Life**. While all of them spend time socialising when in the virtual world, some build and create, and others run businesses. One of the participants offers insight into how the users of Second Life potentially vary, in that the virtual world is not all things to all people, but some things to all people. There is a particular distinction between "fun users" and "professional users":

> When I'm introducing someone new to SL, or describing it. I find myself pointing out there seem to be two general classifications of users... those who are primarily in it for "fun" (however they choose to define that), and those who are in it for professional reasons (training, education, research, sales, RL-to-SL business) … I find that the majority of "fun" users have no idea how much training, education, and RL business happens here,

> and that the majority of "professional" users have either explored and backed away from the "fun" side, or have not even explored it. (EZ)

The research also reveals the **conclusions** that participants draw after using the virtual world for a significant amount of time. For the participants, the outcomes of Second Life can be positive, albeit tempered by their experience:

> I just think SL is a positive experience for anyone willing to try it. All won't like it but I still think it's amazing. (CK2)

Interactions with, and the qualities of, the other users are seen as being integral to what is best about the virtual world and keeps them returning to it. The virtual world offers the opportunity to release the creativity and talent of its users, and to have stimulating interactions with others that would not otherwise be possible. Despite the positive experiences, Second Life appears to fall short. It is seen as not being a substitute for, or any better than, "real life" and ultimately experiences in the physical world are more satisfying:

> *So what was it like meeting your friends in RL? …* I want to live near them. I would like to be around them so much more. *Is sl not enough?* I returned to college last spring because of their encouragement. No. In SL we can support with words. There is no ability to help when needed. Have the social interactions that are so important in daily life. *Have you always felt this way?* I think so, yes. I love to be with people, to talk face to face with an intelligent, thoughtful person ... (SF)

These positive outcomes and shortcomings can both explain one participant's observation that people do not stay long in Second Life, and another's return following a break from the virtual world:

> I have noticed that not many ppl celebrate 3 year rez days in SL … I make invitations ... special event posters. Not many come for 3 years. Usually one or two. (LE)

> *So when you were away from sl did you miss it?* I missed [the sim I owned]. *What about it did you miss?* That it was mine, and that it was very beautiful, and that [my partner] and I had made it together out of a shared dream that we had. And I missed the old, good friends. *What brought you back?* I guess the desire to start over again … (FW)

Indeed several of the participants have reduced usage of, taken breaks from, or even left Second Life, in the period between research tranches. One reason for this is the realisation that "real life" needs attention. This came to one user following a decision to end a Second Life relationship that gave her a sense of entrapment, coupled with a fear that life was progressing in the physical world without her paying attention to it:

> I'm definitely more focussed on RL than I was. I think mainly because I started to realise that I could play in SL and on the Internet in general for the whole week, and ... real time didn't stop. Sounds obvious but SL can feel timeless. It's that odd thing about hanging out in virtual worlds. *Did anything particular happen to make you realise that RL carried on?* Probably just having less free time, I think. And looking back at that relationship, and how long it had been going on, and all the changes in his life and mine in that time ... I think I got afraid that I'd be 50 or 60 and still feel trapped. Then I think I got to thinking about the rest of my life and what I'd miss if I didn't pay attention … (CK)

Another recurring theme among participants' perceptions of Second Life is that of **time**, how much of it is spent in the virtual world, and the extent to which that time

may be “too much”. One of the participants describes how her usage of Second Life has varied, in particular how she felt compelled to use it so much when she first joined that she eventually decided to adhere to a strict schedule, and did not experiment with other virtual worlds in order to avoid similar compulsion elsewhere:

> I was in SL wayyy too much … too often. So I’ve cut back … I’m on a strict schedule. *What is the schedule?* I come online an hour or so in the mornings..while having coffee ... check my mail and IMs … then back at noon SL time for 3 hours, Monday through Friday. Then no more than 4 hours per day ... Saturday and Sunday. I always plan in RL to schedule my time to do something away from home.
>
> …
>
> *Did you ever try any other virtual worlds?* I have thought about it … and even searched a few out. But then when it came to actually logging into one of them … I refused to do it. *Why is that?* I remember how it was in the beginning of SL, and I don’t want to get that way again in any place. *Being obsessed?* Very addicting. Yes. (LE)

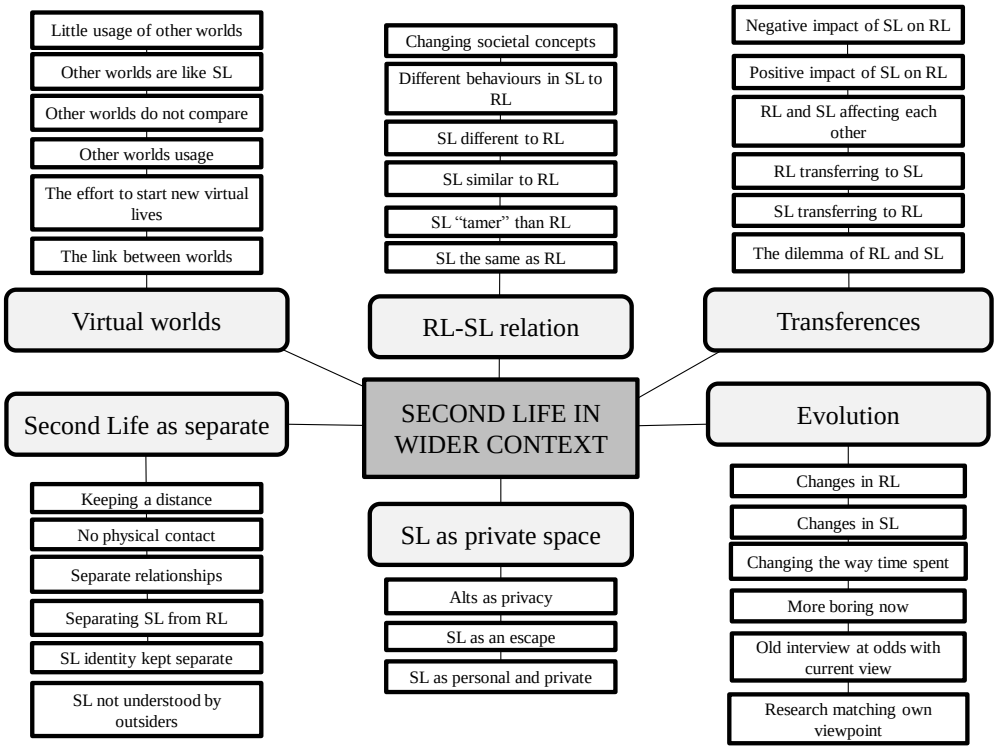
This Global Theme also concerns the extent to which participants feel experience in Second Life changes the person, causes them to **learn** something about themselves or other people, or alter their behaviour, in ways applicable to both the virtual and the physical world. While one participant recognises a change between the two research tranches in the extent to which she exercises more caution in relationships, another has become more confident in herself, her emotions and values, while a third feels she has more understanding of others’ hidden motivations and circumstances:

> Yes definitely I protect myself more, I do not give my trust so easily now. SL and RL have become more of a joining. but only with those that have gained my entire trust. (AM)
>
> But I think I've learned a lot about me during this experience. I know it’s ok to be me and feel what I feel ... who or what can deny what t I feel? No one. I do all in respectful ways and try not to hurt anyone. (CK2)
>
> I think that being in SL made me realise that there are so many aspects of personality that people in RL don’t reveal ... So you have to make an effort to get to those parts of someone in RL. So maybe I am more understanding that people are not what you see at "face value" … DT)

8.5.2.2. Second Life in Wider Context

Figure 8.3 illustrates the Thematic Network that represents the Global Theme of “Second Life in Wider Context”. This theme indicates how **life in the virtual world is situated in an overall context of virtual environment usage and physical world life**.

Figure 8.3. The Thematic Network that represents "Second Life in Wider Context" Global Theme, and the Organising and corresponding Basic Themes that constitute it.



One context for Second Life is the extent to which users also engage with **other virtual environments**. For various reasons some participants have used, or have considered using, other virtual worlds. This is partly due to disenchantment with Second Life, and how it is managed by Linden Labs, although still enjoying aspects of using it, as explained by one participant:

> I feel poorly about what LL is doing about SL ... But I do like the community. And I am looking around at other grids … Inworldz looks to be the best. *What is good about it?* It is formed with the expressed intent to sustain a community. And my explorations there bear it out. (PS)

However, generally participants continue to favour, and use, Second Life. Some users are not in the market for a new virtual world experience, or feel alternative worlds are no better than Second Life. Others feel the upheaval and effort required to begin a new "virtual life" is prohibitive, despite its attraction:

> I logged into Inworldz ... Seemed a great deal like "old" SL. But then I realized ... how much time and effort it would take to put together my avi … so I suppose if something happens to SL ... I will make the effort ... (DT)

Another context for Second Life is "real life". Participants make **comparisons between the virtual and physical worlds**. They speak of the similarities between the worlds, particularly in terms of the kind of person and personality they believe themselves to be and possess. Moreover, they also speak of how they treat the two

forms of "life", Second and "real", as interchangeable and how aspects of them are the same:

> *Is RL and SL all mixed up then, all part of the same thing?* Well for me it is part of SL, as I am me here as I am in RL as my self and my morals etc. (AM)
>
> It's funny that SL is mimicking RL in that I have to continually learn new technology here, too! So I can fight with MS Office 2010 in RL and SL version 2 in here at the same time! LOL … I try to be very real and open in all. I find myself referencing SL friends as often as I do RL friends. (EZ)

However, they also speak of the differences between the two lives, in particular the kind of behaviour, or forms of relationships, they might engage in whilst being in the virtual world:

> It was insane, that's why I began to run away from it, he would just mentally drain me. It began fight after fight after tension and tension. Over just stupid items and I was not used to this in RL. (LM)

The research also indicates the extent to which there are **mutual influences** between Second Life and "real life". Some participants have experienced a change in the way they approach situations in the physical world thanks to comparable experiences within Second Life. As one participant explains:

> *Does any of how you are in SL spill over into your RL anyway? Are you becoming more like [EZ]?* Yes, and I intentionally try to be more like [EZ], but these days that's more social than work-related. For instance... Last night I met someone for a first date through a dating service. In RL in that situation, I tend to be more self-conscious, quieter, and nervous. [EZ] takes it all in [her] stride, assuming all is well and will be fun or interesting. As I was driving to meet, I was literally contemplating the differences in how I approach that situation differently between SL and RL, and decided intentionally be more like [EZ] (assume it will be fun and interesting, rather than being nervous, etc.). *And did you?* So when we met, I gave him a great big smile (as though we'd known each other for years) and then a big hug ... The difference was amazing. Instead of starting off with both of us awkward, etc., it set the tone for a comfortable conversation and fun time. (EZ)

In the participant experience there is a potential for some of these transferences from Second Life to have a negative impact on, and cause dilemmas in, "real life". This particularly applies to the extent to which relationships conducted within the virtual world affect relationships in the physical world:

> But we both still have other friends and interests .. though he spends more time here than I do. *How does this all interrelate with RL?* He is married, I am married and we have talked about the fact that in RL ... this just wouldn't happen. And we both agree that RL comes first ... so somehow ... we just have set the same expectations ... and at times, we even talk about if that works, and the sort of moral dilemma it poses … *So are you in a dilemma sometimes?* Somewhat ... because as we have discussed before ... emotions from RL and emotions from SL are all within me :-) (DT)

However, despite the co-relationship between the physical and virtual worlds, there are ways in which participants see them as being separate or have sought to keep them separate. While some discuss the separation in the lives they lead, and relationships they have, in both worlds, others allude to how interactions in Second Life are separated from "real life" because they are not physical:

> *Does your husband know you come to SL?* Yup ... but to him it is a computer game ... and he knows I have friends and that somehow we all play the game ... and he knows I am happy when I have my "game time". So as long as that time ... doesn't get in the way of RL things ... he is OK with it. (DT)
>
> I had the club up for a year got to know some of our clients real lives and people behind the avatars, developed a sense of "caring" for them. *Why do you put caring in inverted commas?* Well virtually caring. *Is it different?* I can't physical care, such as giving them a hug or a pat on the back … if something bad had arisen in their lives. (LM)

Indeed, separation from the physical world is an important aspect of Second Life, since for some users it is seen as a **"private space"**, as well as an escape from responsibilities of the physical world:

> I don't know, sometimes I want to tell [my RL partner about SL], but I think I don't because this is mine and I don't need to share my every single waking moment with anyone. (CK2)

A final context for Second Life is the **evolution** that has occurred both in the physical world and the virtual world itself. In terms of "real life" changes, participants particularly discuss how they feel aspects of their personality in the physical world have changed, sometimes in response to Second Life experience:

> [The transcript of the first tranche interview] definitely felt like a younger "me".. and yes ... which I guess means plenty of other interviewees had similar experiences and thoughts. *What about it felt younger?* I think when I read it back, I felt that I'd moved beyond some of the problems I'd been having, in SL, with my relationship ... and also RL has changed, and real me too … I hope I've improved heheh.. (CK)

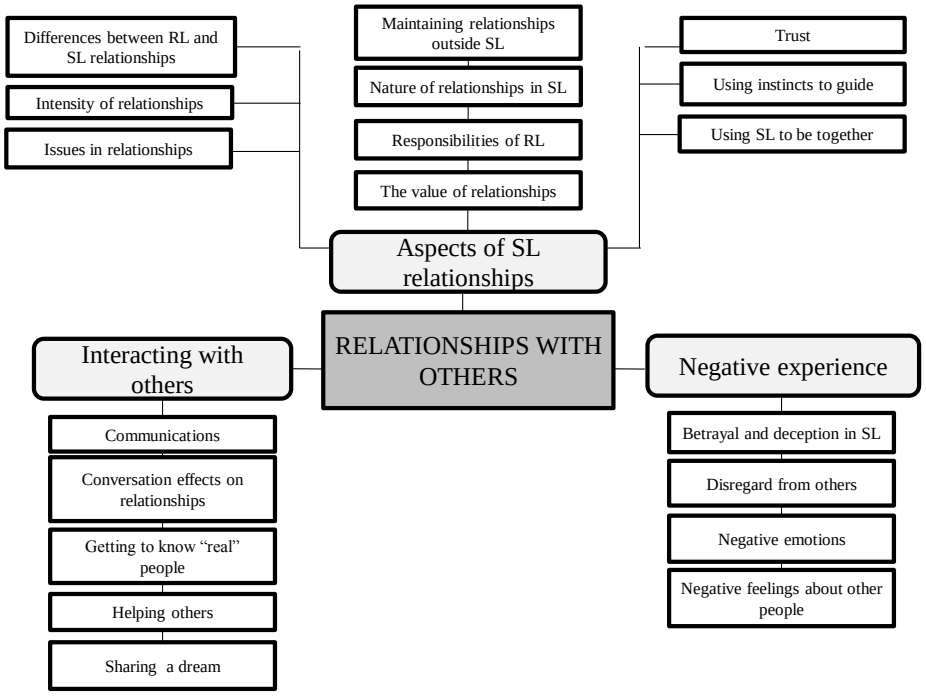
In terms of changes with respect to Second Life, participants speak both of changes to the virtual world platform, the composition of its users, and in particular their degree of engagement with it:

> Some of the changes that have been made to the platform and the policies regarding education and non-profits have had an impact. *Can you explain a bit more?* Platform changes: new capabilities and better streaming (in some cases) have opened up a broader variety of tools that can be used for education. Policies: leadership changes and the policy to no longer reduce fees for education and non-profits had a large impact. (EZ)
>
> For years ago and earlier, SL newbies were largely from a set of identifiable classifications. And their initial behaviour ... there starting points ... were largely defined by these. As time and marketing has passed, we are seeing a more homogenous pool of people coming in. Sort of a general consumer. *What were the previous identifiable classifications do you think?* Role players, in general these folks came with an Idea of who they wanted to be. Gamers, who spent their initial time trying to figure out how to win SL. The online community seeking to communicate. And regular consumers, that were beginning to be marketed to. Each group had, and has, its own formation here. But it has been overwhelmed by the latter now. (PS)
>
> Everything was new, wanted to learn, explore, buy and sell, everything. I thought of it as a creative outlet, to be able to meet other creatives and do things amazingly, with some we had collaborated with others not so much just casual conversations. Everything at that time I wanted to learn and do. Now that think that I have experienced majority of what I was searching in the first place, it seemed to get boring. (LM)

8.5.2.3. Relationships with Others

Figure 8.4 illustrates the Thematic Network for the "Relationships with Others" Global Theme. This reflects **aspects of participants' experience of Self in Second Life over time that emerges through relationships and interactions with other users**.

Figure 8.4. The Thematic Network that represents "Relationships with Others" Global Theme, and the Organising and corresponding Basic Themes that constitute it.



Socialising, interacting, and communicating with other users in Second Life, is a recurring theme. One participant speaks in particular about how during her time in the virtual world, she has become close to other users, as well as realising the role of helping and supporting them in various aspects of their Second and "First" lives, and of being respectful of other users generally in all interactions:

> I had the club up for a year got to know some of our clients real lives and people behind the avatars, developed a sense of "caring" for them … There's also this self-governance you develop. *Can you explain?* Having manners is one, standing up for the new guys. I guess reaction I would have in real life in an environment where there needed to be someone to stand up and say something … *When you said your approach to relationships and developing relationships has changed, how did you mean?* Taking them time out to get to know this person, it is selective and a few have gotten over to my RL, but knowing about them, their real lives, their lives here why they play, share advice and ideas among each other. (LM)

However, the dependence on text for interaction can become tiresome for users, as discussed with one participant:

> I have a good friend in SL … whom I met soon after she came to SL. She had her own theories about people who meet in [SL], having weddings and partnerships in SL, then taking it to RL. She didn't understand it. She eventually met a guy from SL herself, and now they are together in RL. We chatted not long ago about this issue too. She said ... "In RL ... it's nice that we can just 'be together'... we can sit … watch a movie … we don't HAVE to talk ..." … meaning allll the time. But in SL, you really have to fill the time up with constant talking/typing … Eventually ... you run out of things to talk about, and it's annoying to type allll the time. (LE)

This highlights how **relationships** experienced and conducted within Second Life have a number of aspects that are particular to them. In the first instance, they are highly valued because of the access to support they provide, despite the nature of Second Life meaning they can be transitory. For example, one of the participants speaks of how her support network enables her to cope with difficulties in her marriage and business in the physical world, while another discusses how she has a close circle of friends, despite the comings and goings of users over the years:

> We opened a business, it has created massive stress on our marriage …rather than file bankruptcy … It is a horrible climate to open a business. We have done very well, but not well enough ... He is stressing heavily, and I am fairly calm, and it upsets him. I have a support network, and he does not ... *So your involvement with SL is helping your RL in effect by giving you access to support?* Absolutely. (SF)

> I just passed my 3 year anniversary in SL. There are countless "friends" (acquaintances) who have come and gone. But I'm surprised to say that there are a handful who remain, and we are quite close. (EZ)

Moreover, while friendships and romantic relationships begin within Second Life they may become very emotionally intense, as experienced by one of the participants:

> ... it became too deep for me. I even got scared … We talked every day, Skype and SL, and I mean 10 hours, or more per day. We started a few social sites in RL, different online applications, finding ways to create a business of our creative backgrounds. We got to know each other's lives, we spoke about previous relationships and future ones ... just clicked so well, that I became really intrigued with him and wanted him a part of my RL world. My emotions began to run me ... I wanted every part of him for myself, we ran a social network for Second Life together and other women avatars would attempt to befriend or try to get to know him, I made sure it was sabotaged in a way. (LM)

Romantic relationships within Second Life have a particular complexion, since they are often conducted between people who are partnered in the physical world. While partners in Second Life can experience deep feelings for one another, with dreams or expectations of being together in the physical world, sometimes these are sacrificed for the sake of loved ones in "real life", as one participant describes:

> I "dissolved" my SL partnership recently, after telling him via text that I'd realised I wasn't going to leave my husband or my daughter ever, as he'd been holding on to a dream that one day we'd be together in RL. I realised it a while ago but ... when you barely get to talk to someone it's hard to leave them … *In the past did you ever think you might be with him in RL?* I thought so ... years ago. It didn't take long to dawn on me though that it wasn't going to happen. Then he and his wife has a baby, and ... well. I would never choose to leave my kid, and I would never do anything that would result in him losing his. (CK)

Indeed, one participant is of the opinion that relationships conducted only in Second Life are destined to fail, despite being in one herself, because of the limited amount of time available to be spent together:

> I know eventually we will break up. A friend of mine said once "there is only one outcome to relationships in sl never brought into RL ... and end" ... It seems most relationships in sl last 2 years ... if they are good ones. I think she and I will always be friends ... I don't see it ending badly, but it will end. *What is it that makes it inevitable do you think ...?* Well ... time I think. SL is not "24 hours". We are all limited to the amount of time in SL. Also … with that ... it's how much time to be together ... meaning per day. (LE)

In some cases Second Life goes beyond being a platform upon which to interact with other users; in some cases it can become the only means by which to meet friends from the physical world, or conversely in others become just one of many ways by which friends originally made in the virtual world stay connected. One participant has experienced both situations, with Second Life becoming more important in one relationship and less in others:

> My co-worker who started me here ... He has had surgery in RL and been away from the corporate world for 2 months. The only way I've been able to contact him and offer support/encouragement is through SL
>
> …
>
> I find that those friends I meet who actually turn into relationships greater than an occasional "hello" and a short chat, tend to grow beyond SL. It's an interesting phenomenon. We use avatars to visually represent ourselves, and somehow, the visual representation is very important. But as a relationship grows, we eventually take it to a different platform... Skype, Yahoo Messenger, etc. Early on, the ability to interact visually by dancing, playing En Garde, etc., is important in laying the ground work, but once there is a deeper connection, that is no longer as important. The ability to connect more easily and at any time supersedes it. (EZ)

Ultimately, the anonymous nature of Second Life means that relationships and friendships conducted in the virtual world are between people who, unless they eventually meet and spend extensive time with each other in the physical world, know very little about each other's "real life" circumstances. From their experience, users develop instincts for who they can trust and hence with whom they can share aspects of their physical and virtual lives:

> I remember the state of mind I was in at the time [of the first interview]. I was in a partnership ...my first in SL, and it was a horrible experience ... It was a trust issue, but the real problem was me ... and that I continued in it … I felt a lot of mind games were being played ... Since being in that first partnership ... I always had a "gut" feeling, and in chatting with ppl now … there is something about that in SL, if you listen to your instincts, you are usually right. I think SL has taught me to listen to my instincts more about people, not only in SL ... but RL too. (LE)

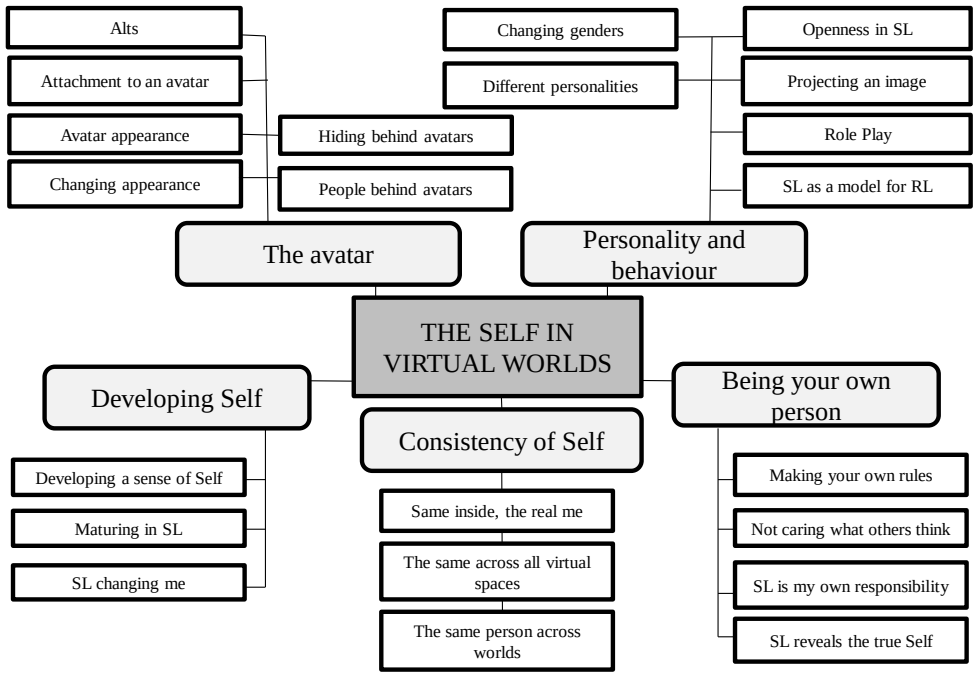
This indicates that relationships with others in Second Life have a **negative** complexion for some of the participants. For some, such poor experiences with other users began almost immediately upon their joining. These experiences mean that some participants have over their time in the virtual world developed a relatively low opinion of how other users behave generally, as one explains:

> In SL, there are a lot of idiots in here. Idiots, psychos and just plain mean people. *Do you feel more strongly about that than you used to?* Yes. LMAO cause the longer I'm in here the more of them I meet. (FW)

8.5.2.4. The Self in Virtual Worlds

Figure 8.5 illustrates the Thematic Network for "The Self in Virtual Worlds" Global Theme. This theme concerns the **various aspects of being a person in virtual worlds, and how that relates to experience in the physical world**.

Figure 8.5. The Thematic Network that represents "The Self in Virtual Worlds" Global Theme, and the Organising and corresponding Basic Themes that constitute it.



A recurring theme with respect to Self in virtual worlds is its representation, in terms of **the avatar, personality characteristics and behaviour**. In the first instance, several participants have a number of avatars which they use for various reasons. Some use them in Role Play, others as a way of meeting friends from the physical world while keeping other aspects of Second Life private, or to start new "Second Lives" when problems have occurred, with only minimal contact with friends already made in the virtual world. Often only one avatar is used regularly to avoid maintaining separate lives, inventories and "Friend Lists":

> I don't use my alts anymore either. *Why is that?* I made one that is associated with my RL identity, for meeting RL friends in SL if they felt like trying it ... but the alts I was playing around on before ... I think I just got fed up having several inventories, logging in and out, separate friend lists. (CK)

Avatar appearance is carefully thought through, particularly with multiple avatars, or with beginning with a new avatar, as one participant who began a new account and avatar explains:

> I basically make them similar to my real self, may be just the eyes or the chin. *So how is [AM] different to the [other avatars]? S*he is more homely if that makes sense. And she is a fae. LOL. *LOL. When you say homely, can you explain?* OK, let me think how to explain this. Sexy in a girl next door look … *Was [AM] always like this?* Only difference is she had short blond hair. *But same shape and looks?* Yes. *What made you decide to change your style with [her]?* ... Well I started a new SL life so to speak and did not want to carry on anything that was like the others. (AM)

Users become attached to their avatars, and sometimes feel reluctant to change them or to use another avatar for any reason. One participant explains how the attachment grows through all the experiences in Second Life that the avatar was a part of:

> [LE] seems to be a part of me … the me in RL. I've even tried alts, but there is something [LE] has which they don't … I have learned a great deal from her… or "with" her... because of her. "[LE] was there"… during the bad experiences in SL. "She" came through it all. So emotionally I'm attached to her. (LE)

Another aspect of the Self in virtual worlds is the sense of **development** that one experiences over time. One participant had been using Second Life for a little under three months at the first tranche, and so at the second tranche had experienced a significant transformation from being a new user to an experienced one, between the two interviews. During the course of her second interview, she explains how she changed from "goofing off" all the time, to developing close friendships and exploiting the creative and intellectual opportunities available in Second Life:

> I calmed down in ways let's put that way. I grew three great close friendships in SL … I still go to the naked beach and goof off. *LOL*. I still do things in that aspect of being funny. But relations and developing relationships have changed. Exploring and taking advantage on some of the creative, language, culture, and open discussion classes on here … *What would the [LM] of two years ago think of the [LM] of today?* Matured in sense of you can choose to make this a game or a learning interactive experience about the world, creativity, and having common causes. She chose to gain more from SL more substance. (LM)

However, despite such changes, and the potential for using multiple avatars in virtual worlds and environments, there are ways in which aspects of the Self remain **consistent**. Participants tend to be consistent in how they represent themselves across virtual environments insomuch that some of them seek to use the same account names and identifiers irrespective of the platform they are using. One describes how she created her identity for use in Second Life, but how she is now beginning to use it across a range of environments, even to the point of replacing her physical world identity where this is already used:

> I managed to get the same name … So you are you wherever? … And in this case, I say that [PS] has moved to Inworldz. I have a larger virtual life. [PS] was created when I logged into SL. But there is some other presence. For example, [PS] has e-mail ... I'm on a few web forums as [PS] … And to be honest, I've considered replacing all my RL name usage with [PS].

In terms of consistency, some feel the person they are in the physical world is the same as in the virtual environments and worlds that they use, while others recognise that although they are the same person in both the physical and virtual worlds, the virtual does enable experimentation and Role Play with their identity and behaviour:

> *Do you think you are the same person in RL as in SL?* To an extent, sometimes I like the role play being a different character (furry) or just being me with an ability to go a little wild in SL. (LM)

In this vein, one participant describes how although there have been changes in her behaviour in Second Life, she continues to be the same person she always was, but with aspects of her personality that are more apparent in the virtual world:

> *Do you think you have changed much since we did [the first interview]?* Hmmmm. Behaviourally probably, but my insides haven't changed. *What kind of things might have changed behaviourally?* Well, I had a love affair with a woman here for about 6 months *…Are you the same person in SL as in RL?* Yes and no. SL brings out parts of me. But those parts it brings out are the real me. *Are they parts that don't necessarily get brought out in RL?* Yes, mostly due to it not being possible for one reason or another. (MT)

A final aspect of Self emphasised by participants is the extent to which experience of **being a person in Second Life is the responsibility and at the discretion of the user**. As one participant observes in reference to a relationship in Second Life within which she had experienced problems, she is responsible for her own happiness in the virtual world:

> Eventually I realised I can only be responsible for my own happiness ... (CK)

In this sense Second Life is unlike a conventional game where the outcomes of experience are within parameters set externally; users make their own rules by which they engage, as described by one participant: :

> I think that SL is a rich, full experience, that is hard to explain in a short essay. Of course, like anything, it's what you make it. I set my rules for myself early, and have abided by those rules about 90 per cent. (SF)

For some participants this means learning not to be concerned about the opinions of others. This is a point made by one participant who has sometimes in the past taken others' viewpoints into account when considering her actions and behaviour:

> For one thing it is great to be back! I've always loved SL itself. I am not caring so much this time around if people like me or not. They can either like me or not like me. I'm not gonna worry so much about how I behave just so I don't offend a potential future customer or whatever you wanna call them … *Do you care less about what others might think or say back?* Oh yeah. LOL. *Why's that do you think? LOL.* Because the people in SL - most of them I will never see again so it doesn't matter … (FW)

Ultimately, there is a view of Second Life that in all a person might do in the virtual world, how they conduct and represent themselves, the "true self" is always revealed, the intentions and motivations that one has cannot be hidden, as explained by one participant:

> *When you say true self, what do you mean?* As they are in RL here they play games and think others are easily fooled and yes some are easily fooled. *Do you think the person in RL is the true self then?* Some yes, the players no. You get players even in RL but they are recognisable by being seen as their real selves but here they think the av is a hiding place. *Because they can hide their RL identity?* Yes or they think they can ... only our features can be hidden behind the av, our intentions cannot … (AM)

8.6. Comparison of data periods

This section provides a comparative analysis of the themes arising from the two data periods, using the consideration factors suggested by Farrall (2006), and summarised in Section 8.3, as a guideline. Observation and analysis contained in the section is based on the Thematic Networks and their supporting evidence, together with the biographies outlined in Section 8.4. There is an initial comparison of Global and Organising Themes at each tranche, which serves to highlight change in experience and trajectory of Virtual Self. This is followed by analysis of the occurrences, "tipping points" and contexts of change, using specific participant examples, and concludes with an analysis of the meanings of such change to participants.

8.6.1. Differences in findings

Rather than being constituted by difference only, there are both continuities and discontinuities in the research findings. In particular, these occur at the levels of Global and Organising Themes.

8.6.1.1. Continuities and discontinuities in Global Themes

At the level of Global Themes, there are continuities in that there are themes concerned with the characteristics of Second Life and the experience of using it ("The Second Life Experience"), and the relationships and interactions that users have with each other ("Relationships with Others"). In terms of discontinuities, while the themes in the first tranche are concerned with how experiences in Second Life and the physical world are related ("The Real Life – Second Life Relation"), those in the second are also concerned with the role of Second Life in the users' overall experience and how it compares to other virtual worlds ("Second Life in a Wider Context"). Moreover, while themes in the first tranche concern the Self as experienced in Second Life and mediated by the avatar ("The Second Life Self"), the second tranche is also concerned

with how Self is experienced in the wider overall context of the virtual and the physical worlds ("The Self in Virtual Worlds").

8.6.1.2. Discontinuities in Organising Themes

The Organising Themes are more generally characterised by discontinuity, even within Global Themes that appear to have similar concerns.

The Global Theme "The Second Life Experience", while ostensibly concerned with the characteristics of being a Second Life user, is comprised of different themes at each tranche. At first tranche the themes emphasise joining Second Life, adapting to its social world, the types of activity conducted within it, and the extent to which it is a conventional game. At the second tranche, while findings continue to reveal participants' ***perceptions of its purpose*** for them (e.g. the extent to which it is a conventional game), it also reveals their ***perceptions of its outcomes*** (e.g. the extent to which it is a positive experience, and the types of experience it allows), the impact of these outcomes, and the "life lessons" the virtual world facilitates. There are also concerns regarding time spent in Second Life and their experiences of reducing their usage of the virtual world (reflected in Organising Theme "Reducing SL").

At both tranches, the Global Theme "Relationships with Others" is concerned with aspects of users' relationships and interactions with others, but with differing complexions. At the first tranche, the themes focus on the nature of communication in Second Life, the range and form of relationships possible, and the intensity and depth of emotion and attachment, emphasising the types of communication and connection it allows (i.e. anonymous, text-based, with individuals from across the world). At the second tranche, while participants continue to reflect on the nature of interaction in Second Life, the themes reflect more ***the role and purpose of interaction*** in the experience of Second Life (e.g. getting to know and respecting other users) as well as its shortcomings (e.g. the extent to which dependence on "talking" shapes the outcome of interactions). Aspects of the range and form of relationship continue to be evident in themes at second tranche that are at the first (e.g. Second Life can be used to be present with people participants care about, the dependency on trust), as well as recognition of the characteristics of relationships that are peculiar to the virtual world less apparent previously (e.g. while relationships are intense they are often transitory). More negative aspects of relationships are also in evidence at second tranche, including the untrustworthy nature of other users (e.g. the betrayal of friends, deception by other users) and participants' perceptions of circumstances at the time of the initial interview (e.g. fear of other users and circumstances in Second Life).

In some ways there are similarities between the Organising Themes constituting the Global Themes "The Real Life – Second Life Relation" at first tranche and "Second Life in a Wider Context" at the second. Aspects of the relationship between Second Life and the physical world emerge in both Global Themes, including the extent to which aspects of the virtual world are similar or different to the physical (i.e. "RL-SL relation" at the second tranche), and the mutual influences and transferences that occur between them (i.e. "Transferences" at second tranche). However, at second tranche there are themes that are also concerned with ***the position of experiences in Second Life in relation to the physical world*** (i.e. "Second Life as separate" and "SL as private space"), and how it compares with experience of other virtual worlds ("Virtual worlds").

Again, there are some aspects of similarity between the Global Theme "The Second Life Self" at first tranche, and "The Self in Virtual Worlds" at second. Both contain themes relating to avatars (e.g. appearance and the relationship with them), and the degree of stability and consistency of Self that is experienced (e.g. the extent to which their sense of Self is the same in Second Life and the physical world). However, at second tranche there are differences among these similar themes, in particular the attachment they feel for their avatars, together with its role and the inclusion of other virtual worlds and environments in their sense of consistency. There are also differences in Organising Themes between tranches, in particular a greater emphasis on ***the self-development that has occurred over time and the role of Second Life in that development*** ("Developing Self").

There are some themes that emerge at second tranche that specifically indicate ***the meaning to participants of the differences and change that occur over time***. These include reflection on the changes in Second Life and their involvement with it ("Evolution" in the "Second Life in Wider Context" Global Theme), as well as their own role in changes to their experience ("Being your own person" in "The Self in Virtual Worlds" Global Theme).

8.6.2. Differences: occurrences, "tipping points", and context

Differences that occur between the tranches occur at particular times, coinciding with particular experiences, in particular contexts. Given the limit to two data sets, the identification of timing, experience and context coinciding with the difference occurrence depends on interpretation of the retrospective information elicited from interview data.

8.6.2.1. The experience of using Second Life

There are two aspects of difference between tranches with respect to the experience of using Second Life: an extension in the range and impact of outcomes the usage of the virtual world can result in; increased concerns regarding the time spent in the virtual world, together with reduced usage of it. These are both changes that occur as time using the virtual world increases, and the range of experiences widens.

At the second tranche, outcomes are both positive and negative. Positively for example, some participants see Second Life as encouraging creativity and the opportunity for stimulating social interaction. In the case of participant "LE", the ability to quickly develop creative ideas in Second Life encouraged her to continue to use the virtual world, and to realise she had a talent that could be used in the physical world. Meanwhile "DT" used Second Life to conduct virtual relationships and have social interactions more "intellectually stimulating" and of a different complexion than she had in the physical world. Negatively, some participants found that any creative outlet Second Life provided declined over time, and its social stimulation inferior to that in the physical world. For example, participant "MT" had used the virtual world for creative purposes, creating avatars and sims that reflected her interests, as well as engaging in close friendships and relationships, but eventually found it no longer as fulfilling as it once was, nor a substitute for anything that was lacking in her "real life". Meanwhile "SF" had developed friendships that had translated into the physical world, with her interactions in the virtual world feeling inferior because they lacked the ability to give physical support and the emotional and intellectual stimulation provided in face-to-face settings. These examples indicate that ***the realisation of the extent and impact of outcomes correlates with interactions and relationships with other users***. In the case of "LE" the realisation that her Second Life partner was deceiving her encouraged her to develop a private detective agency in the virtual world and her creative skills, which in turn encouraged her to be more creative in her "real life". For "DT", the discovery of Second Life enabled her to experience social stimulation lacking in her physical world relationship, but as her inworld friends ceased using the virtual world, she spent all her time with one particular male friend with whom she had a romantic relationship. "MT" had used Second Life to address issues she had with her past, explore her sexuality, develop her interest in history through Role Play, and to find fulfilment that she felt was lacking in the physical world, but it seemed that after her Second Life partnership ended and as time progressed, the virtual world became as routine, unfulfilling and unstimulating as her "real life". Finally, while intellectual and social stimulation was always important to "SF", when she began experiencing

physical world problems she depended upon her Second Life friends for emotional support, particularly since she was able to meet them in the physical world.

The second tranche revealed that participants had struggled with managing how much time they spent using the virtual world, and with the notion that they spent too much time using it, while others had stopped using it altogether, at least for a period. For example, both "LE" and "CK" had reduced the time they placed on Second Life; in particular "LE" had reduced her time in Second Life from six hours per weekday at first tranche to four at second, and from ten hours at weekends to nil, while "CK" spent more time maintaining her "real life". Their cases indicate that some users experience a realisation that ***the scale of time spent using Second Life is detrimental to their lives in the physical world***. In the case of "LE", although at first tranche she had a sense that the virtual world was "addicting", this was accompanied by another sense that absence from it would mean she would "miss" something; however, when she ended a psychologically harmful relationships in Second Life and began one more beneficial, she began realising that nothing would be "missed". For "CK", her change in emphasis from focusing on her Second Life to focusing on her "real life" followed a realisation that her long term virtual relationship could never change, while her family in the physical world were progressing without her "paying attention". These examples indicate that while users may always be conscious of the detriment their time using the virtual world is causing to their lives and experience in the physical world, ***the impetus to actually reduce the time may only occur after a series of events incur them to realise the full scale and impact of the detriment***.

8.6.2.2. Relationships and interactions with other users

The main aspects of difference between tranches with respect to relationships and interactions with others reflect: a change from emphasising the form of interaction to its function i.e. its purpose and shortcomings; an increased recognition of relationship characteristics that are peculiar to Second Life; an increased recognition of the untrustworthy nature of relationships and interactions with other users.

With respect to the change between tranches in emphasis from interaction form to function in Second Life, some participants experienced a transformation, ***from interacting for its own sake to recognising its role in connecting with other users, and the role of its format in shaping their outcome***. For example, as a newer user of Second Life participant "LM" spent an intensive period learning how to use the virtual world, meeting other users and interacting with them in all manner of wide-ranging and relatively random ways, before deciding to focus on increasing the quality of her

interactions, and applying ethical principles of respect and mutual understanding to them. Meanwhile "LE" had a number of close relationships in Second Life, but realised that since communication in the virtual world was highly dependent on the written or spoken word, boredom can quickly set in as no other form or variety of interaction is possible. These examples show how with ***intensive or extensive communication and interaction in the virtual world, users become aware of its possibilities and limitations***. In the case of "LM" her approach to interaction in Second Life changed when she began a club through which she met and became close to other users, developing an awareness that other people with "real lives" existed "behind the avatars" and hence that she should apply an ethical approach to her communications with them. For "LE" the realisation of how the format of Second Life interactions can impact on their outcome coincided with the realisation that her relationship at the time of second tranche could never translate to the physical world and would always be limited by what was possible in the virtual world.

In terms of characteristics particular to relationships in Second Life that are more evident at second tranche, is the observation that while they may be intense they are comparatively short-lived. In the case of platonic friendships for example, "EZ" had gained and lost a great many friends during her time of using the virtual world (3 years at second tranche), and while she had close friendships, she described these as "a handful". In the case of romantic relationships, "LM" experienced a very emotionally intense relationship in the period between tranches, which had ended after a relatively short time. Meanwhile, despite being in a relationship with another Second Life user, "LE" was of the opinion that relationships conducted only in the virtual world are destined to end. The realisation that friendships born in Second Life are not necessarily long-lived is one that occurs over time and gained through the experience of gaining and losing friendships and virtual partners. For "EZ" it is the acknowledgement that her "Friend List" was full of the names of people who she no longer saw online, necessitating their deletion from that list. In the case of "LM", the intense nature of relationships and their impact became evident in her relationship when she felt that her emotions were in control of how she behaved; hence, she ended the relationship to avoid such intensity and lack of self-control. In the case of "LE", the potential futility of relationships in Second Life coincided with her realisation of the impact of the virtual world interaction format on interactions, and that the relationship she had at the time of the second tranche would always be limited by what was possible in the virtual world.

The untrustworthy nature of relationships and interactions with other users was a theme evident at first tranche, since even at the earlier stage in their experience,

participants were cognisant of user anonymity and the potential for deception, particularly through alts. At second tranche, other forms of untrustworthiness were evident. In the case of "AM", she described how other users could be "game players" trying to, and sometimes succeeding in "fooling" others with their lies, while "FW" had developed a low opinion of other users, describing them as "idiots". In both their cases, between the tranches, "AM" and "FW" had experienced deception and treachery by other Second Life users that they had felt close to. "AM" had experienced deception from one of her Second Life partners, who had used alts to conduct multiple relationships in the virtual world without her knowledge, as well as seeking a relationship in the physical world with her while simultaneously having relationships with others; these experiences led her to be generally mistrustful. "FW" had become involved in an inworld strategy game, but found that one of her close friends who also played the game had been motivated by potential success to stealing her assets; this experience had led her to believe that other users were generally not worth respecting.

8.6.2.3. Second Life situated in the wider context of physical and virtual worlds

At first tranche themes emphasised the relationship between Second Life and the physical world. The differences at second tranche reflect an extension on how this relationship is considered, as well as any relationship with other virtual worlds. Hence, they concern ***the position of experiences in Second Life in relation to the physical world, and the comparison of it with other virtual worlds***.

With respect to the position of experience in relation to the physical world, there was emphasis at second tranche on how Second Life is seen as separate to, and private from, "real life". In the case of "DT", she engaged in a number of romantic relationships in Second Life with all interactions kept within the virtual world, and hence separate from the physical world, outside of her physical world husband's knowledge. "CK2" also had a romantic relationship in Second Life, whilst having a partner in the physical world, but chose not to tell him about her involvement with the virtual world. "CK" had recently ended a long term relationship within Second Life, but consistently kept the nature of it private from her physical world husband. Any circumstances and motivations for keeping a separation between the virtual and the physical realms may differ according to user. In the case of "DT", the separation between worlds was so that she could spend time doing something she enjoyed with people she enjoyed the company of, without the commitment she had in "real life". The motive for "CK2" was to create a private space that was for her alone, that she did not feel obliged to share with her physical world partner. For "CK", her motive for

privacy was to avoid causing her physical world husband hurt. These cases also indicate that ***despite any separation that may be erected between worlds by users, there continues to be an overflow of emotions between worlds***; any emotions experienced with or for other users continue to be felt in the physical world.

With respect to other virtual worlds, between tranches some participants had considered using other virtual worlds. While some found them more favourable than Second Life, other participants found them to be almost inferior versions of the original. Other participants had not considered other virtual worlds, nor intended to. For example, both "PS" and "DT" had explored using the virtual world Inworldz, but had come to different conclusions: "PS" favoured it for its intent to build a community of virtual world users, while "DT" saw it as being like the old "SL".[34] Meanwhile "LM" did not intend using any other world. The opinion that participants held of other virtual worlds in relation to Second Life depended on their context: while "PS" was dissatisfied with how Linden Labs ran Second Life, "DT" had committed time and effort into her avatar and lifestyle within Second Life which she did not want to jettison, and "LM" felt that no other world could offer her anything more than Second Life was able to.

8.6.2.4. The Self as experienced in virtual worlds

At first tranche themes emphasised the experience of Self in Second Life, while themes at second tranche indicate how over time the experience both consolidates, and extends to other realms beyond the one specific virtual world. In particular, they indicate the extent to which ***the sense of Self continues to be consistent or develop over time***.

With respect to the extent to which the sense of Self that participants experience is consistent, the first tranche revealed how Second Life is used to explore aspects of identity, particularly through a range of avatars constructed for whatever purpose the participant has in mind, ***while continuing to have a sense of being the same person in both the virtual and physical worlds***. At the second tranche, for some participants this exploration and consistency had expanded to include other virtual environments, while for others the sense of Self had stabilised to become one form of experience and expression. In the case of "PS" at first tranche, she used avatars in Second Life employing a range of different forms, particularly using avatars that were physically able female in appearance, while actually being a male with a disability in the physical

[34] Inworldz is one of a number of virtual worlds that uses software similar to that originally used by Linden Labs for creating Second Life, but eventually made open source. Other examples include Active Worlds and Avination.

world. At second tranche, she was using her “PS” identity across a range of environments, in particular the Inworldz virtual world and a range of activism online fora. Meanwhile, while “LE” continued to focus on Second Life, experimenting with using alts and amending her avatar appearance, she always returned to the same avatar and appearance. This indicates creating and using an avatar and engaging in the form of identity and Self-expression it allows, can enable users to realise how ***the avatar may act as a springboard to broader experience, or a secure base from which to engage in that experience***. For “PS”, the ability to explore being another gender unencumbered by “real life” disability gave her a sense of identity such that she believed she could become involved with issues and controversies that affected the physical world, and courage to adopt a ”househusband” physical world role relatively unknown in the region she lived. On the other hand, “LE” continued to focus on Second Life, feeling that through all her experiences in Second Life, good and bad, her avatar “LE” had been with her through them all; hence she was attached to her avatar, believing that if she changed or replaced it, some aspect of this experience would be lost.

In terms of a sense of development in experience of Self, by time of first tranche some participants had already gained a sense that they had changed and developed during their time of using Second Life, while others with less time were still assessing the opportunities that the virtual world allowed. At second tranche the sense of development was more overt, given the passage of time and the varied degree of continued virtual world usage participants engaged in. In the case of “LM”, at first tranche she was a relatively new user, having been in an intense period of learning how to use the virtual world, as well as meeting and having fun with others; by second tranche, she had developed a business, developed close friendships that had moved into the physical world, and while she still had fun, chose to use the virtual world for learning and more “substantial” activities. Conversely “BM” had focused all her efforts into one aspect of Second Life, and had created a range of avatars that represented characters in Role Play; besides the development of these avatars, her activities in Second Life were very similar at both tranches. This indicates that the role of virtual worlds in self-development depends on the extent to which a user engages with the world, and the purposes for which it is used.

8.6.3. The meaning of change to participants

The meaning that such changes have for those who experience them emerges through the Thematic Analysis of data at second tranche.

Some of the meaning that change holds relates to its impact on experiences of the Self, and ***the extent to which changes in experience reflect on the sense of being a person***. A sense of evolution became evident to participants at second tranche, when they compared the transcript of their first interview to their experience since. For example, in the Global Theme "Second Life in Wider Context", participant "CK" describes how at the time of the first interview she felt like a younger person, and since then has dealt with some of the problems she experienced, as well as becoming more confident in herself when she uses the virtual world. However, while some participants experienced change in their activities between tranches, they are keen to highlight the ***continuity in who they were***; for example in the Global Theme "The Self in Virtual Worlds", "MT" explains while she has "probably" changed in her behaviour, her "insides haven't changed". This highlights a tendency among participants to see a constant and "true" Self that cannot be created but is reified "inside" the body.

Another aspect relating to the meaning of change is ***the extent to which changes occur within the agency of the user***. The Global Theme "The Self in Virtual Worlds" highlights how participants see their experience as being their own responsibility. Some of the agency is because Second Life is a self-determined world with no externally set game parameters; for example, participant "SF" describes how Second Life is a full experience, the rules by which she engages with it set by herself. Other participants describe how they are responsible for their own happiness in the virtual world, or that an over reliance on other users' feedback can hamper their own ability to maximise their potential in the virtual world. For example, "CK" describes how she ended her long-standing relationship in Second Life when she realised that the unhappiness she felt was her own responsibility to rectify, while "FW" outlined how she was determined not to be concerned about other users' opinions of her and what she did, a factor in her taking a previous absence from Second Life.

Meaning is also ascribed by the ***absence of change***. For some users there comes a realisation that their usage of Second Life runs its course. For example, participant "LM" was a relatively new user of the virtual world at the first tranche, and it felt full of possibility. At the second tranche, as indicated in the "Second Life in Wider Context" Global Theme, she describes how she had achieved the majority of her objectives for using the virtual world, and had begun re-emphasising physical world opportunities and outlets for experience. This indicates that once participants see

Second Life as exhausted of opportunity, lacking change or development, it will appear less interesting, and they will cease to use it. In this sense, absence of change indicates that it is time to leave.

8.7. Summary of the analysis and relating it to the research question

This section provides a description of the findings in terms of how they relate to the question:

> What is the trajectory of experience of the Virtual Self in virtual worlds?

The analysis indicates that a person's experience of Self in relation to Second Life is comprised of similarity and difference over points in time. While there is similarity insomuch that a user continues to experience relationships with other users and the virtual world itself, difference occurs as the prominent themes in these relationships change to reflect greater awareness of the range of potential outcomes that are possible and can occur in the virtual world and with other users. Difference also occurs as the person's focus on the context for Second Life and experience of Self expands from the virtual world itself, to consider other virtual worlds and environments. This indicates ***a trajectory for the Self in Second Life, as the accumulation of activity and interactions with others and the virtual world provides a well of experience and knowledge for the user to draw upon, hence shaping their perceptions of the virtual world, other users, and themselves***. However, this experience is not uniform across all Second Life users with a single trajectory applying to all, but is a number of potential pathways. The purpose of this section is to use the analysis hitherto to outline these potential trajectories, and from them develop a schema that indicates typical trajectories of experience.

8.7.1. Potential trajectories of the experience of Self in virtual worlds

The potential range of trajectories of Self as experienced in virtual worlds can be illuminated by using the Global Themes that emerged from both research tranches as a framework for the comparison of data analysis, combined with participant biographies.

8.7.1.1. The experience of using Second Life

The experience of using Second Life has a number of potential phases that a user experiences.

Introduction to Second Life

The majority of users are introduced to Second Life as a means for relaxation and for personal use. Some are introduced by friends who are already using it, others by means of media coverage, e.g. news articles, books, and online gaming discussion fora. A minority of users are introduced in a professional capacity, being required by their employers to use virtual worlds as a meeting place, or for training purposes. Not all those who create a Second Life account continue to use the virtual world for any length of time; some experience problems with using the software or abuse from other others, which discourages them from continuing to use, or cease using if the professional necessity ends. After a period, some of those who ceased using may later create another account (or revive their old account) and begin using again; some of those using for professional reasons may begin using it in their own personal time, and hence continue using it, even in absence of professional necessity.

Learning to be a Second Life user

Some new users of the virtual world are experienced users of computers (or even experienced computer programmers), other video environments (e.g. chat rooms, other virtual worlds) or gaming, and are interested in its potential for programming, interaction with other users, or Role Play. Consequently, their period of learning how to use the programme may be relatively short, as they focus on using the virtual world for the purposes they have in mind. Other new users are relative novices, with little or no experience of virtual environments or gaming. These novice users may take longer to learn how to use the virtual world and to identify how they want to use it, not just in terms of learning how to use the interface, adjusting to communicating by text and manipulating avatars, but also understanding the range of activities possible, and exploring the virtual world itself. To assist learning, users may seek the help of others, whether they are users they are already acquainted with in the physical world and other virtual environments, users they meet once they begin using the virtual world, or contacts made when approaching one of the help groups in Second Life.

Becoming immersed, and developing interests in Second Life

During the period of learning the Second Life programme, users begin the process of immersion into the world. This includes exploring the range of activities available, investigating the extent to which groups exist that coincide with their own interests, exploring the virtual world, and meeting other people. The period of immersion can be an intense one, and users may spend many hours over a relatively short period learning the programme, and engaging in activities that appear fresh and new to them.

As users become immersed they begin to develop the purposes for which they wish to use Second Life. As outlined in Chapter 5, there are a range of activities that users engage in, and it is during this phase of immersion that these patterns of activity begin to happen for the first time. For some users, interaction with others is the sole or main purpose that they use it for, and so spend the majority of the time socialising at inworld venues (e.g. dance clubs), meeting friends, or engaging in Role Play or sexual activities. Other users may realise the virtual world's creative potential, and learn how to build and landscape, or create objects and clothing for use in Second Life. Alternatively, they may realise they have a physical world skill or interest that can be used for financial gain in the virtual world (e.g. DJing or photography), or develop an entrepreneurial spirit by creating a venue for others to use. While some users spent much of their time engaging in any of these forms of activity, all will spend at least a proportion of it interacting with others.

As users become immersed in the virtual world, it can become demanding on their time. The amount of time they spend using it can grow significantly, with interests, obligations and relationships they have in the physical world being given short shrift, in the short term at least, as the virtual world becomes increasingly interesting and attractive to them.

Consolidation, and finding the personal purpose for Second Life

In the period following immersion, there is a period of consolidation as users develop what they believe the purpose that Second Life serves for them, as well as when and how they will use it. By this time, users have had sufficient experience to realise the extent of opportunity in Second Life, if that opportunity is something they wish or are able to exploit, and the range of ways in which others use the virtual world. This is the period in which long term usage habits, and their approach in interaction with others, is established. By now, users have also realised the complexities of Second Life, insomuch that ***it is not a conventional "game" with externally set rules and goals, but***

that it is a place where other people are present and enacting their own goals and objectives.

Managing time

As highlighted, the period of immersion can be a period of intense activity, and hence demanding on users' time; with the period of consolidation, users find the need to adjust and manage the amount of time they spend in the virtual world. There are several reasons for the impetus to manage time, and the same user can experience one or more of these reasons. For some users "real life" is naturally busy, and their Second Life usage is confined to whenever they have time; for these, usage is relatively consistent over time, depending on their availability to use. For some users the realisation of the demands and responsibilities of "real life" force them to reduce the amount of time they spend, or cease using altogether. For others as they become more involved in the virtual world, they realise its potential to take a significant amount of their free time, and decide that it should be managed so they can engage in all the activities in the physical world that they want, and need, to do. Other users will experience a "crisis" that forces them to re-evaluate the time they spend using the virtual world: they may experience a "burn out" whereby the intense usage of Second Life for many hours a day makes them feel unwell and unable to continue; or an event in the virtual or physical world may occur, for example the break-up of a relationship. Related to this, there are some users for whom an evaluation of the outcomes of Second Life occurs, with the evaluation causing them to reduce time, or cease using the virtual world completely. While the impetus to manage time is evident during the period of consolidation, it can happen earlier or later, depending on circumstance and the occurrence of events in the physical or virtual world.

Evaluating the outcomes of Second Life

As indicated, some users' motives for managing the time they spend in Second Life follows an evaluation of the outcomes that the virtual world has had for them. This evaluation occurs on a periodic basis, depending on events and experiences in both the physical and virtual world. For some users there is a recognition of the benefits that Second Life has for them and what it enables them to achieve: for example, the ability to use it as a creative outlet, or as a way of maintaining a social life in a manner less possible in the physical world. Others may decide they have experienced everything within the virtual world that they originally sought, that it no longer holds any interest

for them, or no longer offers the benefits it once did. In some cases, there is a change in opinion of Second Life, that rather than being "better" than "real life", it is in fact inferior; this change in opinion may not change usage of Second Life *per se*, but give usage the context of "it is what it is".

Consistent, declining, and cyclical patterns of usage

Following periods of consolidation, time management and assessment, patterns of usage vary. Having established their approach to the virtual world, some users are consistent in their usage and continue in the same manner for an extended period of time, potentially years. Some decline in their usage over a period of time, eventually ceasing altogether. Others engage in a cyclical pattern of immersion, consolidation, time management and assessment, which can take a number of forms. After a period of assessment, some users take a break from Second Life, before beginning to use it in fresh ways, developing new interests in the virtual world, or making new acquaintances, and engage in a pattern of immersion and consolidation similar to when they first joined the virtual world. Some users may take the opportunity to create a new avatar in order to create a fresh start and patterns of behaviour, unencumbered by past experiences. Other users may on occasion learn new skills or develop new interests within Second Life, without taking a break, and hence find that the virtual world holds a new attraction and purpose of them. At any point, and after any number of such cycles, a user may make the decision to cease using.

8.7.1.2. Relationships and interactions with other users

Learning to interact

New users of Second Life learn how to use the interface in order to interact with others. There are a number of levels to the learning that occurs. In the first instance, while voice communication using a microphone is presently possible in the virtual world, textual communication is most common, and is available privately between individuals, within ad hoc groups of individuals and special interest groups, and in "open chat" where anyone within proximity to the avatar can read what is typed; in order to communicate with others new users must learn how to use the interface at these different levels. New users also need to learn the habitual ways in which communication in the virtual world occurs, e.g. the typical shorthand expressions and "gestures" that are used, as well as the potential of animations available for interactions

with others e.g. hugs. There are some commonalities between Second Life and other virtual environments in the forms of communication that occur (e.g. some shorthand expressions), despite the differences in physical interface between them. Hence, while new users who are "novices" may take longer to become accustomed to interacting in Second Life, those who are familiar with using other environments may learn relatively quickly.

Becoming immersed, and developing relationships in Second Life

One aspect of the process of immersion into the virtual world is meeting other users. Those new users with friends already in Second Life, are commonly introduced to their circle of inworld friends, and given advice on how to meet others, popular venues, etc. Other users begin exploring Second Life, moving from sim to sim, and meet residents as they explore. By offering friendship to those they meet, a new user is able to communicate at a later date, since "friends" are able to see when each other is inworld. Some meet through discovering groups that coincide with their own interests, or through discovering venues (e.g. music) that other residents attend. Depending on the amount of time spent using the virtual world, making acquaintances can be frustrating since there are many thousands of users inworld at any one time, all with time schedules and usage habits that differ, meaning that for a period, reacquainting with someone previously met can take time. With continued use, users develop networks of friends through whom they meet others.

As users become immersed, different forms of relationship begin to occur. A users "Friend List" can become extensive, and it is not uncommon for a user to have many friends who they never communicate with, or only communicate with on an occasional basis (e.g. when at the same venue). Nevertheless, within the list of friends, there develops a small number who users would consider to be close friends, with whom they spend a significant proportion of their inworld time. Besides platonic relationships, sexual relationships commonly occur: while some users enter Second Life purposefully seeking a sexual outlet, for many new users the emergence of a sexual aspect to their experience is unexpected but accepted.

This period may also be one of experimentation, discovering the different types of people that use Second Life and experiencing the various forms of relationship. For a proportion of these, the various forms are part of the "fun" of having new experiences, while others treat them more seriously as an intrinsic part of their Second Life experience. Ultimately, ***the existence of relationships cements the user into the***

virtual world, providing reasons and obligations to return on a repeated basis, and facilitating the immersion into it.

Consolidation: establishing interaction and relationship patterns

Following the immersion period, users establish how they choose to interact with others, and the relationship forms they prefer. In the first instance, users develop habits in terms of how they communicate, i.e. their preference for text or the voice facility: for some users text may be the preferred option because they feel more confident in written rather than spoken English, or wish to conceal their physical world gender, for example; others may prefer to use the voice facility, to facilitate easier communication, or to allow greater knowledge of interlocutor physical world identity. Another aspect users develop is what they communicate, in particular the extent to which they will share physical world information. A third aspect is the manner in how they communicate: as users become immersed in the virtual world, they become increasingly aware of the presence of other users "behind the avatar", and hence may decide to always interact in a manner that is considerate and respectful; others may choose to interact as if other avatars and their users are characters in a game, and hence not be especially considerate in interactions. In terms of relationship forms, users establish the extent to which they will develop close friendships ties, including those with romantic or sexual orientation.

Evaluating the characteristics of interaction and relationships in Second Life

One aspect of the consolidation process is the realisation and evaluation of the particular characteristics that interaction and relationships in Second Life have. ***The characteristics of interaction are a function of the technology and interface used to manifest the virtual world, and with experience users become aware of its shortcomings and adept at adapting to them***. The dependence on text can make communication minimal so that not everything is openly said, as it might be in a face-to-face interaction, combined with the omission of "tone of voice"; consequently users become experienced in "reading between the lines", understanding the intent and emotion that another user may be wishing to impart in a few characters. The anonymous nature of interaction in the virtual world can inspire some users to engage in purposefully deceptive practices, e.g. using alternative avatars without others' knowledge, mislead other users into sharing private information, etc.; with time, Second Life users become aware of these risks, and become adept at using strategies

and past experiences to ascertain the degree of honesty with which others are interacting.

During the period of consolidation users also become aware of the characteristics of relationships in Second Life, in both their platonic and non-platonic formats. For some users, experience of their transitory nature (e.g. due to users leaving the world, or through a change of heart regarding the relationship), or the deception made possible by the virtual world's anonymous nature, can act as a deterrent to forming bonds with other users, or at least encourage them to exercise caution with whom they become friends with. Other users experience the emotional intensity of relationships conducted in Second Life due to the high level of communication that occurs in them, but that in romantic relationships can cause them to "burn out"; while some pursue the intensity, others avoid it, either by reducing their emotional commitment to relationships, or by not engaging in them. Finally, while Second Life allows people from across the globe to meet each other, for some users this eventually becomes the source of disappointment, frustration and even pain, since it is unlikely that they will ever be able to be physically proximate to others for whom they care.

Interactions, relationships, and usage in the long term.

In some cases particular experiences of interactions and relationships in Second Life can have a direct influence on its continued usage. Long term relationships and friendships in Second Life act as an incentive to keep using the virtual world, even when other aspects of experience in it have lost their attraction. Conversely, experience of conflict, deception, or failed relationships, can cause some to decide to no longer use the virtual world, or at least take an extended break from it.

8.7.1.3. Second Life situated in the wider context

Learning to be a Second Life user: boundaries between lives

A new user in Second Life establishes the extent to which they will maintain boundaries between the virtual world and "real life". For many users, joining Second Life is a private affair, and they keep information regarding it to a minimum from friends and family in the physical world: some users may discuss a new computer game they have started playing, some tell no one, while other users offer full disclosure and introduce friends or family members soon after joining themselves. Within the virtual world, new users also decide the extent to which they will disclose information

about their “real life” to others inworld. This disclosure has two forms: users can provide information in the “Real Life” section of their profile (or anywhere else on the profile, should they choose), or they can be open with other residents they meet. Many users decide not to share any information publicly, but in private share basic information, such as physical world location, age, or employment.

Becoming immersed, and developing tensions between lives

The period of immersion can be intense and time consuming, as users explore the potential of Second Life, engage in new activities, and spend time with new friends. Some users feel compelled to use the virtual world with increasing frequency, and for increasing periods of time: in some ways, it may be seen as more interesting and enjoyable than activities in the physical world, or even “better” than “real life". As a tension develops, users may find aspects of their “real life” become neglected, or decide to devise time management strategies. Irrespective of how much or little time is spent in Second Life, users believe that “real life comes first”.

Consolidation, and finding the relationship between lives

Following the period of immersion, users become established in their habits and patterns of engaging with Second Life. This includes working through the relationship with their “real lives” that the virtual world has for them. In the first instance, from being a new user with embryonic patterns of disclosure, users adopt established ways in which they will allow information between the physical and virtual worlds to flow; for example, some users will learn that information regarding their “real lives” will be used against them (e.g. they may find themselves “stalked” in the physical world) and hence become more discreet, while others may discover their Second Life friends can be trusted with physical world information, and hence become more trusting. Some realise aspects of their “real lives” benefit from their virtual world involvement; for instance, they may find a hobby or interest they have in “real life” can be experienced in the virtual world (e.g. Role Play of a particular historical period), or that it can help address aspects of “real life” that the user feels is lacking (e.g. alleviate loneliness through a group of close virtual friends). Some find that experiences or events in the physical world directly impact on their “second life”: for example, commitments in “real life” may curtail virtual world usage.

Evaluating the outcomes of Second Life, and expanding virtual horizons

During the periods of immersion and consolidation users assess the relationship between Second Life and their "real life", the degree to which information should be passed between them, the time spent between the two, and the benefits and experience in one that can be passed to the other. Some may consider Second Life has shortcomings that can be addressed elsewhere, and test other virtual worlds or environments alongside or instead of it. Others decide that despite any shortcomings it may have, it serves a valuable role for them, and hence continue to use it, while still seeking to maintain a balance between time spent using the virtual world and activities in the physical world.

Second Life, virtual worlds, and long term relationship with "real life"

One factor in continued usage of Second Life is the extent to which it offers benefits that other virtual worlds or "real life" cannot: if another world is seen to offer benefits that outweigh those from Second Life, users migrate to them; if the superior aspects of physical world experiences outweigh the benefits of virtual worlds, users cease altogether.

8.7.1.4. The Self as experienced in virtual worlds

Learning to be a Second Life user: creating an identity

When a new user creates a Second Life account, they create a name and avatar appearance; once in the virtual world they may choose to change the appearance of the avatar.[35] Through experimentation and the help of others, users learn how to manipulate the avatar (i.e. move around and interact with other avatars), and change its appearance. The initial attitude to the avatar varies across users: some enjoy changing its appearance, shopping for and making clothes; others take a functional approach, seeing it as essentially a method for engaging with the virtual world. During this phase, users also begin to construct their profile.

[35] Chapter 4 provides detailed rationale for name choice and avatar appearance, as well as creating new avatara, as part of the analysis on representation of the Self in virtual worlds.

Becoming immersed, and experiences of Self in Second Life

As users become immersed into Second Life, they experiment with various aspects of the virtual world which have direct impact on their experience of being a person in it, involving appearance, behaviour and personality. In the first instance, they experiment with their avatar appearance: some have an idea of the appearance they would prefer, while others change it often before an appearance they favour emerges. In this way, some users create an avatar that has some resemblance to their appearance in real life or an appearance they would ideally like, while others create an appearance that they find personally attractive. Some users take the opportunity of having a "second life" and experiment in ways they would not necessarily do in the physical world: some engage in new behaviour patterns (e.g. sexual relations with strangers), while others use the avatar to adopt an identity and persona unrelated to that in "real life" (e.g. an avatar that is in a different age group or gender). Some users engage in Role Play, adopting appearances, behaviour, and persona that are consciously performed as part of a fictional or historical setting, while others use their avatar to re-enact aspects of their past "real life" (e.g. using a younger avatar, or role playing scenes from their personal history).

During the immersion phase users also engage in activities that impact less directly on their sense of Self. Second Life offers opportunities for creativity, entrepreneurship, and socialising, that may be less possible in users' "real lives", enabling them to realise aspects of themselves not possible hitherto; in this way, users may realise they are capable architects, landscapers or designers, successful marketeers, or businesspeople, for example.

Consolidation, and awareness of Self in Second Life

In the period following that of immersion, there is a period where users become aware of the range of opportunities possible in Second Life, and also the extent to which it can be used to be used to explore aspects of Self less possible otherwise. While some users maintain focus on one avatar, sometimes consolidation can involve the creation of new accounts and new avatars; while this can be because of a desire to "start again", or to experience another "second life" that existing virtual friends know nothing about, it can also be to explore other aspects of their personality (e.g. experiencing another gender or age group), or to engage in some specific activity (e.g. Role Play). Even if employing "alts", during the phase of consolidation users develop an attachment to

their avatars: ***amendments to avatar appearance are not taken lightly since it has become their representative and medium for the experiences in Second Life***.

Evaluating the outcomes of Second Life: its role in experience of Self

The consolidation phase includes an assessment of the extent to which Second Life have been beneficial to the user's experience of Self. In some cases this concerns the experience within the virtual world itself, so that some users will realise that while some aspects of their experience in Second Life provide a positive sense of Self and hence will be maintained (e.g. educational activities), others will feel less satisfying and hence be reduced (e.g. acting in disrespectful ways towards other users). In other cases the assessment concerns the extent to which experiences in the virtual world have had repercussions for experience of Self in the physical world, which can be built upon further; for example, users may find that self-confidence gained through discovering hidden talents and personal attributes in Second Life, may translate into greater confidence in "real life". Some feel that the association with the Second Life avatar identity is so positive, that it is used in other virtual worlds and virtual environments (e.g. social networking sites), while others feel that it is so negative they want to try again with a new avatar, consider other virtual worlds, or cease using virtual worlds altogether. With time, users may come to the realisation that however they express themselves, in whatever form, ***they are responsible for their own experience in the virtual world***; if they have any dissatisfactions in that experience they have the power to change it, or end it.

The Self beyond virtual worlds

While some users continue to use Second Life, and potentially other virtual worlds, over many years, there may come a period where they feel that the reasons they have always used it no longer exist; in particular, Second Life has ceased to benefit their sense of Self in the ways it once did, and no longer holds interest for them. In some cases, users may take the experiences gained in the virtual world and use them to improve the experience of "real life" (e.g. use a skill learned in Second Life in the physical world). At this point, users may cease to use to Second Life and virtual worlds, or minimise its usage only in order to remain in contact with others.

8.7.2. A Matrix of Player Timelines

From these potential trajectories it is possible to construct a tabulation of the phases of experience of Self with respect to Second Life and in relation the four salient themes of that experience that emerged through the Thematic Analysis, i.e. a **Matrix of Player Timelines** as illustrated in Figure 8.6. The phases are: introduction, learning, immersion, consolidation, evaluation, long term. The four salient themes are: experience of SL; relationships and interactions; SL in context; experience of Self. In the Matrix, each phase-theme intersection is presented as an arrangement of cells containing a summary of ***potential outcomes*** at that phase in relation to that theme. Where the edges of adjoining cells (e.g. [a] and [b]) are a triple line, this represents a "causal" relationship between adjacent cells (if [a] then [b]); where they are double-lined, this represents an "alternative" relationship ([a] and/or [b]). For example, the "Learning - Relationships and interactions" intersection within the Matrix signifies that at the learning phase, users learn how to interact using text, voice, and non-verbal methods. The objective of the Matrix of Player Timelines is to present the possible outcomes for any one user at any stage of their lifetime within the virtual world, and is designed to be read across left to right, or vertically top to bottom, depending on the phase-theme intersection(s) of interest.

It is important to note that while the Matrix is intended to suggest a timeline of experience of the Self in Second Life, there is no indication for the expected length of time of each phase or overall Second Life usage. This is because the length of each phase depends on the circumstances, characteristics, and approach of the individual users: some users progress through the phases relatively quickly, while others use Second Life more sporadically. Moreover, a person's experience can terminate at any time, before completing all phases; this may because circumstances in the physical world may curtail their usage (e.g. their computer or Internet connection provides a poor experience, so they choose to cease usage, or "real life" commitments prevent them from using), or at any point they may decide their experience of the virtual world does not match expectation, so they choose to cease using.

Figure 8.6. A Matrix of Player Timelines, indicating outcomes at each phase-theme intersection.

Key: Boundary denoted by triple line indicates "causal" relationship between adjoining cells. Boundary denoted by a double line indicates "alternative" relationship between adjoining cells.

Phase-Theme	**Introduction**			**Learning**			**Immersion**		**Consolidation**		**Evaluation**			**Long term**	
Experience of SL	Personal	Friends already using	Novice user	Novice in virtual sphere	Long period of learning	Sole learner	Investigation of opportun-ities	Time consuming	Long term habits in and purpose of SL	Interaction Creation Special interest	Positive outcomes	Time manage-ment	More to learn	Consistent usage	
									Interaction approach	Respect Manipulation				Declining usage	
	Profess-ional	No friends using	Exper-ienced virtual/ previous SL user	Exper-ienced virtual sphere user	Short period of learning	Assist from others	Develop purpose	Interaction	New account	Fresh start New opportunities	Negative outcomes	Cease usage	SL served its purpose	Break and begin again	New avatar New cycle
								Creation	Time management	RL demands RL/SL balance				Cease usage	
								Special interest		Crisis Evaluation					
Relationships and interactions				Interaction		Text Voice Non-verbal	Meeting others	No friends already using	Long term habits in communication and relationship formats		Interaction as function of technology and Interface			Benefit of close relation-ships	Contin-ued usage
								Friends already using			Miscommun-ication	Clarification Conflict			
							Develop network	Non-comm	Communication format	Voice Text	Omissions in communication	Read between the lines			
								Occasional	Communication content	RL info Non-RL info	Anonymity	Deception Detection strategies		Detriment of conflict, deception, relat-ionship failure	Cease usage
								Regular	Interaction approach	Respect Manipulation	Transitory relationships	Avoid Caution			
							Platonic	Close friends	Relationship format	Non-platonic	Emotional intensity	Pursue Burn out			
								Familial		Platonic		Reduce commitment			
							Non-platonic	Purposeful		Close friends	Connect distant friends	Satisfaction			
								Unexpected		Familial		Disappointment			

Phase-Theme	**Introduction**	**Learning**		**Immersion**			**Consolidation**		**Evaluation**			**Long term**	
SL in context		Establish RL/SL boundaries	SL private from RL	Investigation of opportun-ities	Time consuming		Establish perspective on RL-SL relationship		Positive outcomes	Infor-mation flow between worlds	Continued usage	SL benefits > negatives	Contin-ued usage
					Time management		Manage SL-RL information flow	Total privacy				SL detrim-ents > positives	Cease usage
								Discretion					
								Share with friends					
			RL private from SL	Increased usage	Neglect RL		RL benefits from SL	Hobby/ special interest	Negative outcomes	Experience flow between worlds	Use other virtual environme nts	Other worlds > SL	Use other worlds
					SL better than RL			Address RL shortfall				RL benefits-> virtual worlds	Cease virtual worlds
							RL impact on SL	RL commitments	Balance physical/virtual worlds activities				
Experience of Self	Create name	Sole leaner experiment	Manipulate avatar	Experimentation with experience of Self			Explore and establish aspects of Self		Exper-iences of SL on sense of Self	Positive	Increase	SL ceases to add benefit to Self	Cease usage
	Create avatar appearance									Negative	Reduce		
			Change appearance	Avatar appear-ance	Pre-determi ned	Like RL	Single avatar	Attachment to avatar	Reper-cussions on Self in RL	Positive	Increase, build on		Maintain contact with SL friends
						Ideal				Negative	Reduce		
		Assist from others			Exper-iment	Attract-ive	Alts	Fresh start	Positive experience of SL		Expand to other virtual environments		
			Profile construction	Behaviour		Similar to RL		New opportunities					
						Different to RL		Privacy	Negative experience of SL		Begin again		Use SL exper-ience to benefit RL
		Avatar approach	For pleasure	Identity/ persona		Similar to RL		Specific Activity			Use another virtual world		
						Different to RL							
			For function	Indirect influence		Activities that realise aspects of Self					Cease using virtual worlds		
									Outcomes are own responsibility				

8.8. Evaluation of the analysis and discussion of findings

The research here seeks to understand how the experience of Self in Second Life may change over an extended period of time. It indicates that there are a number of salient themes common across experience of Self in the virtual world that transform over the lifetime of a person's usage in ways that can be understood as comprising a number of phases. The findings can be related to existing literature, as well as findings from other aspects of the research programme, in a number of ways.

8.8.1. The Self as reflection on trajectory

Giddens (1990) describes the Self as a "reflexive project", understood by the individual in terms of their own life trajectory. The present research reinforces this notion in relation to a person's experience of Self in relation to virtual worlds. From their first creating a Second Life account, users are in an ongoing process of reflection, assessing their experience in the virtual world, and making adjustments to it. During the earlier phases of their experience they continually consider the possibilities in the virtual world (amending the avatar, engaging in particular activities, etc.) that are then assessed, and then incorporated (or not) into the continued experience. Later on, when usage habits are more established, there is a further reflection on the outcomes of their virtual world experience, and the extent to which it offers benefits to their experience of Self. Through this process, there develops a sense of the Self across the physical and virtual realms, that has emerged through their usage of Second Life. Indeed, it could be argued that the present research became incorporated into the reflexive process of its participants: an intrinsic element of its approach was to allow participants to reflect on their "second lives", comparing viewpoints and experiences at two time-points, and articulating their trajectory and the impact of the virtual world usage on their experience of Self.

For these reasons, the present research also supports the other aspects of the research programme that concern representation and processes of the Self, described in Chapters 4 and 6, and which emphasise the extent to which users reflect on their own experience and actively engage with it; in particular, it highlights the extent to which users perceive their experience as their own responsibility. Contrary to the postmodern view of a passive, technologically-determined, unknowable Self (Gergen, 1991;

Meyrowitz, 1989; Poster, 1990), the picture of the Self painted here is ***a Self that becomes knowable through the active use of technology, and one that becomes only "improved" by experience, good or bad, and from the perspective of the participants is a single "true" Self.***

8.8.2. The Self as multiple trajectories

The multiple nature of Self is well documented in literature, and throughout the findings of this research programme. In literature the multiple nature of Self may be argued to emerge from a variety of contexts by Symbolic Interactionists (e.g. Goffman, 1959) or from the myriad responsibilities, relationships, and roles present in contemporary society by postmodernists (e.g. Poster, 1990). Meanwhile other aspects of the research have demonstrated the multiple character of Self in virtual worlds, through users' simultaneous experiences with multiple avatars and virtual and physical locations for example, as detailed in Chapters 6 and 7. Here, the four salient themes indicate how the Virtual Self emerges not from one trajectory but a number; in particular from the trajectories of virtual world experience, relationships and interactions, the wider context of the virtual world, and the experience of Self in the virtual world. For every individual each trajectory has many potential paths, and the outcome arising in relation to each salient theme indicates the nature of Self experienced by that individual at any given point in their virtual world experience.

The group discussions discussed in Section 3.7 substantiate these findings, by indicating that users themselves are aware of the multiple nature of change in their experience. The excerpt in Figure 8.7 shows how participants readily acknowledge how changes extend to themselves, the Second Life programme, and the purpose, meaning and social structure of the virtual world.

8.8.3. The Self as trajectories of interaction

Both the Symbolic Interaction approaches (e.g. Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1962) and the approaches that emphasise the individual in context (e.g. Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004) highlight the role of interaction in the emergence of Self: while Symbolic Interaction emphasises the interaction between individuals in particular settings, the individual in context approach highlights how Self emerges through interaction with others and the mediation of tools. The research here indicates how the trajectory of the Self

experienced in Second Life emerges through interactions in, and with, the virtual world, on a number of levels. One level concerns the experience of ***interacting with the technology and what it provides***, i.e. the continual process of interacting with the virtual world, learning how to use the programme, what it allows, its benefits and detriments, from which emerges a sense of the Self. Another level concerns the ***interaction between users within the virtual world***, i.e. using the programme to communicate and develop a variety of relationship forms with a range of outcomes, from which emerges an experience of Self in relation to other users. A third level concerns the interactions that occur between experience in Second Life, other virtual environments, and "real life" i.e. ***the continual and evolving flow of information and experience between the range of environments***, from which emerges a sense of Self occurring beyond the confines of Second Life alone. Hence the trajectory of Self emerges from the continual interaction between the user and the virtual world, the user and other users, and the virtual world and other environments.

Figure 8.7. An excerpt from a group discussion, highlighting the multiple nature of change in the experience of Self in virtual worlds.

```
I: do you think SL has changed in the time you have been here?
LE: omg yes
H: not really but I have:)
A: Yes it has
SF: yes
SF: a lot
I: what kind of things, and also H how have you changed?
A: Not alone inworld - e.g. the invention of meshes -, but the
circumstances have remarkably changed
M1: it totally changed, especially the people who join owadays and
the new features make sl better, in the other hand LL screwed much
up, so deinitively theres been big changes
M5: Definitely, but not in any truly...hm...what has changed is
the quality of the graphics, the things possible -- the content --
but not the basic idea, what the world, I think, IS to people.
A: The concurrency of other so-called "Social Media" impairs SL
and its future
H: well my graphics improved when I knew to get a good graphics
card
M1: true, just the servers could need some new stable work
H: had to learn all that stuff
M5: I mean mesh, etc, H. :)
```

The Virtual Self Processes Model in Chapter 6 suggests that Self emerges through the individual's interactions with the virtual world and other users, as well as the interactions between the physical and virtual worlds they inhabit. While the Model attempts to describe the interlace between the various entities (Self, Other, virtual world, physical world), the Matrix of Player Timelines indicates the range of interactions at each phase of a user's lifetime in the virtual world, and how each phase connects to the next. Hence it can conceive how the range of interactions present in the

Virtual Self Processes Model transforms over time to provide an overall experience of Self.

8.8.4. The Self as trajectories of activity

Activity Theory considers how individuals have conscious motivations towards self-generated goals, a concept that can be extended to assert "we are what we do" (Nardi, 1996b, p.88), insomuch that Self-knowledge is gained through activity in specific contexts (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004). Other aspects of the research programme underline the role of activity in the sense of Self that emerges through the virtual world; Chapter 4 describes the extent to which representation in the virtual world is a form of activity, Chapter 5 discusses the range of activities in which users engage, while Chapter 6 highlights how such engagement is mediated by the avatar and creates a sense of Self which to some degree relates to the virtual world (i.e. belonging to the avatar), as well as the physical. Here the Matrix of Player Timelines highlights how a user's experience is a continual flow of activity on a number of levels: it indicates that a user's experience is comprised of phase-theme intersections i.e. periods of time where they engage in particular activities with respect to salient themes with particular outcomes. These activities range from those when first introduced to Second Life that involve account and avatar creation, through to the subsequent activities that allow the user to learn how to manipulate the virtual world interface and interact with others. They include the investigation of opportunities and possibilities within the virtual world as they become immersed, and those activities that become part of their established repertoire. They also include the activities in the evaluation users engage in, as they assess the benefits and detriments of Second Life, and the other options available to them in other virtual spheres and the physical world. Through these activities, virtual world users represent themselves, engage in new behaviours, develop skills and adjust personality traits, and hence Self emerges.

8.9. Conclusions: towards an understanding of the Virtual Self in virtual worlds

This chapter has outlined the approach to addressing the subsidiary research question:

What is the trajectory of experience of the Virtual Self in virtual worlds?

In doing so, research has been conducted among identical participants across two points in time separated by two years. In line with the objectives of the whole research programme it seeks to emphasise the perspective of the virtual world user, and does this by using individual interviews. In order to address the question, the analysis comprises a number of elements: biographical descriptions of each participant, identification of salient themes at each data period, and a comparison of findings at each data period. From the analysis, the potential trajectories of the virtual world user have emerged, and a **Matrix of Player Timelines** has been constructed, in the form of a grid composed of cells arranged in phase-theme intersections. The objective of the Matrix is to indicate the possible outcomes for a user at any stage of their lifetime within the virtual world. In particular, it indicates that the experience of Virtual Self emerges from multiple trajectories relating to experience of the virtual world, interactions and relationships with others, the wider context of the virtual world, and the experience of Self in the virtual world.

There are key roles for reflection, interaction, and activity in the trajectories of Self. In the first instance, experience of Self includes the continual reflection on participation in the virtual world, its opportunities, benefits and detriments. Secondly, it is also comprised of interactions with the virtual world and other users, as well as the interaction of information and experiences across the virtual and physical worlds. Finally, there is a continual flow of activity an individual engages in throughout their experience, from first creation of their account through to any decision to cease usage.

The approach here is relatively novel, since research intended to uncover developments in phenomena is not commonly undertaken, because of the commitment required from both researchers and participants, and difficulties in recruitment. In virtual worlds this is particularly difficult because of the unwillingness of users to guarantee commitment to long-term research participation in their own personal leisure time, and the extent to which users cease to use after a period of time. The long-term involvement of the researcher in Second Life, and the relationships developed with a number of participants over an extended period and across a number of research projects, has overcome these problems to some degree. Hence, it has been possible to explicitly consider how the experience of Self in relation to virtual worlds develops over time. This has been done through ***a combination of not only conducting research among participants over an extended period, but also requiring participants to reflect upon developments over that period and the meaning of those developments to them***.

9. What is the experience of the Self in virtual worlds?

9.1. Introduction

In its presentation of the scale of technological change and its outlining of the virtual worlds phenomenon as an emerging environment for experiencing the Self, Chapter 1 proposes that in order to begin developing a social psychological understanding of the Self in contemporary society it is necessary to address the research question:

> What is the experience of the Self in virtual worlds?

Subsequently, during the course of its review of the literature, Chapter 2 suggests that to do this, a number of subsidiary questions should be addressed:

> How is the Self represented in virtual worlds?
> What are the activities undertaken in virtual worlds?
> What are the processes involved in being a Virtual Self in virtual worlds?
> In what ways do physical and virtual worlds interact with each other and the experience of Self?
> What is the trajectory of experience of the Virtual Self in virtual worlds?

Hence, a comprehensive research programme intended to address these questions has been devised, with methodology detailed in Chapter 3, and research findings presented in Chapters 4-8, each chapter focusing on one subsidiary question.

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesise these findings and hence address the core research question, as well as to evaluate the findings and assess their contribution to understandings of the Self in contemporary society. In the first instance, it summarises the findings from each element of the research programme, and hence addresses the research question. Then the key themes to emerge from the research are outlined, highlighting the contribution of each element to that emergent theme, enhancing how the research question is addressed. The chapter then evaluates the findings in terms of the existing literature, and identifies the contributions they make. Fourthly, the methodologies are evaluated, including a review of the extent to which they have proved appropriate for the objectives and the researcher's role in the process, and a critique of how they have been employed. The chapter concludes with a discussion on implications for future research investigating the experience of the Virtual Self.

9.2. Addressing the research question: "What is the experience of the Self in virtual worlds?"

Chapter 2 established that to understand the experience of Self in virtual worlds a number of aspects must be considered. These are: the manner and methods by which Self is represented in virtual worlds, in terms of the avatar, username and account profile; the types of activity undertaken in virtual worlds; the experience of being a virtual worlds user; the ways in which physical and virtual worlds intersect to form experience of Self; the trajectory of experience in virtual worlds. This section summarises the findings in relation to each of these aspects, hence addressing the research question.

9.2.1. How is the Self represented in virtual worlds?

Representation of the Self is comprised of **four levels of activity**: **personal**, which includes the process of account and avatar creation, representation decisions, and the relationship between the user and their avatar; **social** , which concerns the role of other users and the milieu in which the user is situated in the experience of representation; **practical**, relating to the detailed decision-making process; and the **multiple** nature of representation, reflecting the extent to which representation is continually changing, and concerns multiple virtual and physical expressions of Self. In particular, the research can be used to understand how representation of the Self typically progresses through a series of **milestones**, with the four levels of activity occurring to varying degrees at each milestone. These milestones are: name and avatar choice; profile construction; recording; refinement; avatar change; begin again; stability. Figure 9.1 illustrates these milestones, and the activity occurring at each one.

9.2.2. What are the activities undertaken in being a Virtual Self in virtual worlds?

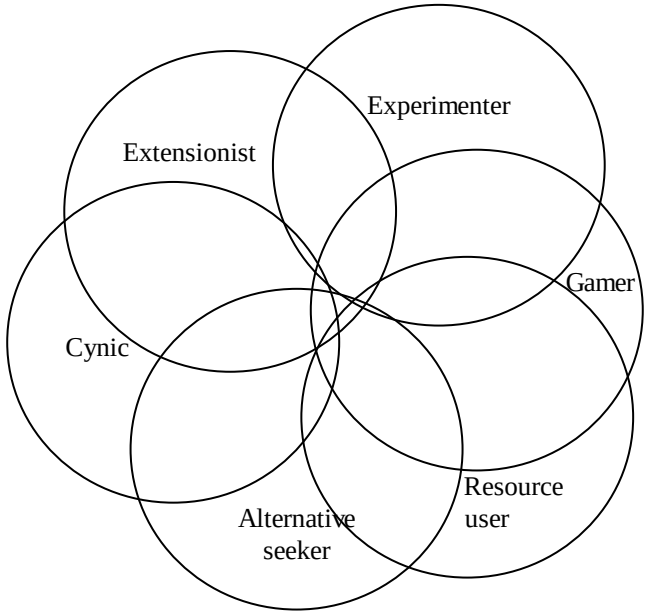
The **Player Taxonomy** provides a catalogue of the variety of activity types that users of virtual worlds typically engage in, and hence reveals their motivations for using virtual worlds. It is not intended to quantify the number who engage in each activity form, but to give an indication to the range of activities and hence motivations possible. The classifications are **"Extensionist"** (engaging in activities similar to those

in the physical world, e.g. shopping), **"Experimenter"** (playing with identity, e.g. Role Play), **"Gamer"** (viewing the virtual world as a conventional game), **"Resource User"** (using the virtual world for self-development activities e.g. education), **"Alternative Seeker"** (replicating aspects of "real life" e.g. relationships), and **"Cynic"** (no longer using the virtual world extensively). Figure 9.2 illustrates the taxonomy; the categories are not mutually exclusive, since a virtual world player may belong to any or even all of the categories.

Figure 9.1. Representation of the Self milestones, and the associated levels of activity.

Milestone	Personal activity	Social activity	Practical activity	Multiple activity
Name and avatar choice	Personal choices made when creating an account.		Spontaneous or planned choices?	To what extent will their avatar name and appearance relate to other virtual environments or physical worlds?
Profile construction		Profiles as inherently social (whether full or empty), so what impression to give others?	Complete details, create portrait picture.	Include "real life" details?
Recording	Take photographs of experiences as they occur.	Include others in photographs, record social events, or use in profile.	Record events and appearance changes.	
Refinement	Changes to avatar and profile as user becomes established in the virtual world: experimentation, Role Play, avatar character development.	View their avatar through the eyes of others, and amend behaviour, appearance, profile accordingly. Application of physical world or virtual world trends and social norms?	Learn how to make amendments and research ideas, sometimes with help from others.	User and avatar continually changes.
Avatar change	Wholesale "makeover": exploit freedom of expression, tired of same appearance, or represent change in approach to the virtual world.	Advice and opinion from others. What impression to give others?	Financial considerations. Research ideas.	Person always is not static.
Begin again	Create new avatar rather than makeover existing one. New start or alt, depending on purpose and rationale. New milestone set begins. New world? More RL?	Escape other users? Management of other users: who knows about the new avatar?	Cost, time, effort?	Maintain a number of "lives" simultaneously: different contacts, experiences, appearances, relationships.
Stability	No changes: attachment to avatar	Others cannot adjust to change?		Consistency as well as change.

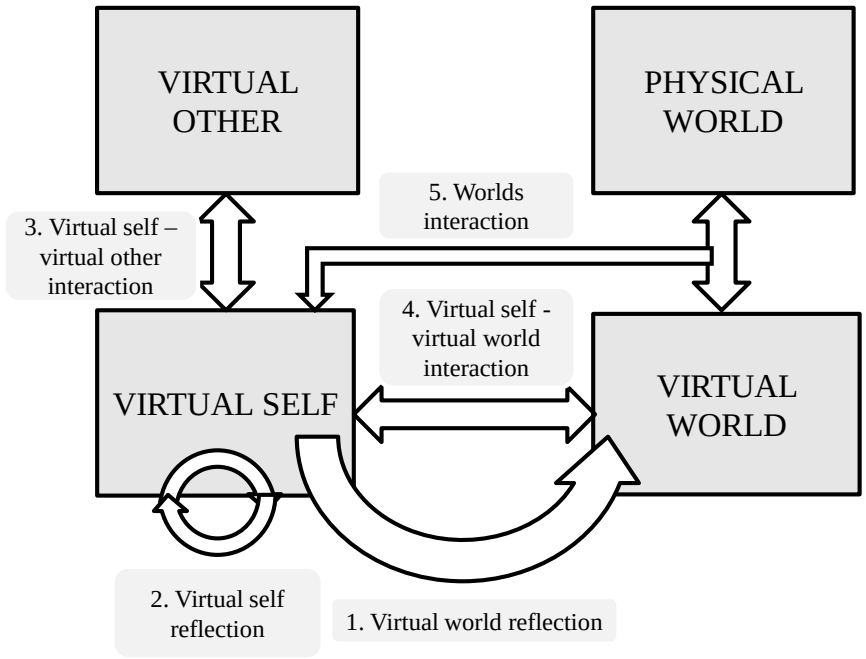
Figure 9.2. An illustration of the Player Taxonomy.



9.2.3. What are the processes involved in being a Virtual Self in virtual worlds?

The experience of Self in virtual worlds comprises a number of themes, relating to reflections and interactions with respect to the user, other users, virtual worlds, and the physical world. These themes include: the experience and perceptions of the virtual world; the experience of being a user of the virtual world; the experience of interacting with other users; experiences of other worlds; and the relationship between the virtual and physical worlds. A rudimentary **Virtual Self Processes Model**, illustrated in Figure 9.3, suggests how the experience of Self is contingent on reflection on the Self and the virtual world, and interactions between Self and Others, Self and the virtual world, and between virtual and physical worlds.

Figure 9.3. The Virtual Self Processes Model: a rudimentary model illustrating the processes that are involved in being a Virtual Self. (Originally presented in Figure 6.10).



9.2.4. In what ways do physical and virtual worlds interact with each other and the experience of Self?

The interaction between worlds and experience of Self is comprised of four aspects relating to Self, Other, Second Life and "real life". Figure 9.4 provides an overview of these aspects, with respect to their main concerns and characteristics, and the conditions upon the experience of Self.

Figure 9.4. Aspects of interaction between worlds and experience of Self.

Aspect	Concern	Characteristics	Conditions
Self	Personal experience of using the virtual world.	Sense of "being there" encourages appropriate avatar appearance and behaviour.	Experience mediated by technology and the avatar. "Being there" does not equate to "not here".
Other	Relationships and interactions with other users.	Interactions with others provide emotional benefits, depth of communication, and facilitate sense of "being there".	Interactions mediated by technology, leading to disconnect between users and disruption of "being there".
Second Life	Interaction with the virtual world and the technology that facilitates it.	Immersion into the virtual world can displace the physical, facilitated by automatic usage of the interface.	Immersion dependent on technology and disruption inherent in the interface.
Real life	Flow of circumstance between virtual and physical worlds.	Virtual world usage occurs in physical world environment, hence impacts on experience.	Physical and psychological transferences between worlds.

The experience of the Self is contingent on the meditation of technology in a co-relationship between the physical and the virtual realms. In this sense the virtual world user has become a form of "cyborg", experiencing Self through the fuse of their organic body and technology.

9.2.5. What is the trajectory of experience of Virtual Self in virtual worlds?

Experience of Virtual Self over time can be characterised as being comprised of a number of trajectories relating to salient themes of that experience. It can be represented in the form of a **Matrix of Player Timelines**, a grid that tabulates phases of experience in relation to the salient themes. The phases are: introduction, learning, immersion, consolidation, evaluation, and long term. The themes are: experience of SL; relationships and interactions; SL in context; experience of Self. While the full Matrix is provided in Figure 8.11, Figure 9.5 provides an illustration of its core structure. The Matrix does not reflect the expected duration for any phase, nor the length of time a person may be a virtual world user, since both depend on circumstance and characteristics of the individual.

Figure 9.5. The core structure of the Matrix of Player Timelines.

	Introduction	**Learning**	**Immersion**	**Consolidation**	**Evaluation**	**Long term**
Experience of SL	Open an account	Adapt to virtual world	Investigate opportunities, develop purpose	Establish habits and purpose, time management, consider new avatar	Assess outcomes and act accordingly	Consistent or declining usage, begin again, or cease usage
Relationships and interactions		Learn to relate	Meet others, develop network, explore relationship forms	Establish preferred relationship forms and communication approach	Assess outcomes of interactions and relationships, and act accordingly	Continue beneficial relationships
SL in context		Establish boundaries	Increase usage	Establish RL-SL perspective	Assess other opportunities in physical and virtual worlds	Usage of SL or other virtual worlds depends on benefits
Experience of Self	Create name and avatar	Experiment, develop approach to avatar	Develop avatar appearance, behaviour and persona	Explore and establish aspects of Self	Assess Self in context of physical and virtual worlds, and act accordingly	No more benefits to Self, so cease, maintain friendships or use experience in RL

9.3. Recurring themes and relating to literature: what does this research contribute?

While the objective has been address each specific subsidiary research question with its own approach, there are a number of recurring themes. This section offers a comparison of the findings from each Chapter, by highlighting these themes. These are also related back to existing theories and findings with respect to the Self and the experience of Self in virtual worlds, and hence highlight what the research findings here contribute to our understanding of the Self in contemporary society.

9.3.1. Reflexivity in experience of Self

This theme occurs across much of the research findings here. In Chapter 4, reflexivity occurs as users adopt the perspective of other users, creating avatars and designing profiles that will be perceived by them and encourage a desired response, whether it be some kind of interaction, or to form an opinion of the type of person they are. Similarly Chapter 6 reinforces the role of reflection in the experience of Self, going beyond how the avatar and their profile may appear to other users, but the extent to which activity and behaviour might also be perceived. Reflection in virtual worlds has a specific characteristic in that the avatar is a separate entity, hence in some senses a user is not reflecting on themselves but on their avatar. The separation of the person from their avatar offers the potential for the virtual world user to self-observe and self-reflect at all times in all activities in the virtual world. Chapter 8 also highlights the role of reflexivity, since it indicates that the user is in a continual state of reflection, assessing their experience and making adjustment to it. From this continual reflection develops a sense of the Self that they experience, and wish to experience. This reflection has implications for the experience of Self beyond a single virtual world, but into other virtual environments and "real life", hence indicating how virtual worlds become ***transformational tools for Self***.

With respect to literature, reflexivity is a key theme in the Symbolic Interaction approach, which emphasises the emergence of Self as the outcome of reflection. The approach has its basis in the notions of a Self that is simultaneously the "knower" and the "known", or a "looking-glass Self" that imagines the perspective and judgement of a "Generalised Other", and responds to it (Baressi, 2002; Robinson, 2007). These notions are further developed, for example by Mead (1956, 1962) and Goffman (1959), who both essentially propose that awareness of Self emerges as the outcome of

embodied interaction with others in particular situations, and the reflection that occurs with these interactions. Mead in particular emphasises how the outcome of interaction is awareness of Self as itself, and as an object of its own regard. Chapters 4 and 6 support this idea of adopting the perspective of another in their highlighting of the avatar as a separate entity from its user, simultaneously "this me" and "that me", "me" and "not me": experiences are seen both in relation to the avatar and their user. The user is continually assessing and amending their avatar appearance and behaviour, not just in relation to an imagined "Generalised Other" or as an outcome of interactions with other users, but by essentially being simultaneously Self and Other. This also relates to previous research with respect to virtual worlds, and the extent to which the avatar is seen as separate to the person using it, i.e. a separate object of the users' regard: while Taylor (2002) proposes that the avatar is a form of embodiment, Veerapen (2011) suggests that the avatar is an extension, or prosthesis, of the user's being. However, the research here suggests a more complex scenario: ***the avatar is not merely an extension or embodiment of Self; it is simultaneously the same and separate.***

Another aspect of reflexivity characterised in literature, is the extent to which Self can be understood as a "reflexive project", emerging from a person's trajectory of experience, as proposed by Giddens (1991). Chapter 8 in particular indicates this notion can be applied to a person's experience of virtual worlds. By identifying the salient themes of experiences and asserting the phases that experience is characterised by, the research here suggests that users are in a continual process of reflection on that experience, assessing it against the possible alternatives or for what they had hoped for, and making amendments accordingly. Through this process a sense of Self emerges in relation not just to the virtual world specifically, but virtual and physical worlds in general. Another related aspect of reflexivity is the extent to which it can actually occur. Giddens' contribution was originally made in the context of debate on the premise that contemporary society can be characterised as being discontinuous with the past, as New Technologies perform increasing roles of mediation for the Self, creating unknowable, inauthentic "selves" (Gergen, 1991; Meyrowitz, 1985; Williams, 1997). The implication of this is that technology impairs reflection and leads to loss of identity. This research refutes this viewpoint entirely, by demonstrating ***the active and responsible role that users of virtual worlds take in their own technologically-mediated experience***. To some extent this can make for uncertainty and "unknowability", but for <u>others</u>: experiments with identity, appearance, and behaviours in the context of the anonymous environment offered by virtual worlds allows an

emerging Self known to the virtual world user but with a degree of opacity for those who surround them in the virtual and physical worlds.

9.3.2. Interaction in experience of Self

Interaction is a key theme emerging across the research, and occurs at a number of levels. In the first instance, both Chapters 6 and 7 indicate how the virtual world user interacts with the virtual world itself, via the onscreen interface: they manipulate onscreen paraphernalia in order to facilitate the experience they wish in the virtual world. Meanwhile, Chapter 8 demonstrates how the user is in a ***continual process of interacting with the virtual world programme***, learning how to use it, examining and testing possibilities, and assessing its usefulness. In this way a sense of Self emerges through the ongoing interaction with, and both enabled and constrained by, the virtual world programme. A second aspect of interaction is that between the user and their avatar. This interaction mainly takes the form of the ***attachment and empathy from the virtual world user toward their avatar***, as demonstrated in Chapters 4, 6 and 8. The separation between the user and the avatar means it is seen as the conduit and inspiration for all the users' experiences (good and bad) in the virtual world. Even if the user has a number of avatars there is usually one that is the "main one", the avatar they return to time and again, and that they are reluctant to change too much or cease using. A third aspect concerns those interactions occurring between virtual world users, which feeds through into many aspects of the virtual world experience. From Chapter 4, one function of the avatar appearance and profile is to encourage interactions of particular forms between the avatar user and others, depending on what the avatar appearance and profile content is; sometimes appearance or behaviour may change directly through the intervention or advice of other users, and sometimes indirectly when others do not respond in the manner an avatar's user would want. Chapters 6 and 7 highlight how interaction within the virtual world has a particular complexion: it is facilitated and framed within the capabilities of the technology that facilitates the virtual world, while promoting the immersion of the user into it. The anonymity and lack of non-verbal language lend an interaction form that is paradoxically both subject to misunderstanding and mistrust, and emotionally intense and explicit. Meanwhile, Chapter 8 indicates the value of interactions and relationships with other users in the experience of Self over time: ***they provide the means to an evolving experience of the virtual world and reasons for continuing to use it, when all other benefits appear to have ceased***. A fourth aspect of interaction occurs between

the social worlds the virtual world user inhabits, particularly the virtual and physical worlds. Chapters 6 and 7 demonstrate how events, feelings, and experiences flow between worlds, from which a specific sense of Self emerges; these can be general, such as the transfer of skills learned in the virtual world transferred to the physical, or very specific, such as the physical health of the user on a particular day influencing how, when, and where they use the virtual world. Meanwhile, Chapter 8 indicates that the interaction between the physical and virtual worlds plays a key role throughout the user's experience: ***the mutual flow of information and experience is continually monitored and the benefits assessed by individuals, until all benefits appear to have ceased***.

Interaction recurs in literature at a number of levels. In the first instance, the key outcome from Symbolic Interaction approaches is the role of interaction in the emergence of Self. This interaction has a varying complexion across Symbolic Interaction theories: for Mead the Self emerges through the embodied interaction with others, the "conversation of gestures", while Goffman highlights the contexts for interactions, with Self emerging from awareness of the myriad roles played in those contexts (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1956, 1962). The role of interaction with other users in the experience of Self in the context of virtual worlds is highlighted throughout this research. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 indicate interactions with others are actively sought, and in response to such interactions users develop their avatar appearance and behaviour, are encouraged to spend time in the virtual world, and become immersed into it. Through interactions with others they develop a sense of "being there" in the virtual world environment and develop intense emotional attachments, facilitating specific experiences of being a virtual world resident. Hence, the research also links to previous work that highlight the "hyperpersonal" nature of technologically-mediated interactions (Walther, 1996) and the importance of social relationships as a component of online experience (Cole & Griffiths, 2007; Peris et al., 2002), while iterating the extent to which they encourage users' continuing participation in virtual worlds and their value in their experience of Self. As Chapter 8 details, ***the format and outcome of interactions, the relationships that emerge from them, and their contribution to the experience of Self, are in continual review by each individual***.

However, interactions also include interactions with the virtual world itself, in particular its onscreen interface. Some earlier research considers the nature of implications of communication in virtual environments and the characteristics with which technology imbues interaction between users, for example the encoding and decoding of emotional expression in text-dependent environments described by Utz (2000). However, these more consider technology as mediator for interaction rather

than considering how users interact with the technology itself as they interact with others. Chapter 7 indicates the extent to which users must interact with the virtual world and its technology, learning to use the onscreen interface, and continually amending the appearance of it, as they navigate the virtual world, interacting with objects and other users within it. Moreover, other forms of interaction relatively neglected in literature are highlighted here. In particular Chapters 6 and 7 indicate the extent to which experience of Self emerges from the interaction between the physical and virtual worlds the person inhabits. This is characterised by ***the flow of physical, social, and psychological experiences, events, and circumstances between worlds, influencing how the worlds inhabited by the individual combine to provide particular contexts in which Self is experienced***.

9.3.3. Performance in experience of Self

Performance of Self in relation to virtual worlds takes a number of forms. From Chapter 4, users adapt their avatar and behaviour according to the environment and situation; while this can be in the context of an overt performance for the sake of Role Play, it occurs in other everyday situations depending on the people they are with or locations in the virtual world. Chapter 6 indicates how avatars are used to play social roles different or deficient to those in "real life", such as a different gender, or a parental role, for example. Related to performance, is the extent to which users wish to give information about themselves, and create an impression for others. Chapter 4 indicates how the avatar, profile, and username, can all be employed to give a particular impression for other users. While this might be specific information, about themselves and their approach to the virtual world that they include in their profile for example, there is also unintended information "given off" from which others can also gain information, hence meaning that what is excluded can be as informative as what is included.

The notion of performance as a precursor to emergence of Self is particularly at the heart of Goffman's approach, in his use of theatrical metaphors to explain how the Self is presented in everyday life in particular settings for the benefit of particular audiences (Goffman, 1959; Papacharissi, 2002). The objective is to present a Self that is credible, while dependent on managing information given intentionally or given off unintentionally. Chapter 4 indicates how in virtual worlds avatar appearance and behaviour are adapted according to situation, adhering to the social norms of its environment. Moreover, information management is fundamental to experience of Self

in virtual worlds: ***users are adept at interpreting another user's avatar and profile, comparing appearance and contents to what might be expected to ascertain the type of person that user is, as well as their motivations for being in the virtual world***. Chapter 6 highlights the extent to which the avatar bears a relation to the person whom the user believes themselves to be in the physical world, and the importance placed on credibility and authenticity in avatar appearance and behaviour, while showing how to some extent all virtual world experience is permeated by Role Play, with people adopting social roles, behaviours and experiences that are not always possible to them in the physical world. This extends previous research which consider the extent to which users model their avatar appearance on the physical world or some other criteria (Bessiere et al., 2007; Ducheneaut et al., 2009; Gilbert, Foss, et al., 2011; Vasalou et al., 2008), as well as that considering the extent to which users experiment with representation in more textual formats, using behaviour and account profiles to demonstrate the type of person they are (Brivio et al., 2010; Papacharissi, 2002).

9.3.4. Activity in experience of Self

Experience of Virtual Self is permeated with activity. The Player Taxonomy (Chapter 5) indicates the range of activity that virtual worlds facilitate, and demonstrates how the activities engaged in depend on motivations and understandings of the virtual world, while at the same time influencing their experience of Self. Considering representation of the Self (Chapter 4) demonstrates how it is comprised of activity at a number of levels: those that are personal, the individual experience of the avatar; those that are social, in response to and in conjunction with the social environment; practical activities in the detailed decision-making that occurs; and the multiple nature of activity, the number of changes and avatars that it may concern. The Virtual Self Processes Model (Chapter 6) indicates the extent to which the avatar is the medium for activity, and hence to which experience is the preserve of the avatar, contributing to a sense of Self that is located within the virtual world. Meanwhile the Matrix of Player Timelines (Chapter 8) indicates that ***the Self emerges from trajectories of activity***, where users engage in specific activity forms according to the phase in their experience they are located.

Activity Theory envisages individuals as being capable of having goals, having motivations towards those goals, and engaging in activity towards them, and is hence argued to imply "we are what we do" (Nardi, 1996b, p.88). Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (described by Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004) is based on the assumption that

through collaborative practice, and assisted by tools in specific contexts, people create and change their environment, hence themselves, and gain Self-knowledge; in this way, Self emerges as an outcome of activity, but can be an activity in its own right. This role of activity in emergence of Self as a "by-product" or as an intended goal is affirmed throughout this research. The Player Taxonomy (Chapter 5) indicates the extent to which experience of Self emerges from user motivations for using the virtual world and the consequent activities they engage in. In this sense it both confirms and extends findings from previous virtual environment user typologies constructed by Bartle (1986), Yee (2006a), and Utz (2000), by indicating how virtual worlds are used in ways similar to other environments and how Self emerges as an outcome.

In terms of other approaches that concern the individual in context, Situated Action Theory emphasises activity as an emergent property between actors and their environment, rather than being the outcome of rational planning, social relations, or knowledge (Lave, 1988; Suchman, 2007). Chapter 4 indicates some support for this approach, since the act of representation to some extent does emerge as an outcome of particular situations and interactions that occur; however, it also indicates that to another extent users have an agenda, using virtual world tools, knowledge and social contacts to create avatars, profiles and names, in acts of representation.

9.3.5. The experience of Self as social

The social nature of the Self as experienced in virtual worlds is threaded throughout all the research findings. From Chapter 4 the role of others is crucial, either ***directly in that users may seek the opinion of others in the creation of their avatar and profile, or indirectly in that they may be created with a desired response from other users in mind***. Chapter 5 underlines that while worlds such as Second Life may be built for the purpose of socialising, social activities are not necessarily engaged in as an end in themselves but for the benefits that may accompany them, i.e. experiences and relationships not possible in "real life". Chapters 6 and 7 indicate how the social environments that virtual worlds provide have a particular complexion: while they are anonymous and set within the framework provided by the virtual world technology, they provide a permissive safe environment to explore multiple experiences, and cement the user into the virtual world. Ultimately, as Chapters 5 and 8 show, the social nature of the virtual world is crucial to the experience of it: it is continually assessed, and ***social experiences with other users can continue to be an incentive to participate in the virtual world long after all other benefits from it have ceased***.

This social nature of virtual world experience reinforces the approaches of Symbolic Interaction and Activity Theory. They have in common the role that social context has for formation of the Self, envisaging Self as emerging from that context, through the interactions and actions that occur in particular environments. In this regard, there is no Self without the social environment. It also reinforces previous research which concerns the development of virtual environment user typologies (Bartle, 1986; Utz, 2000; Yee, 2006a) and indicates how social interactions are a prominent activity, but extends them to indicate how ***social activity is not necessarily an end in itself but emerges from the broader motivations for using the virtual world in the first instance***. While new users of Second Life may join for social reasons, their motivations for using and activities change as possibilities within the virtual world become apparent.

9.3.6. The experience of Self as immersed

From the research here, a key component of the experience of Self is the immersion of the user into the virtual world. This refers to two aspects: the process of involvement that occurs as the user engages with the virtual with increasing frequency and in an increasing depth and range of activities; and the sensory experience of "being there", of being enveloped by the virtual world environment and stimuli (Witmer & Singer, 1998). Chapters 5 and 7 indicate that both forms of immersion are facilitated in a number of ways. In the first instance, activity in the virtual world can be very engaging and satisfying for the user, and hence absorb their attention and time very easily. The social context also facilitates immersion, with users actively encouraging each other to "stay a bit longer", by providing an environment that is emotionally stimulating and engaging, and one that gives the sense of being present with other people; this is despite the mere presence of other avatars not being a guarantee of immersion, since their users may be absent or "otherwise engaged". Immersion is also contingent on technology: the quality of virtual world graphics can encourage immersion, although activities and the social context have a greater role. In fact, poor computer graphics, glitches and bugs in the virtual world programme, or poor Internet connection, potentially have a greater negative impact, than any positive experience offered by superior graphics and Internet speed, or problem-free programming.

The role of "presence" or "immersion" is a core component of experience in virtual environments. Heeter (1992) indicates that a person's sense of immersion can emerge from the sense of being physically present, the extent to which the environment reacts

to the presence of the person, and the presence of others in the same environment, and the research here affirms this. ***Through immersion into the virtual world and engagement in activities and interactions with other users, a user's sense of Self emerges.***

9.3.7. The experience of Self as multiple

The multiple nature of Self as experienced through virtual worlds relates to a number of aspects. In the first instance, Chapters 4 and 6 demonstrate the potential for experience through multiple avatars, each with a sense of "feeling different", and being associated with its own friendship groups, activities and behaviour sets. Secondly, the Virtual Self Processes Model also indicates how the multiple experience of Self extends to the range of worlds, physical and virtual, that a person may inhabit, and the tensions and mutual influences between them. Chapter 7 underlines this, indicating how ***the user is simultaneously located "there" in the virtual world, "here" in the physical, and sometimes even "elsewhere" in another virtual environment***. Finally, Chapter 8 indicates how the trajectory of Self is not singular but multiple, involving trajectories of experience of the virtual world, relationships, the wider context, and the experience of Self, with each trajectory having multiple potential paths. Related to this, is the extent to which multiplicity can lead to some kind of disconnection from a person's experience own experience and the social, physical and virtual environments they inhabit. All aspects of the research show that users actively engage in their own experience, managing the range of avatars and variety of experiences possible to them, as well as the interplay between the physical and virtual worlds they are located in. However, Chapter 7 indicates the potential for psychological disconnect: ***the simultaneous management of multiple identities, tasks, and experiences across virtual and physical environments, can mean that none are engaged in fully***.

The multiple nature of Self is a recurring theme in literature. The Symbolic Interaction approaches of Mead and Goffman emphasise the potential for multiple selves according to the range of acquaintances a person has, and the number of roles performed in situated contexts (Elliot, 2001; Mead, 1962), while postmodern theories emphasise how New Technologies facilitate multiple identities, multiple relationships, and multiple roles (e.g. Gergen, 1991; Poster, 1990). The research here reinforces this literature, and also to some extent supports previous research with respect to virtual environments, particularly how they can be used to experiment with identity in ways that are not possible in the physical world (e.g. Bessiere et al., 2007; Ducheneaut et al.,

2009; Turkle, 1995). Chapter 8 specifically provides rationale for how such experiments occur and the role they play in the ongoing experience of Self. Other aspects indicate levels of multiplicity in ways not so evident in other areas of literature, such as Chapter 8 extending Giddens' observation of the Self emerging from an understanding of its own trajectory (Giddens, 1990) to understanding multiple trajectories, and Chapter 7 indicating the extent to which a virtual world user may be simultaneously located in a wide variety of locations and experiences, virtual and physical. Nevertheless, as Chapter 8 also indicates, ***despite the varying levels of multiplicity across the experience of Self, and the potential for multiple Selves in multiple environments, individuals claim the experience as their own and maintain the notion of a singular "true" Self.***

9.3.8. The experience of Self as evolving

The extent to which experience of Self in the context of virtual worlds emerges through change is highlighted across various aspects of the research. Representation of the Self (Chapter 4) can be characterised as comprising a number of milestones as users create and recreate their avatar, profile and even username, as their experience in the virtual world progresses; sometime this can be to the extent of creating new avatars and/or using other virtual worlds, passing through the milestones on a repeated basis. Chapter 6 highlights how change and evolution is a common experience and change is sought for and valued, maintaining interest and involvement in the virtual world. Chapter 8 expands on all this much further, and indicates how experience of Self is comprised of a number of phases, each of which is constituted by change on the levels of the virtual world experience, relationships and interactions, the wider context, and the personal experience of Self. Ultimately, the experience of evolution, from the initial creation of the virtual world account, through to ceasing it, contributes to the sense of Self experienced by the user: they are in a continual process of assessment of their experience and the contribution of the virtual world to it, and hence make changes until they decide the virtual world no longer makes any positive contribution at all.

Social psychological literature with respect to the ways in which Self may be considered to change over time has its limitations. Symbolic Interactionists and Activity Theorists discuss the emergence of Self as the outcome of interaction and action (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1956, 1962; Nardi, 1996b; Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004), and others argue the extent to which Self is the outcome of life trajectory (Giddens, 1991). In the realm of virtual worlds, the research by Harris, et al. (2009)

provides some indication of the transformations in the experience of Self over a relatively short period of six weeks from the creation of a new account that indicates that with experience users become more sociable and less experimental. However, the Matrix of Player Timelines indicates that across the lifetime of virtual world usage ***there is a regular and continual evaluation of multiple levels of experience and their contribution to experience of Self***.

9.3.9. The experience of Self as mediated

Another theme relates to the extent to which experience of the Self in the context of virtual worlds is mediated. In Chapters 4 and 6 the avatar is shown to be the medium for experience in the virtual world, the means by which the user engages in activity and interactions with other users. Moreover, Chapter 7 indicates that to a greater extent the Self in the context of virtual worlds is mediated by technology. Engagement with the virtual world and others in it is within the framework provided by the onscreen interface structure in conjunction with the capabilities of the user's computer and Internet service. In this sense technology is not only enabling of opportunities not otherwise possible, but also constraining in the manner in which those opportunities can be experienced.

Mediation in the experience of Self is a recurring theme in literature. Tools, artefacts, and technology have played a mediation role in experience of Self throughout history, from pen and paper, through to print, the telegraph and Information Technology (Anderson, 2006; Goldgar, 1995; Heim, 1995; Sterling, 1992) more recently, postmodernists have claimed that such mediation, in particular by New Technologies, leads to a disconnect from individuals' own experience (Meyrowitz, 1985; Williams, 1997). The mediation of tools and artefacts also feature in the Symbolic Interaction and Activity perspectives of Self: for the former, individuals use them as aids for credible performances in the presentation of Self in everyday life, while for the latter is the mediation of tools in collaboration with others that facilitates manipulation of the environment and hence Self-knowledge (Goffman, 1959; Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004). The Symbolic Interaction approach goes further to claim that experience is mediated not just by tools and artefacts, but by the physical embodiment of interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Chapters 4 and 6 indicate the extent to which the avatar as a medium for experience in the virtual world is the virtual embodiment by which users interact with one another and their environment within the virtual world. This also links to the work by Taylor (2002) and Veerapen (2011),

which highlights the embodied nature of virtual world experience. Chapter 7 also indicates the extensive role of technology in the experience of Self, a tool for emergence of Self and a mediator of it. It indicates the extent to which ***the virtual world user has become a cyborg, using technology to mediate their experience of Self beyond the confines of physical embodiment.***

9.3.10. Relating to the Social Psychology of Cyberplaces

The Social Psychology of Cyberplaces approach characterises the sphere of virtual environments in terms of the mediated interactions of users in the context of the variety of social worlds they inhabit in Cyberspace (Brivio et al., 2010). It is concerned with the theoretical realms of the actors, mediating artefacts, and interactions, at the levels of social context, everyday situations and interaction with the environment. The research here follows this tradition in its revelation of the experience of Virtual Self in terms of the mediated interactions that occur and that emerge from the social environment in everyday life. However, rather than confine the Self to the context of Cyberspace, the present research indicates how experience in that realm relates and interacts with experience in the physical world, to the extent which, as Chapter 7 claims, Self can be argued to emerge at the intersection of the virtual with the physical.

9.4. Reflection on the research programme: what did it achieve?

9.4.1. Evaluating the methods: application and achievement of objectives

In order to successfully address the research question "What is the experience of the Self in virtual worlds?" the present research seeks methods that can best reveal the perspective of those who experience, the virtual world user. As described in Chapter 3, the congruence of this objective to the goal of qualitative research to understand the perspective of those being studied (Gorman et al., 2007), has meant a qualitative approach, "borrowing" techniques from the ethnographic tradition intended to capture the perspective of those whom it is studying. In terms of investigating experience of Self in virtual worlds, despite the emphasis placed on seeking to capture that

experience, qualitative techniques are not always used. Rather, as the review of the literature in Chapter 2 indicates, it has been conducted in ways that foreground the research perspective, the outsider perspective, e.g. conducting research that tests an existing hypothesis or theoretical framework, or predetermines the range of experience that can be captured, by using a questionnaire. Because the objective of the research here is to foreground the viewpoint of the virtual world user, the insider perspective, it uses methods intended to capture this viewpoint.

The remainder of this section considers how this approach is manifest for the research, and the effectiveness of the approach.

9.4.1.1. The overall approach to methods, data collection, and data analysis

While the methods must achieve the objective of revealing the inside perspective, they must also be appropriate for the questions they seek to address. In the event, this has meant mainly using individual interviews, supported by group discussions, participant observation, and Subjective Evidence-Based Ethnography procedures. While in using these techniques topic guides have been used to provide frameworks for discussion, each aspect of the research has been conducted such that discussion responds to observation, comment, and viewpoints of its participants; in this way, the methods aim to achieve the dual objectives of addressing the research question with respect to participant experience, while maximising the opportunity to access that experience without prejudicing the outcome of the research. In terms of analysing data that arises, rather than applying pre-determined frameworks, extensive use has been made of the inductive Thematic Analysis approach, which allows themes to emerge "bottom up" through a cyclical process of analysing and re-analysing the data, rather than imposing any kind of pre-existing framework "top down" (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

9.4.1.2. Developing bespoke techniques for the research programme

All methods by necessity have been developed by the researcher specifically for the purpose of investigating social psychological phenomena in relation to virtual worlds. While the techniques used are employed for purposes in the physical world, characteristics of virtual worlds made it necessary to adapt the techniques. In particular, the anonymous nature of the virtual worlds, and the fact participation is dependent on technology, calls for specific protocol and procedures. This includes aspects relating to: recruitment, i.e. identifying sources for participants and establishing procedures; logistics of conducting research, i.e. creating a research centre

appropriate for inworld interviews and discussions; ethical considerations i.e. developing informed consent techniques that gave consideration for the anonymity of participants; establishing protocol for interview participation specific to Second Life, to take account of technical problems; adapting SEBE procedures for capturing the experience of using Second Life "as it happens".

Some aspects of the methodological development have been established and adapted from previous research (e.g. Boellstorff, 2008; Evans, 2011). Other aspects of the research programme are to the researcher's knowledge novel to the realm of investigating virtual world's phenomena, and so have been adapted for the first time: this applies specifically to the SEBE procedures. In particular, while the SEBE approach has been refashioned from the guidelines provided by Lahlou (2011), the protocol has also had to make special consideration for the fact that participants interact with other virtual world users, and hence develop an approach that means any non-participants who may be included in data capture are aware of the fact. Additionally, some of the programme has taken approaches that are relatively novel for research regarding virtual worlds, not in the technique necessarily but how it has been applied. This is particularly the case for the research developed from which the Matrix of Player Timelines emerged; in this instance research was conducted amongst identical participants in two time periods, over a two year interval. As noted in Chapter 8, longitudinal research is relatively uncommon, particularly in the context of virtual environments, given the time and commitment required by both researcher and participant; however, the ongoing commitment by the researcher to participation in, and investigation of, phenomena occurring in virtual worlds, together with continuous contact with a number of virtual world users, made such research feasible.

9.4.1.3. Assessing the efficacy of methods in revealing the insider perspective

The techniques used vary in the efficacy in which they are able to achieve the objective of accessing the insider perspective. The SEBE procedures are theoretically the most effective: by capturing the participant's viewpoint of activity in which they are engaged, and using the capture as a facilitator for recovering memory and experience, it has been possible to access participant experience directly "as it happens". This compares to individual interviews, which while providing access to personal experience as reported by the participant, are dependent on the researcher's skill in eliciting that experience from the participant, and providing an environment that fosters researcher-participant trust sufficient for that personal experience to be shared. Meanwhile, group discussions have been used as a supplement for other aspects of the

research programme since their strength particularly lies in exploring and verifying common themes in experience, and observing how individuals negotiate and discuss the meanings of that experience. In this sense, group discussions provide access to an insider perspective, but one that emerges through negotiation and debate, rather than an individual interpretation, and one that is observed by the researcher in an outsider stance. The final approach is participant observation; here it has been useful in giving the researcher first-hand experience of using the virtual world, and tacit knowledge of practices, rituals, and understandings that are part and parcel of everyday virtual life; this experience and knowledge has been used for construction of topic guides, and in interviews and discussions that have been held. In this sense the technique has been used to give the researcher an appreciation for participant's perspectives and experiences, rather than allow direct access to it.

Another aspect of revealing the insider perspective is the utilisation of analytic techniques. In this case an inductive Thematic Analysis approach has generally been adopted, with the objective of allowing themes that are part and parcel of participant experience to emerge rather than imposing any researcher preconceptions on them. While the approach achieved this objective, the outcome is to some extent dependent on the analyst's interpretations of the data, risking the layering of findings with a veneer of outsider perspective. An ideal scenario would afford triangulation by additional analysts, but the scale of the present research programme precludes such an analysis: the findings from the present research programme have been ascertained from 150 hours of interview data, and are the outcome of hundreds of hours of analysis; hence such triangulation is beyond the scope of the present research. Instead triangulation has been afforded by the range of research techniques, questions and participants, as well as by feedback from those participants; these elements have acted in concert to produce findings with a number of recurring themes, suggesting that any outsider perspective has been offset.

9.4.2. The role of the researcher in the research programme

The discussion on the research programme's efficacy in revealing the insider perspective highlights the extent to which the researcher plays a significant role in the outcome, in relation to their interpretation of data. The dependence on qualitative techniques for addressing questions means the process here is particularly dependent on the contribution of the researcher in other ways too. This occurs at a number of levels.

In the first instance, the researcher's contribution is to some extent dependent on having an experience of using the virtual world being studied. In this case, he has spent several hundred hours participating in the Second Life, besides any time engaging in the research process *per se*. This has facilitated the process in several ways. Not only does it provide expertise in using the onscreen interface, and experience of the practices and understandings that characterise typical usage of the virtual world, it provides credentials for being a "*bone fide* researcher" (Hine, 2005) by allowing appreciation and understanding for participants' experiences, and access to the terms of reference common to all Second Life users. Moreover, the researcher's own experiences of creating an account, learning to use an avatar, investigating the opportunities, and interacting with other users, not only fed the overall topic for investigation but the ways in which that topic could be investigated; for example, the experience of managing the interaction between physical and virtual world circumstances, combined with awareness of the SEBE procedure, led to the research that considered experience of Self at worlds' intersection in Chapter 7.

Related to this contribution of experience, is the time and commitment it requires. In the first instance, time is required in using the virtual world in order to facilitate "*bone fide*" research credentials. However, here time and commitment also facilitated the form the research programme has been able to take. As already highlighted, the present research extended over several hundred hours of research and analysis, across a number of years. This has allowed a number a number of research relationships to be developed: of the 64 participants in the period 2009-2012, 23 were in two or more of the research procedures, including twelve in longitudinal research, and three in research that crossed to the physical world. Without time commitment, research that considered the change in experience of Self over time, or the experience of Self where the physical and virtual worlds intersect, could not have been possible.

A third aspect of the dependence on the researcher reflects the risk of "going native", i.e. losing critical external perspective and adopting the viewpoints shared in the field of study. In the present case it has been a particular risk, given the amount of time spent in Second Life involved in research and non-research activities, and the objective of revealing insider perspective: it is important the present research reveals the insider perspective of participants, rather than that of the researcher. Here, the researcher has sought to adopt the stance of a "professional stranger" (Flick, 2009), with the adoption of multiple methods and inductive analysis already described also offsetting the "going native" risk.

9.4.3. Evaluating the methods

This section assesses the role of qualitative methods, together with the implications for focusing on the individual and Second Life, and for conducting textual research inworld. It also highlights implications for methods in future research.

9.4.3.1. The emphasis on qualitative

Qualitative techniques have been used in order to access the insider perspective of virtual world users. While they may be effective in achieving that goal there are other aspects of virtual world phenomena they are less able to capture, and where a quantitative approach could be more effective. For example, quantitative investigation is arguably effective in revealing the scale and likelihood of phenomena, which the research here is less able to do: the approach here does not allow for any evaluation on the extent of experience, but the degree to which it appears to be characterised by salient themes among the individuals in the participant group. Conversely, while the quantitative approaches to virtual world phenomena test them against predetermined hypotheses in predetermined ways (counting the number of participant actions by type, giving participants a choice of answers to questions, etc.), the approach here has been more open-ended: it allows access to the inner experience of a participant without prescribing the boundaries within which that experience can be considered, or a hypothesis against which its validity will be assessed.

Another characteristic of quantitative techniques is their use of large participant numbers in order to create the scale of data necessary for numerical evaluation of phenomena. Conventionally, qualitative analysis is not necessarily associated with such scale; however, such is the range of questions addressed here that scale has been created: the findings presented here are the outcome of approximately 150 hours of transcript and 41,000 lines of text, from 89 inworld interview procedures. Such a wealth of data indicates that while the present research is unable to indicate the extent to which the phenomena it reveals occur, it is possible to affirm that they are at least "typical". Now that the research has produced a large number of findings and potential structures for experience of Self (e.g. the Player Taxonomy, Virtual Self Processes Model, and Matrix of Player Timelines), the foundations have been laid for research that can begin to quantify aspects of that experience.

9.4.3.2. The emphasis on the individual

The research here places extensive emphasis on the individual; of the 92 research procedures, only two are among groups. The role of social context is highlighted throughout literature, and the present research has sought to understand the experience of Self in that context with respect to virtual worlds. In this sense it might be argued that capturing the experience of Self in the social context would be informative, either through increased group discussions or participant observation of groups. Such an approach was outside the scope of the research programme and, given the core objective of understanding the insider perspective, the focus on the individual is appropriate. Nevertheless, some social context has been captured through the two group discussions; these allow confirmation and extension of findings to emerge from the individual interviews, while providing a basis for further research.

9.4.3.3. The emphasis on Second Life

The present research has been conducted entirely using Second Life as a form of case study: while the research has included consideration for participants' usage of other virtual worlds and environments, this has generally been in reference to their Second Life usage, and how experience of other environments may relate or compare. There are two aspects to this approach that are worth consideration: the choice of Second Life, and the usefulness of the case study approach itself.

With respect to the virtual world choice, as detailed in Chapter 3, the focus on Second Life has a number of benefits: in particular, it is a highly used self-determined virtual world, with a large number of users employing it for a variety of reasons in a variety of ways. In this way, while some virtual worlds and environments may offer a particular type of experience that is of interest to a specific user (World of Warcraft may be of most interest to those who enjoy collaborative combat in fantasy-themed environments, for example), and hence constrain findings, Second Life is able to offer a variety of user types and experiences of potential interest to research. Such benefits are coupled with the researcher's history of using and researching within Second Life, which has facilitated certain aspects of the research programme, in particular the development of the Matrix of Player Timelines, and the SEBE procedures. Consequently, the research has been able to reveal aspects of the experience of Self that can not only be applied to Second Life specifically, but arguably also to other virtual worlds and other environments generally.

With respect to the case study approach, it has arguably been appropriate for the present research for reasons already stated, in particular, that Second Life has allowed access to wide variety of participants and experiences. However, there are some considerations to bear in mind for future reference. A particular concern relates to the extent to which the realm of virtual worlds changes, both in terms of the virtual worlds available and who uses them: new virtual worlds are created and old worlds closed down regularly, while the composition of a virtual world user can change depending on its marketing strategy, or who virtual worlds might appeal to. This has particular implications for long term study of virtual world social psychological phenomena, because it may depress the recruitment for qualitative or longitudinal research, both of which depend on time commitment from their participants. To some extent this impacted on the present research: during the period of study, Second Life experienced a decline in usage, potentially in response a merger of its Teen Grid with the main virtual world, and the marketing of it as a place for Role Play. Both of these led to a change in experience for users, as one group discussant remarked:

> What I recognised is more youth joins SL, due to the advertisements … they usually think it's a game and/or seek sex here. (M1)

For the researcher, this period also coincided with a decline in participant "conversion rate" (i.e. the rate at which people who initially responded to a request for participants eventually became one): for the research reported in Evans (2011), the "conversion rate" was approximately 80 per cent, while for later research it was closer to thirty. As time progressed, while people expressed an initial interest, they became more inclined to not follow through to full participation. One potential reason for this may be a change in user profile; it is possible that if the user profile has changed to become more game and sex-oriented, this might imply a more casual user with less time available in Second Life for non-game or sex related activity. Hence, while a case study approach is beneficial in the context of social psychological research of the nature reported here, there are risks to its successful implementation.

9.4.3.4. The emphasis on inworld text

The present research places emphasis on inworld interviews using text; of 92 procedures conducted in total over the period 2009-2012, 89 are in Second Life using text, with the remaining three in the physical world. As detailed in Chapter 3, conducting research inworld allows a number of benefits: in particular, it allows interaction with participants in their own territory and affords a degree of ecological validity, while respecting their privacy and providing access to them worldwide

without extensive travel cost implications, and allowing maximum breadth of participants to include those who never use voice. Moreover, during the research process it became evident that participants in many cases held practised and formalised views on their experiences and the meaning of them in relation to Self; this is potentially an outcome of depending on text for interaction and hence continually having to talk about something, as highlighted by participant "LE" in Chapter 8. Virtual world users have become adept at debating their own experiences and the implications outside of the research paradigm.

However, despite the role for inworld textual interviews, the SEBE procedures do not conform to this model and yet are able to provide what may be argued to be the primary access to personal experience of the Self as it is experienced in virtual worlds, since they facilitate access "as it happens". While only a small number of SEBE procedures have been conducted for the present research they have provided a wealth of spoken and video data, potentially in excess of what is possible through a solely textual approach. The present research provides foundations for further research using the SEBE technique, both in terms of its findings and in establishing an appropriate procedure for using SEBE on a wider scale for exploring experience of the Self in relation to virtual worlds. Nevertheless, they are not a panacea: these procedures in the present research could not have happened without the mutual researcher-participant trust built through text-based inworld procedures; moreover, given the time, travel, and accommodation required to conduct research in physical world situ, the investment far outweighs that of procedures conducted purely in the virtual world.

9.5. Implications for future research

This section provides some observations on how the variety of outcomes from the research programme may be built on in the future. The observations fall into three categories: extending the research methods; extending the research findings; going beyond Second Life.

9.5.1. Extending the research methods

The discussion in this chapter hitherto highlights opportunities for how some of the methods may be used further to address the research question and its subsidiaries, while still adhering to the desire for revealing the insider perspective.

The first opportunity lies in the SEBE procedure. It has been indicated that the SEBE procedure may be the most effective method for revealing the insider perspective, with its ability to capture experience "as it happens" rather than reported experience. It has revealed particular insight into the role of technological mediation in the experience of Virtual Self, with its implication that in using virtual worlds, an individual may become a form of "cyborg" experiencing Self through the fuse of their organic body and technology. While the three procedures provided a wealth of findings, they have potential to reveal more. Firstly, increasing the number of participants may provide even more insight into the experience of technological mediation, by allowing a greater range of physical world environments, virtual world user types, attitudes towards Second Life, and motivations for using it. Secondly, the procedure could be used to include other aspects of the research programme; if it considered the activities that surround representation, for example, it would allow the researcher to access the minute details of constructing an avatar and account profile, potentially aspects of representation not accessible from an interview approach. Thirdly, the structure of the SEBE procedure as conducted in the present research (i.e. 60 minutes usage followed by 90 minutes reflection, using the researcher's computer, etc.) hampers any desired ecological validity and limits the amount of activity a participant can engage in in the context of a single procedure; by increasing the number of procedures it would be possible to witness first-hand a greater number of typical experiences that occur in virtual worlds, again allowing greater insight than possible through one procedure, or by interviewing alone. An extension of this would be to conduct a longitudinal study, using the SEBE procedure to capture the evolving experience of the virtual world user. As already noted, the procedure is a high time-financial investment option; however, while outside the scope of the present research, a research programme devoted to a purely SEBE methodological approach would be very rewarding in terms of the insights it would afford.

A second opportunity lies in extending research beyond the individual alone to include groups of individuals. Increasing the number of discussion groups and the composition of those groups would allow greater insight not just into the common forms that experience of the Self might take, and how the meanings of these experiences may be negotiated in social situations, but also how these experiences and the process of negotiation might vary according to group. As noted in Chapter 3, Second Life users are commonly members of groups and communities; by conducting group discussions across a range of these, there is potential for greater insight into the experience of Self, since the experience of those in one community might vary from another. Another approach is to extend the role of participant observation in

understanding the experience of Self, from its current role of immersing the researcher into the virtual world, establishing "*bone fide*" credentials, and informing the approach to research questioning. Including a formal participant observation of a specific group or community would allow the researcher first-hand experience of, and insight into, the mechanisms and processes evident in virtual world situations from which Self emerges. While the scale of commitment these approaches require is outside the scope of the present research, research programmes devoted these approaches would be beneficial.

9.5.2. Extending the research findings

There are ways in which the findings here could be enhanced further, either by including new methodologies or new strands of research.

With respect to new methodologies, the present research has focused on the insider perspective and qualitative techniques. However, including some quantitative approaches would be beneficial, since through them it is possible to explore the range and likelihood of experience. There are two key instances where this would be useful. In the first instance, the Player Taxonomy focuses on the range of activity types that Second Life users engage in, and highlights that a user may be categorised into more than one group; however, it is unable to ascertain the scale of those activity types across users. Using the categories in the Player Taxonomy, a questionnaire among Second Life users would allow further insight into the extent to which the categories apply, the degree of overlap between the categories, and the likelihood that a user would fall into a particular category. In a similar way, while the Matrix of Player Timelines identifies the multiple strands of evolution in the experience of Self in Second Life, it is unable to ascertain the expected length of time a person may spend in each phase or in using Second Life in total, or the extent to which each salient theme applies to the average user. A questionnaire among Second Life users based on the outcomes from the Matrix could address these shortfalls, as well as identifying some aspects of each phase (e.g. how many times do users change their appearance, how many avatars do they have, etc.).

In terms of new strands of research, there are two aspects of the programme that could be built on. The first relates again to the Matrix of Player Timelines; this has been constructed from the analysis of two data sets among a cohort of participants over a two year interval, relying on the analysis of participants' reflections on the intervening period, and in comparing their perspectives across the two time-points.

Hence, while it considers change in experience over an extended period, it is unable to provide analysis over a number of data sets, nor able to capture changes as they occur. A useful supplement to this analysis would be to purposefully construct a longitudinal programme comprising repeated interviewing among a defined sample of new Second Life users: this would enable the capture of changes in experience as they occur in the Second Life user, as well as providing witness to the unfolding aspects of the Self which in the research here have been captured through the reflections and reminisces of participants. In this way, research would be able to observe changes in representation, relationships, and activities, as well as the interrelationship between Second Life, "real life", and any other virtual environments that may occur. While such a study would prove beneficial, there are difficulties with this approach that cannot be underestimated: in particular, it requires a long and time-consuming commitment among participants and researchers, while experience from the present research suggests that recruiting inworld for such an endeavour may be problematic.

9.5.3. Going beyond Second Life

The objective of the present research is to deepen understanding of the experience and emergence of Self in the context of virtual worlds, and hence begin to develop an understanding of the contemporary experience of Self in general. To do this, the research has focused on one virtual world on the premise that any findings will form a solid basis for such understandings. In this case, the focus has been on Second Life as a case study, primarily based on its ability to provide a large number of participants who have a wide range of experiences and attitudes. However, an overall understanding of the many complexions of Virtual Self experience would benefit from similar research programmes that consider other virtual environments. This is particularly the case given the general context for the Virtual Self is characterised by rapid change. In the time since Second Life launched, the range of virtual environments has ballooned, including the wide usage of Facebook and Twitter in the everyday lives of many individuals, while usage of Second Life has remained relatively stable; this suggests that while there may be similarities in experience of Self for both users and non-users of Second Life, there may be differences too.[36] Moreover, there have been

[36] While any quantification of differences between Second Life users and users of other virtual environments is outside the scope of the present research, it should be noted that the majority of the participant pool's "virtual usage" emphasises Second Life; generally, they are not users of other virtual worlds, or social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, etc.). This might suggest that the users of Second Life have motivations and attitudes that separate them from virtual environment users generally. Chapter 5 highlights how many of the motivations for

technological changes since the launch of Second Life which may influence on experience of Self. In particular, the growth in usage of mobile technology such as "smartphones" and "tablets", which allow access to the Internet and virtual environments wherever a person might be, may influence the experience of Self in a number of ways. This applies particularly at the intersection between the virtual and the physical, where the experience of Self that emerges through the use of mobile technology may be arguably different to that which emerges from a more static, large-screened computer.[37]

Such factors indicate that research programmes that consider the Virtual Self in other virtual environments would be beneficial, but while the present research programme as is would readily adapt to other graphical virtual worlds (World of Warcraft, Inworldz, etc.), it may be more useful to extend it to consider virtual environments accessible through mobile technology. For example, research conducted amongst Twitter users would allow consideration of similar aspects of Virtual Self experience, but with potentially different outcomes. Although the context provided by Twitter is characterised by its emphasis on interactions comprising a limited number of textual characters and images, both it and Second Life emphasise interaction with others, and representation through an avatar and profile, while users of both become immersed and use them for extensive periods of time. Research amongst its users might reveal additional insight regarding representation of the Self, the actions and interactions that occur, the mediation of experience through technology, and the trajectory of change in the Self.

"Going beyond Second Life" also means using the findings here to understand further the contemporary experience of Self *per se*. The research here is able to highlight more general properties of Self, because in virtual worlds new identities and personalities are created "from scratch" and hence the processes appear clearly, while in the physical world they are taken more for granted. There are several opportunities for this hinted at throughout this work. In the first instance, this could mean exploring how Second Life and other virtual environments are used to change experience of Self, identity and personality; this might include analysis of the areas of Self users of these environments experiment with and change, which in turn aids understanding what aspects of Self are most valuable and salient to individuals. Secondly, since experience within Second Life highlights how sense of Self emerges from the feedback of others

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usage go beyond socialising that characterise these other environments, and that Second Life is used as an environment within which to experiment with aspects of the Self.

[37] Indeed, versions of the Second Life Viewer that provide access to the virtual world through mobile technology have become available more recently, which provide another aspect of experience not considered in the present research.

and the social environment (directly or indirectly), this can be used as the basis for analysis on the processes and ways by which this occurs in the physical world. Thirdly, while virtual worlds allow a Self that it mediated by technology and a fully adjustable avatar, the Self in the physical world is mediated by a physical body that has limitations and is constrained, suggesting an area for further investigation.

It should be noted that to all intents and purposes ***Second Life is an environment within which users experiment with various aspects of Self (appearance, behaviour, personality), and hence is the ideal "laboratory" within which to study experience of Self in contemporary society***; in this sense for present research purposes it was the best choice.

9.6. Conclusions: understanding the experience of the Virtual Self in virtual worlds

This chapter has demonstrated how the findings from the present research have allowed deep understanding of the Virtual Self as it is experienced in virtual worlds: the representation of the Virtual Self is characterised by successive milestones comprised of levels of activity; people engage in a variety of activities for specific purposes that outcome in particular experiences of Virtual Self; experience of Self is also the outcome of reflections and interactions across the Self, Others, and the worlds in which they are located; the experience of Virtual Self is contingent on the mediation of technology, allowing a Self that emerges at the intersection of the virtual and the physical; and Self emerges as the outcome of multiple trajectories.

By considering the common themes to emerge from the research, it can be seen how it reinforces conceptions of the Self as emerging through mediated interactions with others and the environment, as proposed generally by Symbolic Interaction and Activity Theory, and more specifically in relation to virtual experience in the Social Psychology of Cyberplaces. Moreover, Self does not emerge in relation to the virtual world in absence of the physical, but at their intersection, with potential for multiple selves and experiences through digital media. Despite this, the contemporary individual holds tight to the notion of a singular Self. They see their experience as their own responsibility, and are adept in employing technology for their own ends. ***They actively integrate virtual and physical experiences using multiple identities, from which emerges a Self that, although extended and mediated by technology, for them is unified and coherent.***

These findings have been achieved through a methodological approach that emphasises the insider perspective of the virtual world user, an approach which involves the immersion of the researcher into the research field, the development of participant relationships that facilitate trust and access to private experience that extends to the physical world, and research and analytic methods which seek to ***foreground participant experience rather than researcher expectations of what that experience should be***.

10. Conclusions: towards the development of a social psychological understanding of the Self in contemporary society

10.1. The research and its findings

This document has presented the work conducted in order to address the research question:

> What is the experience of the Self in virtual worlds?

The aim has been to develop a social psychological approach that facilitates understanding the experience of Self in relation to virtual worlds by emphasising the virtual world user perspective, and hence contribute to a broader understanding of the Self as experienced in contemporary society as a whole. By considering how the Self may emerge through interaction and mediation of artefacts in particular environments, the implications of technology, and the state of research that considers experience of the Self in relation to virtual environments, five aspects have been identified that provide focus for a bespoke research programme: representation, activity, processes, worlds' interaction, and trajectory. Using approaches developed for investigating virtual world phenomena there are a number of findings in relation to these aspects of the Self as experienced in relation to virtual worlds. It indicates that: representation of the Self can be characterised as successive milestones comprised of varying levels of activity; activity in virtual world serves specific purposes; experience of Self in virtual worlds is the outcome of reflection and interaction across the Self, Others, and the virtual and physical worlds; Self emerges at the intersection of the physical and the virtual as mediated by technology; and Self is an outcome of multiple trajectories.

10.2. The contribution of the research

In approaching the question and in emphasising the perspective of the virtual world user, the research is in the traditions of previous approaches that appreciate the experience of the individual and seek to understand the experience of virtual environments. In this way the research has contributed not just in the findings it has revealed, but in the methods revealing them. Considerable time and effort has been

taken to develop the participant-researcher trust necessary to access what for virtual world users are particularly personal experiences. Such commitment has enabled the adaptation of the Subjective Evidence-Based Ethnography approach which, by extending research partnerships with participants from the virtual to the physical, has allowed particular insight into the minute interactions between the virtual world user, the technology, and the physical and virtual environments. It has also facilitated the detailed construction of a schema for understanding the outcome of Self that emerges from a many-layered experience over an extended period of time. Hence in its approach the research here has been able to provide a thorough understanding of the Self as it is experienced in virtual worlds, in particular the actions and interactions that occur at a number of levels over time, that are continuously reflected upon and amended, from which emerges a coherent Self not just situated in the context of the virtual, but across the virtual and physical realms as a whole.

At a more general level, the research has been able to reaffirm the role of long-standing theory in providing useful frameworks for understanding the emergence of Self, in particular the theories of Symbolic Interaction and approaches based in Activity Theory. These theories situate the individual in context, providing a way for understanding how experience of Self is the outcome of interaction with others, interaction with the environment, and the mediation of tools and artefacts. Such understandings have provided a framework which this research has been able to adopt in order to understand the experience of the Self in virtual worlds. However, in its turn the research has been able to indicate that such notions of interaction, action, and mediation do not just include those in the physical realm. An interaction between two avatars, or between an avatar and a virtual object, has just as crucial role in the emergence of Self. They are not, as Goffman might have mused, "reduced versions of the primordial real thing" (1983, p.2).

10.3. Implications for Self in contemporary society

The objective of the research has been to consider virtual worlds, using Second Life as a focus. Virtual worlds are an emerging "computer-generated environment in which participants adopt an avatar to interact with each other and the virtual environment around them" (Peachey & Childs, 2011, p.1), and as such present an opportunity to observe the wide range of new experiences of Self now possible in contemporary society. Through this research it has been possible to see that far from the postmodern view of a passive technologically-determined Self that is saturated by the voices of

others, responsibilities or information, individuals in contemporary society are able to actively use technology for their own ends. They experiment with identity and experience, present aspects of their personality that contribute to their own sense of well-being and esteem, and engage in a variety of relationship and activity forms. The contemporary individual is able to juggle multiple identities, relationships and experiences, continually assessing their benefits, discarding those that are detrimental. Hence, from all this emerges a Self that without technologically mediation would not be possible. In particular, technology is allowing an extension of Self, making the individual a form of "cyborg" experiencing Self through the fuse of their organic body and technology. Yet despite this mediation and extension, and the potential for multiple identities and layers of experience, individuals hold tight to the claim of a singular Self.

There are some points to note, however. In the first instance, technology is not new: its role as mediator of Self-experience is thousands of years old, it has been used to create communities, to experience relationships, to present the Self in certain ways, and to create "virtual spaces" for people to meet, throughout history. Hence any experiences in contemporary society may be superseded in the future by those mediated by new technological forms, which in their own way will bring fears and concerns, as well as opportunities, just as virtual worlds and digital technology have done. It is possible that society is already on the cusp of this, with the introduction of technology which allows an immersive three-dimensional experience of virtual environments through Head-Mounted Displays, and includes the development of a new virtual world by Second Life's creators designed to work with such technology (Boas, 2013; Tansey, 2015).[38]

Nevertheless, while mediation of technology is not new, and technology always evolves, the opportunities available through today's virtual environments allow experiences that for some people are beyond what is possible in the physical world. However, the Self has multiple simultaneous locations: "here" in the physical world, "there" in the virtual, and even "elsewhere", another environment entirely. The contemporary individual may indeed be a "cyborg", with the Self extended and mediated by technology, yet the Self also emerges not in one location or another, but at their intersection, which at times can be the cause of some psychological disconnect.

Ultimately, while the Self in contemporary society can characterised by the potential for multiple Selves and trajectories, mediated and extended by technology, despite this,

[38] See https://www.oculus.com/ for an example of such technology.

individuals accept agency for their own experience and maintain a Self which for them is unified and coherent.

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The London School of Economics and Political Science

Virtual Selves in Virtual Worlds: Towards the Development of a Social Psychological Understanding of the Self in Contemporary Society

Simon Evans

Appendices

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Appendix 1. Glossary of expressions, terms and abbreviations

This paper uses a number of expressions, terms and acronyms that are peculiar to the sphere of virtual worlds and virtual environments generally, and to Second Life specifically. This glossary provides the definitions of some of these. The source for these definitions is a mix of the Second Life Wiki (http://wiki.secondlife.com/), Second Life wikia (http://secondlife.wikia.com/), the glossary provided in Boellstorff (2008) and researcher experience.

^^: The commonly used emoticon for raised eyebrows.

Alt: An alternative avatar.

Av, avi, avie: Commonly used abbreviations for "avatar".

BDSM: The commonly used abbreviation for Bondage Domination Sado Masochism, a particular form of sexual activity Role Played within Second Life and other virtual environments, as well as being practiced in the physical world.

BRB: The commonly used abbreviation for "Be Right Back", stated by someone if they need to be away from the keyboard (AFK) but will be leaving their avatar logged on.

Crash: The spontaneous shutdown of the Second Life programme, usually due to some form of data overload.

FtF: Face-to-face

Gesture: A phrase, often with an accompanying sound effect and/or action, that is initiated by typing a short code in the open chat field in the Second Life screen.

Griefing: The act of purposefully disrupting another person's experience of being in Second Life.

HUD: Head Up Display; this is the acronym commonly used to describe onscreen paraphernalia that presents information to the Second Life user, or allows them to interact with the programme e.g. to animate the avatar.

Inworld: The commonly used expression by users of Second Life to indicate being in Second Life. Other expressions include "logged on" and "online".

Instant Message: A message that can be read only by the person to whom it is addressed, commonly known by its acronym, IM or sometimes called "private message".

Lag: The slowdown of graphics or appearance of text, due to some form of data overload.

LOL, lol: Laugh out loud.

Open chat: The written communication that can be seen by everyone within a given distance of the avatar that issued it; sometimes abbreviated to “open” or known as public chat.

MMORPG: The commonly used acronym for Massively Multiplayer Ongoing Role Playing Game. These are Internet-based graphical computer games involve many individuals playing simultaneously, often in fantasy world settings. Potentially the most well-known example is World of Warcraft.

MUD: The commonly used acronym for Multi User Dungeon (or Domain). These are text-based Internet sits combining elements of Role Playing and player versus player games, often with a fantasy world setting (although some are purely socialising based). Similar environments are provided by MOO (MUD Object Oriented), MUCK (Multi User Chat Kingdom) and MUSH (Multi User Shared Hallucination).

Notecard: An object in Second Life that appears as a window and contains text or other embedded items. Commonly known as NC.

Prim: The abbreviation for “primitive”, the basic building block in Second Life, used to build objects.

Profile: Information about a resident that is displayed in a separate window within Second Life.

RL: The abbreviation for “real life”, an expression for the physical world commonly used by residents of Second Life and other virtual environments. Also known as “real world” (RW).

RP: The commonly used abbreviation for Role Play.

Script: Programmes, written in a specific Second Life code called LSL (Linden Scripting Language), which determines how those objects behave or how avatars can interact with them.

Sim: The abbreviation for “simulator”, a region of land within Second Life.

SL: The commonly used abbreviation for Second Life.

SNS: The commonly used acronym for social networking site, e.g. Facebook.

Steampunk: A science fiction/fantasy subgenre, having a setting where steam power is widely used, e.g. Victorian Britain, but incorporates science fiction or fantasy themes; this is a popular theme in Second Life Role Play and sims.

Texture: A layer placed on a prim to give its appearance, made with an external programme such as Photoshop.

TP: The commonly used abbreviation for teleport, the ability to move instantly from one location in Second Life to another.

Third Party Viewer (TPV): A Viewer approved by Linden Labs but not developed by them, that provides an alternative mode for using the Second Life programme. These are generally three dimensional graphic viewers based on current or previous Second Life official Viewers, but text-only Third Party Viewers are also available which provide a text-only alternative and hence are not so demanding on computer processing power as the conventional Second Life Viewers. See http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Third_Party_Viewer_Directory and http://secondlife.com/corporate/ tpv.php for information on Third Party Viewers and Third Party Viewer guidelines.

Troll: A person who purposefully disrupts another person's online experience.

WB: The commonly used abbreviation for "Welcome Back", a greeting made when someone returns to their avatar after being away from the keyboard (AFK)

XD: A commonly used emoticon for smiling.

Appendix 2. Inworld recruitment

This Appendix contains copies of the text used in the NCI group Instant Messages to recruit participants (** indicates the name of the group moderator who provided permission to recruit).

Figure A.1. Copies of the text used in the NCI group Instant Messages to recruit participants (** indicates the name of the group moderator who provided permission to recruit).

General users

> Hello all. I am a social psychology student (see my profile). I am conducting interviews and group discussions in SL, to discuss what it is like living in SL. I am looking for people to take part in interviews or groups. If anyone would be willing to be a participant can they IM me please? I will give you all the information you need before you have to make a final decision on whether to be a participant or not. TY very much. (Approval to make this announcement has been given by **).

Group discussions

> Hello all, sorry to bother you. I am a social psychology student (see my profile). I am conducting group discussions in SL, to discuss what it is like living in SL and I am looking for people to take part. If anyone interested in taking part can they IM me please? I will give you all the information you need before you have to make a final decision on whether to be a participant or not. TY very much. (Approval to make this announcement has been given by *).

New users

> Hello all. I am a social psychology student conducting research in SL about what it is like being here (see my profile). I am currently looking for people who have been in SL less than six months to talk about their opinions. If you are interested in talking to me, can you IM me please? If you have been here longer and also interested, please let me know too! TY very much. (Approval to make an announcement has been given by **).

Figure A.2. Copy of the text used in the Instant Message sent to Second Life users who had participated in research detailed in Evans (2011).

> Hi, you may remember you helped me with some research I conducted a couple of years ago, about what it is like to be a person in SL. I have just sent you an NC about some follow up work I would like to do with you, if you are willing to help again. I realise you may have left SL or not be here very often, or even as an alt, but if possible it would be great if I could talk to you again, just about how you feel about SL and the results of the research I conducted before and what has happened in the last two years. If you can't help or I don't hear from you, well thanks for the help you gave me before, it is much appreciated. ☺

Figure A.3. Copy of the text used in the "Second Life Follow Up Research" notecard, sent to Second Life users who had participated in research detailed in Evans (2011).

You may remember that two years ago you were kind enough to be a participant in research I undertook to try and begin to understand the experience of being a person in Second Life. As a participant I gave you a summary of the findings of the research, after I had completed it.

That research was developed as part of a master's level social psychology degree and I am now undertaking a PhD, again focusing on the experience of being a person in virtual worlds. I am currently in the process of developing a new research programme building on the research you helped me with before. Although two years has passed since my previous research, I still believe more understanding is needed of the experience of being a person living in virtual worlds, why people live in virtual worlds, the relationship between virtual life and real life, and how people's experience changes over time.

As a past participant it would be very helpful if you would be willing to help me again. In the first instance I would like to interview you to understand to what extent the findings from my previous research matched with your own views and experience, and to also explore how your opinions and feelings about Second Life may have changed in the last two years.

As before, I am a student in the London School of Economics Institute of Social Psychology and my supervisor is Professor Saadi Lahlou (s.lahlou@lse.ac.uk).

If you feel you can help me again, please send me an IM or notecard and I will then arrange a time and place to meet you, and provide you with another summary of the previous findings, if you need it. If you do not want, or are unable, to participate further, I fully understand and I appreciate all the help you have given me up to now.

Many thanks,
Fearless Foulsbane.

Appendix 3. Informed consent

This Appendix contains copies of the text used in the Virtual Selves in Virtual Worlds Information and Consent Notecard issued to any Second Life resident expressing an interest in becoming a participant.

You are being asked to participate in a research study about social life inside Second Life, in particular in relation to your experience as a person in Second Life. It forms the basis of the PhD programme that I am a student on, in real life, in the London School of Economics Institute of Social Psychology. My supervisor is Professor Saadi Lahlou (s.lahlou@lse.ac.uk).

The research procedure involves a one-to-one interview or participation in a group discussion that will last approximately one hour and be conducted in text. During the course of the interview or group discussion you will be asked to discuss a variety of topics, including how you spend and manage your time in Second Life, something of your Second "Life story", similarities and differences between your Second and First Lives, how it feels to be a person in Second Life and to what extent your Second Life is separate from your First Life. With your permission, the interview or group discussion will downloaded onto the researcher's computer hard-drive which is password-protected. This study will help explain what new kinds of social phenomena are taking place in online environments, like Second Life. As these environments become more popular and more sophisticated, there is a need for better understanding of how they are similar to, and different from, social phenomena in the real world.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or discontinue at any time. You may choose not to answer any question, as well as ask for some or all of your responses to be removed from the downloaded text. No information that personally identifies you will ever be disclosed. I will never use your real screen name in any reports resulting from this study, and I will never ask you for your real life name. If you would like to participate but have a preference for whether it is a group or one-to-one interview you participate in then please inform me.

You can keep the notecard on which this information appears. Because there is currently no way to sign a notecard in Second Life, by typing I an "instant message" saying "I agree to participate in your study" you are saying that you understand this information notecard, that you consent to participation, and you are declaring that you are considered an adult in the legal jurisdiction of the country that you live in, in "real life".

Thank you for your interest.

Appendix 4. Discussion group ground rules

This Appendix contains provides a copy of the text included in the "Virtual Self: discussion group ground rules" notecard, given to every participant before the commencement of each group discussion.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this group discussion … it is very much appreciated. The discussion will be held in text in open chat, and downloaded direct to my hard drive. If you have already spoken to me in an interview, some of the things we discuss might feel familiar; if you want to make a contribution and feel like you are repeating yourself, please don't worry, go ahead and speak anyway!

In order to make the discussion as enjoyable as possible, I ask you to abide by the following ground rules. If anyone has any problems with any of these, please IM me and I will do what I can to accommodate! Thank you. ☺

1. Please be respectful and non-critical of others in the discussion.
2. If you need to unexpectedly be AFK for a short time please state BRB in the open chat.
3. If you crash please try to return as soon as possible.
4. In order to concentrate on the discussion, I would appreciate it if you put your status as "busy".
5. You are reminded that if any aspect of the discussion makes you uncomfortable, you may refuse to answer, or leave the discussion.

Appendix 5. Topic guides

This Appendix provides illustrations of the topic guides that were used for all interviews and group discussions held for the purpose of the present research programme.

Figure A.4. Topic guide for group discussions.

Introduction: thanks for coming, give everyone the ground rules notecard, and check if any questions or problems with it.

1. How did you come to be in Second Life? Did you have any expectations of what it would be like? How does it match to those expectations? What do you like/dislike? How do you get ideas of what to do here?
2. What is the point of SL? What purpose does it serve you? How do you use it? Are there any problems with it (e.g. as an idea, or the technology, etc.)? Are you free to do what you want?
3. What does it feel like being in SL? Do you feel the same person as in RL? Does anyone do role play? What do you enjoy about it? What does it feel like, having an avi?
4. Have you changed since being in SL (in RL or SL)? What do you think of SL now compared to when you joined? How does it feel to look back on your time in SL? Has SL changed?
5. Do you spend much time with other people? How do you meet people? How do you stay in touch? What kind of groups are you in? How much time do you spend with them? What do you do together?
6. How often do you come to SL? When do you come, how do you decide when to? How do you manage to get a balance between RL and SL? Do you ever go to any other worlds?
7. Has anyone anything else they want to say?

TY VM for your time. Can you tell me what you thought of this research experience and why you took part?

Figure A.5. Topic guide for individual interviews concerning representation of the Self in virtual worlds.

In advance: ask participants to provide a pic of their avatars to show how they have changed over time/how avatars compare to each other. 5 pics maximum.

1. Introduction: same arrangement as before, declare agree to participate in my study.
2. Tell me about the joining process and how you decided your name and how to look when you first arrived. What did you think of the process?
3. Do you have expectations of how others should look? What can you tell about a person from their avatar? Are there rules about how an avatar should look?
4. For each picture:
   a. Describe the story of each change.
   b. Why did you look this way, how did you decide, where do you get ideas from?
   c. Why was the picture taken?
5. Discussion on profiles
   a. When you see a profile what do you expect to see?
   b. What can you tell by a person's profile?
   c. Tell me how you decided what to put in your profile.
   d. Do you speak to someone you don't know first, or wait to be spoken to? How do you decide?
6. Do you have avatars for other worlds/networking sites?
   a. Which?
   b. Pictures
   c. How choose, changed over time?

Figure A.6. Topic guide for individual interviews concerning the processes involved in being a Virtual Self in virtual worlds, version for non-regular users of other virtual environments.

Introduction: declaration of being considered an adult in the legal jurisdiction of the country that you live in, in rl; all conversation in IM; may refuse to answer questions or terminate at any point; if you crash return as soon as possible (or we will reschedule); agree to participate.

1. Can you tell me if you use any other virtual worlds besides SL, or if you use Facebook, any kind of messenger, or social networking site? How often?
2. Can you tell me how you first came to SL? How did you "settle into" SL, how long did it take and to what extent is you feel you "fit in"?
3. How much time do you spend here, what do you do and what you like most/least about SL? Is there anything SL gives you that you can't get in RL? What keeps you coming to SL?
4. How did you choose your avi appearance? What does it feel like to use your avi? How similar is who you are in SL to who you are in RL? To what extent do you think that who you are in SL is an extension of who you are in RL?
5. Are you free to be who you want to be in SL? To what extent do you have obligations in SL? Do you ever come here even you don't feel like it?
6. What kind of person are you in SL? Do many people know you? Is it important what people think of you in SL and what do you to do make sure they think well of you? What kind of person would they say you are?
7. What kind of things upset you in SL? Are they the same as in RL? Is it possible to be hurt in SL?
8. How open are you with people about your RL and how open with people in RL about SL?
9. Any other relevant thoughts, ideas and observations you may have?

TY VM for your time. Can you tell me what you thought of this research experience and why you took part? Would you be willing to take part in other interviews and/or group discussions?

Figure A.7. Topic guide for individual interviews concerning the processes involved in being a Virtual Self in virtual worlds, version for regular users of other virtual environments.

Introduction: declaration of being considered an adult in the legal jurisdiction of the country that you live in, in rl; all conversation in IM; may refuse to answer questions or terminate at any point; if you crash return as soon as possible (or we will reschedule); agree to participate.

1. Can you tell me what other virtual worlds besides SL you use? What kind of social networking sites/online comms do you use (for RL/SL/other)?
2. Can you tell me how you first started using these?
3. How much time do you spend doing each of these, and how do you manage your time amongst them? Which is your favourite?
4. What you like most/least about SL? How does it compare to other worlds? Does it give you anything RL or these other worlds can't? How do you typically spend time in SL? How much time do you spend here? How do you manage your time?
5. How did you choose your avi appearance? How similar is who you are in SL to who you are in RL? How does who are you are in other worlds relate to SL and RL?
6. How free are you to be who you want to be? Do you have obligations in the virtual worlds you use?
7. Is it important what others think of you? What do you do to make sure you are seen the way you want to be?
8. Does anything upset you when you are online?
9. What keeps you using virtual worlds?
10. Do the people you know in the various online things you do overlap?
11. Any other relevant thoughts, ideas and observations you may have?

TY VM for your time. Can you tell me what you thought of this research experience and why you took part? Would you be willing to take part in other interviews and/or group discussions?

Figure A.8. Topic guide for interviews conducted in the first time period.

Introduction: declaration of being considered an adult in the legal jurisdiction of the country that you live in, in rl; all conversation in IM; may refuse to answer questions or terminate at any point; if you crash return as soon as possible (or we will reschedule).

1. Can you tell me how you first came to SL?
2. How did you "settle into" SL, how long did it take and to what extent is you feel you "fit in"?
3. How do you typically spend time in SL?
4. What you like most/least about SL?
5. How much time do you spend here?
6. How do you manage your time between rl and SL? Do you spend some of your rl thinking about your SL?
7. If you look back on your time in SL, do you think there is a life-story? Can you tell it to me?
8. How did you choose your avi appearance?
9. How similar is who you are in SL to who you are in rl?
10. To what extent do u think that who u are in SL is an extension of who you are in rl?
11. To what extent has your avi developed personalities, traits and characteristics of their own?
12. When you are watching your avi on the screen what does it feel like?
13. Any other relevant thoughts, ideas and observations you may have?

TY VM for your time. Can you tell me what you thought of this research experience and why you took part? Would you be willing to recommend participation in this research?

Figure A.9. Topic guide for interviews conducted in the second time period.

Thanks for coming – okay if we talk in IM for privacy? Although this is only a follow up, you still may refuse to answer questions/terminate at any point. If crash return ASAP, or we can reschedule. I am interested in how close my findings are to your own experience, and to what extent you agree with what you thought before. Have you read the research summary and the transcript of our interview? (Give 10 mins to read if not).

1. Can you talk to me about how you feel when reading that report and your old interview?
2. To what extent do my findings match what you think and have experienced? What aspects of being a person in SL might be missing from my findings?
3. How similar is who you are now in SL to who you are in rl?
4. How closely does how you feel now having been in SL all this time, match how you felt when we did the first interview?
5. In what ways, if any, have you changed as a person in the last two years ... both in rl and SL?
6. In what ways, if any, has being in SL affected your rl?
7. To what extent does who you are in SL match who you are in rl?
8. In what ways has your involvement with SL changed over the last two years? What part does it play in your life now compared to then?
9. You have been in SL a long time ... what were your reasons for being here in the first place, and what keeps you here?
10. What are the good things and the bad things about being in SL?
11. Have you tried any other virtual worlds? How does your experience with them compare to being in SL?
12. Do you use Facebook, MSN etc., either for rl and/or your avi? To what extent do you think you are the same person across all of these?

Thank you for your help. Would you be willing to take part in further interviews and/or group discussions? I am also interested in speaking to noobs, do you know any who might be willing to meet me?

Appendix 6. Example interview transcripts

This Appendix contains four example transcripts: one group inworld interview, two individual inworld interviews, and one physical world interview (part of the SEBE procedure). These examples illustrate the range of different transcript formats that were used for the purpose of analysis. It is important to note that on transcripts elicited from inworld interviews, while the transcripts include all grammatical and typographical errors as originally made by participants and interviewer, they have been cleaned of the time-stamps included in the original download, and codes have been used to protect the identity of the participant.

Group Interviews

This is an example of a group interview conducted in text in Second Life. There are five participants, none of whom are known to each other. The interview was held at the Fearless Research Centre, and from first arrival to final departure had a duration of 104 minutes. Figure A.8 provides an image of the discussion captured at the time. In the transcript, the participants are signified by the initials A, H, M, N, and S, the Interviewer by I.

Figure A.10. Image of the group discussion, used for the example group interviews transcript, image captured at time.

Chat Range: S [1m]

I: Good morning!
I: I forgot the coffee and croissants
S: I need both
S: we will sit in here?

I: Well we can sit here or the campfire
Chat Range: A [6m]
S: there is a Freudian bent on the chairs, isn't there?
I: maybe here now i have sent the LM
I: i imagine there is
Chat Range: N Resident [6m]
A: oops sorry
I: hi A
S: Hi A
I: Hi N
A: hi :)
I: are you all landing on each other
I: come through into here
S: Hi N
I: i put the LM there to save ppl landing on the table
A: lol I just land on a av is that ok joke
N: :-)
I: lol
S: heh
I: i am going to give you a NC
I: can you have a look at it while we wait for others
A: nice to meet yu N and S
N: Hi A
N: Hi S...
Chat Range: H[6m]
Second Life: Items successfully shared.
Second Life: Items successfully shared.
I: Hi H, thanks for coming!
A: hi H nice to meet you
H: my pleasure I... thanks for inviting me ;-)
Second Life: Items successfully shared.
I: I've just given you a little NC to look at before we start H
S: Hi H
Chat Range: M [6m]
I: Hi M ã‹¡
M: Good Hour :)
I: good morrow
M: *chuckles*
H: greetings all
S: heyo M
A: hi moragn nice to meet you
N: Hello!
Second Life: Items successfully shared.
M: Hello All *grins*
I: M I just gave you a little NC
I: i just realised it sounds very bossy calling it ground rules
I: i might call it something else
A: not really
I: ã‹¡
M: got it thanks :)
A: softer than just saying group rules I think :)
I: its the word rules, it brings out the rebel in me
A: lol

I: i will just wait a couple more mins, one more person might come, if thats ok
N: norms...expectations....
S: It works, it's your meeting.
I: thanks ã‹¡
M: M sips her coffee, trys to wake up
Covenstead Coffee Mug: Hail Caffeina - Enjoy your coffee, M
I: LOL
S: coffee
S: I knew I was missing something
S: brb
A: lol
I: lol
I: get me one please
A: laughs you do not drink coffee :P
Covenstead Coffee Mug: Hail Caffeina - Enjoy your coffee, I
M: M pass I a cuppa joe
A: :)
I: lol thanks
M: yw :)
I: are you back yet S?
S: yes
S: sorry
I: lol np,
I: ::: WELCOME BACK :::
I: ok we will make a start!
I: oops
M: lolz
I: lol
I: thanks for coming everyone, i appreciate it
A: smiles uvw
I: have you all looked at the nc i just gave you?
A: Yvw
I: any questions?
H: yes looked it over
M: the Group Rules? yes, its fine :)
H: no q's
I: good ã‹¡
N: yes - no questions
S: no problems
A: when we need to answer do we siginfy with @
I: no, dont worry
I: unless you want to
A: ok ty
I: just to kick off and people say how they first came to SL?
I: can*
M: My sister dragged me here *giggles*
S: I was out of work, panicking, and my dh told me to check out SL. He's regretted that a few time. ãƒ„
A: a friend introduced me to sl
H: I met Linden in 2005 in California at a Commonwealth Club event in San Fran
S: he has been inworld twice, read about Second Lifeâ„¢ in a magazine.

N: A friend.
H: but didn't do anything again until 2009 when I loved back to Hong Kong and realized my university had an entire SL virtual campus
H: loved = moved
I: ã‹¡
S: very cool, H
H: =-)
I: when you came here did you have any expectations of what it would be like?
A: I joined in 2006 but deletted that av and started again in febuary 2007
S: dang, you'
S: ryou are old
M: no, not really, I didn't know what to expect, except that it would be a different and probably very fun experience ^-^
S: S ducks
I: lol
H: I thought about deleting my initial avi... but grew attached to him... now I have three... H is actually number 3...
S: I had no clue, or expectations
N: No - I came in world to attend my RL's friends opening of a coffee shop. This is my number two avi.
S: I was so overwhelmed just trying to walk.
N: Same here S.
M: *chuckles* I know what you mean S, I knocked myself unconcious falling down the stairs on my 3rd day xD
S: I found NCI, got help from a couple of great people
H: I stayed away from SL initially mainly because of the talks in 2005 at the Commonwealth Club... people were saying that a lot of residents join to have virtual sex
H: and I couldn't quite wrap my ahead around that concept
S: we became friends, eventually meeting in RL. A wonderful experience.
S: H....you and me both.
H: ;-)
A: I think some do but they fail to realise the learning experience here
M: ditto H *agrees*
H: but when I realized that my own uni had a virtual campus then I started becoming interested... and just anted to see how academics and students were using it
S: and what have you found?
H: well.... I've found that students don't like Second Life... and educators are struggling to find support and make SL work for them
H: *sigh*
S: uh oh
S: why don't they like it?
M: that's a shame H
H: mostly because of technical stuff... drag... slow servers
S: they sound like gamers
H: that in itself can kill the experience before it even begins
S: who want everything instantly

M: *chuckles*
A: they need to find what Is causing the lag
H: well... some students actually don't like the fact that SL can feel kind of game like
A: when teaching or learning lag I agree can kill
N: sometimes Sl can be an inconsistent medium
A: sl is what we make it
H: they don't see how "gaming" can be educational
A: if we see it as a game then it will be
H: true
A: we need to adjust our thinking
H: but interestingly... I'm usaing arcade gaming as a means to learn language in SL
M: Huh, that's interesting H, I've taken some courses online and HATED it, I would have much prefered to have taken them in SL
A: and get down to the basics of learning onve again
S: interactive online courses would be awesome
S: sitting listening to dull, dry tutorials is a pain
H: you know what it is as well...?
M: So true S
H: educators who don't spend the time in SL to get to really learn it and understand it
H: but expect their students to learn in it
A: this is a valid point H
M: Ah HA! that I believe :)
A: and most students do not listen
H: lol
M: *giggles*
I: lol
H: bling off
H: *excuse me* lol
A: lol
M: :)
S: lol
I: what do ppl in the "real world" think about SL do you think?
M: that it's a stupid, childish, waste of time---or they've never heard of it :P
N: It is a game only or chat room.
S: I don't know, I. I'm upset with people in general atm. For being sheep and not checking their facts.
M: I get a lot of negative responses---I'm a little bitter
A: I do manager work for clubs and find that most employies take sl work as a game, they fail to realise rl money comes into play, so same as the tutors here it costs them rl money
S: I think this medium is going to become commonplace, and more widely used for meetings and education.
M: Gosh I hope so
S: I have family resistance to what I do here
H: from an educator's pov.... it's received a little bettwer in the USA and Australia... and even in some parts of the Middle East.... but it's a hard sell obver here in East / SE Asia
M: me too S *nods*

S: they look at me at my computer inworld and they seem to think that I am playing
N: sorry to hear about the resistance....
I: do ppl in RL think its not a valid thing to do?
A: is it important what others think S
S: I don't play here. I have at least one nob I'm mentoring who keeps calling it "ingame". It drives me nuts.
S: nob=noob
H: we don't see the value yet of distance education--real distance education--and alternate forms of learning
M: I think there's prejudice in general by non-Gamers towards Gamers, even if I AM playing it's still a hobby that's as vaild as any other >:/
A: well put H
H: we are still a very brick-and-mortar culture
I: how do you all use SL?
A: if we call it a game we can expect others to see it that way
N: I use Sl as a break from studying, I listen to music, watch shows, support friends...
I: (PS I am going to take a pic, hope thats ok)
A: yes
S: I talk to people, have friends here. I have a network of friends, and RHN members, who I seem to be able to put together when there's a need. I quit trying to build a long time ago.
H: I have helped design the virtual Dept of English at my uni... using the idea of ecology as the basis for a tree design (which is the learning platform)
S: yes
M: I use it to learn, connect with friends, watch movies and spend time with people who share my interests
A: I use sl as relaxation and to build
N: photo-yes...again...
M: (that's fine I :))
H: and I also own my own island (1/8th of a homeseatd) where I am trying to build my own educational pad
M: That's kewl H :)
S: that's very cool, H
S: I escape RL, listen to music while I study.
H: I also use my island home as a space for a virtual literary journal I'm trying to get off the ground
M: I take study breaks or watch movies while I do housework ^-^
N: Recently...i started looking for meditation classes - there are a lot of resources here...
S: ãƒ„ sounds familiar, M
H: you watch movies in-world?
S: There are a ton of meditation classes, N.
S: of course!
M: oh Yeah totally N and some great herbalism classes too :)
N: :-)
S: There are several theaters, and you can stream them
S: watch in a group
M: yes, I have several fav theaters H *smiles at S*
H: =-)
N: I've heard about that S, but haven't done it yet...

S: Squeebees?
M: My RL bestfriend and I go to movies together all the time :D
H: there's a poetry group run by someone named Greyville Oh I think...
H: I try to attend... but can never make it
S: I love Seanchi Island
N: Also - attend live concerst1
N: *concerts
S: They do poetry readings, read books, and let people read their own work and get feedback
H: the one run by Greyville?
S: no
H: oh
H: lol
M: I also attend literary readings at the Senchai Library
I: lol
S: ãƒ„
I: does SL have a point? Does it serve a purpose?
A: H what would you do to make learning here better
S: yes, it does
H: A... I wish I had an answer for that
M: it can, like RL it is what you make it
N: Can you clarify I?
A: well it is hard to find an answer
H: if I had the answer virtual life would be so sweet
H: lol
M: *chuckles*
A: but it is not impossible
S: brb
I: lol what would make virtual lif sweet H?
A: hb
I: hb stac
I: e
H: I am part of a confefnece called ENCKE... *points to sign above my head*
A: smiles
H: we're trying to buildi a collaborative univeristy tigether
H: I sppose collaboration is one key
A: yes
M: that sounds great H :D
N: I - when you say a purpose...is that in general?
A: do you set all scripts to mono ?
I: yes N, does it have a role in peoples lives
S: SL's ability to allow people from all walks to meet and talk on a fairly level ground is unique
H: I believe it does
H: I'm part of the MaMachinima group
H: and I was watching a documentary a few weeks ago
M: It's allowed me to connect with communities I otherwise wouldn't have access to
H: that a resident made
N: It always depends on who the person is and where they are in life.

H: about people from around the US,people who you would never have expected, making a life inside of SL
N: i watched mt friend keep herself together by being in world while trying to keep her RL together.
A: sl can be a good medium for learning
H: true
A: as long as the particepents are like minded
M: *nods in agreement*
N: My apologies...my keyboard is going down...
A: grr typo sorry
N: same
N: She was unemployed for about a year or so
H: but I have also found that many peope come in-world because they could never live this kind of life in the physical realm
A: this is another factor
N: but was able to be here with people and build support...
S: see, this is the thing. I'm here, in a "meeting" and my dh (dear husband) walks up and starts a business discussion. Naturally if I did not turn away and listen to him, he would have been upset with me. Second Lifeâ„¢ has no real purpose to him.
M: or they want to try out a life that is different from what they have in RL
A: like myslef I could nerve in rl build what I do here or speak to people from all over the world free
H: an escape to something better... but not necessarily finding a solution to the first life problems they are temporarily leaving behind
N: true H or they are bed bound...etc
H: yes
H: brb
I: hb H
A: I think even a small respite from rl stress is helpful
A: hb
S: I think friends here can help us through a lot of things
A: yes
S: just having that support is so very important
N: agrees
A: but in the end it depends on our way of thinking
I: what do you mean A?
A: well if we depend entirely on others for suprt we do not learn how to suport ourselves here
S: I agree A, for instance, I have experienced people with ideas of gender roles that are very, very foreign to me.
A: I know a few that change gender here
M: *smiles amused*
A: and this is fine so long as they are honest about it
I: is honesty in SL an issue?
A: I think so
M: what if they're not A *curious*
S: I change species
S: and have found some people will not talk to me if I'm other than human
H: back

S: it's stupid, IMHO
N: Define honesty inworld.
A: well if they stay single no harm done
M: lol S
S: honesty is an issue, I
A: but if they partner and get found oput there is a lopt of harm done
S: some people will lie, and know it.
A: honesty here should be the same as in rl
M: people lie in RL, how is it different? *curious*
H: one of my alts is a hybrid vampire... and he's been "shot" at a few times by supposed hunters lol
N: Not sure about honesty...I am on the fence
S: I had a friend, a man, who had partnered a young lady. Long story short, she handed her account over to her aunt when she got married, and the aunt only came clean when he cornered her.
A: would you sit on the fence in rl about lies ?
N: no - but inworld how would you really know
S: before he found out, she was pretending to be the same person, and it just can't be done. The typist ALWAYS shows through the avatar.
M: That sucks S, sorry that happened to your friend :(
A: yes a liar always makes mistakes
S: He has left SL.
A: you see the harm a lie does to someone
H: true
I: some people think that SL is for role play, what do you think of that?
H: karma will give back to you what you give to it
A: tbh I do consilling here and hear many horror stories
A: dang typo again lol
I: lol A
A: lol
S: I think that's fine, as long as they are up front about the rp.
A: yes H I agree but does the one wronged feel this way
N: you could lie in RP - that is why I am on the fence...honesty depends on the nature of the situation
M: I do a lot of RP here, it's a great hobby
H: a lot of students think SL is just for gaming and role play...
H: but yes I agree
H: role playing is a great
A: well rp is like acting no lies there as all know this
H: but I suppose in a way we're all rp'ing in SL
A: hmm
M: maybe we're all RPing in RL too *grins at H*
I: how do you mean, H?
N: lol Morgan
I: lol
M: ;)
H: I mean... I am def *not* 7 feet tall and buff like a brick house in RL!
H: lol

S: we play our roles in society, but it's not necessarily lying to fit into social norms.
N: lol
S: pfft, I look just like my avie
S: :D
H: lol
H: you have wings S?
H: in rl?
H: lol
A: well H our avs are an impression of maybe what we would like to look like or how we once did
H: damn... I wanna look like you then
A: lol H
M: I look NOTHING like my avatar, except maybe the hair *chuckles*
I: lol
H: hhehehe
I: what do you all think when you look at your avis?
S: I wish I did, H
A: lol wish it was yester year
M: but I have another avatar that people say looks EXACTLY like me--if i were thinner lol
I: lol
H: lol
S: I wish the avies could be made to look older
S: you can look like a child
A: they can be
S: but adult avies are perpetually 26
H: when I look at my avi... honestly... I think damn, now that's how I'd to be walking around in first life
H: lol
I: lol
M: they can S but I agree its hard, I had to really search for attractive Mature skins when I created my Dad's avatar (it was a gift)
S: I think my avie doesn't have issues keeping the tummy flat. :/
H: it's ostly the height for me...
A: are our rl looks so important
S: ãƒ„ neat, M
H: I'm only 5'7 in first life
S: the look of an avie can dictate how others respond to you.
S: I deal with a lot of guests and newcomers
H: just 2 or 3 inches off H's height and I would never want again
H: lol
A: well they are shallow
N: i tried with my alt to make it look close to me...but nope
S: In those instances, I dress my avie like she is today, not in my usual attire.
M: My Dad just didn't feel comfortable looking 26, just like I didn't feel comfortable being 6 ft, my avatar and I are both 5'3" NOW :)

A: I am sorry would you all please excuse me I have a client waiting to speak with me and they are very upset
H: actually... I have tried to give H a multiracial / multiethnic look
I: ok A, thanks for coming
H: sure A
H: good meeting you
N: Nice meeting you.
S: ok
M: Bye A !
A: thank you all :)
S: N
I: bye A
A: bye tc hugs
N: yes S.
H: so...
S: lol
N: lol
I: so has being in SL changed things for you at all?
I: lol
H: I have found that there are very few stores that cater to the multiethnic avi... or user
S: I am still married....I was on the road to divorce when I started
M: meaning what I? *confused*
S: you are correct, H
N: same?
S: untapped market there
H: and in first life I am filipino, chinese, japanese, portuguese and german
H: and in that regard H is very much like me
S: you are American?
S: :D
M: Kewl H :D
I: oh sorry M, meaning does being in Second life change who you are as a person, maybe
S: yes
H: I try to reflect my mix in him... but not sure if I did that or not... whatever *that* is...
H: lol
I: yes S?
M: oh ok, Not really no, but it has been an excellent opportunity to explore some different parts of myself, I like to think that SL has helped me become a more well rounded person ^-^
H: I... could you repeat please?
I: sorry, yes i asked does being in SL change who you are as a person?
N: I don't think so, I have a hard time seperating RL/SL...
I: M felt it helps her be more rounded
S: yes, I found myself again in the creativity I can have in SL. I had let a lot of myself blend into my spouse. I managed to get back on my own two feet after starting to come inworld

H: it's actually taught me how to behave better around people ... oddly...
S: that's not odd at all, H
I: how do you mean N?
M: Interesting that you say that H, I also have gotten through some social anxiety by practicing meeting people here :)
H: because we lack facial expressions in SL... at least for the most part... we rely on our words,... and so it is very impirtant to be exact in how we verbalize ourselves
N: meaning I try to be who I am in RL here in Sl - values, beliefs etc...
M: so true, that's why I emote frequently *she said in sincere agreement, nodding* (lol)
S: you are a smart guy
S: lol
S: that's good, M
H: lol
I: lol M
H: N I agree
H: we have a deicsion to either be truthful or not in SL
S: how about this, then. I have a brain, and use it, and I don't find many people in Real Lifeâ„¢ keep up with me. In SL, the medium, and the people I find to talk to can keep up.
S: and my constant moving and multi tasking doesn't drive anyone nuts
N: the exampls is when someone comes across as impolite...I just observe and wait...
H: true dat
I: and then what N?
H: you can also walk away from your screen and grab a cup of tea when someone is being an ass
H: lol
M: I luv luv LUV--the MUTE button ^-^
N: and reflect...maybe something is happening in their RL or maybe they were hurt here...etc
H: and come right back and be totally non-lussed
H: non-plussed
S: I don't mean that I'm smarter than other people, I mean that I move fast and don't always take time to inform those around me of the steps in my thought process. .... I've learned better communication, what H was talking about.
M: I agree N, SL is a great teacher of Patience *smiles*
S: The muste button IS a handy tool. I wish I could mute people in Real Lifeâ„¢
N: I find S, most of my SL friend move faster than me in this medium being of non-computer brain...
H: I can sometimes be pretyt bad tempered in first life... but somehow that just all sheds off when I'm in-world
N: I find it facinating..
I: why do you think that is H?
H: well again, back to what I was saying just now... I can walk away from the situation
H: if someone is upsetting me, there are numerous ways I can remove myself from that...

H: in SL that is
N: true
H: in first life it's a bit harder
H: sometimes that physical presence just tips the balance
S: S nods
S: too true
N: However, the emotional is very strong in world...if that is the right word.
H: yes
S: It can be
H: it can be
N: more than physical
I: why do you think that is?
S: unless half your friends have Aspberger's syndrome. <rolls eyes>
H: you see... I could never get my students to talk like this in class.... lol
N: an outlet?
M: hey now, my bestfriend is an Aspy :)
S: so are 1/2 of my good friends
S: great people, and definitely drama free
S: ãƒ„
M: ;)
N: wait drama free in SL?
S: why not, H?
S: yes
H: I.... just out of curiosity... do you use IPA as a qualitative tool?
H: sorry lol
S: S chuckles
N: lol
I: lol ask me after
M: ^-^
H: hehehe yes yes sorry
I: lol
I: so why does drama happen in SL?
S: N, Aspbergers ... they are people for whom emotions are confusing or even unimportant.
S: drama is a part of life. Some people thrive on it
M: why do think it is difficult to get your students to have good discussions H? *curious*
N: Oh - ok.
H: well for one, M... they are L2 English language learners... so it's tough for them to express thremselevs
M: ah *nods* a language barrier can be a problem
S: they come to Second Lifeâ„¢ to learn?
N: because expression is hard to express in a few words....
S: that would be fun
M: i find it difficult to type in Spanish :)
S: I find Portuguese to be.... confusing
H: but I think, putting that aside... psychological barriers can be removed in-world... and we don't feel so inhibited in saying what we feel
N: *nods

H: but that is also a cultural issue in Asia / Hong Kong
S: there you go
H: students are not used to being given the freedom to say what they feel
H: or believe that anyone cares
S: I know that in China, what people perceive from watching others is very different than in the US.
S: It's fascinating to me.
H: yes
S: what level of study, H?
H: I teach uni
I: do culture clashes occur in SL?
H: I'm an English instructor
S: IMHO, if you get a class to talking, and you will have a very, very successful class
M: neat H ^-^
H: lol
S: my fave classes, there was a lot of give and take with the instructor
S: and not a lot of time sitting down
S: yes, I
S: they do
S: I had an Indian guy once....walk up to me and start demanding things of me.
S: he was creeping
M: *answering I* yes all the time and not just because they're from different countries, they can be from different communities or even just different sims
H: in-world?
S: "things" being sexual acts.
S: yes
S: inworld
S: he thought I was unreasonable to say no
I: what happens across communities M?
N: Morgan that was my thought, but I wondered is that considered RP versus cultural?
M: *sighs* i've just noticed that there's a lot of prejudice, some people don't trust RPers, others hate Furries, some wont talk to anyone who doesnt look "Human" and many many people dont like child avatars or people that do family RP---to repeat a cliche---cant we just all get along :(
H: I was just reading up a bit on Homi Bhabha and his concept of liminal (or in our case, the virtual) spaces being continuously formed and evolved from restless entities
H: so while there are cultural clashes... sometimes those clashes can end up taking on a positive meaning
S: People seem to have a need to shut others out.
H: because cultures merge and become something existential, something new, some more...
S: I had to settle down a guy once who was being a troll in a group I was a moderator in. HE wouldn't settle until we were both in the same place, and I was human. The minute he settled. I changed back to dragon, and he wouldn't talk to me anymore. I found it .... unimaginative.

N: can I ask a question I ?
I: yes course N
H: S... interesting
H: I come across that some times
N: So I am reflecting on what M has stated: is that considered SL culture versus RL culture? Are they the same concept/
M: *chuckles exasperated* I can so relate to that S, one of my friends is a Dragon and he has a real hard time being accepted into RP sims, while I play a werewolf so I get a lot of "rejected" letters too, we commiserate
S: I think so.
N: I love dragons - they are so cool!
I: lol
I: is there a set SL culture?
S: Seawolf....I want one of those. <sighs>
S: no
S: I think Second Lifeâ„¢ is full of many cultures
S: different people with different expectations
S: "My Second Lifeâ„¢ isn't your SL"
M: There is kinda a broad culture, born of just "living" here but there are so many subcultures and sometimes I feel like those are stronger
N: I am stuck on defining...
H: yah same here
I: stronger than waht M?
S: some things you can't define
M: M gets restless, changes position
H: I was reading ina forum or an artcile somewhere that SL is having a tough time figuring out what it wanst to be
I: who is SL in that context H?
M: stronger than the overall culture of being an SL citizen
H: probably the Lindens =-)
S: How can Second Lifeâ„¢ have a hard time being anything?
M: brb, going to get more coffee ^-^
H: well, take the educational community for instance...
H: for wuite some time we were given the back burner
H: closing doen Teen Grid was one example
H: but a lot of educators are taking matters into their own hands now... buildinging communities that we *think* the Lindens are starting to take note of
S: I can't argue with closing down the teen grid. Most of them had accounts here already.
H: lol
S: I konw a guy who came to Second Lifeâ„¢ when he was 14.
H: eesh
S: the kids are smart enough to get in when they want to
S: He's 19 now.
I: does anyone ever use any of the other worlds like opensim?
N: My apologies, Iw as hoping to continue, but I must go. Thank you everyone.
H: nite N
I: oh thanks N, we will be ending soon anyway
N: Good morning!
N: Thank you!

H: I have to get going soon too... beddie bye time for me
I: lets wrap up then
H: I visit WoW
N: Send my best to M. Good nite or morning S.
I: we have gone over the hour anyway!
M: bak
I: ::: WELCOME BACK :::
I: lol M
H: and have an account with Jibe
I: ppl have to get going so we will start wrapping up
H: as well as Active Worlds
M: okies
I: thanks everyone for coming I am very glad you could come!
S: thank YOU, I
H: cheers
M: yw, this was fun ^-^
H: it was great meeting everyone
M: Great to meet everybody!
I: I had a great time
S: thank you for the opportunity.
M: H, your work sounds really interesting, do you have a Group?
S: good to talk. I've been so inactive lately.
H: I enjoyed this focus group a lot =-)
S: S waits for that answer.
S: yes H
I: thanks H!
S: who is your group?
H: well...
H: I have a group called Hybrid-lution
H: but it's very new and so no members yet
H: and I just haven't had the time to recruit lol
M: ^-^
H: Hybrid-lution is supposed to be a play on Evolution =-)
S: that is an interesting concept
H: the group focuses on hybrid identity in all its evolved forms
M: interesting concept H
H: and not just human-centered multiethnic idenity
S: I have a friend you would love
S: look up Cush Cadell
S: ãƒ„
H: sweet =-)
H: cool.. I will
S: His avies.....make you think
H: cheers S
M: i'm thinking you'll get a lot of Underworld RPers heehee
H: hehehehe
I: this sounds interesting H
H: yeah... I just need all my alts to get to work
H: lol
I: when you get recruiting i would like to join if poss
H: omg, of course
H: lol
H: would be an honour

S: sign me up
I: lol thanks
H: yay
M: yes, if you could let us know somehow that would be great :)
S: what's an alt?
I: yippee you can turn this into a recruitment drive
S: S looks innocent
I: lol S
H: well... let me get my s*&t sorted out first
H: lol
S: ok
H: I'm going to try and get back into the swing of things in the next two weeks
I: when you've all got a minute can you IM me later with any thoughts on how the group discussion could have been improved?
I: rl getting in the way H?
M: sure I
S: umm
S: did that
S: ok, I'd better get busy. dh is looking at me
S: lol
I: lol
H: yeah... just so busy with PhD stuff... writing papers, grading papers.... blah blah blah
H: you know the drill
H: lol
I: give dh our regards!!
H: lol
M: yeah and I gotta get some food before my SL Herbalism class ^_^
I: lol i do H
I: lol M
S: I will settle for my bachelor's atm. I should never have raised those kids....they are infesting my house.
H: ok everyone
S: I can't get rid of them
H: good night!
M: lol S
H: and thanks again
S: S taps ... I'm outgreat to meet you
I: ok all
H: really glad I'm stipped by tomight
I: thanks for coming!!!
M: Bye Everyone!
S: N
I: i am glad you did as well H
I: bye M
M: M waves
I: I waves back

Representation of the Self Interviews

This is an example of an interview conducted in text in Second Life. The participant is someone who has been known to the author since initial research conducted in Second Life in March 2009, and during that time has used a number of alts (i.e. alternative avatars). In this case the participant presented a female avatar, created July 28th, 2010. The interview was held at the Fearless Research Centre over two occasions, June 9th and 10th, 2011, and lasted 3 hours 18 minutes in total. Because these interviews used photographs provided by participants as a prompt for discussion, as well as including questioning regarding their Second Life profiles, the transcript includes copies of the photographs as images of their profiles (modified to conceal avatar names, for the sake of participant confidentiality). Figure A.9 provides an image of the participant captured at the time of the second interview. In the transcript P signifies the participant, I the interviewer.

Figure A.11. Image of the participant whose interview is used for the example Representation of the Self transcript, image captured at time of the second interview.

I: Hello :)
I: sorry for slight delay
I: are you ok to come over?
P: hi wb
P: yes
I: hello
I: this is my new research centre
P: hi
I: let me know when you are rezzed
P: now ty
I: thanks for coming!
P: yvw it is a pleasure
I: lets find somewhere to sit
I: hop on the ball if you want

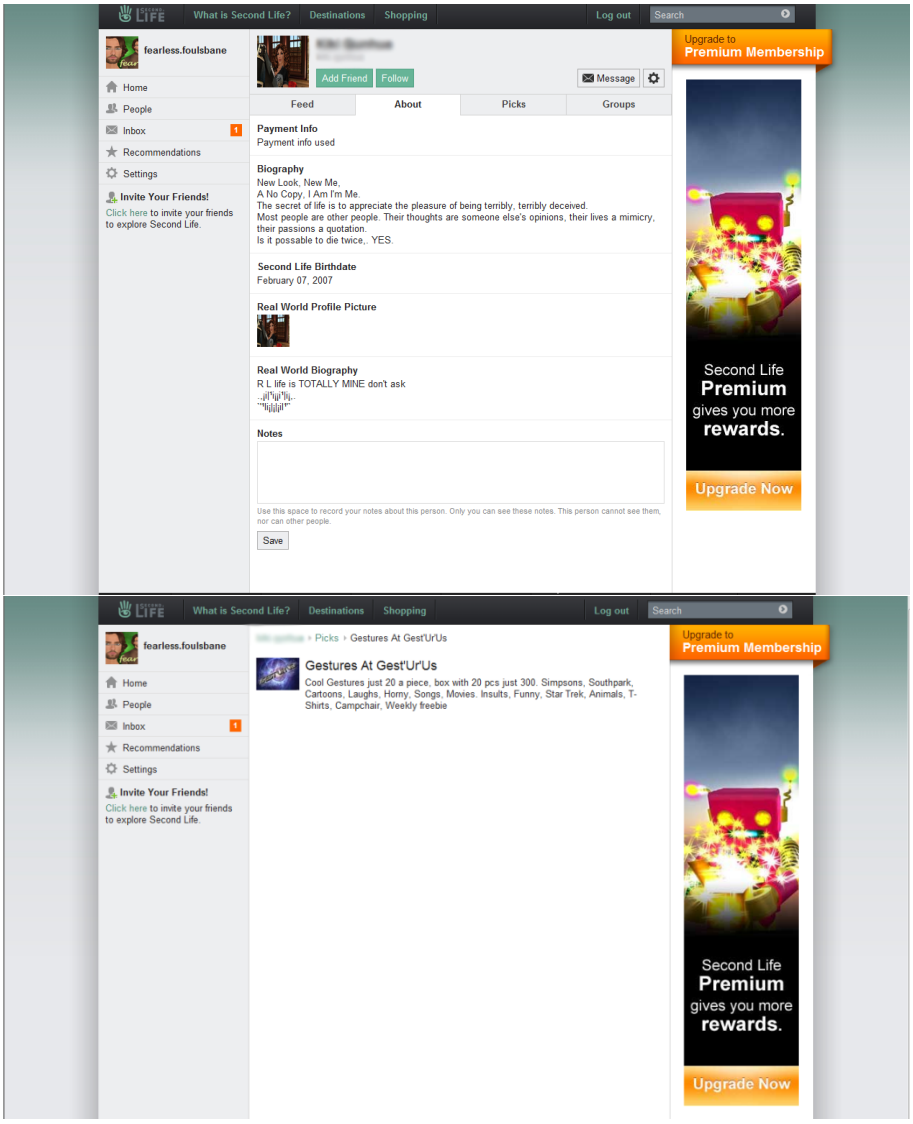
I: sorry these seats have balls for some reason!
I: lol
P: lol well this is sure comfy
I: mind you dont get dirty feet on the seats
P: :P
P: giggles
I: lol
I: can i just check did you give consent to participate in this?
P: yes
P: I answered as it instructed
P: in im
I: yes you did i just checked my records
I: lol
I: ok lets kick off
P: ok how much hair did the barber cut off lol
I: lol
I: my hair is quite short thanks!
P: a moment please this ani is driving me nuts lol
I: lol ok have a fiddle with it
P: oo and qutie formal answer :P
P: ok thats better
I: ok :)
I: just to start can we go right to the beginning
P: yes
I: when you very first joined
I: can you tell me about the process, how you picked your avi what you thought etc
P: well as I knew nothing about sl I choose the av that looked more innocent I chose the girl nextdoor av
P: I did not know how to change clothes nothing
I: how did you figure all that out?
P: trial and error really listening to others as I traveled sl
P: and looking at what the buttons did
I: what made you choose girl next door?
P: I wanted an innocent looking av one that was what I call hmely looking
P: did not know if I would like it in sl
I: so did you want to look 'normal'?
P: yes really and like myself as in not a lot of makeup
I: was [avatar 2] your first av?
P: no there was one before [avatar 1]
I: do we have pics of her?
P: no and she nolonger exsists but a male friend I met here made her look beautiful but not sluty
I: how long did you have her for?
P: she was made in the december then I made [avatar 2] in the folowing febuary
P: so about 2 and a half months
I: can i ask about your names
I: how did you decide them?
P: I wanted a short name one that could not be shortend, the first I named after my great grandmother and grandmother it is also my rl middle name

I: and then the [avatars 2 and 3, with similar names]
I: how did you choose those
P: [The name] is a short name and none related to me I thought this was a good idea so as not to be linked with [avatar 1]
I: ok
I: and then with [avatar 3]?
P: she was named like that because of the guy I was friends with and at that time [avatar 2] was beging griefed by the partner's alt's partner lol sounds confusing, anyway I thought ok if this other guy wants her to be called [avatar 3's name] not a problem thought it would look to obvious it was [avatar 2's name]
I: ah ok, he liked the name [of avatar 2]?
P: yes
P: but I also think it went deeper than that
I: in what way?
P: well he was and still is an egotist so having that name he thiught would be a kick in the pants too [avatar 2's] ex
I: ah ok
P: glad it makes sense
I: LOL
I: well i am working hard here to understand who is who
P: ok lets try and make it easier for you
I: :)
P: [avatar 2] was with a guy called [gives name]
P: we were together hmm 2 years sl and rl may be longer
P: most likely 3 years, anyways
P: things went wrong he put me on a pedistle above other women, so he made an alt [gives name of alt], he still uses him today, but not offten he has one that I do not know the name of
P: when I found this out because we were still together in rl not just here, I ended it
P: then because of circomestances as mentioned ,. I made [avatar 3]
P: with this av I was with [gives name], but should have known better than to take it into rl but hey even by this mistake I learned something,. any way he is an older man 55 this year he made an alt [gives name] and partnered another woman again when I disscovered this I ended it
P: I have the last convo we had together
I: is he the guy who liked the name [of avatar 2]?
P: yes [gives name]
I: OK
I: then [avatar 4] happened?
P: she happened before I ended it with [gives name], again because of his infidelity I was griefed so [avatar 4] was made
I: who was griefing you, his other partner?
P: he being stupid told the other woman knowing full well what she was like
I: oh ok
P: [gives name]
I: who is [that person]?
P: ebven know of her and [gives name]'s other alts
P: [she] is [gives name]'s partner [he] is [gives name]'s alt

I: ok
I: how did you pick the name [avatar 4's first name]?
P: it is mt rl name
P: * my
I: was that a hard thing to do?
P: no
P: you see here we can use any name who knows depends on who we tell
P: so all is good as long as we are careful
I: that is true
I: can you remind me of the problem with [avatar 4] ... was she being griefed as well?
P: yes she was so another [avatar with same name] was made [avatar 5]
P: at first all was good with her then she also got griefed
P: so I thought wait a min the only one that knows who I am is [gives name], so I waited listened and watched
I: ahhh
I: i was going to ask, what was going on with all this greifing
P: you see fearless people who cheat get scred and make mistakes so making them obvious
I: yes
P: I was deformed carshed forzen
P: my local was affected even my im's
I: goodness
I: i am naive, i didnt realise programmes existed that could do that
P: oh the script she used is evil hun
I: so was it [gives name] behind it?
P: well he was the one that was telling [gives name] I was
I: ok
P: so yes in effect it was him
I: so now we are here with [current avatar]
I: was it hard not to be a [gives RL name]?
P: no I was fed up sick and tired of the griefing and this av made it easy for me to enjoy sl
P: and now she is my main av
I: how did you pick the name [current avatar's first name]?
P: I wanted a wholesome name and her names means truth honesty purity depending on where it is used
I: good choice then
P: ty
I: when you said she is your main av, are there others besides the ones i know about?
P: yes I have about 11 in all but laughs all are in my details and the lindens as yet have said nothing
I: lol
I: can they put a limit on the number?
P: oh yes 5 is the limit
I: i didnt know that eithr
P: but I am not sure if that is to each e mail
I: can you tell me a bit about them?
P: lol you learn omething from me hun
I: lol

P: ask me what av
I: well are they all for different purposes?
P: no and yes laughs [avatar 5] was my business av, [avatar 4] my ordinary av the one I used daily
P: [avatar 3] was nor woking right so in efect is a storage av
I: what about the ones we havent spoken about before? do you use them all?
P: no very rarely I bring them on at times to pass things to this me
I: ah ok
I: why did you create them in the first place?
P: as I said because of the griefing
I: oh they were all due to that
P: I never wanted many av's two at the most
I: i didnt realse you needed to create so many
P: yes this one aeryn was to get away from it no mor than that only 3 trusted friends know who she is you being one of them :)
I: oh thank you :)
P: it was a nighmare really it was
P: yvw
I: it sounds like it
I: but you never gave up the idea of being in SL?
P: no never I like sl far to much to give up,... and never to a low life
I: good for you
P: ty
I: ok lets start going through these pics
I: just to warn you i need to leave in about half hour .. so will we be ok to set up a second session?
I: i am relasing these pic interviews are taking longer than i thought
P: ok np
I: ok thanks
I: ok shall we look at [the second avatar] first, is that the earliest pic?
P: I am trying to find that pic
I: its on the notecard you gave me
P: ok what is the nc named
I: oh its just called [avatar 2]
P: kk will look
I: I have them all ina folder called [current avatar]
I: i dont know if thats how you gave me or i renamed
P: grins glad you listen
I: shall i give it you back?
I: lol
P: ok got it

P: this is [avatar 2] in medievil clothes
I: how come she is in medieval?
P: I like that style of dress
I: do you/did she rp medieval?
P: no I have never rp
I: is the skin/hair etc [avatar 2]’s usual?
P: she has many skins/shapes/hair
P: I was looking through her inventory trying to find more pics but she has a lot boxed and I really did not have the time
I: thats ok
P: so at the time the pic was taken this would have been her usual skin and shape
I: how did you decide how you wanted to look?
P: just thought of who I am in a three dimential way hope that makes sense
I: so she looks like you in rl, is that what you mean?
P: no you can see what I look like in rl in [avatar 3] profile 1st life
I: so when you say in 3d, what do you mean?
P: well like now forinstance, this you s your prfesional side , this me is my partacking side but this being so I am still me just sitting in a different seat
P: when you go out with your friends you are different persona to as you are now right
I: yes
P: so now we are seeins maybe our secon dimension
P: * seeing
I: an aspect of ourselves?
P: exactly
I: so how does thinking like that help decide how to look?
P: I honestly base my looks on me choose a certain feature and go from there
P: would make it easier t understand if you get [avatar 2]’s profile up
I: i have :)



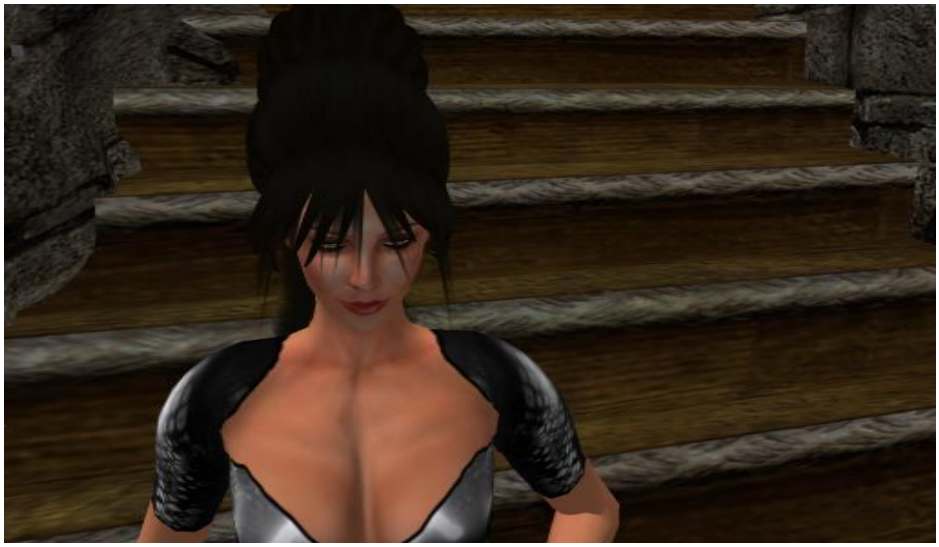
P: [repeats avatar 2's name]
P: lol smart man
I: i think she looks like rl you tbh
I: i remember you showing me this when we first met
P: who this me or [avatar 2]
I: sorry [avatar 2]
P: yes I did because I trusted you
P: kk now take a close look at this me
I: yes
P: use the radar and double click my name
P: so you see the likness yes ?
I: yes i do
I: your lips
P: ty :)
P: yes and eyes I think cheeks also
P: lol not the youth
I: do you spend lots of time on your avs?
I: lol
P: no because I have learnt to alter in edit what shape I buy
I: so its quite a quick process?

P: yes it is
P: I buy as close to what I want
I: what made you have this [avatar 2] pic taken?
P: just for reference of my look at that time
I: oh do you try to keep a catalogue?
P: yes I do
I: lets look at the next pic

P: [avatar 3]
I: tell me about this pic
P: this was taken for a modeling job [avatar 3] had
I: she looks similar to [avatar 2], i presume on purpose?
P: yes in away
I: in a way?
P: well I was not aware at the time was cossen in a rush so not to miss the job
P: * choosen
P: lol still a typo
I: did you create this look quickly thne
I: then
I: lol
I: i noticed
P: yes and sanp :P
I: sanp?
P: grr snap
I: lol
I: in terms of how she dressed etc
I: were [avatar 3] and [avatar 2] the same?
P: well she dressed like [avatar 4] more thananything but also had a rocker sense of dress
I: [avatar 2] wasnt a rocker?
P: no not really just my persona was there
I: do all the avs have your persona?
P: yes my true persona they are all me as in morals

I: are there any differenced, both from you and from each other?
I: differences*
P: the only difference from me with this one is I am a stripper laughs in rl could never be that
I: lol
P: is a way of making money here with out selling my body
I: you say you couldnt strip in rl ... is that because of morals?
P: yes,. and also my age laughs they would pay me to get dressed
I: lol
I: so there is a difference in morals between stripping in rl and in sl?
P: yes and no here you see my pixels not my real body
P: but as for the morals I am me and would never have random sex or escort from being a stripper
I: in sl you mean?
P: yes but also the same aplys to rl
I: i think we better call a halt on that for now, i need to go soon
I: can we set up a time to meet again?
P: ok np
P: yes
I: sorry its taking so long
I: its all these avs!!
P: np time needs to be spent on this
P: yeah yeah yeah :P
I: lol
I: ok when is good for you?
P: any time really to suit you this time of day or earlier
I: could we do same time tomorrow?
P: yes
I: brill
I: what we will do is go through the rest of the pics
I: but i would also like to talk about your profiles
P: kk
I: how you choose waht to write, picks etc
P: kk
P: b 4 you leave have you taken a look at this profile
I: aeryn's?
P: yes
I: oh you got partnered yesterday!
P: yes
P: may I say one of the first things you should do in an interview is get up the profile
I: i do usually but i got a bit waylaid this time round
I: if you could see my screen its a mess
I: i have profile, discussion guides, pics
P: smiles fearless always the same when we meet
I: lol
I: the IM box
P: ah my oartner is on line now
I: you are a little av squashed in the corner

I: ok well thanks for all your help
P: oh ty
P: lol
I: congratualtions!
I: lol
P: ty
P: ok let me ask him for a tp please
I: ok no worries
I: and i will see you tomorrow at 2
P: yes
I: :)
P: just waiting for him to answer
P: hers my taxi
I: ok safe journey!
I: thanks again for everyhting
P: ty
P: I know ok lets get the show on the road :)
I: lol
I: yayyyyyy
I: now dont forget to make me laugh
P: would I giggles
I: lol
I: oh bugger
P: lol no thank you
I: you look different today and i forgot to take a pic yestedday
I: is it ok if i take a pic?
P: yes
P: but only the hair is different
P: ah and the dress
I: yes :)
I: can you move toward me so i can get your feet?
P: ok take a snap of your fav trouble lmao
I: lol
I: thank youuu
P: hope it makes me look good or your in trouble rofl
P: yvw
I: lol
I: ok let me remind myself where we go to
P: kk
I: i think we had got to [avatar 4]'s pics!
P: yes
I: which is the first?
P: let me look at them
I: i want to try to do chronologically if poss
P: ok will do my best
I: god i just realised i destroyed half my house
P: ok [gives name] and [avatar 4] land 148.224.26,.. these are the cordinates on top of the pic



I: ok
P: lol oops sorry for laughing
I: lol
I: i am having a really nice day
P: u sure are
P: look in your lost and found
I: lol
I: hey presto a building
P: lol
I: bear wirh me a sec
P: kk
P: you have two houses now not just the walls you lost
I: lol i thought it looked wierd
P: lmao
P: did u look in lost and found folder
I: i think this will be ok for now
P: lol ok
I: it satisfies my OCD
P: lol
I: this was an object i think i took that instead of stting on the pose
I: anyway!!
I: lol
P: lol
I: dont tell anyone how unprofessional i am
P: damn u spoil my fun lol
I: lol
I: ok first pic
I: [avatar 4] and [gives name]’s land?
P: yes
I: can you tell me about this one
I: when was it taken?
P: this was how I made her the look was taken for her profile
P: the date will be on it
P: if you have it in your inventory click and select properties
I: its on my notecard you gave me
I: are you able to tell me?
P: no can not remember when I took it sorry

I: ok roughly?
P: really I have no idea
I: lol ok
I: no worries
P: let me put them in my inventory
I: ok :)
P: grr stupid sl will not let me
I: lol it doesnt matter
I: can you tell me how you decided on this look for [avatar 4]?
P: I liked it lookd nice not sluty
I: so same criteria really as [avatar 2] and [avatar 3]?
P: yes never have wanted to look like a slut
P: even this av is not sluty sexy yes but not sluty
I: what would you say the difference is?
P: shape more than skin also the hair style
P: and ao
I: oh i mean between sexy and slutty
P: this is what I am saying, the difference is very thin
I: oooh sorry yes
P: you have to go around and look at escorts to know what I mean
P: lol get with it :P
I: lol
I: shush
P: hehe
I: which pic is next?
P: thge second of [gives name] and [avatar 4]’s land 151,142,25

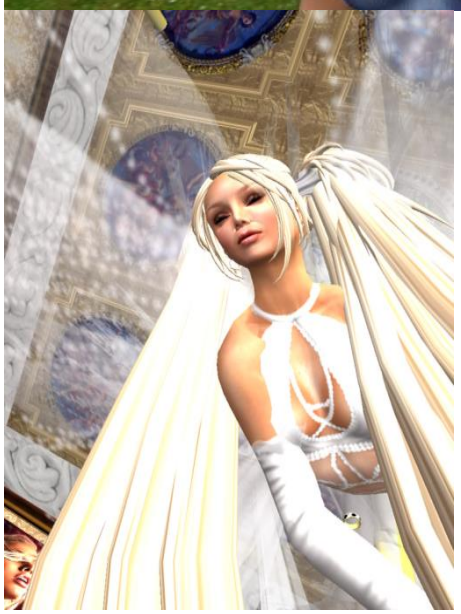
I: tell me about this
P: I just wanted a forties look the clothes but kept my shape and skin
I: was that for a party or just for pleasure?
P: no just for the look
I: where do you get your stuff from?
P: was not even really pleasure just wanted the feel
P: was a forties sim do not have the lm on me

I: do you like forties look then?
P: some of it yes but was never really comfortable with it for every day wear here in sl
I: why not comfortable?
P: just did not feel right
I: for you?
P: yes for me
I: any idea what was wrong?
P: well just did not fit where I lived at the time but at certain forties sims you have to wear that stlye of clothing
I: ah ok
P: so if I went to one I needed the clothes
P: * style
I: is [avatar 4] same looking as [avatars 2 and 3]?
P: no very different
P: all my avs are different in look only the real me is in them
I: what is different about [avatar 4]?
P: she was more a roming av she liked to look at sims, also she was the builder
P: so spent a lot of time building
I: what about [avatars 2 and 3], what did they do?
P: thgey too liked to build
P: and also all my av's help others here
I: in terms of how [avatar 4] looks, how does she differ?
P: skin hair clothes
P: I have to say something all this going back to them is disturbing
I: i did wonder
P: had a lot of problems with griefing with them
I: are we ok to carry on?
P: and built up a lot of resentment to do with the griefing
P: I will try and help as much as I can but it is hard
I: ok well just let me know
P: all the money spent om them, and all the lost wortk,. also the cheating and griefing
P: ok will]do
I: do you sometimes log on as them now?
P: only very rarely just to pass items to this me
I: ok
I: which is the next pic?

P: ok the next one is interesting a underwater world
P: this is to represent my birth sign so is part of me
I: are you aquarius?
P: the outfit she is wearing is pices
I: ohh lol
P: no next one lol
I: what was this taken for?
P: pieces even
P: bloody typos lol
I: lol
I: at least you dont destroy houses instead of sitting down
P: oh I have been known to lol
I: lol
I: what was the reason for this pic?
P: to represent my water side
I: whatdid you do with it? put it on your profile?
P: tyes but took it out after a while
I: how did you design the look?
P: we had a reef so went in there and found a good position
I: and your clothes ?
P: were from bare rose I think , is called lady pieces
P: so was apt
I: ahhh
I: is that white hair?
P: looked right with the outfit may be it came with it I can not remember
I: ok lovely
I: which pic is next?
P: damn I have closed them down
P: but I think we have done all
I: there are 2 pirates ones and an island of adventure
I: all quite different looking

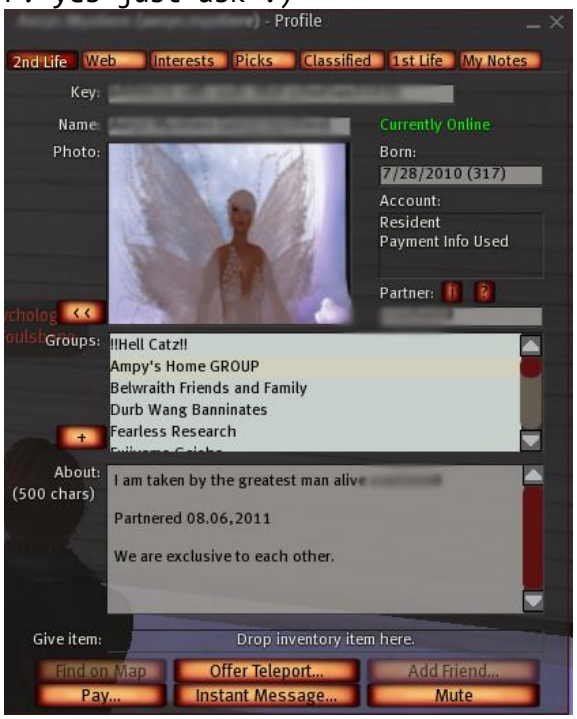
P: the pirates of adventure were atken at the same time the one that looks like I am wearing half a dress is jut I wanted a pic of me wearing that dress
I: it looks good
P: ty
I: lets have a look at the [current avatar] pics
P: did I send you any of this me
I: yes quite a few
Inventory item offered
P: ah ok lol what is the nc called
I: lol
I: i just sent it
P: ty

I: to me she looks very different
I: is she?
I: to the other avs i mean
P: yes she is very different in look and dress
P: more times than not she is a fae innocent if that makes sense
I: yes
I: how did that difference happen
I: was it conscious from start?



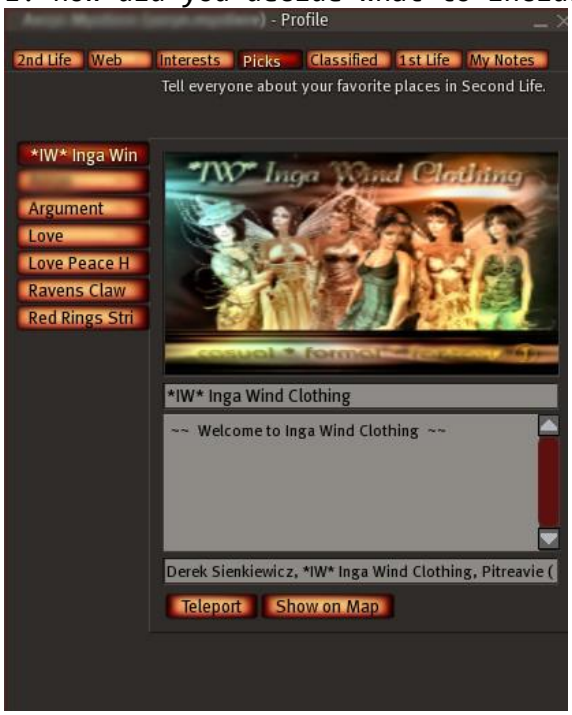
P: the pins forest is how I made in the first place since then she has evoled
P: yes it was
I: did you want something completely different?
P: yes
P: this was a new start had to be different I was starting on my own
I: how did that feel?
P: good
I: and why a fae?
P: fae's are innocent
P: kind of like fantascy
I: you have always liked girl next door, not slutty
I: is this another version of that?
P: yes always
P: yes it is
I: do you play around with [current avatar]'s look more than the others?
P: no not really just now I have a new skin a tanned one
I: ah ok i was judging by the range of pics
P: brb forgot the cooker oops

I: ok :)
P: bk
I: wb :)
P: ty
I: ok just to finish off, can we talk about your profile?
P: yes
I: I am interested how ppl construct it
P: ask :)
I: how what to include or not
I: so can you just talk me through it?
P: yes just ask :)

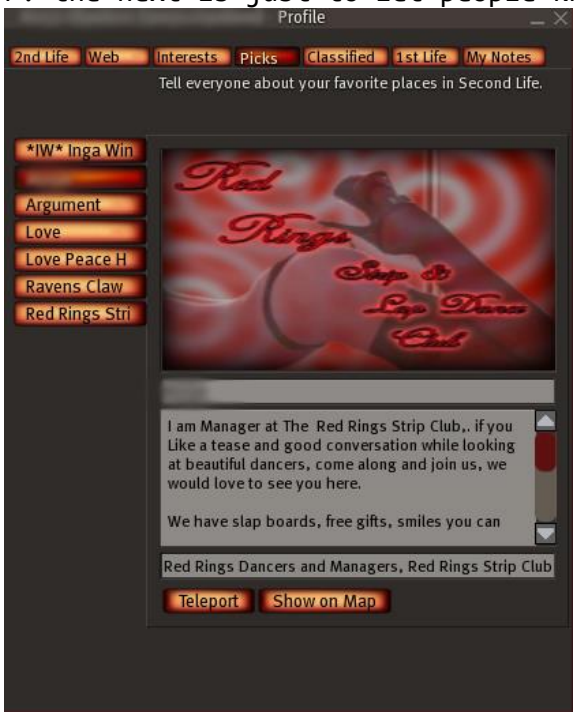


I: so first your 2nd life pic
I: how come you chose that
P: this is the goddess persphony damn thats not spelt right,. she goes along with the fae look
I: its a lovely pic
P: ty I thought so
I: so she is kind of the essence of [current avatar]?
P: yes
P: this is like my spiritual side
I: thats nice
P: ty
I: do you feel more able to express that in [current avatar] than previous?
P: yes as this me is free from all the lies and deception
P: from other btw not me
I: yes :)
I: and in the text box you talk about your partnership, have you had that there long?
P: I out that there the day we partnered
I: what was there before?
P: the poem I am a fae
I: I dont know that

P: just passed you :)
I: brill thanks so much!
P: yvw
I: and now your picks
I: how did you decide what to include?



P: the inga wind is because I buy my fae outfits there and they are verywell made all the clothes are there
I: ahhh
P: the next is just to let people know where I work



P: argument is hopefully letting people know what that means putting a positive side to it

I: did you chose that for a partic reason?
P: yes some do not know what a real argument is they think it is for winning a situation
I: these statements about argument and love you have, i guess these are all things you want to stand for?
P: exactly and hope for others to learn
I: and then finally the 1st life page

I: can you tell me abiut that?
I: who is the pic and how did youu choose the verse
P: well this is my view on an argument those who read it may learn the value of such

P: the pic is the club insugniture the verse just felt right were my thoughts
I: i think its a lovely verse
P: ty
I: did you write it?
P: no
I: i like it a lot.
P: ty so do I
I: OK we will call it a day for now!
P: ok ty
I: is it ok if i screendump your profile pages to remind me later?
P: yes :)
I: thank you so much
P: yvw :0 a pleasure to be helping you
I: thanks and its a pleasure to be helped
I: lol
P: lol
I: i am pretty certain i would like to interview again but not sure waht on
I: i am finding meeting ppl more than once useful
P: this is fine just let me know
I: more comes out
I: brilliant thanks
P: yes it does
P: ok I will be off now and hopeyou get your rl things worked out
I: thanks so much
I: sorry to dump it all on you when you arrived i was just so frustrated
P: np lol
I: lol
P: I am also here to listen ok do not forget that
I: i wont forget thanks
P: good :) ok I am off f tp works lol
I: lol
I: ok
I: spk later
P: ok tc hugsxx

Virtual Selves Processes Interviews

This transcript is also yielded from an inworld textual interview. The participant is a referral from a previous participant, and presented a male avatar, created December 12th, 2005. The interview was held at the Fearless Research Centre, on November 4th, 2011 and lasted 75 minutes (including four minutes when the participant had to be away from the keyboard). Figure A.10 provides an image of the participant captured at the time of interview. In the transcript P signifies the participant, I the interviewer.

Figure A.12. Image of the participant whose interview is used for the example Virtual Selves Processes transcript, image captured at time of interview.

P: hello
I: hi :)
I: thanks for coming
P: my pleasure
I: come on through
P: just reading the notecards...
I: thats ok they are for people who stumble across my island
P: ah, ok
I: my dispensor just threw them at you automatically!
P: it was pretty fast off the mark, i must say :)
I: i like to take pics of my participants, is it ok to take one?
P: sure
I: lol i know, ppl dont know whats hit them
P: :)
I: Thanks again for coming
I: before we start i need to quickly run through a couple of things
P: ok
I: first, can you just confirm you are an adult?
P: yes, i am
I: OK thanks
P: 46 years of age, if that matters
I: no, but thanks for telling me
I: next i just need to remind you that you can refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time
P: ok..thank you
I: also if one of us crashes, we should try to get back, but any longer than 15 mins and we can rearrang
I: e
P: ok
I: and finally, can you please state "i agree to participate in your study"
P: i agree to participate in your study
I: thanks :)

I: before we talk about SL can you tell me if you use any other virtual worlds?
P: no, i don't
P: sl was my first experience in a virtual world
P: and i did look into other places..but kept coming back here
I: do you use messenger, skype or any other networking sites?
P: i do
I: what do you use?
I: and is it for SL?
P: no..not for sl
P: i use messaging on my iphone...chat
P: and gmail chat occasionally
P: skype...almost never
I: ok great
I: so you just said SL was your first virtual world
P: yes
I: can you tell me how you first came here?
P: i read about sl on a blog i follow
P: and it was about the time that i bought a computer that was actually capable of running sl
P: so i tried it out of curiousity
I: what kind of blog is it?
P: boingboing.net....i guess you could call it a popular culture sort of blog
I: ok thanks for this, i will take a look later
P: i think the reference was about it having creative commons content
I: is that what interested you?
P: partly...but i was primarily interested in the concept of a virtual world
P: mainly because of some professional curiosity - i do some work in geographic information systems
I: ah right
P: so there was a bit of a connection
I: had you ever been involved in gaming or chat rooms or anything like that?
P: no, not really
I: so when you arrived here what did you think?
P: hmm..i was completely surprised
P: i had no idea what to expect
P: and got entranced by the idea of a world where you could build what you want, and look as you want
I: did it take long to settle in?
P: months :)
P: i think i was pretty much an observer for 6 months or more
P: i didn't meet many people here..but i explored a lot
P: i wasn't until i bought land that i felt a bit more tied tothe place
I: what made you decide to buy?
P: i got interested in bulding things...owning land helps that
I: how much time do you spend in SL now ... and has that changed at all over time?
P: i spend much less time now
P: maybe an hour a day, and possibly 4 days a week

P: when i first joined, i think it's safe to say i got a bit obsessed with it...spend most of my spare time here
I: how long did that go on for?
P: hmm...about a year
I: what happened then?
P: well, i realised that i needed to find some balance
P: and a recognition that rl is much more engaging :)
P: afk to 2 mins..brb
I: ok :)
P: *afk for 2 mins
P: back
I: wb :)
I: so i was going to ask, did anything particular happen to help you realise you needed to rebalance?
P: i think it was a recognition that as intriguing as this place can be...it isn't a match for rl
P: and also a recognition that i have to balance out my life...i have a job and a rl personal life
P: and i need to attend to those as well
P: and basically the novelty wore off
I: what kind of things do you do with your time here?
P: these days, i practice at building on my land
P: and i spend time socialising with friends here
I: has what you do with your time changed too?
P: yes
P: i spend more time socialising and exploring
P: which is primarily a result of a busy rl
I: what did you used to do?
P: in sl?
I: yes, sorry
P: when i first joined i was more interested in learning to build and script..so i focussed on that
P: i've always explored though...i like to see what others create here
I: what do you like most about SL?
P: i like the fact that it is virtual..you can both create something that reflects our real lives...and at the same time, do things physically impossible here
I: what do you like least about SL?
P: it's very shallow
P: in terms of what you see or creat
P: and also there's a tendency towards the superficial here
P: everyone is thin and beautiful for example
I: is it more superficial than rl?
P: lol
I: lol
P: no..probably not
P: but here it's possible to match your physical self to a superficial ideal
P: i find it interesting when you meet people here who make a point of being aged or obese, for example
I: have your feelings about SL changed over time?
P: hmm..not sure
P: i don't think so

P: i still find it an exciting world to explore
P: i'm less likely to get immersed in it though
I: than you once did?
P: i've always been careful to keep sl and rl apart
P: and i still do
I: why is that?
P: i like my privacy...and i haven't felt the need to introduce sl into my rl
I: does that mean people in SL dont know about RL?
P: i'm fairly open about many things in my rl
P: but i don't share personal details
P: nor do i want to foster contact outside of sl
P: not because of any rl impediments...i've just felt better separating the two
I: so when you say you are open but dont share personal details .. can you explain a bit more the difference?
P: i will tell people what i do
P: discuss how my day was
P: what community i live in
P: but won't often share a photo of myself
P: or a non-sl email address
P: nor do i like to contact sl people outside of sl..e.g. through skype
I: are there sometimes exceptions, you said "won't often"
P: i have in the past
P: but wasn't comfortable with it
I: do people in rl know about your SL?
P: a few do, yes
P: but i generally don't discuss it
I: how did you decide your avi name?
P: it's my rl first name
P: except my finger slipped and i left off the 'er' at the end :)
I: :)
I: how do you decide what your avi should look like?
P: that was pretty much random :)
P: i've had no particular motive in my avi's appearance
P: at one point i was black
P: as well as quite tall and blonde
I: did they feel different?
P: but i haven't tried to reflect a rl appearance, or an idea
P: yes
I: in what way?
P: people respond to you differently
P: this avi is a bit more attractive than the last
P: and you notice that your looks reflect how people respond to you
I: do you mind that it makes a difference?
P: no, but i'm intrigued by it
I: is that why you made radical changes in the past?
P: no.not really
P: and they weren't radical changes either
P: my motivation was primarily a change for change sake
P: and probably some boredom

I: what does it feel like using your avi?
P: it's an extension of myself in many ways
P: it feels comfortable to me after 5-odd years
I: can you explain what you mean by extension?
P: hmm..probably not well
I: lol
I: give it a go, just for me
P: i guess i mean that when i log in to sl
P: the avi that appears on me screen feels comfortable..it's me
P: i'm sorry..i forgot to ask you...how long did you need for the interview? i have another committment in a while..and just wanted to be sure I don't have to cut this short :)
I: ohhh well about another 20 mins ... is that ok?
P: no problem :)
I: thanks :)
P: i thought it was best to check
I: thanks :)
I: so how similar are you in SL to how you are in rl?
P: well [the avatar] is very much like me....25 years ago :)
I: in what sense
P: thinner and in possession of all his hair :)
I: :)
I: what about personality
P: the same
P: i am the same person here and in rl
I: do you think SL gives you anything you cant get in rl?
P: hmm
P: perhaps
P: the ability to be anonymous i suppose
P: or at least more so here
I: is that appealing?
P: yes and no
P: i think i tend to gravitate towards who i am
P: and the idea of behaving differently, or being a different person here
P: simply because of anonymity doesn't have a lot of appeal to me
I: in what way is anonymity appealing in that case?
P: well, the appeal is transient
P: you can say or act in a particular way i guess
P: and feel protected by your anonymity
P: but it doesn't appeal to me much
I: what kind of person would you say you were?
P: umm
P: i'm generally relaxed and accepting
I: do things in SL every upset or annoy you?
P: yes
P: but not often
I: what kind of things are they
P: i think that people here tend to lower their guard when it comes to social graces
P: so you see people being fairly unpleasnt to each other
P: my personal opinion is that in a virtual world, we miss the physical cues that come with body language

P: etc.
P: and that leads to misunderstanding
I: is it possible to be hurt in SL in that case?
P: i think so
P: rl emotions are very much present here
I: what keeps you coming to SL after all this time?
P: i find it a break from rl
I: can you imagine a time when you wont want to come?
P: yes
P: when i am too busy
P: or, i just find more things in rl to occupy my time
I: that was my last question
I: thanks !
I: is there anything else you would like to add?
I: or any questions?
P: hmm
P: not that i can think of
P: brb
I: ok :)
P: sorry
P: back
I: np :)
I: wb
I: thanks for meeting me, that was great
P: one question
I: yes
P: your research will be published at some point?
I: yes
I: i already am published
P: and if so, how can it find it?
I: i just sublitted another paper
I: i am published in a book
I: the book can be seen on google books
I: and i can provide a link if you want it
P: yes, please
I: i
http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=48P5tVhoWaIC&printsec=frontcover&dq=reinventing+ourselves&hl=en&ei=M2S0ToiBBo-x8QOgxbXqBA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false
I: that will take you to my chapter
P: cool..thanks :)
I: yw
P: ok..i will have a look
I: i might be in touch again a bit later
I: i am doing various pieces of research
P: sure...no problem
I: if thats ok
I: brilliant
I: thanks :)
P: my pleasure
P: i enjoyed talking with you
I: good :D

P: you've made me think a lot about my sl...which is probably a good thing :)
I: i am glad i did
P: ok..nice to meet you :)
P: and have a good evening
I: and you!
I: thanks very much
I: have a great day

Intersection of Worlds Interviews

This example is a transcript of a face-to-face interview conducted in the physical world as part of the SEBE procedure employed in understanding the relationship between worlds inhabited by virtual world users. In the interview the researcher and participant are watching a Subcam recording of the participant's usage of Second Life that had occurred previously, with the participant describing their experience and responding to questions posed by the researcher as they watch the recording. The transcript was manually constructed after the interview. The participant is someone who had already participated in the Representation of the Self and Virtual Self Processes research procedures. The researcher was the first fellow virtual world user the participant had ever met in the physical world, and so for their peace of mind and to alleviate any concerns of personal safety, the procedure was held in the mutually agreed public space of a hotel meeting room. The interview was held at a hotel near the participant's home in the physical world, and was conducted on August 14th, 2012, and lasted approximately one hour. Italicised text denotes the researcher's speech.

The way this works is basically-, sorry. Is that it'll just be a matter of going through and you, kind of, talking about what's going on. I'll ask you questions. You know, you'll probably say things that intrigue me. I'll ask you about those and I don't know how long it will take. It depends if we go off the beaten track a little bit. Or it might get to a point we think, 'Oh, you know, we don't want to go on forever' sort of thing. So we'll just have to see how it goes. I'm only getting this because it's got my little-, any questions I might want to ask.

Okay, and that one's mine as well, right?

I think mine are all over in that direction and yours are all around in there. (Laughter).

Don't you think (inaudible).

They had about 1,000 people in this room. How did they get them all in? They must've pulled them in through the window. (Laughter).

Oh, dear!

It would help if I actually switched this recorder on. I don't think I did, did I? No.

(Researcher sets up).

Okay so if we just-, can I, do you mind if I have this? This will be, like, loads of stuff here that we're not interested in, really. Oh this is going through very quickly. This must be the first bit where I said, 'Is this working?' Yes I'm muttering about nothing so I don't think we want to relive that experience.

You did have me typing that.

Pardon?

You did have me typing that password in there.

Yes, I can't see it, though. Is that what you were worried about?

Yes. You can. Can you get rid of that bit?

Yes, are you alright trusting me to do it, though? I can get it onto an editor.

Yes.

I mean, obviously I promise nobody else is going to see this but then you don't know if I'm going to be naughty either, do you, really?

Yes. I'd forgotten I'd got these on when I was doing it.

Or if you feel comfortable, change it when you get home or something.

Yes, I might work-, I don't even know how to change it. I'll work it out.

I think you have to go into your account. You know, go into Second Life account online.

Yes.

You know, normally when you're logging in, obviously you haven't got an idiot like me going on in the background. What normally, sort of, happens? Are you just sitting there in front of your screen, just patiently waiting? Or I mean, some people go off and do other things or what have you. Do you just sit there quietly?

When I'm just logging in? I just wait for it to go. I don't go off and do other things. I'm very, very rarely AFK.

Oh really?

Yes.

So you're either online or you're offline?

Yes, it annoys me when people are AFK.

When you're logging on normally, do you feel any kind of anticipation or are you, kind of, looking forward to it?

Yes, sometimes. Definitely in the earlier days for sure. Absolutely for sure, yes.

What about today? I mean, obviously it was a bit strange because you're sitting in this strange place and everything.

I don't need this on now. I don't think I was thinking about it so much.

Really?

At all, no.

What, the situation?

I was more interested in talking to you.

Oh going in, yes, right, okay.

Yes, the actual logging in to Second Life, no.

You know here, if I remember right, there was loads of strange stuff going on. You were trying to get used to my computer, the way it looked, the new viewer. I mean, what is going on in your mind when all is that is happening?

It was just a bit confusing, I think.

What were they asking you?

Oh, do you want to enable media and do you want it to play automatically?

Oh, it asked you all that?

I think they do when it first sets up. Look at poor old [avatar name], standing there.

Is she separate?

I was just thinking that. I know normally I am [the avatar], just looking at it now-,

She's just standing there, isn't she?

Yes.

Do you feel sorry for her? Does she feel neglected when she's like that and you're fussing about?

I had to go and rescue her once. I don't normally talk about her like she's a third person. Only because it's happening like this. I was thinking that was another time when I was thinking, 'Poor [avatar name].' I got stuck in World.

You were ghosted? That's a nightmare, isn't it? Actually it's very easy to get out of that.

Yes, and luckily I had made that other avatar just to see, just because I could. So I logged in with the other account and went to NCI Kuula and asked around a bit. It was really funny. I was there outside-, I had a house a bit like this one with all the security standing around-,

Could you see her?

I could see her in the corner all poor [avatar name] -, (laughter). So that's when it did feel separate because-,

That is spooky, isn't it? I've never done that. I mean, I've been ghosted. The first time I got ghosted, I sent off a ticket to Second Life and they did actually sort me out. I've learned since then, if you just keep on logging in, logging in and logging in, apparently every fourteen minutes or some bizarre statistic, everything gets wiped. In fact if you go in at that point, it'll let you in. It's a strange thing.

I had to message the landlord to restart the Sim.

Restart the region, yes.

That did it.

Where are we here? Oh, is this your-,

This is my house on Philosophy Island in the sky.

What are you doing now? Is this all to do with me? Oh you're trying to sort out the notecard business now are you?

The groups I think that is.

When you're-,

It wouldn't let me activate it because it was activated already.

Is using Second Life like using a program? You know, a normal computer program?

I can't think what else I would use.

You know what I mean, like having to click buttons and all this? I mean, does that get in the way of the experience at all?

It can do. This is all getting in the way of the experience, having to fiddle around with-,

Why do you dislike the-, what do you call it, the radius or whatever you call it? The menu disk.

Why do I dislike that? I think I got onto version two and was using it about a year before I went onto Firestorm. It felt like it was going backwards to have the pie that goes pop at you.

Pie, that's the word.

I suppose it is more like using other systems, to have it down there lying and you just hover on it and it gives you another submenu to the side of it rather than just.

Yes, that's more in line with the way other programs work in a way, isn't it?

Yes.

Yes, with the pie thing, you have to go to more to list more things. So you keep on doing more, more, more. Next thing you know you've missed something and you have to start all over again.

Yes, I don't like that. This is just a lot of faffing around, isn't it? Never mind, eh?

No, I quite enjoy watching it, really.

Oh do you?

Well from my point of view, it's interesting seeing somebody else do it because I'm obviously only ever used to mine-, I mean usually the last couple of weeks has changed but I'm only ever used to my own, sort of, fiddling about. So what's going on? What's coming up-, oh we're at the sandbox now, are we?

This is NCI Kuula. They have got a couple of sandboxes.

What's all this stuff?

That's the local chat.

Oh, okay, right.

I didn't have it in the-,

In the box.

In the box so it kept disappearing because it's on fade. When you helped me get it back up, it was okay. I could go in and see what was going on. It's funny, I thought that these would have cross hairs on them so you would see-,

No, it's not that sophisticated. These are designed more for not looking exactly where somebody's looking-, they're more of-, it's kind of like a memory outside of your body because you can see everything. You would never remember all of this. I mean, are you-, because the one thing, they are a bit blunt. I can see you're looking over here somewhere but really you're just looking at this bit presumably, aren't you? You're not looking around outside the screen, are you?

I must have been looking at the boxes. I can't think I was looking all around. Why was I-,

You must have been.

Well there I'm looking at the keys, maybe I was looking at the mouse. I don't know.

There was a lot of on-going-, I'd forgotten how long we discussed it for. (Laughter).

Oh dear. Tap tap to run.

Oh, is it two taps? Can you run with two taps?

It's two taps. Tap, tap, tap. You just do that and you'll start running.

Oh I did not know that. I'm just talking to myself. I sometimes get mixed up when I'm in Second Life with The Sims. When you're in The Sims, you drag along the screen. I've destroyed whole buildings before clicking on-, I sat down to do an interview once and my whole research centre vanished, it was hilarious. (Laughter).

Oh, funny.

Why do you use Firestorm out of interest?

When did I start using Firestorm?

Did you use Phoenix before?

No, I didn't. I think that one of the reasons was because you get the music coming, what music is playing.

Yes, I used to like that.

What was the other reason? I cannot now remember why I changed to Firestorm. I'd had viewer two, like, about a year or two ago. When other people was going, was it two or three? Whatever it was.

We're on three now but two is the one that everybody-,

It was two that everyone went (noise). So I just got used to that by then. So the Firestorm one was based on that, wasn't it? So that was it, so I thought I'd give it a go, I think. I knew-,

Yes, use some of the user-friendliness of the Phoenix one, it's supposed to be. I mean, looking at all of this stuff, it looks ever so complicated. You know, you've got this stuff here and this and then you had-, when you pulled up the options there was loads and loads of different things. I mean, is it very user-friendly do you think?

I think it is, well I don't know. Once you've got your bits set up, all of these-, see all of these are in a different order to how I would normally have them. So you just get-,

Why, because you've changed them to be a different role?

Changed them to be in a different order and put different ones up on the-,

How did you decide what order you were going to have them in?

Just the ones that I use more frequently, I guess.

Do you still have them all up or do you hide some? I think you can hide some.

I hide some, yes. I don't need the World map normally. I can go into that under World up there. (Inaudible). (Laughter).

Well be honest, when you're doing it-, I'm thinking about now, about how-, see Lila is facing us here. Do you always look at her from the front or from behind? Do you have a way in which you look at her?

I suppose I do tend to look at her from the front. Or me, I'd normally say me, turn to look at me.

Yes, I'm only saying while you're actually doing this, really, just in case-, yes we're all off on the-, oh I see, what's happened now? Has somebody said hello to you or something?

Yes, I think so. So I ended up-, I had two IMs on the go. I had to get out of there because it was doing my head in which is strange because I thought there'd be nobody to talk to.

You said that before you went in, didn't you? You hadn't been in for a while so people were wanting to talk to you, were they?

Yes, well [a friend] who's the black Finnish fox, I haven't spoken to him in quite a while so that was quite nice. I mean, I don't know whether you'll be able to read it when you go in on the screen capture thing-, you've got the IMs haven't you, anyway?

I may not look at them, to be honest. It depends on things but-,

Yes, so what was I going to say? I've known him more or less since I started.

Oh, right, and how did you meet?

So it feels kind of nice.

When you've been away for a bit and he's one of the first people you speak to.

Yes, that's right.

How did you meet him?

That was at NCI Kuula. Just the people hanging around there. That was-, I can't take these off, can I? I was just about to stick them on your head.

Sorry, I know.

Yes, I thought that he was a woman and older and it checks out, he wasn't. I mean, you say that and he's actually put his age in his profile as well but at the time, he was probably only nineteen or something, and a bloke.

What made you think he was older and a woman, then? I mean, what's it-, so he's a fox?

A fox. I think it's probably the jewellery or something. The fox furry. So that was quite an interesting thing. Yes, so he's quite a sociable sort of person, got lots of friends. Yes, it's quite nice to-, always quite nice to be in touch with people that you've known since the beginning, I think.

How long have you been on there now?

It will be three years in October.

Did you say you have two on the go right at this minute?

I've had two on the go at some point. I don't know who said hello first.

Have you told him that you're-, by this time?

Those people, I said, 'Hello, you should know that I'm-,' [another friend], I think she joined afterwards. She's interested in that stuff. She joined your group.

Yes I think she has done. I don't know whether we've interviewed but I certainly know her.

So I was telling-,

I think she's done a questionnaire for me.

Oh, okay, so I was just telling her that I was-, because I've been telling her that I was going to be doing this.

Oh, brilliant, okay.

So I was just telling her-, I'll let you know, I'm doing the face to face thing.

Oh great, I don't know why that makes me go aww, it just does. It's cosy.

Yes.

Where are we now, by the way? Are we still in Kuula?

Yes, that's in Kuula. I think I've come back to the-,

Oh so you went off for a little bit, did you?

There was nobody there and then they all started popping up. I was probably looking to see if I could see the nearby screen that tells you everybody that's there but-,

Oh they have a thing, one of those, do they?

Yes so-,

What's going on there tonight, cos somebody's dancing?

I don't know. That stage, I kind of stopped looking at people. Sorry, specs, I'll put them back on to see if I can see that any clearer. Ulrika or Kira, I can't remember the name, someone who appears here. A black woman who appears around here, she's the one that starts asking the questions about-,

What, she's doing it in open?

Yes.

I mean, the thing is, if anyone said to me, 'can you stop doing it?', I would just say, 'Yes.' You don't have to stay there or stop doing it, I wouldn't have a problem with it.

Actually if nobody else had been chatting to him, I would probably have gotten into the conversation that was going on because there were about three or four people I know.

How often do you go here then?

Oh I mean, I probably haven't been there for two,three months or something. I used to be there every day.

Kind of, your whole session sort of thing?

Actually when I first started probably for the whole session, yes. It took me ages to go anywhere other than there. My home was the little square around the bank.

Mind you, I was the same. For some reason I ended up-, after I got myself sorted out, I ended up at an info hub and I used to go there all the time. Oh, somebody's given you a link.

Yes.

What's this all about?

It sounds to me like that-, I can't even think of it, you know when you've got EFMJ, those personality classifications -

Okay I see, what happened? Did somebody see you were doing something and giving you this thing, had they?

No, that's because I was chatting to Voodoo and I was saying I'm doing this. You know, if you don't want to chat then that's fine. I didn't mind so she said, 'I've been doing this.' So she showed-, just sent me the link to see what she'd been doing. I didn't spend too long with her. I must go back. Oh no I can't because it's on your computer, I can't check the log. I'll have to ask her again. So to me, this session was just a bit oh it's all coming at me. I find multitasking quite hard. I'm much better at it now. I can more or less normally manage two on the go at once but I mean-,

So it is having more than one IM even.

Yes, so I can do-,

Would you rather just have-, how do you try to-, well you're saying you're getting used to it now. What normally, what used to happen?

Well I can do two. I'd prefer just to chat to one person at one time but it's the usual thing if you've got a local going on and an Instant Message going on. If it gets to any more than two things, it all falls apart. (Laughter).

Is it all part of the immersion thing do you think? Trying to talk to two people and looking at what's going on on the screen in the thing, in the open, it's all a bit dissipatory effort really, isn't it really?

Yes, it's not as pleasurable. Then it's this case of not wanting to be rude to people either. Some people know, they can tell and they say, 'I can tell you're talking to someone else. I'll talk to you later.'

Do they get offended?

People do, yes. And I think probably I'm normally one of the people that will just talk to one person. I can tell when people are doing it to me and I'd rather do something else.

What happens, you know when you log on normally, do you normally get a barrage or are people pretty respectful, sort of thing?

People are normally pretty respectful actually, yes.

When you said about multitasking, you know that (inaudible) you have hunts and games which very often involve collaboration, is that-,

I don't do those.

You don't do any of that? That's very multi-task-y isn't it, really? Oh this is somebody else now. Oh no sorry, I thought you were putting up the-, you're talking to me.

I find it hard to do when-, taking someone out for a drive and riding the boat and chatting at the same time. Hang on, I've got to move that. Perhaps I should-,

Yes, I used to have a Victorian car when I lived in a Victorian Sim and I was always hopping about all over the place. I just couldn't do more than one thing at the same time. Now this is interesting. I don't know how long this session lasts for, really you've obliterated the whole screen.

I have, yes.

Is that common?

No, I like to be looking at the pictures. This is really annoying. I had far too much of that going on. I should have just ignored everyone and gone off exploring somewhere and we could have looked at some-, I have. This isn't usual. I'm normally looking at what's going on.

What is going on? Are people just standing around talking still?

I think they're just standing around. I've no idea. I'm hardly paying any attention to what's going on there. It was a waste of time me being there, quite frankly.

I mean, obviously you're sitting here now. Where-, I know you've moved house and everything but where do you normally go on?

I sit on the sofa.

Just in relaxed sort of mode?

Yes, just sit on the sofa and do it.

With your earphones on?

Yes, listening to the music.

Is that why you like to have your earphones on as well, to listen? Was the music going on here?

Yes.

Oh when somebody dances, it's bound to be there.

Oh yes, they've probably got music on here.

They do clubs and things there?

Not there but yes.

They've got a stream.

There's a stream, yes. Some people just stand there and dance. It's not the best. I suspect that's a new person, that looks like a new vampire, one of the new vampires.

Oh is he, as in newbie new?

I imagine-, I would think so. It's a bot I think or just some sort of prim thing that sits there on the side.

Oh right okay, just sitting there, not a real one, a real person.

Is that a real person? It actually is. I'm looking behind at the dancing guy. I don't know whether this is telling you much.

No, I was just going to ask you, you're standing around obviously just-, to everybody else you're just standing around. When you see somebody standing around, what do you think? Do you think they're IMing?

Yes, I think a lot of people just stand around. Either they're AFK or they're in IMs. Or they're doing something in Facebook or something.

So does that mean, like, when you see people looking like they're not doing anything, you kind of, have learned that that's not really the-, they are actually doing something, you just don't see it as being odd or anything?

I don't know whether it's odd. I would normally be in the conversation. I would like to get in and say hello to people.

I don't mean you're odd but when you see somebody else standing around, you kind of, don't feel-,

It's not odd. That's just how it works in Second Life, isn't it?

Like if you saw somebody in this room standing over there just like this, we would think he was odd, wouldn't we?

Yes, we would but that just goes on. You do think, 'Oh well I've turned up to this place and I'd actually like to speak to someone and you're really just AFK.' I do get a bit irritated by people that go AFK all the time. I know that's what people do.

Yes, you're not one of these that logs on and then-, because some people just log on and are just completely and utterly logged on, aren't they? Just come back occasionally, don't they?

Yes, and then you send them a message and they don't answer. You think, 'Well-,' I've learned that. I mean, generally people aren't just ignoring you, are they? They're just not there. Probably in more than one way. (Laughter).

What is going on now? Are you having to-, you look like you're got about four conversations on the go because everything is all flashing or highlighted mentally.

There are lots of group notices. I only have two conversations on the go.

Oh I see, they're just group notices, are they? What do you normally do with group notices? Do you take any notice of them or do they just-,

Or group chat, you know-,

Do you ever take part in group chats?

There was a chat-, yes I do. I used to learn quite a lot by watching the New Ctizens, the NCI group chat. I used to learn in that.

Oh yes, the NCI group chat has always been helpful to me when I've lost stuff and what have you.

Phoenix Firestorm as well.

Have they got a group?

Yes.

You just said they're asking about the-, so who is this in the open chat business? Is this what's going on there? What are they saying?

It was something like, for your information, implied consent is not-, you can't have implied consent.

Oh, is that what they were saying?

You definitely can't have this thing where-, you can't override Terms Of Service by putting something in your profile to say, 'I use (inaudible)'. You can't do that.

This is where you couldn't see all the chat, wasn't it?

What do you think about child avatars? I think that's a child avatar.

What do I think? I think-,

There are two things, right? What you think you ought to say and then what you actually-,

Well actually I'm thinking, 'What do you think?' This is me interviewing you. I think sometimes it's a bit weird. I do feel a bit weirded out by it, but it depends on where I am. I think I don't think I feel strange here. If I was in a nightclub, I would feel strange because I wouldn't be seeing that in a nightclub anyway in real life, do you know what I mean?

I feel weirded out by it too. Then-, so there's my head that goes, 'This is a space for anyone to be who they want to be and that's fine and we should be all liberal and let it all happen and you can do whatever.' Then the other bit of me goes, 'Oh but that makes me feel a bit uncomfortable.'

Yes well, I mean, various situations, I've had not loads of contact with them but I've interviewed child avatars, when I was involved in the Victorian sim, there were child avatars there who would play children but in a family set-up so there'd be a mother and a father and all this kind of-, I mean there was some role playing going on and they would IM you and talk like an adult but then in open chat, talk like a child. I think it's the end of this one now so I'm going to shut that down and go onto this.

I was in there forever before I got the (inaudible) out of there-,

(?).

I got fed up with being there. I just went. (Laughter).

Did you get fed up because you were too busy talking or you were getting fed up of the thing-, the stuff?

It was too much.

All the stuff?

Yes.

Why were you asking me that?

So you could get my experience of listening to the music.

Oh, I see. Well I don't know yet. It might be on there.

You probably don't care.

I do. Do you always listen to music?

Nearly always.

Is music a really important part? You said that's why you liked Firestorm because you could see what the tracks were-,

Yes.

What do you do-, do you ever go and find the tracks yourself, sort of thing, so you can listen to it?

Sometimes I do, yes. It's terrible, let's get out of here.

What's going on now, then?

Teleporting out. Go somewhere more peaceful.

When you say immersion, what do you mean?

As in feeling totally there.

Is that how you-,

Yes, I do feel like that.

Do you feel like that tonight?

No, not particularly.

Is it because of all of this or because of all the other stuff you had to do?

I think it was because of the unfamiliarity. The settings weren't all quite there. No, I didn't feel like I was totally in there.

Did it make a difference me sitting over there?

I don't know, actually. That's my little beach place, more relaxing.

Is that how you felt when you got there?

Yes.

Do you spend a lot of time there, when you're online?

Yes, I sort of go-, I do tend to spend a lot of time at my places.

How do you divide your time between them?

It just depends what I feel like, I think.

When you're watching this, what does it make you think?

It's just a nice relaxing place to be. I suppose I was thinking that I do quite like to talk to other people but sometimes it is just nice to sit and enjoy the environment. Do you ever get that? Almost feeling the warmth of-,

Oh yes. I don't know why that is. I don't know whether somehow there's-, you know, whether this makes something in our imagination real a little bit. A lot of people-, it's quite common, isn't it, to have these peaceful set-ups. Very often water's involved. I know the default land on lots of places is sand because that makes it easier but I think it's quite common to want to have some peace.

Yes, I do, I love my corner plots. You can see the moon rising.

Oh I see, okay. What shape is it? Is it, like, a square-ish-, is it one of those square plots is it that you've got?

No, it's just a wiggly island. It's a group of islands.

You're sitting on your chair.

Yes, I realised I'm using my AO to sit on it. Oh, I turned it round.

You're doing that but you're all by yourself.

Yes.

Isn't that interesting? Well I think it's interesting.

Do you?

Yes.

I can't-, I need to be sitting looking at the bar. I don't know-, that's wrong.

It is wrong, isn't it?

Yes.

So there is some kind of-, although you are by yourself and this is all pixels as they say, and no one else can see you at all and you're IMing people who are many miles away, it's important that you, kind of, physically look the part. I know this sounds silly but you're not wearing summer clothes or anything. Is that-, does that make a difference?

On another day, I might decide I'm on my island and I need to be wearing summer clothes. It's too much grief.

You've had so much grief already.

I wanted you to see my boots. I put that out especially last night.

Of course, we couldn't have not done that. What's that in here? You're getting yourself settled or something? Oh, what's going on? You didn't like something there.

I think maybe I was just trying to get so I was close enough to read.

Is your laptop normally on your lap? I suppose it would be if you're sitting on the settee.

Yes, so it's a bit closer I think if it's on my lap.

And are you lot talking about anything in particular or are you, kind of, passing the time of day and catching up?

So [the Finnish friend], actually we were having a little bit of a chat about had we seen so-and-so, saying that we'd known each other a long time and the rest of it. [The second friend] had been showing me that stuff.

Are you still talking to [the second friend] now?

I don't know, at some point she said she was going to take her dog out so she went.

When you're talking to people, like they're not there as their avatars or their real personas sort of thing, they're a real life person. When you hold them in your mind when you're talking to them. How do you think of them? Are you thinking of a Finnish Fox or are you thinking of a man?

I've never seen a picture of [him]. I've no idea what he looks like.

So in your imaginings-,

So in my imaginings, I suppose every now and then maybe I do have an image of him. I don't know why, maybe slim and dark haired. I don't know why, he might be a bit gawky looking. I don't know, that's what I have in my mind. I don't know that I really conjure that up when I'm chatting to him, though. Probably-, that's a really hard question.

When you're chatting to him face-to-face, are you seeing, are you conscious of his being a fox?

Yes, he is a fox.

Do you see him as a fox or do you see him as-,

Well as a furry fox, that's his ID. That's definitely-, so a couple of people, I do have pictures, I have seen pictures of them. And it alternates, I sometimes see the avatar, I sometimes see the picture of them. It's just something else that's harder to describe, this feeling about a person that doesn't involve thinking about an image. I don't know, possibly.

What came upon the screen there? It was a Second Life page or something. What happened there?

I don't know, I didn't see.

Let me just rewind, I don't know if it was anything significant, or just - .

Oh, that was [the Finnish friend] showing me his weapons that he was building.

Oh right, does it interest you that he does that? I mean, are you interested in that kind of thing?

Not really.

It's nice he shows you though, isn't it? I think.

Yes, he's really into that so that's his thing.

It's nice he knows he can show you, you're not going to yawn and pretend to talk to somebody else. What are you doing there?

I'm checking out to see whether he still looks like a fox. (Laughter).

He does-,

It looks like a fox.

Yes, so you're-, I mean I do the same. If I'm talking to somebody, I suddenly have a flash of-, oh I'm going to look at their profile just in case something's changed. Do you think profiles are important? Do you use them a lot? Do you look at them a lot?

Yes, I do.

Do you also keep yours up to date? Some people change them all the time, don't they? You're not like that.

I go for a while, then I might change it a few times. Recently I've been struggling with this because this-, I'm interested in this reality and illusion thing. A close friend of mine was saying, 'I think I might just go and create a new personality and get a new avatar.' I got really upset by it actually, I did.

Why?

It was like, well you're going to go and be a fake person or something? That's what it felt like to me.

Did you feel like she was going to get rid of you as well and that was offensive? Or did that not come into it?

He-, yes I did feel like that.

You were part of the fed up-ness.

Yes, I felt like that. I don't think that that's true but yes, I did feel like that. So then I was struggling in my mind with this-, well why does that not feel right? Of course people come and they do role play and they do things like that. So why doesn't that feel right?

Did you come to an answer?

Well in my profile I put that my avatar is designed but my personality is not.

I like that.

That was the closest I could come to it because I know people do react differently to-, slightly also having-,

Some people are very fixed on this authenticity thing, as well aren't they? They get very offended. Well very offended yes, but to them people being real, you know, not fake is very important. You're not really-, I don't think you're really-, you don't get offended by other people being fake or whatever. I mean, that's a harsh word to use. Do you know what I mean? You're not really like that, I don't think by talking to you.

No but if I thought-,

You still felt you wanted to say that.

Yes, if I-, there's a difference, isn't there, between you know that person is role playing or putting on and then someone actually deceiving you. There's a difference and how you work that out is-,

Deception-, when you say deceiving, is that because the difference is there is an intent to hurt?

Yes, I would hate to be made a fool of. It's so hard to describe it. Some people get really upset about the gender thing, which I don't know why that's such a big deal. They're not bothered about other kinds of-, pretending to be a gnome or something but they do get upset if someone's being-, if their avatar's a woman and they're actually a man. I don't see the big deal with that. I would have a big deal with, you know, you pretending to be a generous person when actually you're nasty and horrible or something. I don't know.

Yes, pretending to be all helpful and kind and thinking of others whereas really the only reason you're being helpful and kind and things is so everybody else thinks you're marvellous, that kind of idea.

Yes, I think that's it and then-, I was trying to talk this through with another friend of mine and then he started talking about expressing your inner self and I thought, now he's onto something here. So I put something in my profile about that, about-, yes how much-, what did I say? If I met you in real life, would you know any more about the inner me? Would you or would you get distracted by the environment and the physical things as much as you might get distracted by the avatar and the environment in Second Life? You'd know other things about me, you would pick up my body language and all the rest of it but is it helpful or not helpful?

Or does the body get in the way?

I don't have the answer to that.

No, you're not the only one to think about all of this. I mean, I've talked to people whether they're just thinking of it in the spur of the moment or whether it's something they really think, some people talk about communicating with souls. More than one person has said that to me, they feel like they're talking to other people's souls.

Oh gosh, okay.

Sort of like the person inside, I suppose they mean. Because there's nothing in the way of it. Even if there's an avatar being used, somebody has taken the trouble to look like that whereas at the end of the day with your body, no matter what you do to it, it's still to some degree determined. So you're thinking about this-, is this something you just started thinking about or is it something you-,

No I've been thinking about-,

For ages.

Yes, this whole illusion reality business, yes it's something I've been thinking about for a long time. Some people say, 'Oh but people just tell lies and they can be anyone they want.' On the other hand, some people will just open up much more than they ever would. I think that's probably me, I would-,

I think for the same reason, the fact that they-, maybe no one can see them or there's an interface. Whatever it is that causes someone just to be horrible and completely unlike what they are in real life, it's the same thing that causes someone to completely open themselves so

they can completely say everything, the most frightening things that no one else-, they can tell anybody else at all but they will tell everybody in here or wherever.

Yes. That is an amazing thing. You think of people with perhaps quite profound disabilities in their everyday lives can just come on here and be free from all the judgement.

Some people go the opposite way and make a virtue out of it. I mean, I've met people who've used wheelchairs and things in Second Life, you know.

I think that's fair enough as well.

They can't find-, they take a more political view of it perhaps because it's not something you see very often.

No, but also nice to be free from-,

Constraint.

Constraint, I think, and the same goes for the guy who wants to be looking like a woman. It's just easy to do, really, isn't it? Free from being judged. I enjoy it. I think I'm probably at the stage where I might just go exploring to try and find something new to do.

Why is that?

Just because I think it's good every now and then.

Oh I see, just to reinvigorate things. You're not bored or anything necessarily?

Not necessarily bored, no.

Just want to bring a change.

Yes.

Have you used it consistently? In all the years, have you used it consistently or have you gone through phases where you-,

I've been on, yes, consistently pretty much every day. You know, it might only be five minutes just to log in. This is probably the longest period without because I've just been so busy getting settled in.

Did you miss it?

No. (Laughter). I didn't, no. A part of me thinks, 'Just take the opportunity just to walk away from it for a while' but other times, I would have done, I would have been quite itchy.

Is it the change in circumstance?

Yes, I think so, that's part of it. My focus has been completely on getting settled in the house. That's just been my number one priority. It is an escape, isn't it? I find it so-, in fact perhaps I ought to make sure I do go back on it a bit more, because I've been quite stressed out getting-, running around, chasing my tail. I'm going to delete one of my platforms and build something else. Just go in and relax.

Have you enjoyed talking to people again tonight?

Yes, a really nice chat especially Faron because that's like-, ages since we had a proper chat. That's really nice. It's a feeling, it's a nice, warm, comfortable-, it's someone I've known for maybe three years, really. It's lovely.

So rather than an image, it's more sensations or whatever, that's your idea of him more or whatever.

Yes, I think so. I'm going for a ride in my boat, see what's happened. (58.00)

Oh is this what you're doing now?

Yes.

Are you still talking or are you just thinking, 'I'll have a little-,'

I think I was still chatting a little bit. You know the windlight settings?

Yes, I don't ever use them though. Do you?

There are two sims here. I have done to take-, my profile picture was taken with windlight settings but they've set-, this is so funny now. I wish they hadn't done it but the sim line is about here. So I come here and I'm thinking, 'I'll watch the sunset' and then there's also a bit wave that comes and knocks you over. Then-,

This looks a nice sim though, I must say.

Oh it's a lovely sim. I wish they hadn't done the-, and all the public areas over here, look at the light on the water. It's beautiful. There you are.

Oh isn't that strange.

The wave's knocked me over and now it's gone into this other-,

It's the wave that's done that?

Well the wave's knocked me over. I think it's just the wave and not the sim crossing but you're right, I'm also-, now I'm back in the other-,

You don't slip between the cracks or anything? That is a wave.

So that's back to sunset and I'm going to try and cross again and it will go into the lighting that they've set for that side of it.

Are you still talking? You've still got the box up.

I was chatting a little bit.

That's a very good quality lighthouse. What's happened there, then? Is this where you've crossed the line?

Yes, look! Look, it's done it.

It looks so bizarre as well. It looks like a big whale.

It does. I don't know what-, they ought to take the wave away. They've got some really beautiful textures and some really great buildings.

That looks like a big whale attacking you, doesn't it, really?

Yes, it looks like (inaudible). I can't remember. See you in world, then, I'll take you there and you can have a-,

Oh I'd like that.

Have a look at the sim, it's really nice.

It does look really nice.

See I'm feeling fine sitting here just watching the -.

Watching the whale.

Yes, it's a rubbish whale. I don't know why he's put that in.

What are you doing now? I can see you pressing the key down.

Oh, I'm probably trying to turn around, aren't I? I was chatting. One click, was it? I don't know.

I've got an old Sims game in the disc and every now and again, it decides to try and boot up. I hope it doesn't come over the top. Ignore it, it should be alright. It's just giving a little whirr and it'll go back to sleep again in a minute.

I probably gave up trying to cross to that side of the sim.

What's your other place like?

Did I take a snapshot?

Oh are you-,

Yes that's the sky level and then there's a garden underneath.

Oh, is this all on the same sim? You've got a skybox have you or something, have you?

No, this is a different one. So I've got a platform on this one as well but my home is set to the sky platform, Philosophy Island.

Oh, so they rent stuff out-, they rent space out there then, do they?

I love this red on the water. So that's the sunset. I'll take a picture of that. Then I went back to minimising-, anyway what I'm saying is this can be very relaxing when you're stressed out, to go in and do exploring or a building project or something like that. Then a whole hour's gone and you can come out and-, people say, like, juggling is relaxing because you're having-,

You're having to focus on the little things, aren't you?

Focus, yes, and it's taking your mind completely off other stuff. It's almost like doing an hour of meditation or something, I think. Yes, it's a good sim. I do miss people when they go, though. When you're close to someone and they disappear.

Does that happen much?

It does happen from time to time, yes. I've got a friend in Australia who comes and goes. I think I've decided now that it'll just probably carry on like that.

Does he ever say he's going or does he just one day-,

Sometimes, yes, he's going and that's it. Going, back.

We're really close to winding down now, aren't we?

Yes.

I think I'll stop it there if that's alright because of time, it's quarter past nine now, . It's a bit late.

Yes, that's fine. I don't know if that was useful at all.

I find it very useful. I don't know what I'm going to draw out of it all yet but-, what was this?

Shut this off?

Yes, we'll shut this lot off now.

I feel somehow dissatisfied that that wasn't a true representation. I don't normally-, but there we go.

Trajectory of the Self Interviews at second tranche.

This transcript is yielded from an inworld textual interview. The participant was first interviewed in March 2009, while this subsequent interview occurred on November 7th, 2011. It was held at Fearless Research Centre, and had a duration of 91minutes. Figure A.11 provides an image of the participant captured at the time of interview. In the transcript P signifies the participant, I the interviewer.

Figure A.13. Image of the participant whose interview is used for the example Trajectory of the Self transcript, image captured at time of interview.

I: Hallo
I: Thanks for coming!
P: ello :)
P: I'm really glad you carried on this research
I: Thanks :)
I: when i was doing the initial work my supervisor said i should carry it on
I: people still dont really know much of what happens and why in virtual worlds
P: probably a lot of assumptions based on the juicy news stories n such
I: yes it is, and this is a point i often make in my papers
I: people assume they know what is happening
I: and the academics are the same
I: where we are now is where i meet people
I: i get funding now to work in SL and the school/ESRC pay for this
P: nicely done you hehe
I: lol
I: thanks
I: anyway shall we go through and we can sit down
I: oops sorry to bump
P: it happens hehe. nw
I: lol
P: as do dissapearing skirts... still.. hehe
I: lol
I: some things never change
I: i was here the other day interviewing and instead of sitting down i demolished the building
P: eep
I: lol
I: ok before we start I will quickly remind you that you can refuse to answer any question or can end the interview at any time, ok?
P: ok :)
P: i may fidget for a bit.. hope that doesnt distract heh

I: no its ok
I: i might do the same lol
I: also if one of us crashes we should try to come back, but any longer than 15 minutes and we can reschedule if we need to, ok?
P: ok
I: did you have chance to look at your old interview and the summary of the previous research that I gave you?
P: I looked at it the other day but it wouldnt oad this morning
I: ohhh do you need to look at again?
P: the summary oads but not the transcript.. i may have slight connection issus :(
P: unless I've somehow wiped it, which ... isnt ipossible
I: let me send you again just in case
P: but i have looked at it a few times since..
P: interesting how things have changed or not
Second Life: Inventory item offered secondlife:///app/agent/3e62656c-2f7c-4c2c-b616-c78d2551a6c8/completename: secondlife:///app/agent/3e62656c-2f7c-4c2c-b616-c78d2551a6c8/completename received your inventory offer.
I: how did you feel when you were looking at it?
P: ah, that one loads :) thanks
I: :)
P: lots of things.. i mentioned how SL had improved my confidence enough that i could work on it in RL more.. i had an odd feeling for me - i felt proud of myself hehe
I: :)
I: did the report i did match your own experience?
P: it definately felt like a younger "me".. and yes.. which i guess means plenty of other interviewees had similar experiences and thoughts
I: what about it felt younger?
P: i think when i read it back, I felt that I'd moved beyond some of the problems I'd been having, in SL, with my relationship.. and also RL has changed, and real me too
P: I'm 40 next year, for one thing.. does something drastic to perspective heh
I: yes i know ... lol
I: can you tell me more about how things have moved on in SL?
P: I "disolved" my SL partnership recently, after telling him via text that I'd realised I wasn't going to leave my husband or my daughter ever, as he'd been holding on to a dream that one day we'd be together in RL
P: I realised it a while ago but.. when you barely get to talk to someone its hard to leave them
P: so the effect of that on SL .. was just visible in the profiles, if anyone ever looked.
P: which is probably the other way around for a lot of SL relationships
I: in what sense the other way around?
P: people who meet in SL first rather than elsewhere first.. probably the fallout from the end of the relationship is mainly in SL. Although I'm only assuming that

I: is your ex-partner no longer in SL?
P: He isn't leaving, he owns .. silly amount of land.. about 1/4 a mainland sim or more..
P: I'm not really sure why he stays, he barely logs in
I: did all of this impact on rl?
P: I was pretty terrified it would do
P: as it happens, so far at least, there has been no observable effect
P: we are friends, we still talk outside of SL (online, as he is in a different country)
P: and he and I and my RL husband still play EVE online together in sunday nights ... which probably sounds really... weird
I: lol ... did your rl know?
P: no.. i think he wouldnt be totally surprised if he found out.
P: but he would be .. well. pretty devastated. RL would change, drastically. And thats what terrified me
P: it was support from friends in SL that helped me to go through it though
I: in the past did you ever think you might be with him in rl?
P: I thought so .. years ago. It didn't take long to dawn on me though that it wasn't going to happen. Then he and his wife has a baby, and .. well.
P: I would never choose to leave my kid, and I would never do anything that would result in him losing his.
P: i took a long time to go through with it, unfortunately.
I: Have you changed as a person, both in SL and RL, over all this time?
P: I hope I've improved heheh.. I think I'm attempting to hit 40 with as little guilt and unfinished business as posible.
I'm more confident, which also seems to be more to do with getting older than SL, as I'm spending less time and I'm less deeply involved in SL than I used to be
P: I quit studying and got a job, so.. less free time
I: How has your involvement changed ... and why do you think that is?
P: I'm definately more focussed on RL than I was. I think mainly because I started to realise that I could play in SL and on the internet in general for the whole week, and .. real time didn't stop. sounds obvious but ..

P: SL can feel timeless. its that odd thing about hanging out in virtual worlds
I: did anything particular happen to make you realise that rl carried on?
P: probably just having less free time, I think
P: and looking back at that relationship, and how long it had been going on, and all the changes in his life and mine in that time.. i think i got afraid that I'd be 50 r 60 and still feel trapped
P: then i think i got to thinking about the rest of my life and what I'd miss if i didnt pay attention heh
I: :)

I: where were you trapped?
P: i felt trapped by that relationship. I wanted to do things I knew would bother or upset him.. even just making new friends would have him making "jokes" about me going off with them
P: eventually i realised I can only be responsible for my own happiness.. he'd have to do the same.. and I didn't seem to be helping heh
I: has how you feel about SL changed?
P: Not much.. i still think its a great place to explore, have fun, be creative, meet people.. I aren't loking for another name to put in the Partner info, for sure, hehe.. but then i wasn't looking for that before either.
P: i do find I'm bored sometimes, usually when friends aren't online, and I can spend a long time in here only to look back and wonder why i didnt make better use of it
P: if that isnt a SL/RL parallel I'm not sure what is hehe
I: :)
I: do you think being in SL has affected rl?
P: definitely. I've learned things here about myself, people.. thats balanced by the time lost by being here possibly too much but I do think if i wasnt in SL I'd find other ways to avoid RL sometimes, probably with less benefits..
P: hopefully I've improved my SL/RL balance heh
I: Do you think you are the same person in SL and rl?
P: more than I used to be. I can still be a cheeky bugger in group chats, I find its usually when I've been at work and want to blow off steam. I havent been banned yet, but someone announced they'd muted me recently.. I'd never do that in RL
P: but I think I'm not so bad as I used to be ..   my griefer aquaiintainces have either left or reformed, too
P: I dont use my alts anymore either
I: why is that?
P: i made one that is associated with my RL identity, for meeting RL friends in SL if they felt like trying it..   but the alts I was playing around on before.. I think I just got fed up having several inventories, logging in and out, seperate friend lists..
I: did they used to lead very separate lives?
P: they had mostly quiet lives.. one made a coupleof friends, but the one I usually saw was an alt and we just added each other to our main friend list hehe
P: i realised I was spending a lot of time loitering at infonodes trying to be enigmatic ... lol
I: lol
P: that and flipping lucky chairs and making up numbers on midnight mania boards
I: did P used to be very different to the rl you in that case?
I: lol
P: the loitering quiet one? probably hehe.
P: or rahter probably not... slightly confused myself
I: lol
I: no i meant that you said you are more the same person in SL and RL than you used to be
I: i was wondering if that meant you used to be very different

P: in RL I am the quiet one in the corner, although less quiet these days, more likely to say what I think, and attempt to be amusing
P: The start of that may have been SL, but I think the recent changes in that direction have much more to do with RL age
I: more likely not to care what others think?
P: yup. my RL sister is older than me by 15 years, she has just realised she is more likely to speak her mind recently.. so maybe SL gave me a head start hehe
I: lol maybe it did
I: can you remember what drew you first to SL?
P: i think it was the whole idea of a world that didn't phyically exist, to explore and build things, and meet people like i already did online but in a graphical environment.. that was the first time i tried it anyway.. didnt last a day. bogged down by dialup and an incapable pc
P: I used to play Dungeons and Dragons, old school pencil and paper and dice..
P: i think that had something to do with my interest
I: what is that keeps you still coming?
I: is it*
P: it is.. and I know it can work like that too. Peope are constantly coming up with new builds
P: and I'm still learning to build hehe
I: :)
I: what is the best thing about SL do you think?
P: difficult to choose between the fascinating and fun people, and all the things they create..
P: I'd have to say the people
I: what is the worst thing?
P: limitations.. furniture that you suddenly find yourself using or.. not using.... why did i stand up? hehe.. but really..
I: lol i dont know ... maybe to stretch your legs?
P: niggly things, like animations and how great they look when they are well aligned but how ridiculous they look when they arent...
I: do you ever use any other virtual worlds?
P: i registered this name on several others a year or two back in case SL went under or I just felt like a change, but I never go there
P: others ike SL
P: I play WoozWorld sometimes with my daughter
I: sorry!
I: lol
P: ... and also random logouts... hehehe
I: /me laughs
I: i only had one more question
I: do you use messenger or skype or social networking sites, anything like that?
P: all of the above, although messenger use has fallen by the wayside since I started work
I: is this for SL or for rl?
P: only Google_ as P though

P: Google+
P: i do have a pretty much dormant P FB account .. i think mybe i use it so little because I'm more outspoken as me than i used to be :
I: thank you, that was my last one!
I: can i take a pic?
P: sure :)
P: if i stand,, i even have a skirt hehe
I: lol sorry my SL is being naughty
P: hehe nw
I: thanks very much for coming to see me
P: thanks for the chance to waffle on again hehe. Its good to see you too.
I: i am doing a whole pile of different research in SL, including group discussions and other types of interviews ... would you be willing t help more, if i needed?
I: lol
I: you are a great interview, yourwaffle is interesting
P: sure, would be interesting
I: fantastic, thanks
I: if you have got any questions, or anything, just let me know
P: ok :)
I: the work i did initially has been turned into a book chapter, and i am just working on another paper which will hopefully be publiished early new year, so if you want to know about those, just let me know
I: my interviews with my "old participants" like we have just done, i want to turn those into soemthing as well
P: oh cool :) I just got that book list... trying to start reading Neuromancer but .. free time.. heh.
I: lol i know
I: its not an easy read either
P: Snow Crash was easier
I: yes
P: and Burning Chrome made me cry heh
I: oh i dont think i ever got round to that one! i need to
P: its a short, i think the collectin it was in was also called Burning Chrome
I: ohhh ok, thanks :)
P: Gibson again
P: Glad I could help again, and i am looking forward to the rest of your research :) I joined the group too
I: Thanks!
P: i notice i mentioned a puppy in the original interview.. he is now a dog and .. its walkies time.. hehe
I: lol
I: thanks again for coming
I: i appreciate it
P: youre very welcome, I'll see you next time :)
I: yes see you soon, all the best :)

Appendix 7. Thematic Analysis coding frameworks

Representation of the Self interviews

Global Theme	Organising Theme	Basic Theme	Description	Example quotes
Personal activity	Aesthetics	Appearance based on liking a look	Personal tastes in style or appreciation for a genre playing a role in appearance	AM: I just wanted a forties look the clothes but kept my shape and skin. *I: Was that for a party or just for pleasure?* AM: No just for the look … was not even really pleasure just wanted the feel. Was a forties sim … *I: Do you like forties look then?* AM: Some of it yes but was never really comfortable with it for everyday wear here in SL. *I: What do you like about being goth?* M1: Mostly the old values like the philosophy that people are still people, that we are all humans no matter where or who we are and that I can live out the pain I got in my life. So living the dark side though. M2: … I think I care [for] this stuff. It's just my personality. For me it's fashion. If I like it I take it.
		Avatar appearance and role of RP	Appearance determined by participation, and character played, in Role Play	*I: is [BM]'s time in the past?* BM: [BM] has come from Jack Sparrow's time yes. But I had to make allowances. *I: What is he, 17th century?* BM: 1775. But the sim I pirate RP [Role Play] in is 1805. H: I mix bits of outfits so I was correct dressed for Gor … because free women there should not dance ☺ but [I] had seen a slave dance comp had there was one for free women, so I made up the dance and story. *I: [SF's alt] is very spectacular looking.* SF: Thank you. I like this current look. It is new. She is always in a gown, a ladylike gown … I keep her to a basically medieval theme mostly. *I: Do you think there are expectations of what an avi should look like?* S4: Well it depends on what [world] you are. I know a sim where the buildings are made for 1.84 [metre] people. *I: Oh really? Normal RL height people [Second Life convention is for avatars to be much taller than average physical world height].* S4: Yes. We have "Gorean" measures … a male is 2.5m. I am a bit … smaller … *I: ... what happens if you don't adhere to that?* S4: You are a small man I think. Less than 1.77m is considered a child. *I: So no one says you must increase your height? If you are short in Gor, what do people think of you, does it matter?* S4: Well, I am shorter, but not very short. And then they think you are younger. But it does not matter. *I: They don't think you are odd.* S4: Only the sim limits obliges you for a certain length. *I: You*

			couldn't be a tiny though presumably. S4: No. If you enter a sim, you have to respect their rules
	Avatars as art	The appearance of avatars is an artistic endeavour	LE: In many cases … an avi is what wish to be… if rl were perfect … and we could change it. Also how artistic a person is … what they "see" … an avi is an artistic reflection. Also … how often they change their avi. I know some who change constantly whereas I never change. SF: It's a Grendel's dragon … it would not fit in this room, unfortunately. His avies are works of art, all of them.
	Beauty in appearance	Describing avatars in terms of personal views of beauty or attractiveness	A: Many try to make their dream of a younger, more beautiful body (according to quite conventional measures of beauty) "real" … but the most attractive beings – men as well as women – have created avatars with some "rough edges". M3: Well … as I saw others, I knew what I didn't want to look like … I actually tried to be "less attractive" though it is too hard to not choose to be "somewhat attractive" here.
	Fashion	Expressing a liking for clothes and fashion	*I: Did you make all these clothes yourself then?* BM: The ones I am wearing, not all of them no … the shirt is mine, and so are the boots. The tunic, the jacket OMG I wish I made it, it's gorgeous. M2: As I told you, remember I am female. *I: Yes ... but I meant the long blonde hair, the clothes.* M2: Hmmm, I think I care [for] this stuff. It's just my personality. For me it's fashion, if I like it I take it.
	Girl or boy next door	Choosing avatars with an everyday appearance	AM: Well as I knew nothing about SL I [chose] the av that looked more innocent, I chose the girl next door av … I wanted an innocent looking av, one that was what I call homely looking. Did not know if I would like it in SL. *I: So did you want to look "normal"?* AM: Yes really and like myself and in not a lot of make-up. K (as female alt)*:* My maker tends to think that a male's female avi is the woman of his dreams … some men would have a whore … mine wanted a "nice" girl … but I am thinking he considers me like a daughter … it is a bit dull, you know … :/
	Looking natural	Having an avatar that looks "real" or "natural"	A: Apparently he once knew a student in New England who looked similar to me … when we met at Caledon for the first time, it was winter and I was wearing a padded jacket. Later he told me that it would have been the first time [he] met a "real" looking girl. D: I like my avis to be appealing and natural looking. L: Well the make up on the other is still one of my favourites but the rest of the skin is not as good. Gosh sounds silly but the shoulder blades look like they have been painted in, not so natural. Guess I am trying to find a natural look.

		Picture construction	The role of photography in appearance	*I: The light [your alt's] face looks so good, it is like one of those oil paintings from hundreds of years ago.* SF: A facelight I made … it's barely noticeable … usually. It was enough to light up [the other person in the picture] too. He loves this pic … hung it on the wall at his SL house.
	New experiences	Another perspective	Using avatars to understand the perspective of the other gender	K: [My female alt] is an instrument of awareness … when I first used her I just simply became angry … the perspective of a woman here is very different from that of a man … as a noob, there were all sorts of vulture like characters that she had to put up with. *I: Why did you carry on with her after that initial bet?* K: Curiosity ☺ … I am forever curious ☺ … I wanted more than anything to understand the woman's perspective … had not encountered this before … but now … I could interact as woman … and could learn about how men attempt to get what they want … I did not play against these guys … I was just [the alt] … She is like my "insider" in the world of women … *I: Is she more like a doll then? Something you are "working"?* K: They are all dolls … but [she] is the proverbial "fly on the wall" … experiencing things that men should not know about … or maybe cannot be bothered with … L: When I first created it, I made the male version … so the male one I just made to see what it was all about.
		Avatars as source of learning and research	How having an avatar can lead to learning or necessitate research.	BM: I found a group of other [avatars with the same surname] and they have a clan. They made clan colours, and dresses … I was wearing it that day *I: Is his where your Scottish knowledge started?* BM: Yep ^.^ … or at least got more in-depth … the tartan I believed was researched. The tartan colours and patterns are extremely important in deserning [sic] what clan you belong to … I found that simply amazing. *I: Do you do medieval sometimes?* … BM: Sometimes yes. In RL I love it. I try to be as realistic as possible … research the dress, the customs, the manneriasims [sic] so I don't offend. H: … I just read the gor books and things. K (as female alt): I found it is possible to learn a lot about shopping through [the female alt] … she was mentored by some world-class shoppers … ☺ M2: It's like [being] an actor lol … I wanna improve my English too … there language (sic) so hard for me. S4: … you learn a lot of mythology, being and playing a figure is knowing a figure … in Peleponnesia I was Hermes then I needed to know who my children are, etc. You have to search on the internet, learning about the whole Greek mythology.
		Being an avatar	The sensation of using an avatar	K (as female alt): There are times when I find myself quite happy being [the female

			alt] … I am not certain why …
	Deleting avatars	Remarking on deleting old avatars	SF: I keep her in my inventory … I have erased all the other early ones.
Beginnings	Introductions and joinings	How heard of Second Life	DT: I heard about SL when I was watching CSI New York television show, so I looked it up. L: Well I saw a science programme on the BBC … I didn't put much thought into it at all, I was just impatient to get in and see what it was all about. S1: I read an article in the Wall Street Journal.
	Knowing nothing initially	Lack of knowledge impacting on appearance at the start	AM: Well as I knew nothing about SL I [chose] the av that looked more innocent, I chose the girl next door av. LE: At some point … someone gave me a skin … before that I didn't even realize skins and shapes could change … in the beginning I had no clue at all.
	Learning as a noobie	Learning to use Second Life	AM: I did not know how to change clothes nothing. *I: How did you figure all that out?* AM: Trial and error really, listening to others as I travelled SL and looking at what the buttons did. DT: It was very time consuming since I was clueless and I didn't want to spend money then. *I: The first pic you gave me … was it soon after you got here?* D: Yea I was, at a friend's house. They helped me there … it was real agrevating [sic] learning the viewer they helped tutor me so to speak so I didn't look like a noob anyway. I kept running into things I couldn't drive my avi at all. H: But I played a bit when I stopped being scared I would break something. SF: It took me three days to pick a name. I was slow ... it was a lot to learn for me. I was never involved in gaming, it was a month before I could just move fluently.
	Noob appearance	Describing the inferior quality of the avatar each new account is given and the efforts to change it almost immediately	A: I walk like a duck and I have a pancake face with a small rubber nose. H: Not found [a picture] of my first avi though. *I: What did she look like?* H: The one you get when new that I doctored, scary stuff ☺ … well very new and my graphics card was not good so now I see it, it is scary bless her. L: I chose musician girl, then quickly tried to make my own clothes from clothes editor Actually I promptly lost the hair … *I: Did you stay with that look for long?* L: No it probably changed the first or second day. *I: Does somebody have a noobie appearance influence you at all?* M3: Not really, unless it is a griefer. We had a griefer problem at our home sim, and he and his friends made a new [avatar] daily …

				S1: I can't remember what av I had as [the previous account], but as [S1], I took the most mundane college white girl av then fixed her up from there … yes, I changed the mundane av up a bit right away. I knew how because I'd been on SL with [the previous account] so I knew where to look for nice free skins and clothes …
		Noobies regarded differently	New avatars are treated as inferior and are not fully engaged with by other people.	K: I remember feeling like a total outcast with the noob skin and clothes … noobs tend, I think, to be seen differently … I [found] it difficult to hold anyone's attention for long … I do know folks, women mostly, who go out of their way to help orient noobs … but I made no such connection … it was a fairly lonely time … but that is to be expected, I think … I was not "cool" … LE: [People] treat you differently based on what you look like. Before … when I looked like a noob most did not want to chat or have much to do with me. Once my appearance changed and I looked good and my profile was full … [people] then began to IM me … and seemed nicer to me. *I: Why was that?* LE: I think several reasons … one being … the time it takes to explain things to a noob … it can be time consuming and I think it's just like RL, you think differently of [people] based on their appearance. It's sad but true. A good looking person … gets more respect. It's the same in SL.
	Individuality	Appearance as individual and unique	Wanting to look different to other avatars	DT: … I wanted purple eyes … that is my [favourite] colour and I suppose I thought it would be different ☺ M1 … I wanted to be as I feel in my real life and wanted to look [unique] so I took a picture with that … *I: Do you think there are rules about how [people] should look in SL?* M1 … in my eyes there's only one rule. Look as [you] want to look, everyone is an [individual] (or should be at least), so [dress] and live how [you] feel like. *I: Did you know how you wanted to look when you first came to SL?* M3: Not really, other than unique … hence the cotton-candy coloured hair! … as I saw others I knew what I didn't want to look like … but I didn't want to be the typical long, long hair, blonde, big boobs, I was attempting to have some kind of uniqueness but not so much that I would be "plain".
		Diversity	The range of different personalities and approaches in SL	*I: Do you think there are rules about profiles? …* DT: No ... some people just lie ☺ and some … like to be clever. Or funny … and I think they are as diverse as the personalities behind them. SF: The female avie experience is very different from a male's. There is always the element that wants to SLex … there are males who come in to SL and think ANY female avie is fair game. *I: Are men and women different in this respect?* SF: I think

			so. Some women do come here and instantly want a partner and are needy. Others are unsure of everything. It depends. Some of both are here looking to experiment with things they are not allowed to do in RL.
	Freedom of expression	People can look however they like	DT: But in SL … I can wear whatever I like … like purple leather ☺ … and great [heels] because my feet don't get hurt ☺ … so I am very much like my rl self. But I can express more freely if I choose … like purple eyes and leather. *I: Are there rules about how we should look in SL?* D: No I don't think there are any at all … it's a free world you can be an animal if you want. I know some like that too. *I: A lot of people say they try to look like their RLs.* H: Well have seen some with their own faces and I am not sure why but hey [it's] up to them how they play SL isn't. M3: You, of course, mean unstated [rules about how people should look in SL] … an unspoken societal rule. There are none that I can see … anything goes. Otherwise, you wouldn't have sooooo many long-hair, ridiculous cleavage women. Though I've been told the most outrageous are usually men clothed in women's avs.
Naming myself	My name is who I am	The avatar name represents who I am.	SF: I wanted [S] … my RL name. I was not interested in being anyone else. *I: And [F], you liked that one best?* SF: It was acceptable, I wasn't crazy about it. It's who I am now.
	Name as sounding good	Name chosen just because it sounds good.	SF: The fourth [alt's name] … just a killer name.
	Name decision linked to other avatars, alts, online accounts	Using the same or similar name across different accounts and virtual environments.	AM: [The alt's name] is a short name and non-related to me. I thought this was a good idea so as not to be linked with [my original avatar] … [another alt] was named like that because of the guy I was friends with and at that time [one of the other alts] was being griefed by the partner's alt's partner lol sounds confusing, anyway I thought OK if this other guy wants her to be called [a similar name as the first alt] not a problem though it would look obvious if it was [exactly the same]. M2: The truth is I always [choose the same name] everywhere in world net … *I: You said you used it for Gmail, did you also use it in chat rooms and things like that?* M2: Yeh, chat rooms and any website I need to apply a nickname.
	Name linked to something liked	Choosing names that have positive connotations.	D: Well my name [D] because I love diamonds and close to my name and my email … is because there is nothing more beautiful than a diamond in the summer day. SP: [A name of an alt] was fun and [the name of another alt] is a racer … and I am in motorsports, so it fit.

		Name related to fiction or games	Fiction and games as inspiration for avatar names.	*I: How did you choose the name [B]?* BM: I like it. A favourite character in [Final Fantasy 9] is [B], General [B]. I used that name for ages … I liked the character at first then I started to find reasons to like the name. S1: As for my name, I was a girl scout as a kid and I loved the movie "To Kill A Mockingbird". A little girl in it was named [S] and I've been told I look exactly like her when I was young. SF: [An alt's name] is a character in a book, as is [another alt's name] written by Anne McCafferty, both are strong women, and characters I enjoyed reading about.
		Surname choice	Choosing surnames from the list Second Life provides (prior to June 2010).	BM: At first I didn't like the last name thing but [now] I kinda miss it. … now everyone is Resident … at first no [I didn't like my surname] but [it] grew on me and it helped me work my character. DT: And I am half Japanese – so out of a list of last names available at the time – [T] was appealing. S1: [My surname] just came up and it seemed simple … [my alt's surname] was picked because it was as close as I could get to aviation. I have a private pilot license.
	Personality and character	Character construction and behaviour	Describing the characters and differences between alts	K: When I did learn how to construct a character … creating an individual and original shape and appearance … took me a couple of weeks to find myself in [the female alt] … I guess she is an enigma to me … because now … I feel very comfortable when I am her … but she is a cold player … with no interest in emotional intimacy … *I: What makes her a convincing female av?* K … in my opinion … the way she is made … the profile she creates … and the way she behaves. K: [The old male alt] is a crusty [old] bugger … elegant in his own way … but a bit short with others who [may] toy with him or waste his time … I think [he] is the old man in me … a curmudgeon of sorts … *I: How old is [the young male alt]?* K: Not sure … maybe just out of school. I think of [him] as Siddhartha just coming out of the palace … and discovering that the real world can be a very disturbing place … [the old male alt] already knows this … and makes his judgments accordingly …
		Names informing avatar character	How a name can inspire the shape an RP character takes.	BM: … [the surname] grew on me and helped me work my character … having a last name makes you question it, why is it [BM], who gave her the surname … turns out her mother was a [M] … who left home to go to sea … [from] Scotland I learned. It gave me a [bit] of an opportunity to learn of Scottish heritage.
		RL personality in SL	Having the same personality traits as in the physical	DT: I think that is a part from my RL personality, you know … some people are "like" themselves here … and some people

			world.	are a complete "fantasy" here … so I am very much like my RL self. But I can express more freely if I choose … like purple eyes and leather ☺ K: Yeah, I would say [K is like the RL me] … I think I told you before …
		Role Play as aspects of personality	How aspects of "real" personality are reflected in Role Play.	K: I suppose that there is a bit of RP going on there … [K] has a time and a place … [the two male alts] have no commitments. *I: Do they have their own friends?* K: Yeah … and their own groups and interests. *I: It's interesting you say you aren't an actor, but now you are in RP sims a lot … what do you think has happened, are you an actor after all?* S4: Hm, no. I think I use my roles to help people. Instruments. Initiates is a priest, to whom people come and ask for advice. I was a master of a trainee, to help people combat with the sword. Triton is a new role, I do not know how to develop. Yet. *I: … are you taking a role and then being yourself within that role?* S4: Yes. Each role has a part of me … initiate: I like to help people with being developing their soul. Soldier: I am a field hockey player, so a part of sport is showing there. Tactics with a team. Triton: I love to be underwater. Hermes: I can be charming and I try to be tricky sometimes.
	Reflexivity	Appearance or avatar reflecting mood	Using a particular alt depending on mood, or dressing to reflect a mood.	*I: Do you log on as [the alts] depending on mood?* K: … yeah … it is based on mood and whether I have the time in RL to devote to SL … [the older male alt] when I want to see somebody in particular or when I wish to be alone … [the younger male alt] when I want to wander and explore by myself. M1: Mh, it's mostly a mood-thing today, I love red and black as colours which is really good combined in that outfit, still having a touch of gothic as I am and feel like. And the spikes and inner graveyard on my chest shall remind that gothic and my character as it is. So in a way like "hell yes I can be offending when [you] get bad one me" and kind of being straight with what I say what I still mean then. SF: [One of the alts] is my "leave me the hell alone avie". I'm usually very bitchy at times when she's in … but not always. I allow myself that. With [SF] … I try to maintain my self-control at all times. I remove myself rather than lash out at people. *I: Because she has responsibilities?* SF: Well yes, and a public face. And involved in several groups I would not want to make look bad because of any lack of self-control … [another alt] is for talking to [a friend] … occasionally I will wander with her, explore, but not often. I use [another alt] for that now. To explore, build, and hide from the constant chatter. And to spend time dancing with [another friend]. That's not dancing … but spending time with [him].

		Being aware of own profile content	Being conscious that other people read one's profile and may be affected by what it says.	DT: It is way too easy to misunderstand … and I think some aren't even aware. That when you say something gushy about one person … another person may get hurt … we are sort of reckless ☺. Or so focused on our current situation … we forget about the others … who may be still checking things out. *I: Do you mind that people might be scrutinizing your profile?* DT: I don't mind … but I find myself trying to be careful about what I put there …
		Reflecting on experience	Spending time reflecting on the experience of what happens in SL	K: I think about this stuff almost constantly ... trying to figure out what it means … there is not parallel experience in [RL] … M1: Well been depressed a bit at that time and asked myself what the [intentions] of [people] were when they treat others like air. Or still bug them, abuse them as that kind of a trashbin for their own problems.
	The experience of SL and virtual worlds	Other virtual worlds	Using other virtual worlds	A: Before SL, I have been in more conventional chat rooms. And at Meez where I created my first avatar, of course with the means which are available there … but it was my entry to 3D environments.
		Professional interest in SL	Involvement in SL because of professional interests or bringing professional interests into SL	DT: Because I am a software engineer in RL … the technology was interesting to me … so I was curious what kind of programming was behind all the graphics and such. H: I would like to bring our training to SL. Am talking to a guy in Nottingham Uni about helping me use our small agency as a pilot before rolling it out across the UK.
		Remaining in SL	Discussing the possibility of leaving SL	AM: It was a nightmare really it was … I like SL far too much to give up … and never to a low life. *I: Do you think one day you will leave SL?* LE: Definitely. And I see it coming … sooner rather than later.
		Separation between worlds	The separation between SL and the physical world	L: Oh dear, SL is funny … this is when you realize the rest of the world would have no clue whatsoever … yes a strange experience. *I: And you decided not to say anything about RL under First Life [in the profile]?* S4: No. First life is a different world. Maybe I can place my presence time.
		SL as a dreamlike state	Comparing the experience of being in SL to dreaming	A: My profile shows a poem by Edgar Allen Poe. It came to my mind within the first days of SL. "All that we see or seem. Is but a dream within a dream" … it describes perfectly how SL appears to me. Nothing is forever here. Like in RL. But this world is ten times faster changing. And we are dreams within a dream … it is this mixture of a more or less hyperreal projection of SL environments and fairylands. And you can TP between these different environments with two mouseclicks. This is similar to a dream. You rarely have just one dream per night. But you can just remember some snippets the next morning – or nothing.

		SL wearing off	SL no longer has the effect it once did	M3: I've basically become pretty immune to everything, which is kinda sad to say. I'm not as prone to say hello to people as I walk by them … and I do have a strong sense of not portraying a rude first impression. But when one is shopping or exploring, one does NOT have to always say hello.
		The purpose of SL	Using SL for a purpose.	A: Others are top models, table dancers, escort cuties, fashion designers, business women … I'm an Auntie … when I wear Victorian robe or an Ancient Egyptian robe, I look different in SL as well. My look is determined [by] what I want and what I actually incorporate at SL. My role as to say, though I'm actually not a Role Player. I'm learning and working being … so a certain "Blue Stockings" look seems appropriate for me. D: I suppose it's good for anything that interests you. L: I think SL probably coincided with my so-called midlife crisis. And part of that was about thinking oh no this is it for the rest of my life. Or 15 years or so anyway. So by thinking not too far ahead and knowing that things can change, I have helped fix those fears and SL is a great escape. SF: I was out of work and spent hours going through the menus to learn how everything worked. It kept me from having panic attacks about RL … I do know I have the support of friends here … [my SL partner] in particular. I have been able to use that to help my self-confidence. And to be able to dell [my RL husband] when he's being a jerk and stand up for myself.
	User-avatar relationship	Attachment and antipathy	Being attached, having no attachment or even hating the avatar.	*I: Do you get attached to [your avatar]?* D: Yes. K (as the female alt): Each reflect something within me … I am less comfortable being [the female alt] … I do not personally identify with her. LE: I think that I have grown attached to [LE] … almost as a third person outside of myself … [when I was dressed up as a noob] it wasn't anything to me really … the avi was just a tool to move around the game. SF (as one of the alts): I got to the point of hating [the alt speaking]. I was restricted from changing her … I use her mostly to talk to one guy who is exhibiting first signs of Alzheimer's. He has not asked, but when I change her … it upsets him.
		Avatar fits me	The avatar used feels comfortable.	K: I guess [my female alt] is an enigma to me … because now … I feel very comfortable when I am her … *I: Why did you experiment with changing her a year ago?* L: I thought I could do it again. And the avi did look good … but oddly … it wasn't "me" … it didn't fit my

			personality so I wore it only a couple of days … and went back to what I felt comfortable in.
	Avatars as aspects of Self	The avatars show aspects of personality and who we are as people.	AM: So at the time the pic was taken this would have been her usual skin and shape. *I: How did you decide how you wanted to look?* AM: Just thought of who I am in a three dimensional way, hope that makes sense … well, like now for instance, this is you, your professional side, this me is my partaking side but this being, so I am still me just sitting in a different seat. When you go out with your friends, you are different persona to as you are now, right? … So now we are seeing maybe our second dimension … *I: An aspect of ourselves?* AM: Exactly. K (as the female alt): Each reflect something within me … K: I think that [the older male alt] is the old man in me … a curmudgeon of sorts … actually … I think of [K] as the anchor … the "whole" … [the older male alt] and [the younger male alt] are perspectives of [K] … *I: Do people in SL see all these sides of you?* S4: One part the one side more than the other, but yes, I think because I am myself for a great part, all sides are shown.
	Empathising with avatar situations	Putting oneself into the situation the avatar is in.	*I: Can you remember how it felt to be new in SL?* M3: Yes. Scary and exciting. Even though one has some anonymity here, it felt odd to walk by someone without saying hello or some sort of acknowledgement. And I recall the first few times I competed in medieval tourney, swords. I was soooo nervous, my heart was pounding! *I: When you are being the character, do they feel as if they are you and you are them?* S4: Hm, a bit. I have done scuba dive, so I know a bit the feeling, what a triton might have. *I: So you try and imagine what it is like?* S4: Yes, indeed. How it is to be able to live under and above water. I know from experience, under water is magical.
	Lack of emotional involvement	Not having emotional involvement with others in SL.	K: I guess [the female alt] is an enigma to me … because now … I feel very comfortable when I am her … but she is a cold player … with no interest in emotional intimacy … poor Italian and Spanish guys wind up hating her K [as the female alt]: … I tend to keep to myself … not many friends … no lasting contact with others … ☺ … I cannot deal with it emotionally … simply not equipped for it … ☺ I do have girl friends … with whom I shop … and yes … they know about the "real" me … but that is just fun … ☺
	Only an avatar	The avatar attributes are only pixels, they are not "real".	L: Silly really it's only an avatar …. And also not many are sold and I suppose I just got exposed to it and eventually thought it was OK and they are not my real legs [discussing wearing short skirts in SL].

		People behind the avatar	The avatars are operated by people with feelings to be taken into consideration.	*I: When you see [your RL husband's] avie then, is it invisible?* H: No. I see his avi. And I know it [is him]. And well it [is] just him isn't it? So don't look at him a lot :)) K: These people are digressions and diversions … I do not seek these engagements … and I realize that I must be careful … I am mindful that for some, SL is a primary vehicle for social engagement … I am not about to turn somebody's life on its head for my own pleasure … M1: Well I thought about to place [a poster] in an [album] open for all and call it artwork and reminder that behind most pixels (avatars) are real humans with feelings and own life and problems.
		Pride in avatar construction	Taking pride in the work done to make the avatar.	BM: Much earlier work, I still look at it with pride [discussing an early picture of her avatar]. LE: I was very proud of that. Then a few months later … found new eyes … and hair … and haven't changed since … In the end, I was … and still am … proud of what [LE] looks like. I have never seen anyone come close to looking like [LE] and I get compliments all the time on her.
		The avatar referred to as Me	Self-referencing when discussing avatar behaviour.	AM: Only very rarely just pass items to this me.
		Third person referencing	Referring to one's own avatar, alt or self in the third person during the interview.	K [as female alt]: Please excuse my appearance … ☺ [K] did not mention this meeting to me … ☺ … I would have dressed a bit … ☺ [K] is very tolerable … it is [the old male alt] who is the absolute tosser … ☺ … my maker tends to think that a male's female avi is the woman of his dreams … mine wanted a "nice" girl … but I am thinking he considers me like a daughter … I have made some clothes … [K] buys everything off the rack … ☺
Social activity	Being in context	Appearances for different purposes	Changing appearance and clothing according to purpose.	*I: How do you decide what to wear in SL?* DT: Guess it depends on what I am going to do ☺. So if I am going dancing … I have dresses. And if I am just going to hang out and chat … I have jeans … D: … only diff kind of avi was a furry because I had to dance as one and the other was the nekko ones for dancing. I have a lot of costumes for dancing including I dream of Jeannie. H: That is me dressed for a Gor dance I made up :)) K [as female alt]: Most of my clothes are free … I can be elegant … or I can be quite provocative.
		Appropriate appearance	Changing appearance according to sim regulations or as appropriate for the situation and environment (including the	*I: Do you like forties look then?* AM: Some of it yes but was never really comfortable with it for every day wear here in SL … just did not feel right … just did not fit where I lived at the time but at certain forties sims you have to wear that style of clothing. BM: A pirate sim I went to as a kid was

		research interview).	actually kinda grown up. So I changed to a grown up … *I: Do you do medieval sometimes?* BM: … sometimes yes. In RL I love it. I try to be as realistic as possible … research the dress, the customs, the mannerisms, so I don't offend. DT: In RL … I dress pretty conservatively … say business casual … and I suppose appropriate for my age ☺ H: I mix bits of outfits so I was correctly dressed for Gor. Because free women there should not dance :)) But had seen a slave dance comp and there was one for free women so I up the dance and the story … One day when I was out I had joined a Persian sim and was trying out the dress for it. K [as the female alt]: I also spend time at Calas Galadhon ["a beautiful set of 10 park like sims"] … and I wear a cute little park ranger outfit … ☺ M1: Only topic was kinda cowboy but has mostly been working as host at that place I took the pic. SF: It's just dress up to me. But I do like to fit the occasion. *I: Why did you change [for the interview], did I make you feel uncomfortable all dressed in black?* S4: No, but it seemed not … proper to sit in RP stuff, in 21st century.
	RL norms and expectations applied to SL	The norms and expectations of RL are applied to appearance are applied in SL.	*I: Do you think there are rules about appearance in SL?* DT: No … but I think how others perceive your avi is related to the "rules" they know in SL … even if you try to let those "assumptions" go. And not be judgmental from your RL perspective … and I think it depends on what you are doing … but even someone who is playing a fantasy … is using those perspectives from their RL as an influence … I mean look at what sexy means here … so for me … it is subtle .. but for some women … they want to be bigger than Dolly Parton … ☺ H: Well was brought up to always look good because it says a lot about you. So that transferred to here … [it says] that you care about yourself. That you have basic hygiene skills :)) S1: People are people. It pervades to SL just like RL … Just earlier today I was at a lucky chair sim and saw a guy watching a hot girl when another girl came by, he turned around [and] watched her … now maybe I imagined it, but who knows … *I: Are the same rules in RL in SL too then?* S1: … of course. As I said, we're human. Avs are human. Even if you chose your av to be some other creature.
	Social expectations of avatar appearance	The extent to which others have expectations of what avatars should look like	*I: Do you think there are expectations in SL about what avis should look like?* H: Not at all. It depends on the person I think. *I: So there are expectations about how*

	and attitudes towards them.	*someone is supposed to look in SL?* K: I think so … in the main, anyway …
		I: Do you think there are expectations of what avis should look like? M2: … no I don't think so. Just improve it. *I: What kind of things would improve an avi?* M2: Skins, shapes, etc. There is many skins are ugly. And everything there is a good and bad …
		M3: You, of course, mean unstated [rules about how people should look in SL] … an unspoken societal rule. There are none that I can see … anything goes. Otherwise, you wouldn't have sooooo many long-hair, ridiculous cleavage women. Though I've been told the most outrageous are usually men clothed in women's avs … as a woman, I can say that society puts so much emphasis on being and retaining beauty, that it is understandable why so many choose to look the way they do. But honestly, I hate that look. Even in RL.
		I: Do you think there are expectations in SL about how an avi should look? S1: Of course! ... People are people. It pervades to SL just like RL … Just earlier today I was at a lucky chair sim and saw a guy watching a hot girl when another girl came by, he turned around [and] watched her … now maybe I imagined it, but who knows … *I: Are the same rules in RL in SL too then?* S1: … of course. As I said, we're human. Avs are human. Even if you chose your av to be some other creature … Beauty is beauty. Well then you base what you think about the person on what they say. Their intellectual capacity. Or at least I do. Like when I go to Frank's Jazz Club to dance and someone asks me to dance. I don't say no because they are wearing cheap clothes. But I do keep in mind that maybe he is a noob or maybe he just doesn't care about his looks. Historically though, for the most part, if a person takes a little care to look good, I have more in common with them.
		I: Do you think there are expectations of what an avi should look like? S4: Well it depends on what [world] you are. I know a sim where the buildings are made for 1.84 [metre] people. *I: Oh really? Normal RL height people [Second Life convention is for avatars to be much taller than average physical world height].* S4: Yes. We have "Gorean" measures … a male is 2.5m. I am a bit … smaller … *I: ... what happens if you don't adhere to that?* S4: You are a small man I think. Less than 1.77m is considered a child. *I: So no one says you must increase your height? If you are short in Gor, what do people think of you, does it matter?* S4: Well, I am shorter, but not very short. And then they think you are younger. But it does not matter. *I: They don't think you are odd.* S4: Only the sim limits obliges you for a certain length. *I: You couldn't be a tiny though presumably.* S4:

			No. If you enter a sim, you have to respect their rules.
Displaying Self	Appearance as a projection of Self	Avatars as a projection of how we perceive ourselves as looking.	D: The way I look now is close to how I project myself as it's close to how I think I look.
	Appearance as an enhanced version of RL	Avatars give opportunity to look like an enhanced version of appearance in the physical world.	L: I am happy to do touch ups hehe. My av is a bit thinner and slightly better endowed than the real me. And I look a bit older. But yes. Trying to look like me. Sort of. M3: … As I saw others, I knew what I didn't want to look like. I actually tried to be "less attractive" though it is too hard to not choose to be "somewhat attractive" here. But I didn't want to be typical long, long hair, blonde, big boobs. I was attempting to have some kind of uniqueness but not so much that I would be "plain". If we could remake ourselves in RL, certainly we would choose enhancements of some sort.
	Authentic avatar appearance and behaviour	Ensuring the appearance and behaviour displayed is authentic to the avatar.	BM: The tartan I believed was researched. The tartan colours and patterns are extremely important in deserning [sic] what clan you belong to … I found that simply amazing. *I: What makes her a convincing female av?* K … in my opinion … the way she is made … the profile she creates … and the way she behaves … *I: What makes her profile convincing do you think?* K: The care with which it is assembled … one of the most obvious give-aways of a male playing a female is that there is absolutely NOTHING in the profile … I have not found anyone yet who doubts that [my female alt] is not genuine … but many believe she is an older woman in RL … and relatively conservative …
	Avatar representing personal attributes	How the avatar may be used to reflect personal characteristics.	A: Well, my avatar should have something from my RL self and should also mirror what I prefer to do and like. At Meez, I was automatically a "granny" in comparison to the majority of teenagers. Though I also met some grown-up avatars there … Others even underline their RL "defects" like too big noses. The most radical avatar I already met in my first days at SL is a student from the US west coast. She lost both her legs in an accident when she was a child. And her avatar has no legs and is sitting in a [wheelchair]. *I: Do you think your avatar represents you?* S5: Physically, a perfect me, psychological, I am the same I think … *I: Do you think you can tell what someone is like by looking at their avi?* S5: Oh I think so … one can put the attention to what he wants to be, or what he is. For example, you … you are clever, so you put [on glasses]. Glasses looks like a wiseman. An intellectual. Hm, you are shy. You are in black, so you do not like to be in the middle

			point.
	Profile for establishing participation	Using the profile to declare how and when one uses or is willing to use SL.	BM: The rest of the front [the Second Life profile tab] is disclaimer how I don't do certain things etc. DT: … or the clear boundary expressions - "I do NOT … whatever" … as if that will prevent … hmmm. H: And the others are about the pressure you feel in SL sometimes to have sex here. I don't do sex hehe. *I: When you say "later, later, later, later", what does that mean?* M2: Mean I won't write anything about me on profile. M3: I had in SL that I was "friendly, liked to explore SL sims, and how to pronounce my name". *I: Do you think profiles are important?* S5: Well, in RP they can be important … for the alternative name … like mine is [Greek version of his account first name] … *I: And you decided not to say anything about RL under First Life?* S4: No, first life is a different world. May be I can place my presence time.
	Profiles as representative or misrepresentative of a person	The extent to which profiles represent the kind of person someone actually is.	A: But after consulting with some friends I decided to remove [a picture of me on a motorcycle] again … and this was a good decision since some guys with BDSM interests were already reacting on this … the issue with presumably strong women in leather, you know ;) … *I: How did you choose the one that is there?* A: A neighbour said that it would look quite typical … I surrounded by hats in my store. DT: Some people just lie ☺ S1: I have a friend I met as [my previous avatar] (being bad!) and didn't look at his profile because he was very intellectual. When I finally did, I was shocked! We became good friends and when I later checked out his profile, I actually told him to tone it down a little and said if I had looked at it before talking to him I wouldn't have touched him with a 10 foot pole! … but as I said, it was my own fault for not looking at it first … I just took him at face value on his chat because he was very cordial and polite.
	Profiles expressing an aspect of Self	Using profiles to show some part of their personality.	AM: This [profile picture of me] is the goddess persphony damn that's not spelt right. She goes along with the fae look … *I: So she is kind of the essence of [AM]?* AM: Yes. This is like my spiritual side. *I: And you said this pic [a picture of the avatar on a motorcycle] shows your wild side. Is this something you wanted to show?* A: For a very short time, I had a RL picture of my motorbike there.
	Profiles used for personal mission statements, beliefs, causes.	How profiles can be used to make declarations regarding personal beliefs.	AM: [discussing an entry in her profile picks that states "the purpose of argument should not be VICTORY but progress"] [The] argument [entry] is hopefully letting people know what that means, putting a

			positive side to it … some do not know what a real argument is, they think it is for winning a situation. *I: These statements about argument and love you have, I guess these are all things you want to stand for?* AM: Exactly, and hope for others to learn. *I: How do you decide what to put in picks?* DT: Things that I care about … or that were amazing that someone else should see. H: And the others are about the pressure you feel in SL sometimes to have sex here. I don't do sex hehe. L: I think it's nice to say what part of the world you come from. And as people don't always believe a female av is a female, I say that in my [profile] too. The "illusion" bit is because I think there is illusion everywhere. Not just in SL … and really it's about your own perception or how you look at things. To me SL reveals as many things as it hides. M1: [Discussing a profile picture with the phrase "restrained life" on it] It was a time as I held myself back and still looked at people. Still to figure about their psyche, how they act in a virtual community where they can be as they want, what they prolly want all the time in real life … Sometimes I still do that now BTW ☺ … No one ever did [ask what it meant].
	RL representations in profile	Putting RL information, imagery or detail in the profile.	A: I had a pic of the reconstructed castle at Brunswick there, a RL pic … but … it shows a Christmas tree, so I could place it again in November or so. BM: Oh wow I forgot I wrote that ["life sucks" in the First Life section]. Yeah I got through depression now and then. *I: Are those your eyes?* M3: Yes … only part of me I felt worth sharing, lol.
	Stereotyped, exaggerated and sexualized avatar appearance	The extent to which the appearance of avatars is exaggerated sexually and physically.	AM: .. a male friend I met here made her look beautiful but not slutty … *I: Can you tell me how you decided on this look for [one of the alts]?* AM: I like it, looked nice not slutty. *I: So same criteria as [two other alts]* AM: Yes never have wanted to look like a slut. Even this av is not slutty, sexy yes but not slutty … the difference [between sexy and slutty] is very thin … you have to go round and look at escorts to know what I mean. *I: So when you meet someone via their avatar, what goes through your mind?* A: It depends on their avatar … most women here apparently hadn't enough Barbies in their childhood … and women care more for their shape and style than most men. The latter are more stereotype in their appearance … the amount of sexy, very tall, super-athletes is very high. E.g. to have arm muscles like yours, you would have to work in a hard job like construction worker, miner or something like that, or to spend most of your life in a body building studio.

				People who work that hard have usually other faces. They aren't that cutie and fine. So exaggeration is the rule here. Looking average is an eye catcher in a world of superlatives.
	Impact of relationships	Friends in SL	The scale of friendship in SL.	BM: I make friends… it's harder to do that in RL. I don't know why. *I: Is it easier to make them in SL?* BM: Oddly enough yes … people see me as a little kid, they know I'm not but they accept it. K [as the female alt]: I do have girlfriends … with whom I shop … Relatively speaking no [I do not have many men friends as any of my alts]… I have a number of male friends … but these are not really social relationships per se … [K]'s neighbours … technical resources … vendors and men I would do business with …
		Help from others	The role of other residents in helping with appearance and other factors, particularly at the start.	BM: … my RL mate helped me … showed me what to do lol. H: Was taken by one of the guys. I was frozen and asking for help … they just laughing and taking pics of me. They cruel like that he he … then my mother in law joined. She made lots of friends … and they all help her and she tell me ☺ LE: This avi ... is what I looked like … until someone took pity on me … and showed me around SL to change my appearance. … At some point … someone gave me a skin … she took me to Laqroki [a shop in SL that sells skins] … then I met someone … I thought I looked good … and said … "Look at yourself … then look at the models". *I: In terms of how to look, when you first got here, what happened, did you get help?* SF: Yes. Second day. With a sweet man from Arkansas and another from Wisconsin … *I: How did they help you?* SF: With the technical learning of how to use the SL program.
		Others involved in and influencing avatar appearance	The extent to which avatar appearance is directly or indirectly influenced by others.	A: Two of my friends offered me to refurbish my avatar in order to look more sexy since I'm quite tiny in SL measures ("only" 6'/1.82m which is a dwarf here). *I: Did your friend help you sort out how to make your avi look?* BM: Nope I did that on my own. He gave me an LM to Freebie Dungeon and he bought me hair when I wanted it. D: My first outfit that was give me … the look was from friends … They helped me there … it was real agrevating [sic] learning the viewer they helped tutor me so to speak so I didn't look like a noob anyway. I kept running into things I couldn't drive my avi at all …the woman … she made me that avi. H: My partner joined SL a few months after me and went straight out and bought new stuff. So I did too. Before that I did not spend.

			K: When I did learn how to construct a character … creating an individual and original shape and appearance … I did help some noobs myself. LE: So she asked me what I would want to look like and I said … Is there any way to look like me in RL? So we took a pic of me from RL … and tried to work on that … I tried to change about a year ago. My friends didn't like it. Hahaha. And neither did I really. L: … [the original avatar] probably changed the first or second day. I ended up in the changing rooms at Kuula [the NCI sim] and started playing around with the sliders. Then I got some help and picked a shape from the free ones they have there. This shape I have now is just adapted from that one. M3: The girl who made me over took both the before and after profile shots. SF [as one of the alts]: I got to the point of hating [this alt]. I was restricted from changing her … I use her to mostly talk to one guy, who is exhibiting the first signs of Alzheimers. He has not asked, but when I change her … it upsets him … he talks to me, almost daily … and tells me his day. *I: In terms of how to look, when you first got here, what happened, did you get help?* SF: Yes. Second day. With a sweet man from Arkansas and another from Wisconsin … *I: How did they help you?* SF: With the technical learning of how to use the SL program … I wanted a totally different look and when I made [another alt], I was often around Italians. So …Sophia Loren came to mind. Strong woman.
	Others involved in name choice	Other people having involvement in the naming of avatars.	AM: [This alt] was named like that because of the guy I was friends with and at that time [the other alts] was being griefed by the partner's alt's partner … anyway I though OK if this other guy wants her to be called [a name closely related to the first alt] not a problem, thought it would look obvious it was [the other alt]. *I: Ah ok, he liked the name [of the other alt]?* AM: Yes. But I also think it went deeper than that … well he was and still is an egoist, so having that name he thought would be a kick in the pants to [the other alt]'s ex.
	Pictures taken by others	Other people taking photographs of the avatar, for pleasure or for profile.	A: One of my very first [pictures], taken by my first lover … on day 2 or 3 of my existence. *I: This is a good pic.* DT: Yeah [K – another participant referred by DT] has a knack … course … that is why I have hundreds … H: Was taken by one of the guys. I was frozen and asking for help … they just laughing and taking pics of me. They cruel like that he he. M3: The girl who made me over took both

				the before and after profile shots. S4: Well, I am a free rider, so pictures was an expensive thing … *I: Do you always take your own profiles?* S4: No. Some were made by friends.
		Relationship status and performance on profile	Using the profile to provide info on relationships or to discuss some aspect of them.	*I: … in the text box you talk about your partnership, have you had that there long?* AM: I put that there the day we partnered. M3: I actually just changed it last nite. In recent months, I've been putting quotes from songs or some such poetic blurb. It is in direct response to recent SL heartbreak. I guess it is an SL equivalent of venting pain. But the current SL blurb is actually showing progress away from the heartbreak.
		Relationships in SL	Relationships as described in profiles and pictures and the role they are playing.	D: So a lot of guys will try to date me and I want them to not just have interest in sex. *I: is that where the rest of the profile comes in [the First Life section discusses how the participant will not engage in sex]?* D: I like being friends most of all. Well RL is diff and you might meet someone in SL for RL but so far I haven't. *I: Who is the gentleman [dancing in the picture with the participant]?* H: It is my RL partner :)) … he took it. *I: What is it like being with him un SL?* H: Well it is good … I can always rely on him to be there when my friends are not on. Also he goes out more in SL than me. So always takes me to dancing in new places. L: [L] develops relationships over time and is in it for the long haul I think. But [my alt] doesn't know many people so can flit in and out a bit more. Erm I am not sure whether that is making sense … I suppose I feel that [L] has more responsibilities. But that doesn't mean I would be cruel or unkind as [the alt]. Because that's not me … and rabbits [in the picture] reminds me of the guy I was with for a long time here … but it also feels a nice relaxed pic … actually if my husband could talk to me I might not need the need to find romance here. M1: Well [the person in the picture] was my adopted daughter for a few month where she didn't want the parents which adopted her because of some problems, we lived and talked together until RL college caught her up and now she's logging in from time to time again. M3: The second last [picture] is me and a good friend of mine on one of my patios at my home. The second one is a girl I met with the same first name/pronunciation so we became "sisters".
	Influencing others	Appearance for creating desired impression	The extent to which avatar appearance gives a specific impression to others.	D: It's a projection of how you want people to see you. *I: Do you think you can tell something about a person by the way their avi looks?* H: Yes :)). Think so. The look you have gone for these interviews. Is supposed to

			researcher yes? *I: Yes, although to begin with I looked a bit more researcher-y.* H: Bit scatter-brained and harmless? *I: Do you think you can tell what someone is like by looking at their avi?* S5: Oh I think so … one can put the attention to what he wants to be, or what he is. For example, you … you are clever, so you put [on glasses]. Glasses looks like a wiseman. An intellectual. Hm, you are shy. You are in black, so you do not like to be in the middle point.
	Impact of appearance on others' behaviour	The extent to which the avatar appearance causes others to behave differently.	H [discussing the chaperoning of her RL son in SL]: Yes [he was a youngster in the game also] :)) that is why he is never in SL alone :)). He was a little prince … but then the sims had trouble with a kid fighting and asked him to get adult avi … then I had to watch him twice as hard hehe. SF: It's the land of make believe. And dressing up or being a different character is fun. And I was fascinated with the different reactions I would get with various avies … If I was helping with [my fairy avi] people treated me as if I was a child … she is as short as you can go in the slider scale [the instrument used to change avatar physical characteristics] without scripts … and very skinny … and when I was a Tiny I was walked over by noobs. I was a helper then, and greeting new residents. Their reactions tend to be what they would be in RL … [they] would ignore me. Or don't ask questions of me, but to the avie they see that they think would know the [answer]. [Another helper] was always looking like a professor. They would ask him quite a bit. And it was funny when the females would ask, because he was clueless about how to dress a female … The female avie experience is very different from a male's. There is always the element that wants to SLex … there are males who come in to SL and think ANY female avie is fair game. *I: Are men and women different in this respect?* SF: I think so. Some women do come here and instantly want a partner and are needy. Others are unsure of everything. It depends. Some of both are here looking to experiment with things they are not allowed to do in RL.
	Name has meaning or connotations	The name of the avatar has connotations and meanings, both intentional and unintentional.	AM: I wanted a wholesome name and her names means truth, honesty, purity, depending on where it is used. BM: I looked [the avatar name] up once too… queens have had it. It's a regal name. *I: I must admit it's those connotations that come to my mind. It sounds strong.* K: It is a strange thing … the name [of the young male alt] evokes the image of a playboy … but he is just naïve and kinda tedious. M1: Well it's both been a combination (name and that log in) – my RL name also is [the first part of M1] and I like those

			Mediterranean things like life and the names, [they reflect] kinda proudness, so I made that name then and did that so unique so that many ppl remember me after a long time too. M2: I think [I use the name] to make sure who will talk to me am not an easy girl. *I: … so you can fight back if you need to?* M2: Yes and I do and did.
	Profiles influence on interactions	Profiles used to decide if and how to interact, or avoid, someone.	*I: Are there things you expect to see when you look at a profile?* DT: Maybe just a hint of what the person is interested in in SL … that might influence if I talk to you. I mean contact you first … if someone IMs me … I will talk to them … I will reply … but yes I would probably pull up their profile out of curiosity … to see what they have there. Well … I am not … at this time ☺ … interested in. Things like slave. LOL. Or fighting game roleplay. So I will talk to someone … As sometimes … they are seeing something in my profile or pics … they want to know about. And sometimes … it is the "hi you are cute" kind of short lived conversation … just for fun ☺ D: I have my RL pic in [the First Life tab]. So a lot of guys will try to date me. H: Well I had [my RL husband] as a partner once … but only to put men off a bit. But then I found I got no dance partners. So I took him off. *I: … why does [K] have a German paragraph in his profile?* K: [The older male alt]'s name is Northern European … and I speak German … it is a way of inviting conversation in German. LE: I've never spoke to him more than one time. But have kept up with him and his profile. I have now decided NOT to work for him … or make his logo. In his profile, he has a pick … which says … (excuse language) "FUCK YOU" to all the profile whores out there! With a nasty picture inside. That … along with the other details of his profile … tells me he is not in a good place right now … and would be very difficult to work for. M3: If they don't know how to hide groups, one naturally forms a picture of their personality from their groups. For example, BDSM, Boys who date Naked Girls (<- paraphrasing here), DJ Susie, etc. It can display a common bond. I have sometimes IM'd those whom I share a group with. It can be a way to start a conversation. An effective ice-breaker … [my friend, who reads everyone's profiles, is] a very shy guy so I suppose he reads it because he can, because he can get an idea of the type of person they might be. S1: I try to look at their profile to get a better sense of the person. If they have only sexual stuff or nothing at all on it, I am wary … I have a friend I met as [my

				previous avatar] (being bad!) and didn't look at his profile because he was very intellectual. When I finally did, I was shocked! We became good friends and when I later checked out his profile, I actually told him to tone it down a little and said if I had looked at it before talking to him I wouldn't have touched him with a 10 foot pole! S4: They groups can be practical … if you are in a gay friendly sim, it can be nice, if you recognise if he or she is straight or gay … some guys are homophobic. *I: So you want to know if you have something in common and are safe?* S4: Yes.
		Profiles used to portray desired characteristics	Constructing a profile that gives the desired impression on others.	DT: … and some [people] like to be clever. I don't think of myself as witty or very creative ... so it was sort of ... put enough to express something coherent and somewhat intelligent … but don't be boring or preachy ☺ LE: I simply write about [the things that happen to me in SL] but only the good things. I don't write about negative things. As I don't want to come across as a negative person.
	Interactions with others	Communication in SL	The role of appearance and other factors in how communication takes place in SL.	A: My idea about avatars is that they are a very important means of communication, especially in the first moments of an encounter. Not different to RL, but more important.SL is mainly a visual determined world. So other impressions, like e.g. the sound of a voice, the gestures, mimics, smell is not present. You have to rely and to focus on the "image" of the other self condensed in someone's avatar … *I: So when you see someone's avatar can you make an assessment about what kind of person they are?* A: Not always, but quiet often. An avatar tells often about wishes, needs, if there is a creative or more consuming mind behind … a more consuming mind trues to look like the majority and is eager to get the latest fashion creations, hairdos, animations for the AOs and things like that. Surface-related features … while creators are often defining themselves not by their personal look but by their works. BM: Sometimes voice but it hurts my head … in the terms of trying to hear properly. *I: So it's possible to read between the lines?* DT: Yes … even when the person writing didn't mean anything by it. *I: When she speaks does she speak the same as you?...* [K, as the female alt]: No … she expresses simpler ideas … and in simpler ways … she is not an intellectual … *I: Do you just see someone and think they look interesting, I will IM?* M2: Yep lol … *I: What would make someone look interesting?* M2: His look lol. How he is talking to ppl. *I: Do you IM women as*

				well? M2: Yes, but not usually. Just if I feel [curiosity] or help, or she is in my clan. I will IM her and say hi at [least].
		Community in SL	The importance of community in SL.	S4: Well, I was in Klima, a very deserted city, in the Role Play. It makes people very close, like a family. All people respect extremely the RP rules, and that is great …. *I: Does the idea of family and community appeal to you?* S4: Hm, yes. You are not in SL, to be alone, I guess. It is a social game.
		Losing contact with others	Losing contact with other people in SL.	BM: These [two people in a photograph] are two people I no longer speak to. The girl disappeared from my SLife the next day. And the boy turned out to be a bully and perve. And a liar. *I: The girl did she just log off and never come back?* BM: He's pretty much banned from a jillion sims. Dunno. We just didn't care. The way she is dressed I doubt she's even a child av anymore. *I: You were only a few weeks old and sussing out how crappy people can be in SL?* BM: LOL ya pick up a lot. DT: BTW … the moment I gave you that picture … the person in that picture IM me … and that has sort of thrown me off … because I haven't spoken to him in close to 2 years …
		Mis-communication and mis-interpretation	Misunder-standings happen in SL, people put their own meaning into other' texts and images.	A: But after consulting with some friends I decided to remove [a picture of me on a motorcycle] again … and this was a good decision since some guys with BDSM interests were already reacting on this … the issue with presumably strong women in leather, you know ;) *I: So it's possible to read between the lines?* DT: Yes … even when the person writing didn't mean anything by it … ☺ … it is way too easy to misunderstand … and I think some aren't even aware that when you say something gushy about one person … another person may get hurt … H: …the reading things into SL and what others say that is not there.
		Pictures of friends	Friends feature in pictures.	A: … my English friend, who calls me "his New England girl". D: These pics were some of [me] blonde, the man was the first guy I ever liked. H: Well was late at night. We had fire on beach. [My mother-in-law] had just gone as had the others. I had taken some pics of them all. Maybe I had a new look. Don't remember. SF: I am the Ghost drake in it, and that is my friend … in it. He was having a rather bad, depressive day … and it was interesting. That the Ghost drake, hovering over him like a protector. Seemed to calm him down.
	Making statements	Poetry and quotations in profiles	Using quotations from poetry, songs, literature and others, to sum up experience in	A: My SL profile shows a poem by Edgar Allen Poe. It came in my mind within the first days at SL. "All we see or seem, Is but a dream" … It describes perfectly how SL appears to me. Nothing is forever here.

		SL on the profile.	Like in RL. But this world is ten times faster in changing. And we are dreams within a dream. LE: I came across that quote [“Someday, we’ll look back on this, laugh nervously, then change the subject” is included on the First Life section] some time back … and thought it funny … and a few friends and I have talked about SL .. and what people in RL think of SL … and how they don’t know what it is … or don’t understand how people can get so involved in SL. I thought that quote related well. I don’t share SL with my friends in RL. No one knows I am in SL. And never will. And truly … if they ever found out. I would laugh nervously … and change the subject. Hahahahahah. M1: Well, obviously I got a few quotes in that where I think it was a great statement which wasn’t aimed for. M3: I actually just changed it last nite. In recent months, I’ve been putting quotes from songs or some such poetic blurb. It is in direct response to recent SL heartbreak. I guess it is an SL equivalent of venting pain. But the current SL blurb is actually showing progress away from the heartbreak … *I: Where do you find the blurbs you put in?* M3: The current two are both pieces of song lyrics. Though one is very limited to character-wise in length. So I’ve made some edits when I’ve had to. In order to get the most important lines in. In a few weeks, you’ll see them change again, at least the SL one.
	Profiles for expressing emotional states	Text and pictures in profiles that evoke emotional states and responses.	M3: I actually just changed it last nite. In recent months, I’ve been putting quotes from songs or some such poetic blurb. It is in direct response to recent SL heartbreak. I guess it is an SL equivalent of venting pain. But the current SL blurb is actually showing progress away from the heartbreak … *I: Do you find it helpful to put those blurbs?* M3: In a psychological sense, I guess so. It’s really only for my benefit, isn’t it? Doubtful he’ll read it. And I guess a way of telling strangers that something is going on here. *I: Maybe others will though and feel supportive.* M3: Or be intrigued and a new friendship might be develop, from kindred souls, perhaps. SF: I like SL pics that elicit and emotion … give the viewer a feeling. Not just “bleh” another pic.
	Profiles for negative content	Using profiles for negative content, e.g. to make comments about others, and the impact that has on the profile reader.	DT: I did realize though … that sometimes people use picks to manipulate others … And I found myself reading picks … to see if anything had changed with people I know … relationships … When you are “in love” … the pics are gushing … and then suddenly the picks are gone … or even nasty. Like a passive/aggressive mode of communication … or like a code game. “Did they say that … meaning about me?” LOL.

			LE: I simply write about it. But only good things. I don't write about negative things. As I don't want to come across as a negative person … *I: What do you think when people do write negative things?* LE: That they've have bad experiences in SL. And haven't got over it yet. Example. [A] new customer came contacted me a week ago … wanting a [logo]. His profile has changed a lot in the last week. And I know he is having issues with his GF in SL. Solely based on his profile. I've never spoke to him more than one time. But have kept up with him and his profile. I have now decided NOT to work for him … or make his logo. In his profile, he has a pick … which says … (excuse language) "FUCK YOU" to all the profile whores out there! With a nasty picture inside. That … along with the other details of his profile … tells me he is not in a good place right now … and would be very difficult to work for. *I: Do you have expectations of what should be in a profile?* M3: … not really but I do detest those profiles that threaten bodily harm such as … "this is my sis … anyone f***s with her, I'll kick your ass".
	SL for protesting	Using the profile to make a point about something that annoys.	BM: … I had changed [my Second Life profile to say "So I was punished last night because I simply warned the woman. So now she is banned for life because of her 2 stupid friends and linden labs were given chat logs. Bottom line. I will NOT BE BULLIED! EVER! Shame on you who even try."] in the past few days … when I'm [done] being mad I'll put it back … the other day I was told a lady harassed another lady for money. I had sent a warning … her two friends immed me. They threatened me and told me I was banned from their sims I never go to … they threatened to get me banned from SL. And I was terrified that anyone who owns 7 sims might have some sway … I feel much better now. But I don't cave to bullies. I'm sick of it … *I: So changing your profile was quite radical.* BM: The rest of the front is disclaimer how I don't do certain things etc. I was very angry. When I figured out why they attacked me I was steamed. H: … in the private bits well I have changed that many times. Never have been sure what to put in. Was empty a long time. But lately seem a lot of lying going on ☺ so first quote stemmed from that. LE: In his profile, he has a pick … which says … (excuse language) "FUCK YOU" to all the profile whores out there! With a nasty picture inside. That … along with the other details of his profile …" L: The latest wording [The Second Life section of the profile ends with the phrase "Talk, tell me how you FEEL."] is basically because I am fed [up] of people who are AFK or don't talk.

	Privacy, openness and trust	Alts	The use of alts, the extent to which they involve secrecy and deception, and the implications of it.	AM: Things went wrong, he put me on a pedestal above other women, so he made an alt …, he still uses him today, but not often, he has one other that I do not know the name of. When I found this out, because we were still together in RL not just here, I ended it … with this av, I was with [another person], but should have known better thank to take it into RL but hey even by this mistake I learned something … any way he is an older man, 55 this year, he made an alt … and partnered another woman again, when I discovered this I ended it. K: [The female alt] does have girlfriends … *I: Do they know about her RL?* K: Yes ... ☺ I have no secrets from friends … K [as the female alt]: they know about the "real" me … but that is just fun … ☺ *I: Do they know about [K] and the others?* K [as the female alt]: All but one do … yes … She does go out on the rare occasion and dances with mine … of course she can play them like pianos … *I: I am presuming they have no idea.* K [as the female alt]: She knows exactly what questions to ask … nope … I do not let on … *I: Do these friends know about [K] and the other avs?* K: The closes ones do … for most [the younger male alt] is more anonymous … ☺ SF: My 4th [alt] is not known by anyone, and I try to separate her from everyone.
		Privacy	Efforts to gain privacy and the extent to which it is possible.	LE: Some ppl think that when others read profiles … they are being "nosey" … crazy … lol. If they think that … why write anything in them at all. *I: If someone hides groups, what can you tell about their minds?* M1: That they kind of hide parts of themselves or that they keep it like me in a way, that they won't give everything to other ppl on the first shot they separate things for strangers and friends/ (virtual) family. Honestly I hide some too but that's more the way that I keep one eye on business with that and on the other that I won't give where I go to relax … so that I have some privacy here as far as it is possible in a virtual group/community. SF … so many here think they have privacy online. Which is crap.
		Trust and safety	Being cautious with what one shares with others.	AM: You see here we can use any name, who knows depends on who we tell. So all is good as long as we are careful … Yes this one [AM] was to get away from it, no more than that, only 3 trusted friends know who she is, you being one of them ☺ *I: Is there any reason you haven't told the one who doesn't [know about the other alts]?* K [as the female alt]: Perhaps only because she has recently met me … and I am not really certain yet "who" she is … ☺ *I: Might she be someone else?* K [as the female alt]: Stranger things have happened in SL … I tend not to be terribly trusting …

				☺ … because I am a woman in SL … ☺ and I have seen things … and maybe because I am somehow familiar with the minds of men ….*giggles* *I: Are the other three [alts] more trusting?* K [as the female alt]: The other three have less to worry about …. ☺
	Reading and speaking between the lines	Appearance for making a statement	How appearance can be used to make a statement for others to interpret.	M1: [Re. a photo entitled "Gothic"] That's been as the same times as said as I [felt] like beaten down for a bit by those ppl and shaped my own more than to my actual being. With the aim to give those people that topic to think about, just in a sarcastic and direct way instead of going more metaphysical with those pictures which obviously not much will understand. Anyhow sarcasm is a thing I favoured since years (same with dark humour) … [Re. a photo entitled "Second Restrained Life"] I wanted to be as I feel in my real life, and wanted to look unique so I took a picture with that. Plus I wanted or tried to get a statement which is a metaphysical way to get ppl think like "what does that mean?" So it's a combination of that …. [Re. his appearance for the interview] Mh, it's mostly a mood thing today, I love red and black as colours which is really good combined in that outfit, still having a touch of gothic as I am and feel like. And the spikes and inner graveyard on my chest shall remind that gothic and my character as it is. So in a way like "hell yes I can be offending when u get bad on me" and kind of being straight with what I say what I still mean then.
		Coded messages in picks	How the Pick section of the profile can be used to give messages that are coded and loaded with meaning.	DT: And then suddenly the pics are gone … or even nasty. Like a passive/aggressive mode of communication … or like a code game. "Did they say that … meaning me?" LOL. *I: So is it possible to read between the lines?* DT: Yes. Even when the person writing didn't mean anything by it …
		Empty profiles	Using empty profiles as a judgment on the character of a person, noobie or alt.	A: Ppl with empty profiles are either newbies or suspicious. H: And in the private bits well I have changed that many times. Never have been sure what to put in. Was empty for a long time. *I: How important is the profile?* LE: Very important I think. An empty profile to me … based on the age of the avi … can tell a lot of a person. An empty profile suggests they are an alt. Or trying to hide. Even shy ppl will say a lot in profiles. *I: What about if a profile is empty, or doesn't have much in it?* M3: Well when we had a griefer problem, we looked at the profile to see if it was just possible WAS an actual newbie. So a profile, or lack thereof, is very telling I think.
		Impressions given by avatars	How the appearance of an avatar gives an	*I: Does someone's avatar influence what you think of them?* A: Yes, definitely. And women care more for their shape and style

		impression of the kind of person someone is.	than most men. The latter are more stereotype in their appearance … *I: So when you see someone's avatar can you make some assessment about what kind of person they are?* A: Not always, but quite often. An avatar tells often a lot about wishes, needs, if there is a creative or more consuming mind behind … a more consuming mind trues to look like the majority and is eager to get the latest fashion creations, hairdos, animations for the AOs and things like that. Surface-related features … while creators are often defining themselves not by their personal look but by their works. *I: Do you think how an av looks is important?* D: Yes. It's a projection of how you want people to see you as. *I: Do you think it's possible to tell what a person is like from their av?* D: No, not really. *I: Do you think you can tell something about a person by the way their avi looks?* H: Yes :)) Think so. The look you have gone for these interviews. Is supposed to researcher yes? *I: Yes, although to begin with I looked a bit more researcher-y.* H: Bit scatter-brained and harmless? … but you refine as tastes and fashions change in SL as well as RL I think. But hair is still a bit wild. Like you too busy to do it ☺ *I: Do you think how an avatar looks tells you something about the person?* M3: Definitely, to some degree of course. Also with men. So many choose that Arnold Schwarzenegger look. Which is ridiculous to me, in both lives. But I understand the motivation behind it. And I think, that some, evolve over time and make themselves a little less Arnold. Some never do. I am turned off, at first glance, by either of those overtly feminine or masculine types. Unless the personality comes through as decent, I will not go out of my way to converse with them. *I: Do you think you can tell what someone is like by looking at their avi?* S5: Oh I think so … one can put the attention to what he wants to be, or what he is. For example, you … you are clever, so you put [on glasses]. Glasses looks like a wiseman. An intellectual. Hm, you are shy. You are in black, so you do not like to be in the middle point.
	Interaction decisions and behaviour based on appearance	The extent to which decisions on whether to interact with someone, or how to interact, is dependent on judgments based on avatar appearance.	K [as the female alt]: I enjoy simple summer dresses … good travelling clothes … I tend not to be bothered by men ... or women … when I wear this … maybe they think I am dull … ☺ … *I: Do women come on to you then?* K [as the female alt]: When I dress "butch", yeah … K: Like [K], [the older male alt] "hides" in his old age … fairly attractive looking … but white hair is a turn off to many younger women here … *I: Are you both white haired for that reason?"* K: Most, I would say … ☺. Yeah

			… there are a few I care about … and one I very much care about … for them, white hair is not an issue. LE: Here's what I know for sure. And the difference is the same I think in RL. Ppl treat you differently based on what you look like. Before … when I looked like a noob most did not want to chat or have much to do with me. Once my appearance changed and I looked good and my profile was full … [people] then began to IM me … and seemed nicer to me. *I: Why was that?* LE: I think several reasons … one being … the time it takes to explain things to a noob … it can be time consuming and I think it's just like RL, you think differently of [people] based on their appearance. It's sad but true. A good looking person … gets more respect. It's the same in SL. *I: What was it like being a male avi?* L: Oh I think I told you I got hit on by a female vamp … and it was funny I rezzed him while [L] was on at a friend's party. That was funny seeing their reactions even though I told them who he was … I think they wondered what else might be going on. Like what I was using him for. *I: Do you think how an avatar looks tells you something about the person?* M3: Definitely, to some degree of course. Also with men. So many choose that Arnold Schwarzenegger look. Which is ridiculous to me, in both lives. But I understand the motivation behind it. And I think, that some, evolve over time and make themselves a little less Arnold. Some never do. I am turned off, at first glance, by either of those overtly feminine or masculine types. Unless the personality comes through as decent, I will not go out of my way to converse with them.
	Pictures to represent an idea, a belief or a personal statement	Using pictures and images to promote something one believes in.	M1: There's a bit of my own philosophy in it too … *I: Did you put in your profile?* M1: But don't think that those who have seen that were thinking in any way about the words on it. No, had it in an album near the store where all could look at … I wanted to be as I feel in my real life and wanted to look [unique] so I took a picture with that … plus I wanted or tried to get a statement which is a metaphysical way to get ppl think like "what does that mean?"
	Profile revealing the person behind the avatar	Using the profile to get a sense of the kind of person who is behind the avatar.	DT: … I think I see a difference in what someone puts … after they have had some time to interact with others … so you see the "there is a RL person behind this avatar". *I: Do you think profiles are important?* D: Yes … because I like to see if they don't like ppl to know who they are or if they do, and also tells a little bout the person's liked and dislikes *I: Is the RL pic for a partic reason?* L: Oh that picture. That's in my garden. I just like snaps of nature … just think it gives a feel

			for my RL. M1: And it's a good clue to see what other ppl's intentions are like, the description, in which groups they are and if they hide or not hide groups. That's a great peek into their minds tho. M3: He's a shy guy so I suppose he reads it because he can, because he can get an idea of the type of person they might be. S1: I try to look at their profile to get a better sense of the person. If they have only sexual stuff or nothing at all on it, I am wary.
	Profiles as a fun read	Profiles as being amusing to read, and designing them to be amusing.	M3: My friend … is the one who read all profiles, that's the only reason I began to. And sometimes there are ones that are just funny to read, whether intentionally funny or not. *I: Your picks, how do you decide what to include?* SF: … random acts. I try to set them up, so as not to give away where I really hang out, be a little irreverent and funny when I can.
	SL reveals the inner person	How the avatar can be "read" to see who the person is inside.	*I: What does SL reveal?* L: Well I think that because we don't have the other illusions of RL we might be more inclined to pay more attention to the written word. And what people are actually saying. To see people's spirit. Everyone can be beautiful here. *I: Through the avi?* L: Yes. But not everyone has a beautiful spirit. A person who is not so attractive physically in RL, may have the most amazing personality and because of the illusions of RL have been taken away, we can see their inner self more clearly … about how they feel. Not always. But more so than you might get from a conversation in a library or something. *I: Do you think how an avatar looks tell you something about the person?* M3: Definitely, to some degree of course.
	The role of groups in profiles	Using profiles to see what others may have in common and to get a feel for the kind of person they are.	H: I do look down groups to see what they may be interested in also. M3: If they don't know how to hide groups, one naturally forms a picture of their personality from their groups. For example, BDSM, Boys who date Naked Girls (<- paraphrasing here), DJ Susie, etc. It can display a common bond. I have sometimes IM'd those whom I share a group with. It can be a way to start a conversation. S1: But it's possible that he added more groups from the time I met him til the time I viewed his profile. But no matter. *I: What was it you were assessing him on? Was it his groups?* S1: Escorts, pole dancing, hot sex now kind of thing … [in his] groups … since that's the first thing that comes up when you look at someone's profile. But as I said, it was my own fault for not looking at it first … I just took him at face value because he was very cordial and polite … if I see a girl … and I like what she's

				wearing, I'll check out her profile to see what her groups are. S4: The groups can be practical …. If you are in a gay friendly sim, it can be nice, if you recognise if he or she is straight [or] gay.
	Seeking, providing and receiving information	Limiting info in profile	Consciously limited what is put in the profile to maintain privacy.	*I: When you say "later, later, later, later", what does that mean?* M2: Mean I won't write anything about me on profile. SF: We [all the alts] don't put the groups in our profiles. I don't have all of mine showing. My social ones are hidden … *I: Your picks, how do you decide what to include?* SF: Again, random acts. I try to set them up in VERY public places, so as to not give away where I really hang out … *I: And you decided not to say anything about RL under First Life [in the profile]?* S4: No. First life is a different world. Maybe I can place my presence time.
		Looking for interests in the profile	Looking at the interests section of a person's profile.	*I: Are there things you expect to see when you look at a profile?* DT: Maybe just a hint of what the person is interested in in SL … that might influence if I talk to you. I mean contact you first … if someone IMs me … I will talk to them.
		Picks used for recommendations	Using the pick section to make recommendations for sightseeing or shopping.	AM: Inga Wind is because I buy my fae outfits there and they are very well made, all the clothes are there. *I: How do you decide what to put in picks?* DT: Things that I care about ... or that were amazing that someone else should see …
		Profile to establish SL biography and connections	Using the sections of the profile to record what has happened, and who is important, in SL.	*I: What do you normally have on your Second Life page of your profile?* BM: … "Ahoy, me name be [BM] an' I be a 4 year old pirate. Me mum and da are [provides names, but withheld to preserve anonymity]." DT: Yeah … it is "public" information … tho I think some ppl use it like a diary ☺ LE: As time went on … and things happened to me in SL … I simply write about it. M3: The second to last one is me and a good friend of mine in one of my patios at my home. The second one is a girl I met with the same first name/pronunciation so we became "sisters".
		Profiles as information source	Profiles provide useful information which is actively used.	A: Profiles are the second important information source [the first is the avatar appearance]. BM: A friend gets married or invites me to come to their home, I'll put it in the pics to find it faster. H: The bits I find most important … are how old they are in SL, interests, and First Life, if they put anything in there. The rest no. I do look down groups to see what they be interested in also … *I: Is it better for someone to put something in First Life than nothing at all?* H: No. I do like to see

				where they are from if I can. That's all I need to know really. Think it may be a safety thing … to close to home [may] scare me :)) *I: When you look at someone else's profile, what do you look for?* M2: I always tell someone who ask about myself check my profile, to know the answer … usually I don't see the profile until I feel this who I [talk] with them are really interesting. Looking in First Life page. Of course their pic. S1: I try to look at their profile to get a better sense of the person. If they have only sexual stuff or nothing at all on it, I am wary … if I see a girl … and I like what she's wearing, I'll check out her profile to see what her groups are. S4: The groups can be practical …. If you are in a gay friendly sim, it can be nice, if you recognise if he or she is straight [or] gay.
		Work info in profile	Using the profile to publicise where and what work in SL one does.	AM: The next is just to let people know where I work. M1: The other half Is for business which I try and need to push a bit.
Practical activity	Avatar construction	Appearance related to RL	Appearance in SL related to appearance or interests in RL.	*I: I think she looks like RL you TBH.* AM: … KK now take a close look at this me … use the radar and double click my name. So you see the likeness yes? *I: Yes I do. Your lips.* AM: TY ☺ yes and eyes I think, cheeks also. A: Well. My avatar should have something from my RL self and should also mirror what I prefer to do and like … *I: When you say should have something from RL and be a mirror, can you give me a bit of details?* A: My general body shape, hair and eye colour, my style to dress up and of course the glasses. *I: Are these key aspects of your appearance in RL?* A: And I won't look like a teenager of today. Yes … I'm not literally a translation of my RL look, but quite close. Maybe it gives me a certain feeling of intimacy in this strange world. *I: When you came here did you already know you wanted a child av?* BM: Not yet. When I came here I was checking out different things. It was 3 days into and then I remember you could be a child here, so I went for it … *I: Before you came were you already writing comics and stories and things or was that after [BM]?* BM: Before. I've been drawing avidly since I was 8.I'd draw stories, comics none of which made sense but was fun. *I: Do your comics now all have their basis in [BM]?* BM: No I have many characters actually. [BM] and her dad sometimes creep in. But mostly they stand on their own. DT: … I think I wanted to look sort of like me. The me of RL. Except I wanted purple eyes ☺ … that is my favourite colour. And I suppose I thought it would be different. ☺

… *I: Is your dress sense similar to RL too?* DT: No. Well … somewhat …

D: The way I look now is close to how I project myself as it's close to how I think I look [in RL] … I tried to have one made to look like me but don't have enough pictures for them to do it … *I: Is it important to you that in SL you look similar to RL?* D: I like to but I just get close enough to what I like I guess. It was at one time.

I: A lot of people say they try to look like their RLs. H: Well have seen some with their own faces. And I am not sure why. But hey it's up to them how they play SL isn't it?
LE: So she asks me what I would want to look like. And I said … is there any way to look like me in RL? So we took a pic of me from RL … and tried to work on that. Blonde hair … blue eyes.

L: Much of my taste is the same … but I wouldn't wear a really short skirt in [RL]. Not without any tights or anything anyway. Took me ages to take that step … the face I tried to make like the real me. I often wear dark eyeliner … made the eye shape a bit like mine, etc. …. Guess I am trying to find a natural look. *I: Are you trying to look close to the RL you?* L: Yes. But don't get me wrong. I am happy to do touch ups … my av is a bit thinner and slightly better endowed than the real me. And I look a bit older. But yes. Trying to look like me. Sort of.

I: Did you always have long hair? M1: Mh, in SL yes. Long or halfway long (at least chin-sized) … *I: Long hair is pretty unusual [for a male], why did you decide that's how you would look in SL? …* M1: … well, it's not unusual anymore, I decided to because I love having long hair no matter if SL or RL, SL it's way easier and faster to "grow" LOL. *I: Oh you have long in RL too?* M1: Yes ☺ not as long as the actual one but it's long … I wanted to be as I feel in my RL and wanted to look unique so I took that picture with that … *I: Do you have a similar sense of style in RL?* M1: Yes, but not the money to get [it] though LOL … well if you look at the prices: an outfit like that would cost me 1000 Euros, money that I don't have or need to spend for other things ATM.

M3: … as I saw others, I knew what I didn't want to look like. I actually tried to be "less attractive" though it is too hard to not choose to be "somewhat attractive" here. But I didn't want to be typical long, long hair, blonde, big boobs. I was attempting to have some kind of uniqueness but not so much that I would be "plain". If we could remake ourselves in RL, certainly we would choose enhancements of some sort.

			S1: I could have picked the hot girl all in leather, but that's just not me. I guess because I'm pretty average … my inventory got out of control with [my previous avatar] and she was kind of a bad girl so I wanted to start fresh. Both are still me so they look the same as much as I can. *I: How do you decide what kind of shape you like?* SF: Depends on the goal … [with the first one] I just played with the sliders until I liked what I saw. And subconsciously … was making her look like what I see in the mirror every morning … [SF] is almost always blonde … that's what kind of hair I have in RL.
	Avatar constraints	Technical constraints on what is possible in SL and what is provided when one joins.	BM: I started noticing mistakes made with the skirt though … the front was done good, but the back of the neck was never cropped right. *I: Oh it didn't [match] the front?* BM: [Nope]. H: Not found my first avi though … the one you get when new that I doctored, scary stuff ☺ … well very new. And my graphics card was not good. So now I see it is scary bless her. L: … I realized there is a technical problem with long skirts in SL. You need to wear a different shape. Or you get huge bum syndrome … not sure why I chose that hair … but I like how the hair from that shop flexes.
	Building and editing own appearance and clothes	Making and editing the avatars appearance and clothes, as opposed to buying.	*I: Did you make all these clothes yourself then?* BM: The ones I'm wearing, not all of them no … [in the pic] the shirt is mine and so are the boots. The tunic, the jacket OMG I wish I made, it's gorgeous … the jacket yes … much earlier work I still look at it with pride. H: I mix bits of outfits so I was correct dressed for Gor … Oh I am not bad at altering now if they let you ... or just leaving off and making own bits to add ☺ … or worse still copy it :)) K: In fact, I create three other avis for myself … mostly for the joy of sculpting a new body … ☺ … *I: Can [K] make clothes too?* K [as the female alt]: I have made some clothes … [K] buys everything off the rack … ☺ L: I chose musician girl [one of the choices of avatar available when setting up an SL account], and then quickly tried to make my own clothes from clothes editor. Actually, I promptly lost the hair … … [the original avatar] probably changed the first or second day. I ended up in the changing rooms at Kuula [the NCI sim] and started playing around with the sliders. Then I got some help and picked a shape from the free ones they have there. This shape I have now is just adapted from that one. That T-shirt in the pic was probably one of my first attempts to make some clothes from clothes editor … the clothes, well on that [pic] I

			think its leggings I made plus a skirt from a flexi skirt pack. Erm I forget what you call them. One where you can modify them yourself … *I: Do you make all your own stuff?* L: No, actually I don't which is the strange thing. I tried a bit back then, but bought clothes are much better. I just thought it was fun to try. Sometimes I will add something in. Like leggings. SF: I make all my own shapes. Rarely using a bought one … I don't make clothes and hair, just adjust when needed … I made 10 or more shapes. Still have several that I use. I don't have as much time anymore. So I don't change or make new things as much.
	Buying appearance	Buying appearance rather than creating it and the cost it entails.	*I: Is this the [avatar] you bought?* D: Yes. *I: How did you decide what to get, and why did you decide to buy one?* D: Well it sorta favoured me I guess I liked the look. H: My partner joined SL a few months after me and went straight out and bought new stuff. So I did then too. Before that I did not spend … but he comes on and spends like mad so I thought … what's good for him is good for me :)) *I: Can [K] make clothes too?* K [as the female alt]: I have made some clothes … [K] buys everything off the rack … ☺ LE: When I joined SL, I said to myself … there is NO WAY I will ever pay for a game … until I saw what I really looked like. To [buy] the right skin and shape was the first time I had set up to buy Lindens. *I: Do you make all your own stuff?* L: No, actually I don't which is the strange thing. I tried a bit back then, but bought clothes are much better. *I: Do you have a similar sense of style in RL?* M1: Yes, but not the money to get [it] though LOL … well if you look at the prices: an outfit like that would cost me 1000 Euros, money that I don't have or need to spend for other things ATM. SF: I like the Seawolf dragons. But they are crazy pricey and HUGE.
	Constructing an appearance	The details in putting together avatar appearance.	*I: And your clothes?* AM: Were from Bare Rose I think, is called Lady Pieces. So was apt. *I: … Is that white hair?* AM: Looked right with the outfit, maybe it came with it, I cannot remember. *I: What inspires changing?* H: … How I feel I guess. Could be blonde, red or any colour. And sometimes it is the new dress that says what hair and skin should be. *I: So if you see a nice garment you can build yourself around it?* H: Yes after I have bought it of course … they don't let you try on first ☺ Mores the pity … some look great in picture then terrible on. LE: I worked very hard on creating Leslie. I remember we spent days … looking for the right skin. The best shape. Shopped all

			over SL for hair … and even the eyes. We were very detailed about every little thing. In the end. I was … and still am … proud of what Leslie looks like. I have never seen anyone come close to looking like Leslie. And I get compliments all the time on her. *I: Is the skin the same as the previous unintended?* L: No it's a different one. *I: Why did you change it?* L: Well the make up on the other is still one of my favourites but the rest of the skin is not as good. Gosh, sounds silly, but the shoulder blades look like they have been painted on, not so natural. Guess I am trying to find a natural look. *I: You look nice …* M3: Thank you … freebie ☺ … *I: Very good quality.* M3: There are some, amongst the junk. I've gotten quite a lot of compliments on this one, except if you look close, the belt is huge, but it IS SL … I tried to re-size this, it went badly LOL. SF: [SF] is almost always blonde … that's the kind of hair I have in RL …. I did what I know early on … but at time I use hair that goes with the avie costume.
	Editing one's own avatar	Taking what is provided by Second Life or bought in Second Life and editing to suit one's own taste or preference.	*I: Do you spend a lot of time on your avs?* AM: No because I have learned to alter in edit what shape I buy. *I: So it's quite a quick process?* AM: Yes it is, I buy as close to what I want. *I: Do you adjust your avis when you get them?* D: Not no more, unless I want to be taller. *I: Did you used to adjust them?* D: Sometimes I would attempt. H: Oh I am not bad at altering now if they let you. Or just leaving off and making own bits to add ☺ … or worse still copy it ☺) K: The avi was selected randomly … subsequently, I discovered that I could take a blank shape and create my own form … and that was what I did … there is really nothing of the original avi I selected … *I: So when you first amended your av, you did it yourself?* K: … Yes … I found it easy … I spent a lot of time in school studying art … and in particular figure drawing … this was a breeze … *I: Did you do a lot of editing once you learned?* SF: Yes. Actually I make all my shapes rarely using a bought one … I don't make clothes and hair, but adjust when needed … I made 10 or more shapes. I still have several that I use. I don't have as much time anymore, so don't change or make new things as much.
	Inspiration for appearance		AM: I honestly base my looks on me, choose a certain feature and go from there. *I: Where did the inspiration come from for this appearance?* BM: Hmmm, I'd day at first I was simply a red haired pirate woman ... then I found the kid av 3 days into, found an orphanage that gave out better ones. And then [BM] and her back

				story began. H: How I feel I guess. Could be blonde, red or any colour. And sometimes it is the new dress that says what hair and skin should be. *I: So if you see a nice garment, you can build yourself around it?* H: Yes, after I have bought it of course.
	Decision strategies for rep-resentation	Appearance unplanned	No set decision on how the avatar should look when first joining Second Life.	BM: I got free shapes and I found one I liked, then I found a shape called sassy which was a child av. *I: When you came here did you already know that you wanted a child av?* BM: Not yet. When I came here I was checking out different things. It was 3 days into and then I remember you could be a child here. So I went for it. K: The avi was selected randomly … subsequently, I discovered that I could take a blank shape and create my own form … and that is what I did … there is really nothing of the original avi I selected … LE: I remember going thru that place when you join … they try to show you the basics. I don't know why I chose the avi I did … It didn't really concern me at the time what I looked like. I didn't think it important. *I: Did it become important?* LE: Yes it did … L: And the male one, well I fancied having a good looking av but actually I don't think he is really. Didn't work out how I imagined. *I: … what did you imagine?* L: Dark and handsome, but he looks a bit on the mean side. To me anyway. *I: Did you have an idea of how you wanted to look when you first came?* M1: No, that's been a thing I had no clue about. Just grabbed a few freebies I liked for clothing and dressed me with them until I earned some money to form me a bit then. *I: Did you know how you wanted to look when you first came to SL?* M3: Not really, other than unique … hence the cotton candy hair!
		Choosing a setting for pictures of self	Decisions regarding the setting for pictures for profiles.	AM: We had a reef so went in there and found a good position. *I: The one you did yourself, where was that taken?* M2: In free studio in SL. It became my best friend studio, but you can't find this studio now in SL.
		Pre-existing idea of avatar	Having a view of what the avatar should be like before choosing appearance.	BM: I got free shapes and I found one I liked, then I found a shape called sassy which was a child av. *I: When you came here did you already know you wanted a child av?* BM: Not yet. When I came here I was checking out different things. It was 3 days into and then I remember you could be a child here, so I went for it … *I: How soon was it that [BM] was a pirate and she had red hair?* BM: [BM] became a pirate pretty much after rezzing. *I: Was the idea already in your head, kind of?* BM: Freebie had some stuff. I've always liked pirates. Pretty much. They'd always find a way in my work, even if it didn't call for it. They don't care if they hijack a story lol.

			I: Did you have in mind how you wanted to look? DT: … Yes. I think I wanted to look sort of like me. The me of RL/
	Spontaneous decisions or little thought	Occasions when things are put in profile without any forethought.	*I: And your 2nd Life pic, how did you decide on that?* A: It is also a woman on a motorbike (much faster looking that in RL), but actually it was a spontaneous decision. *I: Can you tell me about your profile, how did you decide what to put in it?* M2: Easy, no need to think. And I don't think I picked up anything interesting.
Finance	Appearance in SL more affordable	In real terms the cost of clothing is more affordable than the physical world.	*I: Do you have a similar sense of style in RL?* M1: Yes but not the money to get it though LOL … well, if you look at the prices: an outfit like that would cost me 1000 euros, money that I don't have or need to spend for other things ATM. Unless I do it on my own, but therefore I'd need a machine to get the patches together which I don't own.
	Free avatars and appearance	Acquiring free avatars and appearance, rather than paying for it.	BM: I got free shapes and I found one I liked, then I found a shape called Sassy, which was a child av. DT: And actually … the first few days, I spent all my time going to freebie places and getting free stuff to make my avi up … LOL. *I: How did you know where to go?* H: Oh, started all the normal; freebie places. K [as the female alt]: Most my clothes are free … *I: Oh that's a nice dress …* K [as the female alt]: … another freebie. LE: When I joined SL … I said to myself … there is NO WAY I will everrr pay for a game. L: [The female alt] was the freebie avatar but that pic there is musician girl [one of the avatars given by Second Life upon joining] with my shirt. M1: Just grabbed a few freebies I liked for clothing and dressed me with them until I earned some money to form me a bit then. *I: You look nice …* M3: Thank you … freebie ☺ *I: … very good quality.* M3: There are some, among the junk. I've gotten quite a few compliments on this one, except if you look close, the belt is huge, but it IS SL. S1: Yes, I changed the mundane av up a bit right away. I knew how because I'd been on SL with [a previous account] so I knew where to look for nice free skins and clothes. SF: Freebie everything, skin, hair, clothes … I kept trying to use the freebies. I had no money. It was like playing dress up. So I changed her a ton. Like I said, a lot of the early stuff was because I was out of work and needed a focus, badly.
	Investment in avatars	Time, money and effort in avatars.	AM: All the money spent on them, all the lost work, also the cheating and griefing.
	Pictures cost	Having photos for	M2: The first one yes I did but the new no,

			profiles made professionally is costly.	I let photography make it and I pay to her. S4: Well, I am a free rider, so pictures was an expensive thing.
		Try before you buy	The risk of buying garments in SL without being able to try them on.	*I: So if you see a nice garment you can build yourself around it?* H: Yes after I have bought it of course … they don't let you try on first ☺ Mores the pity … some look great in picture then terrible on.
	Pictures as a recording activity	Pictures for profiles	Taking photos for use in profiles.	AM: This was how I made her, the look was taken for her profile … *I: What was the reason for this pic?* AM: To represent my water side. *I: What did you do with it? Put it on your profile?* AM: Yes, but took it out after a while. A: I don't have any special profile pics. *I: The second pic you gave me, was that your profile pic?* M2: Yes and the new one. Just before two days I take it. SF; That's [one of the alts and a male friend] ... and I got lucky … I had downloaded Phoenix [one of the third party Second Life viewers] and was playing with windlights [i.e. changing the sky displayed so changes lighting].
		Pictures offering memories and capturing life history	Pictures give reminders of events in the past and are actively used to capture memories.	AM: I have to say something, all this going back to them is disturbing … had a lot of problems with griefing with them ... and built up a lot of resentment to do with the griefing. I will try and help as much as I can but it is hard … all the money spent on them, all the lost work, also the cheating and the griefing. *I: What's it like seeing you this long ago.* H: Nice memories :)) Was very happy time and fun … *I: How come you took the pic?* H: … I take a lot of pictures, have about 5 box full in inventory. My life in SL, sort of :)) … Some are in those rotating frames, and I put those out sometimes and remember good times :)) as do my friends that are still around. L: But this is on the island where I had my first house … and I just put it in because it brought back good memories … I just loved the location. I had happy times there with my long term BF, and the guy who runs the place was really nice … The pic is of me with my rabbits, and the rabbits remind me of the guy I was with for a long time here…. But it also feels a nice relaxed pic. *I: What's it like looking at these old pics?* M3: Definitely brings back sweet memories … much like when one is youthful, recalling how naïve one was, and those early friends. SF: The butterfly has a story … when I met [my male friend] I was fairly depressed, and he passed me that butterfly … it's a freebie, nothing special, and told me her name was Gertrude and she would watch over me. Silly as it sounds, it's become a thing with me, butterflies. It reminds me

			that I DO have friends and to shut up and get on with things. ☺
	Pictures taken for purpose	Examples of how pictures are taken for specific reasons.	AM: This was taken for a modelling job [one of my previous avatars] had … this was how I made her look, was taken for her profile. BM: This was in August of 08. I was learning to build clothes. There were no clothes for pirate kids that I could find, so I started trying to make my own. H: That is me dressed for a Gor dance I made up :)) L: Oh and I love the moon. Smiles. I am always taking photos of moonrise in SL. M1: Well been depressed a bit at that time, and asked myself what the intentions of ppl were when they treat others like air. Or still bug the, abuse them as that kind of trashbin for their own problems … mh, I wanted to be as I feel in my real life and wanted to look unique so I took that picture with that. Plus I wanted or tried to get a statement which is a metaphysical way to get ppl to think like "what does that mean?"
	Pictures to record achievements	Pictures taken to record achievements.	A: Ah funny pic: he and me on my very first build … a twisted pillar … This is my first store, building test prims for a friend … Here in a typical school situation: my friend and teacher ... is examining my first self-scripted texture organiser.
	Pictures to record activity and fun	Examples of how pictures are taken when people are having fun or doing some kind of activity.	BM: I got silly. *I: What's [BM] doing as Darth Vader LOL?* BM: My friend had a wandering chicken you could ride ... and we got out of a party that was themed. So I put my shape back on and kept the costume and rode the chicken … This is where I'm in a medieval place and I am dressed up. I built this dress for the fair … *I: All these pics are over quite a short period and a long time ago. Did you used to take a lot of pics?* BM: Aye. Now and again yeah. I have a few saved on my hard drive too but I generally I don't pull them out due to upload cost. *I: What's happening in this pic, you are dancing?* DT: Yes. H: One day I was out. I had joined a Persian sim and was trying out the dress for it. I liked it and this animation in this land. L: OK, this is just a quick one to illustrate the place I am at now and also me dressed up for a party. M1: .. it was still the first time and the time I were trying to earn a bit to get more and better clothing …
	Pictures to record an occasion, event, object or place	Examples of using pictures to keep a record of an experience	H: … just sometimes something is so lovely I want to record it. L: … I just put it in [the collection of photos for the research] because it brought back good memories … I just loved the location. *I: Where was the pic taken?* M1: Next to

				our house, besides it.
		Pictures to record changes in appearance	Taking pictures to record changes in appearance.	*I: What made you have this [alt] pic taken?* AM: Just for reference of my look at the time. *I: Oh do you try to keep a catalogue?* AM: Yes I do, H: Well was late at night, we had fire on beach. [My mother-in-law] had just gone, as had the others. I had taken some pics of them all, maybe a new look, don't remember. *I: So tell me about this pic?* L: Evolving again into the current me. M1: Guess if then the poster ask yourself, the other one was taken at the same time and was a testing phase into my gothic/steampunk side. So it gad not that big intention, just a reminder for me how I looked like. M3: The girl who made me over took both the before and after profile shots.
Multiple activity	Avatars and alts	Alts as time off from the main avatar	Using an alt as a break from the main avatar.	K: [K] became almost immediately domesticated … so [the older male alt] was "time off" from that relationship … he was to explore … anonymously … by himself … L: I have given the female one an airing recently just o to go exploring without interruptions … there are some really great people in SL. You just have to try and avoid the idiots. Hmm. Perhaps [L] needed a break from being serious. But don't get me wrong [L] likes to have fun too.
		Avatars as a disguise	Using the avatar to hide or disguise the real person inside or the person in SL.	*I: Do you think an av shows what kind of person they are inside?* D: It can in some instances but not all. Most try to disguise themselves. M1: … had some trouble with the job and place I been with my boss before, he took the place and sold it without any word and then I decided to be my own boss and started to think and philosophise about people's intentions, their acting and so on. And that brought me to his appearance as kinda hiding myself to still look at people from a distance and kind of memorial being [sic] … *I: You know you said on the previous pic how you kind of hid yourself. Do you still do that? Rather than looking a lot like RL as you did to begin with?* M1: Mh, well hiding not in that direct way, I just get to a quiet place where I know there won't get many people when I need a break and feel like I need some time to think in SL.
		Avatars for different purposes	Examples of the different reasons and ways in which multiple alts are used.	*I: … are they all for different purposes?* AM: No and yes laughs. [One of the alts] was my business av, [another] my ordinary av the one I used daily. [Another] was not working right so in effect is a storage av. *I: What about the ones we haven't spoken about before? Do you use them all?* AM: No very rarely, I bring them on at times to pass things to this me … *I: What is different about [the avatar used*

	previously]? AM: She was more a roaming av, she liked to look at sims, also she was the builder. So she spent a lot of time building. *I: What about [the avatars used before that], what did they do?* AM: They too liked to build, and also all my avs help others here. BM: I'd be a kid mostly but for shopping I'd be adult because I learned quickly people didn't like child avs. K: [K] became almost immediately domesticated … so [the older male alt] was "time off" from that relationship … he was to explore … anonymously … by himself … but [the young male alt] has taken that youthful place … like [K], [the older male alt] "hides" his age … [the older male alt] also represents a spiritual side of me … a traveller … one who is curious, observes, and is free to move around … [the younger male alt] asks a lot of irritating questions … ☺ I suppose that is me drilling down into the character of others … ☺ … *I: Do you log on them depending on mood? …* K: Yeah …. *I: So when you feel grumpy do you log on as [the older male alt]?* K: It is based on mood and whether I have the time in RL to devote to SL … [the older male alt] when I want to see somebody particular or when I wish to be alone. *I: [The younger male alt]?* K: Mostly when I want to wander and explore by myself … ☺ *I: [The female alt]? …* K: [The female alt] … hmmm … that is a good question …. I am not sure … hehe … bit likely when I "I feel pretty, oh so pretty …" 8D … *I: When do you log on as [K]?* K: With commitments … like a wedding I attended yesterday … S1: … I pretty much only go onto [my alt] to try to fix my inventory/transfer it to [S1] or when I get a little randy, which isn't often. I know that sounds bad! *I: LOL no not at all. I got the feeling she was the alternative side to [S1].* S1: Yes, she was the original, and there are so many redeeming qualities to her, but I just needed a good girl side. SF: [SF] is the changeling though … with [SF] I try all sorts of avies, just to play. [One of the other alts] is my builder alt. I keep her simple, and most of her inventory is building crap … [another] only listens to music … and only 5 … or now 6 of my friends know of her. *I: Are you her when you need some peace and quiet?* SF: Well, yes, and when I'm studying and want to find music … *I: [Referring to a pic of one of the alts] Are you a bunny?* SF: [That alt] is, yes. *I: Is she a bunny often?* SF: When I'm lonely, usually, or getting too much attention as a human … *I: What moods are [two of the alts]?* SF: Eh. [One] is for talking to [my friend with Alzheimer's] … occasionally I will wander with her, explore, but not often. I use [the other alt] for that now, to explore, build, and hide

			from the constant chatter, and to spend time dancing with [another close male friend].
	Avatars for dressing up	Using avatars to play dressing up.	*I: Was the ferret a dress up thing, or was he a character? I called him he, was he?* BM: She, and it was a dress up … this is where I am in a medieval place and I am dressed up, I built this dress for their fair. SF: I kept trying to use the freebies, I had no money. It was like playing dress up, so I changed her a ton … *I: When you put a different avi on, do you feel different?* SF: No, it's just dress up to me, but I do like to fit the occasion. Hence the M&M [referring to a picture of SF dressed as an M&M sweet] … that was for a cartoon party … I think of the avies as dress up dolls, [one of the alts] in particular … she's a kewpie … I am limited with her … and I hate being limited with my own creation.
	Confusion of using alts	Having more than one avatar can be confusing.	*I: Do you use [your alts]?* L: Only really occasionally. I have given the female one an airing recently just to exploring without interruptions. I find it too confusing, to be more than one person. Sometimes I have logged both on at once … and that is hard … things like not having the right inventory or landmarks, etc. for one thing, and confusing when logged on at once.
	Differences across alts	The extent to which alts are different to each other and the main avatar.	AM: … she is very different in look and dress. More times than not she is a fae innocent if that makes sense. *I: What was the difference between [your alts]?* K: One is female … one is a rangy kind of older character … and the other is a young naïve fellow … totally clueless … K [as the female alt]: She expresses simpler ideas …. And in simpler ways … she is not an intellectual … she feels more than she thinks … ☺ … K: [The older male alt] and [the young male alt] are very similar except in two respects … one is old, the other is young … and one is reasonable seasoned and experienced … [the young male alt] is naïve … almost to the point of absurdity sometimes … *I: Do you have different reactions and experiences of the same thing depending on who you are?* K: E.g. if approached by a female avatar … and she goes into a flirt mode … [the older male alt] may continue the flirt if he is reasonably assured that she is mature … [the young male alt] on the other hand will engage and explore any situation … ☺ mostly because he knows no better … ☺ [he] is much less discriminating … but [the young male alt] is much more tolerant of silly buggers than [the older male alt] would be … it is hard to say whether I am biting my tongue … I feel more tolerant with [the young male alt] … *I: and more grumpy as [the older male alt]?* K: Exactly. *I: What is it like being female [version of the male alt], she looks opposite of you. Does she feel different?* L: Yes, a little. I think she is probably less serious … [L]

			develops relationships over time and is in it for the long haul I think, but [the female version of the male alt] doesn't know many people so can flit in and out a bit more … I suppose I feel that [L] has more responsibilities, but that doesn't mean that I would be cruel or unkind as [the female version of the male alt] because that's not me. *I: Why do they look so similar? Did you think about having a different look?* S1: no … my inventory got out of control with [my previous avatar] and she was kind of a bad girl so I wanted to start fresh. Both are still me, so they look the same as much as I can. Some of the skins I couldn't get for [S1] because they were no longer available.
	Multiple avatars	Examples of the large number of alternative avatars people may have, and how they relate to each other and the person using them.	*I: When you said she is your main av, are there others besides the ones I know about?* AM: Yes I have about 11 in all but laughs, all are in my details and the Lindens as yes have said nothing. *I: … Can they put a limit on the number?* AM: Oh yes, 5 is the limit. K: In fact, I created three other avis for myself … mostly for the joy of sculpting a new body … ☺ *I: Do you still use them?* K: Yes … but they are subordinate to [K] … I read at one point that – quite apart from virtual world considerations – we are a collection of personalities … I began to develop a theory off of that … that our alts can represent forms of those personalities … we will always be OK if only one those personalities are in charge … but there will be reigning chaos if it is not clear which is in charge … [the young male alt] is the young one … and I remember being [him] when I was young … suspicious, idealistic, curious, shy, inwardly reflective … [the older male alt] is the old gruff character … seen it all … keeps to himself as he knows better than to trust anyone … at times cynical … mostly quiet and watching from the side … discouraging interpersonal depth … [the female alt] is an enigma … I suppose there is a bit of RP going on here … [K] has a time and a place … [the older male alt] and [young male alt] have no commitments … I think of [K] as the anchor … the "whole" … [the older male alt] and [the young male alt] are aspects of [K].
	Roles and purpose for avatar appearance	How people use different appearances to say something about themselves and to fit in with the role they see themselves fulfilling.	A: When I wear a Victorian robe or an Ancient Egyptian robe, I look different in SL as well. My look is determined by what I want and what I actually incorporate at SL. My role as to say, though I'm actually not a Role Player. I'm a learning and working being … so a certain "Blue Stockings" look seems appropriate for me … many try to make their dream of a younger, more beautiful body (according to quite conventional measures of beauty) "real". But the most attractive beings – men as well as women – have created avatars

				with some "rough edges" … some prefer not to be appear as humans, others escape to roles in distant times. *I: Do you think you can tell something about a person by the way their avi looks?* H: Yes :)) think so. The look you have gone for for these interviews, is supposed to be a researcher yes? … bit scatter brained and harmless?
	Continuity	Consistency of appearance	Examples of how some people do not change the way their avatar looks over time, sometimes based on their appearance in the physical world.	BM: Oh [BM] is always a flame haired pirate kid, but she does dress up … just like a normal kid … *I: Has [BM] been a kid since you got the child av to begin with?* BM: Unless I went to that pirate sim or Freebie Dungeon, yes. DT: Well … mine haven't changed that much … sort of started off and just "refined" … *I: So this is same shape/skin/hair as now more or less?* DT: Yes … though I have a few more hair styles – I use at tomes … this is most of the time how [DT] looks ☺ *I: Is this your main look?* D: Yes … I have two main ones … it's mostly the hair is different. LE: This is it … I was very proud of that. Then a few months later … found new eyes … and hair … and haven't changed since … I know some who change constantly, whereas I never change … *I: How long have you been this appearance?* LE: 3 years. I tried to change about a year ago. My friends didn't like it … and neither did I really … *I: Why did you experiment with changing her a year ago?* LE: I thought I could do it again, and the avi did look good… but oddly … it wasn't "me" … it didn't fit my personality. So I wore it only a couple of days … and went back to what I felt comfortable in. L: Then I got some help and picked a shape from the free ones they have there. This shape I have now is just adapted from that one … so that is pretty much the face I have now … SF: My alts are all me … I don't act different as them … I don't change [one of the alts], and she is the only one. I don't change her much … little bits at a time … I like this current look, it is new. She is always in a gown, and a ladylike gown … I keep her to a basically medieval theme mostly … [SF] is almost always blonde … that's what kind of hair I have in RL.
		Same person behind all the alts	The same person, the "real me" is behind all the alts.	AM: … just my persona was there. *I: Do all the avs have your persona?* AM: Yes my true persona, they are all me, as in morals … all my avs are different in look, only the real me is in them. SF: My alts are all me.
		Similarity across all the alts	Characteristics and habits that are similar across alts.	*I: She looks similar to [a previous avatar], I presume on purpose?* AM: Yes in a way … I was not aware at the time was chosen in a rush so not to miss the job … *I: Can*

			you tell me how you decided on this look for [another alt]? AM: I liked it, looked nice not slutty. *I: So same criteria really as [two previous avatars]?* AM: Yes, never have wanted to look like a slut. Even this av is not slutty, sexy yes, but not slutty. BM: Yes, that's me and me [referring to a pic of two alts together] ^.^ … *I: Is Dad a Pirate too?* BM: Yep ^.^, storyline-wise he raised me to a pirate, mum too. *I: Do the other three ever go to the same places as you?* K: Yeah … but they do not shop … SF: All are female … notice the tat on the shoulder … those are a rather new feature, all of mine have them.
	ExperimentationAppearance	The extent to which people change appearance and see how it feels to look different to how they normally would in SL or the physical world.	*I: Do you play around with [AM]'s look more than the others?* AM: No, not really just now I have a new skin, a tanned one. *I: Have you changed your appearance much since you came to SL?* D: Somewhat, I do try blonde avis and a redhead … I've been a lot of different avis … just to see what it would look and feel like. *I: Why did you experiment with changing her a year ago?* LE: I thought I could do it again, and the avi did look good… but oddly … it wasn't "me" … it didn't fit my personality. So I wore it only a couple of days … and went back to what I felt comfortable in. L: I went through a stage after Christmas of my first year of trying loads of different hair, and eventually settled on this one … *I: How come you created [the alts]?* L: Well people kept talking about alts in [one of NCI's regions] and I just thought I would give it a go, just because I could think, and I deliberately chose a name that could be male or female. *I: Do you like to change your avi too?* M2: … Skin yes I would like, but shape I don't think so … but if I find a good shape or have a good idea or mood, maybe. SF: … subconsciously … was making her look like what I see in the mirror every morning … when I realised that … I started making other shapes. *I: You didn't want to look the same in SL as RL?* SF: Well, it's the land of make believe, and dressing up, or being a different character, is fun, and I was fascinated with the different reactions I would get with various avies.
	Exploration	Exploring Second Life, discovering new places and what is possible there.	*I: When you are doing this, what is going on? Are you re-exploring certain aspects of being in SL? … Or are you taking the mickey out of people?* K: Perhaps … but mostly I am exploring places in SL that I have never seen before … that is my primary interest, I think. M1: … and first while on this account, was exploring a few places until I found NCI, and the place I started to work. So I was

			looking around, trying out what's what, what I could do here, playing with the buttons, just to learn what's what and what's possible.
	Transgender appearance	Making avatars the opposite gender to the physical world in order to experience something different, or to see if it can be done realistically.	D: … I know a man that dresses as a girl all the time, and wants to be a whore and really wants me … I refuse … why I don't know, except maybe they really wish to be a woman. Some have said it was more fun. *I: Than being a man?* D: Yes. One told me that. Another one. K: I have no relationship to being a woman, of course … and it took me a while to be comfortable with her … she was created on a bet … from a TG in Los Angeles … who bet me that I could not create a convincing female avatar … He lost … but it was not easy. L: When I first created [the alt] I made the male version … so the male one I just made to see what it was all about … and the male one, well I fancied having a good looking av, but actually I don't think he is really. Didn't work out how I imagined. *I: … what did you imagine?* L: Dark and handsome, but he looks a bit on the mean side, to me anyway.
RL-SL relation	Difference between SL and RL appearance	Differences in style and how the avatar appears in SL compared to the physical world.	*I: Do you think it is possible to tell what a person is like from their av?* D: No, not really … I've gotten to know some people and saw pics of them, and not all the same. L: … much of my taste is the same yes, but I wouldn't wear a really short skirt in SL, not without tights or anything anyway. Took me ages to take that step … [female version of male alt] is blonde and blue eyed, to be the opposite of me, but otherwise is similar in shape. *I: Would you have similar style in RL?* M2: Hmmm sure no. If my av had blonde hair, I will colour my hair for my av, it's silly, thinks … I wear glasses in RL, should my av wear it, no. Not in my system rule … *I: So really being in SL gives you the chance to try different styles and fashions?* M2 … … it's made me know different styles. And all this style we have it in our RL, but it doesn't mean my av wear [if] I did. SF: … subconsciously … was making her look like what I see in the mirror every morning … when I realised that … I started making other shapes. *I: You didn't want to look the same in SL as RL?* SF: Well, it's the land of make believe, and dressing up, or being a different character, is fun, and I was fascinated with the different reactions I would get with various avies.
	Differences between the person in RL and the avatar	Differences in appearance, behaviour and attitude between the avatar and the person in the physical world.	AM: The only difference from me with this one is I am a stripper laughs, in RL could never be that. H: So you are not a replica of the RL you then? *I: No, nothing like.* H: … me either :)) … I wish hehe *I: Why did you need to learn that about*

			men? K: I suppose … because I have been really rather naïve in RL … my entire life in RL … I am not a fast and loose player … I am a fairly socially conservative guy … curious … ☺ … I am comfortable with who I am and what I have experienced … *I: You are blonde in RL but [LE] is dark in SL … is that for any particular reason?* LE: Yes, [LE] was blonde too … even after the change … one day … for fun … at a new hair place … I decide to see what red would look like. As it turns out, this colour hair fits the skin tone much better … *I: … It doesn't feel odd after being blonde?* LE: Ya know … it never did … when I found this hair … I loved it immediately.
	Look like myself	Making the avatar resemble how the person looks in the physical world.	AM: … like myself as in not a lot of make-up. DT … I think I wanted to look sort of like me, the me of RL. D: The way I look now is close to how I project myself, as it's close to how I think I look.
	Name linked to RL	The complex ways in which the name used in SL is related to their names, or the names of people they know, in the physical world.	AM: I wanted a short name, one that could not be shortened, the first I named after my great grandmother and grandmother, it is also my RL middle name … *I: How did you pick the name of [the previous avatar]?* AM: it is my RL name … you see here we can use any name, who knows depends on who we tell. So all is good as long as we are careful. BM: The fact one of my mother's nicknames for me is [a shortened version of BM's first name] … *I: The fact your mom calls it you makes you like it.* DT: My RL name is [a long version of DT's first name] … and at that point – I did not belong to any other social networks or online stuff … so I wasn't really concerned with "anonymity" or any of that stuff … and I am half Japanese – so out of the last names available at the time [DT's surname] was appealing. So my name is a reflection of me ☺ … and I didn't realise at the time … that when chatting … when someone calls me [DT's first name] … it probably comes across as much more personal to me even if unintentionally … *I: How does that feel?* DT: Well sometimes I have to remember that the person may not really know that ☺ *I: Have you got used to it?* DT: I think I adjusted so I don't take it so personal … as those who know … if they wanted to emphasise RL … they would use [the long version of DT's first name]. But I think that might be a distinction that is only my own awareness … rather than who is talking to me … it is too easy to assume the wrong tone in text. ☺ K: I am a writer in real life … among a number of other things … and my pen name is [a name whose first name is the same as K] … but [the surname of the pen

			name] was not available as a last name … and [K's surname] seemed closest … [the older alt's first name] is the name of a Finnish friend in RL. L: [I] chose a name really quickly, must have forgotten that the name was above your head too, because I tried to choose something that would be easy to remember rather than anything else … the first name was one I named a cat of mine, and the second I wasn't convinced of it because I thought I would have to remember it, I chose [gives the first letter of L's surname]. My maiden name began with [the same letter]. M1: Well it's both been a combination (name and that log in) – my RL name also is [first part of M1's first name] and I like those Mediterranean things like life and the names, [they reflect] kinda proudness, so I made that name then and did that so unique that many people remember me after a long time too. SF: I wanted [SF's first name] … my RL name. I was not interested in being anyone else. *I: How did you choose the name?* S4: [S4's first name]? That is easy. My RL is [a long version of S4's first name] … my family name in RL starts with [the same letter as S4's surname].
	Overflows between RL and SL	How aspects of life and representation in SL and the physical world flow into one another and impact on one another.	*I: Does being in SL help at all?* BM: Actually yeah, I interact better with the world and I can donate [to] worthy charities. DT: … some would know what parts of SL … actually reflect parts of my RL … and others wouldn't ☺ For example … whether I tell someone that [DT's first name] … is part of my real name … … and I didn't realise at the time … that when chatting … when someone calls me [DT's first name] … it probably comes across as much more personal to me even if unintentionally … *I: How does that feel?* DT: Well sometimes I have to remember that the person may not really know that ☺ H: I know [my RL husband's SL avatar]. We don't talk a lot in SL when out. He in IM, I just dancing and we talking in RL … my lad, one of the foster children was being bullied in school, and was bored, so I join him to SL to help with his spelling and reading and well he likes fighting games in RL, so he joined there and became a prince, so I went to chaperone sort of :)) … good thing was he did learn to read and spell better, but the plus side was his interaction with people. The fighting sims have strict codes of conduct :)) … honour appeals to him a lot :)) Fair play too. *I: Has it helped him address things in RL?* H: Oh yes. He is very popular now. The boys that pick on him all his friends now, and he plays out more now :))

			L: The latest wording [on the second life section of the profile] is basically because I am fed [up] of people who are AFK or who don't talk. Actually if my husband could talk to me, I might not feel the need to find romance here. *I: Is it hard meeting [the male friend with mild Alzheimer's] every night?* SF: Sometimes, yes. I always try to let him know when I can't come online. And [my RL husband] knows I talk to him. I added him to Skype. That helps. *I: Does [your RL husband] mind?* SF: Not too much, not often. I told him what was happening … *I: How does it feel when SL spills over into RL like that?* SF: I think it's part of my life. I interact here the same way I would in RL. Nothing different.
	Perceptions of SL by people in RL	Views on what people in the physical world may think of SL.	LE: I came across that quote some time back … and thought it funny. And a few friends and I have talked about SL, and what people in RL think of SL … and how they don't know what it is … or don't understand how people can be so involved in SL. I thought that quote related well. I don't share SL with my friends in RL. No one knows I am in SL, and never will. And truly … if they ever found out, I would laugh nervously … and change the subject hahahahaha. L: Oh dear, SL is funny … this is when you realise the rest of the world would have no clue whatsoever.
	RL appearance as a link to the virtual	The potential that looking similar to the physical offers security.	A: I'm not literally a translation of my RL look, but quite close. Maybe I gives me a certain feeling of intimacy in this strange world.
	RL in profile	Describing what is looked for, and what they themselves have included, in the First Life section in the profile.	*I: Is it better for someone to put something in 1st Life [section of the profile] than nothing at all?* H: No. I do like to see where they are from if I can. That's all I need to know really. Think it may be a safety thing … too close to home may scare me :)) *I: When you look at someone else's profile, what do you look for?* M2: Usually, I don't see the profile until I feel this who I take with them are really interesting [sic]. Looking in 1st Life page, of course their pic. *I: Do you like to know what someone looks like in RL?* M2: If they doesn't mind why not, but I don't ask them, just check if they load it. M3: In RL tab, I had included RL info as to some of my basic interests … *I: Are those your eyes [referring to the picture in the 1st Life section]?* M3: Yes, only part of me I felt worth sharing LOL
	RL v SL morals	The application of physical world morals to SL and the extent to which they may vary.	AM: [Stripping] is a way of making money here without selling my body. *I: You say you couldn't strip in RL … is that because of morals?* AM: Yes … and also my age laughs, they would pay me to get dressed. *I LOL so there is a difference in morals*

			between stripping in RL and in SL? AM: Yes and no, here you see my pixels not my real body. But as for morals, I am me and would never have random sex or escort from being a stripper. *I: In SL you mean?* AM: Yes, but also the same applies to RL.
Transition	Becoming a new avatar	The experience of changing from one avatar to become another.	*I: Was it hard not to be [the previous avatar]?* AM: No, I was fed up, sick and tired of the griefing and this av made it easy for me to enjoy SL. And now she is m main av. *I: How did you pick the name [AM's first name]?* AM: I wanted a wholesome name, and her name means truth, honesty, purity, depending on where it is used.
	Changing appearance	Examples of how people change their appearance, and the experience of and for such changes.	D: I suit them to suit me … I have favourites that I add to another fav and see how it comes out. *I: Is it like wearing different clothes?* D: Yea, sorta. H: … you refine as tastes and fashions change in SL as well as RL I think … *I: So when you have a new look, does it feel different?*... H: Yes of course :)) Have to get used to it first though ☺ *I: Is this how you looked at the time …?* M1: That was how I looked like. *I: You had changed a bit from the previous pic.* M1: In between I still get back on that too. *I: Do you like to change your avi too?* M2: You mean change my look, like thin become fat? *I: Yes or your skin or shape.* M2: Skin yes, I would like, but shape I don't think so … but if I find a good shape, or have a good idea or mood, maybe. SF: I kept trying to use the freebies. I had no money. I t was like playing dress up, so I changed her a ton. Like I said, a lot of the early stuff was because I was out of work and needed a focus badly.
	Changing profiles	Examples of how people change the contents of their profile and the reasons behind changes.	A: I will replace [the picture in the 1st Life section of the profile] one day again. *I: And your Second Life pic?* A: It will change some day as well. *I: How often do you change your picks?* BM: Occasionally as the situation warrants. My family changed, so I changed that. DT: … and then too … the experiences … I think I see a difference I what someone puts … after they have had some time to interact with others … so you see the "there is a RL person behind this avatar" or the clear boundary expression "I do NOT … whatever"
	Changing tastes	How tastes and judgment of how the avatar looks changes from when someone first joins Second Life.	LE: This avi … the second picture, is what I looked like … until someone had pity on me … it's funny … and showed me around SL to change my appearance. I thought I looked good then hahahahaha …. Then after the change … *I: Did you see that other people didn't look like noobs?* LE: hahahaha Yes I did … but honestly, she took me to Laqroki [clothing store] … then I met someone … I thought I looked it, and said "Look at yourself … then look at the

			models" … *I: What was it like when you dressed up as a noob?* LE: It wasn't anything to me really … the avi was just a tool to move around in the game. *I: I mean for the pic you took for me.* LE: Oh … it was funny to see it again, and I wondered why someone had to point it out to me … I consider myself artistic, I should have seen it.
	Evolution	How the avatar experience changes over time.	*I: Was [the older male avi] always older?* K: No … he began as a young man … L: Evolving again into the current me … *I: Has [L] changed over time?* L: Inside as opposed to experience? *I: Yes. And how It feels to be her.* L: Probably yes. More confident I think, as time goes on, and not worrying so much about rights and wrongs. But basically she is still me. *I: Is this how you looked at the time …?* M1: That was how I looked like. *I: You had changed a bit from the previous pic.* M1: In between I still get back on that too. SF: [SF] is the changeling, though. *I: In what sense? She progresses?* SF: [All the alts] progress.
	New starts	One person's complex experience of starting a series of new avatars.	AM: She was named liked that because the guy I was friends with, and at that time [the previous avatar] was being griefed by the partner's alt's partner LOL, sounds confusing, anyway I though OK if this other guy wants her to be called [another version of the previous avatar's name] not a problem, thought it would look too obvious it was [the same avatar] … AM: She happened before I ended it with [my SL partner], again because of his infidelity, I was griefed so [the next avatar] was made … *I: Can you remind me of the problem with that avatar … was she being griefed as well?* AM: Yes, she was, so another [avatar with the same first name] was made. At first all was good with her, then she also got griefed … *I: I was going to ask, what was going on with all this griefing?* AM: … people who cheat get scared, and make mistakes, so making them obvious … *I: Why did you create [all the avatars] in the first place?* AM: As I said, because of the griefing … I never wanted so many avs, two at the most. *I: I didn't realise you needed to create so many.* AM: Yes, this one [AM] was to get away from it, no more than only three trusted friends know who she is, you being one of them ☺ … *I: Did you want something completely different?* AM: Yes. This was a new start, had to be different, I was starting on my own … *I: Do you feel more able to express that in [AM] than previous?* AM: Yes, as this me is free from all the lies and deception. From others BTW, not me.

Virtual Selves Processes interviews

Global Theme	Organising Theme	Basic Theme	Description	Example quotes
Virtual World Reflection	Activities	Exploration	Exploration of Second Life, both geographical and social	C1: … the exploration of certain deviant behaviours that would be … "socially less than acceptable", to say the least ☺ C2: When I first joined I was more interested in learning to build and script … so I focused on that. I've always explored though … I like to see what others create here. M4: One thing I should mention is that … when I first came to SL, me and my friend T we did a lot of exploring of other sims. I still do that now with one of my newer friends … I met him at a romance ballroom and he was afraid I'd never wear jeans … so whenever we go exploring, we are dressed casually. S1: … I'm very curious so I love to explore … I like to travel in RL … I used to be a flight attendant. You can go anywhere you want, almost, in SL.
		Keeping busy	Using Second Life to occupy time	D: Well [I've] been trying to make activities for people, but no one comes so I've built and took down several times. Now don't know what exactly to do. L: I was at a stage in my life where I was looking for something new to do … and had more time on my hands. M3: [I spend my time in SL doing] a lot of dancing … and shopping, lol. Normally [I spend] 2-4 hours per week nite [here] … more if I'm bored. N: … always busy hahha. S2: A lack of things to do [keeps me coming to SL], no job, no car. I can at least hang out with people here to keep myself from going crazy.
		New opportunities and experiences	Second Life giving access to experiences not necessarily available in the physical world	*I: Do you think SL gives you something you can't get in RL?* K: Only access … that would be multidimensional … say, geographic, personal, a whole different set of rules regarding physics, etc. S5: I think somehow she [my avatar] was my "gate" to a lot of nice experiences.
		Teaching and education in SL	The role of Second Life in general education and education about virtual worlds.	A: My profession here is a documentarist - a "schoolbook writer" so to say – for a German SL school … you should know that Germans love voice classes while 90% of English-speaking classes are held in text chat. B: I just finished my first doctoral year. My study involves support practices of virtual worlds. So I wanted to see if there were any in other worlds. *I: When you say support practices, what do you mean?* B: When students take courses in virtual worlds, who supports them in their quest for knowledge, who guides them to good sites, who answers their technical questions, "how do I use voice", "how do I create a notecard", etc.

			T: I think the opportunities for teaching and learning in SL are still abundant, and I would like to see more.
	Working in SL	Description of work in Second Life, its role and impact on their experience	B: I am an academic librarian, I build virtual libraries. I have one in SL, one in OS [Open Sim] gird and one in Jokaydia M1: By searching for a job, as I found a neat venue which were seeking some applicants. *I: What kind of job was it?* M1: Uhm, it was in a ballroom connected with some music shows, mainly was serving there, greeting guests or be kind of butler in the connected restaurant. *I: Oh, was this soon after you came to SL?* M1: A few days, maybe 3. *I: Did you already know you wanted to work here?* M1: Well, I didn't have an exact clue what they were doing, just was reading that the manager was searching applicants and took a look at, then I saw that this was a really nice build up place and agreed to work there. M2: As you see am a red hot manager [M2 is wearing a group tag describing her as "Red Hot Manager"]. M3: In the sci fi sim, there are expectations as GM [General Manager] to spend time working in a "RP" [Role Play] store.
Technology	SL as advanced programme	Second Life providing an environment more advanced than other virtual worlds	A: Meez is a pseudo 3D environment … mainly for a teenage audience … in comparison to SL, it is rather primitive.
	SL as new	Second Life as a new kind of idea	*I: What was it that interested you ... when you heard about it?* M3: Just becoz something it's new thing I never tried.
	Staying connected to the technology	Staying with Second Life because familiarity with its technology may be advantageous in the future	T: I don't want to lose the connection right now. I suspect there could be more use in the future. Virtual worlds may still increase in popularity in the future, and it will be good to have the experience at the right time.
	Technical issues	The impact of technical problems on the experience of being in Second Life	A: Once I tried to talk to a friend via Skype in parallel, but it didn't work for me. My avatar became a static wax puppet … it was just an alternative technical solution, since SL voice is often interrupted or has malfunctions. L: Lag [is the worst thing about SL]. M1: Yeah 2 years before I got my actual account, but my laptop was and is too weak for SL so as I had a computer where the viewer ran on I tried again and it was working … (so my laptop hasn't the required hardware what I didn't know in the first try). S1: Well, I wish they hadn't changed SL viewer 2 so radically. It's not as user friendly. That's why I use Phoenix. If I had started SL after viewer 2, I'm not sure I would have kept using it, but that's hard to say S3: I was the dumbest noob you ever would meet … I was under the dance floor, locked in rooms, etc … couldn't open a box, realized my pants were off

			T: … I've been crashing more and with my Mac I do not like the strain it puts on the system.
The nature of SL	Craziness of SL	Second Life as a place where strange things happen or that others might think are strange	N: … you will think I'm mad lol … but he [my avatar] knows someone omg and he is falled in a SL love … I love my RL life but I have another, or another's haha [N has more than one avatar]. I know is a foolish, but I do ^^ … a madness I mean … well is not a usual thing. S4: You are part of a hidden world … you cannot talk with your RL about it. They think you are crazy.
	SL as a dream	People use Second Life to try and realise their dreams (which may be another person's nightmare)	A: You have to pay for your dreams. *I: Is SL a place of dreams?* A: … yes, definitely. Of dreams and of nightmares … the dreams of some people are the nightmares of other people. *I: Are you male or female in RL?* N: Female … wife and mother ^^ … and dreamer lol … This is like a dream where you can come back when you want and also is nice, find some different people from all the world Y: People release here their weirdest dreams. Well I guess it's the addiction for SL. *I: You mention dreams in your profile. "When you're dreaming, you get away from this 1-st life. At least this how I do or I imagine …"* Y: Oh yes, everybody is dreaming.
	SL as an illusion	Second Life is not the wonderful and idyllic place that many residents think it is	S5: It makes people think and feel like if they are a true part of this world, like they would really do things. It's absurd, because this is exactly what has been my benefit. I think it is stupid, and an illusion – but out of this illusion I learned a lot. Maybe I think that other people don't get this, that they live in this illusion without ever realizing that it is one. I often think "Open your eyes guys! See what it is."
	SL as "not existing"	Second Life is not physical so does not exist to the "outside world"	S3: I couldn't get my head around her involvement in a world that didn't really exist.
	SL is not for everyone	Second Life does not offer the breadth or scope of opportunity that some believe	S1: … but SL is not for everyone. I do it for fun. If a person doesn't have patience or is looking for a date, or to make money or get something for nothing, this isn't the place to be really.
	Superficiality	Second Life tends to emphasise surface qualities	C2: It's very shallow in terms of what you see or create and also there is the tendency towards the superficial here. Everyone is thin and beautiful for example.
	Unexpected	Second Life is not predictable and is a place where surprises happen	H: I had no idea what to expect here at all. I just liked it, so wandered around looking and stayed on the first sim I likes. K: … to be honest, I did not know what to expect … but it has been good … *I: What keeps you coming to SL?* L: … the thought that something new and interesting might happen, a good discussion, a hot affair, a new experience. N: I was shocked about these feelings …

			when I started I cannot believe that feel love here ahha. Well in a SL plane of course.
The purpose of SL	Potential in SL	Second Life as a place where things are capable of being	H: I like here that you can see the potential for making all sorts of things to take to other places
	SL as a try-out	Using Second Life to try out behaviours and ideas that would not happen in the physical world, or before trying them in the physical world	M5: … I think for me it's more a place where I try things out, ideas, behaviours, activities before I do them in RL. No one knows me here, so I can't embarrass myself ☺ S2: Really, it's more of a "try out the world here, so you won't be stupid when you finally get out and about" feel. S3: I tried out several relationships in SL. Also one with a woman – I never did that before, and I never thought about it before … you can do what you want, so I did that. When I thought I MIGHT like something, I tried it. If I liked it, I did it again and if not, no problem. It's much easier than in RL. Y: … to test a kind of relationship … I wanted to find out if I like girls more than I know. So I've found [a] few girls here, wanting me to be their mistress. I had to test this too …
	SL as an escape or break from RL	Second Life as a place to escape to	C2: I find it a break from RL. *I: What do you like most about SL?* S1: Escape from reality maybe? Just kidding … lol
	SL as entertainment	Second Life as a form of entertainment or a hobby	C1: I'm here for relaxation and enjoyment. It's a hobby. D: … perhaps entertainment I would say [keeps me coming back to SL]. S1: I'm pretty much on SL all the time whenever I'm not working or have appointments or other engagements. It's my main source of entertainment … It's my favourite form of entertainment.
	SL for being sociable	Socialising and interactions with others	B: I use Second Life for socializing. I am friends in a book group for personal enjoyment. Also I am a little dragon in the Isle of Wyrms and we chat on weekends. C1: [I] chat with friends, meet people, hang out in sexual sims, go dancing, mingle, interact, take pictures, flirt, have sex … for me the SL experience is about community and socialization. C2: … I spend time socializing with friends here. M3: … I became more of a socializer, looking to establish new friendships … it has reactivated and fulfilled my need for socialization. S4: A total new thing was there for me. Socialising without knowing the other. Just knowing the "soul". Y: Well, lately I'm more calm and friendly. But friendly I was since long time ago. I like to socialize.
	SL for mood enhancing	Second Life offers opportunity to do	M3: … I do it because sometimes I'm looking for something new to take me out of the bad

		things that lift a mood	mood.
	SL for relaxation	Second Life as a place to rest	M1: Well, RL is quite hard in past weeks for me so I use SL a bit to chill out.
The world of SL	Commercialisation	Second Life is a place where people try to make money	A: … The commercialization [is the worst thing about SL] … Maybe it is a cultural difference between us Germans and the Americans who host this world. You have to pay for your dreams.
	Creativity	Second Life is a place where people can make and build things easily and so discover a creative aspect of themselves and others	D: [SL is] pretty similar [to RL] - only difference here is that you can be more creative with ideas, more things to do etc. L: I have really enjoyed landscaping my plot. It's a good creative outlet for me. I am not saying I am great at it, but it's relaxing and rewarding. M1: …[freedom] to start things what I can't do in RL, like designing and having a company, see other (rebuild) places where I can't get in RL because too far away and to be able to cover my creativeness. M3: We have been GMs [General Managers] there a long time … and he delved into building … we met one of the GMs there who taught us a lot about building, etc., gave us free reign with decorating, housing, etc. It was very creatively stimulating. N: Is amazing. You can do things. Is creative. I like to create characters and play them. S3: I have fun being creative. S4: To create a thing and succeed, it is thrilling.
	Easy to avoid problems	In Second Life difficult situations or confrontations can be quickly escaped	S1: I can shut it down when I want to. You can't shut down RL. S4: Well, it is easier to ignore people here, because your transportation is quicker. You can not move your house so easily in RL.
	Limitations of SL	The simulated nature of Second Life and the lives that people live in it mean it has restrictions on what can be done and how long one should stay in it	A: SL is simplified in many ways due to technical reasons. The economy is existing, but the whole scope of professions like in RL not. S5: Maybe it's like this: it can be good for a certain period – to try out new things which can absolutely affect your RL positively. But you need to get rid of it afterwards, otherwise it will affect your RL in a negative way … you can't compare SL to RL relationships of course. There are a lot of limitations.
	Non-physical	Being constructed of pixels has implications	S2: Well, I can reach out and touch you here, but you won't feel it … IRL I can reach out and actually touch you.
	Permissive environment	People do things in Second Life that they would not do in the physical world	H: … as a virtual world where anything is possible, so many people want it like RL and don't seem to rise above the baser instincts … BDSM. K: Most recently it caused me to be unfaithful in my relationship … but I think in general it relates to the notion that this is a permissive environment far beyond the boundaries of emotional intimacy … one rarely knows how "seriously" any interaction with others is being taken.

			S1: You can do taboo things in SL that you would never do in RL. I've met a few people who have told me that.
	Safety	Second Life offers a safe environment because people cannot be physically harmed	C1: Also the excitement [keeps me coming back to SL], the vibe I get from meeting people here, while in the safety of my own home. *I: Do you think SL gives you something you can't get in RL?* S1: Of course. Safety … you can't be killed in SL … lol … although there are some sims that are damage enabled, but then you just get sent home, I think, if your av gets killed … You're not going to catch any STDs here. S5: I think I'm quite open-minded but in RL security is important to me. But here in SL there is no need to be safe … and like I said, in SL security is not important to me. That's a big difference as well, which leads to different consequences in behaviour.
	Sense of community	Second Life can provide an environment where people feel close to one another	M: … [I] connected with a huge community like here was quite ideal for me … so SL is just more extended and has a huge community behind, that's way more interesting. S4: In most places, in small sims, you have a feeling you are brothers and sisters.
	Sociality	Second Life provides an environment that is intrinsically social	B: It was eye-opening. People were friendly … [SL is my favourite because of] collegiality, fun, opportunity to meet other like-minded people. S2: SL gives me the freedom to get out and "see the world" so to speak without my social awkwardness getting in the way. I can make more friends here, see more things and even learn more here than I can within the confines of my own home XD. *I: Was it the technical as well the social you were interested in?* S3: I'm totally a non-techy. I'm a technical idiot. So … social.
	Worldwide	People from all over the world can meet in Second Life	C1: … meeting people etc. is the main driving force that brings me here. And I can do that outside of course. I mean in RL … But meeting people from all around the world is more difficult to do. L: I still get off on the fact that you can be in a room full of people from all over the world. M1: … it was the primary learning about SL … just to know other people from around countries and what's the traditions and how people live elsewhere. That's a point that interests me a lot too … well e.g. people in Asia, how they manage their life, what their traditions are, the behaviour of families are different to Europeans as an example. *I: Do you think SL gives you anything you can't get in RL?* M2: … meeting people from all over the world. M3: The ability to cross international boundaries [is the best thing about SL]. If not for meeting our friend in the medieval sim, we would not be going to England. Not that we wouldn't want to … but we wouldn't have

			an actual reason to go there over another place. Nor would we invest the money that easily to go somewhere we didn't know someone.
Virtual Self Reflection	Avatar appearance	Beauty	Recognition of the role of beauty in avatar appearance	D: Ha! Is funny … to be an avi in a way, it's wishful thinking to be beautiful. Y: Hmm, I have an eye for beauty, what you can see now is not exactly what I wanted. But I guess I've spent less money here than a lot of other people. I just wanted to look decent, not someone at her best.
		Deciding avatar and appearance	The process of decision-making and rationale for appearance decisions	A: I came into this world as a start avatar named "female musician" … it was the less extreme character for a start, and "musician" sounds creative. H: I saw some wonderful people so I just wanted to look good too. M2: Hey don't forget am female … ^^ that important to female … I: Appearance is important? M2: Yes so important. M3: Personality wise, this is me in both lives. Appearance wise … my hair and eyes are brown by birth [M3's avatar has brown hair and brown eyes] and my chest is pretty accurate … the rest is a combination of default appearance and a makeover some girl I met did for me. In a way, I look a lot like a RL good friend of mine, who moved to the south … she is older but very pretty … I dress well here because I can easily afford it and easily find my size! lol *I: … are you a furry for art?* S2: No, I'm a furry here because I can get this av for less than 1k, the clothing for 600L and be set. Where as a human av is insanely overpriced and is pieced apart to make people buy even more than they need to … It's simply more practical to be a Rabbit, like I was in the fandom and was even after I left it, than to go out of my way and try to recreate some odd expression of myself in human form. S5: It hasn't been a true "decision" – it came step by step. I went somewhere, tried something out. Liked these hair style, or that pants. I had a couple of different styles. It changed over time, but without really thinking it through.
		Ideal appearance	Using avatars to look the way one would ideally like	C2: But here it's possible to match your physical self to a superficial ideal. I find it interesting when you meet people here who make a point of being aged or obese, for example. D: I have several avvies … I have a few that I tried to look like me … I don't wear them everyday the same … others betray how I would like to look.
		Looking different to RL	Having an avatar that is different to appearance in the physical world	D: It's a cute avi made to look real but it doesn't look like me. *I: How similar is your av to your RL?* M2: lol nothing. *I: Do you think they [participant's avatars] are like you or are they different?* M3: Yes *smiles*. Both.

		Looking like RL	Replicating physical world appearance in Second Life	A: I felt the need to get some glasses … *I: Do you wear in RL?* A: (I feel naked without them). Yes. C1: I wanted something that was close to my own look. OK, I'm not a 2,70m tall piece of hunk meat ;) … but at the time I created the avatar, I shaved my head, had a goatee, have blue eyes. Am male, etc. So I just did a sort of "improved" me … Funnily enough, the skin I ended up acquiring has the same name as me in RL ☺ … kinda thought it was a sort of "sign" like serendipity … but more importantly I actually liked the skin itself. L: Well I didn't want to look like a Barbie that's for sure. I chose musician girl as the first dress not the pink spotty dress girl. And well I didn't really think about anything other than being human. Later on I tried to make my av's face look a bit like me in RL and have had this since about Jan 2010.
	Avatar experience	Attachment to avatar	Feeling an attachment to the avatar, so that few changes are made or would miss it if it ceased to exist	*I: Are you quite attached to this av in that case, having had it so long?* L: … Yes I am happy to be me like this. Sometimes new hair or skin but I don't change around a lot. Again this hair I have had for over a year. S5: I like her [the avatar] a lot. "We" did a lot of stuff together … if something would kill my SL account I would be very sad because of [S5] herself.
		Avatar as not important	The avatar being not important, but just a way of expressing oneself and is not a good differentiator between people	S3: I kind of see the avi, as no different than my physical body … a tool in which to express my soul. S4: … people may have biases because of another's shape, prejudices … it is easy to be handsome here for 100 euro, you are very cute. So everybody is cute. So what differs us is our soul, here.
		Avatar feels like me	Identification with the avatar as being the same person	L: I think it's me. I am happy to see her [the avatar]. Or me. *I: Is it like looking at yourself from the outside?* L: Well it doesn't fully look like me but I have had it so long it feels like me. The me in SL. Which is mostly like the RL me. But has more fun.
		Avatar reflects my mood	Changing the avatar to reflect mood	M1: … in past weeks but I'm changing it [the avatar] with my mood too … well it's mainly my mood I'm in at that time, if I feel pressured or a bit depressed then it leads to that outfit, when I feel like … uhm … more high class living then I grab my tux as example, when I got that typical weekend feeling and laziness it's something else again then. M3: My child avi is an idealized Steampunk 6yo, my Inner Child if you while. While [R, another of the participant's alts] is primarily an Idealised Self but she has lots of different faces that embody different emotions or moods.
		Avatar reflects RL and me	The appearance and experience of the avatar being a reflection of what occurs in the	C2: Well [C2] is very much like me … 25 years ago ☺ … thinner and in possession of all his hair ☺ M2: Maybe the only think is she is thin and am thin too. And what she wears is my style.

			physical world	*I: Does [S3] feel free?* S3: Well. [S3] was very free. But now … [the participant's alt] is getting into [S3] more. So now [S3] is becoming more boring like [the alt] LOL … because the more I am on the avi, the more the avi reflects the person who I really am.
		Avatar's with their own life	The experiences of the avatar and not necessarily belonging to the person operating them, or under their control	M3: … I find that avis are like characters in a novel, you can create them but then they create themselves, it's like they have a mind of their own … I find that avis "speak" to me and though I may start with a germ of an idea after a while they start collecting skins and clothes in their wardrobe and telling me who they want to be, like how you might create a fictional character in a book, you may start with an idea but after a while the character writes for itself. N: And I can feel them almost real haha. I borrow them my soul and hands and they walk alone … mmhh [N] is a male character. Is real in an imaginary world. Like Anna Karenina by example ^^. She is not the bearded man that create her *I: You called [S5] she just … does she feel separate? From you I mean.* S5: .. I realized it as well. In my "intense" SL time I always referred to "us", talked about "us", as I was acting through her, I have been [S5] and vice versa. Now it's different … Sometimes when I talked to other people about myself, I referred to my "RL avatar" to make clear whom I'm talking about … it's been like having one mind in two bodies – one RL and one SL body ☺
	Being a person in SL	Contradiction of being a person	A person being comprised of different, not necessarily coherent, aspects	Y: My left brain is more active … so I want to understand things. I'm an engineer, not a painter but I can see the little ballerina turning both ways. So perhaps I am in the middle of my brains.
		Extension of self in SL	The avatar not being identical to the person in the physical world; it does things and has experiences that cannot happen in the physical world.	A: Regarding my personal values, my taste in fashion, my preferred doing. I'm not a 1:1 copy of my RL ego, but an extension … As I already said: In RL I never would have dared to programme things. Or create fashion. Or even to build a whole steampunk hospital for a friend, what I did at Caledon [a steampunk sim] some months ago. C1: It's a pretty natural extension of my "self". I can easily relate to it and its interactions. I am comfortable using the commands, keyboard and mouse. So it feels natural … The look is close to mind, so I can easily project myself. C2: It's an extension of myself in many ways. It feels comfortable to me after 5-odd years. M1: I'm straight looking at me. *I: Like a mirror?* M1: Mh, more into an extension of my being … if I could afford it I had such a similar outfit in RL too. I'm more a sarcastic and ironic person with a hang to gothic/grunge and those directions and SL gives me the opportunities to live it more as I in RL actually can do. In that way it's meant as extension of myself and that I can live that

			way in SL more as I can in RL at this time.
	I am me in SL	The person in SL is in essence as the same person that is in RL	C2: I am the same person here and in RL. H: I am me here as in RL but others use here to be different. I like me, so don't see that need … They say they are exploring themselves. But. Well I know me. I don't need to do that either. M2: I'm who I'm. I'm in SL as am in RL … *I: Do you mind what other people think of you?* M2: No. Only if it's some important person but I can't change myself. If they like they will like how I'm. So what they think this will never going to change me. That why I don't care. S2: I'm me and I'd be worried if I wasn't xD S3: … and the more time I spend on an avi, the more of "me" comes through … Fun, funny, kind, caring, strong spirited, and a little hot headed at times, can be impulsive, creative etc. Things I've been told by friends …….. I am just myself. *I: Are you in character all the time?* S4: … that is hard to say because the character have the same characteristics as my RL. Y: And the most important thing is I am me, as I am in RL with my friends.
	Making mistakes	People making mistakes in Second Life that affect others, without malicious intent	K: I came to understand that I can admit to a fault … I can readily accept that responsibility … almost immediately … M2: But I am human, after all, and have my flaws. *I: Why was [the situation] a mess?* N: Well during several months he doesn't know [that the participant was female, not male, in RL]. Then I'm started to feel bad and guilty. But I want not to lose him ☺
	Real people behind the avatars	The avatars being operated by real people	A: In some ways yes [SL and RL are similar], since you interact with real persons behind the avatars. Even when they prefer to change gender, shape or even to prefer appearing as a plush puppet
	RL-SL identity connection	Using avatars as a representative of the person in the physical world	T: The other [avatar] is the first. He explored a lot, socialized and remained fairly anonymous. [T] is connected to my RL identity … I believe there was a desire to do something that would encourage me to connect to RL identity, likely education related, but I can't recall the specifics.
	Same characteristics in SL as RL	Characteristics of the person being the same in Second Life and the physical world	C1: I'm still me, quintessentially so. My avatar is like a distilled version of me, for good or bad. I like talking and expressing myself, so I am even more talkative here. D: I'm about the same I think. Try to be. M1: It's just touching my clothing in the end, my personality is quite the same. M2: Yeh am the same person I don't like a drama. But I am more shy in RL. N: Keep an eye on me. I'm absolutely different lol. … Well, my soul is the same yes. S1: I would say personality wise, I'm

			basically the same in RL and SL. I try to make my av look the same also except I'm not as tall in RL and I couldn't figure out how to make my av look a little older … hehehe. S3: [In SL I am] very much the same as I am in real life. I am interested in very similar things. I am always curious about people. I think I am very much the same person. I range from silly, crazy, to serious and intense.
	The forgotten me	Being the same as the person used to be in the physical world in the past	L: SL gives me the chance to be the forgotten me … so yes I don't go out clubbing in RL. But it's only because of circumstance. *I: Which is the forgotten you?* L: The single person without commitments, who is not in a role.
Doing my own thing	Being unique	Being in Second Life it is possible to be different to others	M1: Well I want to be unique ☺ and up to now I am lol. M2: … You can choose your pathway … and you can learn many things. *I: [Referring to a motto on the participant's profile] I also like this: "Be yourself, everyone else is taken".* Y: I have a lot of quotes I like. Or … you are unique, like everyone else.
	Freedom	Ability to be the person and behave how one would like, more so than in the physical world	B: I am 61 in RL. At this stage of life, I feel pretty secure with who I am. C1: More importantly, I feel freer to be myself in SL. Or to be "bolder". I'm still me, quintessentially so. C2: I had no idea what to expect and got entranced by the idea of a world where you could build what you want, and look as you want. *I: Is it important what people in SL think of you?* M4: Not really, maybe that's part of the appeal ;-) … I think a lot about what others think in RL, here I can be as strange or as embarrassing as I want …and I NEVER have a "fat" day heehee. N: Was amazing to be him [the avatar]. I'm a little shy haha. But with [N] I was so … free!!!
	Having purpose	Being in Second Life having purpose	B: It is very fulfilling to help people. T: Talk about the edu related activity, such as with [T]. It was more real. It had purpose. *I: When you were/are the other avi, is there less purpose?* T: … Definitely. But, he still remains.
	My SL is my responsibility	What happens in Second Life being the responsibility of the person, not circumstance or anyone else	S3: I created the same boring life in SL, that I had in RL LOL … but of course I did. I am the pilot. I am the creator. S5: What I did was natural. Without thinking about the reasons. I had an idea, or wanted to do something - so I did. Y: … I was also in "bad" places … because I want to find my limits and in RL is harder. And in this way I felt which is good or bad for me.
	Strength in SL	Having the strength to do things not possible in the	*I: Are you the same person then in SL as you are in RL?* H: Oh yes. Maybe stronger. I am more straightforward cos I don't know them. I don't have to see their eyes or meet them in

		physical world	RL ☺
Evolution	Changes over time	Changes in experience, activities, avatar, involvement and environment in Second Life occurring with passage of time	C2: My motivation was primarily a change for change sake. And probably be some boredom. H: I am not so manic about building now. I am not doing so much as I started a RL degree … In SL I am totally different than I was at first here. I have more confidence here now. *I: In RL?* H: Well yes that too. Cos I am doing a degree. Would never have tried that before. K: Change [is the best thing about SL] … SL is ever changing … and there is a lesson to be learned every time I log on ... M1: Well SL changes, new people arrive and SL isn't the same like let's say a year ago. M3: It *[a close friend leaving SL without warning]* definitely changed what I did when I came in … I became more of a socialiser, looking to establish new friendships. But have not had the same kind of relationship as I had with her. You know "best friends". T: I've gone through different periods of extensive and minimal use. There were days when we had a good group who used to socialize regularly at a learning hub. They have pretty much all disappeared.
	Changing view of SL	Opinion of Second Life changing	C2: I spend much less time now. Maybe an hour a day, and possibly 4 days a week … I realized that I needed to find some balance and a recognition that RL is much more engaging ☺ S5: My opinion of SL changed a lot. Now I'm not doing anything really here, I don't feel like a true resident anymore, although I'm still online now and then … it feels like the illusion has gone, that I realized what SL really is – an online game, with avs etc.
	Development	A person developing within Second Life in terms of capabilities and experience	S3: Well it just kept expanding in all directions. I kept learning and making friends and having interesting experiences.
	Learning	Second Life providing an environment for learning and education	H: Learning [keeps me coming to SL]. Learning technical stuff and about how the new media and stuff affects me and others. They all seem open to me. S1: … I just really like learning new things S2: In a sense, it gives one the ability to meet people, to learn about personality, actual human reaction to things. It's kinda a learning tool :P … I learned more about the human reaction to things and the simple nature of how things work. S3: I am learning things here. S4: I dropped history lessons on high school …so I needed to learn all from "the Great Library" … in Role Play we call Internet the Great Library (of Alexandria) … SL has given me the opportunity to learn more about history, to learn more about how people react on certain situations

			S5: What I learned … basically of course how to act and interact in SL, but that's not very helpful in RL ☺ I learned a lot about relationships, and what I really like.
	Learning about myself	Second Life providing an environment for learning unrealised aspects of the self	A: You can learn here in a very effective way. Not only skills, but about yourself as well. It is like a mirror. H: I can use imagination here more and I can learn about me … I learned that I suppress a lot of things RL and SL and that my thoughts are so different to most. M4: Anyways, [M4] was created to be a RP character but after a while I realized that she had become richer over time and actually had a lot to tell me about certain identity issues I have. N: … I find things from me that I didn't discovered … I never guess that I was so dominant lol. S5: I think I learned a lot about myself in SL and I'm very thankful for that. At some point I quit my RL relationship. I guess one of the reasons has been SL. I didn't quit it because of my addiction (or whatever we might call it), but because I realized that this is not the type of relation I really want to have … I realized that there is a lot inside me that is not satisfied or even touched in RL … it has been good for myself to get to know myself. Y: … I'm discovering myself … Lately I discovered I like to help people and to see them happy because of me so I've attended a coaching training course. *I: Did SL have any role in that discovery?* Y: Oh yes I was trying here with some people.
	Starting again	Part of the evolution process in Second Life meaning starting a fresh new avatar	S1: I guess I wanted to have another av that was more selective … keeping my inventory in check, not going to questionable places. More innocent, I guess … untainted. S5: I think it's been like "I really want to try this time". Maybe I have also been bored in my RL? Wanted to get some new input? Y: I was off for about 1-2 weeks. Because most of the people I met were like that. Some of them were nicer in the beginning, but in short they were the same … and then I thought it's impossible that all the people here be the same. So I came back and discovered another kind of people, some of them very nice.
	The influence of how I start	Experiences when first joining Second Life influencing the eventual outcome of experience in Second Life	L: You know after a while I was curious about alts and I made one, went to a welcome hub and it was such a horrible place. I was so glad that I found Kuula *[a region that New Citizens Incorporated operates]*. I might not have stayed I had been around the wannabe gangsters. M2: I became a vamp in my third day in SL lol … I didn't know what is that … to now lol but I change my clan lol. *I: Oh you are still [a vamp]?* M2: Yep. But not with the same clan. N: I was a little scared when I started about this game and I choose a male character …

				I've been only a man during 8 months. I had any idea about SL. Mmhh I want not to be required or molested. And then I discovered my male side hahahhahah.
	Multiple experience	Alts	The role of having alternative avatars	L: … people kept talking about [alts] and some people I knew had more than one. And I suddenly started to wonder who was who. When I made an alt I made it as a man just to see what it would be like. Actually I picked a name that could be either and it's a woman ATM but I hardly use it. I prefer just to stick with one. It's too confusing and I don't like to trick people. M4: [I] sometimes [use the other avi], but I could never figure out what to do with her, mostly she's where I keep all my outrageous and Steampunk clothes and I only use her to go to parties, although I was a Mod for a fashion group for a while on that avi. *I: Do you have alts, or does [N] play all the characters?* N: We are 3 alts. 2 men, 1 woman. S1: I don't know if I mentioned this to you before, but I have another av on SL that was my first one created Feb. 2008 … so even though this av hasn't been here as long, I've been on SL since then. *I: Do you still use that one?* S1: Once in a while, but my inventory got out of control and I didn't want to pay for two accounts. *I: Is [S4] the av you first came to SL with?* S4: No … I have been in SL for about 1.5 years … this avi will be 1 year in August.
		Avatars feel different	Changing avatar leading to different sensations	B: Being an owl feels different than being a librarian, especially when you are flying. But in some cases being a librarian bleeds through conversations. Such as the dragon sim. People will say, are you really a librarian? And then you are talking in the dragon avatar but you are drawing on your experiences as a librarian. T: I am not sure I feel different. Haven't really thought much about that. I guess I use the other when I socialise more.
		Avatars for different purposes	Different avatars being used depending on the intention or purposes of the user	B: I would change this one, but too many people know me as this one and it would be a chore so I leave it … I have several avies for fun. I have a dragon and elf and a cute little brown mouse … In some cases in order to participate in a sim it is good to look similar so it was easy to get something new … something different from my original avatar that I stared with. In some cases an animal, for instance. T: They are two different avis for different purposes.
		Changing gender	The experience of creating an avatars of different gender to the user	D: In another form like cross dressing so do they here … I know a few that wear women's avis but they are men … they seem to think is funner to be a woman. K: I think many, if not most, users tend to live in SL through their avatars … in a number of respects, those avatars are idealized

			manifestations of who the user would like to be … or perhaps who they believe they are (but aren't) … I have even developed a theory that males who create female avatars are, in fact, attempting to create the "woman of their dreams" … and the same for women who create male avis … ☺ [This (male) participant has a number of alts, one of which is female.] N: Me feels more real being a woman ^^. *I: Are you male or female in RL?* N: Female … wife and mother ^^. [The participant is female but used a male avatar for the interview.] Y: I know a lot of the women here are actually men. Someone said about 75%. But I don't care. The connection is the most important. Sharing.
	Contradiction of alts	Different avatars having different experiences, purposes, behaviours, appearances to each other, although operated by the same person	D: I have several avis … I have a few that I tried to look like me … I don't wear them everyday the same … others betray how I would like to look. N: Me and she [the male avatar the participant used in the interview and a female alt], we are a little dominant ☺. The other boy [a third, male, alt] plays a slave role ^^ … I never guess I was so dominant lol … mmhh I'm sweet and pleasant on RL … [the male slave avi] isn't dominant … I needed a time for understand this. Finally I did. When I started to play the Mistress, I can be a slave like man. But don't like at all being a woman … I don't like play slave woman … but I can play a slave man … I like to see his body submitted I guess. S1: I was selective with my older av also, but more of a risk taker. S3: [The alt] is more conservative but really all the same … but since I have personal information on the [alt] avi, she probably acts more conservatively … I created [S3] to be wild … yes [S3] was created to be the wild child of [the alt] … *I: They both have partners.* S3: Yes LOL. *I: Same or different?* S3: Different. *I: Do they know?* S3: Cracking up at myself … [S3]'s partner knows about [the alt]'s partner. But [the alt]'s partner would probably kill himself if he found out. He's too over the top in love.
	Playing roles	Playing a number of different of different roles, different to those in the physical world and within Second Life	A: Like my RL, I play a bundle of roles her as well … at this place which looks like an odd town in East Germany I have a social function: I'm Auntie [A] for a flock of child avatars. *I: Who is the forgotten you?* L: The single person without commitments who is not in a role … Erm that's funny I think as I say it. SL is supposed to be the one for Role Play … I have roles that either I choose and can't get out of easily or have been given to me. In RL that is … Parent, manager, wife, employee … there are roles in SL but mostly you can choose them. N: Well in a certain way [I did Role Play from the start] because I am being a man … so that's Role Play. [The participant is a woman

				using a male avatar].
		Role Play	The experience of engaging in Role Play	H: I wanted to Role Play not even knowing truly what it was. *I: Did you start SL with the intention of RP-ing?* M3: Not me. I wanted to socialize. *I: Why did you create [M4]?* M4: My BIL [brother-in-law] got my sister … into fantasy RP and she wanted someone to play with so she dragged me to the village *grins* … I also have a child avi and I do individual and Family RP … I'm a student so I don't have much time, I need RP where I can just drop-in RP for 2 hrs and leave. S5: My partner wanted to go to an ancient Greek sim … oh it was great. It had a "divine" Role Play too. There were Gods, as avatars … I also became a god … In Gor [a RP sim], rules are very strict, and one chose to go into Gor with those strict rules. I hate it, when they do not go by the book.
		Similarity between alts	Alternative avatars having similar traits or attributes	B: … I am conservative, chatty, and helpful in all avatars. S1: … I'm sure if someone wanted to do a people search, they could probably find me again because I used the first same name and the profiles are somewhat similar. S2: This is my second [SF] was third, [SM] was fourth. [All the alts have the same first name].
	Satisfaction	Comfortable with avatar	The avatar feeling comfortable to the user, whether or not is similar to their appearance and attributes in the physical world	C1: I actually created [C1] with that idea [of being the same in SL as in RL] in mind. But at first it was more out of convenience. I didn't want to spend too much time contemplating being "original" or "out of this world" or "cool". I thought consciously "I'm going to be out there. So might as well be someone I'm comfortable being". C2: The avi that appears on my screen feels comfortable … it's me. *I: Do you spend much time and effort thinking about what your avi should look lik*e? S3: No. But I have to be comfortable with her appearance same as I am in the physical world.
		Contentment with self	Being content with aspects of the self, behaviour, attributes, achievements	*I: Can you be free to be who you want in SL?* C1: … Yes, I think so. Except that I like being me ☺. So I don't need to escape too far from my "real personality". C2: I think I tend to gravitate towards who I am and the idea of behaving differently, or being a different person here simply because of anonymity doesn't have a lot of appeal to me.
		Self-doubt	Inhibited from doing what one would really like to do through fear of what others might think, as in the physical world	D: I wanted people around me as I don't like to be alone … but though I have only few friends they are busy … I want to sing but maybe no one like, it's sorta like RL … and is soo expensive and getting more expensive too I can't afford much like before … I will have to let go of some things if I do stay.
Virtual Self – Virtual	Emotions and Feelings	A pure love	Love in Second Life is not	S4: How to "love" friend without knowing them. *I: Is it different to loving someone in*

Other Interaction		dependent on a physical body	*RL?* S4: "The bond of the flesh is lust, the bond of the soul is love". *I: What do you think that means?* S4: I think in SL it is pretty the same, love, friendship. Because the action we do here, we will be judged by others, like in RL.
	Emotional substitute for RL	Emotions in Second Life acting as a replacement for experiences lacking in the physical world	S5: When I came to SL, I had a relationship in RL, but it hasn't been that good anymore. Maybe that's been a point why I came to SL, because I haven't been that satisfied. I don't mean satisfied in a sexual way, but emotional whatever.
	Emotions in SL are real	Emotions experienced in Second Life not being pretend or Role Play, but as real as in the physical world	C1: … I fundamentally believe emotions and feelings are real, regardless of SL or RL. If I have a friend, and that friend does something that hurts me, then it hurts. I am upset about something here, then it's true feelings. C2: RL emotions are very much present here.
	Emotions in the past	Emotional experience no longer playing a significant part of being in Second Life	*I: Do things upset you in SL ever?* T: Not now. We have had situations in the past where we have felt close. There has been considerable concern for some of the friends, and also times of felt betrayal. We've seen situations with marriage, divorce, serious illness, death and difficulties due to the way people were. Yes, some times of concern.
	Hurt	Events occurring in Second Life that cause emotional pain	D: I was to be married and that turned out that he was too busy RL. So I've been hurt by others too in a lot of ways similar to RL. M2: … I also know many people get hurt and so deep hurt. But am not that kind who been hurt so deep. M3: Now … if she returned, I'd be kinda pissed I think. Very hurt that she could leave without a goodbye … *I: How easy is it to be hurt in SL?* M3: Easy. I have had two romantic relationships here … both have been devastating. One that I am still recovering from right now. So much so that I have been staying away a lot. N: … nobody feels hurted because I'm playing the submissive boy … I'm always afraid about feelings from the others.
	Hurt as part of SL experience	Emotional pain being an inevitable part of Second Life	C2: I think that people here tend to lower their guard when it comes to social graces, so you see people being fairly unpleasant to each other. *I: Do your feelings ever get hurt here?* K: Yeah … to think that it could not happen would be unrealistic … a realistic participation is here is a full participation … there are some who only want a pleasurable experience … they have no time for the possibility that it might be a bit rough … S4: [It's] as easy to get hurt [in SL as] in RL. But I think generally, people in SL are more open to each other … because you are anonymous. It is easy to say your secrets to a trusted stranger than to your friends, your RL friends.
	Isolation of	Keeping	L: … awful when you have heartache,

	emotions in SL	emotional experience in Second Life separate from the physical world, although this can be painful	because there is nobody to share it with apart from your SL friends.
	Managing emotions	Keeping control of emotions experienced in Second Life	H: … they [emotions] all come out in the end … but I try not to let it affect others here cos very conscious that they are real people. S2: I wouldn't really take very many things to heart since it's not something that happens IRL … I've gone through enough crap in my life to get a firm understanding of how to deal with stress … I tend to keep my heart behind the locked gate in a stressful sense. Y: … there are no things here that upset me, because I KNOW how it is and I don't get involved personally. Yes, in the beginning. And since I'm very honest, I don't like people who are trying to cheat you in different ways. But it's OK, I can deal with them. When you don't have expectations, you can't get upset.
	Passion	Emotions in Second Life being very intense	N: … I'm a normal wife and mother and happy ^^. And here well … all that mess. lol. But I love so much.
	Suppressing feelings	Emotions being suppressed and gaining an outlet in Second Life	H: … how I feeling. I don't show it sometimes. N: … and I guess I have some rage hided ^^
Interactions	Communication between souls	Because no physical bodies are involved, communication in Second Life is between the inner parts of people	N: I like how people we contact here with the full soul sometimes … I mean that we are all beauty if we want here so … the truly important is the soul, here, the mind, the way of talking, why someone is so interesting and other not at all, is an amazing thing, S4: … a total new thing was there for me. Socialising without knowing the other, just knowing the "soul".
	Communication within SL	The implications of the written nature of communication in Second Life	K: … I think in general it relates to the notion that this a permissive environment far beyond the boundaries of emotional intimacy … one rarely knows how "seriously" any interaction with others is being taken … M3: … I think that SL actually returns us to an older way of getting to know someone, by writing … and in these avs we have some sense of anonymity so we can be freer to open up. We can more easily talk to someone because we are not turned off or away by their "looks" … I suppose [it is easier to be hurt in SL than in RL] in that one believes what someone writes … anything in writing has more credence vs. oral, right? I mean that's a RL presumption. So I suppose I take someone's writing to heart here, as I would in RL. *I: Like it's proof of something?* M3: And here one can pull it up from the log, and say, here … look! Yes … the old adage … it's in black and white. Though I'm old enough to know that people can lie in chat just as easily as they can in voice or to your face. Maybe even more easily. S1: Like my older av belongs to the group

			Wild Coast which is a nudist beach group and it was fun at first, but the people there just weren't the type to have a good intellectually stimulating conversation with, you know? … I guess that's why I like ballroom dancing … there's almost always good conversation.
	Helping	The experience of helping others, and being helped, in Second Life	A: When I started at one of these then still existing newbie islands, a little girl picked me up. She reveals herself as a voluntary tutor and tried to impress me with some particle effects … I told her that I would prefer to know what to do next instead of seeing here legerdemains… she was a bit surprised … so the next was a huge bundle of items – hairdos, clothing, landmarks … she was very generous … *I: What do you like most about being here?* A: Learning and helping others to do the same. B: I interact with teachers, students and other librarians. We enjoy helping people, especially students. D: I'm good to people and like making friends … I like to help others but don't get in return. M2: … I work as volunteer in help people land. M3: I am thoughtful, try to help newbies. S1: … I'm nice to people and try to be helpful whenever I can. S3: I did have some experienced friends here and was always screaming for help, in some weird dilemma … I trained to become an Inworldz mentor. I trained new people coming in. S4: I am/was an initiate. People, especially slaves, came to me with problems, RL, Role Play all kinds. Not because they have to RP it, but they trust me … I seem to be an attraction for helping people. If I want or not.
	Interested in people	Others in Second Life as being intrinsically interesting	S5: It's still interesting to see what people are doing here. How they create, live, compete. Y: I like the interaction with people … Most time I spent here was to talk, to find why they are here, why do they have a happy family in RL and another family in SL, to see what makes them to have sex with animals or tentacles …
	Meeting people	Second Life offering an opportunity to meet others	A: SL has a Janus face. One side is a fascinating place to meet people in a totally different way than e.g. at Facebook … C1: … meeting people, etc. is the main driving force that brings me here. L: The best thing is meeting people and of course the friendships you make.
	Misunderstandings	The nature of communication in Second Life, textual and dependent on avatars, leading to misunderstandings	C2: My personal opinion is that in a virtual world, we miss the physical cues that come with body language etc. and that leads to misunderstanding K: … the social side was a struggle … and still is … the absence of full communications modes that we rely on in RL [make it a struggle] … text is an abysmal mode … even with the attempts to describe our physical and

			emotional state, we have to rely on text and our personal filters … the unfortunate condition of our species is that we here what we want to hear, see what we want to see, and believe what we want to believe … RL is far more robust … ☺
	Networking	Second Life offering an opportunity to network from home with people otherwise not possible	*I: Does SL give you anything that RL can't?* B: The ability to network with people worldwide which would be expensive in RL. The ability to stay at home and still interact with peers. So I can stay at home, fulfil family responsibilities and still connect with like-minded people.
	Sex in SL	Sex as part of the Second Life experience	C1: .. but the fact that she was there [in SL] and I had an "ulterior motive" so to speak, in spending time with here, made the motivation that much stronger. You can say I was basically lured to SL by sex ☺ … I believe that's true for many people here. Or at least the ones that stick around for any length of time … sex, companionship, intimacy, etc. are a huge motivator to be in SL, IMHO. H: … if I am honest, I would say, that as a virtual world where anything is possible so many people want it like RL and don't seem to rise above the baser instincts … BDSM … hurting people. N: And 3 [the participant's three avatars] like to play sex too of course … nobody says everybody do lol.
	Trust	Trust being a key aspect of the Second Life experience	H: They say they are exploring themselves, but, well I know me, I don't need to do that either … I need people I trust to play with and that is my hard bit. I don't trust. *I: So that it is clear what is RP and what is not?* H: Yes and people have to think similar don't they?? *I: Do people in RL know about your SL?* M1: Yes. *I: And do people in your SL know about your RL?* M1: Just my closest friends here which I can trust. So not that they shout it all over everywhere. S4: People, especially slaves, come to me with problems, RL, Role Play, all kinds. Not because they have to rp it, but they trust me. How can you trust pixels? There must be something else that attracts them. Y: Today I wanted to finalise what I promised you, I keep my promises. Maybe a bit later, but always … Trust is an important value for me.
	Understanding others	People in Second Life trying to understand others' experience and motives, through various methods	C2: I'm generally relaxed and accepting. H: I sight see, look into the minds of others … I look in showcase to see what's new and go and visit. What they build says a lot about people I think, don't you?? … Some very talented people here, some very strange thoughts ☺ *I: How does it feel to see them [real life family and friends] as avatars rather than RL, does it feel like them?* H: Funny, because you see how they would like to be ☺ you learn things about them. K: I understand that you are here to research … I get your purpose here … but I cannot

				read that in everyone … some take SL way too seriously … and some just totally waste their time and the time of all around them … and sometimes I do not know … it's not that there is some binary – serious or frivolous … there is an entire spectrum … I do not know exactly where I am on that spectrum … and I am always trying to figure out where everyone else is on that spectrum … and sometimes that is both surprising and very very frustrating. *I: When you say you know their souls, what do you mean?* S4: Well, how they feel, how they can be touched, spiritually. Y: Usually I was wearing jeans and a tee. This is because I've met a girl, not much talking, but I wanted to get closer to her. And she is a kind of self bondage girl and I wanted to understand why. So I was trying to copy her, at least in her outfit, with what I could find here for free, like clothes.
	Negative behaviour	Deception	Deception occurring in Second Life, due to anonymity	D: Well the worst to happen is a few things … a man was selling me land for 10K and I fell for it, he didn't pay tier fee and ripped me off. H: I found that they seem to lie a lot here and I found that difficult to cope with. *I: How did you realize they lied?* H: Oh inconsistencies in what they said. I have a pretty good memory and they say single and things. Then GF [girlfriend] IM you and shouting? K: … a very substantial amount of delusion … ☺ *I: Deluding each other?* K: Yeah, that is a fair statement … we tend to bullshit others … and we tend to bullshit ourselves, I think … ☺ L: … and I suddenly started to wonder who was who. When I made an alt I made it as a man just to see what it would be like. Actually I picked a name that could be either and it's a woman ATM. But I hardly use it. I prefer to stick with one. It's too confusing and I don't like to trick people. M3: … I suppose [it is easier to be hurt in SL than in RL] in that one believes what someone writes … anything in writing has more credence vs. oral, right? I mean that's a RL presumption. So I suppose I take someone's writing to heart here, as I would in RL. *I: Like it's proof of something?* M3: And here one can pull it up from the log, and say, here … look! Yes … the old adage … it's in black and white. Though I'm old enough to know that people can lie in chat just as easily as they can in voice or to your face. Maybe even more easily. N: I was exploring and discovering this world, trying not have friendship because I was not real. But with time friendship arrives and my ethical doubts start … I'm an affective person, so I feel some SL friends like friends and I start to be concerned because in a way I was lying. What a mess. … *I: Did you create her [the female alt] so you wouldn't have to lie?* N: Mmhh yes. For me was not a lie, was

			another life, different, but some people doesn't look like me.
	Disrespect	Disrespect occurring in Second Life, due to anonymity and the use of a keyboard as an interface	C2: I think people here tend to lower their guard when it comes to social graces. So you see people being fairly unpleasant to each other. M1: Well the worst [thing about SL] is those trolls and misbehaving kids running into SL lately … the environment of SL [has changed], that's surely a positive thing but on the other end those new people in SL, mainly kids which don't have the attention to see that others are humans too and disrespect many others or are cussing and yelling around, still having no behaviour or respect for others. M3: The worst thing is when people are "multi-tasking" without advising you and not responding for minutes on end. I hate that rudeness. S1: Sometimes you'll get some rude person doing something stupid, but I just ignore it.
	Griefing	The experience of 'griefing' (behaviour intended to disrupt others' experience) in Second Life	B: Griefers [are the worst thing about SL]. They upset the new people and some don't return, which is a shame. M3: I really enjoyed fighting a griefer that regularly came here, that was fun cause he was very tricky. He created a new av every day or had his friends come in as a new av. He would show up at all hours day or nite … I loved being there right on top of him as soon as he came in. [We] watched the radar or map for his arrival all the time. *I: What did you enjoy? The challenge?* M3: Exactly. Everyone kept saying ignore him, but he was not a typical griefer. He has a personal grievance against one main person and some of the others associated with that person. *I: He sounds smart.* M3: Oh very. Haven't seen him in a long time and I honestly believe [we] discouraged him because we were just as tenacious as he.
	Sexual harassment	The experience of sexual harassment in Second Life	M3: It is even worse than the men who just IM you with "do you want to fuck?" M4: … I don't like to be sexually harassed, it feels like an actual assault. It's funny you can't be a victim of any violent crime here, but is still very upsetting to be harassed. Y: … I wanted to quit in short … If you're a girl, you can find rude people very easy here … so, my first days here … "do you want a good fuck?". No Hi, nothing but this question. They are in a great hurry. But nothing from my profile or look was telling them I'm here for this. I was normal dressed, more normal than now and a bit helpless, too many infos at once.
Relationships	Friendship scope and mix	The range of friendships within Second Life	C1: I have probably near 100 contacts in my list. Don't know if that's "many" by SL standards but I talk mostly to half a dozen people regularly. The rest are either friends who are not there that often. Or "one-night stands" ☺ not necessarily the sexual kind :D *I: Are all your friends furry?* S2: No, I work

			at a human/neko/furr club as well where I am one of 4 or 5 furs out of around 100 staff … a lot of people know me both IRL and online. S3: Yes I do [have many friend in SL] and I have lots in RL as well.
	Friendship ties	Friendships in Second Life involving strong bonds	A: The ties of friendship and duty [keep me coming back to SL]. C1: I've built some relationships along the years that I value. L: I have my "music friends" that I see on a Tuesday night at least … I have known that crowd from just after I joined and I love it. Such a nice bunch of people. We always have a good laugh. M1: Well I have friends here who need someone to listen and mostly get back on me then so I'm kind of available and see can reply faster than checking mails first what I prolly do twice a day … I think it's the friendships I made here over the time [that keep me coming to SL]. M4: It used to be the clothes and an escape [that kept me coming back to SL], now it's the people, I have many friends here and I would miss them if I left. N: … I try not to have many deep friendships like man. There is a couple of friends of me. I talk to him and I tell if they care about my RL. They say no. They say doesn't mind if you are guy or girl ☺ S3: I look after them because I care for them as people, I would want to keep them safe just as (I would hope) they would wish to keep me safe. But at the same time I recognise the simple fact that if you are always there for someone, they will never develop on their own and will slowly retract in the terms of capabilities. S4: It began to change for me when I started bonding with people here. The people became real. Well the people are real. I made some very good friends, still have my older original friends.
	Not true friends	Friendships in Second Life not being as strong as those in the physical world	H: After a while you realize that they not friends in the true sense.
	Others as a reason to come to SL	People coming to Second Life specifically to maintain friendships, when they might otherwise cease to come	D: I want to leave …but something I think the people or something bring me back, I'm not sure. K: I have been consistently on in the evenings for a couple of years now … I had a reason … a friend … but that became very unstable recently … S5: … at the moment I'm logging in almost every day for maybe 30 minutes or so, as [a friend] is taking part at a building competition and wanted to have my opinion and ideas about what she could do. *I: Do you think you won't come back to SL [the participant was thinking of leaving and had not been online for a while]?* Y: I don't

			think so, or from time to time. There are people here, very dear to me.
	RL relationships in SL	Second Life as a place where physical world relationships are maintained	B: Two of my colleagues, at my encouragement, attended the annual ACRL conference in Second Life. They enjoyed it but it took some adjustment. The avatar thing is still a challenge for some. *I: You mentioned earlier you have family and a friend in SL … did you introduce them to SL?* H: Yes ☺ … *I: Do you meet them in SL?* H: Oh yes ☺ go out with them dancing, shopping. *I: How does it feel to interact with them via your avatars?* H: Great, it so much fun. Like my husband, we at home … and bored so we go to see live act and dance ☺ M3: Eventually I heard about it again and made a new account this one, 3+ yrs ago. Got my friend to join months later … and he wasn't here long before he had a girlfriend. Boy was I pissed! M4: My sister dragged me here :D She wouldn't shut up about it, after a while I caved and tried it out, I wasn't immediately hooked though, I couldn't figure out what I was supposed to be doing.
	SL relationships as being unfaithful	Relationships in Second Life being unfaithful to those in the physical world	S5: While I've been in SL I tried out being with other people. I think it has been some kind of cheating, not physical, but emotional. Somehow I really needed that time, and couldn't do it in RL, because I truly loved my BF.
	Structure of relationships	The characteristics of relationships in Second Life being the same as in the physical world	C1: Human relationships are the same [in SL as in RL] IMHO. So betrayal, unjust accusations, disappointments affect me in the same way, although to a lesser extent in SL than in RL.
	Uncertainty of friendships	Friendships in Second Life as not lasting very long or as strong as those in the physical world	K: … I often wonder to what extent they are really friendships … in some cases, I get the sense that some are only collecting names for a list and that that somehow is comforting … in other cases, I get a sense that I am a future reference and that I shall be called upon when somebody wishes to "begin again" … not really sure what friendship in SL means, really. M3: … it did make me realize that people come and go very quickly and that the ones who hung around were keepers.
Reputations and reactions	Friendship respect and expectations	Friendship in Second Life as involving respect and expectations	K: … [what kind of person my friends in SL think I am] depends on the nature of the relationship, I think … might even be as granular as the individual … as well as their "stated purpose" for friendship … in general, though, I tend to think I am well-regarded … with some significant karmic flaws, of course … *laughs*. S3: I think I only lose my temper at people I really care about because I have higher expectations of them. So if I lose my temper at you, it's a compliment LOL. S4: I respect other avs, like I respect other people. Both have a conscience. *I: What do*

			you think people think of you in SL? S4: I think they highly respect me. *I: Is it important that they do?* S4: Well I think it is important for everybody.
	Inferiority to older residents	The experience of feeling inferior to people with more experience in Second Life	L: … I think tended to feel inferior to those who have been here longer. In fact I often still do but not so much now. *I: How come you felt inferior?* L: A knowledge thing. But it's fine if just talking about regular subjects that you would in the real world. *I: Do you mean general knowledge, or knowledge about SL?* L: Knowledge about SL.
	Negative perception by people in RL	People in the physical world as having negative perceptions of Second Life	A: … SL has a very bad public image, at least here in Germany. It seems to be ok to play WOW [World of Warcraft] like many of my younger colleagues do. But SL has a bad reputation. The argument of "I wouldn't have the time to waste for that …" is often to hear. D: A few family do [know about the participant's Second Life] …they think I'm crazy … I spend too much time and money. M2: … my whole family [know about the participant's Second Life] … lol my bro when he sees me dancing on pole been shock and laugh how a crazy I'm … my parents hmmm doesn't say anything. M3: … some might think it's crazy too … but I will talk a lot about it in RL. The virtuality of it … they can't seem to comprehend that it is real and I can understand that, if they came here and saw some of the avs and the way people act, etc., they'd be mightily turned off. S4: You are part of a hidden world. You cannot talk with your RL about it. They think you are crazy. *I: What about your SL would have embarrassed you?* S5: First of all that I'm regularly playing it. I was afraid people might think I'm a fool because I'm doing that. Not that I think that SL players (or other online gamers) are fools but I didn't want others to know anyway. And then of course WHAT I am doing here. I did a lot of boring stuff, nothing interesting for others but the fact that I have relationships with other "avatars" in SL – I didn't want that made public. And also the sexual stuff of course - I am one with SL beds, as you know – and this would have been VERY embarrassing. (I don't talk about RL sex in RL as well.)
	Opinions of others	The opinion of others as being an influence on experience of Second Life	A: … it was a good thing not to believe in the media's features about wild sex orgies and other fairy tales about SL before ^^. B: I do care what colleagues think to some extent but I feel pretty confident that I need to be me, regardless of what others think. C1: I do it [only tell two people in RL about SL] because I don't think many people in my RL would understand what I do here, like it's an outlet, etc. Some people, like my wife, would definitely object ;) T: … I used to socialize while dancing with friends. My wife wasn't impressed ☺ … she

			felt it was a big waste of time.
	Others' response to my avatar	Others' behaviour towards an avatar depends on appearance	C2: I've no particular motive in my avi's appearance. At one point I was black as well as quite tall and blonde … but I haven't tried to reflect a RL appearance, or an idea … people respond to you differently. This avi is a bit more attractive than the last and you notice that your looks reflect how people respond to you.
	What others think of me is not important	Others' attitudes towards the person as not being important	*I: Is it important what people in SL think of you?* C1: … Not all people. The ones I care about, yes. I like to be perceived as a good guy, in general ☺ *I: Do you mind what other people think of you?* M2: No, only if it's some important person but I can't change myself. If they like me, they will like how I'm. So what they think, this will never going to change me, that's why I don't care. *I: Is it important what people in SL think of you?* M4: Not really, maybe that's part of the appeal ☺ S3: I don't think I worry a lot about [what people think of me in SL]. I think I just assume they like me LOL. S4: … "whatever floats their boat" has been my backing. I'm me and I'd be worried if I wasn't xD *I: Do you think it is important what other people in SL think of you?* S5: To some degree … I'm nice to people and try to be helpful whenever I can. I try to look nice also, but I basically let my actions and words speak for themselves.
Virtual Self Being online – Virtual World Interaction	Dislike online comms	Not having or not liking social networking media	A: … is a fascinating place to meet people in a totally different way than e.g. at Facebook (which I totally dislike as a dangerous spyware). L: I don't have Facebook, I tried it, and honestly I don't get it. And I quite like my privacy. S5: I hate Facebook, I don't like online communities in general. I have an account with five (?) friends, cause they forced me to create one. I have a fake name and no photo. … *I: Why do you hate online communities?* S: "Hate" is too harsh … I don't get the sense of it. I don't want to publish any private information or pictures and if I want to share "important information" about myself, I prefer talking about them. I guess there is no need telling everyone I'm having a shower now.
	Online comms as SL spin off	Using social media for communicating with people met in Second Life	C1: I sometimes "overflow" from SL to other tools. When I meet people I like, we sometimes use other tools to stay I touch, even when not using SL. D: Sometimes [I use] Skype but is too large for my comp to run both and yes Facebook I use. Messenger I have 1 friend in SL I talk to on. *I: What about Facebook, Skype, IM and stuff like that, do you use those?* L: Sometimes IM

			but only as an SL spin off. M2: … I have friend always keep text me on Yahoo or mail and also I have friend know my number lol. M3: I used Facebook for this av but they closed my account and I actually was happy, it's too much, and "friends" were too annoying with their buttons, hunts, etc. S4: [I use] Facebook for SL. As an av. *I: How about social media, Facebook, Skype, Messenger etc., do you use those?* T: Very little with FB anymore, but past user. Linkedin, Skype, GTalk, Messenger, Yahoo, probably more. Primary are Linkedin and Skype. *I: Are these for RL, or have you used them for your avatar?* T: RL, but I have used MSN and Yahoo Messenger and Skype for avi.
	Online comms for RL	Using social media only for communicating with people known in the physical world	A: … I have a personal homepage in RL, but I haven't any accoumt on Facebook, Twitter and Co. B: I use social media in real life. I do chronicle my activities on my blog. C1: I have friends from SL I give my FB to, but the persona there is my Real self, not my SL avatar *I: … can you tell me if you use Facebook, Messenger, Skype or any other kind of networking facility?* K: All of the above … ☺ And LinkedIn … *I: Do you use for RL or for SL (or both)?* K: Just RL … M1: … I have those but limited them to contacts I really know in RL … mostly for these which live a bit more away from me because they had to move for example. M4: I used to Facebook but I've pretty much given up, I do Skype for school related stuff, I don't use any other social networking, although I'm probably going to go to Linkedin soon, OH and I used to Livejournal but I don't anymore. S1: … I use FB, Skype (but rarely), Yahoo IM (also rarely) and I have MSN Messenger, but use that even less … [it is for] RL although I have two friends from SL on FB … and maybe one or two group friends. S3: … I use Facebook … for my family and friends.
	Other experience of online	Having experience of online environments before being in Second Life	A: Before SL, I was in a conventional chat named Everywherechat.com. My original aim was to brush up my rusty English in a non-German chat community. C1: I remember trying a French version of a 3D avatar world prior to AL … that was a long time before I came to SL, like years … the first experience was called "Deuxième Monde", literally "Second World". And that's when everything went "boink" ;) K: … I have been working both synchronous and asynchronous text messaging since the late 1980s …
Keeping a	Anonymity and	Anonymity	C2: [SL gives me] the ability to be

distance	ambiguity	allowing people to explore aspects of self, deal with confrontations, and facilitating the experience emotional hurt	anonymous I suppose. Or at least more so here. *I: Is that appealing?* C2: Yes and no. I think I tend to gravitate towards who I am and the idea of behaving differently, or being a different person here simply because of anonymity, doesn't have a lot of appeal for me … the appeal is transient. You can say or act in a particular way I guess and feel protected by your anonymity but it doesn't appeal to me much. D: I suppose it's a little different, but people have made me to cry, get mad and all that … even feel like a stranger … and RL is diff cause I know I'm looking at and taking to – here might be a man, might be a woman. H: I am more straightforward cos I don't know them. I don't have to see their eyes or meet them in RL ☺ … so it is easier for me to say no ☺ N: I like this kind of people. I'm try to be ambiguous and I play more my female avatar and have not this problem lol … but do you know? Hahahahah a lot of people think that she is a man on RL lol [the participant is female who uses both male and female avatars]. S4: [It is] as easy to get hurt [in SL as] in RL. But I think generally, people in SL are more open to each other … because you are anonymous. T: The other [alt] is the first. He explored a lot, socialized, and remained anonymous. [T] is connected to my RL identity.
	Keeping RL separate	Keeping lives led in the physical world and Second Life separate	A: So I decided in general not to use voice anymore. My voice is part of my RL. Another practical reason is that my partner would feel disturbed while watching TV in the living room. C2: I still find it an exciting world to explore. I'm less likely to get immersed in it though … I've always been careful to keep SL and RL apart and I still do … I like my privacy … and I haven't felt the need to introduce SL into my RL … I'm fairly open about many things in my RL but I don't share personal details nor do I want to foster contact outside of SL, not because of any RL impediments … I've just felt better separating the two. M1: … I keep it separated from people I don't know that good in the first – well I do that with people in RL too, as example not involving them into my problems and look if they're interested in my person at all before I shoot out my whole personality what even for friends take a while to get that all. M2: … am not the kind who been hurt so deep, nehh. *I: Is that because you try to keep RL and SL separate?* M2: Yepppp am always keep that in my mind.
	Moral dilemma	Relationships in Second Life involving ethical problems	L: For a while I was torn about the morals but I have gone through that and in my particular circumstances I think I am not going to beat myself up about it. It's better than the alternatives.

			N: I was exploring and discovering this world, trying not have friendship because I was not real [the participant is a female using a male avatar] but with time friendship arrives and my ethical doubts start … I'm an affective person, so I feel some SL friends like friends and I start to be concerned because in a certain way I was lying. Was a mess.
	Privacy and openness	Keeping personal physical information private from people met online	*I: I see on your profile that you share quite a lot about RL so would you say you are quite open?* A: Well, you know the information policy of the U.S. government during the Cold War? At first glance, most things appeared public. You could go in a bookstore and buy a book about the latest weapons systems for instance. In Moscow, it was of course impossible. Nonetheless, everything which is really vital was hidden and secret as well. *I: I understand* ☺ L: I don't have Facebook, I tried it, and honestly I don't get it and I quite like my privacy. *I: Does [L] have her own IM account then?* L: Yes. But you know I do anything to keep my real life details off the internet and that has nothing to do with SL. I just don't want sales people or anyone else nosing about me. I always say no to giving out numbers when you buy things for example. M4: My closest people do [know about my SL] but most people don't, I find that people who don't do any kind of virtual gaming just don't "get it" and I have to admit, most of what happens here sounds pretty silly when you try to tell someone about it, so I just keep it to myself. I like that SL is a private world anyway, that's sorta the point. *I: Has SL helped [with problems in real life] at all?* S2: Not really and a good portion of the time I try to keep things like that IRL. It's not something meant to be shared with the world. S3: I share nothing about myself … until I really get to know someone and it feels right and safe. *I: Is it based on instinct?* S3: Absolutely, in combination with other things … I observe their behaviour, I watch for inconsistencies, conflicts in stories, etc. etc.
	RL-SL separation	Keeping effects of what occurs in Second Life separate from the physical world	C1: If I am upset about something here, then it's true feelings BUT I rarely let it affect me in RL in the sense that I try to avoid drama spilling over in my RL. I don't make or organise my days and behaviour according to SL. I have a pretty busy RL, actually ;)
	Time management	Deciding how much time to spend in Second Life	A: [I spend] around 2-4 hours per day [in SL], when I'm online. Similar to the average TV usage (not my TV usage which maybe 2 to 4 hrs per month) … I try to spend not too much time here after a certain phase of – yes – addiction … but RL and SL has to be balanced. B: [How I manage how much time I spend in each of the worlds] depends on what is going on in RL. During school and work, from September to May I am really careful not to

			exceed my time. I have homework, work and family. *I: Do you set a certain amount of time that can be spent?* B: It varies, depends on what is going on that week. If there are family functions such as birthdays, then less, if it's a quiet week, maybe more … *I: What proportion of your time here is "professional" and what is for "pleasure"?* B: Well for me that is a difficult distinction to make. My profession is closely tied to my personal mission of improvement of quality of life for students, etc., so it's hard to divide them up. If I had to give a number, I would say maybe 6 hours per week of play, like building, maybe ten of attending meetings, volunteering at a reference desk here etc. D: [I spend] quite a lot more [time in SL now] than I really should … about sometimes varies from 6 to 8 hours. Some days not much at all. *I: How much time do you spend in SL?* H: Lots ☺ … it varies. But when nothing in RL happening and I bored, can be mmm 14 hours a day approx, other days 10 mins. L: Sometimes it's difficult when you have to leave because of RL or can't organise things because of your own or other people's RL commitments … *I: How do you manage your time between SL and RL?* L: Hmm good question … get what needs to be in RL and have play time here when I can. *I: How much time do you spend in SL?* M2: Only in my summer and some time if I feel free or boring. But in my summer holiday whole time … am student too … so in summer you can say whole my day lol. *I: You have worked out how much time to spend in SL? You have all your times on your profile.* S4: Yes, else I will be a stranger for RL lol. *I: Is that something you did from the start?* S4: No About 1½ years ago, I set up a timetable … so that I won't become a stranger to my friends and family. Y: … this is a bit weird, some days I spend 12-14 hours. Most of the days when I was online I spent about 2-3. It depends of what I find here, to do, to talk …
New to SL	Adjusting to SL as a new person	Settling into Second Life when first joining	C1: So, first I installed SL and tried it a couple of times … not too convinced, honestly. Seemed slow and clunky, people didn't really want to talk, it seemed to me. D: It was a little strange at first learning was difficult. *I: Was it very different to how IMVU [another virtual world that participant used before Second Life] works?* D: Yes, a lot different … the controllers and how to walk and move, it made me crazy learning … was like wrecking car all the time … if someone wanted to come to SL then I would caution them … there vamps and all and strange people … they nice but need to be prepared a bit before coming. *I: Did it take you long to find your feet in SL?* K: Hmmmm … technically …? No …

		socially … ? Yeah, that took me a while … the technical side was not difficult as I have been a programmer for some time ... and have done a lot of work in design … prims and textures and scripts are easy … the social side was a struggle … and still is … M3: I came here originally back in 2006 I think … saw it on the net or read about it in paper, I can't honestly recall, but my PC was so slow, I couldn't really manage it. *I: Was [N] always male?* N: I was a little scared when I started about this game and I choose a male character … I've been only a man during 8 months. I had any idea about SL. Mmhh I want not to be required or molested and then I discovered my male side hahahhahah. S3: [When I got here I thought] "Oh shit … There's a lot to learn x.x." And then I started looking into just about everything I could on TG [Teen Grid, the young person's version of Second Life, merged with the main grid in January 2011]. I got a small home and me some people. Tried my best to blend in and make do as I explored things … *I: When you say you did your best to blend in, what do you mean?* S3: Found a decent av for the time, got some clothing … moved into the TG Furnation and got an apartment so I could take part into the community. S4: I was the dumbest noob you would ever meet … I was under the dance floor, locked in rooms, etc. … couldn't open a box, realized my pants were off … etc., etc. LOL. Y: Hummm, I guess it was in April 2009, about mid of the month and I wanted to quit in short … If you're a girl, you can find rude people very easy here … So, my first days here … "Do you want a good fuck?" No Hi, nothing but this question. They are in a great hurry. But nothing from my profile or look was telling them I'm here for this.
Choosing a name	Choosing an avatar name	A: After I finally found an acceptable surname (I refreshed the Linden list five times to prevent a name like "Suppenkraut" = soup vegetable for me ^^) … C1: [I use] MSN. Skype, Gtalk, Yahoo Messenger … hmmm. Haven't used IRC in years. *I: Are they all in [C1]'s name?* C1: Yes, pretty much. Except the phone. Also except for my Facebook, which is in my own name … [C1] is a nickname I've been using for about … oh my god … 25 years :D. Online, I mean. SO my usage of [C1] actually predated SL … it's a French comic book character from the '80s. I was a fan of the book when I first started becoming active online. I took it for myself. C2: It's my RL first name. Except my finger slipped and I left the 'er' at the end ☺ H: I had to get a surname first and I liked [the one I chose]. It means to me knowledge and I came to find some. Then had to get first name and thought [H] knowledge.

			L: I chose my old cat's name for a first name … and then picked one beginning with W cos I thought it would be easy to remember. M3: My first name is what I named my dog. I am half Italian so it is a play on words … "Whose dog is that? That's my-a dog" (said with Italian accent). And the last name … I wanted something mystical, spiritual …
	Introduction by friends	Introduced to Second Life through friends, either met through other online environments or known in the physical world	C1: Later, like 2 years later, I met someone online in another virtual community for Alternative sexual lifestylers. I was chatting to someone there who told me she was on SL. And being curious, I thought maybe it would be fun to explore while knowing someone there already. So I re-downloaded the client, created a new account, and that was the end of it ;) D: A friend introduced me. We played on Yoville FB. M4: My sister dragged me here :D. She wouldn't shut up about it, after a while I caved and tried it out, I wasn't hooked though, I couldn't figure out what I supposed to be doing. S2: Few friends were talking about it, ragging on it really and I thought I'd give it a look to see if it was really as crappy as they said xD.
	Introduction by media	Introduced to Second Life through coverage in the media (television, radio, newspapers, magazines, books)	H: … I read a book that mentioned here. So I came to look and was blown away. Never see anything like it. L: … I saw a programme about new technology and it featured Second Life. The presenter was flying around Paris and I thought it looked interesting. I was at a stage in my life where I was looking for something new to do too and had more time on my hands. S1: I read an article in the Wall Street Journal about it. S5: … I think [I knew about SL in the first instance] through newspapers or internet. Not from a friend or someone else in my RL. T: I recall someone pointing me to an article about SL. That was back in June 2007 when I first joined with other avi. Y: [I heard of SL] from a friend, then from TV.
	Introduction for professional reasons	Introduced to Second Life for non-leisure related reasons	B: I was listening to NPR [National Public Radio] and the woman they interviewed was a librarian from UCLA … and she said how useful virtual worlds were. Then a co-worker told me the same week. So I logged on. K: I was invited to attend a virtual meeting … it was political … related to the US Presidential election … I never found that meeting … got distracted by the experience on the way in … ☺
	Introduction via Internet	Introduced to Second Life through coverage on the Internet	C1: I downloaded the tool out of curiosity after reading about it on the internet. C2: I read about SL on a blog I follow and it was about the time that I bought a computer that was actually capable of running SL. So I

			tried it out of curiosity.
	Joining SL like puberty	Joining Second Life being compared to the intense and emotional experience of puberty	L: Can I tell you something that I think joining SL is like? … It came to me a few months back after a love break up. Well it's like going through puberty. You join and suddenly the world is new and exciting. You are sexually attractive and others are attracted to you. You just want to go out and enjoy it all. I have wondered so many times if this is the experience of others and why it is so … it fascinates me. *I: I think it is a common experience. Like puberty it is a very intense thing. Emotions run high.* L: YES. *I: Is that what you found?* L: Absolutely.
	Quick learning	Being a quick learner of how Second Life works, when first joining	*I: So when you first came to SL, did it take you long to 'settle in'?* M1: Not that long, gladly I found some people very quick who helped me a lot and teached me – and in some ways I am able to learn quick ☺ … in those things I can learn quick and had kind of experience in similar games like Sims before and good teachers here. S5: … I'm not afraid to ask for help, say on Help Island or online chat, if I need it.
	Taking time to get started and settle	Taking a while to settle into Second Life and find out how it works	*I: How did it feel interacting as avatars?* B: Clumsy at first. After a couple of months, more comfortable. It's an adjustment, but worth it. C2: I think I was pretty much an observer for 6 months or more. I didn't meet many people here … but I explored a lot. It wasn't until I bought land that I felt a bit more tied to the place. H: I am still trying to settle ☺ … always some things new to learn and the people are always so different that you never really know where you are do you ☺ *I: … how long did it take you to find your feet in SL?* L: Well, quite a while I guess and I still can't walk in a straight line … smiles. Erm, I did find it quite hard. I had never been in a virtual world before or even a chat room. So 'brb' sounded like a burp or something to me … hehe. Yeah so I had to learn that language as well as knowing what a prim was, etc. *I: How long did it take to figure out how SL worked?* M4: Gosh, a whole year I think, [M4] is not my first avi BTW. S5: [S5] is not my first av. I had one before, maybe 1.5 years earlier. I think I created "her" out of curiosity, I wanted to see what this SL is, and why such a lot of people "play" it. Initially it's been very boring for me, I had only one friend on my contact list and didn't do anything, just logged in for a couple of times and then gave up.
	The help of others	Getting settled and started in Second Life with the help of others	D: I had a few friends on that tried to help, just was still hard – I didn't understand it … I'm not computer literate. L: I found New Citizens Incorporated. Tried to make hair and looked awful. lol … Somebody kindly agreed to help me with a

			"makeover" and that was a bit better … went to a good class on appearance and a basic building class. NCI is really an excellent place for noobs I think. M3: … when I been in here in first time there was a girl fake me too. But then I met a people that helped me.
Reduction	Intention to leave	Thinking of leaving Second Life	D: It's making me to think now … I'm thinking seriously bout my stay here to be less. *I: Is it [the fact that environment in Second Life has changed and people have no respect for others] making you feel like you don't want to be here?* M1: Well kind of not being at those places where they are. And sometimes just not joining SL at all.
	Missing people	Missing people who have left Second Life	C1: … I'd say losing friends [is the worst thing about SL]. Sometimes people you like just go away, no news, etc. So that's not much fun … [it feels] like in RL really, when you sometimes wonder about "What happened to XYZ? It's been so long since I heard from him/her". So it's sort of melancholy, nostalgia, sometimes a little bit of protectiveness, when you know it's about someone who was in a difficult situation and you'd like to know s/he is ok. M3: She disappeared 2 years ago, Memorial Day holiday … we don't know if she died or just chose to leave. She had told us that she had left here once before … we grieved for her a long time. We discussed her every day.
	Reducing time online	Reducing the amount of time spent in online environments, including Second Life	H: I have a Twitter account, but hardly go there now. I have messenger and Skype but don't think I have used them at all. M4: I used to Facebook but I've pretty much given up, I do Skype for school related stuff, I don't used any other social networking, although I'm probably going to go to Linkedin soon, OH and I used to Livejournal but I don't anymore. S3: My real life got busy and I had to cut back. I decided to sell my music sim there [Inworldz, another virtual world]. Sold it to some "tinies" [extremely small avatars, resembling animated stuffed animals] kept it as … I left Inworldz. S5: A couple of months later I met someone here in SL, we directly had a "link" to each other and we took it over to RL step by step. We're now together in RL for around one year, and since we began to have contact in RL, our SL got less and less. He never came back, completely quit SL after maybe 4 years of playing very regularly. It was natural to leave SL behind, and it was easy and not a fight. So yes, this was my main reason why I stopped being in SL.
	Taking breaks	Having periods of time not being in Second Life	Y: My last time online here was in early February, this year. *I: Have you been away from SL?* Y: Since then, yes. *I: When did you come back?* Y: I had some long breaks from here. The day we've talk in that group [New Citizens Inc., where the participant was

				recruited] … 5 mins before your message [the message sent requesting research participants]… your message was the first.
	Relationship with SL	Curiosity	Joining Second Life due to curiosity and the continuing experience of curiosity in every day Second Life	C2: … I was primarily interested in the concept of a virtual world, mainly because of some professional curiosity – I do some work in geographic information systems. *I: How did you come to be in IMVU?* D: Advertisement and curiosity. *I: What were you curious about?* D: £D virtual. K: I have been in IT for almost 25 years … but I had never encountered anything like this … ☺ I was, of course, fascinated … ☺ … Insatiable curiosity [keeps me coming to SL] … it draws me everyday … I awaken with it every morning … SL is only a slice of RL for me … sometimes that curiosity is deeply satisfying … and sometimes it gets me into very deep trouble … M2: … I feel curious what I will meet next my day lol … ☺ like I find you. *I: What kind of person would you describe yourself as?* S1: Just your average upper middle class college educated American with an open and curious mind.
		Dislike of Linden Labs	Negative attitude toward the Linden Labs [the organisation that built and maintains Second Life]	S2: … Yeah they do a pretty good job of letting people do whatever they really want here. I just don't like LL as a group. I like their work, but not them … I've lost two accounts to them really … One as because according to them, I stole my own account and was "denying use to the original owner" and the second time, I was hacked, reported it and they sided with the hacker who changed all the data.
		Sentimental	Having sentimental feelings towards time spent, people and places in Second Life	S5: I had a break for a couple of months, then I begin to log in from time to time. I am a very ... I don't know the English word. I like memories. *I: Sentimental?* S5: And I have a lot of good memories with SL. Yes ☺ … I think she [the avatar] is one of the reasons I still come back, I am sentimental about her. Y: I miss my close friends only. And some nice places.
	SL takes over	Addiction and obsession	Feeling addicted to being in and obsessed with Second Life	A: … actually THIS is the worst thing of SL: it can make addictive like a drug. especially creative people are endangered. Or the desperate or sad ones with a somehow difficult RL. I would count myself to the first group. I'm thankful having a quite nice RL with job and family. But … RL and SL has to be balanced. D: … I do feel it's addictive. *I: Have you felt addicted?* D: Yes .*I: Do you feel addicted now?* D: Somewhat I do … I want to leave … but something I think the people or something bring me back, I'm not sure. M2: I never feel I don't like it [coming to SL] until now. lol … I think I am addictive. lol … You know even I spend whole my time on it, but I never be bored. Always there are surprises. S4: About 1½ years ago, I set up a time table

			… so that I won't become a stranger to my friends and family. *I: Were you spending too much time here?* S4: Yes, SL is quite addicted. *I: You said your opinion has changed a lot … in what way?* S5: Now I think it can be dangerous, addictive, affect our RLs a lot … I think I have been addicted to SL. I'm not an addictive personality. I have never been addicted to anything else, not cigarettes, alcohol, drugs or whatever. Not even any other games. But this here – I don't know. Maybe it's been the people I have been addicted to. When I got rid of my "close relationships" here, I got less and less addicted and interested in SL itself. And now it doesn't play an important role in my life anymore. Y: I guess it's the addiction for SL [that is the worst thing]. *I: Were you ever addicted?* Y: Yes, few weeks, in the beginning.
	Immersion in SL	Feeling like one is inside and engaged with the Second Life world itself	A: This is a funny thing: when I'm here "inside" my avatar, I see this world with her eyes. Once I tried to talk to a friend via Skype in parallel, but it didn't work for me. My avatar became a static wax puppet. C1: …I was already well versed in conversing through the net, having participated, played, and role-played during years online. But this is by far the most complex and visually engaging environment I've used. M4: It's easy to get lost in here. S5: It's still interesting to see what people are doing here, how they create, live, compete. But when I see that, it doesn't feel like I'm part of it anymore. Before I had my SL break I always felt like being INSIDE SL, being a true part of it. For example – now here, in this interview situation, I would have felt like sitting on your chair, being in your house. Now I feel like sitting in my home, watching something on the screen and chatting to someone who is probably in a university setting. So it's way different. It doesn't feel like my life anymore … *I: Did all of these [doing things in SL] feel like it was "you" doing it?* S5: Yes absolutely. And I think emotionally it was true. I was involved with all my feelings. I didn't have a long SL, maybe one very intense year, but in this time I guess I tried out most of the things you can do in SL. Maybe not most, but a lot lot lot ☺
	In SL even if don't feel like it	Coming into Second Life even when not in the mood to be there	*I: Do you come to SL even if you don't feel like it?* M3: Sometime, yes … silly isn't it? *I: Why is that?* M3: Why is it silly or why do I do it? *I: Both* ☺M3: Heh. It's silly because there are RL things one could do to amuse oneself, especially if you're in a bad mood. And I do it because I'm looking for something new to take me out of the bad mood, or to see someone (hopefully) that I haven't seen in a while … it would be a shame to miss them because I'm home pouting in RL!
	Obligation of	Relationships in	K: There were [obligations] until last week …

	relationships	Second Life as involving obligation to come to Second Life	that is under a cloud of uncertainty at the moment … and these constraints were imposed upon me by a relationship … and I happily accepted them and regrettably violated the understanding I had in a relationship … I do not consider that a burden… but I have been otherwise free of any constraints … Mostly [the kind of things that bother me in SL is] … I think when folks bring their RL in and share it with me without my asking about it … I can be as compassionate as the next person … but I do not come here with the expressed purpose of absorbing the ills of others' RL … I will help – listen and advise as necessary – people with whom I have a real friendship … S1: … I guess it was because I had made friends with people on my old av that wanted to do things that I didn't want to do anymore, but I didn't have the heart to unfriend them because they were nice. S2: [I have] Only a few [obligations in SL], and I have severed them before to get myself away from here for breaks or vacations x3 *I: What kind of obligations are/were they?* S2: Friends, my workplaces. That's about it. *I: Are friends an obligation?* S2: They are friends, and nobody likes to leave them behind to an unknown fate.
	Obligations	Other aspects of life involving obligation to come to Second Life	*I: Do you feel like you have obligations in SL?* D: Yes … payments on space here is one like RL, I have bills and is crazy I think to feel this way. M4: I used to Mod a fashion groups but … I don't really have time to hold an SL job or be a Guild Elder, though I have TA'd or otherwise helped out in the past. S5: There are some differences [between the person in SL and RL] of course, [S5] has no work, no tasks, no … I need to look up the word. *I: Obligations?* S5: Yes ☺ T: … I have seen a lot of that [people having jobs, groups, friendships they need to support or come online even if they don't want to], particularly when people partner. … I don't [have obligations]. I have had friends that seemed to be very needy for time and attention, and I always found myself feeling pressured so avoided. Nothing that requires or forces me to come online … I am pretty matter of fact. I don't waste time very often, and I avoid commitments. Even the program I was taking became too much of a drain on time.
	Problem with others' problems	Other people's problems in Second Life being a burden	K: Mostly [the kind of things that bother me in SL is] … I think when folks bring their RL in and share it with me without my asking about it … I can be as compassionate as the next person … but I do not come here with the expressed purpose of absorbing the ills of others' RL … I will help – listen and advise as necessary – people with whom I have a real friendship … S4: I seem to be an attraction for helping

			people. If I want or not … sometimes the problem can be very difficult. And I hate to disappoint people with a "I don't know a solution for your problem".
	SL as real life	Second Life as an alternative to life in the physical world	S3: … to her, she said, it was her real life … the person she was "meant to be". IT was the only time she was happy. I thought "wow how creative she is, build herself a second life".
	Staying online	Being continuously online and in Second Life	*I: How much time do you spend here?* C1: Hmmm. There are two sides. In the actual viewer, with the 3D visuals, between 3 and 6 hours daily, more or less. During day time, I also often connect using a text viewer, makes the SL experience seem like a basic text chat room. So on average, I'd say around 5 hours … a lot of that time is spent idling actually … just standing at home, doing something else in another window. Like actual work ☺ … I just stay connected like I'd be connected on a messenger system, MSN, etc…. Due to my job and hobbies, I am online a lot anyways. So when I was on my PC, I had SL opened the same way throughout the years. M1: … I am mostly logged in, but not always doing something in here … then RL comes up, like cleaning my apartment, cooking, RL friendships and those stuff … so RL at all and peeking in in between … I have friends here who need someone to listen and mostly get back on me then so I'm kind of available and see can reply faster than checking mails first what I prolly do twice a day. T: I'm probably [online] an hour a week. I don't just leave it running, as I used to. *I: Did you have it on in the background while you did other stuff?* T: Yes. I was available to be contacted. I also listened to [music] streams I had coming to my land.
	Sucked into SL	The experience of being pulled into Second Life and time passing without realisation	A: Sooner or later, everybody who is a frequent user is Lord or Lady of the Eye Rings, at least for a certain phase. *I: … what is the Lord of the Eye Rings?* A: Don't you know Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings"? *I: Yes. Ooh you mean SL is like the ring?* A: So we are then Linden's "Lord/Lady of the Eye Rings". *I: Drawing you in.* A: The next morning after another too short night … in English: Grommets. In German literally Eye Rings = Augenringe. This play on words doesn't work exactly in both languages. M4: It's easy to get lost in here. *I: How much time were you spending here then?* S5: Maybe four hours a day. Longer at weekends. I think my eyes have been squared … and I didn't sleep much ☺ I don't regret it at all, but I'm glad it's over … because it killed my RL time.
	Too much time	Spending what is seen as an excessive amount of time in Second Life	*I: So how much time do you spend in SL now?* D: Quite a lot more than I really should … about sometimes varies from 6 to 8 hours, some days not much at all. L: Too much probably. It doses depend but as I only work half a week, I tend to be here for

				a few hours on my days off, like this morning. And I come for one evening a week. I am not sure of the hours. M4: Probably more than I should, my therapist put me on a diet of 4-6 hours a week … At one time it was 2-3 hours a day! S1: Way too much! But that will change when school starts back up and now that I'm working full time again.
Worlds interaction	Balancing worlds	Fit SL around RL	Use Second Life when time and obligation in the physical world allows	K: I work in RL … but I tend not to allow SL to interfere with my work … I am an independent contractor … sometimes I am busy and sometime not … M1: … then RL comes up, like cleaning my apartment, cooking, RL friendships and those stuff … so RL at all and peeking in in between … I have friends here who need someone to listen and mostly get back on me then so I'm kind of available and see can reply faster than checking mails first what I prolly do twice a day. S3: I am extremely busy, I have a very busy real life, as a therapist, and I raise and show purebred poodles. Also write music … And. I run a therapy business in SL under a different name.
		Keeping a perspective	Taking the view that what happens in Second Life isn't important enough to get upset over	S2: I wouldn't really take many things to heart since it's not something that happens IRL … I've gone through enough crap in my life to get a firm understanding of how to deal with stress.
		RL takes priority	Obligations, events and people in the physical world are more important than those in Second Life	B: … I pretty much let people know that I am available to help but that my RL responsibilities come first. In some cases I have stayed online to help someone who was upset or confused. But I always knew I had the option to be frank with the person and log off if necessary. C2: I think it was the recognition that as intriguing as this place can be … it isn't a match for RL. And also a recognition that I have to balance out my life … I have a job and a RL personal life, and I need to attend to those as well. And basically the novelty wore off. N: I have a family that's sacred … *I: It sounds like it is sometimes hard to keep what happens in SL separate from RL.* N: Well sometimes yes. But RL is the first ^^
		SL killing RL	Being in Second Life taking priority over and ultimately reducing involvement in life in the physical world	S5: … I think my eyes have been squared … and I didn't sleep much ☺ I don't regret it at all, but I'm glad it's over … because it killed my RL time.
	Bleed-through	Knowledge of another's RL	The role of having knowledge of others' lives in the physical world	D: I suppose it's a little different, but people have made me to cry, get mad and all that … even feel like a stranger … and RL is diff cause I know I'm looking at and taking to – here might be a man, might be a woman.

			T: I do not Role Play as many do. To establish a relationship, I feel it does help to know something. I it is obviously a comfort level. Some will show pictures and use voice. Others don't. Relationships can, and have, developed through text based, but it varies … there are a lot of relationships that occur in many ways. I have a difficult time just maintaining much with an anonymous avatar.
	RL-SL not separate	Not being possible to separate the kind of person one is and the impact of events, experiences and relationships, in Second Life and the physical world	C1: I don't necessarily agree with the whole "SL is SL, RL is RL" that is so common around here. Feelings and emotions you feel are always RL. The avatar is only a secondary vector, but it projects your own emotions and behaviours. I think if you behave like an A-hole in SL, it's you. Not your avatar … no excuses ;) T: When it comes to developing relationships with people, I have been 'me'. I have been criticized for not Role Playing. I don't see the complete RL/SL separation that others are able to maintain.
	Sharing RL with people in SL	Giving people in Second Life personal details of life in the physical world	C1: In terms of committed relationships, I have one in RL. I can be monogamous here in SL, of course, but as I said, I'm flirty … and I ensure people know I am in SL. So people are informed. C2: I will tell people what I do, discuss how my day was, what community I live in, but I won't often share a photo of myself or a non-SL email address. Nor do I like to contact SL people outside of SL … e.g. through Skype. *I: Are there sometimes exceptions, you said "won't often"?* C2: I have in the past, but wasn't comfortable with it. *I: How do you decide who and what to tell?* D: Hmm well pretty much my profile tells it. But I don't know some people so I only share with those who I've known a good while. L: I am reasonably open, but I don't give my full name, address etc. Just about what I do, and my RL circs. M3: The only thing I'm hesitant to share is my age, cause some people get turned off by that. M4: [I share my RL with] Only my most trusted friends and even then we censor a bit, we've never asked each other for personal identifiers like real names, locations, etc. *I: Do people in SL know about your RL?* N: … Real name or like this? No. When I have mail contact is not my personal mail … is a mail for SL. Well some close friends know that I'm a woman married and all this. S2: Only my most trusted friends know me IRL, and we don't even know each other's cell number XD We may have seen each other over webcam, talked a lot on voice or even dated (which is extremely rare) but in all I keep things to a need to know basis. S5: … I didn't make a strict censorship. My good friends knew a couple of facts about me … But there have been only two people who

			got my RL name or RL pics.
	Sharing SL with people in RL	Telling people in the physical world about life led in Second Life	*I: Do people in RL, besides work colleagues, know about your virtual lives?* B: Oh definitely. Children, spouse, friends. It's not a secret… some think it is "cool". Some don't get it and wonder why I like it. C1: Only a couple [of people in RL know about SL]. But I keep it to the basics. I sometimes use SL, it's fun, it's a hobby, and I get off on it, sometimes. Only two people know. In RL I mean. C2: A few [people in RL know about my SL] … but I generally don't discuss it. L: Yes [ppl in RL know about my SL] but not about all of it. Have to admit I am a fan of SL romance. Smiles … so that bit I don't talk about. *I: Do people in RL know about your SL?* M2: Yep. My whole family. *I: What do they think of it?* M2: Lol my bro when he sees me dancing on pole been shock and laugh how a crazy I'm … my parents hmmm doesn't say anything. M4: My closest people do [know about my SL] but most people don't, I find that people who don't do any kind of virtual gaming just don't "get it" and I have to admit, most of what happens here sounds pretty silly when you try to tell someone about it, so I just keep it to myself. I like that SL is a private world anyway, that's sorta the point. *I: Do people in RL know about you being in SL?* N: No. Never ☺ … is my personal world. *I: Are you open with people in RL about SL?* S1: Yes, especially if I know they are into computers or technology. *I: Do people in RL know about your SL?* T: Yes, some have over time, but most don't care … we never get to that level of discussion, unless it is someone from SL that then becomes a contact in RL. There are very few, and they are not local. Y: … some friends [in RL know about my SL]. Because they are friends and I'm not addicted to SL, they are OK with it.
	Transfers between SL and RL	Transfers of experience, development and relationships between Second Life and the physical world	B: … in some cases being a librarian bleeds through conversations. Such as the dragon sim. People will say, are you really a librarian? And then you are talking in the dragon avatar but you are drawing on your experiences as a librarian. H: In SL I am totally different than I was at first here. I have more confidence here now. *I: In RL?* H: Well yes that too. Cos I am doing a degree. Would never have tried that before. *I: You mentioned this when we first spoke … are you doing your degree because of SL?* H: Yes I wanted to learn all this. M2: I met many people are really my best friends not just in SL, they become also RL … I know everything about them, we are so close and if someone have problem we try to help like friends.

				I: Has anything you learned transferred to RL? M4: Good question *thinks* … I think I've learned to stop looking for acceptance among people who are never going to give it and that it's more important to be comfortable with yourself than to try to conform to a situation that you feel just isn't right for you. S5: A couple of months later I met someone here in SL, we directly had a "link" to each other and we took it over to RL step by step. We're now together in RL for around one year, and since we began to have contact in RL, our SL got less and less.
	RL-SL relationship	Different behaviour in SL to RL	Having different behaviour in Second Life compared to in the physical world	*I: So would you say you are the same in SL as in RL?* C1: … there are specificities when I am in SL, of course. I wouldn't leap off a building in RL ;) *I: Do you do things in SL you wouldn't necessarily do in RL?* S5: I have from time to time. Not as much as I used though … I think the type of people I was meeting at certain places were really not the type of people I wanted to hang around with, plus sometimes I'd try to go back to the sims and they were gone so I just sort of gave up. *I: Do you ever do things in SL you would never dream of in RL?* S4: Oh, yes. Nudist beaches.
		Positive influence of SL on RL	Experiences in Second Life having a positive effect on life in the physical world	L: You know it's a strange thing and I am not sure now how much changing jobs has to do with it as that came at the same time. But I am so much more chilled since I came to SL. Before, my head was fill of must pay this bill, or organise that trip or fix that in the house or do that at work. Worrying about this and that. And now my head is full of nice SL things. Not all of it of course. M3: I have grown up so much … *I: So has being in SL changed you?* M3: Definitely. It has reactivated and fulfilled my need for socialization. As we age, friends get married, have children, move away, develop different interests. I have never married nor had children, so I have lived differently than the norm. And I don't age discriminate … as long as there are common interests and goodwill, what's the difference?
		RL as "better" than SL	Life in Second Life as inferior to that in the physical world	C2: I think it was the recognition that as intriguing as this place can be … it isn't a match for RL. And also a recognition that I have to balance out my life … I have a job and a RL personal life, and I need to attend to those as well. And basically the novelty wore off. K: Yeah … if you could see real and not scripted body language …? It would be a very different ball game … voice gives some clues … but the façade of misrepresentation is hard to maintain over time … RL tends to be more consistently reliable than SL … one is not better than the other … ☺
		RL insufficient	Second Life as being able to offer opportunity or	S5: I realized that there is a lot inside me that is not satisfied or even touched in RL … The relationship I had in RL lasted for about six

		quality of life not possible in the physical world	years. We always got along very good, didn't argue – he has been my best friend as is still a good friend of mine. But now I think it has been not intense enough for me. It felt like paddling on the surface. Y: Can't find now anything to test my limits in RL. Maybe they are, but I don't know. And I'm pretty open to things. But maybe I understand them better now.
	RL-SL differences	Differences in characteristics of Second Life and life led in the physical world	C1: I can be "shy" in RL, but in SL, obviously, I don't care … I go to people and crack silly jokes, which I would not necessarily do in RL. C2: I like the fact that it is virtual … you can both create something that reflects our virtual lives … and at the same time, do things physically impossible here. K: In terms of appearance there are a number of differences … my hair is not white in RL … it is dark brown … but the white hair marks me as older and there are some tedious youngsters here who will avoid me for that … *laughs* … I am not as toned or tanned as [K] … I tend to take more risks here than in RL … I tend to be a social recluse in RL … I tend to have closer friendships among a few and few overall friendships in RL … *I: Does it [Second Life] give you anything you can't get in RL?* S2: Yeah, the ability to fly, beat the hell out of people, join the military, argue and not get decked … The list goes on x3 *I: How long did it take you to realise you could be different here in SL?* S4: I'm not sure if I ever had this thought. What I did was natural, without thinking about the reasons. I had an idea, or wanted to do something – so I did. T: [T] is fairly similar [to who I am in RL]. The other [alt] will go to places I wouldn't, such as dance clubs, vampire clubs, etc. hang out with furries. This is pretty much in the past now. When the other comes in, he only has a few current contacts and has been to a dance club or two … *I: Were you different then in terms of "not being yourself"?* T: Yes, I would say so. I would never go to strip clubs in RL, and others I mentioned.
	RL-SL similarities	Similarities between characteristics of Second Life and life in the physical world	A: In some ways [SL and RL are similar] … since you interact with real persons behind the avatars. Even when they prefer to change gender, shape or even to prefer appearing as a plush puppet. M4: There are some things I consciously WON'T do in SL because I would NEVER do them in RL. I don't think it's a good idea to practice something you don't like, because it becomes part of you.
	SL allowing opportunities not possible in RL	Being in Second Life allowing people to do things they cannot necessarily do in the physical world	D: I am quite laid back at home and somewhat bored and here I can do things not possible in RL, like travelling. M1: … I think [what I like most about SL is] to be able to talk with people all over the

				world and the freedom here … so starting things what I can't do in RL, like designing and having a company, see other (rebuild) places where I can't get in RL because too far away.
		SL reflecting RL	Experiences in Second Life having similarities to experiences in life in the physical world	M4: [M4] is a werewolf, she is originally based on the Red Riding Hood fairytale except with a twist – Little Red Riding Hood just happens to BE the Big Bad Wolf. I was living in Artsonia village before the sim closed, and they don't take kindly to monsters there. I was liked by some, tolerated by others but mostly I just always felt like an Outsider. I realised after a while I had recreated my own social experience in RL – yay Subconscious! *giggles* S3: When I first separated from [the original avatar] and created [S3], it was because [the original]'s SL life was starting to mimic my real life too much. I couldn't believe it … I created the same boring life in SL, that I had in RL.
		SL satisfying something RL cannot	Second Life offering opportunities for fulfilment in areas that life in the physical world cannot	S3: I learn from them [other people] … What's important to people in SL … what is the commonality. Quite often, love, loneliness etc., broken hearts. *I: That sounds sad.* S3: Yes … but maybe good for those who can find in SL what they are not able to find in RL. *I: Do you think those things are very common in SL?* S3: Yes I do. I think if your life is great and full … why join SL? If you have everything you want in RL, then why would you waste your time in SL? It's pretty cool. You take someone in RL who is in a wheelchair, and can walk and dance in SL, etc.
	Virtual worldliness	Other virtual worlds	Experiences of using other virtual worlds and being generally inferior to Second Life	*I began interviews asking people if they visited other virtual worlds.* A: I have visited GermanGrid, because our "town major" (= sim owner) decided to move his buildings to this cheaper environment, but it was boring … because there were yet less people in there than in SL. We have enough abandoned places here. D: I have tried 2 other, Avination and IMVU … IMVU doesn't have all the same ways can't do as much activities. Avination is cheaper, I haven't tried it enough to actually know. *I: Do you still use them now?* D: I plan to go back to Avination. M2: … and before I was been in IMVU, it's also 3D chat but I didn't like it … first there is only silly things you can do in IMVU, party, dating, shopping and dancing. And there I met only bad guys they only looking on GF. Even I didn't stay too long. M4: I have a hobbit on LOTRO [Lord Of The Rings Online] but I don't use her much. S1: I tried World of Warcraft a couple of times, but couldn't really get into it. S2: I used to [use other virtual worlds], but they were overly annoying and never once could I get the customization that I wanted.

			S3: I left SL for a while and moved over to Inworldz.com I liked it better. I became an Inworldz mentor, owned a sim and a live music venue there … I sold my sim there and left due to personal reasons, busy … I also bought a sim in Avination but left there. I don't care for Avination.
	Other worlds behind SL	Other virtual worlds not as advanced as Second Life, technically or socially	A: Meez is a pseudo 3D environment … mainly for a teenage audience … in comparison to SL, it is rather primitive. B: [I spend in each of the virtual worlds, including SL] about 2 hours a day total. I check on them. But Second Life is my primary one. The others don't see many people just yet. D: IMVU doesn't have all the same ways, can't do as much activities. L: I tried Inworldz and Blue Mars … Inworldz is way behind SL and in Blue Mars I didn't like the fact that you couldn't create as you do in SL. And actually both were pretty empty.
	Perspectives of other worlds	The characteristics of other virtual worlds	B: … Jokaydia is growing. They are mostly from Australia and that is good for me, to see other perspectives. OS Grid is comprised of many educators but they are very independent, run their own sims. It is a little more difficult to connect, but rewarding. S3: [Avination] didn't have the same warm feel as Inworldz. And also, if I was going to help build a smaller virtual world, my loyalties were with Inworldz. I did not like the vibe there as much anyway. Inworldz is much warmer.
	Pioneer spirit of other worlds	Other virtual worlds being less advanced than Second Life and so offering a more pioneer experience	S3: From SL I went over to Inworldz.com. Explored there for a while … Inworldz, I discovered was like SL was when SL first started 6 or so years ago … probably longer. So, I got to see what SL would have been like had I joined earlier … Once I got to Inworldz, I found the people much different, a totally different vibe. I felt more like a pioneer in a new world. Things did/do not run as smooth. You crash and freeze a lot.
	Similarity across worlds	Continuity of avatar and personality across the different virtual worlds used	B: … I use a generic one [avatar] here in SL for library work. This is the one that comes free and I just added hair. In the other grids I use the generic one and add clothes when I can to make it more professional. *I: Do they all look similar?* B: Yes they do in a sense. *I: And do they have the same name?* B: In Second Life I am [B]. In OS grid, Reaction grid and Jokaydia, I am *[the same name. All of the participant avatar names have the word library in them] … I: What about the other worlds, do you feel different there?* B: In the other virtual worlds, I have not had an opportunity to get another avatar. The library one has been enough, as I am trying to establish some new relationships with educators. *I: Do you feel like the same person/librarian in all the worlds in that case?* B: Well librarian is my profession, not my whole persona… *I: So does some of your*

			persona come into evidence even in other worlds? B: I think my ability to help people comes through. I think my friendliness and curiosity comes through, no matter what world or what avatar. Sometimes my impatience with hurtful people comes through too. *I: Is the same person in SL the same that was in IRC and other IM tools?* C1: Yes, pretty much. Flirty, Chatty, Silly? Yeah, definitely ☺
	SL as the only or main virtual world	Second Life as being the main experience of virtual worlds	B: Second Life is my favourite, because there are many more librarians here. C1: I am active in various instant messenger tools … but SL is the only virtual community of this type that I use. C2: SL was my first experience in a virtual world. And I did look into other places … but kept coming back here. M1: I didn't log into Avination for a few month now, just been there 3 times or so … so if virtual world, then it's just SL. M4: I have a hobbit on LOTRO [Lord Of The Rings Online] but I don't use her much. *I: So mainly in SL?* M4: Yes mostly SL. S3: I am now back in SL … started playing around in SL again … I felt guilt about not returning to Inworldz instead … I had full plans to return to Inworldz ….. but came to SL instead. I guess I like being fluid. S4: … I have an av in Open Life and 3D Rock, but I am totally not active there. *I: Do you use other virtual worlds?* S5: No, never. *I: Can you tell me, do you use any other virtual worlds besides SL?* Y: Like similar "games" or something? *I: Yes.* Y: No. I've heard about others, but no thanks.

Second Life Usage (SEBE procedure stage one) interviews

The Global Theme: Interactions

Organising Theme	Basic Theme	Initial code	Description	Example quotes
Interacting with others	Representation	Appearance	The role of appearance and dressing appropriately in Second Life.	AM: The clothes, some of them, they're absolutely lovely, because have you noticed in Second Life, it's very hard for a woman to cover all her bits up. *I: Well if you do it's like making a statement as opposed to the other way round.* AM: I know. *IM: They're all supposed to be making a statement with no clothes on.* AM: What do you do Simon, you know? If you don't you've got your boobs hanging out. You know, everybody thinks, 'Oh she's up for it.' If you cover them up they, as you say, make a statement. Then they question you why and I'll say,

			'Well-,' *I: It's strange isn't it?* AM: You know, I don't like to show my wares thank you very much. *I: If you're a man it's not like that at all.* AM: No, it isn't. Oh and that's another thing …
			SG: What I do is, I normally, depending upon the audience, so if it's a casual conversation or an interview like in the Virtual World Education Round Table, where we are just sitting across with colleagues and talking across the round table, then I would, I'm normally quite professionally dressed, I think. I don't know, it's for the viewer to say, but I would dress, not in a very-, I would dress in a normal-, like when I go to the University. If I was going to be presenting where I am standing and it's a formal conference and event, then I would make sure that I had proper shoes, I have proper-, perhaps a blazer or a jacket, so I would make sure, as if I would do it in real life, as if I was going to Coventry to do a presentation. *I: Is that for your benefit or for the viewer's benefit, the other viewers?* SG: I would say that it is just how I present myself. Also to give respect to the people who come, because I think that, whenever we dress well or we present ourselves well. If somebody invites us to their house, and we go and we dress up well, it's not only for us to look good and to feel good about ourselves, but it is also to give respect to the person whom you are visiting. That they have made an effort, we've given this invitation and they have made this effort to dress up well and come to us.
	Representation in SL	Representing and presenting oneself in Second Life and how it may be different to the physical world.	*I: Just to come back, what is the difference in Second Life, do you think, that you have more fun and maybe feel more confident earlier, or easier?* SG: I think because I'm not so worried about how people are perceiving me. How I look in real life, or how I sit in real life, they are just perceiving me on the basis of what my avatar is, and if they know me about my research they only have that lens in their mind. *I: So do you think in Second Life, there's, like, a portion of you that is being presented.* SG: That is right. *I: Whereas, if you meet somebody in real life, actually there's much more-, it might still only be a portion but it's a far bigger portion.* SG: Exactly, so that, and I as I said, I'm not very open and confident in real life, in the first instance, it takes me some time to build up that tempo, that momentum, and I think that is another barrier for me. Whereas in Second Life I sit in a conference, I sit in an event in the corner or in the front, it doesn't really matter. In the real world, you would go out for a cup of tea with them, they would look at your badge from where you are, they would talk to you. All that adds to my worries, my internal worries, nobody bothers me,

			nobody is unkind to me, it is just my own inner way, it takes me time. Once the tempo builds up and I'm able to identify people and I'm able to talk to people and feel comfortable, then I feel alright. But at the end of the conference, wherever I've been, if I look back there are only two or three people that I remember. Any conference in real life.
Social relations	Friend lists	Using the list of friends in Second Life and how it relates to the friends with whom one has regular contact.	L: … probably the first thing I'd do would look to see who was online, my friends, whether I feel like-, so, you will have, you will have loads of people on there, some of them you don't even talk to. *I: No.* L: That's how it ends up, you get these lists and there's only a few that-, so then I might drop them an IM and say hello, and then maybe meet up with some of them.
	Privacy settings	Using the programme settings to give oneself privacy.	AM: I set offline sometimes when a pest comes online I must admit, because they just don't understand English, but and then I might go round the stores, it depends.
	Socialising	The extent to which the participants socialise and who they socialise with.	AM: I will chat to friends, some of the friends if they're online … Oh no, you can talk. No, they're avatars so they've got-, they're real people with an avatar they probably got from Grendel's and you get dragons and you get pet pterodactyls and it's amazing what you can do. Yes, occasionally you will come across someone that's there just to cause trouble. You know, think they're smart alecs. It's so lovely. It's worth taking the risk of meeting someone like that. L: I'll probably go in and there will be nobody around. I don't know whether there will be anybody around. So, I might go in and I'll-, actually, probably the first thing I'd do would look to see who was online, my friends, whether I feel like-, so, you will have, you will have loads of people on there, some of them you don't even talk to … I'm thinking I might just pop to NCI Kuula tonight. *I: Do you go there quite a lot, then?* L: I haven't been there for ages, but it was, like, one of the first places I ever went. Sometimes I can still go there and there will be people I know, and I can just have a little chat to them.
	The role of courtesy	How courtesy and respect for others, or lack of it, impacts on experience of Second Life and life in the physical world.	SG: That is right, but what really bothers me is that if I reach the event well in time, I'm five or ten minutes ahead of it, and then the organiser keeps delaying it, if it was supposed to start at nine o'clock in the evening, nine o'clock start is anyway very late for us in the UK. Then you keep waiting until 9:15, just to build up the crowd, then I feel that whoever made that effort in the audience to come early, you are not doing justice to them. I was there from 8:50, you've already wasted my twenty five minutes I could have probably done five or six emails and prepared for my next day at work and because the event would start late, I will sleep late. So in fact

			I am even thinking of giving up on our University events, because they start at 9:00, they start normally at 9:15 and it just doesn't suit me because the next day I feel very tired. I have a set pattern of sleeping and a set pattern of getting up in the morning and it upsets my plans … Yes, that is right, that is why going ahead of time and preparing yourself a few hours or a day before you know about the event, is a very good idea, that you don't get into these kinds of situations where you are bothering, because I feel the courtesies of real life are even more valid in Second Life.
Interacting with the interface	Activities	Being prepared	How one of the participants spends time preparing for meetings in Second Life.	SG: Now, I have them in my diary, so those are the events that I never miss, educational events. If I'm presenting, let's say, then what I do is, I go in a little early, even if I'm attending, and if I don't know the place, and only a SLURL has been sent to me. I don't want it to be a panic at the last moment, that I reach home at 7:15, 7:30, as the event-, so I wouldn't want to look around for the place, what I do is, a day before or in the afternoon, I just go and check the location. Make a picture in my mind, where I am going to sit, where I can get some good pictures if I wanted to take a picture of the setting, and where I could hear better. So, I know you can always increase the volume, and you can do that, but I almost read it as if I'm going to be attending as in real life, and because the time is such a big constraint, Second Life is really not a part of the main profile of work at the University … Yes, that is right, that is why going ahead of time and preparing yourself a few hours or a day before you know about the event, is a very good idea, that you don't get into these kinds of situations where you are bothering, because I feel the courtesies of real life are even more valid in Second Life … *I: You wanted to tell me how you normally use Second Life.* SG: Exactly, so if I'm presenting, then a couple of days before, let's say, I'm presenting on the Wednesday or the Thursday, then once the week starts, then I get less time to go into Second Life, so what I would do is on a Saturday or a Sunday, I would go in and have a look at the location, change my attire.
		Building	The process of building in Second Life, and how time passes quickly whilst doing it.	AM: I get addicted, I must admit, to building and terraforming and landscaping especially. Oh, if I start landscaping, that's it, time just goes away. *I: Is that what happens? Does the time go or do you think, 'I'll just finish this bit'?* AM: I do. I think, 'Oh, I can't leave this. I need to get that,' and then I'll start surfing on looking through the Marketplace, because I might need something and it takes me some time, because I know exactly what I want, but I don't really want to pay for it if that makes sense? I mean, you'd make Second Life very expensive if you did that. So, yes, but

			landscaping is my downfall. I'm ashamed to admit I went in one day at 6.00am, the only time-, between 6.00am and 1.00am the next morning I only left to visit the bathroom, let the dog out, get a drink. I just got so into landscaping this sim I couldn't leave it until it was finished and that's really bad. I suppose that in away is an addiction or a compulsion, whatever … Well no, because I have to stop it, because I become so deep into it I lose track of time and then I think, 'Well, I could add this and I could add that.'
	Doing new things	Ringing in the changes by doing new things in Second Life.	*I: Do you, like, I mean, buy places or rent places just as a hobby, kind of thing, to do stuff*? L: Sometimes I just think, 'Oh, right, let's go and find somewhere else,' and I just fancy building somewhere new.
	Exploring	Exploring in Second Life.	AM: I'll go what they call sim hopping. I'll get up Search and usually the showcase sims I'll go and have a look and I'll get the map up and have a look what else is around those sims. There's some beautiful places. *I: You'll do some exploring?* AM: Yes, I like the exploring side. I haven't been-, what I used to do is go to Grendel's and I haven't been there for ages. To be honest with you I'm not sure if I've got the landmark for it now, but I love Grendel's. L: I might just go and do a little bit of exploring, or I might pop to look at the places that I sometimes go to. I'm thinking I might just pop to NCI Kuula tonight.
	Fantasy play	Discussing experiences of fantasy role play and avatars in Second Life.	AM: They've got some wonderful avatars free and they have got things that you pay for, but there's another part to Grendel's and it's this kind of barren desert wasteland but they've got all their creatures on there and you can talk to them. It's absolutely amazing … Oh no, you can talk. No, they're avatars so they've got-, they're real people with an avatar they probably got from Grendel's and you get dragons and you get pet pterodactyls and it's amazing what you can do. Yes, occasionally you will come across someone that's there just to cause trouble. You know, think they're smart alecs. It's so lovely. It's worth taking the risk of meeting someone like that … As [a previous avatar I] met this Gorean master and I said, 'I'd love to know about Gor. It interests me. I just don't understand it.' So, I used [another avatar] to learn about Gor and to keep me safe I was a white silk and that means no sex and no other Gorean master will touch you. They will respect you for that and I learnt quite a bit, but I've forgotten quite a bit of it.
	Pets	Taking care of virtual pets in Second Life.	AM: I normally go into second life at about 6, 7 am of a morning to see to the pets. I go in again, oh, it could be anything from between 1 pm and 3 pm and I always sign out at 5 pm … *I: You just said a little bit about this, but when you're in Second Life,*

				what are-, you know, in the morning you feed the animals. What have you got? AM: I've got meeroos. Oh, I love them they're so cute and I've got some cats … *I: Then in the afternoon what you do when you go online then? What do you do?* AM: In the afternoon, right, well I recheck my animals, because meeroos... *I: How often do they need seeing to?* AM: Well I suppose really once a day, but they're so cute. I know, it's terrible. *I: They just run around?* AM: Oh, they just run around, but you set the distance. I always set them to five metres. I*: Don't they get lost?* AM: Oh they can do, yes. The cats are the ones and then you have to get up and highlight your things ...
		Shopping	The experience of shopping in Second Life	AM: I'll probably go round stores … but and then I might go round the stores, it depends. *I: When you say you go round the stores, what's that? What do you mean?* AM: Well, there's a shoe store called Shoenique and they've got marvellous deals. In my opinion they're the best shoes in Second Life and they've got the lucky ball, so you can wear win the shoes if your initial letter comes up. Then I may have a look around and see what they've got new and then I will go-, I go a lot to Gorean sims, because the freebies are marvellous. Oh they are brilliant ... *I: So, you don't go to store-, you go to stores.* AM: I go to the stores for the freebies more than anything. The buildings are absolutely fantastic, but they're very high prim and sometimes you're lucky enough that they're modifiable, so you can take them apart, make them less prim, you know.
	Managing SL	Addiction	Experience of being unable to stop using Second Life.	AM: That's my deadline. Sometimes I may go in after, but if it gets to 9.00, no I won't go back in to Second Life. I've cut my hours down drastically. It's not just because I've not been well, it's because, oh, it's pointless. I could be doing something else, but I've never really been addicted to Second Life. I get addicted, I must admit, to building and terraforming and landscaping especially. Oh, if I start landscaping, that's it, time just goes away … I do. I think, 'Oh, I can't leave this. I need to get that,' and then I'll start surfing on looking through the Marketplace, because I might need something and it takes me some time, because I know exactly what I want, but I don't really want to pay for it if that makes sense? I mean, you'd make Second Life very expensive if you did that. So, yes, but landscaping is my downfall. I'm ashamed to admit I went in one day at 6 am, the only time-, between 6 am and 1 am the next morning I only left to visit the bathroom, let the dog out, get a drink. I just got so into landscaping this Sim I couldn't leave it until it was finished and that's really bad. I suppose that in away is an addiction or a compulsion, whatever.

		Cutting down	Reducing and controlling the amount of time spent in Second Life.	AM: That's my deadline. Sometimes I may go in after, but if it gets to 9.00, no I won't go back in to Second Life. I've cut my hours down drastically. It's not just because I've not been well, it's because, oh, it's pointless. I could be doing something else, but I've never really been addicted to Second Life. I get addicted, I must admit, to building and terraforming and landscaping especially. Oh, if I start landscaping, that's it, time just goes away.
		Deadline	Setting a time by which one has to stop using Second Life.	*I: So, when you said that you only have these two hours in the morning and then you have-, if you go in the afternoon and you said you normally finish about 5 pm. Do you kind of-, is that you just think, 'Right, it's 5.00 now, I will leave, I will stop now'?* AM: Yes. Unless I'm talking seriously to someone and we're discussing a problem or something like that, an issue they have, whatever, or if I'm helping someone it may run over by half an hour or an hour it has done, but usually I think, 'No, this is my cut-off time, I'm leaving.' I say goodbye to everyone and I'll log off … It depends on how long I've got in there, because I really don't want to be in past 10am, because I have a house to look after. So, I'll probably go round stores.
		Using for a purpose	Only using Second Life for specific purposes and/or events.	SG: So Simon, I normally go in for a particular purpose, so if there's a lecture, there is the Virtual World Education Round Table this afternoon, this evening in fact.
	RL-SL relationship	RL more effective than SL	The nature of meeting people in the physical world and how it is more effective for quickly building chemistry in a professional setting.	SG: So, that I won't have been able to do in the virtual world, there are certain things that when crucial decisions have to take place, or before virtual world meetings or projects have to start. Having this real world interaction in the first instance is crucial, now if I meet these people who came yesterday on Skype, or on the phone, or on email, it would be very good, because I have already established-, *I: You have already established some connection … between you.* SG: Exactly, they were empathetic to my cause, they were good to it, they understood me, I could speak to them in a way that expressed, that how much I wanted them to be on board, how much I wanted their support, I couldn't have done it even if I had the most beautiful avatar. I couldn't have conveyed those emotions and those things which I did yesterday. Having done yesterday, now I feel quite happy, I mean the time was short. *I: If it had been like your voice was involved, would that make a difference?* SG: Yes, I mean voice is involved even in the virtual world, but I think there is something about the real world Simon, that for crucial decision making meetings, or the first meetings where you are setting up a project, you require that kind of association. It may go the other way also, that sometimes, like we sometimes say too

			much familiarity also isn't very good, so maybe these meetings aren't the-, if a person meets you in real life and you somehow, sometimes it just doesn't click. Though it hasn't happened in my case, but it just hasn't clicked, then that real life meeting, in fact, dampens your spirit and your enthusiasm to meet in Second Life. It hasn't happened in my case, I can't think of any situation at the moment, maybe it will come later but I can't think of anything happening, but it may go the other way also. So it depends upon the nature of the project, the nature of that meeting, that determines. Now I have interviewed, over the past couple of years, three years, I think amongst me and my students, we would have interviewed about 50 or 60 people. Maybe I've met only five or six in real life, and those 60 people, at least out of those, 25, at least, that I have interacted with directly, I can-, even now, after two years, I feel if I sent them an email for help they will come back on board, and I have never met them in real life. Those interactions have been purely for research purposes where I have been requesting for their help. Where you have to usually work towards a common goal, like a one year research project where your neck is on the line, almost … if you don't deliver, you need people's support, you can't do it on your own, it's not like a PhD or a small project where you somehow can manage on your own, most of the time. Where you need professional input on things, like a developer or a designer, or somebody who knows geology, which I don't know and I'm building up something … which involves geology. I need to have the geologist on board, I cannot just do without you, those kinds of meetings, you really need face to face interactions up front, and then you can do it by all virtual means, whether it is Skype or Second Life or so on. *I: So, you do need a bit of real life to kick start things, in a way.* SG: Exactly. *I: To kick start the chemistry?* SG: That is right, but it depends upon the nature of your initiative, it doesn't depend upon, if we hadn't met in Second Life, real life, let's say, and Simon, if you had contacted me that [person] who had participated in my experiment it would have just been the same with me. The real life meeting wouldn't have come into play at all, hasn't come into play, because I would have, anyway, helped you as a researcher.
	SL impact on RL behaviour	The benefit of SL is building confidence without concern for other people's opinion, and how this may translate into the physical	SG: I think with age I may have matured also in real life, I don't know. Four or five years down the line, I was a bit more rigid on my own thoughts, that people <u>should</u> do this, <u>must</u> do this. I think over a period of time I feel, let them do it. Perhaps Second Life may have played a role in it, because as I told you the other day, I have much

			world.	more fun here, I mean I'm much more relaxed here. If I'm attending a real life conference or a real life event, I'm conscious about the way I'm sitting, I'm conscious about the way I'm talking. With you, Simon, it's very different, I don't know, even in the first meeting, I've been very open to you, and I've opened up very easily, I'm able to talk to you, even in emails I'm able to express myself very well. In real life I do tend to hide. I'm not so good, and I'm very conscious about, how people are perceiving me … *I: Just to come back, what is the difference in Second Life, do you think, that you have more fun and maybe feel more confident earlier, or easier?* SG: I think because I'm not so worried about how people are perceiving me. How I look in real life, or how I sit in real life, they are just perceiving me on the basis of what my avatar is, and if they know me about my research they only have that lens in their mind.
	SL characteristics	Changes	Changes that occur with respect to Second Life: people leaving, ending of relationships, change of physical world circumstances that impact on time spent inworld.	L: … sometimes these things fall apart. So, after about a year, that went. *I: There's a perfect moment for a lot of these things, isn't there, really?* L: Just a really, really nice bunch of people. *I: What happened to them?* L: What happened? Just real life stuff, I think, got in the way. A couple of the DJs just decided they didn't want to be doing a regular slot each time. I think, you know, sometimes people get into all the drama don't they, and falling out - … There was a while, I was, sort of, logging on about 5:00 or 6:00 early evening, I did that a lot recently. As I say, you have just caught me at a real change point in my life. So I've separated from my husband and I've moved into this new house and everything, and I'm just working all around. *I: Trying to work it all out.* L: Work all that out, and then have the children some of the time with him, and some of the time with me. So that's just what's happening. It's all quite amicable, but it's just a new routine. I don't know what I'm going to be doing. *I: So you don't know how it'll all work out, do you, really?* L: I have absolutely no idea how it'll work. *I: Is there a chance that you won't carry on with Second Life, just out of interest?* L: I don't think that will happen. I don't think that will happen. I think what will happen is it just goes through a-, 'Oh, here's a change time,' and then something else will come along and I'll get into a different routine with it. We'll see.
		Immersion	How sometimes activity in Second Life can absorb one's time.	L: Yes. Now and then I'll get a little project and it will just completely absorb me … It's completely absorbing, and if I'm doing one of those, I just really, really get into it.
		Noobie	The experience of shopping as a new user, and helping other users who are new as one	AM: I used to go to the Freebies Dungeon and it's a huge place with loads of freebies. *I: I used to go there a lot.* AM: And you-, I: Yes I did. AM: Oh my god! *I: I think it was the first-, I think when I first logged on it*

			becomes more experienced.	*might have been one of the very first landmarks anyone ever gave me.* AM: Yes, it was one of mine. The only thing is it's so darn laggy. *I: That's like-, don't worry, it's like that, because I haven't been there for ages, but it used to be like 40 people or more in there.* AM: Oh my god, no, you know. Sort of like 40,000. *I: Alright, we all do the same, because I've given that landmark to like loads and loads of people.* AM: I have. There's lots better stores though and I can't think of the name of them at the moment where you can get some really good freebies. Yes, I still go back to the Freebie Dungeon every now and again to see if they've got anything new. The avatars they've got there are absolutely awful. I think, 'Oh my god, the newbie looks better than that.' There again, someone might like them. Someone might think, 'Oh yes, that's nice.'
	Technology	Technical problems	Problems with Second Life technology and interface	AM: SL at the moment it's easier to TP outside of a building. *I: Why's that? Do you know?* AM: Do you remember, quite, about two or three months ago, they were doing maintenance on the main grid and someone made an error. It's never been the same since and they keep working on it, but friends lists get messed up, friends go out of your list and they think you've taken them out or you've taken yourself. You know, whatever. Like, 'What have I done?' and blah blah. 'No, you've done nothing, what do you mean?' 'You're not in my friends list.' I says, 'Well, you're in mine.' *I: Isn't that weird?* AM: Yes. Then the TPs as well, I mean, I took-, I bring my alts on every now and again to make sure they're not ruthed and sometimes I can't even TP with them.
	Using SL	Drama	How some users use Second Life to create dramatic scenes and trouble for others.	AM: Yes, I've even seen that, you know, this is a simulated soap opera or something.
		Inventory	The large number of items that accumulate in the user's inventory.	AM: I've got over 3,000 hairstyles. *I: Do you keep them all in your inventory?* AM: Yes. *I: Maybe that's why you can't TP anywhere! It's like trying to teleport with a tower block on your back*! AM: Excuse me, sorry. *I: How many items have you got in your inventory then?* AM: Well, I was just going to tell you. Over 37,000. *I: No*. AM: Or is it 27,000? I don't know. I lose count.
		Projects	Using Second Life for projects e.g. building.	L: Yes. Now and then I'll get a little project and it will just completely absorb me. *I: A personal project, or that someone's asked you to do?* L: No, my own self. It ended up now I've got two places. Yes, one on Philosophy Island and one on another island. Just, because that gave me lots of things to do.
		Routine	Examples of habits and routine that develop in	AM: I normally go into second life at about 6, 7 am of a morning to see to the pets. I go in again, oh, it could be anything from

			Second Life.	between 1 pm and 3 pm and I always sign out at 5 pm. L: I think, 'Oh, right, okay. What next?' Yes. I have had phases where - Not long after I started, there was something like every Tuesday night, I'd be there every Tuesday night, at the Original Soul Rebels, there was this really nice bunch of people, but, I don't know, sometimes these things fall apart. So, after about a year, that went.

Intersection Between Worlds (SEBE procedure stages two and three) Subcam recordings and interviews

The Global Theme: Self – Other – World Intersections

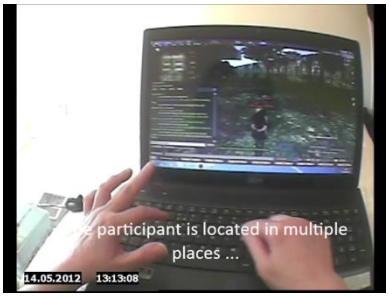
Organising Theme	Basic Theme	Initial code	Description	Example quotes
Self	Activities	Exploring	Going to locations in Second Life that have not been visited before.	SG: This is what I do at home also, or at work. If I spot something a bit interesting there, I first go and check-up what's new. So I find this Second Life doing this all very, very useful for myself … We are where the Linden Labs celebrations have been going on. Then you will notice here something which I will just take up now which I really like. I like those tours, where you can sit in something and they take you around and where a message keeps coming on as to where you are and I very much enjoy those. *I: Do they do those in Second Life do they?* SG: Yes, this is now I've noticed and I run like a child and I stop it and it-. *I: Oh one of these here? I don't think I've ever been on one.* SG: Then I sit on this, and then I'm very happy now. It's asking me, did you want a notecard, do you want to go into speed mode, and then wherever now I pass by, it's like the contextual information will keep appearing, like this is the Africa space, this island, and so on. Each little island has made up its own exhibition thing here. I very much like this because instead of the audio commentary, I like this written commentary.
		Games	Playing games in Second Life, in this example pet breeding.	*I: You're looking at your friend list by the looks of it.* AM: Yes. I don't know why I've got it up and left it up to be honest with you. Now I'm off to my roos. I just think they're absolutely gorgeous, these little meeroos, I really do. *I: How many have you got?* AM: I've only got six out now, but-, *I:* How many did you have? AM: Oh, it's the forty-fifth one, but I've got over twenty nests. I know. Oh, I do the oracle as well, because it gets-, *I: What's that?* AM: Regard points. That's on Meeroo HUD. *I: What's a regard point?* AM: Well, the more regard points you have, each level you get up to and

			then go up to the next, you get a name change where you are in the group. *I: So, you'll get a central server on here?* AM: Oh yes. *I: Right, okay.* AM: I mean I'm not as-, oh, some people, my gosh, they are so into these meeroos as in gaining higher level and regard points and that. I mean, I just go-, I just enjoy having them. When you see …
	Pets	Spending time caring for virtual pets.	*I: Oh, I see you've fed the cats and now you're going to feed the meeroos are you?* AM: Well, the cats actually feed themselves but you need to pet them. *I: Keep their emotions up?* AM: I haven't done that because their happiness levels way up and I just check to make sure they are eating, but yes, oh my gosh they're worse than having real ones really.
	Experiences of Authenticity Self	The importance of being a genuine and authentic person, not manipulating, deceiving or hurting others, or not taking what happens in Second Life seriously.	*I: Do you also keep yours [profile] up to date? Some people change them all the time, don't they? You're not like that.* L: I go for a while, then I might change it a few times. Recently I've been struggling with this because this-, I'm interested in this reality and illusion thing. A close friend of mine was saying, 'I think I might just go and create a new personality and get a new avatar.' I got really upset by it actually, I did. *I: Why?* L: It was like, well you're going to go and be a fake person or something? That's what it felt like to me. *I: Did you feel like she was going to get rid of you as well and that was offensive? Or did that not come into it?* L: He-, yes I

			did feel like that. *I: You were part of the fed up-ness.* L: Yes, I felt like that. I don't think that that's true but yes, I did feel like that. So then I was struggling in my mind with this-, well why does that not feel right? Of course people come and they do role play and they do things like that. So why doesn't that feel right? *I: Did you come to an answer?* L: Well in my profile I put that my avatar is designed but my personality is not. *I: I like that.* L: That was the closest I could come to it because I know people do react differently to-, slightly also having-, *I: Some people are very fixed on this authenticity thing, as well aren't they? They get very offended. Well very offended yes, but to them people being real, you know, not fake is very important. You're not really-, I don't think you're really-, you don't get offended by other people being fake or whatever. I mean, that's a harsh word to use. Do you know what I mean? You're not really like that, I don't think by talking to you.* L: No but if I thought-, I: You still felt you wanted to say that. L: Yes, if I-, there's a difference, isn't there, between you know that person is role playing or putting on and then someone actually deceiving you. There's a difference and how you work that out is-, *I: Deception-, when you say deceiving, is that because the difference is there is an intent to hurt?* L: Yes, I would hate to be made a fool of. It's so hard to describe it. Some people get really upset about the gender thing, which I don't know why that's such a big deal. They're not bothered about other kinds of-, pretending to be a gnome or something but they do get upset if someone's being-, if their avatar's a woman and they're actually a man. I don't see the big deal with that. I would have a big deal with, you know, you pretending to be a generous person when actually you're nasty and horrible or something. I don't know.
	Established identity	The identity in Second Life is well entrenched, others know the kind of person the participant is and what she stands for.	*I: Your identity in Second Life in this instance, does it feel very entrenched and strong, to you? Do you feel clear on who you are?* SG: Very much, and I think it's not only me, people have a picture of me. Then they contact me, they have assessed me in the right manner. The picture that I have created because of my research, and the areas that I have researched, when people approach me they have assessed me properly, that yes, this is the area that she has done research. *I: You feel like the assessment they're making of you is the assessment you want them to have?* SG: Exactly, that's why I feel very happy about it. They will approach me with the right questions, with the right event for me to participate in, or they will refer to my work rightly in this round table kind of thing, 'Ask [the participant], she's written

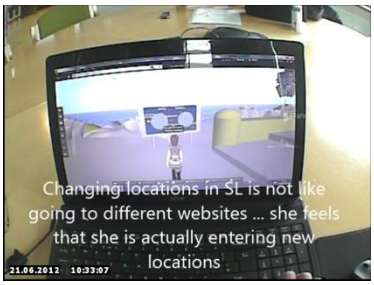
		a paper on it.' Sometimes they point out things that I have forgotten I have done … *I: I've lost my thought. I think it was something along the lines of, this management of your identity that you're able to do in the virtual environment, is that less controllable in the physical environment?* SG: Not necessarily. I've tried my best in the physical environment also to create a right kind of identity, in the sense-, I've not deliberately created it, it has implicitly developed over the period of time. I think in a virtual world I feel much more comfortable. Probably is it very focussed, in the real world there is- I: A concentrated version. SG: Concentrated, yes. It's a very focussed research area, focussed way of approaching and thinking people, whereas here it is quite diverse, in real life. I have done many things over a period of time, and people, the snapshot of the time they met me, that's the picture they carry in their mind. If they haven't met me for five years subsequent to that, they still carry the picture of the first year. Whereas in Second Life, because it has been over three years, that has only been a concentrated research area, they identify me with that, and that makes me very happy, because they don't have the history of what I did.
Location of Self	How the Self in multiple locations simultaneously, Second Life and the physical world, while feeling present in both.	*I: I'm just-, because I'm trying to figure all this out, and I'm kind of thinking, 'Ooh, isn't it strange?' You're sitting here, on the bed, with the laptop, and Harry is around, and I've just walked through the door, and you're also in here with your friend, giving her a cuddle. Where are you?* AM: I'm with her. It's kind of like-, think about it this way, when you are talking to someone new, your mind is kind of in two different areas, really. You're talking to them, they say something the other part of your mind is trying to work out, and that is kind of how you have to do it. I mean, I think I said to you a couple of times, 'Oh, wait a minute, I've got to answer,' and I will re-read what she's said to make certain I answer her properly. She knew that you were there. I told her that I was talking to you occasionally. She said, 'It's okay,' and I copied over-, I think I showed you, didn't I? I copied over your statement to the IM, what should go in IM, and I also copied over to her what was in the profile-, my profile, but yes, it's kind of like, I will listen-, I can read what she's saying. I don't have to listen. You, I can listen to … *I: So, in a way-, I mean, this might sound a bit esoteric. I'm just trying to fathom all this out). Is-, in this instance, is it like, here is your mind and there is your body, kind of thing?* AM: No. *I: You know like, if you're having an interaction with someone in real life and, like you just said, you don't know them, you're kind of*

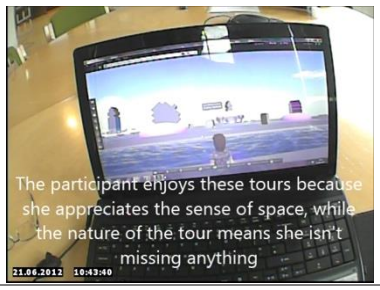
thinking at the same time as speaking, and lots of stuff going in your mind-, or even in a normal conversation, if it's an uncomfortable situation or you-, you know, you go into a situation where you're meeting all new people, or a party, or trying to make conversation, all this stuff goes on in your mind and then, like, your mouth says things. In a way, is the same going on here? Out of the side of here is your mind and inside there is your body? AM: No. *I: It's not like that?* AM: No. If it were like that, then I would be thinking that my avatar was, like, a living reality. *I: Okay, right.* AM: We can't afford to do that. *I: Do you think some people might do?* AM: Oh, I know they do. It scares me. Literally, in a way, I do get scared. *I: Do you think that's only something that happens in Second Life because of all this physicality?* AM: No. *I: Or do you think it happens in lots of different things?* AM: I think it happens in a lot of different things. It happens in these chat rooms. It happens in so many ways, really it does, and that is scary. This is how people get hurt. This is how people get attacked. Honestly.



I: You mentioned that this is like an application, I think you called it. For you, is this all it is? You know when you're going from one place to another, is it like going to different websites, almost? SG: No, in my mind it is different locations, different places. It's not like a website. I've never treated it that way. *I: Okay, so although you are-, so do you kind of feel physically present in that space?* SG: Very much, yes. I don't like to teleport much, I like to walk around … No, it's only when I couldn't find today that I was teleporting and this island is part of the fact it's part of the fact it's our department's island, I find

a bit difficult-, some islands in which I've been very actively involved in the design I just walk around, because I've done so much of testing … *I: What are you doing now?* SG: I was just walking around and looking around and I do this many times. *I: When you're walking around, is there any kind of sensation of physical movement at all?* SG: Yes, I'm very much aware of my surroundings. I'm very much looking around with both these eyes, just as I would do if I were walking on a road. I'm very inquisitive to see what new and interactive things have come up- … I think with Second Life it gives me an outlet for, it gives me an outing, as if I've-, *I: Gone somewhere?* SG: Gone somewhere and had fun. *I: Okay.* SG: Especially like the one I was doing today, and doing at home also. The day that I really feel that I've not gone out much and had a really, really work loaded day, then I'll go into Second Life, sit in some nice place near the water. I will, it's a great sense of enjoyment for me.





	Mental instability	Behaviour of others giving the impression that they have mental problems.	*I: Why would she have engineered it so it went downhill, rather than closing down the club? Did she have an ulterior motive?* AM: Do you know, she had a psychological problem, and very severe depression, but it was kind of-, it was (talking over each other) it was kind of like psychotic, it was self harm. It was such a mixture of things, that it was impossible to talk to her. She would be there, and she wasn't AFK, she was there behind the avatar, but she wouldn't answer my IMs, she wouldn't do this, she wouldn't do that. She got up on a platform, up to ten alts, for the traffic. I kept saying to her, 'No, that's not working, we've got to have them actually in the club, because people will search it, bring it up on the map, the club's empty, they're not going to come.' I think she did it deliberately, it was a bit of, like, self-destruction.
	People responsible for their own acts	Anonymity gives people the ability to act in ways they otherwise wouldn't, but the responsibility for those actions is theirs, not the Second Life computer programme.	*I: What do you think causes people to begin to think it's real?* AM: Because they haven't got a life. *I: It's nothing to do with the programme itself?* AM: No. *I: The immersion, or the 3D-ness or anything like that?* AM: No. I mean, at the moment it is only two-dimensional, but it will be three-dimensional very soon, I should imagine this is what's going to-, *I: 3D glasses and all that kind of thing.* AM: Yes. Well, I'm not sure how they're going to do it, because these tech guys are very, very clever. It's not the programme, it's the person itself. We cannot blame the programme for our actions, we can't. I mean, in reality I'm a very assertive person, but I think we need to have some assertion about us, we don't need to be dictatorial or doctorial, we don't need anything like that. I could look at it like a lot of people do, anonymity … Anonymity behind this avatar, and could sort of let fly every time I felt like it, but that's losing

			control. We have to keep that certain control, no matter how irritating someone is, we have to not, sort of, let rip at them … *I: Do they think about that, though? Do people forget about the Lindens?* AM: I think sometimes they do, and I think another thing is they forget about the protocol you need within Second Life. Yes, people do get lost, and this is the scary thing. People forget things, and they make mistakes. Like we all do, we make mistakes in real life, but the point is within Second Life, if you use anonymity to go about and be disruptive in any way, that is not because you've got an avatar, that is you. That is you. *I: It's not these programs or being online that causes someone to behave in a certain way, it's the way they would be anyway given the chance?* AM: Yes. Given the chance, they would be like that. A lot of these people are blooming cowards because they can't be themselves. This is a shame, because their cowardice, and then their taking advantage of anonymity upsets and hurts other people at times. You know, we can't blame Second Life, we have to blame the person behind the avatar, the onus must lie with them. The same as when you're in real life, if you do something wrong is it because the person sitting next to you is there, you know … That, again, if it's different behaviour it's like, I think really we've covered that, because it's what they cannot be in real life because they think it's socially unacceptable. Or, it's like you get some people that can't be like that, because of some kind of restriction put on them. There are so many different aspects here, but a lot of the people in general, within Second Life, are there because they are too scared to be themselves in real life. It's probably because they know they'd be arrested or something, you know.
	Person inside	Second Life reveals the inner person, more so than the physical world.	L: I was trying to talk this through with another friend of mine and then he started talking about expressing your inner self and I thought, now he's onto something here. So I put something in my profile about that, about-, yes how much-, what did I say? If I met you in real life, would you know any more about the inner me? Would you or would you get distracted by the environment and the physical things as much as you might get distracted by the avatar and the environment in Second Life? You'd know other things about me, you would pick up my body language and all the rest of it but is it helpful or not helpful? *I: Or does the body get in the way*? L: I don't have the answer to that.
	Personal ethics	Having an ethical approach in Second Life usage.	*I: So you have your own kind of ethical practice even for yourself?* AM: Even for myself …
	Physical and emotional	Using Second Life can bring physical	*I: Did that put like an emotional strain on you as well or was it just a physical thing?*

		pressures	and/or emotional stress.	AM: I think it was a bit of both, because you need time to yourself even in Second Life. You need to be able to relax, cut off.
		Pushing my capabilities	Using Second Life to stretch one's ability.	AM: I love it. It allows me to see how far my capabilities can go, how they've grown, and if it's something above my level, I will tell them, 'I'm sorry, that's out of my class. You know, it's just not-, it's above my level. So please-,' and I usually give them your name.
	Immersion and presence	Appearing present	Unlike the physical world, in Second Life it is possible to appear present and aware of all that is going on without actually being so.	*I: You know when there's a discussion situation, like, you said, 'Oh, people are just so off the track, and I find myself not paying attention,' whatever, does that also happen in a physical meeting, or is it more likely to happen?* SG: In a physical meeting, if I get distracted, and I do sometimes, it happens, one gets distracted, there is no way I can go back unless I ask somebody. I'll ask [my colleague], 'What was he saying? I didn't fully understand,' I won't say to [him], 'I was actually looking outside the window.' What I'd say is, '… what were they saying, do you remember? I didn't quite get it,' so I try to act in that way. In Second Life, the best part is you can go back and look at the text chat.
		Aware of my surroundings	The sensation of feeling the virtual environment around oneself, appreciating it and taking pleasure in it.	*I: What are you doing now?* SG: I was just walking around and looking around and I do this many times. *I: When you're walking around, is there any kind of sensation of physical movement at all?* SG: Yes, I'm very much aware of my surroundings. I'm very much looking around with both these eyes, just as I would do if I were walking on a road. I'm very inquisitive to see what new and interactive things have come up-, … Especially like the one I was doing today, and doing at home also. The day that I really feel that I've not gone out much and had a really, really work loaded day, then I'll go into Second Life, sit in some nice place near the water. I will, it's a great sense of enjoyment for me. *I: So even like sitting in next to the water that's pixelated, a computer image, that kind of thing-*, SG: I enjoy it, yes. I mean the interview that we had the other day, I really liked the setting. *I: Did you?* SG: The cameras were positioned in such a way I was like in the water, and I was thinking in my mind, it's such a beautiful setting.
		Habit	The habitual aspects of using Second Life e.g. the logging on process, and the interface appearance.	*I: It kind of shows in a way how habitual, you know, we kind of quickly get used to something, don't we?* AM: I think we take things for granted, and we assume it's going to be the same. Even if we don't assume, we just don't think about it, because we're so used to doing it, it's just, like, second nature. This is why I made the point that you need to keep a grasp, a hold, on reality. We need to in Second Life … *I: Do you think Second Life, because it's kind of another life, it's kind of replicating*

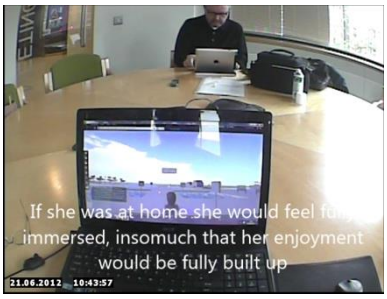
			and mimicking aspects of real life, do you think it's even more the case that you can quickly get used to things being the way they are? In effect you're actually kind of-, it's even more upsetting? You know, if you were using an e-mail, and you were used to your e-mail settings being a certain way, but then for some reason you downloaded, like, a new version of Outlook or something and that changed, that would be disconcerting but it wouldn't be necessarily upsetting, perhaps. Do you know what I mean? AM: Well, it's really strange, because I rely a lot on e-mail, and some of my friends are on Facebook. When that interface changes it so annoys me. *I: People get very upset on Facebook, don't they?* AM: Oh my gosh, I can't believe. *I: Yes, they do actually*. AM: Oh, it's dreadful. I'm thinking, you know, get a grip. I: Why is that upsetting? AM: I think it's because that is their life. It's such a shame, it's very sad that someone has to rely on Facebook or something like that, or even Twitter, to have a life. It's very sad. The same applies with Second Life. I know people that go into a fit of tears and depression because Second Life is changed in some way. I*: When you're going off and starting off on a session, I've asked you that question about the computers because it's part of your orientation isn't it? Do you have any sort of-, anything that you do, when you're starting off a session, not necessarily with the computer per se, but with your Second Life or virtual worlds or whatever?* SG: I mean a couple of years before, Second Life used to drain the system, so I used to remember to switch off my mail, any other applications, check that everything else is switched off because then Second Life can run comfortably, because if Second Life is going to take all the power and I don't give it all the power then in the session I'll be logged out. Now, because the machine at home is very powerful and even at work I find I don't find it difficult to run Second Life with other applications, then I keep all the applications open.
	Immersion	The sensation of being within the virtual world, and with the people one meets there.	*I: When you're in your house, what does it feel like? Do you feel like you're there?* AM: Well, you have to keep a grip on reality. You have to. I mean some people do. They go in there and they're actually physically, mentally in Second Life. I can't do that. *I: Do you feel like then you're just sitting with a computer on your lap messing around with a programme? I know that there's real people involved but do you know what I mean?* AM: Yes and no. I realise that I'm sitting at a computer. I realise I'm using a three-, sorry, a two dimensional programme that is-, oh what do you call it? It's virtual world. I know that that's a virtual world. I can't get lost

in myself …

I: What's going on now, then? L: Teleporting out. Go somewhere more peaceful. *I: When you say immersion, what do you mean?* L: As in feeling totally there. I*: Is that how you-*, L: Yes, I do feel like that. *I: Do you feel like that tonight?* L: No, not particularly. *I: Is it because of all of this or because of all the other stuff you had to do?* L: I think it was because of the unfamiliarity. The settings weren't all quite there. No, I didn't feel like I was totally in there. *I: Did it make a difference me sitting over there?* L: I don't know, actually. That's my little beach place, more relaxing. *I: Is that how you felt when you got there?* L: Yes.

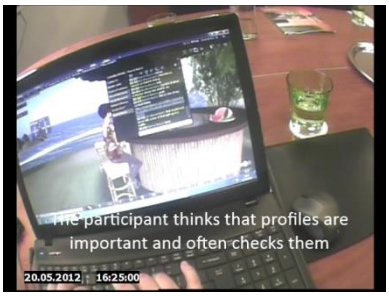
I: Do you feel like this is like, you're physically in a massive area? SG: I am very much, and I, if I'm enjoying it fully and all the textures were coming as they come at home, and if I was engrossed fully in it, I just get fully immersed in it. I was really, really enjoying it. I know this is when I say fully immersed doesn't mean that I become unconscious of what is happening, but my sense of enjoyment is building up … Especially like the one I was doing today, and doing at home also. The day that I really feel that I've not gone out much and had a really, really work loaded day, then I'll go into Second Life, sit in some nice place near the water. I

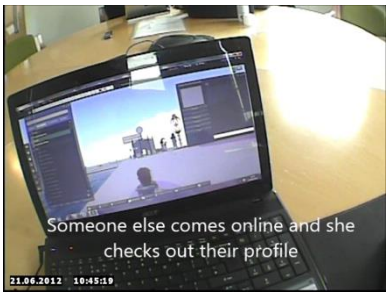
	will, it's a great sense of enjoyment for me. *I: So even like sitting in next to the water that's pixelated, a computer image, that kind of thing-,* SG: I enjoy it, yes. I mean the interview that we had the other day, I really liked the setting. *I: Did you?* SG: The cameras were positioned in such a way I was like in the water, and I was thinking in my mind, it's such a beautiful setting … I think the one thing is that 'away' appears quite quickly, and I feel that people might feel that I am away. That is a kind of worry at my mind. Even if I am totally concentrating on it, and sometimes what I do is I open a text file to make notes. Like, I was attending [a Second Life] event the other day, he was talking about the future of virtual worlds, so I was making some notes alongside. Then you are concentrating on the notes and you're just listening, you are not really immersed in the immersed sense. Then suddenly I'm reminded that if the 'away' shows on my head, then people might think I'm not available … *I: I suppose that meant the-, I know this format was probably different to what you were used to, I know because you were doing it on my computer, weren't you, but having to use bits of the programme to do things, you know, having to look at menus and clicking on a thing, and doing right click mouse, do you know what I mean?* SG: I know, I fully understand your point. It doesn't affect my immersion. I: Right, that's what I was trying to get to. SG: Because the tasks that I am doing are very much oriented towards my tasks in this immersive environment, and I am doing it for the reason to achieve something there. That doesn't take away my immersion at all. I mean, I don't know whether it is something that I feel is unique, because I've had no previous experience of games, but I so much enjoy moving around in this virtual world. It is a kind of outing for me, at times. It's like going out and having a break … *I: For you, where does that immersion come from? Is it, you know, how realistic things look within the screen, or is it the interaction with other people?* SG: I think it is four or five years now that I am going to Second Life, but the idea of being in such an environment where you can replicate both realism and non-realism. You can meet with people, have that sense of co-presence, which a Skype conversation, or eliminate, or any other of those conferencing tools cannot give you, continues to amaze me.

			
	Sense of responsibility	Feeling obligations to other people within the virtual world.	*I: Why do you think you had that sense of responsibility? A lot of people, maybe the owners even would just-, wouldn't necessarily think that way. They would just think, 'Oh, it's just pretend. It's just people on a computer somewhere else. Why am I-,' you know?* AM: The point is, I've always realised that, yes, we spend Lindens there, but the Lindens come from real life money. When people are sold a club and they're running this club, it costs them money, real money and it's a lot of money. So, my sense of responsibility didn't actually lie with the Linden monetary value, you know, what we spend. It lay with that person spending their real money in there and if I say I'm going to do something I do it to the best of my ability. It was long long hours and I was the only one. The other managers wouldn't turn up and when they did they didn't really know how to do the job. They were sort of, 'Well this has happened, what do I do?' I used to think, 'God, well this is what you do, but you have to do it your way, but stick to the rules. Look at it as though this is a real life job and then it will become easier,' which it does. It was a load of responsibility on me. A lot of guests would only speak to me. They wouldn't even speak to the owner.
Representation and the avatar	Clothes	Dressing the avatar, and being aware if the same clothes have been worn for a long time.	*I: Did you have to change yourself or anything or are you just wearing the clothes you wore this morning or what?* AM: No, I just wear the clothes-, I've been in them for about four days. *I: I was just going to say, how often do you change?* SG: I feel I should leave the session and go. It bothers me, because again of the time. You'll notice in my session, just in case we are not able to do because of the time, you will notice that I try to do two

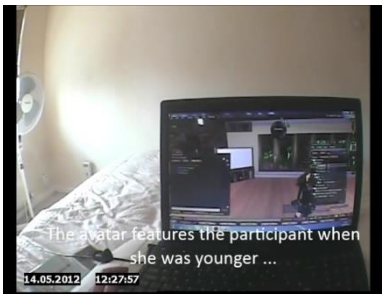
			things at the same time in Second Life. While I was doing the tour which I was doing, I was also trying to change my clothes at the same time. *I: Oh were you?* SG: Yes, and then I got a bit afraid, I said, I was trying just to change just the cardigan because there is an event today and the last time I went to the event I was wearing the same-, *I: Oh you wanted to look different?* SG: I wanted to look different today, because I thought it doesn't look nice going in the same clothes every time so the last time they recorded me, so they know what I was wearing because it's all in the pictures and so on and the snapshots, and they've put it on the website as well. *I: I'm terrible, I don't change my clothes for months on end anymore. I used to change them twenty times a day, now I can't be bothered.* SG: I change, but then I get a bit worried in case something happens, you are recording it. So I would rather leave it to it, because even though the textures aren't very good. So I logged back again and here I think I noticed something about Berlin.
	Others see the avatar, not me	It is easier to be less self-conscious and more confident in Second Life, because others can see the avatar but not oneself.	SG: In Second Life I'm sitting on the chair, just listening and concentrating, I'm only being assessed or looked at as what my profile and my appearance in Second Life says. I'm very happy of that. When it comes to the real world, sometimes I lack confidence. This is something to do with me, it is nothing-, I take time to get to know people. With you it has been instantaneous, I've, we've met, and we had spoken on e-mail earlier. Sometimes you really get along with people, like with one of my colleagues, … with whom I had a meeting, I just get along with him, it is an understanding that we have. If you have lots of strangers in a room, it's very hard. I find it particularly hard. I*: In Second Life, for example, it's easier. What is it that makes it easier? Have you got more control over the way you are able to portray yourself?* SG: That is one point. Also, I am not under that impression that people are looking at me. *I: Is it because they're looking at your avatar, but not looking at you?* SG: That is right. In real life, people sitting around the room, I become conscious of myself. Whereas in the virtual world, I'm sitting comfortably, whatever I'm doing-, *I: You don't feel conscious or unconfident in … the avatar, then?* SG: I don't, no. I mean, the confidence-, I don't speak much in Second life, also.
	Profile	Using the profile, checking other user's profiles, and its appearance onscreen.	AM:

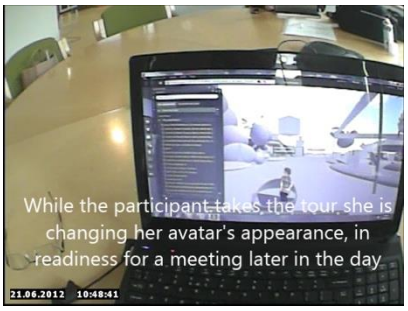
I: It's nice he knows he can show you, you're not going to yawn and pretend to talk to somebody else. What are you doing there? L: I'm checking out to see whether he still looks like a fox. (Laughter). *I: He does-, L: It looks like a fox. I: Yes, so you're-, I mean I do the same. If I'm talking to somebody, I suddenly have a flash of-, oh I'm going to look at their profile just in case something's changed. Do you think profiles are important? Do you use them a lot? Do you look at them a lot?* L: Yes, I do. *I: Do you also keep yours up to date? Some people change them all the time, don't they? You're not like that.* L: I go for a while, then I might change it a few times.

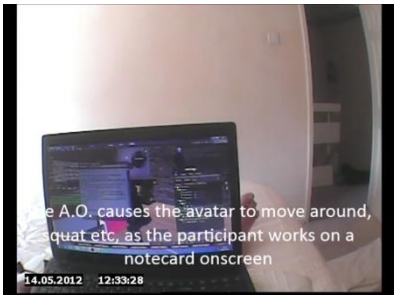


			 SG: 
	Relationship with the avatar	The extent to which the avatar is different from the user.	*I: I know that you're not looking at yourself, you know you're not looking at yourself, but is somehow [AM], the person in the Second Life, is it a bit like looking at yourself? I mean, what's the kind of relationship?* AM: Well, [she]'s kind of like me in certain features, but more like me as I was younger. It's not-, for me, it's not so much the avatar as I act as I am. I am myself in there. Yes, okay not all the time, because as I say, I go there for relaxation, so sometimes I'm an airhead in there. *I: When you say that what do you mean? You put on an act or you just can't be bothered to think.* AM: Oh just act stupid. You know what I mean? Fool around, have a laugh. Not take things too seriously.
	Representing myself	Ensuring how the avatar appears, how it behaves and the	*I: Some habits, or ways of doing things in the physical world, they do go through?* SG: Influence, very much. I mean, even

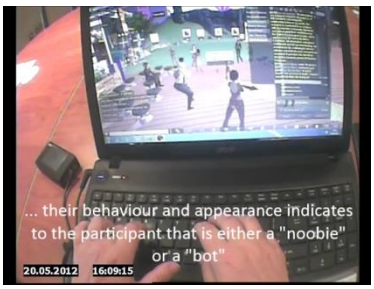
		people and events that are associated with reflect positively on the user.	protecting my identity and looking after my avatar, and I'm sure I've discussed this in the past with you, is something that comes from real life, that I need to project myself in a professional manner. *I: What do you think of the fact that everybody can see your name, and look up your details? Obviously in the physical world, that doesn't happen, you're just a human being.* SG: Yes, it doesn't bother me so much, because I only go to places where I feel comfortable. If I am sitting amongst educators like I was last night, it doesn't really bother me, because we introduce ourselves anyway, that I am from the Open University, anybody can look up on the web and see who I am. It doesn't so much bother me. Though I am cautious of keeping my profile up to date, but I don't know, I've not checked it recently, whether it's up to date or not … I mean, there was one meeting of the OU which I've stopped attending for this reason. *I: What reason was that?* SG: The reason was that the person who used to organise used to be in such odd dresses that I used to feel very uncomfortable. *I: Did you really?* SG: Because I felt that if I associated myself with the event, and I announced it, and people came and she was dressed that way and behaving that way, it would affect my-, so I've stopped going. I feel sorry, because sometimes I'm missing some very beautiful talks, but there has to be some kind of a discipline. You have to draw the line, that beyond this you won't be willing to do it.
	Role of alts	Using alts to do tasks.	SG: These things you need to check in advance. I think you should have a kind of a research avatar. I have another avatar that I don't use, I only use it for testing. *I: That's a good idea.* SG: So for example if I set up in my conference if I set up a dispenser for note cards, they are used by [the other avatar] because that avatar is not even my friend. It's not even in my contact list, so-, *I: It's like a blank-, like a stranger.* SG: Just because if I have no association with them, then they can check. So what you could do for this experiment say is have another avatar with which you can check up the settings. So that way it won't be Simon, it will be somebody else.
	SL showing what is inside the person	The extent to which how people behave in Second Life is reflective of the kind of person they are.	*I: Some people say, and it's been written about, that this anonymity, that word I can spell but can't say, that, you know, naturally, as it were, causes people to lose their inhibitions, but also kind of lose touch with themselves, in a way, because they lose their own identity. What do you think of that?* AM: Well, this is what I say. I don't think their lose their own identity, what I think is they bring out what is inside them, and that can be very dangerous. *I: Because no-one knows who*

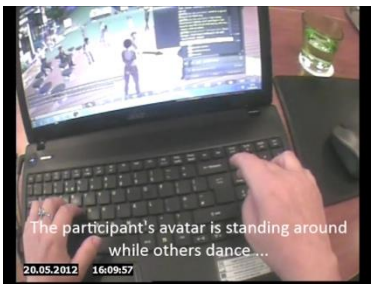
			they are? AM: Well no, because, I mean, the Lindens know who they are. Even if they give a fake name- …
	Wrong impressions from others	How avatar appearance and how it behaves can give an impression of how a person may be in the physical world that is incorrect.	L: Yes, I thought that he was a woman and older and it checks out, he wasn't. I mean, you say that and he's actually put his age in his profile as well but at the time, he was probably only nineteen or something, and a bloke. *I: What made you think he was older and a woman, then? I mean, what's it-, so he's a fox?* L: A fox. I think it's probably the jewellery or something. The fox furry. So that was quite an interesting thing. Yes, so he's quite a sociable sort of person, got lots of friends. Yes, it's quite nice to-, always quite nice to be in touch with people that you've known since the beginning, I think.
The avatar	Avatar appearance		AM:  L: SG:

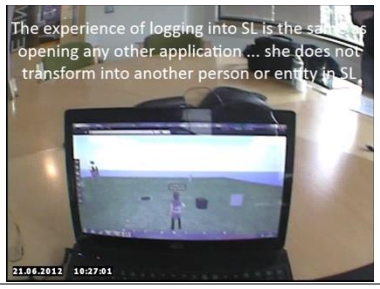


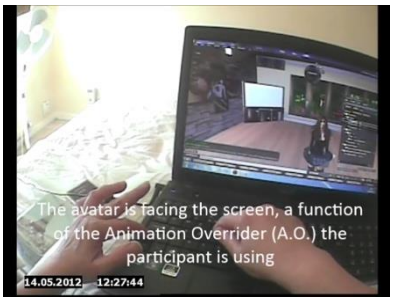
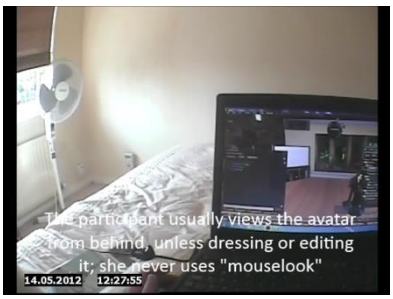
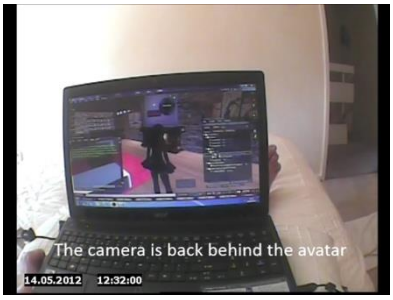
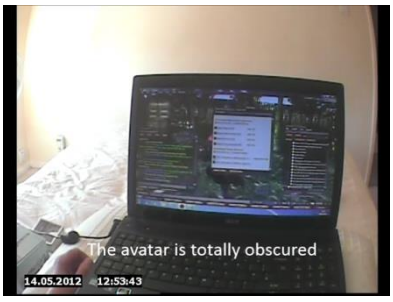
	Avatar behaviour	The behaviour of avatars, and the impression it gives.	AM:  *I: I was just going to ask you, you're standing around obviously just-, to everybody else you're just standing around. When you see somebody standing around, what do you think? Do you think they're IMing?* L: Yes, I think a lot of people just stand around. Either they're AFK or they're in IMs. Or they're doing something in Facebook or something. *I: So does that mean, like, when you see people looking like they're not doing anything, you kind of, have learned that that's not really the-, they are actually doing something, you just don't see it as being odd or anything?* L: I don't know whether it's odd. I would normally be in the conversation. I would like to get in and say hello to people … *I: You're sitting on your chair.* L: Yes, I realised I'm using my AO to sit on it. Oh, I turned it round. *I: You're doing that but you're all by yourself.* L: Yes. *I: Isn't that interesting? Well I think it's interesting.* L: Do you? *I: Yes.* L: I can't-, I need to be sitting looking at the bar. I don't know-, that's wrong. *I: It is wrong, isn't it?* L: Yes. *I: So there is some kind of-, although you are by yourself and this is all pixels as they say, and no one else can see you at all and you're IMing people who are many miles away, it's important that you, kind of, physically look the part. I know this*

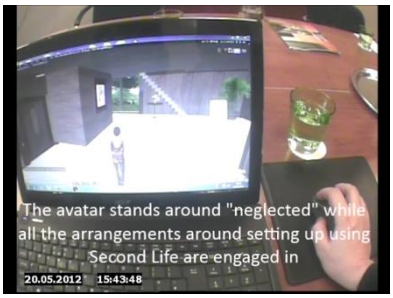
sounds silly but you're not wearing summer clothes or anything. Is that-, does that make a difference? L: On another day, I might decide I'm on my island and I need to be wearing summer clothes. It's too much grief. *I: You've had so much grief already.* L: I wanted you to see my boots. I put that out especially last night.





	Avatar entity	The extent to which the avatar is a separate entity from the user.	*I: … you go into a situation where you're meeting all new people, or a party, or trying to make conversation, all this stuff goes on in your mind and then, like, your mouth says things. In a way, is the same going on here? Out of the side of here is your mind and inside there is your body?* AM: No. *I: It's not like that?* AM: No. If it were like that, then I would be thinking that my avatar was, like, a living reality. *I: Is there anything changing as you're going from, whatever is going on, and I know this situation is different because we're chattering away, you don't feel like there's any kind of you becoming [SG] in Second Life or anything like that.* SG: No, it's just like opening another application. So it isn't to do-, *I: Nothing mystical happening?* SG: No. *I: (Laughter) some mystical transformation into a virtual person or anything?* SG: No. 
	Avatar movement	The movement of the avatar through the virtual world.	AM: L:

Avatar view	The appearance of the AM: avatar onscreen.	     *I: Well be honest, when you're doing it-, I'm thinking about now, about how-, see Lila is facing us here. Do you always look at her from the front or from behind? Do you have a way in which you look at her?* L: I suppose I do tend to look at her from the front. Or me, I'd normally say me, turn to look at me.


The avatar stands around "neglected" while all the arrangements around setting up using Second Life are engaged in
20.05.2012 15:43:48

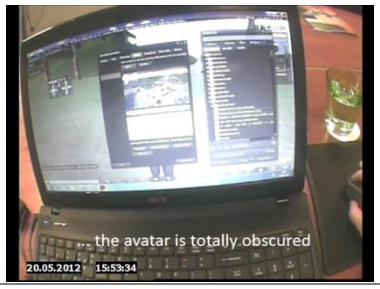
"camera" HUD (top left), which allows her to adjust the view she has of the avatar
20.05.2012 15:44:58

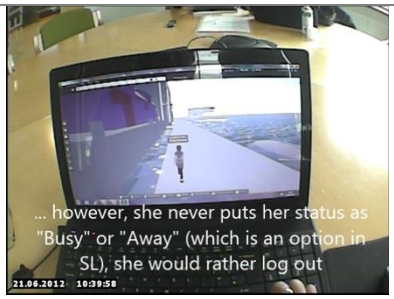
The avatar faces the participant
20.05.2012 15:45:25

research group so a group tag appears above the avatar ...
20.05.2012 15:46:13

The participant views the avatar from behind (the default view)
20.05.2012 15:50:58

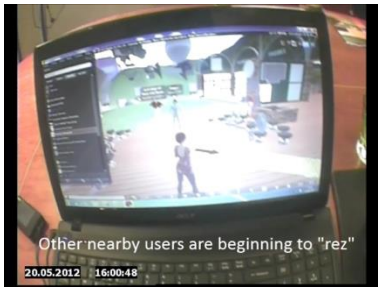
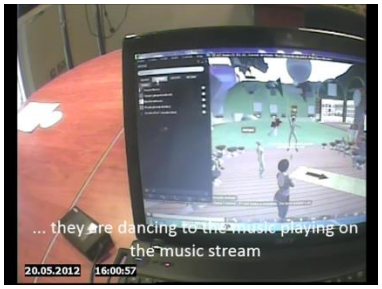
The camera turns to view the avatar face on
20.05.2012 15:51:05

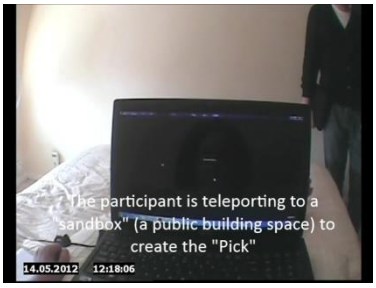
				  
Others	Being with others	Awareness	Being aware of other avatars nearby	*I: What is going on? Are people just standing around talking still?* L: I think they're just standing around. I've no idea. I'm hardly paying any attention to what's going on there. It was a waste of time me being there, quite frankly.
		Being away	Being away from the keyboard or too busy to talk to other users.	*I: You know, normally when you're logging in, obviously you haven't got an idiot like me going on in the background. What normally, sort of, happens? Are you just sitting there in front of your screen, just patiently waiting? Or I mean, some people go off and do other things or what have you. Do you just sit there quietly?* L: When I'm just logging in? I just wait for it to go. I don't go off and do other things. I'm very, very rarely AFK. *I: Oh really?* L: Yes. *I: So you're either online or you're offline?* L: Yes, it annoys me when people are AFK. *I: Do you ever put yourself as busy or away or anything like that*? SG: Not busy. Not away. I would rather log out.

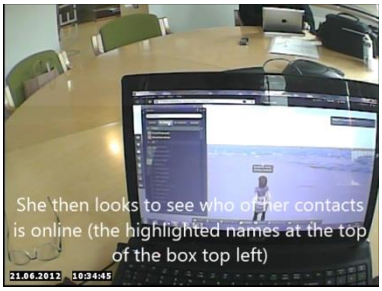
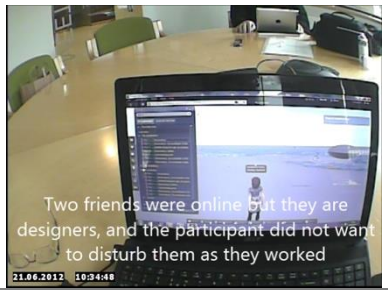
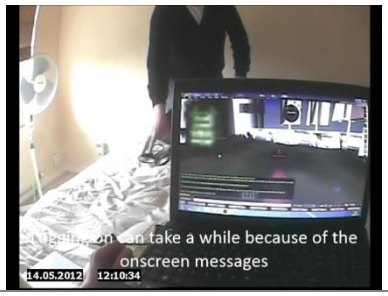
			
	Co-presence	The role of other others in providing a sense of community and immersion in Second Life.	*I: For you, where does that immersion come from? Is it, you know, how realistic things look within the screen, or is it the interaction with other people?* SG: I think it is four or five years now that I am going to Second Life, but the idea of being in such an environment where you can replicate both realism and non-realism. You can meet with people, have that sense of co-presence, which a Skype conversation, or eliminate, or any other of those conferencing tools cannot give you, continues to amaze me. *I: A Skype conversation, to you, isn't as good as a conversation-, really?* SG: I get tired in a Skype conversation. Half an hour is the most, and after an hour I would just not be able to do it. Unless there are, like today we had a long, it started at about 9:30 and ended at about 11:45, when I reached you. Because we were sitting in a group, and I was not the only one answering the questions, it didn't bother me so much. If I had just one to one Skype conversation, I wouldn't have had-, *I: What is it that tires you then? Presumably that means interactions here aren't so tiring.* SG: No, I can sit in Second Life for three hours in conference, I won't be tired. It is just that appearance of an avatar sitting next to one another, that sense of co-presence. If you were in another island talking to me while I was here, I wouldn't enjoy it. *I: You want to be with the other person.* SG: I think the feeling of sitting across the table very much replicates, for me, that face to face experience. That is why it doesn't tire me. Even a face to face meeting would tire me, but because this is a virtual meeting happening, and you have your sitting in beautiful surroundings, which you normally wouldn't have in real life, all those things. As I said, the aura of it has never gone down, for me. Even when people might think it is strange, you've been there for five years, four years, you should take it as a part of your life, but I still feel it is something amazing. Whoever has conceived this idea, of not a game, but people can meet, and build communities, they can sell products, they can generate their own content. Enabling people to-, World of Warcraft, you go there, you play a game, and you come out. You can't create objects, you cannot share objects, you can't ask the other educator, "Give me

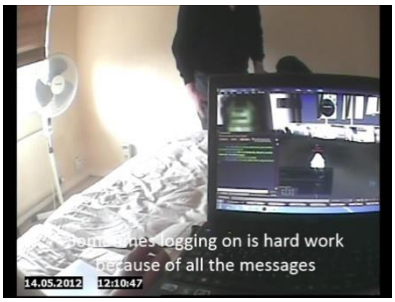
			your PowerPoint board today because I'm going to give a presentation tomorrow," and they'll come and help you to put up the slides if you're doing it for the first presentation. They will even create a notecard giver for you. Where can you find such a community? I have known people, not very-, they have just known me through one or two conferences, and they'll say, "… I know you're doing your presentation tomorrow, shall we do a rehearsal with me?" then they would now come and do a rehearsal with me. Where would you find such a community? *I: Well, it is unique, certainly.* SG: It is unique. You cannot find it in OpenSim, you cannot find it in World of Warcraft. World of Warcraft is all driven by motives.
	Holding virtual friends in mind	To what extent participants think of their friends' avatars when they think of them.	*I: It's not really related to that, but you're with your friend here and everything. Before that, it was like you were on the phone, almost, IMing each other and what have you. Do you have an image of, you know, all the various people you know? Whether you're talking to them in IM or meeting with them through their avatars, do you have, kind of, an image in your mind about them?* AM: Sometimes I do. I think-, you know, you wonder, 'Ooh, I wonder what you look like.' *I: Yes.* AM: You know? The thing-, I must be so bloody boring. The thing-, I must be, because it's not-, to me, yes I do wonder what someone looks like, but that is not important to me. What is important to me is the inner person, and that is very important to me. *I: So do you, like, form an image of somebody, not by what they look like but how they feel (talking over each other).* AM: How they act, what is their way of thinking, where are they going *… I: Now, so, just as a contrast, then, people who aren't in Second Life, how do you build an image-, what kind of image do you have of other people? You know.* AM: How do you mean 'those that aren't in Second Life'? I: Well, other friends or relatives or whatever. You know, like, when I think of somebody who I know, I guess I have a little series of images in my mind or feelings or I know-, AM: Of course you do. *I: Do you know? So, how does that compare to what-, I'm just thinking, like, compared to the rest of life.* AM: It's much easier, isn't it, in a way? In one way it's easier in real life, and you have these images of-, and, you know, you recall conversations, and you know what that person is like, because you have spent years knowing that. So, yes, I mean, it's like if I think of Lisa, one of my cousins, yes, like-, … My cousin Lisa, yes. I can see her face now. I mean, not like I can see yours, but-, *I: Yes, but in your mind's eye (talking over each other).* AM:

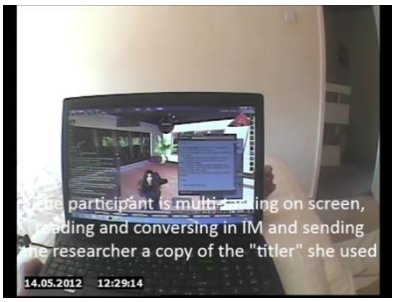
			In my mind's eye, yes, I can see her face now, but I've known her since she was born. So, yes, but-, *I: Oh, that's an interesting thing, as well. I know it's not related to this, but obviously if you've known someone since they were born, you know, you don't think of them-, a baby's face doesn't come into your mind.* AM: No. *I: Do you know what I mean?* AM: No. I can-, but there again, if I want to think of her when she was a baby, I can bring that to mind. If-, oh, she was such a cute little thing, and she was so funny, but, you know. *I: So, when you're thinking of a friend in Second Life, does an avatar come to mind?* AM: No. No, it's kind of-, oh God (talking over each other). *I: Do you even know what your avatar-, your friends' avatars look like? Which I know sounds a weird question.* AM: Only-, a lot of them it's only if they have a photo in the profile. *I: Sometimes you don't even think of what they look like?* AM: No. I mean, it's the people that are suffering and I'm trying to help. Those-, it's kind of important to see them physically in virtuality. It's not important to me to meet them in real life. Some of them I wouldn't, anyway. *I: When you're talking to people, like they're not there as their avatars or their real personas sort of thing, they're a real life person. When you hold them in your mind when you're talking to them. How do you think of them? Are you thinking of a Finnish Fox or are you thinking of a man?* L: I've never seen a picture of [him]. I've no idea what he looks like. *I: So in your imaginings-,* L: So in my imaginings, I suppose every now and then maybe I do have an image of him. I don't know why, maybe slim and dark haired. I don't know why, he might be a bit gawky looking. I don't know, that's what I have in my mind. I don't know that I really conjure that up when I'm chatting to him, though. Probably-, that's a really hard question. *I: When you're chatting to him face-to-face, are you seeing, are you conscious of his being a fox?* L: Yes, he is a fox. I: Do you see him as a fox or do you see him as-, L: Well as a furry fox, that's his ID. That's definitely-, so a couple of people, I do have pictures, I have seen pictures of them. And it alternates, I sometimes see the avatar, I sometimes see the picture of them. It's just something else that's harder to describe, this feeling about a person that doesn't involve thinking about an image. I don't know, possibly.
	Identifying other users	Identifying friends from their profile when their display name has changed.	SG: Now what happened was, that somebody came online and they said, "Louise is online". *I: Yes.* SG: I felt that who's this Louise, I don't know Louise. How did she become my friend? So I went and looked who Louise was. *I: What*

			did you find? SG: I found now that you can change your display names from your Second Life, and then I looked at the Second Life name and I could identify her … *I: This fact that people can change names now, completely change names really and look completely different until you realise and look at their username, is that disconcerting?* SG: It is disconcerting for me, yes. It think it was earlier it was better, when people had to-, now I'm looking up somebody's profile because again this was a person I didn't see for a long time so I thought, let me look at their profile. Their profile reminds me.
	Nearby users	The presence of other avatars nearby, how they appear onscreen and identified in the interface display.	L:  
	Presence of others	The experience and sensation of having another person present in the same space in the virtual world.	*I: I only wanted to ask, is when you see-, now, that person's a stranger. I mean, do you feel conscious there's another person there?* SG: It depends on the context. If I was here at a conference, and somebody came in and we both were waiting for the event to start. That has happened many occasions, I tend to reach early and sit there and look around, because I am so very keen for it to start, like a child sitting there, with all that expectation. Somebody comes, I sometimes will even introduce myself, and that other person might say, "We are both early", and then I laugh and say, "Yes we are both early", and we'll introduce ourselves. It depends upon the situation. It's not that I am reluctant to speak to strangers, but in places like this, or if I am in shopping areas, or if I reach

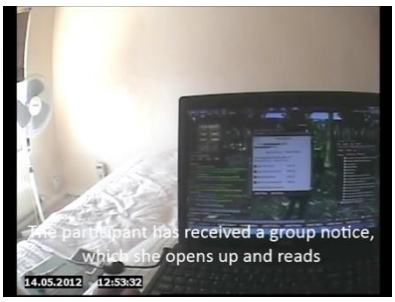
			an island which I don't feel very comfortable with, because sometimes some islands don't exist and they move you another location, I would be reluctant to talk. It's the same in real life, even if nobody can do anything in virtual life, nobody can be-, I can just log out.
	Public space	Being in public spaces.	AM:  L:

	Who is online?	Checking who on the friend list is also in Second Life.	SG: There are a few people that I don't intend to meet, I don't know about their real lives at all but they are good to me in Second Life. So if they're on I will just speak to them. So I look around if who's around in the friends, so that's why I was looking. *I: Weren't anybody on line?* SG: No, there were two people logged in but they were the ones who's specifically come for designing and I didn't want to disturb them, so I just left it … Here, what happened was that Real Life Education Group came up and I saw that there were so many people online so I felt happy. *I: Oh these are all people who are members of the group?* SG: Members of the group were all online. I: When you say made you feel happy, what do you mean and why? SG: It just makes me feel that there are so many educators at this time of the day, it was 2.14 in the US in the night, there are so many people (talking over each other).  
	Communication and interaction	Communications and interactions	Communication and interaction as observed onscreen.	AM: 


Sometimes logging on is hard work because of all the messages
14.05.2012 12:10:47


The participant is multi-tasking on screen, reading and conversing in IM and sending the researcher a copy of the "titler" she used
14.05.2012 12:29:14

A friend IMs and the participant talks herself through the protocol of informing them that she is participating in research
14.05.2012 12:38:42


The participant has received a group notice, which she opens up and reads
14.05.2012 12:53:32

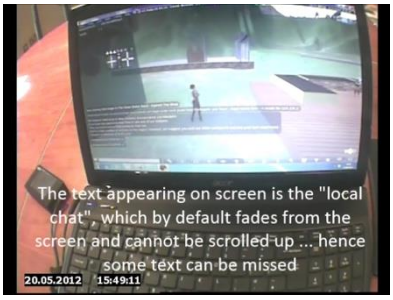
L:

Text appears onscreen, providing log on information, notices and messages
20.05.2012 15:41:49

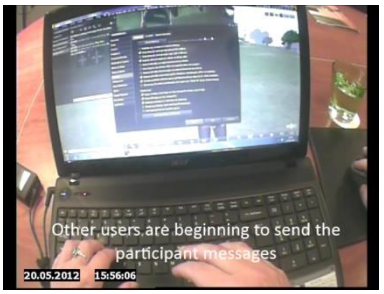
The box on the left is the message box, where the message from the researcher will be stored
20.05.2012 15:42:36

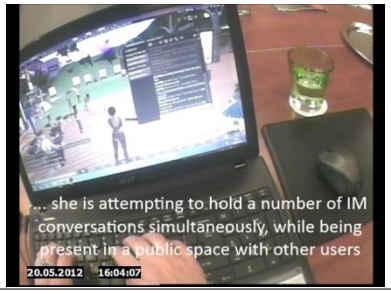
A group notice appears, top right
20.05.2012 15:45:02

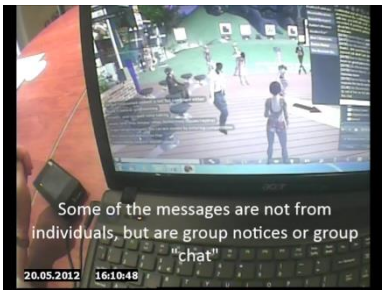
The participant closes it down
20.05.2012 15:45:08

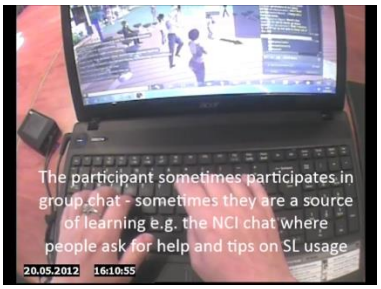

The text appearing on screen is the "local chat", which by default fades from the screen and cannot be scrolled up ... hence some text can be missed
20.05.2012 15:49:11

Another group notice appears behind the Profile and inventory boxes ...
20.05.2012 15:53:28

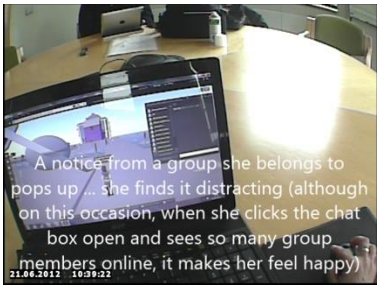

Other users are beginning to send the participant messages
20.05.2012 15:56:06


... she is attempting to hold a number of IM conversations simultaneously, while being present in a public space with other users
20.05.2012 16:04:07



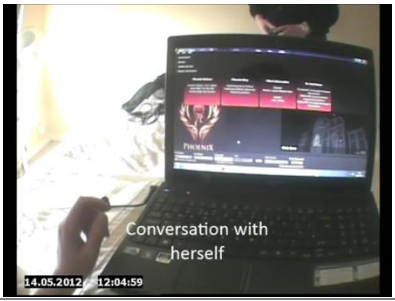


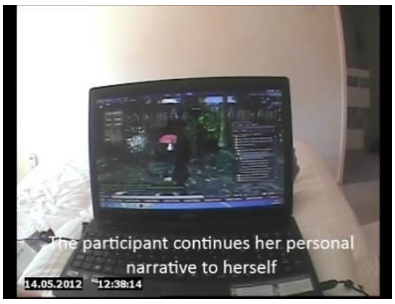
SG:



	Physical interactions in	How simulated physical interactions	*I: Are you having a hug?* AM: I'm giving her a hug. She needed it. *I: Does it-, is it*

	SL	in Second Life can be as effective as in the physical world.	*helpful to hug?* AM: Oh my God, yes. It really is, because they-, even though they can't feel your arms around them, they know you care enough to give them a hug. *I: Right.* So is it like a symbol, really? Or is it real? AM: It is real to them. It's like sometimes, I've got a friend, and if I need a hug, I'll say, Ninni I need a hug. "Oh, YB", as I call him, Yummy Bear, "I need a hug." "Come on sweetie," he says, and he calls me little bab-baby, because he says, "Oh my God, you've got such a sharp knife in me." He will. It's like when I heard the news of my son-, it wasn't good news last night, and I-, he came into Second Life just to be with me and see how things were, and he said, "Come over, LBB and let me give you a hug." He said, "You need that", and it's surprising how it helps, because I know he really cares. It's different, like-, it's like I always used to give you a hug in Second Life, because I do love you as a person. You're a very nice man. You interest me, and not sexually, you know that, but you do interest me. You've got a brain, and, you know, it's a lot of things with you. You know, it's like, when you came in, and I said to you, I'm going to give you such a great big friendship hug, because that's the only way now you will take back the memory, and if I ever give you a hug in Second Life again, it'll be more real to you.' *I: I understand, yes.* AM: I don't say, "Come out of reality", but you know what I mean? Some of these people I'd love to be in real life and give them a hug.
	Sussing out the truth	How with practice one becomes adept at surmising if other users are truthful in what they say.	*I: Right. I was going to ask you this, and maybe this is what you're beginning to allude to. People are telling you things, but-, going back to something we were talking about before, you can't see their eyes or whatever.* AM: You can't-, *I: How do you work out if someone is being honest with you?* AM: It's what they don't say. *I: Right.* AM: You have got to read what they say very, very carefully to spot what they're not saying, and it always comes out, the way they phrase things. They're sidestepping. They don't really answer you. Or what they say is totally unbelievable. Then, I've got a nice little trick, if you want to say, but a method. I remember an important question that I've asked, and I remember their answer, and

			I'll ask them the same question again but in a different way. *I: Later? On another day? Or in the same* – AM: No, that same session. You'd be surprised-, when a liar, or someone that is not so much a liar but a romancer, kind of thing, you know-, surprised how they let this slip because they answer in a totally different way. They get so self-confident that-, in what they're saying that you're believing, they forget what you've asked them. Now, if it was the truth, even if they answered in a different way, it would still mean the same. You see? There are other little things. There are trigger words with people, as you know, that will either set them off or they'll go really quiet, because-, and-, but those, the trigger words you use, you've got to take from the whole context of the conversation. You think, 'Hm, I wonder?' and it does work. Yes, it sounds devious. It's not devious, because if you didn't do that, and you didn't find out the truth, you'd never help that person, never. You have-, you've got to do it. I bet you think I'm a really devious person now, but, you know, it's honestly-, I've got to do it.
	Verbal commentary to self	The practice of narrating to oneself what is occurring onscreen.	*I: I can hear you chattering and I don't know whether I'm interrupting. So, you know, this talking, giving yourself a narrative while you're-, do you know when you're doing it?* AM: Yes. *I: What service-, what purpose does it serve do you think?* AM: I really don't know, but I'm a very verbal person as if you hadn't noticed! I'm a very verbal person it's like usually, sometimes you get the idiots who think and I say to myself, 'I can't shut up. You're not making any sense. *I: You're telling yourself here now-, I just heard you say, 'Saved.' Do you tell yourself what is going on the screen?* AM: No. I'd saved it, then I opened up the profile again and checked, because sometimes SL doesn't actually save it so you have to redo it. I think I said that then so that once we were watching this you would realise. *I: Okay (talking over each other). Do you think some of you talking-, do you always-, you know like you said you talk out loud? Were you doing it for this or were you doing it for me?* AM: No, just that part. *I: Just that part, but the rest of it is like what you would normally?* AM: Oh that's what I normally talk like, yes. 



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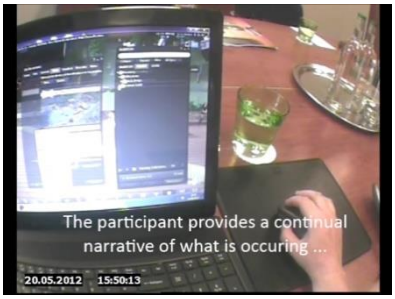
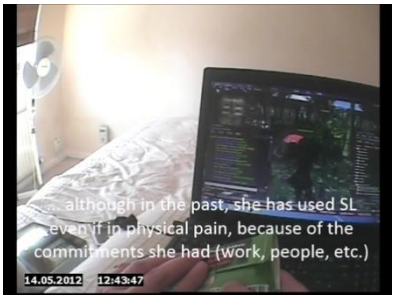
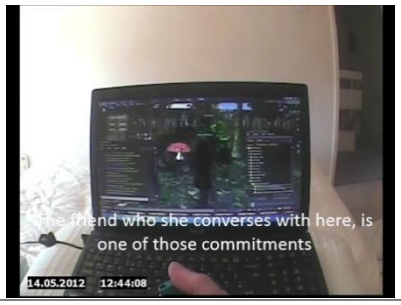
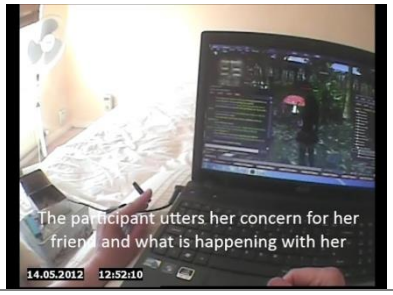
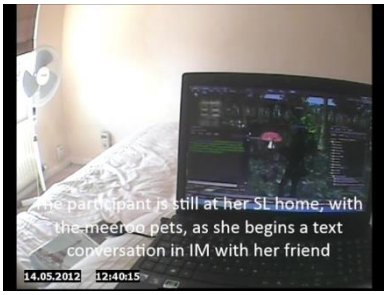
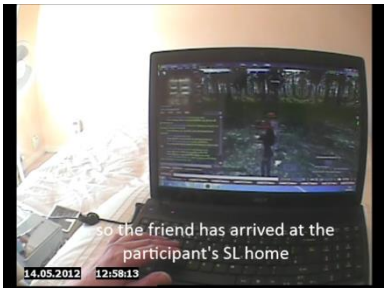


	Voice	The extent to which the voice facility is used in Second Life.	*I: There's something I meant to ask you as well, although you've had a notification-, I don't know whether you end up having a conversation with anybody later on, I don't know, but do you ever use voice or is it mainly text? I know you present in voice, but do you ever use voice as a normal sort of thing as a way of interacting on here?* SG: No. If I have known somebody for a long time then I

			would use voice, or if I'm presenting, but if I don't know somebody very well, or if I feel that-, I get cautious of the voice, I try to use text. I*: When you say cautious, why is that?* AM: Not cautious, but conscious. *I: Right.* AM: I don't know why I don't want to use voice much. Unless I know the person. So even (talking over each other). Yes, I just don't feel like it. I would rather be on text and be happy. *I: Maybe it's kind of related to what we were talking about before.* AM: Yes.
Relationships	Active community	The role of being in a community in the user's enjoyment of Second Life.	SG: Here, what happened was that Real Life Education Group came up and I saw that there were so many people online so I felt happy. *I: Oh these are all people who are members of the group?* SG: Members of the group were all online. *I: When you say made you feel happy, what do you mean and why?* SG: It just makes me feel that there are so many educators at this time of the day, it was 2.14 in the US in the night, there are so many people (talking over each other). *I: It's the middle of the night there, isn't it still?* SG: So the more support people continue to give to Second Life it will exist and it would still be perceived to be an educational platform. So that is why I felt good about it.
	Commitments in SL	Continuing to use Second Life because of commitments to others.	AM:  
	Empathy and emotions	The extent to which it is possible to be emotionally involved in the Second Lives of other users.	*I: When-, do you-, you know, like, people are telling you this. Do you yourself feel emotionally involved?* AM: I do at times, because-, with these two, yes I do. I know the kind of life poor [gives her friend's name] has had, even with-, from a young girl, and I know the type of life [another Second Life user] has had from a young man. He's still a young man now. I think he's about 30, which is very young, isn't it, really? I know the type of life they've had. I know the stresses that they've been through, and it's awful. Yes, I do-, sometimes I do get emotional. It's like

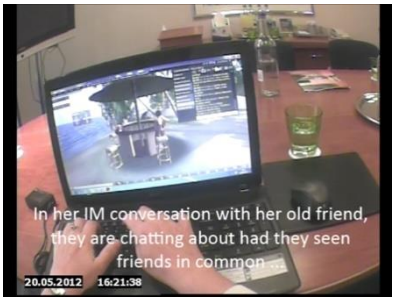
	anyone else, when they tell me some of the stories, I do get emotional, because it's-, they're having their life taken off them, and they can't get it back how it should be. Yes, they could get bits back, but they never get the full life back, and that is sad. It does upset me, but I can't allow it-, that emotional state to linger with me, else I'd be no good helping them or anyone else. *I: No, yes. Well, I was going to ask you, you know, how do you stop yourself being, you know, immersed in their lives?* AM: I never get immersed as such. I listen, yes. I get emotional sometimes, I mean, I've been sat at my computer crying sometimes, but you can't afford to get in there. You can't. If you get into that too deep, emotionally, you would be no good to them at all, no good to them at all. My job, to help them, is to get them to think about their situation and what they want to do, and in their way, not my way. My way may not be right for them. They have to-, and it's my job to lead them there. Yes, sometimes I suggest something and they'll come back, "No, no, no, I can't do that", and I'll say, "Okay, that's good. You don't feel comfortable with that. I'm sure you'll find-," well, not in those words, but what I'm saying is, "Yes, you will find a way to do it." It's not easy at times, because you-, even when they find a way to do it, you can say, "Oh my God, they're going down the wrong road", but they've got to learn. A lot of people within psychology and helping someone don't realise that you have to let your client make a mistake. You can't baby them. You can't wrap them up in cotton wool. They won't grow emotionally. They won't grow knowing how to deal with problems. That's sometimes worse than what they're actually going through, because what life have they got? We all make mistakes. It's good to make mistakes. It's not good to be right all the time.
	
Friendships	AM:





I: You said that before you went in, didn't you? You hadn't been in for a while so people were wanting to talk to you, were they? L: Yes, well [my friend] who's the black Finnish fox, I haven't spoken to him in quite a while so that was quite nice. I mean, I don't know whether you'll be able to read it when you go in on the screen capture thing-, you've got the IMs haven't you, anyway? *I: I may not look at them, to be honest. It depends on things but-*, L: Yes, so what was I going to say? I've known him more or less since I started. I:

Oh, right, and how did you meet? L: So it feels kind of nice. *I: When you've been away for a bit and he's one of the first people you speak to.* L: Yes, that's right.



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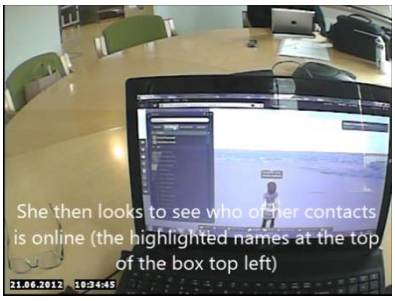
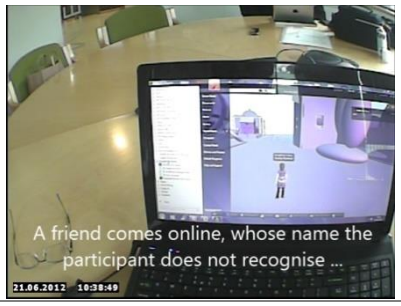
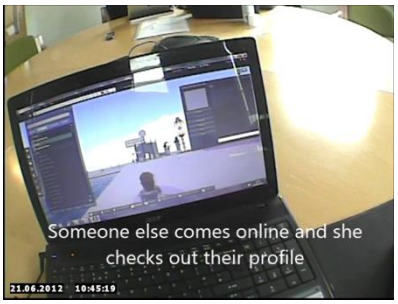
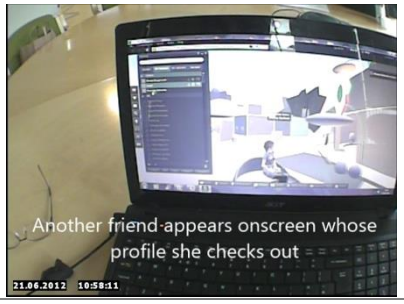
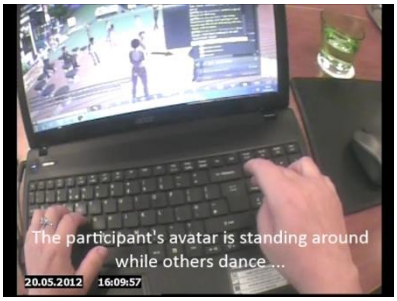
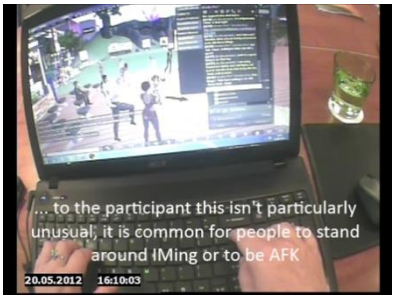
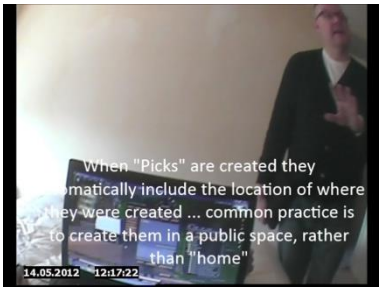
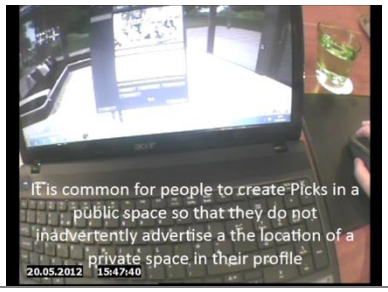


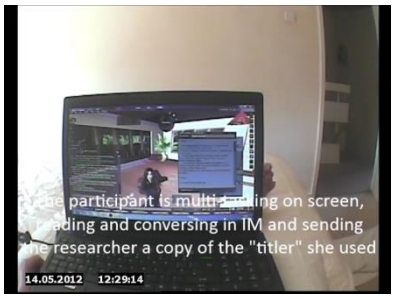


			 
	Helping others	An approach to helping others in Second Life.	AM: No, it's okay. I-, you can't-, I mean, I've taken quite a bit of the course, and I would never come into Second Life until I had written up my paper on that day's study. When that was all written up, then I would, you know, get things ready for the evening meal or whatever, and then probably have a cigarette and a drink, and then I'd go into Second Life for a little while. So I'd learnt-, but I'd always got this in my head anyway. I mean, when we were asked, the first session, you know, the tutor was getting to know you, "Would you advise someone what to do?" everyone was saying, "Yes", and I went, "No." She looked like this, but that's me. No, I want to help that person grow. I want to help that person deal with their own problems so that they can stand on their own two feet and become a whole person, or just a bit of-, or just find a better way to live, you know? It's-, that's my job. It comes easier to me because it's how I've always felt. It's-, I have to remain one step reserved from them, apart, or beyond, whatever you want to call it, because it's also my job to spot the lies.
	Interacting with others that will never meet	The fact that one may never meet any of one's online friends encourages even more caring behaviour.	*I: I was going to ask you-, just going to ask you that, because when you said that about me, you know, obviously we're in a situation where we have met each other and everything, but obviously you know people all over the world, and that's possibly, probably never going to happen.* AM: No, it never will happen. *I: So how does that feel?* AM: Well, it makes me stop to think, "Okay, well, I've got to show more caring, or more firmness, even", because firmness is a way of caring, not cruelty, and this is how I try to overcome that. So far it has worked, and people have said thank you for caring, even when I've been firm. You can overcome it, but it's like I always say,

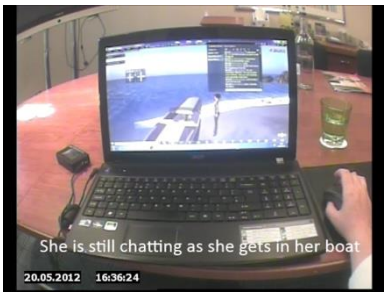
				even with my actions towards those I'm trying to help, I have to keep a sense of reality. Never let go of reality. Never get so carried away that you forget that when we're talking, not when we're building or developing something as in, you know, a scene, but when you're talking to someone, that is real, and that's the only thing you should 100% look at as real.
Second Life	Experience of SL	Behaviour peculiar to SL	Avatars appearing and behaving that would seem unusual if such behaviour occurred in the physical world.	*I: No, I was just going to ask you, you're standing around obviously just-, to everybody else you're just standing around. When you see somebody standing around, what do you think? Do you think they're IMing?* L: Yes, I think a lot of people just stand around. Either they're AFK or they're in IMs. Or they're doing something in Facebook or something. *I: So does that mean, like, when you see people looking like they're not doing anything, you kind of, have learned that that's not really the-, they are actually doing something, you just don't see it as being odd or anything?* L: I don't know whether it's odd. I would normally be in the conversation. I would like to get in and say hello to people. *I: I don't mean you're odd but when you see somebody else standing around, you kind of, don't feel-,* L: It's not odd. That's just how it works in Second Life, isn't it? *I: Like if you saw somebody in this room standing over there just like this, we would think he was odd, wouldn't we?* L: Yes, we would but that just goes on. You do think, "Oh well I've turned up to this place and I'd actually like to speak to someone and you're really just AFK." I do get a bit irritated by people that go AFK all the time. I know that's what people do. *I: Yes, you're not one of these that logs on and then-, because some people just log on and are just completely and utterly logged on, aren't they? Just come back occasionally, don't they?* L: Yes, and then you send them a message and they don't answer. You think, 'Well-,' I've learned that. I mean, generally people aren't just ignoring you, are they? They're just not there. Probably in more than one way. (Laughter) … L: What do you think about child avatars? I think that's a child avatar. *I: What do I think? I think-,* L: There are two things, right? What you think you ought to say and then what you actually-, *I: Well actually I'm thinking, "What do you think?" This is me interviewing you. I think sometimes it's a bit weird. I do feel a bit weirded out by it, but it depends on where I am. I think I don't think I feel strange here. If I was in a nightclub, I would feel strange because I wouldn't be seeing that in a nightclub anyway in real life, do you know what I mean?* L: I feel weirded out by it too. Then-, so there's my head that goes, "This is a space for anyone to be who they want

			to be and that's fine and we should be all liberal and let it all happen and you can do whatever." Then the other bit of me goes, "Oh but that makes me feel a bit uncomfortable."  
	Creating picks	The experience of creating Picks in the avatar profile.	AM:  L: 
	Having a Second Life	The extent to which for some people Second Life is their only or main life.	*I: Do you think Second Life, because it's kind of another life, it's kind of replicating and mimicking aspects of real life, do you think it's even more the case that you can quickly get used to things being the way they are? In effect you're actually kind of-, it's even more upsetting? You know, if you were using an e-mail, and you were used to your e-mail settings being a certain way, but then for some reason you downloaded, like, a new version of Outlook or something and that changed, that would be disconcerting but it wouldn't be necessarily upsetting, perhaps. Do you know what I mean?* AM: Well, it's really

			strange, because I rely a lot on e-mail, and some of my friends are on Facebook. When that interface changes it so annoys me. *I: People get very upset on Facebook, don't they?* AM: Oh my gosh, I can't believe. *I: Yes, they do actually.* AM: Oh, it's dreadful. I'm thinking, you know, get a grip. *I: Why is that upsetting?* AM: I think it's because that is their life. It's such a shame, it's very sad that someone has to rely on Facebook or something like that, or even Twitter, to have a life. It's very sad. The same applies with Second Life. I know people that go into a fit of tears and depression because Second Life is changed in some way. *I: Do you think then, for some people, Second Life is like a life, and then for other people is it kind of a lifeline, i.e. you know, they kind of need it for something, but it's not everything, do you know what I mean?* AM: Yes, I mean, for some people it is their only life, and the only time they get to feel a person. That may sound very strange, but it does happen. It's the only time they experience love, tenderness, caring, or they have a laugh without having any repercussions. If they make a mistake it's not the end of the world. It is totally sad. For others, I mean I put myself as an example, again it's the landscape and the terraforming, the building, I love it. It's the creating and making your environment look good. I love that. I couldn't do that in real life, so it is replacing something for me that I can't do in reality, but I never ever for one minute think it's real. It's real in as much as we are doing it, but it's not real as in touching it. We have to, but some people just have not got that. There again, you've got the other end of the scale, where people go in and they're living a life that they would love to live, but is probably a very, very obscure way of living, but that becomes a reality to them. Others go in and they take it as a joke, then they start to moan because, "Why are they moaning, I haven't done anything", but they've hurt someone. It's a combination of things within Second Life. Second Life is so broad, there's so much to it, that it can't be one or two things, it's impossible for it to be that. There's such a wide variety of people with different lifestyles, different ideas. In fact, that there's a lot of wannabes in there. *I: In what sense?* AM: In the sense, "This is what I want to be like", they build up a story, and you know, they can pretend to anyone they're a big film star, rock star, whatever, you know.
	Individual experience	The extent to which Second Life is a solitary experience.	*I: Is it strange having another person here talking to you while you're doing this?* AM: No. *I: You're normally on your own though?* AM: I'm always on my own, yes. *I: Apart from-,* AM: Well apart from, yes, [the dog] or if my son comes in he's got to

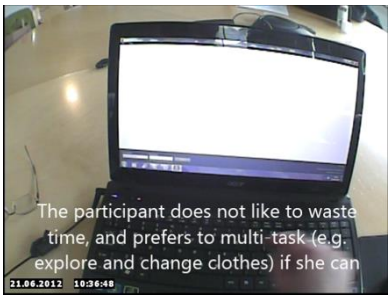
			ask me something or tell me something. SG: That is right, moving around. Again, I think it comes back to my basic personality, nobody is watching me, I am just doing what I would like to do. In real life also I would like to visit an exhibition and just be with myself, I would like to enjoy. I went to the Manchester exhibition they had on Alan Turing recently, I went with my friends. I mean, those are the places I like to go, and be on my own so that I can reflect. If there are people with me, what happens is it takes away my attention from the task. I think that is another reason perhaps why I so much enjoy Second Life, because it is very much an individual personalised experience.
	Keeping a record	The extent to which the automatic download of text is used.	*I: Just a little sort of like metaanalysis in a way, I've got you to-, we've recorded this and I wanted to download the text, do you do that kind of thing yourself. Do you do that kind of thing yourself, do you keep a transcript of everything that you do? Do you download everything?* SG: No, I don't. For example, there was a very, very good keynote at one of the conferences, then just as you recorded everything today, I recorded that. Or if Pathfinder comes in and gives very good presentation any new thing, Jive etc. I record it, but it is only for myself. It's not for distribution. So therefore I don't have to take a consent as soon as I've seen it, I delete it.
	Multi-tasking	The extent to which users of Second Life are perpetually engaging in simultaneous tasks.	*I: So, you're talking to me and moving around inside Second Life and talking out loud? Are you walking around in second pilot? Are you kind of trying to-, are you actively doing three things at the same time or what?* AM: I'm so used to multitasking I can keep my mind on several things at a time, so I've gone in and I've checked the cats and make sure that they're all still in the house and-,  *I: Would you rather just have-, how do you try to-, well you're saying you're getting used to it now. What normally, what used to happen?* L: Well I can do two. I'd prefer just to chat to one person at one time but it's the usual thing if you've got a local going on and an Instant Message going on. If it gets to any more than two things, it all falls apart. (Laughter). *I: Is it all part of the immersion thing do you think? Trying to talk to two people and looking at what's going on on the screen*

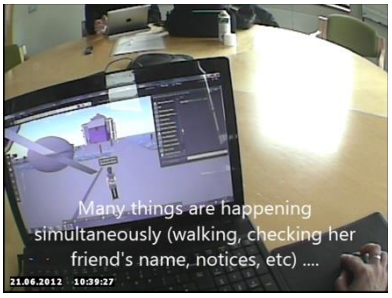
in the thing, in the open, it's all a bit dissipatory effort really, isn't it really? L: Yes, it's not as pleasurable. Then it's this case of not wanting to be rude to people either. Some people know, they can tell and they say, "I can tell you're talking to someone else. I'll talk to you later." *I: Do they get offended?* L: People do, yes. And I think probably I'm normally one of the people that will just talk to one person. I can tell when people are doing it to me and I'd rather do something else. *I: What happens, you know when you log on normally, do you normally get a barrage or are people pretty respectful, sort of thing?* L: People are normally pretty respectful actually, yes. *I: When you said about multitasking, you know that (inaudible) you have hunts and games which very often involve collaboration, is that-*, L: I don't do those. *I: You don't do any of that? That's very multi-task-y isn't it, really? Oh this is somebody else now. Oh no sorry, I thought you were putting up the-, you're talking to me.* L: I find it hard to do when-, taking someone out for a drive and riding the boat and chatting at the same time … I like to be looking at the pictures. This is really annoying. I had far too much of that going on. I should have just ignored everyone and gone off exploring somewhere and we could have looked at some-, I have. This isn't usual. I'm normally looking at what's going on. *I: What is going on? Are people just standing around talking still?* L: I think they're just standing around. I've no idea. I'm hardly paying any attention to what's going on there. It was a waste of time me being there, quite frankly.

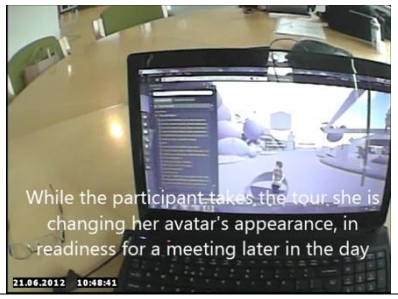


I: Are you just randomly-, what is going on, are you randomly just-, SG: Understandably-, *I: Are you randomly moving the mouse?* SG: Yes, I was just trying to show you-, *I: You're not thinking about two things at the same time?* SG: No. I: What are you doing here? SG: This, I was checking the settings for you. Remember you came here to check the settings? *I: Here you're between us trying to sort the program out. I mean, does that interrupt the flow of what you're doing? Are you getting into it?* SG: No, because I wanted whatever I do it gets recorded for you otherwise the whole exercise will go a waste. So I wanted to be sure that you check it out, but I could keep myself quiet, I was trying to … I feel I should leave the session and go. It bothers me, because again of the time. You'll notice in my session, just in case we are not able to do because of the time, you will notice that I try to do two things at the same time in Second Life. While I was doing the tour which I was doing, I was also trying to change my clothes at the same time … *I: Now, we are kind of trying to describe what is going on, or you're trying to describe what's going, but there's many things going on at the same time. You're walking around, you're thinking about the woman's name, and you're kind of thinking, "Louise", and then you're thinking, "Oh it says Louise but it's somebody else because you can change display names, oh and a little note's come up and I'm walking around", all this-, that's quite a lot to be managing at the same time. Is it something you find easy?* SG: No, I don't like it myself. I feel that I'm not focusing on it. I should focus on what I'm doing, but today what was happening was, and generally when I'm on, it's like a tourist roaming around. *I: Right.* SG: Then I'm just enjoying myself. So it doesn't matter doing too many things, but let's say I was preparing for a presentation. *I: Yes.* SG: Or I was sitting in a presentation, I would have just ignored all that. I would not have gone to check who Louise is. I would have been inquisitive but left it to one side at this moment- … *I: Yes, and so is it easy to stay on top of [the discussion], or do you find yourself scrolling up all the time?* SG: I sometimes find myself scrolling, because

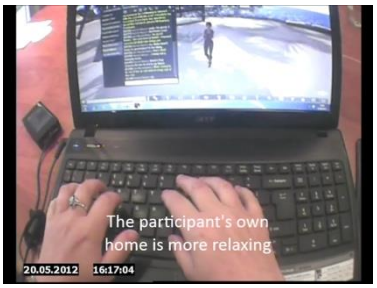
just like this, I lost the concentration, I was looking at you, I would be perhaps looking at my e-mail, something comes up. Do I try my best, and the e-mail goes, but sometimes it is just on and I look around, or I look at the news I'm very fond of. What happens is that I lose the text chat, and then I try to catch it up by looking at all the past comments. Sometimes it is not just my distraction, the text chat is so boring, or the discussions that are going are so much off the point, that I lose interest. Then suddenly I realise I'm here for a purpose, so I need to concentrate, and then I need to look back as to what is the recent, kind of, thing.

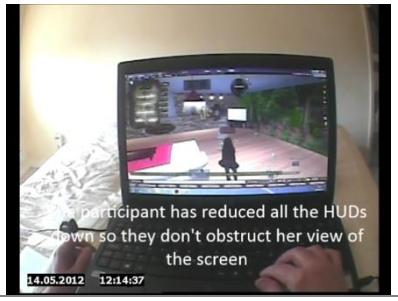
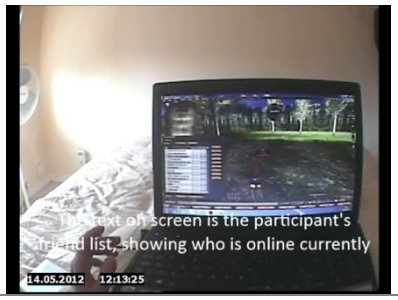


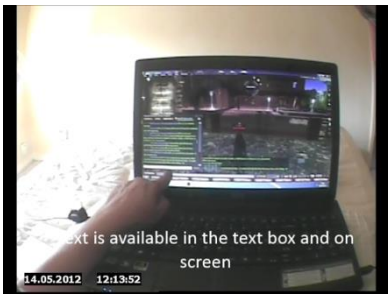




	Music	Listening to the music stream provided in Second Life.	*I: Do you always listen to music?* L: Nearly always. *I: Is music a really important part? You said that's why you liked Firestorm because you could see what the tracks were-*, L: Yes. *I: What do you do-, do you ever go and find the tracks yourself, sort of thing, so you can listen to it?* L: Sometimes I do, yes.
	Reduced use	Using Second Life less over time.	SG: Yes. I mean, the difference between then and now is that I have used less of Second Life. *I: Have you?* SG: So I was amazed myself at how I was going on a tour. I just don't have the time now. I only go in for those Thursday activities, which is the virtual world educational round table, or if there is a seminar by somebody whom I know, and I feel that I really need to be there to show my support.
	Relaxation	The extent to which aspects of Second Life are relaxing for the user.	*I: When you're watching this, what does it make you think?* L: It's just a nice relaxing place to be. I suppose I was thinking that I do quite like to talk to other people but sometimes it is just nice to sit and enjoy the environment. Do you ever get that? Almost feeling the warmth of-, … I love this red on the water. So that's the sunset. I'll take a picture of that. Then I went back to minimising-, anyway what I'm saying is this can be very relaxing when you're stressed out, to go in and do exploring or a building project or something like that. Then a whole hour's gone and you can come out and-, people say, like, juggling is relaxing because

			you're having-, *I: You're having to focus on the little things, aren't you?* L: Focus, yes, and it's taking your mind completely off other stuff. It's almost like doing an hour of meditation or something, I think. Yes, it's a good sim. I do miss people when they go, though. When you're close to someone and they disappear. 
	Savouring the experience	Making the most of the Second Life experience, and experience in general.	SG: Also, because now that I don't go much in Second Life, and the events are becoming less and less frequent in Second Life, it is like almost cherishing every moment of it, or every event … It doesn't stop, for me, when I say, "Quit". It at least stays in my thinking for at least half an hour, I would say, after the session when I'm reflecting, making the best of it. I think, … what happens is we are so busy these days in life generally, not this November month, I mean in general in life. We are so busy these days that when we devote something to some activity, we want to make the best of it. *I: We want to, or we should?* SG: At least I do want to

				make the best of it, so I go through the notes, I try to do some background reading, so that I feel that if I have spent a couple of hours this morning, there was one meeting 9:30 to 10:30, then 10:30 to 11, I do go back home and reflect on those. If I feel that I have spent half a day on something, then there should be some learning coming out of it.
	Interface appearance	Arranging the screen	Arranging the HUDs and icons onscreen.	*I: What about how the screen looks? I mean, I know you're having to use the way I suppose my default, how I have the screen, but your HUDs and things have come up? I mean, do you think about them anymore?* AM: No. I usually close them down, but I've left them even though. *I: Do you even notice them though? That's what I suppose I-*, AM: Well, when I close them down, no I don't. If they're open like that, yes I do. The AO, I've put it over to the right and I squash it down, but yes, I've left that up, because I've got to go and see to the meeroos, so yes, I've left that one up. Usually I close it right down so it's in narrow. 
		Onscreen interface	The appearance of the screen during various activities.	AM: 


ext is available in the text box and on screen
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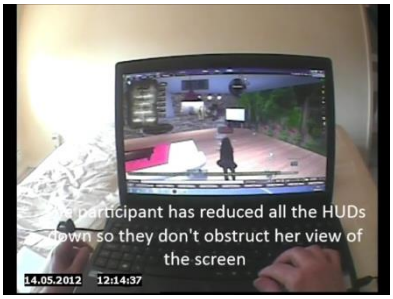
participant has reduced all the HUDs down so they don't obstruct her view of the screen
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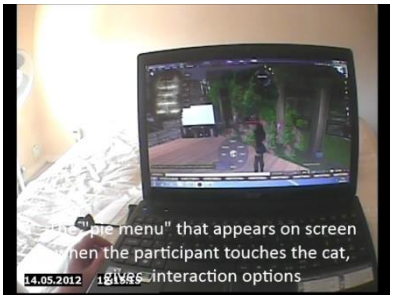
ple menu" that appears on screen hen the participant touches the cat, gives interaction options
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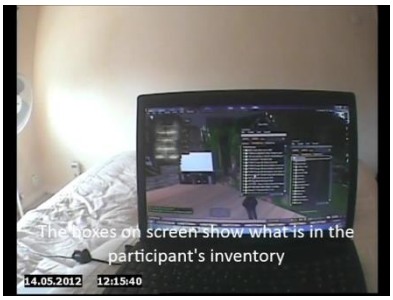
The boxes on screen show what is in the participant's inventory
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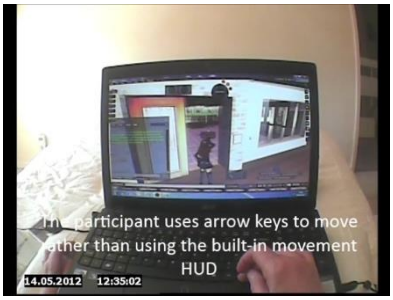
participant uses arrow keys to move ather than using the built-in movement HUD
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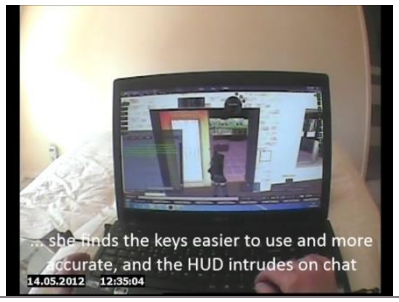
she finds the keys easier to use and more accurate, and the HUD intrudes on chat
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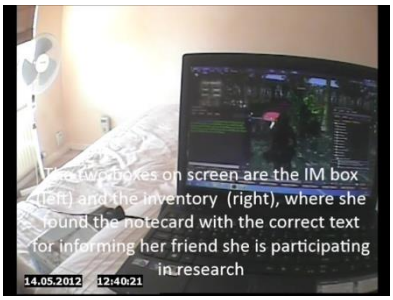
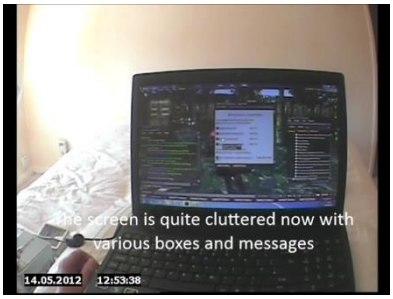
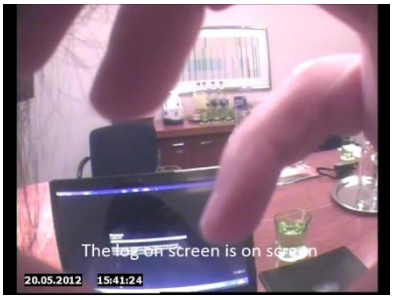

The two boxes on screen are the IM box (left) and the inventory (right), where she found the notecard with the correct text for informing her friend she is participating in research
14.05.2012 12:40:21


The screen is quite cluttered now with various boxes and messages
14.05.2012 12:53:38

L:


The log on screen is on screen
20.05.2012 15:41:24

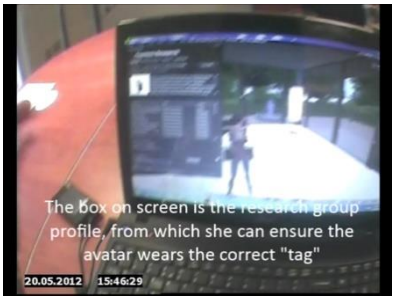
Text appears onscreen, providing log on information, notices and messages
20.05.2012 15:41:49

The box on the left is the message box, where the message from the researcher will be stored
20.05.2012 15:42:36

The panel on screen is the control panel for viewer settings
20.05.2012 15:44:34

"camera" HUD (top left), which allows her
to adjust the view she has of the avatar
20.05.2012 15:44:58

A group notice appears, top right
20.05.2012 15:45:02


profile, from which she can ensure the
avatar wears the correct "tag"
20.05.2012 15:46:29

By clicking the avatar a pie menu appears,
with an option to edit the profile
20.05.2012 15:47:21

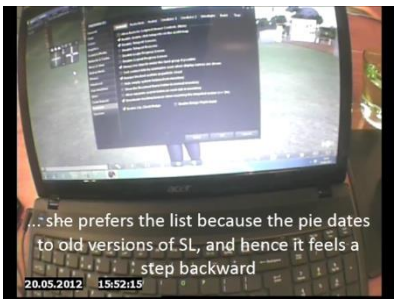
The box on screen is a menu that allows
shortcuts to be added to the screen
toolbar, including "landmarks" (LMs)
20.05.2012 15:48:15

The text appearing on screen is the "local
chat", which by default fades from the
screen and cannot be scrolled up ... hence
some text can be missed
20.05.2012 15:49:11

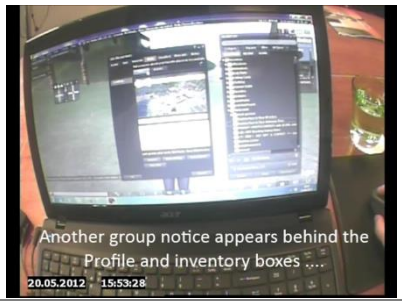
The researcher and participant discuss how the HUD can be used for onscreen movement
20.05.2012 15:51:14

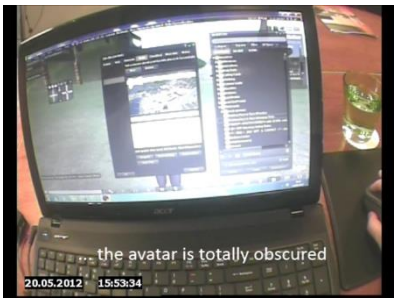
The interface is quite "user friendly" once you have got used to it ...
20.05.2012 15:51:22

... which is why the participant is taking a lot of effort to rearrange the screen how she prefers it
20.05.2012 15:51:28

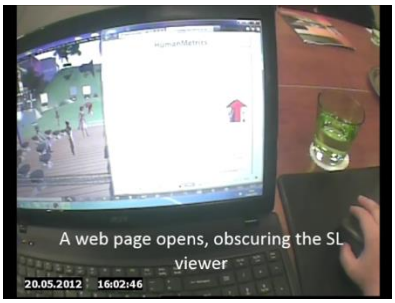

... she prefers the list because the pie dates to old versions of SL, and hence it feels a step backward
20.05.2012 15:52:15

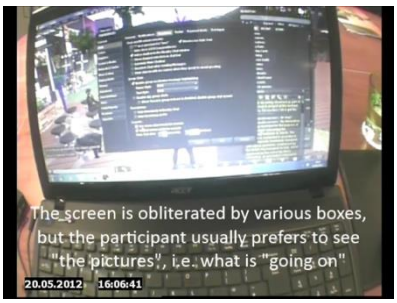
She also like the menu toolbar at the bottom of the screen arranged so that what she uses most often is shown
20.05.2012 15:52:29


Another group notice appears behind the Profile and inventory boxes ....
20.05.2012 15:53:28


... the avatar is totally obscured
20.05.2012 15:53:34

The centre box is a message from SL, requesting permission to open the URL
20.05.2012 16:02:18


A web page opens, obscuring the SL viewer
20.05.2012 16:02:46

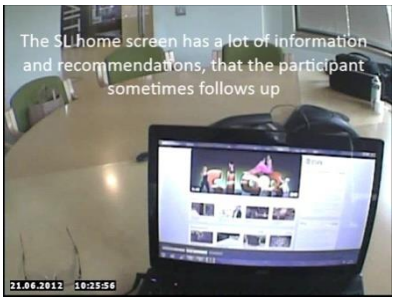

The screen is obliterated by various boxes, but the participant usually prefers to see "the pictures", i.e. what is "going on"
20.05.2012 16:06:41

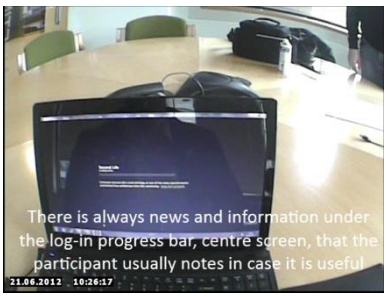
The left hand column of the IM box indicates all the people with whom she is having IM conversations ...
20.05.2012 16:08:27

The URL he provides her with takes the participant to the location where the weaponry is sold in the Second Life Marketplace (i.e. the online store)
20.05.2012 16:23:57

The participant rearranges the screen, perhaps to maximise the view
20.05.2012 16:40:01

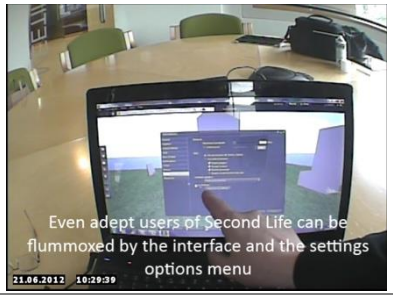
SG:

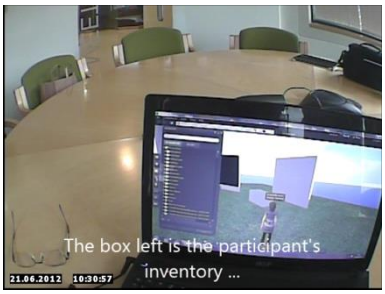

The SL home screen has a lot of information and recommendations, that the participant sometimes follows up
21.06.2012 10:25:56

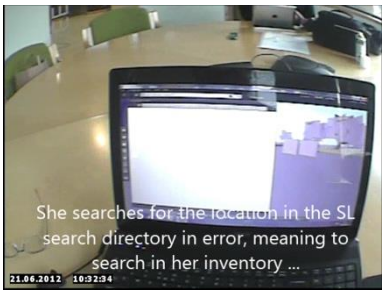

There is always news and information under the log-in progress bar, centre screen, that the participant usually notes in case it is useful
21.06.2012 10:26:17

The box with pictures onscreen top left is a noticeboard, providing recommendations from Second Life (places to visit etc.)
21.06.2012 10:26:29

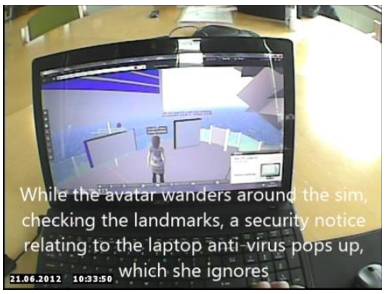
The objects on the platform are presentation boards, dispensors, etc
21.06.2012 10:27:39

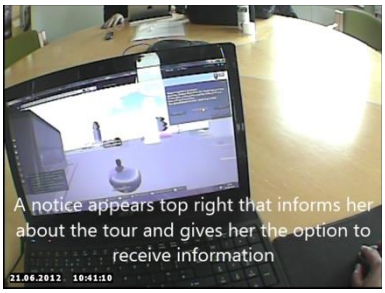

Even adept users of Second Life can be flummoxed by the interface and the settings options menu
21.06.2012 10:29:39


The box left is the participant's inventory ...
21.06.2012 10:30:57


She searches for the location in the SL search directory in error, meaning to search in her inventory ...
21.06.2012 10:32:34

... since the SL interface changed, she sometimes makes this mistake
21.06.2012 10:32:42


While the avatar wanders around the sim, checking the landmarks, a security notice relating to the laptop anti-virus pops up, which she ignores
21.06.2012 10:33:50

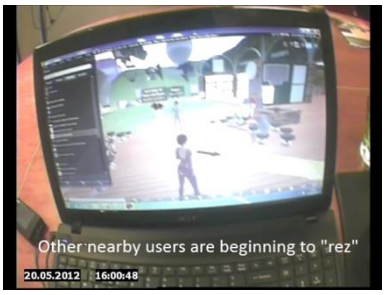

A notice appears top right that informs her about the tour and gives her the option to receive information
21.06.2012 10:41:10

... although in this instance, the same notice kept appearing, asking her if she wanted information
21.06.2012 10:41:33

	Rezzing	The appearance of objects and avatars as screen as data feeds through.	L:

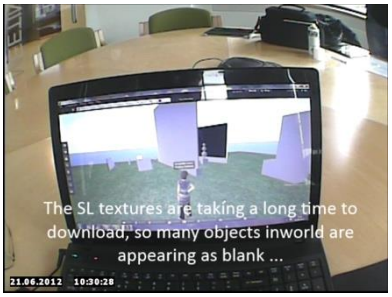
The "cloud" is how the avatar appears as the data streams down the line
20.05.2012 15:41:41

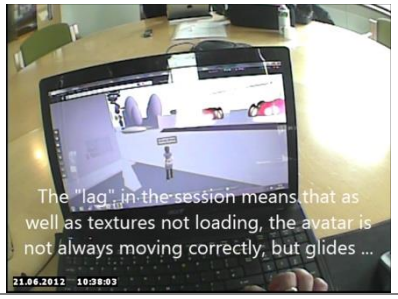
The avatar has fully "rezzed"
20.05.2012 15:41:58

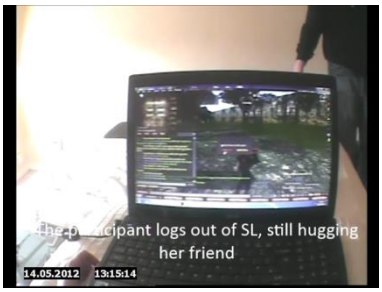

Other nearby users are beginning to "rez"
20.05.2012 16:00:48

SG:

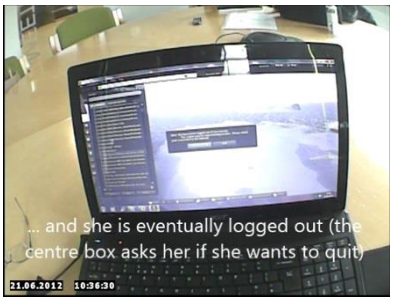
The avatar begins to appear onscreen ... it appears as a cloud until all the data has fed down the line
21.06.2012 10:26:35

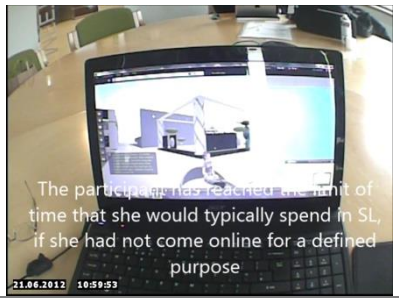

The SL textures are taking a long time to download, so many objects inworld are appearing as blank ...
21.06.2012 10:30:28

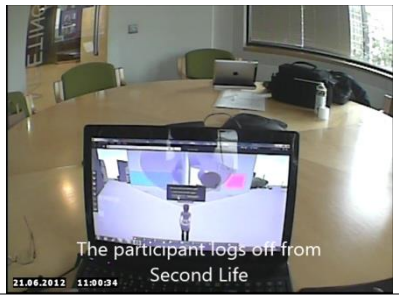
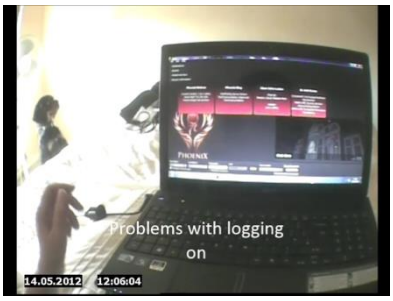
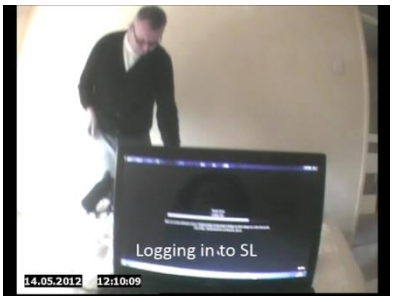

The "lag" in the session means that as well as textures not loading, the avatar is not always moving correctly, but glides ...
21.06.2012 10:38:03

	Logging on and logging off off	The experience of logging off, and being logged off, from Second Life.	AM:  L: *I: Now, you just logged off here. I don't know if there anything I want particularly to ask you about the logging off thing, apart from to say, I'm just going to double check, do you just, like, go bang and whoosh?* SG: If I was in a real setting, in the sense I was, like, say in John Lester's talk, and I hadn't been able to keep a track of all the URLs that were given or something, I might, before logging out, copy and paste the entire chat. I sometimes don't trust the backend, the text file that gets-, *I: You don't necessarily trust the download?* SG: Yes. What I do is-, and also because that file builds over a period of time, I don't have a separate file for every session, I'm not that systematic. That files builds up over a period of time. What I would do is, I copy and paste it into a file. *I: Right, yes. I don't do that, but what I do do is I will call up the text file, and just check.* SG: Check that, yes. *I: I'll see if the last thing that happened is what I think happened.* SG: Yes. No, I create is separate, then what I'll do is I will copy and paste it in an empty e-mail message, send the e-mail to me but with a proper subject, so 'John Lester's talk on this in Second Life' so that if I have to find it later on, I know what it is. I know that I put the keywords in the subject line, so that it was on digital literacy, or it was on

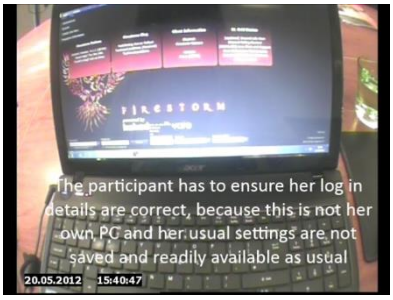
libraries in virtual worlds, so that when I search through Mac, it's very easy to search through all your e-mails in one go. Then I find that very useful. I sometimes do go back, it's not that I've never gone back. There are some I've never gone back, because you don't need that, but you've just kept it … *I: Just watch this a second, just in case. You're saying, "I would normally log off now, as I've done my time and I've had enough", and I'm saying, "Okay, stop." (Recording plays) When you log off, there's no, sort of, strange you're there then you're not sort of feeling?* SG: No. *I: It's just the end.* SG: Yes, that's it. *I: You don't have to, like, psych yourself up to, you know, I'm coming towards the end of my session now. Does your mind start thinking about what you've got to do after?* SG: No. I feel very good about it. I mean, if I have presented myself, then what I would do is I would make sure that whoever asked me to be a friend, I've noted down their name so I know what the reference was in which they asked me to be a friend. Then I'll also make some reflective notes, so that if people have asked me questions, and if I have some observations, I make those notes. I'll give a proper ending to it. It's not that I switch it off, my activity is over, and I'm gone, I'd reflect a bit. Like, last night also after coming out, I was reflecting on what [one attendant] was saying, what [another] was saying, how their ideas matched together.





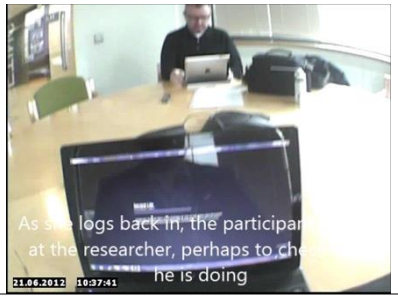
			
	Logging on	The experience of logging onto Second Life.	*I: When you're actually logging in is there any kind of sense of anticipation?* AM: No. *I: Did there used to be? Has there ever been?* AM: No, there never has. I mean, I do think, 'Oh god, how many group IMs am I getting. How many-,'   *I: You know, normally when you're logging in, obviously you haven't got an idiot like me going on in the background. What normally, sort of, happens? Are you just sitting there in front of your screen, just patiently waiting? Or I mean, some people go off and do other things or what have you. Do you just sit there quietly?* L: When I'm just logging in? I just wait for it to go. I don't go off and do other things. I'm very, very rarely AFK. *I: Oh really?* L: Yes. *I: So you're either online or you're offline?* L: Yes, it annoys me when people are AFK. *I: When you're logging on normally, do you feel any kind of anticipation or are you, kind of, looking forward to it?* L: Yes, sometimes.

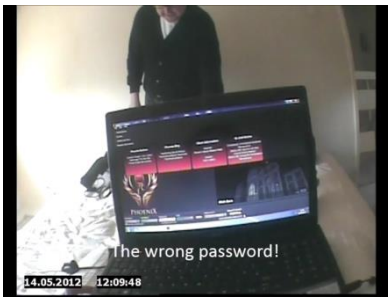
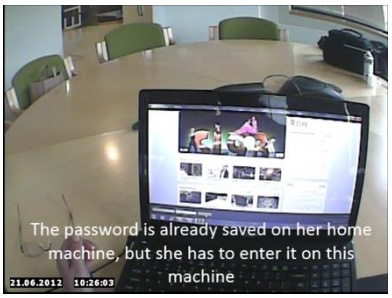
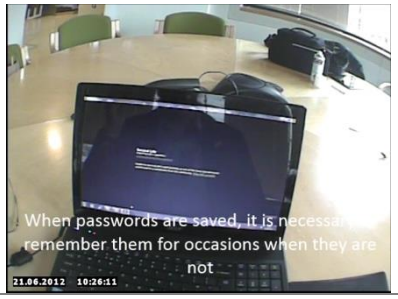
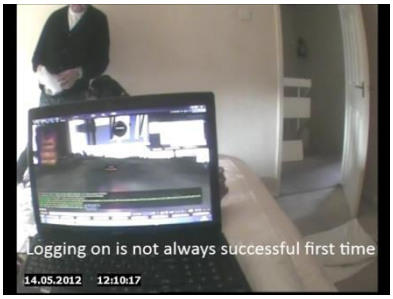
Definitely in the earlier days for sure. Absolutely for sure, yes.

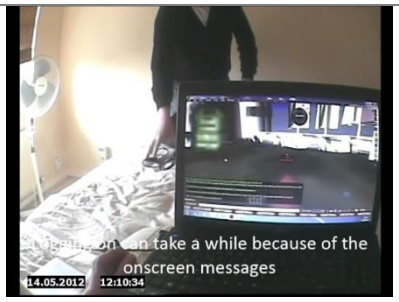


I: I mean, is the actual system logging you in? Oh no, she's on the home screen. What do you think of this home screen? Do you even see it? SG: I sometimes see it, yes. I pick up something, for example the Linden Labs birthday celebrations are going on. So I keep a look out because sometimes I feel that certain educational sides might be of interest to me and I would like to go and visit them. *I: At the moment-, this is logging in at the moment, isn't it? You know the bar and everything. Obviously at the moment we're talking, so it's kind of going on without you focusing on anything. Is anything going on in your mind normally when that's going on?* SG: I look at these messages here. I keep my eye because I think that anything important or any new island or anything that Linden Labs is doing, I will take notice of it. *I: Do you ever click on them?*

SG: I sometimes do, yes. *I: Right okay.* SG: Like today I saw something on Berlin so I immediately clicked in and went onto the island … and part of the Second Life Linden Lab birthday celebrations. *I: Is there anything changing as you're going from, whatever is going on, and I know this situation is different because we're chattering away, you don't feel like there's any kind of you becoming [SG] in Second Life or anything like that.* SG: No, it's just like opening another application. So it isn't to do-, *I: Nothing mystical happening?* SG: No.



	Passwords	Inputting passwords when logging on.	AM:  SG:  
	Takes time to log on	Delays in the logging on process.	AM: Well, it depends on how SL is. Sometimes I go straight in, but it's then because when I log in I usually have loads and loads of group notices, IMs and it takes a bit then for me to log in, but once all those are cleared, it's not too bad at all. Sometimes if SL's playing up I have to try about three times. Yes, I have to get in. 

				
		Transition between worlds	The sense in which there is a transition between the physical world and Second Life.	SG: Normally it doesn't happen, but I do. Even when I go back in the car, I'll be thinking. If I've been in a Second Life session here, I'll be thinking about it. It goes for about half an hour, 45 minutes. Quitting is not quitting. *I: So in a sense there is a kind of transition that goes on?* SG: There is a transition, but only in terms of learning. I wouldn't-, *I: And it's an internal, sort of, transition?* SG: Yes.
	SL characteristics	Beauty of SL	The beauty of creations within SL and the extent to which it can facilitate immersion.	SG: No, I wouldn't probably enjoy them. I like the colours, I like the beauty of the places, and I sometimes admire how designers have made it. There might be abstract forms, which have no relevance to real life, there might be long, beautiful tunnels in which you can move, I just love them. I think of it how the designer perceived this, so that creativity amazes me, and it inspires me. I like the beauty of Second Life. That is why I don't feel comfortable on all the islands. I feel comfortable in those islands which have been very aesthetically and creatively designed. I might go and spend time, like in the virtual world, what is that conference? Best practices education conference. Sometimes they have those very different themes, like steampunk theme or something, and things are very dark, the entire auditorium is very dark. I don't like it … I think the beauty of the environment has a lot to do with the immersion. As you say, it is very individualistic attitudes towards it, not everything …
		Freedom from constraints	The extent to which Second Life gives users freedoms from constraints that exist in the physical world.	L: Yes. That is an amazing thing. You think of people with perhaps quite profound disabilities in their everyday lives can just come on here and be free from all the judgement. *I: Some people go the opposite way and make a virtue out of it. I mean, I've met people who've used wheelchairs and things in Second Life, you know.* L: I think that's fair enough as well. *I: They can't find-, they take a more political view of it perhaps because it's not something you see very often.* L: No, but also nice to be free from-, *I: Constraint.* L: Constraint, I think, and the same goes for the guy who wants to be looking like a woman. It's just easy to do, really, isn't it? Free from being judged. I enjoy it. I think I'm probably at the stage where I might just go exploring to try and find something

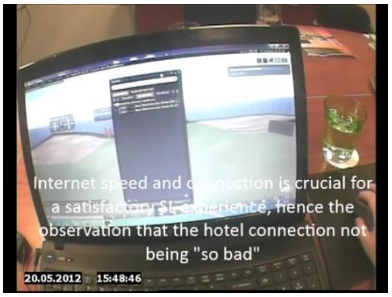
			new to do. *I: Why is that?* L: Just because I think it's good every now and then. *I: Oh I see, just to reinvigorate things. You're not bored or anything necessarily?* L: Not necessarily bored, no. *I: Just want to bring a change.* L: Yes.
	SL as an alternative therapy	The potential for Second Life to be used for behaviours that are unacceptable in the physical world, as a way of eradicating them.	*I: Well, some people would say that certain films or certain games encourage violence and all this kind of thing, and there'd be another few that says, like what you're saying, 'If it stops them from going out and killing someone, maybe it's okay.' I mean, what do you think of that?* AM: No. To be honest with you, it's kind of a 50, 50 thing, because yes if you-, watching violence can provoke violence in someone. Usually it's the young that have no real grasp on what life is worth or anything, they're too young to have this knowledge, they learn it by getting older. To sit a child, or say an adult that is kind of slightly unbalanced, to let them sit and watch violence, yes I think it can. If you're a mentally healthy person, no it won't, because that's not part of you. You know, I mean no-one can argue the fact that someone that wants to go physically harm, or mentally harm someone, they are not mentally fit, they're not a well-balanced person. Yes, I do, and I mean, it's like these role plays, some of them are fine, but others are just not. It's just sick what they do. *I: What do you think should happen, then? Do you think they should have treatment or something?* AM: I think that this grotesque role play of murder, or mentally intimidating someone, anything like that, that can cause physical or mental harm, should be stopped by the Lindens in Second Life. I really do. I think that the ones that have participated in this should be looked at very closely. It's very, very wrong. I mean, I've never seen it, but someone was telling me they've got the Ku Klux Klan in Second Life, they go and burn black people in Second Life. You know, okay, you can't burn pixels for real, but it's sick. *I: Well, it's the intention I suppose.* AM: Well, it's the sickness of someone wanting to do that, and some of the Gorean sims, they're saying child avatars. I don't give a damn whether it's an adult running this child avatar or not, it's not right. It's those kind of things. This is why I do keep reiterating to a lot of-, *I: Do you mean in the Gorean sims for actual sex and stuff, is that what you mean?* AM: Well we don't know, I've got no clue, I can't say whether it's like that, but they sell a child avatar into slavery. Usually it probably would be, I don't know. This is why I keep on reiterating to people, please keep the grasp on reality, this is not real, this is virtual. One thing you mustn't lose sight of is there's a real person running this avatar.

	SL as an outlet	Using Second Life as a way of experiencing a break from the physical world.	SG: I think with Second Life it gives me an outlet for, it gives me an outing, as if I've-, *I: Gone somewhere?* SG: Gone somewhere and had fun. *I: Okay*. SG: Especially like the one I was doing today, and doing at home also. The day that I really feel that I've not gone out much and had a really, really work loaded day, then I'll go into Second Life, sit in some nice place near the water. I will, it's a great sense of enjoyment for me.
	Unique characteristics of SL	How some aspects of, and experiences in, Second Life are unique to it.	SG: So I love these tours, very much. I: Why do you like these? SG: These are the things that make Second Life unique and special for me. *I: In what sense?* SG: It gives me a great sense of enjoyment. *I: Just from an artistic point of view, creativity, or just like kind of a new experience?* SG: The characteristic, the feature, the experience that there is such a vast space and I come here, I don't have to, I don't miss anything because I'm getting a guided commentary.
	What is reality?	The nature of reality in Second Life, how it is created between the people who use it.	*I: Does-, so does that mean that really the only things that are real in Second Life are the-, you know, what goes on between people?* AM: The only thing that is real, totally real, is the conversations, the inter-reaction. *I: Even if it's-, I won't say 'fake', but you know we were talking about people either deceiving or not, are-, even those are real? Even if they don't represent the truth?* AM: If they're scheming, trying to fool you, yes, it's real. The only thing-, *I: Because the outcome is-*, AM: Because of the outcome. They're intending to do it. They are trying to deceive you into believing something that is not genuine from them. The only thing, although it's still chat, that isn't real, is role play, because it's acting out like a film. *I: Yes.* AM: Do you see what I mean? *I: Yes.* AM: If we look-, if we take it as you and I sitting here now, and we're watching the TV, say, and we've got a film on the TV, like this is, we-, if that wasn't me, and me sitting here, this would be a film. This would be fiction. It would be somebody playing out a role. Yes, the people that are in Second Life to deceive are playing out a role, but it's probably-, it's more likely to be a role of what they would like to do in reality. This is what is very unstable. *I: Well, also, is it real because even though they might be pretending or whatever, the person who is talking with them and interacting with them thinks it's real as well?* AM: Well, it-, *I: Does that kind of make it real, even if it's only on-, real on the one side?* AM: It only becomes real then, in reality, when the person that they are trying to deceive realises it. Think about it. It is. It's further down the line, and that person will be really hurt, because they've been fooled, they feel themselves foolish, and

				you know, it hurts them, and it's nothing to do with a case of pride. It's a case of real hurt, you know? You can hurt my pride any day, just don't hurt my bloody feelings, you know? Kind of thing. This is why I think we have to look at everything as if a virtual-, even in real life, we get some people that have a virtual reality and we have some people that have a real reality. You know, we have to be aware of this. We can't go through life thinking everything is cut and dry, everything is black and white. It isn't. There are grey areas … *I: So some-, the things that might go on in Twitter or something like that can be just as-, the same sorts of things can happen there, can they?* AM: Oh, yes, of course. Of course they can. This is all to do-, not so much a physical reaction, but a verbal or text connection, conversation, interaction, and some people see that as real in there as you and I now sitting here talking. That is not a stable mind. *I: What makes it real? Is it the connection with other people? Is it the fact that they can talk to other people, and somebody can say something and they can say something back? Is that what makes it real to them, then?* AM: I-, to be honest with you, that-, it's a personal thing, really, when you think about it. I don't know, I'm not in their head, but I think they just take things too literally. *I: Oh, okay.* AM: I think they are searching for something that's real, and unfortunately when they're in one of these virtual things or, oh God, a chat room, that's life to them. I know that's sad. When they-, if they turn it, that's personal life. It's life, in a way, to me. When I go into Second Life, it's life to me because I talk to so many people with so many problems, but apart from that, no. This is not real. This is a virtual reality. The chatting is real, that is very, very real, because it's words in text coming from a real person. Would you not say when you read a book that it's real? You see? As I say, oh my God, Simon, so many people in SL, that's the only life they've got. Now this is so sad. I mean, I don't go in-, there are various reasons why I don't go into Second Life as much as I used to. It's because A, I was spending far too much time in there, B, it was giving me less and less time in reality, in a real setting.
	Technology	Computer technology	The extent to which computer technology comprises experience of Second Life.	AM:

.... she is always aware of where she is physically and that she is using a computer programme
14.05.2012 12:25:23

L:

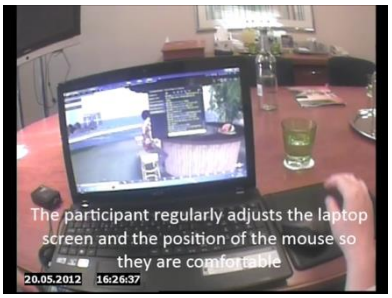

Internet speed and connection is crucial for a satisfactory experience, hence the observation that the hotel connection not being "so bad"
20.05.2012 15:48:46

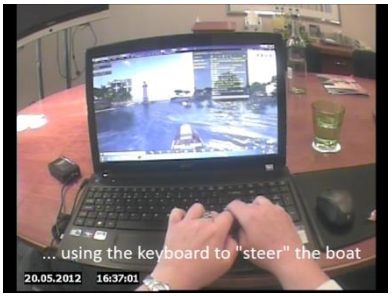
When the avatar hits an obstruction it "trips" and looks like it is tumbling/flying
20.05.2012 15:50:48

"Tap tap" ...two taps of the up arrow to allow the avatar to run
20.05.2012 15:50:54

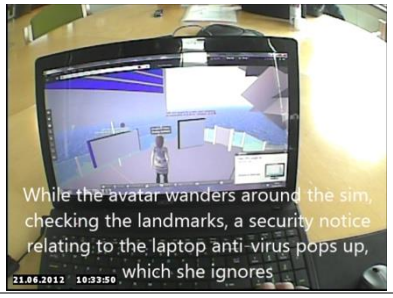
The participant is a skilled typist
20.05.2012 15:56:38

The participant remarks she thinks she might need spectacles for using computers
20.05.2012 16:20:52





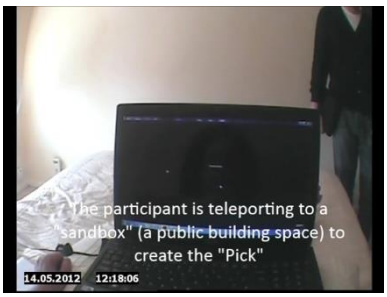
SG: I mean a couple of years before, Second Life used to drain the system, so I used to remember to switch off my mail, any other applications, check that everything else is switched off because then Second Life can run comfortably, because if Second Life is going to take all the power and I don't give it all the power then in the session I'll be logged out. Now, because the machine at home is very powerful and even at work I find I don't find it difficult to run Second Life with other applications, then I keep all the applications open.



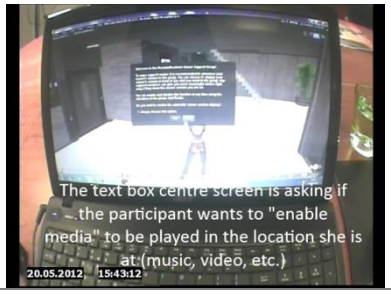
SL technology

The impact of Second Life technology on experience of the virtual world.

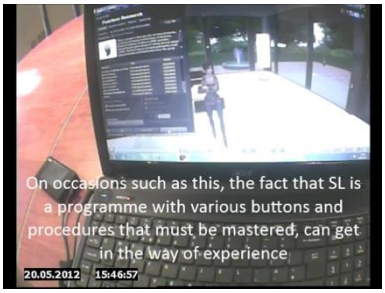
AM:

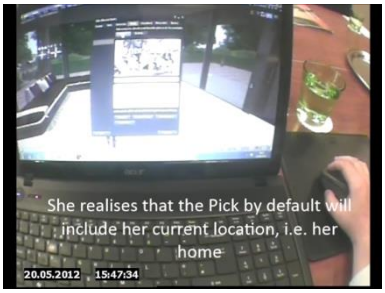


L:



... in this case it was already activated so the new tag would not show; the group had to be deactivated and reactivated
20.05.2012 15:46:18


On occasions such as this, the fact that SL is a programme with various buttons and procedures that must be mastered, can get in the way of experience
20.05.2012 15:46:57


She realises that the Pick by default will include her current location, i.e. her home
20.05.2012 15:47:34

The participant teleports to a public space, so she can complete the research protocol
20.05.2012 15:48:39

Objects appear ("rez") on screen as the data feeds down the line (hence the need for a good connection)
20.05.2012 15:49:04

The public space is "laggy" i.e. there are so many items and avatars there it takes longer for data to feed down the line and inventory items to open
20.05.2012 15:49:46

The participant is preparing to teleport out of the space
20.05.2012 16:15:53

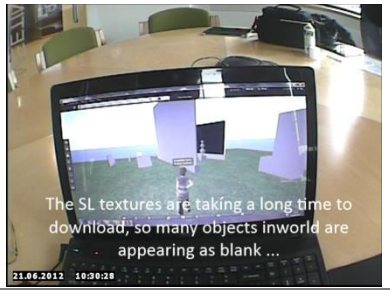
She enjoys the "windlight" settings that provide the sky and lighting appearance in the sim ...
20.05.2012 16:37:16

... but the sim is two regions joined together, so the sky changes as she crosses the borderline ...
20.05.2012 16:37:26

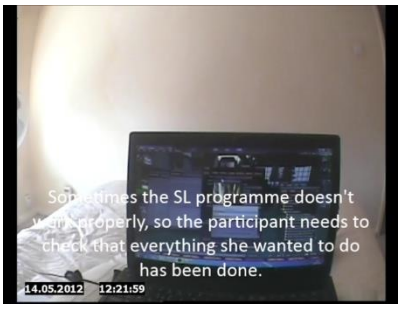
... and the wave placed at the border knocks the boat over
20.05.2012 16:37:28

SG:

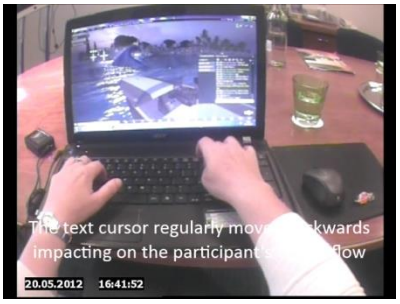
The participant checks if the onscreen text in this session will download to the computer hard drive
21.06.2012 10:28:12


The SL textures are taking a long time to download, so many objects inworld are appearing as blank ...
21.06.2012 10:30:28

	Technical problems	Problems with the Second Life programme.	AM: I'd saved it, then I opened up the profile again and checked, because sometimes SL doesn't actually save it so you have to redo it.

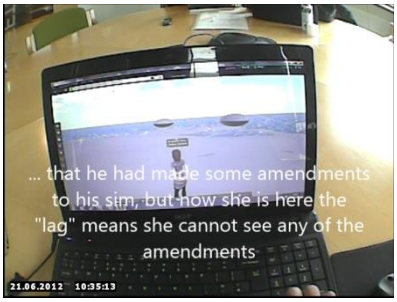


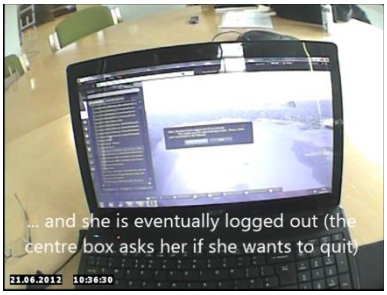
L:

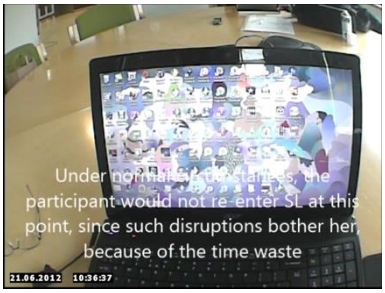


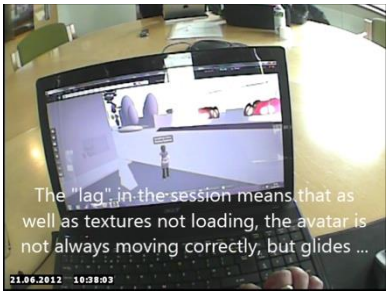
SG: Now, I was looking for the Abyss because I'm now wanting to go to Abyss and check how he has been redesigning because over this weekend I received a note card from the designer that he has made some changes, so I thought I'd go

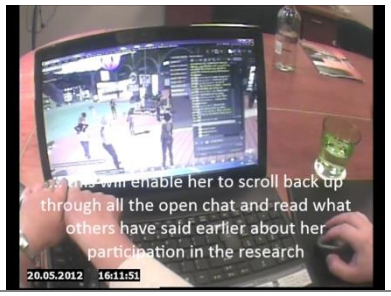
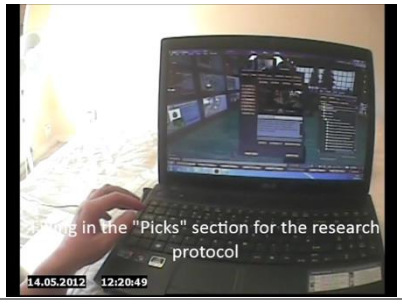
and look today, but when I went there I didn't enjoy it much because the textures weren't complete.

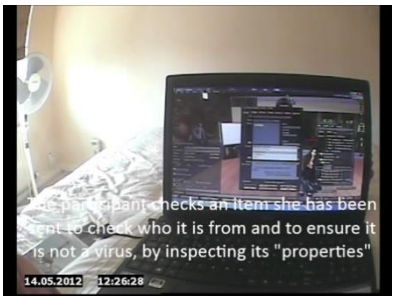






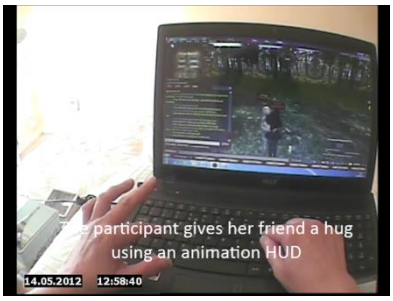


				  
	Using the interface	Awareness of using a computer	The extent to which the user is aware of the computer, as opposed to being so immersed in Second Life that the interface is not noticed.	*I: When you're in your house, what does it feel like? Do you feel like you're there?* AM: Well, you have to keep a grip on reality. You have to. I mean some people do. They go in there and they're actually physically, mentally in Second Life. I can't do that. *I: Do you feel like then you're just sitting with a computer on your lap messing around with a programme? I know that there's real people involved but do you know what I mean?* AM: Yes and no. I realise that I'm sitting at a computer. I realise I'm using a three-, sorry, a two dimensional programme that is-, oh what do you call it? It's virtual world. I know that that's a virtual world. I can't get lost in myself.
		Interacting with SL	Examples of using the interface.	AM: 


The participant checks an item she has been sent to check who it is from and to ensure it is not a virus, by inspecting its "properties"
14.05.2012 12:26:28

A friend has sent the participant an Instant Message, so she pastes the text in the box that explains she is participating in research
14.05.2012 12:28:11

She finds the notecard the researcher sent her and copies the appropriate text from it, and pastes it into the message box
14.05.2012 12:39:38

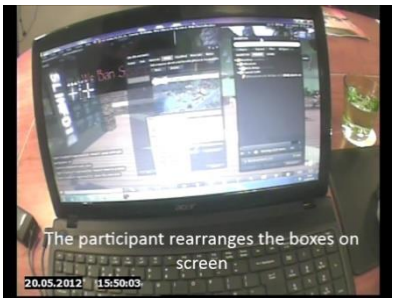

The participant gives her friend a hug using an animation HUD
14.05.2012 12:58:40

L:

The participant begins to edit the "Picks" section to include the text informing others she is a research participant
20.05.2012 15:47:27

The participant teleports to a public space, so she can complete the research protocol
20.05.2012 15:48:39

The participant starts again to enter a new Pick
20.05.2012 15:49:21

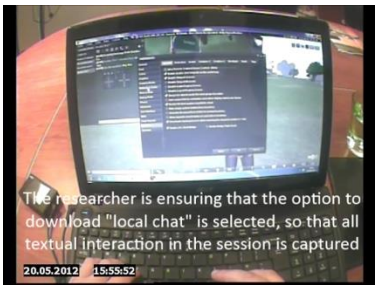

The participant rearranges the boxes on screen
20.05.2012 15:50:03

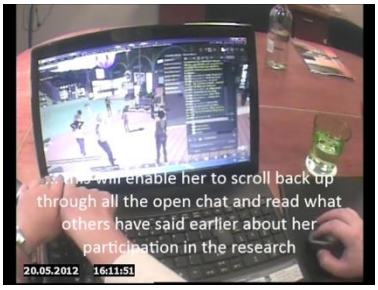
The participant uses the keyboard to move the avatar rather than using the default onscreen HUD
20.05.2012 15:50:37

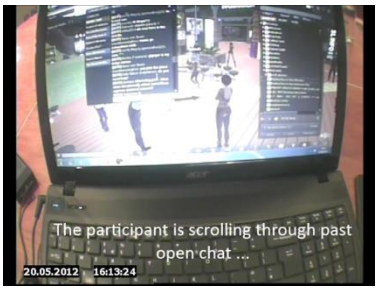
The camera turns to view the avatar face on
20.05.2012 15:51:05

The participant prefers the avatar menu when clicked to appear as a list rather than pie, but cannot remember how to change it
20.05.2012 15:52:09

She also like the menu toolbar at the bottom of the screen arranged so that what she uses most often is shown
20.05.2012 15:52:29


The researcher is ensuring that the option to download "local chat" is selected, so that all textual interaction in the session is captured
20.05.2012 15:55:52


This will enable her to scroll back up through all the open chat and read what others have said earlier about her participation in the research
20.05.2012 16:11:51

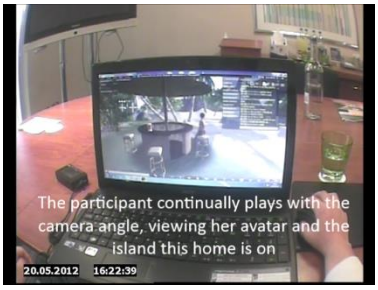

The participant is scrolling through past open chat ...
20.05.2012 16:13:24

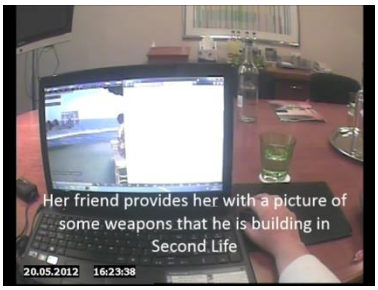
out of practice and being a bit slow doing things in SL
20.05.2012 16:14:19

The participant selects a chair and seats her avatar on it, using the pie menu
20.05.2012 16:18:12

The participant changes the sitting pose, and turns the chair around so it faces the bar
20.05.2012 16:19:42

She has switched on her Animation Overrider (A.O.) so that the avatar will use the pose built into the bar stool
20.05.2012 16:19:48


The participant continually plays with the camera angle, viewing her avatar and the island this home is on
20.05.2012 16:22:39

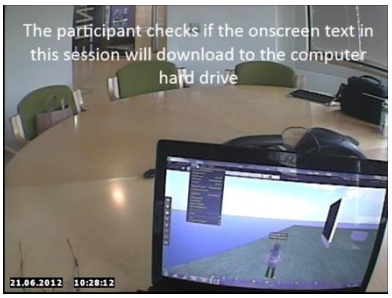

Her friend provides her with a picture of some weapons that he is building in Second Life
20.05.2012 16:23:38

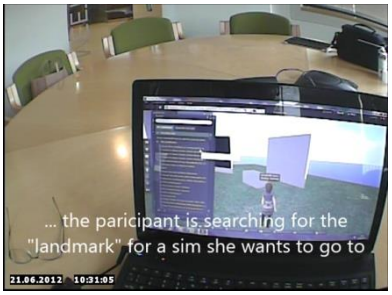
she opens up his profile to check that his avatar remains a fox
20.05.2012 16:24:37

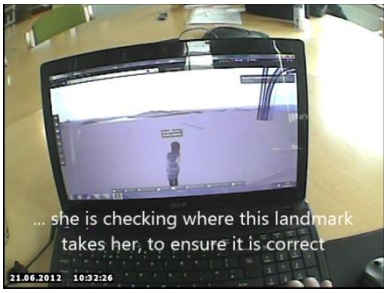
Moving the camera around ... and checking the time
20.05.2012 16:42:25

The participant enjoys taking snapshots of the moon
20.05.2012 16:44:25

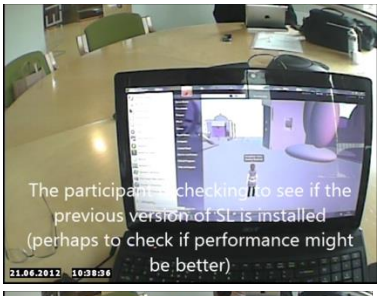
SG:


The participant checks if the onscreen text in this session will download to the computer hard drive
21.06.2012 10:28:12

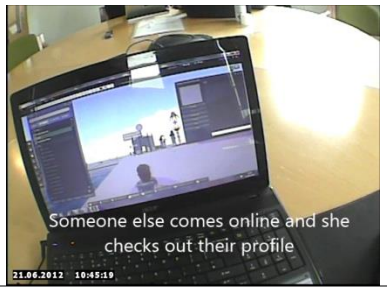

... the paricipant is searching for the "landmark" for a sim she wants to go to
21.06.2012 10:31:05

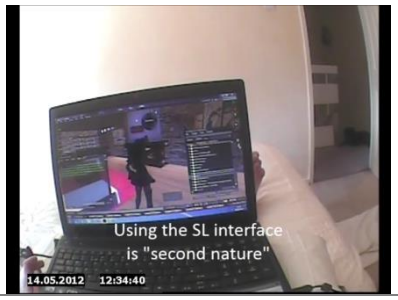
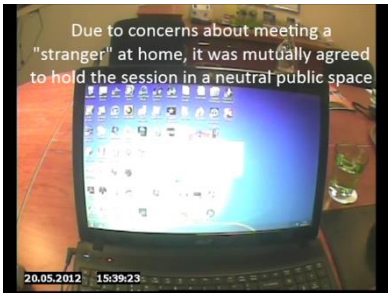

... she is checking where this landmark takes her, to ensure it is correct
21.06.2012 10:32:26

The participant checks the landmarks within the region, by looking at the map situated inworld ...
21.06.2012 10:34:01


The participant is checking to see if the previous version of SL is installed (perhaps to check if performance might be better)
21.06.2012 10:38:36

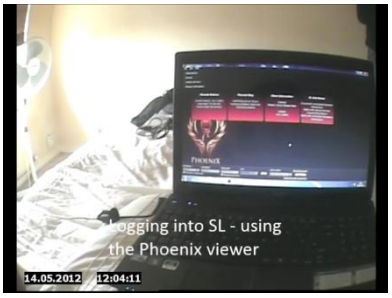
... she checks her friend list, and discovers it is a friend who has changed their display name
21.06.2012 10:39:03

			    
	Not a website	Despite being a programme, Second Life is not a series of websites.	*I: You mentioned that this is like an application, I think you called it. For you, is this all it is? You know when you're going from one place to another, is it like going to different websites, almost?* SG: No, in my mind it is different locations, different places. It's not like a website. I've never treated it that way.
	Programme preferences	Second Life settings preferences.	SG: No, I have it on default, whatever it is. On the old viewer I had it on advanced and somebody [at my workplace] only told me about it, it was because there was an option in advanced that if you take a snapshot it doesn't take, the click sound doesn't come.
	Second nature	Using Second Life, its interface, how to use the programme and how it appears, becomes automatic and taken for granted.	*I: Does having to use keys to do things, is it a nuisance or do you just get used to it? You know, like putting a question mark with slashes on the question mark and having to use something, you know. When you're in real life you just do something don't you without even kind of thinking about it, but here you're having to use a screen to-, you're having to think on a different level almost aren't you?* AM: Well, I've been doing it for so long, it's second nature. I don't really have to think about it now, that one. I just know what to do and do it, but yes, sometimes I hit the shift key and I think, "Got the wrong icon there." … *I: It kind of shows in a way how habitual, you know, we kind of quickly get used to something, don't we?* AM: I think we take things for granted, and we assume

			it's going to be the same. Even if we don't assume, we just don't think about it, because we're so used to doing it, it's just, like, second nature. This is why I made the point that you need to keep a grasp, a hold, on reality. We need to in Second Life. 
	Security	Examples of the security concerns that surround Second Life e.g. someone having your password details, or meeting people "offline" who you have never met before in the physical world.	L: You did have me typing that. *I: Pardon?* L: You did have me typing that password in there. *I: Yes, I can't see it, though. Is that what you were worried about?* L: Yes. You can. Can you get rid of that bit? *I: Yes, are you alright trusting me to do it, though? I can get it onto an editor.* L: Yes. *I: I mean, obviously I promise nobody else is going to see this but then you don't know if I'm going to be naughty either, do you, really?* L: Yes. I'd forgotten I'd got these on when I was doing it. *I: Or if you feel comfortable, change it when you get home or something.* L: Yes, I might work-, I don't even know how to change it. I'll work it out. *I: I think you have to go into your account. You know, go into Second Life account online.* L: Yes. 
	Using the viewer	Aspects of using the Second Life viewer, the choice and its appearance.	*I: What about how the screen looks? I mean, I know you're having to use the way I suppose my default, how I have the screen, but your huds and things have come up? I mean, do you think about them anymore?* AM: No. I usually close them down, but I've left them even though. *I: Do you even notice them though? That's*

what I suppose I-, AM: Well, when I close them down, no I don't. If they're open like that, yes I do. The AO, I've put it over to the right and I squash it down, but yes, I've left that up, because I've got to go and see to the meeroos, so yes, I've left that one up. Usually I close it right down so it's in narrow … *I: Are you normally behind or do you use mouse look ever or-* AM: Oh, I hate mouse look. I can't move with the darn thing. I go into everybody's then. I really do, I hate it, but no, that is the AO. It has bought-, oh I think that's [my friend]. I'm not sure, I can't see actually what it is there. It might not be. It might be a group IM, I'm not sure. If I drop it it's group IM. No, I might have altered the angle, but sometimes when SL is playing up a bit you're an avatar with certain AO's, animation overriders turns your avatar to the screen after TP. You men are lucky, because it doesn't happen much with you. *I: Do you usually look at yourself from the front or from behind?* AM: Only when I'm getting dressed or if I'm-, obviously when you're editing your appearance … *I: You know you're looking around quite a lot? Are you looking around at anything in particular or is it just-,* AM: No, I'm not. If you notice I'm not using the movement keys, that's the-, *I: Oh okay, you're just looking around. No, I mean you you as in through the glasses?* AM: Oh, I'm sorry. Oh, I'm turning my head from one thing to another and watching that IM box *… I: Well, I think what's difficult as well, it looks different depending on what viewer you're on.* AM: Oh yes it does, very different. *I: So, it's a bit of a pain really. Things aren't as simple as what they used to be.* AM: It's the text. Now, there I use the movement keys. I don't use that. *I: Oh, you don't use the-,* AM: I use the other key. The camera. I don't use that one you've got on the bottom of the screen. I find it intrusive with chat and things like that. *I: So, when you're moving around what are you using, just using arrow keys?* AM: I use the arrow keys to turn and move forward, but the camera controls, I use those. They're more accurate I find. *I: Okay.* AM: If I go anywhere where it's really laggy I stand somewhere out of the way and I go through the store or wherever in camera controls. So, they're much better than those movement keys that you've got up. *I: Oh, okay.* AM: They are awkward, jerky and I find anyway *… I: … Is (laughter). Oh, that's just like the AO just doing its thing. Are you still sending me stuff here or what?* AM: I don't think so. I can't see what that card is there. Oh, I'm doing the titler. *I: Oh okay, right.* AM: I think I'd got it wrong and I was, "I think that's changed", and I suddenly realised I'd got the question mark there instead of

forward slash. Yes, I mean-, *I: Does having to use keys to do things, is it a nuisance or do you just get used to it? You know, like putting a question mark with slashes on the question mark and having to use something, you know. When you're in real life you just do something don't you without even kind of thinking about it, but here you're having to use a screen to-, you're having to think on a different level almost aren't you?* AM: Well, I've been doing it for so long, it's second nature. I don't really have to think about it now, that one. I just know what to do and do it, but yes, sometimes I hit the shift key and I think, "Got the wrong icon there."

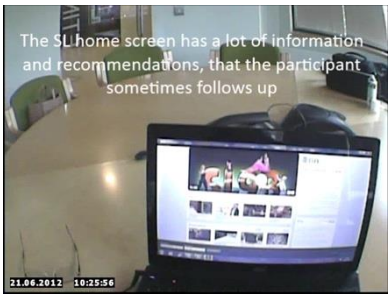


I: What are you doing now? Is this all to do with me? Oh you're trying to sort out the notecard business now are you? L: The groups I think that is. *I: When you're-,* L: It wouldn't let me activate it because it was activated already. *I: Is using Second Life like using a program? You know, a normal computer program?* L: I can't think what else I would use. *I: You know what I mean, like having to click buttons and all this? I mean, does that get in the way of the experience at all?* L: It can do. This is all getting in the way of the experience, having to fiddle around with-, *I: Why do you dislike the-, what do you call it, the radius or whatever you call it? The menu disc.* L: Why do I dislike that? I think I got onto version two and was using it about a year before I went onto Firestorm. It felt like it was going backwards to have the pie that goes pop at you. *I: Pie, that's the word.* L: I suppose it is more like using other systems, to have it down there lying and you just hover on it and it gives you another submenu to the side of it rather than just. *I: Yes, that's more in line with the way other programs work in a way, isn't it?* L: Yes. I*: Yes, with the pie thing, you have to go to more to list more things. So you keep on doing more, more, more. Next thing you know you've missed something and you have to start all over again.* L: Yes, I don't like that. This is just a lot of faffing around, isn't it? Never mind, eh? … I must have been looking at the boxes. I can't think I was looking all around. Why was I-, *I: You must have been.* L: Well there I'm looking at the keys, maybe I was looking at the mouse. I don't know … *I: Did you use Phoenix*

before? L: No, I didn't. I think that one of the reasons was because you get the music coming, what music is playing. *I: Yes, I used to like that.* L: What was the other reason? I cannot now remember why I changed to Firestorm. I'd had viewer two, like, about a year or two ago. When other people was going, was it two or three? Whatever it was *… I: We're on three now but two is the one that everybody-*, L: It was two that everyone went (noise). So I just got used to that by then. So the Firestorm one was based on that, wasn't it? So that was it, so I thought I'd give it a go, I think. I knew-, … *I: Yes, use some of the user-friendliness of the Phoenix one, it's supposed to be. I mean, looking at all of this stuff, it looks ever so complicated. You know, you've got this stuff here and this and then you had-, when you pulled up the options there was loads and loads of different things. I mean, is it very user-friendly do you think?* L: I think it is, well I don't know. Once you've got your bits set up, all of these-, see all of these are in a different order to how I would normally have them. So you just get-, *I: Why, because you've changed them to be a different role?* L: Changed them to be in a different order and put different ones up on the-, *I: How did you decide what order you were going to have them in?* L: Just the ones that I use more frequently, I guess. *I: Do you still have them all up or do you hide some? I think you can hide some*. L:I hide some, yes. I don't need the World map normally. I can go into that under World up there. (Inaudible). (Laughter).

I: I just want to look at this because obviously this is, you couldn't ignore, I had to put it on lower quality so it doesn't take up loads of power, but all of this is all grey still isn't it? SG: Yes, because of [my employer's] network. *I: Right, and does that matter?* SG: It didn't matter here because I'm quite used to working [here] in this kind of a setting. At home, I would have got worried, "What's happening to my broadband?" and because I wasn't starting here, but at [work] also I get the same-, *I: So you're kind of-*, SG: I'm quite used to it, but I have to get some work done sometimes if there is an event or if I have to prepare myself and if I-, one of my computers only this browser runs, not the older one and I just got it to work in this

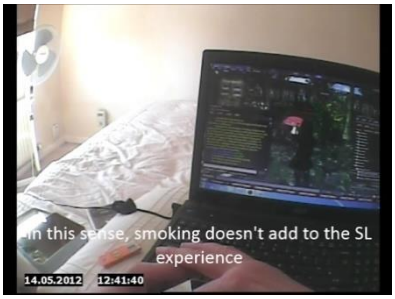
client, it doesn't bother me … I'm doing an interview with somebody, or if I've changed this version of Second Life they keep doing updates. So what I have to do is, I then go and check all my settings back again, and then I'm using my headset so that others at home are not disturbed. Again, I go into sound and check … As far as I remember, I think I was either looking for a URL to go somewhere else-, sorry, the SLURL to go somewhere else. Just because I was thinking that I might like to give you a variety of places that I go to. Because the screen was very, very dim that day because of the network problem, the greyness, I think I was-, that's another way my distracting myself at times, that I look at my inventory, I look at other SLURLs. I start preparing for the next actions while I'm doing the previous action, because if I have a slot in my thinking, then I start thinking about the next action. *I: All of this clicking, menu stuff, does any of this interfere with your experience at all?* SG: No, I don't do it as much as it's visible here. I think it must be something specific I am looking for. Otherwise, like in yesterday's session, I remember when I was in the virtual world education round table, once I teleported to the location I wasn't actually looking at my inventory at all. I didn't look for a change of address, or I didn't-, … *I: ... One thing I wanted to ask you, and I might have asked you this before, I don't know, is-, I think we have had this discussion, actually, I just remembered something, a comment I made. Your personal experience is, kind of, influenced by the medium you're accessing that experience. It's my laptop on the [employer] wireless, or whatever, so it's all not quite perfect, and also it might be a different interface and everything. I mean, do things like that get in the way of the experience?* SG: They can do, yes. I mean, the machine is a big difference for me. When I work on a PC, on a laptop that I have today, which I brought specifically in case we wanted to go to Second Life, because that works here on this [employer] network. That's a Dell laptop, but I don't enjoy Second Life on it, just because of the screen resolution, everything is not so great. When I work on a Mac, which is a bigger one, like I was doing the virtual world education round table on that last night, it is just because of the colours, the resolution, all those things make a lot of difference for me. It is not just the people or the places I am going, it's the beauty that I am seeing.

				   	
Real Life	Bleed through	Managing RL around SL	How usage of Second Life can become so dominant, that obligations of the physical world need to be fit around it.	*I: You know, when you were in their nineteen hours a day-*, AM: Oh my God, yes. *I: What was going on then, then?* AM: Oh, I was so busy working. *I: Did-, were you-, you know, you said you were tired and were making do on one or two hours of sleep.* AM: Yes. *I: Were you losing touch with what was real, or was it kind of your caring and obligation towards the others that was making you do it?* AM: It was, in one way. Another thing is, I would go off for that hour and switch off. I was up-, I'd go into Second Life at 6:30am. Maybe earlier, sometimes a little later, but around 6am, 6:30am, and I would work until lunchtime. Sometimes I'd only work until 10am, I'd have an hour off and I would do housework, because I've always-, if you keep your housework up it doesn't take long to do or keep right, does it, really? *I: No, not really.* AM: You know what I mean. Then, lunchtime I'd have my lunch and I'd prepare the evening meal, and I'd go back sometimes. I mean, obviously doing that doesn't always take an hour. At that time, I used to smoke at the computer. Yes, and then I thought to myself, "No, this is no good. I'm going to do my housework before I go into Second Life, and I want my evening meal prepared", and I made myself do that. I mean, I used to prepare the evening meal before I did the housework, then I'd have a	

			cup of coffee and a cigarette and then I'd start doing the housework at around about 8, 8:30 when I knew, sort of, next door was up. This time, there are some new people, and she's got three young children, so you can't-, housework has to be done at a later time. Then I'd go in, and I could be in there until 2, 3 the next morning. *I: What about your dinner?* AM: I'd come down and I'd put that on and then I'd set the timer on the cooker and I'd come back down when the timer went off and dish up and make the gravy or whatever, you know? *I: How did your head feel? Was it buzzing, with all of this computer work?* AM: You get numb. You actually get numb, to carry on. You know, it's like you're working on autopilot. You go on autopilot. It's very detrimental to your health, because you get exhausted. *I: Yes*. AM: When I started to feel annoyed, and I'd say I wanted to rip someone's head off, I thought, 'Oh, no, come on, stop it, you're doing far too much. Stop it.' Literally, I could've ripped someone's head off. Verbally, I mean, not physically, you know? *I: Yes, I know.* AM: I thought, "This isn't me." Yes, I have got a tongue on me if I want to, I can be very, very sharp, but this was going one step further, because I was too tired and exhausted. I couldn't be bothered with the trivia of some people. I used to say to them, "For goodness' sake, get a life", and I used to think, "Oh my God, I've said that?" but I had, I'd literally said that, because I'd had enough of them. So it was bad, wasn't it? That was very naughty of me. *I: How long did that go on for?* AM: It didn't go on for long, thank God, because I realised. It had probably gone on long enough, about two weeks, and I thought, "Just before someone", actually, I was thinking, "Oh God, I am starting to be really, really sharp with people. This isn't right." Then when someone said, "… you're so changed, you're getting quite aggressive for you", well, I said, "Yes, you're right", and I said, "I'm just overworked, very tired." So I stopped it, because you've got to put yourself first. You can't let yourself go down. You know?
	RL appearance	Knowledge of how friends appear in the physical world.	*I: Whether you're talking to them in IM or meeting with them through their avatars, do you have, kind of, an image in your mind about them?* AM: Sometimes I do. I think-, you know, you wonder, "Ooh, I wonder what you look like." *I: Yes.* AM: You know? The thing-, I must be so bloody boring. The thing-, I must be, because it's not-, to me, yes I do wonder what someone looks like, but that is not important to me. What is important to me is the inner person, and that is very important to me.

			 I: When you hold them in your mind when you're talking to them. How do you think of them? Are you thinking of a Finnish Fox or are you thinking of a man? L: I've never seen a picture of [him]. I've no idea what he looks like. *I: So in your imaginings-,* L: So in my imaginings, I suppose every now and then maybe I do have an image of him. I don't know why, maybe slim and dark haired. I don't know why, he might be a bit gawky looking. I don't know, that's what I have in my mind. I don't know that I really conjure that up when I'm chatting to him, though. Probably-, that's a really hard question. *I: When you're chatting to him face-to-face, are you seeing, are you conscious of his being a fox?* L: Yes, he is a fox. I: Do you see him as a fox or do you see him as-, L: Well as a furry fox, that's his ID. That's definitely-, so a couple of people, I do have pictures, I have seen pictures of them.
	RL personality carries over	How aspects of the personality in the physical world is in the virtual world.	SG: If I don't know something very well, I would rather listen and understand, than to just speak for the sake of it. Those traits of real life I do carry in Second Life, so I am not an extrovert in Second Life, and I am not an introvert. There isn't a plus and a minus difference between me, so many of my personal traits I do carry in Second Life, but it's just an extra bit of comfort, that your identity brings, that you don't have in real life.
	RL-SL interaction	Examples of how situations and circumstances in the physical world coincide with and influence experience in and of the virtual world.	AM: The other one where you saw me typing, that was from [my friend], he's the one I said was a wrestler. *I: Oh yes, yes.* AM: All he types was, "I've only got two black eyes." *I: Do people very often talk to you just like that about something that's going on in-, I mean, are conversations very often about real life?* AM: To be honest with you, more tell me their real life stories than don't. *I: From the start or quite early on?* AM: Fairly early on. It

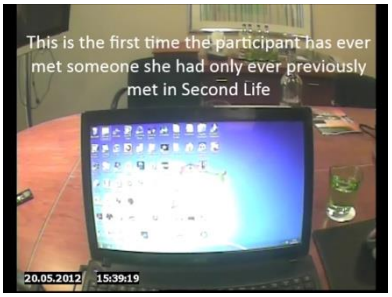
was-, oh, perhaps started from about the end of 2007 to the beginning of 2008, but since-, you know, I stopped doing it, the counselling in there and then I get one-, oh [my current avatar], when I made [her], just stopped doing it. Then, "Oh … , I need this, I need that, I need the other. Oh what am I going to do?" blah blah blah. I started it again, but it became too much … *I: What are you doing? Oh, you're sorting out your drink?* AM: I'm not sure if I had a drink or a cig-, yes, a drink. I think I was looking for the dog as well at one stage. Oh, the cigarettes. *I: Do you have to get all of yourself-, do you like to have everything, you know, normally?* AM: Normally yes, if I'm on my laptop on the bed I get these here and I've got my phones here, so everything's at hand. *I: So that you can be here in Second Life and if you need a fag or have a drink you can just do it?* AM: Yes, because it's painful when I get off the bed … *I: Now, talk about minutiae now. Do you often have a fag while you're-, when you're in Second Life, have a cigarette or a smoke?* AM: No. It's only in the bedroom, like, this bedroom. In my computer room, down here, anywhere else in the house, I never smoke. *I: Oh, so it's just-, okay.* AM: Yes. *I: Does it add anything to it?* AM: No. *I: I mean, it doesn't make you enjoy your session even more or anything?* AM: I think what-, no, no, no. I think what it is-, I was really feeling poorly that day, and I was in a lot of pain with my leg, and I think I just smoke because of that. It takes my mind off the pain. *I: In what sense? Too much responsibility?* AM: No. *I: Taking all your time up?* AM: Taking all my time up.

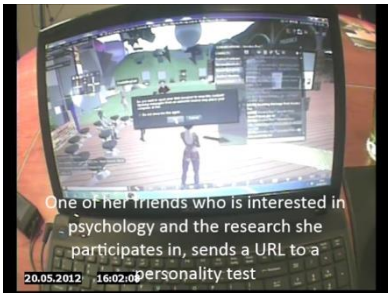


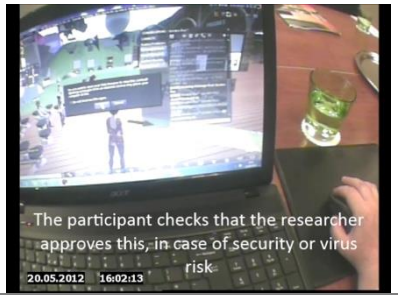
I: I know this sounds silly but you're not wearing summer clothes or anything. Is that-, does that make a difference? L: On another day, I might decide I'm on my

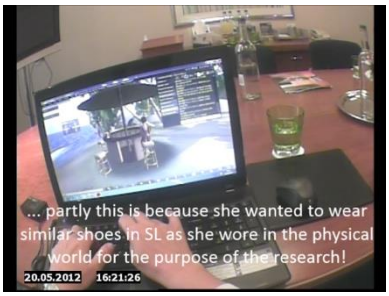
island and I need to be wearing summer clothes. It's too much grief. *I: You've had so much grief already.* L: I wanted you to see my boots. I put that out especially last night. *I: Of course, we couldn't have not done that … are you still talking to [your friend] now?* L: I don't know, at some point she said she was going to take her dog out so she went. *I: When you're talking to people, like they're not there as their avatars or their real personas sort of thing, they're a real life person. When you hold them in your mind when you're talking to them. How do you think of them? Are you thinking of a Finnish Fox or are you thinking of a man?* L: I've never seen a picture of [the friend whose avatar is a fox]. I've no idea what he looks like. I: So in your imaginings-, L: So in my imaginings, I suppose every now and then maybe I do have an image of him. I don't know why, maybe slim and dark haired. I don't know why, he might be a bit gawky looking. I don't know, that's what I have in my mind. I don't know that I really conjure that up when I'm chatting to him, though. Probably-, that's a really hard question. *I: When you're chatting to him face-to-face, are you seeing, are you conscious of his being a fox?* L: Yes, he is a fox. *I: Do you see him as a fox or do you see him as-,* L: Well as a furry fox, that's his ID. That's definitely-, so a couple of people, I do have pictures, I have seen pictures of them. And it alternates, I sometimes see the avatar, I sometimes see the picture of them. It's just something else that's harder to describe, this feeling about a person that doesn't involve thinking about an image. I don't know, possibly … Recently I've been struggling with this because this-, I'm interested in this reality and illusion thing. A close friend of mine was saying, 'I think I might just go and create a new personality and get a new avatar.' I got really upset by it actually, I did. *I: Why?* L: It was like, well you're going to go and be a fake person or something? That's what it felt like to me. *I: Did you feel like she was going to get rid of you as well and that was offensive? Or did that not come into it?* L: He-, yes I did feel like that. *I: You were part of the fed up-ness.* L: Yes, I felt like that. I don't think that that's true but yes, I did feel like that. So then I was struggling in my mind with this-, well why does that not feel right? Of course people come and they do role play and they do things like that. So why doesn't that feel right? *I: Did you come to an answer?* L: Well in my profile I put that my avatar is designed but my personality is not … I've been on, yes, consistently pretty much every day. You know, it might only be five minutes just to log in. This is probably the longest period without because I've just been so busy

getting settled in. *I: Did you miss it?* L: No. (Laughter). I didn't, no. A part of me thinks, "Just take the opportunity just to walk away from it for a while" but other times, I would have done, I would have been quite itchy. *I: Is it the change in circumstance?* L: Yes, I think so, that's part of it. My focus has been completely on getting settled in the house. That's just been my number one priority. It is an escape, isn't it? I find it so-, in fact perhaps I ought to make sure I do go back on it a bit more, because I've been quite stressed out getting-, running around, chasing my tail. I'm going to delete one of my platforms and build something else. Just go in and relax.





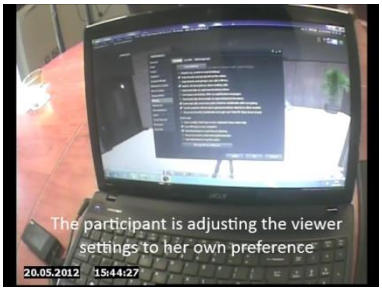


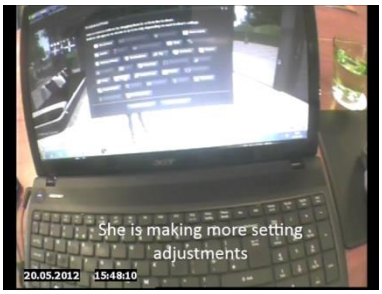


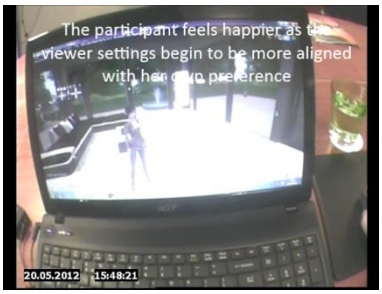
I: Do you have any sort of-, anything that you do, when you're starting off a session, not necessarily with the computer per se, but with your Second Life or virtual worlds or whatever? SG: I mean a couple of years before, Second Life used to drain the system, so I used to remember to switch off my mail, any other applications, check that everything else is switched off because then Second Life can run comfortably, because if Second Life is going to take all the power and I don't give it all the power then in the session I'll be logged out. Now, because the machine at home is very powerful and even at work I find I don't find it difficult to run Second Life with other applications, then I keep all the applications open … *I: I just want to look at this because obviously this is, you couldn't ignore, I had to put it on lower quality so it doesn't take up loads of power, but all of this is all grey still isn't it?* SG: Yes, because of [my employer's] network. *I: Right, and does that matter?*

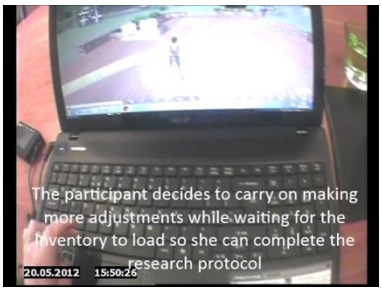
		SG: It didn't matter here because I'm quite used to working at the university in this kind of a setting. At home, I would have got worried, "What's happening to my broadband?" and because I wasn't starting here, but at university also I get the same-, *I: So you're kind of-*, SG: I'm quite used to it, but I have to get some work done sometimes if there is an event or if I have to prepare myself and if I-, one of my computers only this browser runs, not the older one and I just got it to work in this client, it doesn't bother me. *I: You know when you first started going in Second Life and this kind of thing was going on and you couldn't see properly, were you kind of aware that you couldn't see properly?* SG: No, this problem has only happened at [work] from this January onwards. *I: So, before then when you went in it was absolutely clear?* SG: They have changed some settings and the network team are not willing to say what has changed. But they're looking into it. I need to make a business case for it. Why I need Second Life, and only then they will do it. So I'm trying to manage it without it. *I: Your settings specifically typically, what do you normally have them on? You personally I mean in your client, irrespective of what -*, SG: It's any client of three point doesn't work on here. It's not my settings.
Sharing real life	How people share events that occur in the physical world with people in the virtual world.	*I: Do people very often talk to you just like that about something that's going on in-, I mean, are conversations very often about real life?* AM: To be honest with you, more tell me their real life stories than don't. *I: From the start or quite early on?* AM: Fairly early on. It was-, oh, perhaps started from about the end of 2007 to the beginning of 2008, but since-, you know, I stopped doing it, the counselling in there and then I get one-, oh [my current avatar], when I made [her], just stopped doing it. Then, "Oh … , I need this, I need that, I need the other. Oh what am I going to do?" blah blah blah. I started it again, but it became too much … It's like [my poor friend] up here. I mean, I did get quite firm with her at one time. I said, "For God's sake, stop opening your legs to the men and then you'll probably get someone that's genuine", and I had to be like that. I felt awful, but it's made her stop and think. She says, "I don't." I say, "Yes, you bloody do." *I: She wasn't offended, then, or anything?* AM: No, she was shocked that I had turned like that and had said that, but, you know, she came back to me a couple of weeks later and she said, "Oh … thank you so much. You made me stop and think." I said, "Darling, I'm sorry I had to be so strong and firm with you, hard with you, but it needed it." She said, "Yes, it did." She will still go and make the same mistakes, but probably not so often.

	Transferring RL conventions and expectations	How expectations and conventions of social situations in the physical world become transferred to, transformed in, the virtual world.	SG: Some comments stay in mind like the other day, there was one student of ours, she came in the virtual world education round table, and she only uses Second Life for social purposes. Although she's a … student, she doesn't use it for learning purposes. She came in a dress which was not suitable for an educational meeting. Later on, the lady, … who's from [another university], [she] is our local, I've known her through Second Life, never met her in real life. She's doing her PhD in health literacy in virtual worlds, and she's based in Glasgow. She said to me later on, after that [other] student went away, "Is she really a … student?" I said, "Yes she is". "She was not dressed appropriately for an educational meeting", then she laughed away. That point remained in my mind, even when I logged out, that people do carry those perceptions. *I: They do, don't they? Interesting.* SG: Even if it doesn't matter, she might be attending a dance party half an hour ago, and she didn't have time to change, she said, "Let me come and attend this." I don't know, whatever be the context. She came independently, I went independently, but because both of us said we are from the [same institution], she wanted to know more about her from me, and why probably I hadn't influenced her to dress appropriately. *I: What do you think of that? Do you think she should have dressed differently?* SG: I feel so. I think that whenever you are in a professional setting, you're not only representing yourself, but you're representing your university. Either don't take the name of the university, just sit there and say, "I'm a student", that's all, nobody's forcing you to take out the name of the university. If you're taking the name of the university, and you are sitting there, then you've got to represent yourself. You have to act in a way which-, just as in real life, you wouldn't come in a dress which doesn't mark the occasion, which is not matching with the occasion. *I: Right, so if people are attending something like that, and they're, like, a cat or a parrot or a tree or a vampire or something-,* SG: That's different. *I: You think that's different?* SG: That's alright. I mean, if they come in an avatar which is-, some come as horses and sit there. *I: Oh, so you think that's alright, but wearing a party dress wouldn't be okay?* SG: I mean, you're in a human avatar, so you're perceived a human avatar. I think horses etc. for these meetings wouldn't matter, but if they were my students, of course. *I: If they were your students, you wouldn't want them to come as a horse?* SG: I'd feel uncomfortable. No, I won't. I would rather they all have human avatars and dressed as you would do if you were attending a class or a tutorial. It depends

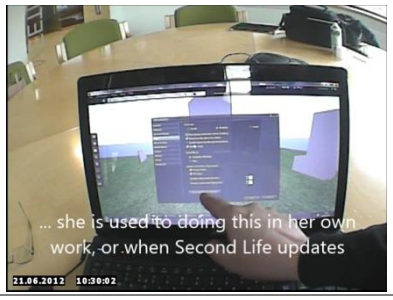
				very much, Simon, on the event. When I go to a conference in Second Life, if out of 30 people, two come dressed as horses or hedgehogs it doesn't make so much of a difference to me … I mean, there was one meeting of [my employer] which I've stopped attending for this reason. *SG: What reason was that?* I: The reason was that the person who used to organise used to be in such odd dresses that I used to feel very uncomfortable. *SG: Did you really?* I: Because I felt that if I associated myself with the event, and I announced it, and people came and she was dressed that way and behaving that way, it would affect my-, so I've stopped going. I feel sorry, because sometimes I'm missing some very beautiful talks, but there has to be some kind of a discipline. You have to draw the line, that beyond this you won't be willing to do it.
	Disruption	Adjusting	Adjusting the viewer settings so that they feel comfortable and familiar.	AM: L: 

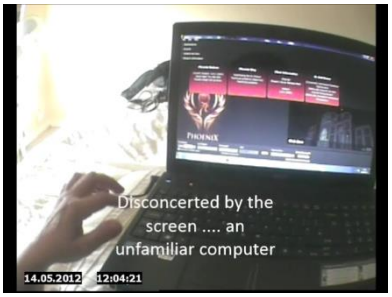
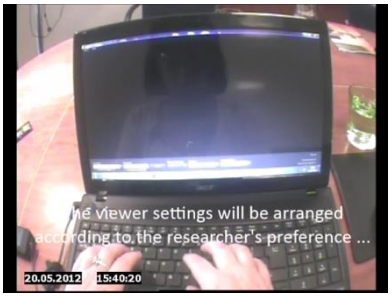


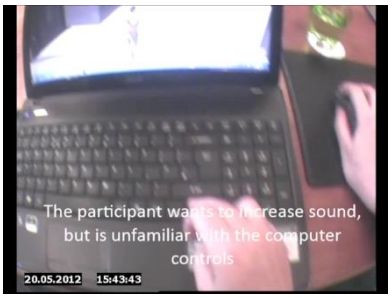




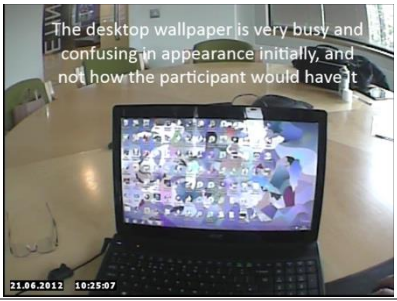
I: You know this kind of process that we're going through at the moment, trying to fiddle with the settings. Is that a disconcerting thing to have to do-, SG: No, I do it at home. *I: All the time?* SG: Not all the time, but the days I want to record something. *I: Right.* SG: I'm doing an interview with somebody, or if I've changed this version of Second Life they keep doing updates. So what I have to do is, I then go and check all my settings back again, and then I'm using my headset so that others at home are not disturbed.

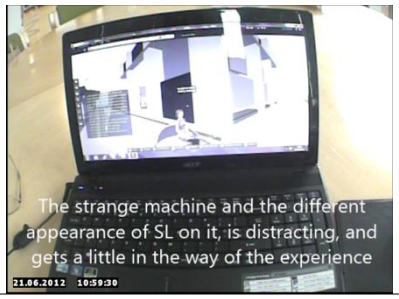
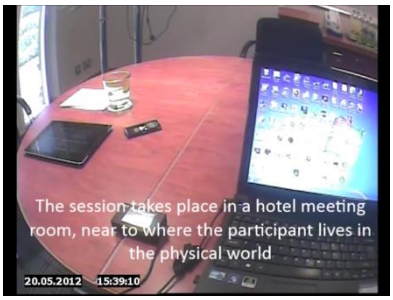
			  
	Disrupted viewing	How the experience of Second Life can be disrupted, either by the way the programme works, or by events within the virtual world.	AM: Yes, it's very disorientating at first. *I: Why? In what way?* AM: The colours are different. The graphics are different. There's a different resolution, so it makes it-, I had to stop and think for a moment or two what was going on, if everything was okay. At first I thought, ; "Oh my god, something's wrong," and I thought, "Stupid, you're not on your own machine", you know. *I: You know what I mean, like having to click buttons and all this? I mean, does that get in the way of the experience at all?* L: It can do. This is all getting in the way of the experience, having to fiddle around with-, SG: I feel I should leave the session and go. It bothers me, because again of the time. You'll notice in my session, just in case we are not able to do because of the time, you will notice that I try to do two things at the same time in Second Life. While I was doing the tour which I was doing, I was also trying to change my clothes at the same time … This message came up, that I looked up. This was from Real Life Education Group. *I: Oh right, yes.* SG: So, these things when they come up. I go and look, and they are a bit distractive … No, it drops me somewhere, it's currently doing the West I think, or somewhere. I did two tours, the West and the East. I did the West, then somebody else came online and that was a bit distracting again, for me … *I: This fact that people can change names now, completely change names really and look completely different until you realise and look at their username, is that disconcerting?* SG: It is disconcerting for me, yes. It think it was earlier it was better, when people had to-, now I'm looking up somebody's profile because again this was a person I didn't see for a long time so I thought, let me look at their

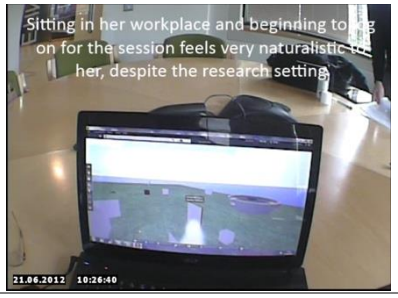
			profile. Their profile reminds me.
	Unfamiliar settings	Using computer settings that are unfamiliar.	*I: You're sitting with this, my laptop on your lap, not in your computer room on your computer or not on your laptop? Does that interfere at all?* AM: Yes, it's very disorientating at first. *I: Why? In what way?* AM: The colours are different. The graphics are different. There's a different resolution, so it makes it-, I had to stop and think for a moment or two what was going on, if everything was okay. At first I thought, "Oh my god, something's wrong," and I thought, "Stupid, you're not on your own machine", you know.  *I: You know here, if I remember right, there was loads of strange stuff going on. You were trying to get used to my computer, the way it looked, the new viewer. I mean, what is going on in your mind when all is that is happening?* L: It was just a bit confusing, I think. 



SG: Also the wallpaper was very busy for me. So normally it is very busy on my computer for most of the time because what happens is (talking over each other). I have all my files saved on the desktop because I am under that strain that if I move it somewhere else and I forget, and I don't want to put it into the main folder because I'm still working on it … *I: Your personal experience is, kind of, influenced by the medium you're accessing that experience. It's my laptop on the [employer's] wireless, or whatever, so it's all not quite perfect, and also it might be a different interface and everything. I mean, do things like that get in the way of the experience? AM:* They can do, yes. I mean, the machine is a big difference for me. When I work on a PC, on a laptop that I have today, which I brought specifically in case we wanted to go to Second Life, because that works here on this university network. That's a Dell laptop, but I don't enjoy Second Life on it, just because of the screen resolution, everything is not so great.



		
Location in RL	The setting for the usage session.	AM: L: 



Location in SL

Locations visited in SL during the usage session.

AM:

L:

The avatar is still in the public space ... one of the participant's favourite sims, a help space organised by New Citizens Inc
20.05.2012 15:59:56

The participant has not visited this sim for a couple of months ...
20.05.2012 16:01:50

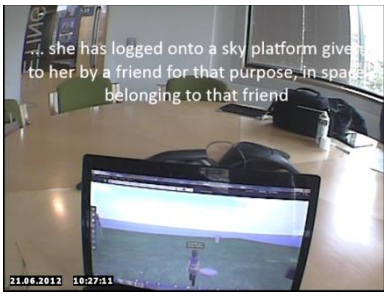
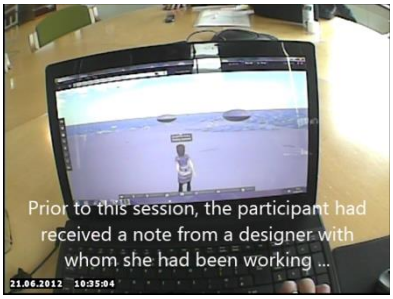
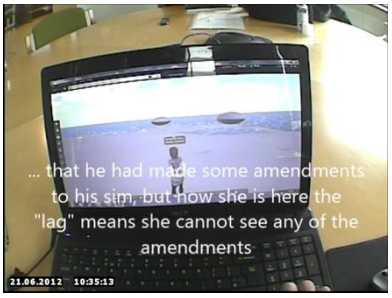
... although there was a time she visited every day
20.05.2012 16:01:54

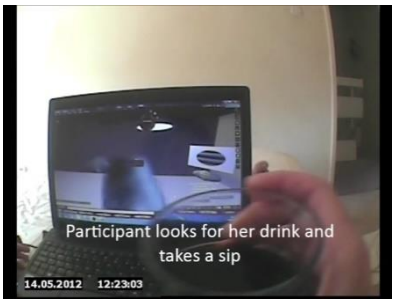
The participant has returned to her home, somewhere more peaceful
20.05.2012 16:16:28

... she felt more relaxed once she arrived
20.05.2012 16:17:13

SG:

The participant likes to rehearse and prepare for her inworld presentations ...
21.06.2012 10:27:04

				  
	Multiple environments	Focus on the situation	Focusing on the Second Life environment for the time one is there.	SG: I focus mostly on myself. I mean, more so now than I used to do earlier, because, as I said, the time that I spend now, in Second Life, is very important for me, which never used to be. Even these Thursday meetings are one off, now, and they're the only ones left. I feel, if I don't go and support them, even this would go away, so let me at least go for these and support them.
		Interacting with RL	Incidences of interacting with the	*I: You're looking around here? What are you doing? Oh, you're sorting out your*

	physical world environment whilst using Second Life.	*drink?* AM: I'm not sure if I had a drink or a cig-, yes, a drink. I think I was looking for the dog as well at one stage. Oh, the cigarettes. *I: Do you have to get all of yourself-, do you like to have everything, you know, normally?* AM: Normally yes, if I'm on my laptop on the bed I get these here and I've got my phones here, so everything's at hand. *I: So that you can be here in Second Life and if you need a fag or have a drink you can just do it?* AM: Yes, because it's painful when I get off the bed. *I: Oh right, okay. Yes, of course.* AM: So, the only time I do get off the bed is when I go to the bathroom ... *I: Now, talk about minutiae now. Do you often have a fag while you're-, when you're in Second Life, have a cigarette or a smoke?* AM: No. It's only in the bedroom, like, this bedroom. In my computer room, down here, anywhere else in the house, I never smoke. *I: Oh, so it's just-, okay.* AM: Yes. *I: Does it add anything to it?* AM: No. *I: I mean, it doesn't make you enjoy your session even more or anything?* AM: I think what-, no, no, no. I think what it is-, I was really feeling poorly that day, and I was in a lot of pain with my leg, and I think I just smoke because of that. It takes my mind off the pain. *I: Yes. So all the time you're here, and this thing's on your lap, of course, as well, isn't it? Was it hurting you?* AM: Yes. I was in an awful lot of pain. I felt sick. I wanted to be sick, and I thought, "No", You know, "Get a grip on this." 

she uses her laptop on the bed she has everything nearby ... phone, drink, cigarettes etc ...
14.05.2012 12:23:23

.... she is always aware of where she is physically and that she is using a computer programme
14.05.2012 12:25:23

The participant starts preparing a cigarette
14.05.2012 12:41:00

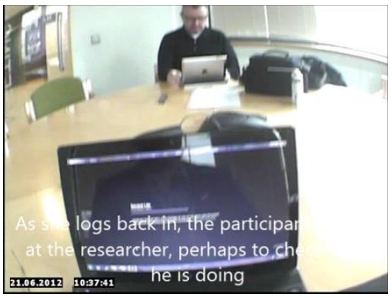
The participant only smokes in the bedroom, no other rooms in the house
14.05.2012 12:41:19

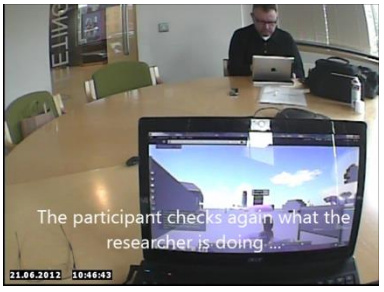
She would normally have the phone with her, but she forgot it
14.05.2012 13:10:08

L:

The participant looks for her spectacles, which she needs for using the computer
20.05.2012 15:41:17

I: Can I just ask you something, you're looking around a little bit here, aren't you? SG: Yes, I was looking probably at you, as to what you're doing. It happens with me at home, also, I'll look outside the window or do something else, perhaps check my e-mail. I find it difficult to concentrate in one place all the time. Some people are good at it, but I'm not.

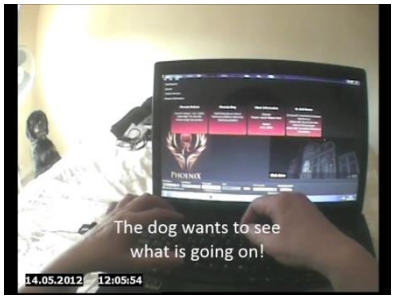
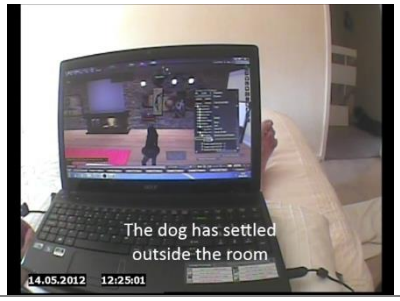


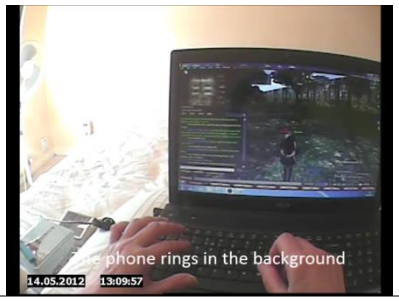


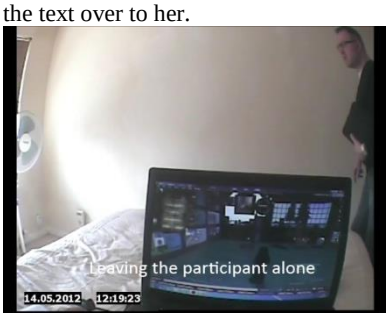
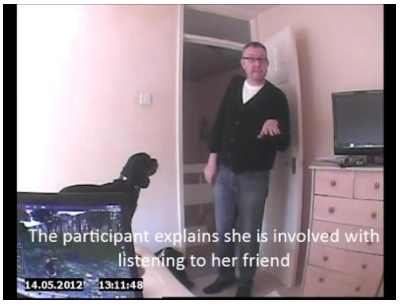
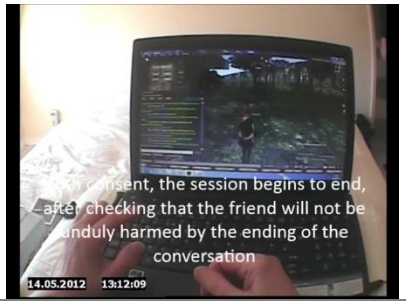
	My space	Sense in which Second Life space belongs to the user.	*I: You're talking. When you were talking to me here, and moving around, where you thinking about two things at the same*

			time? SG: No, I was just trying to give you context on why this is my home. *I: You are scanning around and walking and talking to me at the same time. What's going on there?* SG: Actually, that's what I do when I come here. I just look around-, *I: (Inaudible). Do you not recall?* SG: It's my space, I feel it's my space … I think the beauty of the environment has a lot to do with the immersion. As you say, it is very individualistic attitudes towards it, not everything-, and when I got [my employer's] islands, like we had beautiful [employer] islands, no we just have one ... I think there is, I feel this is mine, there is a deep sense of ownership towards the place. It is just pixels on the-, but, I don't know, it is still mine. The [employer] logos, and I feel if I bring somebody in, it's as if this place is mine.
	Physical situation	Typical situation in the physical world, in which Second Life usage occurs.	AM: Yes, but I'm usually in the other room and he lies down by my feet. The only time he interrupts me is when he wants to go outside, because he's got a dish of food in there and a dish of water, you know. Prince Harry I think! … *I: Now, talk about minutiae now. Do you often have a fag while you're-, when you're in Second Life, have a cigarette or a smoke?* AM: No. It's only in the bedroom, like, this bedroom. In my computer room, down here, anywhere else in the house, I never smoke … *I: I mean, it doesn't make you enjoy your session even more or anything?* AM: I think what-, no, no, no. I think what it is-, I was really feeling poorly that day, and I was in a lot of pain with my leg, and I think I just smoke because of that. It takes my mind off the pain. *I: Yes. So all the time you're here, and this thing's on your lap, of course, as well, isn't it? Was it hurting you?* AM: Yes. I was in an awful lot of pain. I felt sick. I wanted to be sick, and I thought, "No." You know, "Get a grip on this." *I: If I-, if this hadn't been for what we were doing, would you have actually not bothered, then, or just logged off or-,* AM: I wouldn't have gone into Second Life that day. I'd have gone on first thing in the morning and seen to the Meeroos and the cats, but that would've been it, and I would've come out and I would've rested the leg, exercised it as much as I could, and rested again, and done it that way. I wouldn't have been smoking as much, which is no excuse for smoking, you know? … *I: Do you prefer-, where do you prefer to do-, to be in Second Life? In here? On-, do you prefer to do it in your computer room.* AM: I prefer to be in my computer room. It's more comfortable, the chair. I can move my leg better. Sometimes, when I just need to be on the bed-, I used to, when I was like that, I would go into Second Life, but now I

			don't. If I'm feeling that poorly, I think no, "Forget it." *I: I mean, obviously you're sitting here now. Where-, I know you've moved house and everything but where do you normally go on?* L: I sit on the sofa. *I: Just in relaxed sort of mode?* L: Yes, just sit on the sofa and do it. *I: With your earphones on?* L: Yes, listening to the music. *I: Is that why you like to have your earphones on as well, to listen? Was the music going on here?* L: Yes … *I: Of course, we couldn't have not done that. What's that in here? You're getting yourself settled or something? Oh, what's going on? You didn't like something there.* L: I think maybe I was just trying to get so I was close enough to read. *I: Is your laptop normally on your lap? I suppose it would be if you're sitting on the settee.* L: Yes, so it's a bit closer I think if it's on my lap. *I: Before we talk about work, can you tell me about home? Where do you normally work at home?* SG: Well at home if it's extreme winters and it's holiday time and I have just gone in to do an interview, because as I was telling you the other time, at that time is the best for participating emails etc. So at that time I do it in the bed, if it's just listening and casual seminar going on, or a conference, or if I'm not too well, very tired, then I will just sit in the bed. Most of the time, like in this kind of weather, it would be on my desk and I-, If I'm attending a seminar or I'm at any event) I don't want to be bothered then I switch off the email, but other Word documents might be open in the background. It doesn't matter to me, but I don't want the email to be interrupting me … It just feels home to me [at work], even if I go and do it because of your name, I feel at home here, just because I can see that (talking over each other). I like the logos here and I like I am in my location. So I think it's been the most naturalistic session that you can expect.
	Physical surroundings	The physical surroundings in which Second Life usage typically occurs.	*I: You're looking around here? What are you doing? Oh, you're sorting out your drink?* AM: I'm not sure if I had a drink or a cig-, yes, a drink. I think I was looking for the dog as well at one stage. Oh, the cigarettes. *I: Do you have to get all of yourself-, do you like to have everything, you know, normally?* AM: Normally yes, if I'm on my laptop on the bed I get these here and I've got my phones here, so everything's at hand. *I: So that you can be here in Second Life and if you need a fag or have a drink you can just do it?* AM: Yes, because it's painful when I get off the bed. SG: Just as that gentleman came, two or three times you will notice in the recording that I looked out. It is not unusual, I do it at home also, because if my-, let's say this

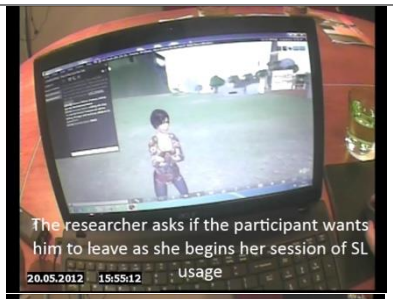
		is my desk, I have a window here, so if I hear a noise, what is my neighbour up to, so I look out of the window. *I: So you're not so engrossed or immersed that everything else just you're oblivious to?* SG: No, I'm very conscious of what is happening … *I: Does that happen every time, even if you're in a, you know, a meeting?* AM: If I was presenting myself, then even the phones would be off, everything would be off, the TV would be off and I'd be at my desk and then irrespective of what happens outside, I wouldn't do it. Otherwise I would … *I: Can I just ask you something, you're looking around a little bit here, aren't you?* SG: Yes, I was looking probably at you, as to what you're doing. It happens with me at home, also, I'll look outside the window or do something else, perhaps check my e-mail. I find it difficult to concentrate in one place all the time. Some people are good at it, but I'm not … *I: The room that you're normally in, I presume you've got all of your stuff around you, normally. Is it like a little office, or something? At home I mean.* SG: It's a little office, but there isn't anything behind it. The room is behind-, *I: The room is behind you, so you can still look about?* SG: Yes. I'm very much on the wall, but I have the window in left side. Sometimes in the summer, I mean, these evenings nowadays are so dark that you can't look at anything outside. Sometimes when there is a noise in the garden or something, then I might, the real life distracts me, and I have to go out and look from the window. I mean, I really find it very, very immersive. I am fully in it.
RL environment	The physical world environment as Second Life usage occurred.	AM:  

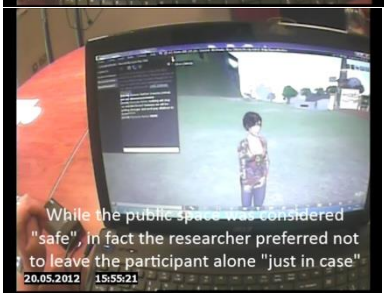
				
		Virtual environment	The Second Life environment in which Second Life usage typically occurs.	L: That's my little beach place, more relaxing. *I: Is that how you felt when you got there?* L: Yes. *I: Do you spend a lot of time there, when you're online?* L: Yes, I sort of go-, I do tend to spend a lot of time at my places. *I: How do you divide your time between them?* L: It just depends what I feel like, I think. *I: When you're watching this, what does it make you think?* L: It's just a nice relaxing place to be. I suppose I was thinking that I do quite like to talk to other people but sometimes it is just nice to sit and enjoy the environment. Do you ever get that? Almost feeling the warmth of-, *I: Oh yes. I don't know why that is. I don't know whether somehow there's-, you know, whether this makes something in our imagination real a little bit. A lot of people-, it's quite common, isn't it, to have these peaceful set-ups. Very often water's involved. I know the default land on lots of places is sand because that makes it easier but I think it's quite common to want to have some peace.* L: Yes, I do, I love my corner plots. You can see the moon rising. *I: Oh I see, okay. What shape is it? Is it, like, a square-ish-, is it one of those square plots is it that you've got?* L: No, it's just a wiggly island. It's a group of islands. *I: What makes it like going out? Is it meeting other people, is it being in different environments?* SG: It's just being in environments where sometimes I would like to be, like sitting around, like when we were having the meeting, there was a very good view of the-, when we were having our first interview session, I think, which was in Second Life, we had the sea. Those are the places that I would like to be, in real life. When I come into these virtual worlds, and I find unique things that I wouldn't experience, like going to Sistine Chapel for example. Because the experience is so real, you feel you've been there. It makes it remarkable for me, I feel it is-, I don't know how many virtual worlds have come after this, but Second Life continues to be something that whenever I go in I have a unique sense of happiness.
	Research environment	Research experience	The experience of participating in the research from the	*I: You don't feel-, I mean this whole process of having to sit there with these spectacles on and knowing at least I was*

	participants' viewpoints.	*attempting to capture what you were doing online, did that feel odd?* AM: No. I've got time to think about it and I know that this is for a certain purpose and I know everything's confidential and, okay, it sounds quite strange probably me saying this, but I've always enjoyed my participating in the project, your research work, always. It's lovely that you and I can interact and we help each other and I looked at this as a helping hand for you to test out your ideas. No, I've never been nervous or intimidated by being captured on camera or on a mic. It doesn't-, but it may sit easier if you know who you're talking to. I mean, who you're-, who's going to watch this and-, … Then I delete what's already in there and copy yours over and so that's in then, all your text for what you put picks on. So, all that's in there. Even though I've told [my friend] that you would be here today monitoring things that I do in Second Life I still copy the text over to her.   

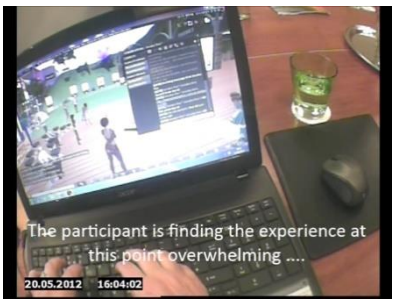
I: When you're logging on normally, do you feel any kind of anticipation or are you, kind of, looking forward to it? L: Yes, sometimes. Definitely in the earlier days for sure. Absolutely for sure, yes. *I: What about today? I mean, obviously it was a bit strange because you're sitting in this strange place and everything.* L: … I don't think I was thinking about it so much. *I: Really?* L: At all, no. *I: What, the situation?* L: I was more interested in talking to you. *I: Oh going in, yes, right, okay.* L: Yes, the actual logging in to Second Life, no. *I: You know here, if I remember right, there was loads of strange stuff going on. You were trying to get used to my computer, the way it looked, the new viewer. I mean, what is going on in your mind when all is that is happening?* L: It was just a bit confusing, I think … L: That's the local chat. *I: Oh, okay, right.* L: I didn't have it in the-, *I: In the box.* L: In the box so it kept disappearing because it's on fade. When you helped me get it back up, it was okay. I could go in and see what was going on. It's funny, I thought that these would have cross hairs on them so you would see-, … *I: Has somebody said hello to you or something?* L: Yes, I think so. So I ended up-, I had two IMs on the go. I had to get out of there because it was doing my head in which is strange because I thought there'd be nobody to talk to … So to me, this session was just a bit oh it's all coming at me. I find multitasking quite hard. I'm much better at it now. I can more or less normally manage two on the go at once but I mean-, … *I: You don't do any of that? That's very multi-task-y isn't it, really? Oh this is somebody else now. Oh no sorry, I thought you were putting up the-, you're talking to me.* L: I find it hard to do when-, taking someone out for a drive and riding the boat and chatting at the same time. Hang on, I've got to move that. Perhaps I should-, *I: Yes, I used to have a Victorian car when I lived in a Victorian Sim and I was always hopping about all over the place. I just couldn't do more than one thing at the same time. Now this is interesting. I don't know how long this session lasts for, really you've obliterated the whole screen.* L: I have, yes. *I: Is that common?* L: No, I like to be looking at the pictures. This is really annoying. I had far too much of that going on. I should have just ignored everyone and gone off exploring somewhere and we could have looked at some-, I have. This isn't usual. I'm normally looking at what's going on. *I: What is going on? Are people just standing around talking still?* L: I think they're just standing around. I've no idea. I'm hardly paying any attention to what's going on there. It was a waste of time me being there, quite frankly. *I: You just said they're asking about the-, so who*

is this in the open chat business? Is this what's going on there? What are they saying? L: It was something like, for your information, implied consent is not-, you can't have implied consent. *I: Oh, is that what they were saying?* L: You definitely can't have this thing where-, you can't override Terms Of Service by putting something in your profile to say, 'I use (inaudible)'. You can't do that … I got fed up with being there. I just went. (Laughter). *I: Did you get fed up because you were too busy talking or you were getting fed up of the thing-, the stuff?* L: It was too much. *I: All the stuff?* L: Yes. *I: Why were you asking me that?* L: So you could get my experience of listening to the music. *I: Oh, I see. Well I don't know yet. It might be on there.*


The researcher asks if the participant wants him to leave as she begins her session of SL usage
20.05.2012 15:55:12

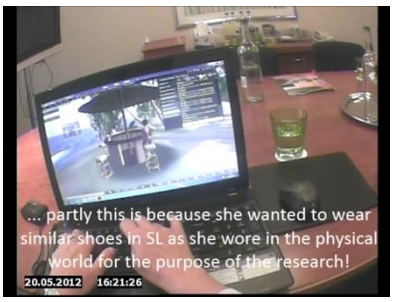

While the public space was considered "safe", in fact the researcher preferred not to leave the participant alone "just in case"
20.05.2012 15:55:21

The research situation was somewhat removed from the participant's usual SL usage situation in any case and so it was felt that researcher presence would have little additional impact on participant behaviour
20.05.2012 15:55:25

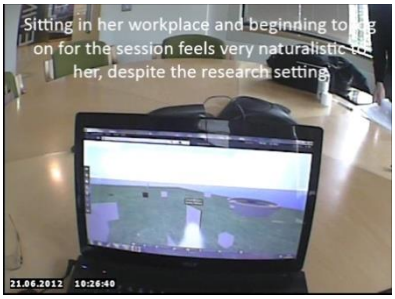

The participant is finding the experience at this point overwhelming ....
20.05.2012 16:04:02

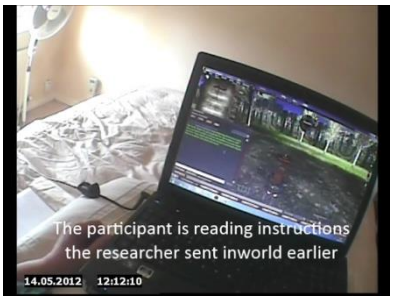
People in the public space are beginning to notice the participant's research tag, and ask questions about it
20.05.2012 16:11:06

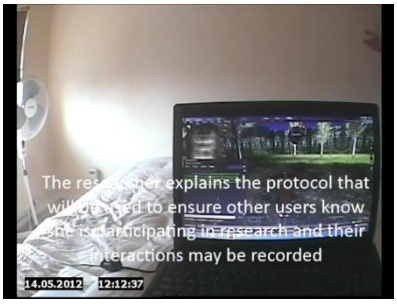
... in essence the public chat discusses that there is no such thing as "implied consent"
20.05.2012 16:13:31



SG: It's [my workplace]. (Talking over each other). It just feels home to me, even if I go and do it because of your name, I feel at home here, just because I can see that (talking over each other). I like the logos here and I like I am in my location. So I think it's been the most naturalistic session that you can expect … *I: You're talking. When you were talking to me here, and moving around, where you thinking about two things at the same time*? SG: No, I was just trying to give you context on why this is my home. *I: You are scanning around and walking and talking to me at the same time. What's going on there?* SG: Actually, that's what I do when I come here. I just look around-, *I: (Inaudible). Do you not recall*? SG: It's my space, I feel it's my space. *I: What I'm trying to say is you're interacting in the physical world with me and doing something in here at the same time. What's-, can you explain kind of how you*

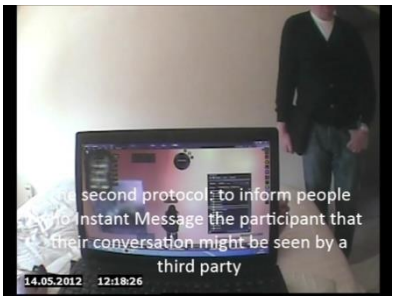
			feel? SG: This wasn't affecting me. I was just enjoying myself. *I: So is this kind of like when somebody is driving and they're talking to the passenger at the same time? Is it that kind of experience?* SG: Actually, at home, nobody talks to me. *I: In this particular one? SG:* No, I was so keen to tell you about my home here in Second Life, it didn't bother me … *I: What are you doing here?* SG: This, I was checking the settings for you. Remember you came here to check the settings? *I: Here you're between us trying to sort the programme out. I mean, does that interrupt the flow of what you're doing? Are you getting into it?* SG: No, because I wanted whatever I do it gets recorded for you otherwise the whole exercise will go a waste. So I wanted to be sure that you check it out, but I could keep myself quiet, I was trying to … You should also for your future research click this off, keep this not-, *I: Yes, I didn't even think of that, because I deactivated my Dropbox but I forgot to-*, SG: It is disturbing for the other person not for me, but-, *I: What do you do in this instance?* SG: I left it on, because I didn't want to disturb your settings.
			
	Research protocol	Aspects of the session involving the research protocol.	AM:

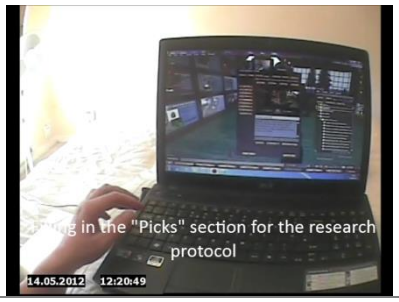

The participant is reading instructions the researcher sent inworld earlier
14.05.2012 12:12:10

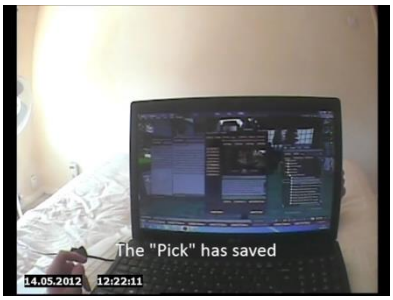

The researcher explains the protocol that will be used to ensure other users know she is participating in research and their interactions may be recorded
14.05.2012 12:12:37

Still looking for protocol information, which was sent as notecards, in the inventory
14.05.2012 12:15:35

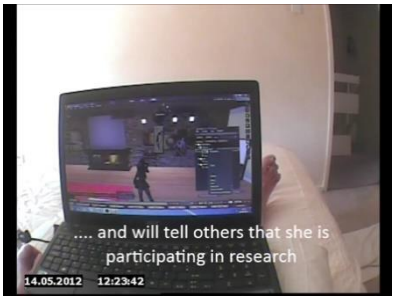
Explaining the protocol: create a "Pick" that informs other users that she is being observed
14.05.2012 12:17:02


second protocol: to inform people via Instant Message the participant that their conversation might be seen by a third party
14.05.2012 12:18:26

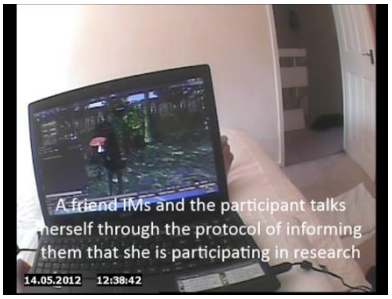

in the "Picks" section for the research protocol
14.05.2012 12:20:49

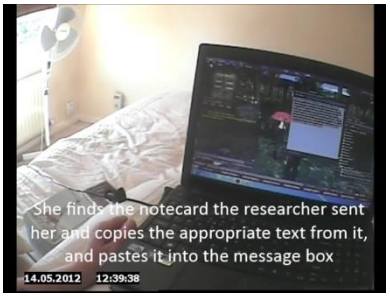

The "Pick" has saved
14.05.2012 12:22:11

The participant is constructing a "titler" for herself, that will appear above the avatar ...
14.05.2012 12:23:38


.... and will tell others that she is participating in research
14.05.2012 12:23:42

A friend has sent the participant an Instant message, so she pastes the text in the box that explains she is participating in research
14.05.2012 12:28:11


A friend IMs and the participant talks herself through the protocol of informing them that she is participating in research
14.05.2012 12:38:42


She finds the notecard the researcher sent her and copies the appropriate text from it, and pastes it into the message box
14.05.2012 12:39:38

L:

The researcher explains that he has sent the participant notecards ...
20.05.2012 15:42:18

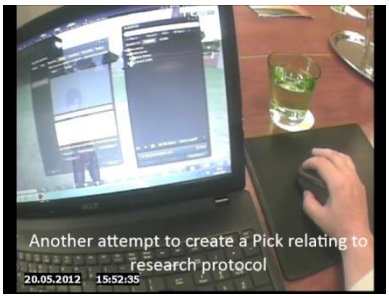
... the notecards contain the text relating to protocol that ensures other people know her interactions are being recorded and observed
20.05.2012 15:42:23

The participant accepts the notecards the researcher has sent her
20.05.2012 15:45:19

The researcher asks the participant to wear his group "tag" which tells others who see it that she is a research participant
20.05.2012 15:45:42

Part of the protocol involves joining the research group so a group tag appears above the avatar ...
20.05.2012 15:46:13

The tag will say "Recording see Picks"
20.05.2012 15:46:50


Another attempt to create a Pick relating to research protocol
20.05.2012 15:52:35

The researcher reminds the participant that if someone sends her an Instant Message they need to be informed that the conversation will be recorded
20.05.2012 15:56:13

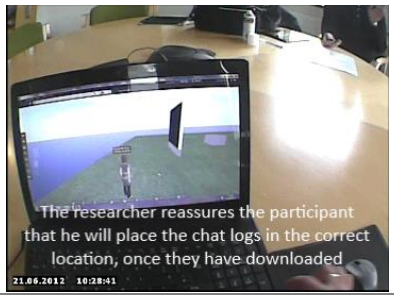
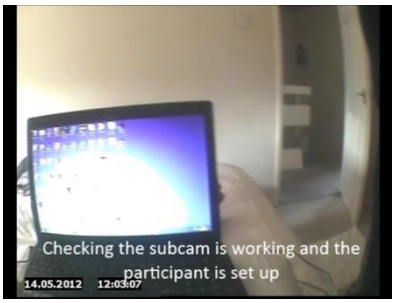
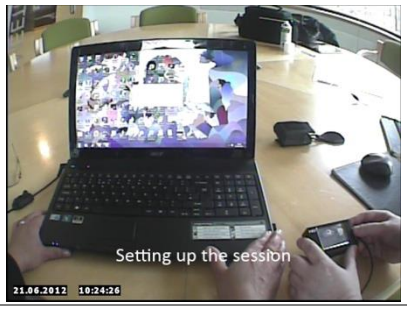
She has informed the people who converse with her that she is participating in research and a third party may see the conversation
20.05.2012 15:59:00

... her focus is on the IMs, and ensuring that new interlocutors are aware that she is participating in research
20.05.2012 16:07:16

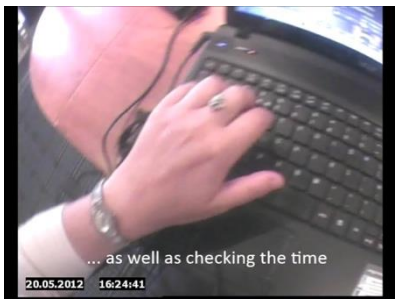
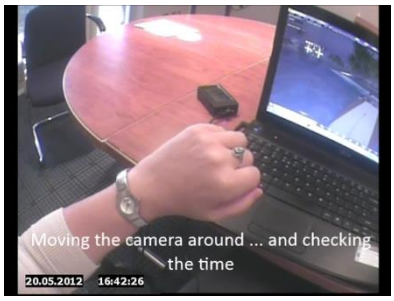
SG:

The researcher explains the procedure
21.06.2012 10:24:55

The researcher reassures the participant s
can do whatever she wants
21.06.2012 10:25:33

			
	Set up	Setting up the research equipment and programmes so the session can be recorded.	AM:  L: SG: 
Time	Changing use over time	The extent to which the amount of time and how time is spent in Second Life changes with the passage of time.	*I: Have you used it consistently? In all the years, have you used it consistently or have you gone through phases where you-*, L: I've been on, yes, consistently pretty much every day. You know, it might only be five minutes just to log in. This is probably the longest period without because I've just been so busy getting settled in. *I: Did you miss it?* L: No. (Laughter). I didn't, no. A part of me thinks, "Just take the opportunity just to walk away from it for a while" but other times, I would have done, I would have been quite itchy. *I: Is it the change in circumstance?* L: Yes, I think so, that's part of it. My focus has been completely on getting settled in the house. That's just been my number one priority. It is an

			escape, isn't it? I find it so-, in fact perhaps I ought to make sure I do go back on it a bit more, because I've been quite stressed out getting-, running around, chasing my tail. I'm going to delete one of my platforms and build something else. Just go in and relax.
	Lots of time	The experience of spending large amounts of time working in Second Life.	AM: Taking all my time up. It was ridiculous. I mean, I was club manager at that strip club and I was working nineteen hours a day there. Then I get people saying-, I said, "No, I'll be on a break in an hour. I'll talk to you then and you can have that hour's break." *I: When you're online nineteen hours a day working properly by the sounds of it, I mean, what was that like?* AM: Oh it was horrendous. It was exhausting, because I was club manager. The GM was never there, so I was doing her job as well and trying to sort the dancers out, trying to sort other people out, trying to deal with the guests. The owner, she never did a thing, just left it all to me and the other managers were hopeless. They didn't know the job at all.

	Speed of time	Instances of time passing during usage	L:  

Trajectory of the Self interviews at second tranche

Global Theme	Organising Theme	Basic Theme	Description	Example quotes
The Second Life Experience	Learning Lessons	Experiences causing changes	How experiences in Second Life cause a change in attitude towards the types of things participants will do in the future, or changes in behaviour.	AM: It was interesting to see that my feelings had not changed much, only I am now much stronger in dealing with personal issues here. *I: What has happened to make you stronger, have you changed?* AM: My last relationship here also went into rl, he even asked me to marry him in rl. Then I found he was partnered as an alt, also he said in no uncertain terms he had fucked his cleaning lady in rl, but still expected me to

				marry him. So now I stay away from relationships, will have to be a very special man and I would have to trust him completely, but this would take a lot of effort on his part … yes definitely, I protect myself more I do not give my trust so easily now. *I: Did being in that situation change you?* LE: Very much. I did two things … I gave myself something to do … to get used to her being gone … I bought a sim, opened a new business. And second … I vowed to never do partnerships in sl again.
		Learnings	Example of what being a Second Life user has taught participants.	*I: Has it made you more cautious generally?* AM: Yes or I would not have learned it. CK: Definitely. I've learned things here about myself, people … that's balanced by the time lost by being here possibly too much, but I do think if I wasn't in SL I'd find other ways to avoid RL sometimes, probably with less benefits … hopefully I've improved my SL/R: balance heh. CK2: But I think I've learned a lot about me in this experience. I know it's OK to be me and feel what I feel … who or what can deny what I feel. No one. I do all in respectful ways and try not to hurt anyone. This refers to me relationship here and rl. DT: I think that being in sl made me realise there are so many aspects of personality that people in RL don't reveal … so you have to make an effort to get to those parts. Of someone in RL … so maybe I am more understanding that people are not what you see at "face value".
	Reducing SL	Downsizing and taking a break	Reducing the amount of time spent using Second Life, or ceasing using altogether.	CK: And looking back at that relationship and how long it had been going on, and all the changes in his life and mine at that time … I think I got afraid that I's be 50 or 60 and still feel trapped. And then I got to thinking about the rest of my life and what I'd miss if I didn't pay attention. Heh. CK2: Well, first I took a break from sl. I unplugged after I dissolved my partnership. DT: Yes, I think a lot of people had to "downsize".
		Missing RL	How spending time in Second Life means missing events, occurrences and "real life" in the physical world.	CK: I'm definitely more focused on RL than I was. I think mainly because I started to realise that I could play in SL and on the internet in general for the whole week, and … real time didn't stop. Sounds obvious but … SL can feel timeless. It's that odd thing about hanging out in virtual worlds.
		Missing SL	Aspects of Second Life that were missed while not using it.	*I: So when you were away from sl did you miss it?* FW: I missed [my sim] … that it was mine, and that it was very beautiful, and that [my partner] and I had made it together out of a shared dream we had. And I missed the old, good friends.
	The outcome of SL	Cannot substitute RL	Experiences in Second Life cannot take the	MT: Somehow I am just not finding the avenues for personal expression as much as I used to, sometimes it almost feels like RL

		place of those in the physical world.	in that way, which sucks … I'm lost half the time. Sometimes I just sit around in SL like I do in RL, wondering what to do and where I am going. Maybe I am realising that SL just isn't the best substitute for an unfulfilling RL. *I: Is sl not enough?* SF: … no. In SL we can support with words. There is no ability to help when needed. Have the social interactions that are so important in daily life.
	Creativity and talent in SL	The extent to which Second Life is a place where people exhibit their creative talent.	*I: What is the best thing about SL do you think?* CK: Difficult to choose between the fascinating and fun people, and all the things they create. LE: RL singers ☺ … yes … there is soooo much hidden talent in sl … but what keeps me here … is the artistic abilities I have in sl. LM: I thought of it as a creative outlet, to be able to meet other creatives and do things amazingly, with some we had collaborated, with others not so much, just casual conversations. SF: I LOVE the creativity here.
	Focusing in people and relationships	Spending time with other specific users is the preferred activity in Second Life.	DT: And then about that time I also made a very good friend … and now I find that for the most part, I pop on to talk to him and that is about the only regular relationship I maintain here … well when [my SL partner] and I first met, we talked about everything and the time we spend here matches even though we are in different time zones … so it was really just a matter of I preferred spending time with him than doing most other things.
	More than a game	Second Life is not just a game.	CK2: I still think it's more than a game. There are many aspects that are, but the true relationships one forms are not a game at all. And that does not only include b/f and partnerships.
	SL as positive	Second Life as a place for positive experiences.	CK: I still think it's a great place to explore, have fun, be creative, meet people … I aren't looking for another name to put in the Partner info, for sure, hehe … but then I wasn't looking for that before either. CK2: Hummmm, I just think sl is a positive experience for anyone willing to try it. All won't it, but I still think it's amazing. *I: Do you think being with her has also helped you to be more open too?* LE: Oh yes … I was … in the beginning … quite surprised about it … as it was not something I had experienced in sl.
	SL as short term	People do not use Second Life for a long period of time.	LE: I have noticed that not many people celebrate 3 year rez days in SL … I make invitations … special events posters. Not that many come for 3 years, usually one or two.
	SL as stimulating	Experiences in Second Life offer stimulation different to those	DT: I think I am infinitely curious. So every person I meet, I want to know what makes them tick … because maybe that is something that is of value to me. And also, I

			in the physical world.	just need to do something that is stimulating to my intellect … a challenge in a different way than the challenges I face in rl. I guess ...
		SL is not enough	Experiences in Second Life are not sufficient.	*I: So what was it like meeting your friends in rl?* SF: … I want to live near them. I would like to be around them much more. *I: Is SL not enough?* SF: I returned to college last spring because of their encouragement. No. In SL we can support with words. There is no ability to help when needed. Have the social interactions that are so important in daily life.
		Starting over	Returning to Second Life after an absence, because it is missed.	FW: I missed [my sim] … it was mine, and that it was beautiful, and that [my partner] and I had made it together out of a shared dream we had. And I missed the old, good friends. *I: What brought you back?* FW: I guess the desire to start over again … and [my partner] got over being mad at Linden Lab.
	The purpose of SL	SL is a game	The extent to which Second Life is used just for fun.	EZ: When I'm introducing someone new to SL, or describing it, I find myself pointing out there seem to be two general classifications of users … those who are primarily in it for "fun" (however they choose to define that), and those who are in it for professional reasons (training, education, research, sales, RL-to-SL business) … I find the majority of the "fun" users have no idea how much training, education and RL business happens here, and that the majority of "professional" users have either explored and backed away from the "fun" side, or have not even explored it. LM: From when I first initially thought it to be just a game … I'm not on so much, I figure the initial high of everything being new to me kept me busy exploring and testing in world. Yes, I was more focused on playing than developing any relations.
		SL for building and creativity	How Second Life is a place to be able to build and create things.	BM: What keeps me here is the random things like waking early morning with an idea to build or plan something … the creativity and the ability to help others with virtual money is awesome. CK: I think it was the whole idea of a world that didn't physically exist, to explore and build things, and meet people like I already did online but in a graphical environment …
		SL for business	How Second Life can be considered as an opportunity for making money.	SF: I was out of work, and panicking. The economy collapsed just after I collapsed physically from working 7 days a week for 3 months. 16 hour days, usually. I had to quit … Anyway. We were trying to find ways to make money. [My RL husband] found an article or three in Fast Company and I started looking at leads. This was one … not a good one for making money, but one that I checked out anyway.
		SL for socialising	Using Second Life for social activities and to be with other	CK: I think it was the whole idea of a world that didn't physically exist, to explore and build things, and meet people like I already did online but in a graphical environment …

			people.	EZ: If none of my friends are active in Yahoo Messenger or Skype and I feel like socialising, I'll come to SL just to hang out with new people. MT: Well as I said I have an SL boyfriend of about 3 months now. We do couple kinds of things. Also an old school friend and I met up here and she is now what I consider my SL sister, we share land and spend a lot of time together. PS: I'm probably here 4-6 hours a day. I still have trouble walking, so it is my primary social release.
	Time	Time spent in SL	The extent to which time spent in Second Life has changed over their usage.	AM: … I spend more time here now … give or take maybe 15 hours. CK: I'm definitely more focused on RL than I was. I think mainly because I started to realise I could play in SL and on the internet in general for the whole week, and … real time didn't stop. Sounds obvious but … SL can feel timeless. It's that odd thing about hanging out in virtual worlds … I do find that I'm bored sometimes, usually when friends aren't online, and I can spend a long time in here only to look back and wonder why I didn't make better use of it. CK2: I'm a grad student now and I try to budget my time here better … but I do come here often. DT: … I am still here most every evening. But the amount of time varies, from an hour or so to maybe 3 hours … depending on day of week … and RL responsibilities. EZ: Much more of my time in SL is toward the social or fun side these days, except when I'm helping with a specific machinima script. *I: How much time do you spend in SL?* EZ: Not as much as I used to, but it's easy to make the wrong assumption from that. *I: …how you spend your time, how much time, how you feel about it?* SF: I spend less time here. My friends are in Skype, and I keep it up when I'm on my computer. The visual interface is more fun, but I don't have the time.
		Too much time	The tendency of Second Life to take up too much time, and the need to manage it.	FW: I've been in a lot because we just came back and we've been putting everything together … building and all that, so … *I: Do you think having the break make you feel better about sl?* FW: Anyway, yeah I'm in here a lot but I am NOT going to let it consume a lot of my time like before. LE: I was in sl wayyy to much … too often. So I've cut back… I'm on a strict schedule … I come online an hour or so in the mornings … while having coffee … check my mail and IMs. Then back at noon sl time … for 3 hours, Monday through Friday. Then no more than 4 hours per day … Saturday and Sunday. I always … plan in rl … to schedule my time … to do something away from home … sl is very addicting. As

				my friend and I agreed as we talked about … "sl steals your rl". *I: Do you find it tugging you, even though you are strict?* LE: Not as much as before. I think after some time … you realise ... or have a pretty good idea … you're not going to miss anything if you're not here.
Second Life	Evolution in a wider context	Changes in RL	The extent to which experiences in the physical world have changed during participants'' time of being a Second Life user.	*I: Do you think you have changed?* BM: Maybe a little. But I think that's a result of life to be honest. *I: Do things in SL affect RL?* BM: I'm finding myself more patient. *I: Oh really?* BM: It can if you let it. *I: Does it ever affect your RL?* BM: Not really … *I: What is happening for you to be more patient? ...* BM: My daughter turned five. I have to learn patience LOL. CK: It definitely felt like a younger "me" … and yes … which I guess means plenty other interviewees had similar experiences and thoughts. *I: What about it felt younger?* CK: I think when I read back, I felt that I'd moved beyond some of the problems I'd been having in SL, with my relationship, and also RL has changed, and the real me too. *I: Do you think you have changed at all in the five years you have been in SL…*MT: 5 years is a long time to summarise, I am always growing and learning and improving myself. Inside anyway. PS: But when I notice it, I thought long and hard about it and willingly embraced it. *I: Did other people notice too?* PS: Yes, and they gave positive feedback.
		Changes in SL	Changes in Second Life in terms of its structure and experiences during the participants' time of being a user.	*I: Do you think SL has changed much in the last 2 years? ...* BM: Yeah I think it has. Kids are not as discriminated as much. There are still PG places that won't allow kid avs … but those guys are just stupid and you can't fix stupid. CK2: It was OK, I remembered it as if it was yesterday, altho some things have changed. *I: What kind of things have changed?* CK2: The time I spend here, my partner, some of my views. *I: What is it you found interesting?* EZ: My interview … noting how things [have] evolved since then … some of the changes have been made to the platform and the policies regarding education and non-profits have had an impact. PS: For years ago and earlier, SL newbies were largely from a set of identifiable classifications. And their initial behaviour … their starting points … were largely defined by these. As time and marketing has passed, we are seeing a more homogenous pool of people coming in. Sort of a general consumer. *I: What were the previous identifiable classifications do you think?* PS: Role players, in general those folks came with an idea of who they wanted to be. Gamers, who spent their initial time trying to figure out how to win SL. The

				online community seeking to communicate. And regular consumers, that were beginning to be marketed to. Each group has, and has, its own formation here. But that has been overwhelmed by the latter now.
		Changing the way time spent	Changes in pastimes in Second Life between interviews.	*I: How does how you spend time now compare to when we first met? What did you do then, can you remember?* AM: All I did then was build and yes have fun, but now I do many things like I said, make clothes, landscape, dance.
		More boring now	Experience of Second Life not being as interesting or as satisfying as it once was.	DT: and then I was thinking … I think you mentioned that you were interested in seeing what has changed … and so I started trying to compare … what my SL is like now versus when we did the interview. I think I have become boring … lol … LM: Everything was new, wanted to learn, explore, buy and sell, everything. I thought of it as a creative outlet, to be able to meet other creatives and do things amazingly, with some we have collaborated, with others not so much, just casual conversations. Everything at that time I wanted to learn and do. Now that I have experienced majority of what I was search in the first place, it seemed to get boring. MT: I'd say I get bored with it more now … somehow I am just not finding the avenues for personal expression as much as I used to, sometimes it almost feels like RL in that way, which sucks.
		Old interview at odds with current view	A change in perceptions of events at the time of first interview.	FW: I think maybe I was a bit too negative about having a public place; probably I had recently been through a bunch of crap with someone, near the time of our last interview …
		Research matching own viewpoint	The extent to which the reported findings from first tranche matched participants' experience.	*I: How did you feel when you read the report and old interview?* AM: I felt it was very enlightening, gave a good view of SL and its residents. *I: Do you think the report matched your own experience or what you think too?* AM: Yes to some extent it did very closely. DT: Your summary was so interesting … I think it made a lot of sense from what I have experienced. FW: And I think you were dead on, you hit the nail on the head from what I've experienced and have seen from what others have experienced and told me about. *I: Is it close to what you have experienced?* LM: Very accurate now that I have been playing a little bit longer.
	RL-SL relation	Changing societal concepts	Behaving in ways that are contrary to social norms.	CK2; I love both of them. This was really hard for me to swallow. I always get caught up in societal concepts of love, relationships, etc. Also I was raised in a very very religious home so that sometimes comes into play … I know it's OK not to subscribe to societal norms where it concerns my feelings or emotions … *I: This idea that it's OK not to subscribe to societal norms .. is this something you have realised*

			more due to being in SL? CK2: No, not really. I've always been anti for anti sake.
	Different behaviours in SL to RL	Behaviour and attitudes in Second Life not necessarily what participants would have in the physical world.	*I: Do you think if SL didn't exist you would have more than one relationship in RL?* CK2: Mmmm LOL … probably not, IDK though. It's subjective … depends on what I'm getting out of the relationship … I think in RL once you allow someone to step in, it's bound to happen, so I would not go there in RL … I don't sleep around. *I: How did this compare to how you would normally feel in relationships?* LM: It was insane, that's why I began to run away from it, he would just mentally drain me. It began fight after fight after tension and tension. Over just stupid items, and I was not used to this in RL.
	SL different to RL	Changes in Second Life that make it more like real life.	DT: Well for me, the most significant change is the merging of teens to the adult grid, so now I am a little concerned about who I am really interacting with … no I did not either [agree with the change] exactly because of what I have situations do to adults … I can't imagine that … teens have the emotional resources to handle some people here, but I suppose that just makes SL even more like RL … which I am not sure is the point ☺
	SL similar to RL	Ways in which participants' Second Life experiences is similar to the physical world.	*I: Do you think you are the same person in SL and rl?* CK: More than I used to be. I can still be a cheeky bugger in group chats, I find it's usually when I've been at work and want to blow off steam. I haven't been banned yet, but someone announced they'd muted me recently … I'd never do that in RL. But I think I'm not so bad as I used to be … my griefer acquaintances have either left or reformed too. EZ: It's funny that SL is mimicking RL in that I have to continually learn new technology here too! So I can fight with MS Office 2010 in RL and SL v2 in here at the same time! LOL. MT: Somehow I am just not finding the avenues for personal expression as much as I used to, sometimes it almost feels like RL in that way, which sucks. *I: How does it feel like RL?* MT: I'm lost half the time, I just sit around in SL, like I do in RL, wondering what to do and where I am going, maybe I am realising that SL just isn't the best substitute for an unfulfilling RL.
	SL tamer than RL	Experiences in the physical world which are more outlandish than Second Life.	EZ: I also shared with you that experiences in SL made me realise that I did want to open myself back up to the possibility of RL romantic relationships. Since then I have become active in several online dating services. Let me tell you … THOSE people are nuts! SL is tame in comparison.
	SL the same as RL	Ways in which experience and personality traits in Second Life is the same as the	*I: Is rl and sl all mixed up then, all part of the same thing?* AM: Well for me it is part of sl, as I am me here as I am in rl as my self and my morals, etc. *I: Is there any that are most like you? As a*

		physical world.	*person I mean.* BM: [BM] and [my toddler avatar] basically. It's the story telling. [BM] is motherly but that's usually my OOC moments. EZ: And I try to be very real and open in all. I find myself referencing SL friends as often as I do RL friends.
SL as separate	Alts as privacy	Using alts to be alone in Second Life.	FW: Okay, actually I made another avatar before [FW], but I messed her looks up so bad cause I didn't know what I was doing, so I quit using her and made me. THEN. After I knew what I was doing with skins and all that … I brought her back in and used her to work on building on our property so that I could be logged in and on one know it. I couldn't get any work done with all the IMs so I used her a lot when I needed to build/edit stuff. *I: Are you still using any of your other avis?* MT: Once in a while, like I just want to be totally alone in SL. But that's really it.
	SL as an escape	Using Second Life to escape the responsibilities of the physical world and to experience another life.	BM: I am an adult 24-7. We can't escape it, the only alternative involves not being able to do anything ever again. But this is a fun way to relax for me. MT: Companionship/socialising would be number one. I have some very dear friends here. It's a wonderful escape … visually it's very interesting and can be so beautiful. I can try new things any time I want to. Basically it's truly another life.
	SL as personal and private	Using Second Life as a personal space and an opportunity to spend time alone or without responsibilities.	CK2: I don't know, sometime I want to tell him but I think I don't because this is mine, and I don't need to share every single waking moment with anyone. DT: I think it would have hurt others even though if I had a partner, it really wouldn't have anything to do with those other friends … I come to SL for my own sake. "my time" to do what I want while RL most of my time is for others. *I: Is this your private space?* DT: Yeah … I think that is a good description … but it really isn't private … lol. *I: lol. But private from rl I guess. Maybe personal space is a better word?* DT: Yes, perhaps … it really sort of winds up being a place that I shed a lot of personal responsibilities from |RL … SF: I admittedly made an alt that I keep hidden. I can log in and listen to music while I study. I use her, so as not to upset my friends. *I: So you can have private time?* SF: There is something about listening here that cannot be had with a radio website … Private time is nice. [SF] is involved in groups and projects. Getting away to simply talk to friends without all that is great.
SL as separate	Keeping a distance	Keeping an emotional detachment from others in personal relationships.	LE: I am reluctant to allow myself to get that involved. I think I went "so far" … then pulled back with her. *I: Because of the distance?* LE: Yes … and getting that emotionally attached to someone so far away. It would not be a pleasant experience.
	No physical	In Second Life it	LM: I had the club up for a year, got to

	contact	is impossible to have physical contact and hence physically support each other.	know some of our clients' real lives and people behind the avatars, developed a sense of "caring" for them. *I: Why do you put caring in inverted commas?* LM: Well virtual caring … I can't physically care, such as giving them a hug, or a pat on the back … if something bad has arisen in their lives. SF: In SL we can support with words. There is no ability to help when needed. Have the social interactions that are so important in daily life.
	Separate relationships	Maintaining a separation and distinction between romantic relationships conducted in Second Life and those in the physical world.	*I: Is your partner in sl your partner in rl?* CK2: No. I don't think I'd ever take an SL relationship to RL … it's tempting but I won't. DT: ... emotions from RL and emotions from SL are all within me ☺ … so I am really able to keep what belongs in RL in RL … and what belongs in SL in SL … but actually I don't even want to in certain cases … *I: But you met him now in rl I guess I mean.* LM: Right, we met in RL. *I: So does that make it an rl relationship?* LM: In March our friends were cheering, happy, etc. At this point no, the distance.
	Separating SL from RL	The extent to which information and experiences between users' first and second lives crosses from one to the other.	*I: Have you become even more the same here than you used to be, or do you think to begin with things were separate?* AM: At the beginning, yes they were separate, as in keeping personal self out of SL, but as for now I treat people that was always the same … *I: Do you talk to your friends you made here in rl too?* AM: Yes some I do, but only the trusted ones ☺ *I: Do you use MSN, Facebook, or anything like that?* BM … Nope, mostly IMs. I try not to bother people outside of sl. *I: Does your rl partner know you are in sl?* CK2: No no no. He knows I'm on the computer a lot but he does not know what I do … the guy I'm partnered with now alluded to meeting up for drinks since we are not far from one another … it's very inviting but would not just drink and say good night, so I would not meet him EVER. DT: He is married, I am married and we have talked about the fact that in rl … this just wouldn't happen. And we both agree that RL comes first … I*: Does your husband know you come to sl?* DT: Yup … but to him it is a computer game, and he knows I have friends and that somehow we all play the game … and he knows I am happy when I have my "game time". So long as that time … doesn't get in the way of RL things … he's ok with it. EZ: [EZ] has her own email, messenger, and Skype. *I: Is your relationship with [your SL partner] kept to sl, or do you go outside?* LE: We have talked about meeting in rl, but I don't feel right about it at this point. We

			live sooo far apart. She is Dutch … I'm American. There is the issue of miles separating us … and an issue of our cultures being so different. SF: Biggest part of those rules in place. Firmly in place. No meet ups. Ever. Admittedly, I will meet up with the women friends I have. I have met three.
	SL identity kept secret	Not using the avatar identity outside of Second Life.	*I: Do you use things like Facebook, MSN or any other social networking/instant messaging functions?* AM: I use at times MSN and Skype, Facebook I do not go there any more, I do not like the changes. *I: Did you use [it] for your rl or for your avi?* AM: RL. *I: Some people use them for their av.* AM: My avatar is for here only ☺
	SL not understood by outsiders	People who do not use Second Life will not appreciate its qualities or understand what happens there.	*I: People still don't really know much of what happens and why in virtual worlds.* CK: Probably a lot of assumptions based on the juicy news stories n such. SF: There is so much to SL. It's not easy to explain, or talk about. To the uninitiated, I would imagine that bit would not inform much … I think that a reader without experience here will never really "get it".
Transferences	Negative impact of SL on RL	Events and experiences in Second Life that have a negative impact on "real life".	*I: Did all of this impact on rl?* CK: I was pretty terrified it would do. As it happens, so far at least, there has been no observable effect … looking back on that relationship, and how long it had been going on, and all the changes in his life and mine at the time … I think I got afraid that I'd be 50 or 60 and still feel trapped. Then I got to thinking about the rest of my life and what I'd miss it I didn't pay attention heh. *I: Has being in SL affected rl at all?* DT: I don't get enough sleep … lol. *I: Did it affect rl all this hoo-hah?* FW: … Yes it did affect RL. I was pissed!! And in a bad mood for a long time … I still get mad about the last thing that happened … it was really bad. I still have to tell myself from time to time "It doesn't matter! Get over it! Move on!"
	Positive impact of SL on RL	Ways in which experiences in Second Life have a positive impact on the approach to "real life".	*I: So what are the good ways that sl has affected your rl?* AM: There are many, but the most important one is the making of a true friend and just as important the helping I can give to others. CK: Lots of things … I mentioned how SL had improved my confidence enough that I could work on it in RL more … I had an odd feeling for me – I felt proud of myself hehe. *I: Would you say that being in sl has changed you?* EZ: Yes, in my ways. 1) World View. 2) Physical. 3) Social. 4) Better communications. 1) World view. In SL I'm constantly challenged to examine and re-examine my world view and beliefs. I love it! It may be as simple as catching myself making small assumptions, or it may be deep (but friendly) debates … as a result, my world view has definitely become more

			liberal than it was. 2) Physical. I have lost 30 pounds since starting SL. From the research I've read, there is a high relationship between watching your AV succeed, emulating your AV, and succeeding in RL … I think the process of creating a visual representation of yourself and watching "yourself", you really do internalise some of it. 3) Social. I just described one example, but there have been many. [EZ]'s successes and lessons have spilled over into RL in terms of more self confidence and more willingness to step "outside the box". 4) Better communications. SL was the first place I experienced IMing. I think it has been monumental in changing how I communicate in RL, and has made a big difference in my success here. Let me explain … IMing forces you to be more concise. This was a huge improvement in my verbal and written skills at work, producing more effective emails … IMing also make it very clear when someone is trying to reply, since I can see when you are typing. In RL verbal conversations, now I find myself MUCH better at pausing to actually LISTEN to the other person's reply. PS: SL is a lot safer there. *I: In rl then you are very brave and getting braver. When you say you are doing more things in rl, what has brought this change?* PS: More, I have support here. I guess I've had success in being accepted here. And a small taste of social freedom makes me crave more.
	RL and SL affecting each other	The mutual effect between Second Life and "real life" are unavoidable.	FW: …. You can't do things in here and it not affect you and others.
	RL transferring to SL	Behavioural and social problems in the physical world become evident in Second Life.	*I: The counselling, is that regarding problems people have in rl and sl?* AM: Yes I find many have rl and sl issues that are the same, unfortunately some cannot change they interact with others so their problems follow them … we have to make a change in us to change what happens to us.
	SL transferring to RL	Ways in which experiences, relationships, and attitudes have transferred from Second Life through to the physical world.	*I: Have the things that have happened to you here changed who you are and how you do things in rl?* AM: Hmm yes and no ☺ I have taken on what others do here as a helping aid in rl and understanding why some act in an [immoral] way. *I: Has it made you more cautious generally?* AM: Yes or I would have not learned from it. *I: Does any of how you are in sl spill over into your rl anyway? Are you becoming more like [EZ]?* EZ: Yes, and I intentionally try to be more like [EZ], but these days that's more social than work-related. For instance … last night I met someone for a first date through a dating service. In RL in that situation, I tend to be more self-conscious, quieter, and nervous. [EZ] takes

			it all in stride, assuming all is well and will be fun or interesting. As I was driving to meet, I was literally contemplating the differences in how I approach the situation differently between SL and RL, and decided intentionally to be more like [EZ] (assume it will be fun and interesting, rather than being nervous, etc.) … So when we met, I gave him a great big smile (as though we'd known each other for years) and then a big hug … The difference was amazing. Instead of starting off with both of us awkward, etc., it set the tone for a comfortable conversation and fun time. LE: I have been a graphic designer … artist in sl. It has progressed and grown … and given me confidence which I lack in rl. I have seen this improve in rl … and my accomplishments in sl … have inspired me to create more in rl. LM: It had become part of me and had made great friends, turned to RL … it crossed over to Skype-ing, working on real life projects, meeting their family via Skype … so I planned a trip in March (2011) to visit Portugal and meet them … *I: When you said your approach to relationships and developing relationships has changed, how do you mean?* LM: Taking [the] time out to get to know this person, it is selective and few have gotten over to my rl, but knowing about them, their real lives, their lives here, why they play, share advice and ideas among each other. *I: Do you think SL has affected your rl at all?* MT: Oh yes, definitely yes. It has from the beginning 5 years ago, and continues to do so constantly … I have learned that I can love a woman, for thing. Her and I continue to keep email contact. It's hard to think of all the things really. It certainly has brought up important conversations with my rl husband. PS: I do a lot of community things here. And to be honest, I'm doing more in public IRL now too … Yes, I'm more inclined to express myself now. I'm in an area where men staying at home is … frowned upon … sometimes fatally. And I've learned to some degree to resist those folks. And so far, it's working … I'm on a few web forums as [PS] … and to be honest, I've considered replacing all my rl name usage with [PS].
	The dilemma of RL and SL	How having experiences in Second Life can pose a moral dilemma regarding their implications for "real life".	DT: But we both have other friends and interests … though he spends more time here than I do … he is married, I am married, and we have talked about the fact that in rl … this just wouldn't happen. And we both agree that RL comes first. So somehow …. We just have set the same expectations. And at times, we talk about if that works? And the sort of moral dilemma it poses.
Virtual worlds	Little usage of other worlds	Have dabbled with other virtual	*I: Did you try any other virtual worlds?* FW: I created a character in something … I

		worlds but not used extensively.	can't even remember what it was cause that's all I did was create her. I've never been back in.
	Other worlds are like SL	Similarity between other virtual worlds and Second Life.	CK2: Now Avination is very SL like. But it's like a ghost town on most days. It's very much like sl. In fact lots of sl vendors have shops there … owning a sim is much cheaper. They call their money C's lol. People are much nicer.
	Other worlds do not compare	Other worlds are inferior to Second Life.	CK2: On Spot no comparison to sl totally confused by it.
	Other worlds usage	Using other virtual worlds.	PS: I feel poorly about what LL is doing about SL … But I do like the community. And I am looking around at other grids … Inworldz looks to be the best … It is formed with the expressed intent to sustain a community. And my explorations there bear it out.
	The effort to start a new virtual life	Starting a new account and life in another virtual world takes a lot of effort.	DT: I logged into Inworldz ... seemed a great deal like "old" SL. But then I realised … how much time and effort it would take to put together my Avie … so I suppose if something happens to SL … I will have to make the effort. *I: Did you ever try any other virtual worlds?* LE: I have thought about it … and even searched a few out … but then when it came to actually logging into one of them … I refused to do it … I remember how it was in the beginning of sl and I don't want to get that way again in any place. *I: Being obsessed?* LE: Veryy addicting. Yes. *I: Also does the time and effort come into it? You have put a lot into [LE]. It would mean starting again I guess.* LE: Exactly. *I: What about other virtual worlds, have you tried any?* LM: No. And I am not looking to try either. This place is enough for me.
	The link between worlds	What happens in Second Life is linked to events and situations in the physical worlds.	*I: It sounds like sl affects rl, because it's joined. Is that right?* AM: Well yes it does, has to if you are honest and do not deceive and being yourself here, of course it affects both worlds.
Relationships with others	Aspects of SL relationships	Differences between RL and SL relationships	Differences in the characteristics of relationship experienced in Second Life, compared to those in the physical world.	CK: People who meet in SL first rather than elsewhere first … probably the fallout from the end of the relationship is mainly in SL. Although I am only assuming that. CK2: Well, it just is, he not anything like my rl partner. I think maybe that's [why]. I just know he is not him and vice versa. DT: Yes – we go listen to live music, or just hang out and talk or dance. And we have a relationship as well. Sort of like being SL partner I suppose. But I don't get that whole SL partner thing ☺ … well, I think that everyone has such different expectations of what a "partner" is. And if you aren't clear about that, you are just setting up a lot of possible reasons for drama. So some [think] it is like a "marriage in rl. … and others are

			just using it to manipulate the behaviour of others … sort of like – "if we are partners, you can/can't do xyz" … but if you are not clear about those expectations, you wind up with a great deal of misunderstanding, and drama ☺ *I: How did this compare to how you would usually feel in relationships?* LM: It was insane, that's why I began to run away from it, he would mentally drain me. It began fight after fight after tension and tension, over just stupid items and I was not used to this in rl … I have not had that magnitude of a relationship in rl, they are relatively calm, only gets close to what I experienced with my ex if he is cheating or no trust.
	Intensity of relationships	An example of the overwhelming intensity of emotion, possessiveness and dramatic behaviour that can characterise a relationship conducted in Second Life.	LM: There is a person behind this avi … now what their intents are in this game varies and is a mystery and something you can choose to find out or leave alone. *I: How did you begin to realise this and change your approach?* LM: After my first partner it became too deep for me. I even got scared …we talked every day, Skype and sl, and I mean 10 hours or more a day. We started a few social sites in rl, different online applications, finding ways to create a business of our creative backgrounds. We got to know each other's lives, we spoke about previous relationships and future ones. We both love strange UFO sightings, ghosts, spirits, after life, space, potential life forms, just clicked so well that I became really intrigued with him and wanted him a part of my rl world. My emotions began to run me … I wanted every part of him for myself, we ran a social network for Second Life together and other women avatars would attempt to befriend or try to get to know him, I made sure it was sabotaged in a way. He would do this as well, he would investigate everyone I knew, and would keep as "his", no one can have or share me, friendships or interactions ... *I: How did this compare to how you would usually feel in relationships?* LM: It was insane, that's why I began to run away from it, he would mentally drain me. It began fight after fight after tension and tension, over just stupid items and I was not used to this in rl … and it went silent for a few months, then we began talking again though didn't know what to call it. For the longest he thought me and his friend … were talking behind his back, etc. I can't even begin [to] describe what it was after the months of silence, in a way it was a getting back and working things out, and in a way it was not. And my strong feelings for him kept me pulling back to him. *I: How did you get over that?* LM: I haven't. It's still like there, the emotions. But I have a little more control over them.
	Issues in relationships	Examples of the types of problematic characteristics	CK: I "dissolved" my SL partnership recently, after telling him via text that I'd realised I wasn't going to leave my husband or my daughter ever, as he'd been holding

		that relationships in Second Life can have.	on to a dream that one day we'd be together in RL. I realised it a while ago … when you barely get to talk to someone it's hard to leave them. So the effect of that on SL … was just visible in the profiles, if anyone ever looked. Which is probably the other way around for a lot of SL relationships … *I: In the past, did you ever think that you might be with him in rl?* CK: I thought so … years ago. It didn't take long to dawn on me though that it wasn't going to happen. Then he and his wife has a baby, and … well. I would never choose to leave my kid, and I would never do anything that would result in him losing his. I took a long time to go through with it, unfortunately. CK2: There are parts of [a] relationship here or rw can be taken or left. SL relationships are not ideal. They come with their own set of issues. LE: I know eventually we will break up. A friend of mine said once … "there is only one outcome to relationships in sl never brought to rl … [an] end". *I: So it's inevitable?* LE: I think so. It seems most relationships in sl last 2 years … if they are good ones. I think she and I will always be friends … I don't see it ending badly. But it will end … it's as if a partner muse experience rejection … any time their partner logs on and does anything which isn't with each other. MT: … I didn't get to see that much even when we were together. It's like it only felt like a relationship when were together because of that. So, I think I was feeling that disconnect with SL even then. SF: I knew him a long while before admitting that I stood around waiting for him to log in.
	Maintaining relationships outside SL	Ways in which friendships originating in Second Life are then maintained on other digital platforms or in the physical world.	*I: Did all of this impact on rl?* CK: I was pretty terrified it would do. As it happens, so far at least, there has been no observable effect. We are friends, we still talk outside of SL (online, as he is in a different country), and he and I and my RL husband still play EVE Online together in Sunday nights … which probably sounds really …weird. DT: Actually [my SL partner] and I have talked about that. *I: What, if SL ends you mean?* DT: Yes. *I: And what did you conclude?* DT: We would find another way to spend time together … though I don't know if it would be sustainable. EZ: I find that those friends I meet who actually turn into relationships greater than the occasional "hello" and a short chat, tend to grow beyond SL. It's an interesting phenomenon … we use avatars to visually represent ourselves, and somehow the visual representation is very important. But as a relationship grows, we eventually take it to a different platform … Skype, Yahoo Messenger, etc. Early on, the ability to

			interact visually by dancing, playing EnGarde, etc., it is important in laying the ground work, but once there is a deeper connection, that is no longer important. The ability to connect more easily and at any tie supersedes it. Every one of the people here I would call a REAL friend (as opposed to an acquaintance) is now on my Skype and Yahoo Messenger lists, and we connect there just as often (or more) than we do in SL. LE: We chat on voice … email. But no physical contact … LM: It has changed for the best, I have met someone who is a good man, sweet, sincere and we speak via Skype, so no need for SL, other than catching up with others whom I don't have on my Skype contact list.
	Nature of relationships in SL	The extent to which relationships in Second Life can have aspects that are different or unique.	*I: Did you think you would have a relationship like this in sl?* DT: Absolutely not ☺. It has been quite a surprise to see what level of discussions and interaction has come about. And frankly, love. LE: I know eventually we will break up. A friend of mine said once … "there is only one outcome to relationships in sl never brought to rl … [an] end". *I: So it's inevitable?* LE: I think so. It seems most relationships in sl last 2 years … if they are good ones. I think she and I will always be friends … I don't see it ending badly. But it will end. *I: What is it that makes it inevitable do you think … I don't mean you specifically, but relationships in general?* LE: Well … time I think. SL is not "24 hours". We are all limited to the amount of time in sl. Also … with that … it's how much time to be together … meaning per day.
	Responsibilities of RL	The sense of responsibility that one has in the physical world.	CK: I "dissolved" my SL partnership recently, after telling him via text that I'd realised I wasn't going to leave my husband or my daughter ever, as he'd been holding on to a dream that one day we'd be together in RL. I realised it a while ago … when you barely get to talk to someone it's hard to leave them. So the effect of that on SL … was just visible in the profiles, if anyone ever looked. Which is probably the other way around for a lot of SL relationships … *I: In the past, did you ever think that you might be with him in rl?* CK: I thought so … years ago. It didn't take long to dawn on me though that it wasn't going to happen. Then he and his wife has a baby, and … well. I would never choose to leave my kid, and I would never do anything that would result in him losing his. I took a long time to go through with it, unfortunately. DT: No, I have always been very responsible, sort of "always trying to do the right thing". And so I didn't want to be that way here.
	The value of relationships	The extent to which old	AM: What keeps me here are several things, one the friends that I have made here, the

		friendships developed in Second Life have meaning and value, and are a source of support during difficult times.	other the things I can do ... the best thing is the ability to make things and the interaction with others. CK: It was support from friends in SL that helped me to go through it though. CK2: The [worst] losing a friendship or partner, and the feeling associated with the loss. DT: And that group has sort of dissolved so I miss those people. And many of the friends I had at that time are no longer around. EZ: First of all … the friends list. As with everyone I know, it grows like a virus and has to be tamed occasionally … early in this process I wondered how many of these "friends" would actually be around sometime down the road, and have a meaningful relationship. I just passed my 3 year anniversary in SL There are countless "friends" (acquaintances) who have come and gone. But I'm surprised to say that there are a handful who remain, and we are quite close. *I: And when you are in sl, what do you do>* LM: … see old friends, catch up on our lives, they tell me gossip, build, and sometimes just get a good laugh at goofying off. MT: Companionship/socialising would be number one, I have some very dear friends here. SF: My RL marriage has been very difficult in the past year. This man … has helped me stay straight, keep my calm, and my resolve to stay married. I allow things I would never allow anyone else … *I: So what was it like meeting your friends in rl?* SF: … I want to live near them. I would like to be around them so much more … I returned to college last spring because of their encouragement.
	Trust	The role and importance of trust in relationships in Second Life.	*I: Do you talk to your friends you made here in rl too?* AM: Yes some I do, but only the trusted ones ☺ CK2: I'd never take a SL to RL because I've heard more negative than positive about those things. Also the safety factor, all things are not always as they appear. Although I don't think I've met any serial killers, one never knows and now that I'm with this guy who has been trying to get my attention for a while now, I care for him and he is a good man. *I: Do your friends on these [Skype, Yahoo Messenger, etc.], know you only as [EZ]?* EZ: I have revealed my RL identity to a few, and will be meeting one in September for a weekend. *I: How do you decide who you reveal yourself to?* EZ: The same way I decide whom I give my name and phone number to in the real world … if they seem authentic and trustworthy, and if they are someone I'm interested in keeping in my "inner circle". The 2-3 who have that

			information … I have spent COUNTLESS hours with them over at least a year. In that many conversations it becomes apparent if they are presenting a false front because they are inconsistent. Little things make it clear who is and who is not being upfront. LE: I remember the state of mind I was in at the time. I was in a partnership … my first in sl. And it was a horrible experience … she had alts. It was a trust issue. But the real problem was me … and that I continued it. I felt a lot of mind games were being played.
	Using instincts to guide	Relying on and trusting gut instincts and feelings during the course of interactions with others.	*I: Have you developed an instinct also?* EZ: I believe so. LE: Since being in that first partnership … I always had a "gut" feeling and in chatting with people now … there is something about that in sl, that if you listen to your instincts you are usually right. I think sl has taught me to listen to my instincts more about people. Not only in sl … but rl too … I rely on my gut … my instincts about people when meeting them for the first time. I am a sceptic anyway … and suspicious.
	Using SL to be together	Using Second Life to be with people when it is difficult to be together, in the physical world for instance.	BM: We created [our avatar] because we were going to be apart in rl. EZ: … my co-worker who started me here (I call him my SL mentor) is now on staff at one of the inworld universities. He has had surgery in RL and been away from the corporate world for 2 months. The only way I've been able to contact him and offer support/encouragement is through SL.
Interacting with others	Communications	The characteristics of communicating in Second Life.	DT: The best … is that you can make your interactions here whatever you want … the worst … is that that there can be so much misunderstanding … when you communicate in text … and you can't always really now if you understood, or if the other person takes your comment in the way you intend …
	Conversation effects on relationships	The extent to which the dependence on conversation only undermines the strength of relationships in Second Life.	LE: I have a good friend in sl … whom I met soon after she came to sl. She had her [own] theories about people who meet in rl, having weddings and partnerships in sl, then taking it to rl. She didn't understand it. She eventually met a guy from sl herself, and now they are together in rl. We chatted not long ago about this issue too. She said … "in rl it's nice that we can just 'be together' … we can sit … watch a movie … we don't HAVE to talk … meaning allll the time. But in sl, you really have to fill the time up with constant talking/typing, and it's annoying to type allllll the time. *I: I think that gives it its initial intensity but then its boredom.* LE: Exactly. *I: Everything is revealed and discussed very quickly.* LE: Things move very quickly in sl.
	Getting to know real people	Making the effort to really know other users.	*I: When you said your approach to relationships and developing relationships has changed, how do you mean?* LM: Taking [the] time out to get to know this person, it is selective and few have gotten

				over to my rl, but knowing about them, their real lives, their lives here, why they play, share advice and ideas among each other.
		Helping others	Using Second Life as a means to help others.	*I: Despite these things that have happened you still like to be here?* AM: Yes I do here, I can still help others and make true friends. May I give an example? *I: Yes please* ☺AM: Like you with your study, you have made advances with your rl study … so this in effect joins both worlds, I even think that we sharing your work here has had an impact with us as friends, so even this has an rl link … *I: How do you help others?* AM: By helping them with their issues, I do counselling here also. And taking part in your study … ok, also the help I can give here is a big thing to make me stay in sl … I listen to people, and if they say they are having problems I offer my help. LM: I had the club up for a year, got to know some of our clients' real lives and people behind the avatars, developed a sense of "caring" for them. *I: Why do you put caring in inverted commas?* LM: Well virtual caring … I can't physically care, such as giving them a hug, or a pat on the back … if something bad has arisen in their lives. SF: Several of my "puppies" have become good friends. As a helper I meet a huge number of people. My friends coined them my puppies … I will friend them, help them a while, and then they move on.
		Sharing a dream	Using Second Life to create a dream with someone else.	FW: That it was mine, and that it was very beautiful, and that [my partner] and I had made it together out of a shared dream that we had.
	Negative experience	Betrayal and deception in SL	How Second Life can be used to betray and deceive others.	*I: It sounds like sl affects rl, because it's joined. Is that right?* AM: Well yes it does, has to if you are honest and do not deceive and being yourself here, of course it affects both worlds … *I: Was it a burden having an sl relationship. Or I should say a relationship in sl.* AM: Not at first, it became so when the doubts set in and even more so when I had proof of his cheating and lies … the best thing is the ability to make things and help and the interaction with others, the bad thing is the lies. *I: How much lying goes on, do you think?* AM: Oh a whole lot, just as bad as rl, but some think that because they are an av they can hide the lies, big mistake. *I: Why do they think they can hide their lies?* AM: Because they think they are invisible to their true selves. *I: When you say true self, what do you mean?* AM: As they are in el. Here they play games and think others are easily fooled and yes some are easily fooled. FW: I was stabbed in the back repeatedly and betrayed by some very close friends. Which totally hurt my feelings and pissed me off at the same time … that damn game has caused more back-stabbing, lying,

				manipulation … SL is fascinating and overwhelmingly exciting when you are new. Then you begin to realise that there is more shopping than you can care to see … it's hard to trust people really … (or so has been my experience) and I think people are generally shocked to find that they can be hurt emotionally through their interactions here. Then SL becomes, not so great.
		Disregard from others	How the efforts you make on behalf of others are not valued.	FW: Maybe they wanted to say "screw you [FW]" lol … but I was a good Queen. I gave them a great place to hang out … a HUGE castle … the whole bit. They didn't care.
		Negative emotions	Examples of the negative emotions that can arise from the experiences, relationships, and interactions within Second Life.	AM: … I think more could have been shown of the hurt from relationships here. This is an important issue I have found. CK: I felt trapped by that relationship. I wanted to do things I knew would bother or upset him … even just making new friends would have him making "jokes" about me going off with them. Eventually I realised I can only responsible for my own happiness … he's have to do the same … and he didn't seem to be helping heh. CK2: I felt he cheated, spending lots of time away from me. I swore I'd never do it again, because I was hurt and did not want to experience that again. I changed my mind cause I wanted this person more than they wanted me, So I guess it's like they say, it's more enticing trying to have what you cannot. DT: Yes and we also discussed about things put into their profiles. I think some use their profiles to honestly express their feelings but other use it to purposefully hurt others. *I: What did you think of your old interview?* PS: I was surprised by just how scared I was … *I: What was it you were scared of?* PS: Well, I started out being scared of everything. I had trouble with griefers and scammers. And many of the unknowns, I still approached with great caution.
		Negative feelings about others		FW: Can you believe that? They leave for the gold over staying with someone they've cultivated a relationship with? *I: Why do you think they did that?* FW: They're stupid. LOL. *I: Does it mean they don't think your friendship is worth that much? lol.* FW: No, I think they are really stupid … in SL, there are a lot of idiots in here. Idiots, psychos and just plain mean people. *I: Do you feel more strongly about that than you used to?* FW: Yes. LMAO cause the longer I'm in here the more of them I meet. *I: lol. Is there more of them now, or are you just more aware?* FW. Hmm tough question. Maybe it's that this is just how I've determined that things are?
The Self in virtual worlds	Being your own person	Making your own rules	Second Life as a place where one decides for oneself what one	MT: Yes, I had read about it and I just thought "wow, a place where I can do anything!" and I was hooked from day one. Even though we had reallllly bad avs back

			will do and how to conduct oneself.	then. SF: I think that SL is a rich, full experience, that is hard to explain in a short essay. Of course, like anything, it's what you make it. I set my own rules for myself early, and have abided by those rules about 90%.
		Not caring what others think	Not caring for the opinion that others might hold about one.	FW: For one thing it is great to be back! I've always loved SL itself. I am not caring so much this time around if people like me or not like me. I'm not gonna worry so much about how I behave just so I don't offend a potential future customer or whatever you wanna call them … *I: Do you care less about what others might think or say back?* FW: Oh yeah lol. *I: Why's that do you think? Lol.*. FW: Because the people in SL - most of them I will never see again so it doesn't matter (except for the earlier Tiny Empires crap that we talked about). Also … in SL, there are a lot of idiots in here, idiots, psychos and just plain mean people.
		SL is my own responsibility	The extent to which the events and circumstances that a person is in in Second Life is their own responsibility.	CK: I felt trapped by that relationship. I wanted to do things I knew would bother or upset him … even just making new friends would have him making "jokes" about me going off with them. Eventually I realised I can only responsible for my own happiness … he's have to do the same … and he didn't seem to be helping heh.
		SL reveals the true self	The characteristics of the person in Second Life is the person they "really are" in the physical world.	*I: When you say true self, what do you mean?* AM: As they are in rl, here they play games and think others are easily fooled and yes some are easily fooled. *I: Do you think the person in rl is the true self then?* AM: Some yes, the players no. You get players even in rl, but they are recognisable by being seen as their real selves. But here they think the av is the hiding place. *I: Because they can hide their rl identity?* AM: Yes, or they think they can … only our features can be hidden behind the av, [our] intentions can not. *I: … I wonder if the person in sl is the true self because it is who you are inside?* AM: This is something that is also true but for the ones that are unsure of themselves. They have no confidence or very little in who they are. *I: In rl?* AM: Yes. There are men here who have a female av because inside they feel female but are scared to be that in rl. Same for some women here.
	Consistency of self	Same inside, the real me	The person across worlds is the same, but some aspects may be more evident in Second Life.	*I: Do you think you have changed much since we did it?* MT: Hmmmm. Behaviourally probably, but my insides haven't changed. *I: What kind of things might have changed behaviourally.* MT: Well, I had a love affair with a woman here for about 6 months. It wasn't just sex, I loved her … still do really … *I: Are you the same person in SL as in RL?* MT: Yes and no. SL brings out part of me, But those parts it brings out are the real me. *I: Are they parts that don't necessarily get brought out in RL?* MT: Yes, mostly due to it not being

				possible for one reason or another.
		The same across all virtual space	The extent to which the Second Life identity is used across other virtual platforms.	*I: So when you are Skyping or used to be in Facebook and when you are in SL, it is all essentially the rl you, do you think?* AM: Yes totally me, not an imitation of me. *I: I am only asking because people do loads of different things now. I am just wondering how people represent themselves.* *I: Are you CK2 there [Avination] too?* CK2: Nah not at all, no one logs in there, seems like a world hit by a disease, empty … yes [same] name first and last. *I: Do you go in there [Inworldz] as [PS] as it were, with a different name?* PS: I managed to get the same name. *I: … so you are you wherever?* PS: Well my language and typing give me away. Even on e-mail lists … *I: I was going to ask, does [PS] have a big virtual life beyond SL?* PS: … I have a larger virtual life. [PS] was created when I logged into SL> But there is some other presence. For example, [PS] has email … *I: Does she do Facebook or anything else like that?* PS: No, I have security issues with Facebook. I'm on a few web forums as [PS].
		The same person across worlds	The extent to which the same person with the same characteristics is present across all the virtual worlds and environments used.	*I: Do you think you are the same person in rl as in sl?* LM: To an extent, sometimes I like the roleplay, being a different character (furry) or just being me with an ability to go a little wild in sl. *I: Are you the same person in SL as RL?* MT: Yes and no. SL brings out parts of me. But those parts it brings out are the real me. *I: Are they parts that don't necessarily get brought out in RL?* MT: Yes, mostly due to it not being possible for one reason or another. *I: Do you go in there [Inworldz] as [PS] as it were, with a different name.* PS: I managed to get the same name … I'm on a few web forums as [PS] ... And to be honest, I've considered replacing all my rl name usage with [PS].
	Developing self	Developing a sense of self	How the sense of being a specific person in Second Life emerges.	LM: you develop a person along with your avatar, sometimes based upon moods, where you are going, or whom you are around.
		Maturing in SL	How ways of using and being in Second Life change over time.	LM: I calmed down in ways, let's put it that way … I grew 3 great close friendships in sl … I still go to the naked beach and goof off … I still do things that aspect of being funny. But relations and developing relationships has changed. Exploring and taking advantage on some of the creative, language, culture, and open discussion classes on here … *I: What would the [LM] of 2 years ago think of the [LM] of today?* LM: Matured in sense of you can choose to make this a game or a learning interactive experience about the world, creativity, and having common causes. She chose to gain more from SL, more substance. *I: How does the role that SL plays in your*

			life now compare to the role it did when we met? MT: Well I still spend as much in it as I did then. I think maybe then I used it more for dealing with old RL issues and now I use it to explore new parts of me.
	SL changing me	How experiences in relation to Second Life can bring about a sense of change in the experience of being a person.	CK: Lots of things … I mentioned how SL had improved my confidence enough that I could work on it in RL more … I had an odd feeling for me – I felt proud of myself hehe. LM: And it got very heavy with a relationship that developed through here. There were 2 partners that I grew unbelievably close to. *I: Did they remain online or move into rl?* LM: I must say this place changed me. Moved into rl meeting with the 2nd.
Representation and behaviour	Changing genders	Using an avatar that is a different gender to "real life".	PS: It turns out the majority of women AVs are men IRL … a lot of the more sensitive men are here in skirts and separate themselves from the more macho sort … I actually passed successfully from day one too, but later found that SL was skewed in my favour. *I: In what sense?* PS: Well, a lot of newbie AVs are obviously guys.
	Different personalities	The extent to which the personality of participant varies across avatars and between the physical and virtual worlds.	*I: They all [the alts] have different personalities?* BM: .. I try to vary them. *I: Do you think you are different here then?* DT: … yes I am much more open to expressing my opinions. Though I am pretty open in RL as well. *I: This seems a daft question, but are you the same person in sl as you are in rl?* FW: … No I'm not the same … sorta but not really … I think I am more flamboyant in here. And … I can say what's on my mind a lot easier in SL than I can in RL.
	Openness in SL	Behaving with an open attitude towards others in Second Life	LE: Things were different right from the start with here … because of her honesty and openness about who she is in rl … there was no doubt she was being truthful. She shares her rl name … country … speaks very open about her rl. She talks on voice. *I: Are you able to be the same?* LE: Yes … when meeting them for the first time, I am a sceptic anyway … and suspicious. *I: Do you think being with her has also helped you to be more open too?* LE: Oh yes …
	Projecting an image	Displaying outward behaviour that conceals internal emotions.	PS: I can project a braver attitude than I have inside. *I: Do you think the interview reads as scared, or is that you remembering?* PS: I can read my phrasing and see my worry. *I: Such as?* PS: It's the same methods I use in public speaking. I tend to overfocus. I look for complex phrasing. And generally hide behind my words.
	Role play	Example of where role-playing occurs.	*I: When you do your rp, how does that work? Is there a sim you go to?* BM: I'll joke around with myself and others … Antiquity, Willowdale.
	SL as a model for RL	Behaviour and attitude in Second	EZ: I actually would like to be more like [EZ] in rl … I'm not a split personality here

		Life as a model for "real life".	… it's just easier to differentiate by referring to my av as [EZ] etc. [EZ] is much more light hearted and fun than I am in RL. [EZ] is also a much truer expression of who I am, emotionally and psychologically speaking.
The avatar	Alts	Examples of participants having alts.	*I: Now you have all these avs, are you really only using [AM]?* AM: Yes, I do bring the others on to pass things but do not run them … well I started a new sl life so to speak and did not want to carry on anything that was like the others. *I: Did you carry friends over even though "a new life"?* AM: Only the ones I knew I could trust totally … *I: Did you say anything to the ones you didn't transfer? Or have you just become dormant?* AM: They are dormant. *I: What kind of things have changed?* BM: I have two new avs … *I: Is [BM] still your main av?* BM: Yep. All my building stuff is on this one … *I: How much of your time are spending not being [BM] i.e. being the other avs.* BM: Offlinewise I can spend the day being me. I'm still a mom first. But sometimes I can run two or three windows at the same time. So I can be [BM and my other avatars]. *I: Are you more than one av at once?* BM: Time to time, yes. CK: I don't use my alts anymore either … I made one that is associated with my RL identity, for meeting RL friends in SL if they felt like trying it … but the alts I was playing around on before … I think I just got fed up having several inventories, logging in and out, separate friend lists … *I: Did they used to lead very separate lives?* CK: They had mostly quiet lives … one made a couple of friends, but the one I usually saw was an alt and we added each other to our main friend list hehe. FW: And I have made some alts here in SL. *I: Do you do anything with them?* FW: Last interview I told you "no", but actually I do have alts … I didn't admit to having them to anyone lol. *I: I would be shocked if someone was here for years and not have an alt or two.* FW: Yes. *I: Even if they are only used as a storage facility or bank.* FW: Lots of people start over with alts.
	Attachment to an avatar	Forming a sentimental bond with the avatar due to shared experience.	LE: [LE] seems to be part of me. The me in rl. I've even tried alts. But there is something [LE] has which they don't … I've learned a great deal from her, or "with" her … or because of her. "[LE] was there" … during the bad experiences in SL. "She" came through it all. So emotionally, I'm attached to her.
	Avatar appearance	Relating avatar appearance to physical world appearance.	*I: How did you decide how to look?* AM: I basically make them similar to my real self, maybe just the eyes or the chin. *I: Is that the first time you have an alt that's a bit like you?* BM: In sl yes. When I first started in Gaia Online, the little av looked like me at first. *I: I haven't been on Gaia, what's that like?* BM: Occasionally I'll

			draw myself in to my comics … it's a forum where you can discuss anything from politics to food. *I: Oh, so you can have a little av that goes with your username?* BM: Yep and you can buy clothes, dress them up. It's kinda cute.
	Changing appearance	The details that comprise decision-making regarding the change in avatar appearance.	*I: So how is [AM] different to the others.* AM; She is more homely if that makes sense. And she is a fae … *I: … When you say homely? Can you explain?* AM: OK let me think how to explain this. Sexy in a girl next door look. *I: So that is homely?* AM: Yes. *I: I thought you might mean more mature, so I am glad I asked.* AM: No, the others are like that ☺ *I: Was [AM] always like this?* AM: Only difference is she had short blonde hair. *I: But same shape and looks?* AM: Yes. *I: What made you decide to change your style with [AM]?* AM: … Well I started a new sl life so to speak, and did not want to carry on anything like the others.
	Hiding behind avatars	How avatars are used as to conceal the user.	LE: I think I had grown to think everyone was hiding behind their avs.
	People behind the avatars	People are using avatars.	LM: I had the club up for a year, got to know some of our clients' real lives, and people behind the avatars. Developed a sense of "caring" for them … *I: Do you think you see them more as people now? Rather than avs.* LM: Yes. There is a person behind this avi. Now what their intents are in this game varies and is a mystery, and something you can choose to find out or leave alone.

Appendix 8. SEBE procedure consent form

The consent form was sent to all participants in advance of the procedure.

VIRTUAL SELVES IN VIRTUAL WORLDS
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

INVITATION

You are being asked to take part in a research study about social life inside Second Life, in particular in relation to your experience as a person in Second Life. It forms the basis of the PhD programme that I am a student on in the London School of Economics Institute of Social Psychology. My name is Simon Evans (s.evans@lse.ac.uk) and I use the username Fearless Foulsbane in Second Life. My supervisor is Professor Saadi Lahlou (s.lahlou@lse.ac.uk). The research has been approved by the departmental Research Ethics Committee.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN

The research procedure involves three stages.

1. The first stage is a one-to-one interview held in Second Life, lasting approximately an hour and conducted in text. You will be asked to discuss a variety of topics, including how you spend and manage your time in Second Life, something of your Second Life 'life story", similarities between your Second and First Lives, how it feels to be a person in Second Life, and to what extent your Second Life is separate from your First Life. With your permission, the interview or group discussion will downloaded onto my computer hard-drive which is password-protected.
2. The second stage involves meeting me in real life and then my observing you while you use Second Life. This will last approximately one hour, or whatever your typical length of usage is. It will be recorded in three ways: a camera filming you as you use SL; a "subcam" attached to spectacles that you wear that records your point of view; a screen capture of the session. The recordings will be downloaded onto my computer hard-drive.
3. The third stage is a one-to-one interview held in real life. This will involve showing you the recordings of you using Second Life and your describing your experience as you "relive" it. This will last approximately one hour and will be recorded using a sound recorder, the recording from which will be downloaded to my computer hard-drive.

As environments such as SL become more popular and more sophisticated, there is a need for better understanding of how they are similar to, and different from, social phenomena in the real world. It is also important that as a researcher I understand the subjective experience of using these environments and your participation helps me do this. There are no risks or benefits to your participation. All research is conducted in accordance with Second Life Community Standards.

TIME COMMITMENT

The study typically takes 60 minutes (per session) across 3 sessions.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or discontinue at any time. You may choose not to answer any question, as well as ask for some or all of your responses to be removed from the records. You have the right to have your questions about the procedures answered (unless answering these questions would interfere with the study's outcome). If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, you should ask the researcher before the study begins.

CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY

No information that personally identifies you will ever be disclosed. I will never use your screen or real life names in any published reports or presentations resulting from this study,

and while excerpts from our meetings may be included in my reports, your identity will be concealed.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Professor Lahlou will be glad to answer your questions about this study at any time. You may contact him via email at s.lahlou@lse.ac.uk. If you want to find out about the final results of this study, please inform me via email at s.evans@lse.ac.uk. A written summary of findings will be supplied on completion of the analysis in winter 2012/2013.

DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

By signing below, you are agreeing that: (1) you have read and understood the Participant Information , (2) questions about your participation in this study have been answered satisfactorily, (3) you are aware of the potential risks (if any), and (4) you are taking part in this research study voluntarily (without coercion).

_____

Participant's Name (Printed)*

_____ _____

Participant's signature* Date

_____ _____

Name of person obtaining consent (Printed) Signature of person obtaining consent

**Participants wishing to preserve some degree of anonymity may use their initials (from the British Psychological Society Guidelines for Minimal Standards of Ethical Approval in Psychological Research)*

Appendix 9. Matrix of Player Timelines: Basic Themes by Organising Theme at the first tranche

Global Theme	Organising Theme	Basic Themes
The Second Life Experience	Introduction to Second Life	Professional introduction
		Friend introduction
		Introduction through media coverage
		Long-term resident
	Socialisation	Assistance settling
		Help of friends in settling
		Easy adjustment to SL
		Helping people
		Self-adjustment to SL
	Second Life as a game	Role Play
		SL is a game
		SL as “normal”
		SL as a “place to play”
	Second Life as a place for activities	Creativity
		Exploration
		SL business
The Real Life – Second Life Relation	Real Life – Second Life division	RL as priority
		RL privacy from SL
		RL and SL similarity
		RL and SL difference
		RL and SL self difference
		RL and SL self similarity
		SL as an alternative to RL
		RL and SL separation
		SL as part of RL entertainment portfolio
	Real Life – Second Life time relation	Addiction
		Balancing time
		Difficult balance RL v SL
		Immersion
		Passage of time differences
	Real Life - Second Life mutual influences	RL sickness and RL
		RL v SL blurring
		RL v SL overflow
		SL burnout
		SL improvement of RL
	Second Life as a place in its own right	Achievements not possible in RL
		SL as an escape and place to be
		SL as “real”

Relationships with Others	Social interaction	Communication
		Internationality
		Social interactions
	Everyday relationships	Friendship
		Community
		Trust and deception
	Intimate relationships	SL relationships
		SL families
		SL relationship pain
		SL sex
		SL relationships as real
		RL emotions in SL
The Second Life Self	Avatar and Real Life Self relations	Alting
		Avatar and Self disassociation
		Avatars as controllable
		Avatars as “idealised me”
		Avatars as representations of the self
		Real people behind the avatar
		Relation with avatar as separate entity
		SL self as younger or non-human
	Stability and instability of Second Life Self	Consistency of self
		Different selves
		Contentment with self
		Evolution of self
		Exploration of self and identity
		Second Lifestory
		SL as a ‘try out’ for self
		Transgender avatar
	Real Life v Second Life Self relationship	RL misfit
		SL as a reflection of RL self
		SL as “me”
		SL as a version of RL self
		SL as the real “inner me”
		SL as an extension of the RL self

Appendix 10. Matrix of Player Timelines: published findings at first tranche

3. The Self and Second Life: A Case Study Exploring the Emergence of Virtual Selves

Simon Evans

Abstract

Using the virtual world Second Life as a case study, the chapter begins a social psychological exploration of how living in virtual worlds may be transforming the experience of the self in contemporary society, from the 'insider viewpoint' of virtual world residents. The relationship between the virtual self and the 'real life' self is explored using data collected and key themes elicited from 40 textual interviews conducted inworld and inductive thematic analysis. The findings indicate a variety of complex relationships between the self experienced in the physical world and Second Life. First, the degree of similarity between the actual and virtual self varies according to experience. Second, the avatar tends to be seen as a separate entity. Finally, social processes within Second Life affects how the self is experienced, by allowing exploration of aspects of the self not possible in the physical world.

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter has a trajectory beginning in November 2007 and a programme broadcast on BBC4, *Visions of the Future*. Presented by physicist and futurist Dr Michio Kaku, it included a piece on Second Life[1]: the graphical virtual world, accessed via the internet, where people, represented by avatars, led 'second lives', living, working and having relationships. The article was intriguing on a number of levels: that people created lives alternate to or alongside their real lives; the potential for exploration of one's identity through creation of avatars; the conflicts that such alternatives and explorations can cause in relation to real lives and 'real life' identities; and implications for the (Western) common sense notion of the self as being 'unique and bounded' (Geertz, 2000). Inspired by the programme, the author, then a social psychology master's level student, became a Second Life resident. It is in the context of his own 'second life', that the author undertook a research programme making a social psychological investigation of being a virtual

[1] An outline of the series that included the article may be found on http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/documentaries/features/visions-future.shtml.

self in virtual worlds, which is described in this chapter. Agger (2003) uses the term 'virtual self' to describe the experience of being a person in contemporary post-modern society, which among its characteristics are virtual interactions via computer mediated communication (CMC). In particular, this chapter considers how the self or virtual self is affected by experiences within virtual worlds, using Second Life as a case study. The need to understand how the rise of virtual worlds may affecting how the self is experienced is becoming ever pressing, since most recent figures indicate the number of registered accounts in virtual worlds has reached 1 billion, with almost half being among 10-15 year olds ("Virtual world", 2010)[2].

The chapter serves a number of functions, within the context of this book. It provides a social psychological exploration of how living within virtual worlds is changing notions of who we are by outlining research that shows how people are using such worlds to actively explore and construct who they are as selves. It also contributes to the development of good practice in research in virtual worlds by providing a detailed rationale for, and outline of, a research programme that was undertaken by the author, and by offering critique on how research practice may be improved. Finally, it provides insight into how Second Life specifically is being used to explore the nature of the self by the people who live there. In particular, the stance of the chapter is to highlight that virtual worlds are places where people live lives, form relationships and explore what it means to be a person.

To this end there are four main sections. The first provides a brief review of the existing literature, exploring existing theoretical conceptions of the self. The second provides details of the case study itself, including the research context, questions and design, methodology for data collection and analytic approach. The third presents an outline of the findings, relating them to the research questions posed and some case histories outlining the particular experience of specific residents. The final section provides a discussion of the findings, highlighting implications for theoretical conceptions of the self and providing recommendations for future research. Given the author's context as a resident in Second Life, the final section also contains a brief reflexive analysis of the implications on the research procedure and interpretation.

[2] 1 billion accounts does not necessarily signify 1 billion individuals, since it is possible to have accounts across different worlds and more than one account within a given world.

3.2. A REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

3.2.1. Theoretical background: the self.

It has been claimed that "it is at the level of human interaction and interpersonal relationships that the fabrication of the self arises" (Elliot, 2001, pp. 22-23). However, how the self may be conceptualised is a contested issue. Geertz (2000) argues that the western notion of the person as a "bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic centre of awareness, emotion, judgement and action, organised into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background, is, however … a rather peculiar idea within the context of world cultures" (p. 59). This western conception has its roots in the Cartesian mind-body separation, where the "visual and sensual aspects of human nature are subordinated to faculty of reason" (Bolter, 2003, p. 129). It is against this backdrop of a unitary bounded person, that traditional theories of the self have been developed, but against which post-modern theories of the self pitch themselves. This section reviews these theories.

Traditional theories propose a self that is reflexive and arises through mind and body together, the mind being "inseparably associated with and dependent upon the physical organism known as the body" (Hintz, 1960 cited in Barnes, 2003, p. 239). Primary among these is that of Mead, who proposes that the self "can arise only where there is a social process within which this self has had its initiation" (Mead, 1956, p. 41). It is through interactions with others in what he calls 'the conversation of gestures' that one adopts the perspective of the other, becomes an object of observation to oneself and hence through reflexivity becomes conscious and aware of the self. Crucial to the development of self, is awareness of a 'generalised other', initially arising through childhood play, and defined as "the organized community or social groups that gives the individual his unity of self" (Mead, 1962, p. 154); 'the conversation of gestures' is key to this. This term is adopted by Berger and Luckmann (1966) who claim that "a person's experience of himself always hovers in a balance between being and having a body" (p.68). For them, both the organismic development and the social environment as mediated by significant others are crucial for the formation of self.

Like Mead, Goffman (1959) considers the self to be arising in a social environment and to be a reflexive agent. For him, presentation of the self is a salient part of everyday life, and involves the management of information intentionally or unintentionally given off to others (Papacharissi, 2002). He proposes a theatrical metaphor for the development of the self and, while everyday interactions are crucial, he envisions a self that is more situated and fragmentary. For him, people can be likened to actors on a stage, using scripts and props to portray convincing performances according to the social environment they are in.

Hence, a sense of self arises from "an awareness of the multiplicity of roles that are performed in various situated contexts" (Elliot, 2001, p.31).

In contrast to these earlier theories of the self, post-modern theorists emphasise a self that is fragmented, empathetic and 'anti-Cartesian' (Bolter, 2003). In this vein, Gergen (1991) proposes that the self in contemporary society is saturated by multiple voices, typified by multiple disconnected relationships and roles which result from a cast of 'significant others' in "continuous motion" (p.67). He proposes that these myriad relationships, which arise through technologies of saturation such as telecommunications, facilitate a self that is inauthentic and unknowable and that a "fully saturated self becomes no self at all" (Gergen, 1991, p.7). This influence of new communications technologies on the self is supported by Cerulo (1997), who proposes that they have expanded the range of 'generalised others', changing the context in which the self arises. Hence because the postmodern view proposes a self that is subject to external constraints and lacks agency and coherence, it implies a self that is non-reflexive. This is contrary to the traditional view for which reflexive "turning back of the experience of the individual upon himself" (Mead, 1962, p.134) is crucial to the development of the self.

Postmodern theorists have also considered specifically how the arrival of CMC has had influences on the contemporary self. According to Poster (1990), when electronically mediated exchange replaces oral and written exchange there are four implications: there are new possibilities of playing with identities; gender cues are removed; existing hierarchies in relationships are destabilized; and "the self is decentred, dispersed and multiplied in continuous instability" (p. 6). Moreover, Baym (2006) claims that CMC allows a self that is divorced from bodies, time and space and a "multiplicity of identity … with no one of these selves necessarily more valid than any other" (p.41). As with Gergen's view, this indicates a self that is uprooted and unfocused. However, contrary to this, Turkle (2005) proposes that the computer is a medium for 'getting things done', working through personal concerns and thinking through issues to do with the self. Rather than being saturated by uncontrollable myriad influences, people may become the "masters of self-presentation and self-creation" (Turkle, 1996, p.158). Consequently, this indicates that while the selves mediated by computer technologies could indeed be divorced from bodies, time and space, they may still be characterised by the reflexivity characteristic of more traditional conceptions of the self. It is in this context that the author developed a research programme designed to explore further the experience of the self in contemporary times.

3.2.2. The self in virtual worlds.

In addition to the consideration of the impact of changes in society on the experience of self, there has also been specific research on the effects of participation in virtual worlds. These can be argued to group around certain themes. Firstly, there is the potential for self-exploration. The clinical and

ethnographic investigation of the textual MUDs[3] conducted by Turkle (1995, 1996) reveals a blurring between the boundaries between the self and game, the self and role and the self and simulation, with the self being experienced as a "composite of characters" (Turkle, 1996, p.157). She proposes that such virtual worlds offer the opportunity for 'parallel lives'. More recently, Boellstorff (2008) conducted an ethnographical study of Second Life and explored all aspects of social life, including what he terms 'personhood'. While he found a tendency for people not to consciously role play but to be themselves in some way, he also found it was possible for the self experienced in Second Life to be different from that experienced in the physical world. He proposes that the possession of alternative avatars (known as 'alts') or avatars of a different gender to that in the physical world allows the exploration of aspects of the self.

There has also been research conducted into the role of avatars in offering an embodied experience of the self. Following his ethnographic study of the virtual world The Dreamscape, Taylor (2002) proposes that it is through the use of a body in the form of an avatar, that users gain a sense of 'being real' and of immersion in virtual worlds. This has parallels with Mead's emphasis on the role of the body in social interactions facilitating a sense of self. Taylor also found that some people identify with their avatar as being 'more them' than their physical world body. The effects of embodiment via an avatar on behaviour and perceptions of self have been explored by Yee and Bailenson (2007). Using experimental studies, they propose the Proteus Effect, i.e. individual's behaviour conforms to the appearance of their avatar. Those with avatars 'more attractive' or taller, acted more intimately or confidently respectively. Likewise Boellstorff (2008) found that an avatar can take on a 'role' that fits their appearance, outside of what the person who that avatar represented necessarily would take on themselves in the physical world. Ducheneaut, Wen, Yee and Wadley (2009) used questionnaires to investigate the rationale for avatar depiction in three graphical virtual worlds (Maple Street, Second Life and Worlds of Warcraft), which reveals a tendency to use avatars to explore embodiment rather than facets of personality or self.

Finally, there are findings that suggest the physical world benefits that virtual life has on the self. Turkle (1996, 2005) proposes that it is possible for participants in the textual MUDs to work through 'real life issues'[4], through exploration of different aspects of the self and personality. Boellstorf (2008) found similar benefits in Second Life but proposes the potential for aspects of personality in the physical world to be changed in ways not possible in MUDs. This is because it offers a closer approximation to the physical world through its graphical format that the textual MUDs cannot.

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[3] Multi User Domains or Multi User Dungeons.

[4] While this chapter will most often use the expression 'physical world', on occasion the term 'real life' will be adopted when in the context of taking the viewpoint of virtual world residents or in understanding various aspects of being a virtual self. This is because 'real life' (or RL) is the expression used by virtual world residents when referring to the physical world.

3.2.3. A note: social psychological research in virtual worlds.

It is interesting to note that, while there has been deliberation on the effects of CMC generally and virtual worlds particularly on the experience of the self, much of this comes from without the discipline of psychology, for example, anthropology (Boellstorff, 2008) and communications (Yee and Bailenson, 2007). Where research has been conducted by psychologists, it has been with an eye on its clinical applications (Turkle, 2005; Gorini, Gaggioli, Vigna and Riva, 2008). This suggests that there is potential to consider more the social psychological implications of the virtual self.

3.3. THE CASE STUDY: SECOND LIFE

3.3.1. The research rationale, context and questions.

While theorists concerned with virtual worlds have begun to explore the experience of being a self in them, there is an opportunity to consider this from the perspective of social psychology and from an 'insider viewpoint'. This chapter seeks to do this through research in the form of a case study based on the residents of Second Life. It explores the tensions, similarities and differences between the self as experienced within Second Life and in 'real life'. Because of the variety of existing theories and assumptions with respect to the self, but limited insight into the social psychological phenomena involved, the approach the case study takes is an inductive one. It explores the range of experience of being a Second Life self and then considers how present theories may or may not be applied[5].

Boellstorff (2008) provides a very detailed account of the history and workings of Second Life. At the time of writing, there are 1,360,030 accounts[6] that

[5] As a relatively new area of study for the discipline of social psychology, a grounded theory approach, as outlined by Flick (2009), could provide the basis of a new social psychological 'theory of the self'. A grounded theory is one that is developed inductively from data, via a cycle of data collection, coding, analysis, writing, design and theoretical categorisation, rather than being a pre-developed theory tested by data. While a new grounded 'theory of the self' is outside the scope of this chapter, it is believed that the procedures and findings from the research discussed here could form the basis of a more extensive piece of research that develops a grounded theory.

[6] As with the current universe of virtual worlds detailed above, this does not necessarily indicate 1,360,030 different users, since it is possible for one person to have more than one avatar, i.e. more than one account.

have been active in the 60 days to 13th October 2010[7], with the number of accounts active at any one time ranging from 40,000 to 80,000 depending on the time of day, day of week and time of year. An important consideration for current purposes is that it may be argued that there is a demarcation between the physical world and Second Life for many residents. While it is possible to make public physical world information through the avatar profile, in practice many residents choose to keep this information private or reserve it for those they feel they can trust. At the same time, residents are conducting 'second lives' that may be private from people known to them in the physical world and involve experiences, relationships, interests and employment that are separate from it. Another key consideration is the experience of the researcher, of virtual life generally and Second Life specifically. This is because it can inform the research questions that are posed and the appropriateness of transferring methodologies from the physical world to virtual worlds, as well as allow potential insight into others' experience. The researcher has been a resident in Second Life since December 2007 and has two homes, one a modern beach house, the second a small terraced home in an area of Second Life devoted to Victorian-inspired lifestyles. He has a large number of friends, is a member of a number of groups and has had a wide variety of experiences, including attending weddings, exploring simulations of physical world cities, attending night clubs and parties. Throughout the research period, he identified as a white human male (his appearance in the physical world also). This makes him well placed to understand the issues that may arise with respect to the self within Second Life and to have empathy and appreciation for the situations and experiences of other residents.

The research outlined here focuses particularly on the relationship between Second Life and the physical world, with respect to the experience of the self. The questions it seeks to address are:

– To what extent are Second Life selves the same or different from 'real life' selves, in terms of characteristics, capabilities, motivations and traits?
– To what extent are Second Life selves independent of or dependent on the 'real life' selves operating the key board?
– To what extent does a Second Life self emerge as a result of social processes within Second Life, separate from 'real life'?

3.3.2. Research design.

The research presented many new and unique challenges not normally experienced when conducting research in the real world. These challenges were present in all aspects of the research process and shaped the research design, the

[7] The numbers of residents who have logged in the previous 60 days and who are online at the time of logging are presented every time an account holder logs into Second Life. This is the source of the statistics presented here.

methodology and procedures. In terms of the design, there were a number of influencing factors. Second Life is a place with unique practices, rituals and environments, and the experience of it is in the privacy of the residents homes and potentially private from others in the physical world. Additionally, residents are located worldwide, with a tendency to keep their identity in the physical world private from those in Second Life. Coupled with the subject matter of the virtual self potentially being a personal one, this meant that utmost confidentiality and sensitivity would be needed in approaching participants. Finally, it was not the 'average' or 'usual' experience of being a person in Second Life that was of interest for the purpose of the research, but the range of experiences that are found among Second Life residents and their 'insider viewpoint' of that experience. To address these challenges and the research question, a programme of individual interviews was devised, the format and questions informed by the researcher's experiences as a Second Life resident, with the interviews providing the data by which to address the research questions. However, it was important that researchers own experience did not influence or determine the outcome of the research, so a semi-structured interview approach was undertaken, allowing flexibility in the discussion according to the participants' own experiences.

All interviews were conducted inworld[8], i.e. within Second Life. There were a number of specific benefits to this. It allowed research participants irrespective of location and cultural background, not necessarily possible if conducting physical world interviews. Additionally, it potentially overcame any concerns participants might have in keeping the physical world and Second Life private from each other. Moreover, the fact that the researcher had already been a resident for several months could ease the recruitment and research process, because of access to individuals and groups comprising potential participants. This also afforded the researcher ready-made credentials and experience as a genuine resident, providing a basis for rapport with participants.

3.3.3. Methodology: format, data collection, sampling, the topic guide and ethical considerations.

Although Second Life provides a 'voice' facility[9], all interviews were conducted in text. This was because not all residents have English as a first language, and may feel more confident in written rather than verbal formats. Moreover, some residents specifically choose text-only communications, for example, if they represent themselves as another gender, have hearing difficulties, or wish to protect physical world privacy. A by-product of textual interviews is the option to

[8] 'Inworld' is the expression commonly used by residents to mean being logged onto Second Life.

[9] i.e. where users can use a microphone to allowing verbal communicate rather than being limited to text only.

download textual communications to the computer hard drive, which is built into the Second Life programme, facilitating raw data for analysis.

For this research, it was assumed that the data produced in a single textual interview of comparable length to a verbal interview, would produce less data. This is because a typed response usually takes more time than a verbal one. Also experience suggested that textual communication in Second Life is more truncated, so it was believed that textual responses could be shorter than verbal. Hence, to gather as much data as possible, the interview programme comprised 40 hour long interviews.

Participants were from a number of sources. The majority were recruited from the Second Life help group New Citizens Inc. (NCI), with the remainder recruited from Monkey Channel (a group used to advertise services), opportunity recruitment from chance encounters, and referrals by participants. Table 3.1 details the sources of participants. No physical world demographic recruitment controls were exercised, since in virtual worlds, physical world age and location controls cannot be easily applied since people commonly keep such information confidential or can deceive. Any demographic controls based on the avatar (for example, how long the avatar had been in Second Life, and its gender) risk being invalidated, since individuals may have alts of different ages or have an avatar of different gender to their physical world status (both situations occurred during the course of the present research).

Table 3.1 Numbers of participants, detailed by source.

Source of recruitment	Number of participants
New Citizens Inc. (NCI)	34
Monkey Channel	2
Opportunity recruitment	2
Referral by another participant	2

A topic guide was used, aiming to provide "an easy and comfortable framework for a discussion" (Gaskell, 2000, p.40). It addressed four main areas: arrival and 'settling into' Second Life; the balance between 'real life' and Second Life; similarities and differences between 'real life' and Second Life; the relationship with their avatar.

Ethics were a consideration that presented particular challenges, because the process involved interviews conducted virtually and between avatars. One challenge concerned informed consent, which in the real world is indicated by participant signatures notifying their awareness of and consent to participate in the research procedure. In Second Life, signatures are not possible, so to address this, an 'Information and Consent Notecard' was given to all prospective participants. This detailed the research purpose and interview topics, with a request to Instant Message[10] (IM) their informed consent with the phrase "I agree to participate in

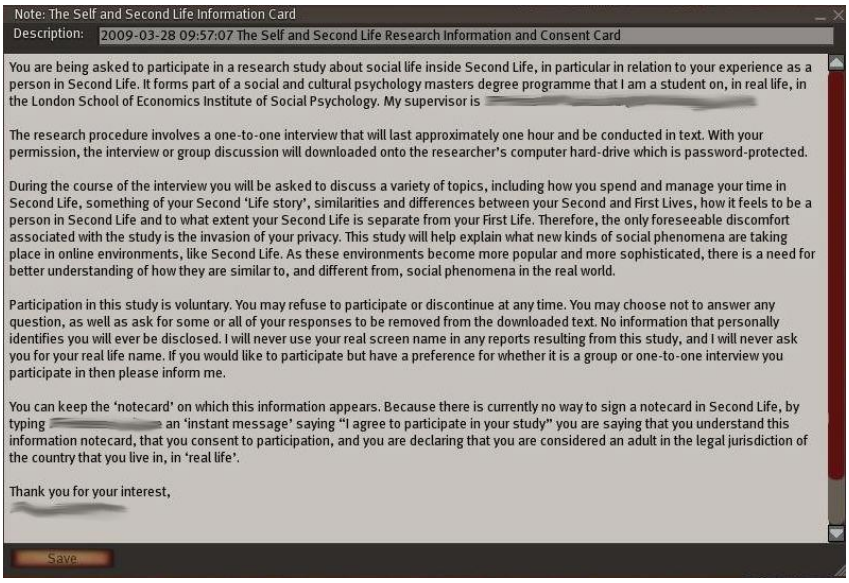
[10] An Instant Message comprises typed text that can be read only by the resident or residents to whom it is addressed, and that is not limited by the proximity of the addressee's avatar.

your study". Another challenge, concerns anonymity and confidentiality. While theoretically all avatars represent an 'alias' that cannot be tracked to the physical world, all text is downloaded onto Linden Lab[11] logs, and it is the researcher's experience that residents guard their privacy. Hence, the researcher assured anonymity in the final report, that physical world identities would never be requested and guaranteed that avatar names would only be stored on the researcher's personal computer hard drive. A third challenge concerned the unknown physical world status of participants which impacted on the normal procedures of verification. Consequently participants were asked to verbally verify that they were considered adults in the physical world country they lived in, at the beginning of each interview.

3.3.4. Interviewing: recruitment, schedule and procedure.

Participants were recruited from the NCI group via a group IM and the Monkey Channel through a group notice, where the research was outlined very briefly and a call for participants made. Anyone expressing interest in participating were given a copy of the 'Information and Consent Notecard' and appointments for interviews made, confirmed via an appointment notecard. Figure 3.1 demonstrates how the 'Information and Consent Notecard' appeared in Second Life.

Fig. 3.1 Information and consent notecard.



[11] Linden Lab is the company that has developed and maintains Second Life.

40 interviews were conducted over the period March 3 to April 19, 2009, held at times convenient to both participant and recruiter and depending on the participant location. Participants were given the choice of location for the interview; 38 of the 40 interviewees elected one of the researcher's homes and two their own homes. All interviews were conducted in IM, allowing privacy and aiding analysis by downloading the interview into a dedicated participant file. All interviews commenced with a welcome, thanks for participating and sought permission for the conversation to be in IM. Before questioning began, the researcher asked for confirmation of adult status, reminded of the right to refuse questions or to terminate the interview, and advised them of arrangements should either participant or researcher 'crash'[12] (a relatively common occurrence in Second Life, although only experienced a few times during the interview programme). Although each interview was due to be an hour's duration, participants were often willing to converse beyond this. To monitor the interview experience, each concluded with an enquiry into participants' experience of the interview, their reason for participating and willingness to recommend to others.

3.3.5. The approach: thematic analysis.

The research here does not seek to work within a particular epistemological framework, nor build on a particular theory. Its purpose is to understand the range of experiences of being a virtual self in Second Life and from this understand how existing theories of the self may relate to virtual worlds. Hence a thematic analysis method is used because, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), it is "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data in (rich) detail" (p.79) and is argued to be an approach to qualitative analysis independent of theory and epistemology.

Given the exploratory nature of the research, an inductive thematic analysis was undertaken, with themes purely derived from the data without applying any predetermined frames. The procedure provided by Attride-Sterling (2001) was used as a guideline. There is a systematic classification of data into 'basic themes' based on semantic meanings, which is then used to construct hierarchies of 'organising themes', which groups the 'basic themes' together based on abstract common principles, and 'global themes', which represent the principle underlying themes. Relationships can then be identified between the hierarchies to conceptualise a 'thematic network'.

The thematic analysis was undertaken with the assistance of Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software, in the form of NVivo (version 8). The data set was analysed twice, the first to provide a coding framework identifying potential 'basic themes' arising from the data, the second to refine it. This derives

[12] This means to be unexpectedly logged out of the Second Life programme, usually due to data overload.

75 ‘basic themes’, clustered then into fourteen ‘organising themes’, in turn grouped into four ‘global themes’.

3.4. THE THEMATIC ANALYSIS.

3.4.1. The themes and thematic network.

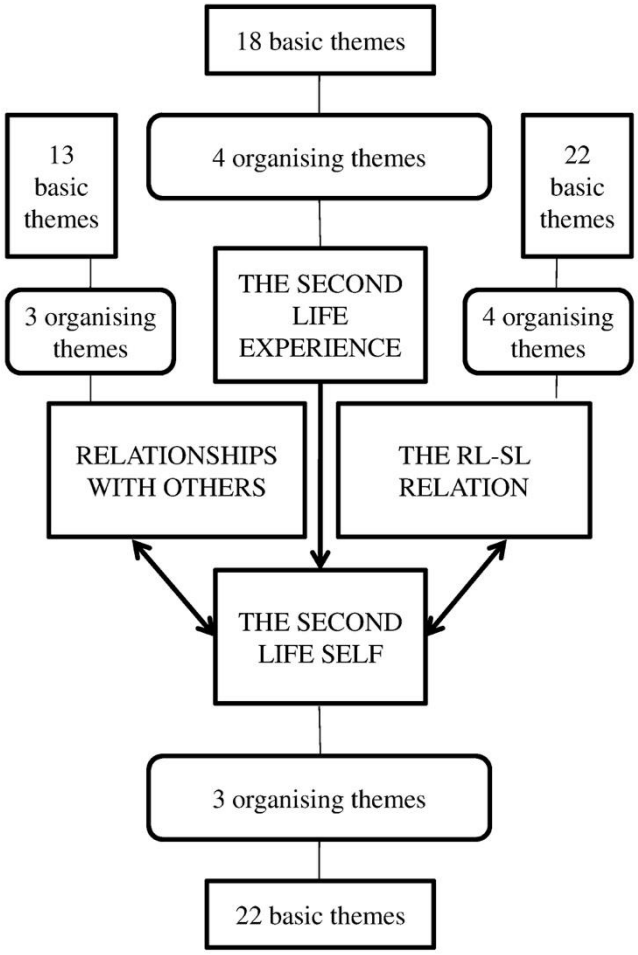
The four global themes arising from the data analysis are: ‘The Second Life Experience’; ‘The Real Life – Second Life Relation’; ‘Relationships with Others’; ‘The Second Life Self’. Each global theme encapsulates a number of organising themes as detailed in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 A summary of the global and organising themes derived from interview data.

Global theme	Organising theme
The Second Life Experience	Introduction to Second Life
	Socialisation
	Second Life as a game
	Second Life as a place for activities
The Real Life – Second Life Relation	Real life – Second Life division
	Real life – Second Life time relation
	Real life – Second life mutual influences
	Second Life as a place in its own right
Relationships with Others	Social interactions
	Everyday relationships
	Intimate relationships
The Second Life Self	Avatar and real life self relations
	Stability and instability of Second Life self
	Real life v Second Life relationship

Figure 3.2 outlines the structure of thematic network constructed from the data and indicates the relationships between global, organising themes and basic themes, a summary of which follows.

Fig. 3.2 Thematic network from data.



3.4.1.1. Global theme: 'The Second Life Experience'.

This encapsulates areas of experience by Second Life residents that may reflect and impact on their sense of self. The relationship between organising and basic themes is shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 The relationship between organising and basic themes as associated with the global theme 'The Second Life Experience'.

Organising theme	Basic theme
Introduction to SL	Professional introduction
	Friend introduction
	Introduction through media coverage
	Long-term online resident
	Stuttered start
Socialisation	Assistance in settling
	Help of friends in settling
	Learning
	Easy adjustment to SL
	Helping people
	Self-adjustment to SL
SL as a game	Role play
	SL is a game
	SL as 'not real'
	SL as a 'place to play'
SL as a place for activities	Creativity
	Exploration
	SL business

There were several ways in which participants were introduced into Second Life but for some it was a natural progression from and enhancement of their involvement in other textual or graphical virtual worlds. For example:

> I had experienced online affection in the use of chat programs before, that were all text ... and the thought of a visual seemed to me that it would enhance the experience. (VL)[13]

How they came to Second Life had influences on how well they were socialised into it, for example those introduced by friends were helped by the same friends to understand how to make the most of the experience and to understand etiquette, how things are 'done', etc. Participants were not passive in the socialisation process and show active determination in joining and understanding how to be part of Second Life:

> .. so I became frustrated … and was screaming in local[14] ... asking for help ... and then someone came across and helped me to a noob[15] place. (LM)

[13] All quotes in this section have been amended to be grammatically correct for ease of reading. Initials parenthesised after each quote represent the participant from whose interview the quote is taken. Moreover, the quotes adhere to the convention of abbreviating Second Life and 'real life' as SL and RL respectively, which is commonly used by residents.

Once in Second Life, while seeing it as a place to socialise and meet people from all walks of life and nationalities, participants also engage in all kinds of activities, although the capacity for exploration and creative expression is an important aspect of people's experience:

> I love exploring in here, wandering around by myself, late at night, you get to peek inside people's heads. (MD)

> SL really brings out a creative side in me - I love seeing how others make this world their own. (LN)

Whether Second Life is a game is a contested issue. While some do engage in role play games within Second Life or even see themselves as role playing a character during their everyday lives within it, the sentiment that it is important to recognise that 'real people' are involved is stressed:

> I think there are two types of people in SL. Those who are themselves and retain their own character and treat others as if they are too. And those that think it's a game and forget that here are other people behind the av. (RW)

An example of a particular participant's experience is outlined in Case History Box 1.

Case History Box 1: MN's Second Life experience.

> MN, a graphic designer in the physical world, discovered Second Life through its coverage on You Tube and search engines and was intrigued by its creative and networking possibilities. She gave herself a 'crash course' on socialisation into the virtual world and, with the help of those she met in Second Life, in her first extended session learned about 'freebie shopping', searching, navigation, flying, teleporting, purchasing new skin and hair, and sex. She now has an active and busy social and business life in Second Life, having a large group of friends she has fun with and a nightclub designed as a place for men and women to find potential sexual partners. While she does not role play in Second Life, she does see her virtual self as being a teenage version of herself in the physical world.

3.4.1.2. Global theme: 'The Real Life – Second Life Relation'.

This theme reflects concerns, opinions and experiences that participants expressed with respect to how the physical world relates to Second Life, which in turn influences, and was influenced by, their experience of being a person within it. The relationship between organising and basic themes is shown in Table 3.4.

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[14] The terms 'local', 'local chat', 'open chat' or 'open' are used to denote conversations that occur in public making it possible for anyone within in a given distance (typically 20 'metres') to hear or read what is said verbally or textually. In this context LM means that she was continuously asking for help via text in 'local chat'.

[15] The term 'noob', 'noobie', 'newb' or 'newbie' is an expression used to denote someone who is relatively new and/or inexperienced in Second Life.

Table 3.4 The relationship between organising and basic themes as associated with the global theme 'The Real Life – Second Life Relation'.

Organising theme	Basic theme
RL-SL division	RL as priority
	RL privacy from SL
	RL and SL similarity
	RL and SL difference
	RL and SL self difference
	RL and SL self similarity
	SL as an alternative to RL
	RL and SL separation
	SL as part of RL entertainment portfolio
RL-SL division	Addiction
	Balancing time
	Difficult balance RL v SL
	Immersion
	Passage of time differences
RL-SL mutual influences	RL sickness and RL
	RL v SL blurring
	RL v SL overflow
	SL burnout
	SL improvement of RL
SL as a place in its own right	Achievements not possible in RL
	SL as an escape and place to be
	SL as 'real'

A division between 'real life' and Second Life is alluded to, with the privacy of 'real life' being important and with 'real life' taking priority, for as one participant said:

> No one knows me, no one will be at the grocery store, so I am free to do what I want. (ZD)

> I prefer the term First Life to real life, as when it comes down to it, in general, "RL" has to come first. (MT)

Despite this, some participants indicate that Second Life is a place in its own right and just as real as the physical world. Being a person in Second Life is seen as both different and similar to 'real life'. Participants indicate that it offers the opportunity for activities and self-expression not possible in the physical world, although perhaps still subject to the same social structures found in the physical world:

> I saw how one could do many things here that they were unable to do in RL and that excited me. (KM)

> It's more a realisation that RL and SL are more similar than different … in both places there are social norms and expectations, in both places I worry about wearing the right thing. (EZ)

Time spent in Second Life is expressed as being intense: much happens in a short time period, and this experience is often described as compulsive and addictive, meaning that participants differ on how well they manage to balance time spent in Second Life with that in the physical world:

> … but the balance thing was hard, I have an addictive personality anyway and playing a minor god in your own little world is mighty enticing.(MD)

> RL has gone neglected. However, the past few weeks, I have HAD to do something about it, so I do what I have to in RL although .. my mind ... my brain ... see to be here. (LE)

This illustrates that, despite there being indications that the physical world and Second Life are considered separate, participants also acknowledge that there are influences between the two lives. On a basic level, Second Life, their friends and activities within Second Life occupy some participants' thoughts when in the physical world. However, more significant influences are also indicated. Some participants related how being in Second Life helped them cope with, and overcome, physical world sickness and disability, while others spoke of 'burn out' and the physical ramifications of continual presence inworld. Some also indicate how experiencing themselves as a person in Second Life, enable them to improve their physical world self by exploring new attitudes and behaviours or learning new skills:

> I came into SL it helped my RL. Well, I was in abusive life. I learned you can be treated well. An abused person has abuse as focus, see, and SL helped give me focus away from abuse. So I didn't go back. ☺ (SC)

An example of a particular participant's experience is outlined in Case History Box 2.

Case History Box 2: Relationships between DP's 'real' and Second lives.

> When DP discovered Second Life, he was recovering from stress related illness and a failed marriage in the physical world. By reading about Second Life he taught himself to build but due to his anxiety did not make any friends in the virtual world until one year had passed. He found being in Second Life therapeutic, giving him the opportunity to express himself creatively and build relationships with people, things that he would have been even more difficult in his physical world environment. He feels that being a resident in Second Life has helped improve his mental health such that he has reduced from being on heavy medication to none. His view is that Second Life gives everyone, despite any disabilities they might have, the freedom to express themselves.

3.4.1.3. Global theme: ‘Relationships with Others’.

This concerns the importance that participants placed on relationships, which in turn influenced and was influenced by their sense of self. The relationship between organising and basic themes, and explanation of the basic themes, is shown in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5 The relationship between organising and basic themes as associated with the global theme ‘Relationships with Others’.

Organising theme	Basic theme
Social interaction	Communication
	Internationality
	Social interactions
Everyday relationships	Friendship
	Community
	SL as reuniting separated friends
	Trust and deception
Intimate relationships	SL relationships
	SL families
	SL relationship pain
	SL sex
	SL relationships as real
	RL emotions in SL

Social interaction with people from all over the world is indicated by some to be one of the key drivers of their participating in Second Life. However, communications are not necessarily straightforward, with language differences and lack of verbal tone and body language often the source of misunderstandings:

> I think people have huge drama in SL that wouldn't fly in RL because the missing cues and body language, facial expressions, etc. are in RL to get more information and meaning across. (KV)

Some participants indicate the value of friendship and community within Second Life, and in particular how being in Second Life gives them a sense of place and offers the potential to be in contact or be reunited with people in ways that otherwise would be difficult:

> But I think what SL was for me in the beginning, and probably still is, is a way of being with the people I love and care about. And it's almost as if I'm right there, right here, seeing us together, or even chatting in the same window. Out there, anywhere, but online. :p (KW)

Because of anonymity issues and the risk of 'alts', trust is indicated by some to be a fundamental part of relationships, because the potential is always there to be hurt and deceived by others:

> In RL you have to trust to a certain degree. In SL you have no choice BUT to trust, unless you let it drive you crazy. (LE)

Despite this risk, close and intimate bonds are formed by participants, including sexual and familial relationships[16]. Moreover, intense 'real life' emotions are experienced by participants within Second Life. While some indicate that Second Life relationships are a source of emotional pain, the experience of the physical world emotions are seen as valuable and important:

> I like RL feelings and emotions ... even if they hurt. (LE)

An example of a particular participant's experience is outlined in Case History Box 3.

Case History Box 3: GU's relationships with others.

> GU is a successful businessperson in Second Life, running a sim that has activities and shops. Through her business she makes many acquaintances and has become aware that, as in the physical world, being seen to be in a position of influence, as she is, can impact on how others interact with her. She is also aware that being such a person means that many people are aware of her behaviour within Second Life, which means that she cannot always be open in her thoughts and opinions as they may reflect negatively upon her. An important part of her Second Life is her relationship with her virtual partner with whom she fell in love. She has found that 'real life' emotions are involved in Second Life and, in her words, "... there is definitely a RL psychological effect from SL stuff".

3.4.1.4. Global theme: 'The Second Life Self'.

This global theme encapsulates participants' viewpoints on being a person in Second Life. The relationship between organising and basic themes, and explanation of the basic themes, is shown in Table 3.6.

[16] In Second Life relationships occur that reflect those that occur in the physical world. Residents may have sexual partners, which while may become realised in the actual world, occur within virtual space. These relationships may involve role playing sexual activity through animations available within Second Life and/or describing it through text or voice. Additionally, Second Life families may be constructed by the residents, so that they may be consider themselves to be husband, wife, mother, father, brother, sister, etc. to other selected residents. While this may involve child avatar role play, it is not necessarily the case.

Table 3.6 The relationship between organising and basic themes as associated with the global theme 'The Second Life Self'.

Organising theme	Basic theme
Avatar and RL self relations	Alting
	Avatar and self disassociation
	Avatars as controllable
	Avatars as 'idealised me'
	Avatars as representations of the self
	Real people behind the avatar
	Relation with avatar as separate entity
	SL self as younger or non-human
Stability and instability of SL self	Consistency of self
	Different selves
	Contentment with self
	Evolution of self
	Exploration of self and identity
	Second Lifestory
	SL as a 'try out' for self
	Transgender avatar
RL v SL self relationship	RL misfit
	SL as a reflection of RL self
	SL as 'me'
	SL as a version of RL self
	SL as the real 'inner me'
	SL as an extension of the RL self

A key aspect of their experience is their avatar. For participants this may be both a representation of who they are as a person, reflect some kind of ideal self that they wish to portray, represent a younger self, or even reflect a desire for exploring the potential to be non-human:

> Well this is how I see myself a couple of years ago. Since my operation I have gained weight so this is how intend to be in the near future, more like my original self.(KM)

Some participants indicate how the avatar is seen as separate from them, expressing admiration or a need to protect them from bad experiences within SL. Some discuss how the avatar is a puppet or doll that can be manipulated by them, while others claimed avatars can have a life of their own:

> It's more like when I was little and playing with dolls. I would control the doll, the movement, how the doll acted, and the personality behind the doll were me, but I was not the doll. (LQ)

> The alt has developed its own life ... things happen and you react to the situation, people you meet. (IC)

Participants reiterate that despite this, it is important to remember that there are real life people operating the avatars:

> They are from blood and bones behind that doll. (MD)

The opportunity for changing appearance and 'alting' reflect some participants' views that Second Life allow them to explore aspects of themselves, including those more difficult in the physical world, such as another gender:

> They have different personalities and also have the same as RL. I have several personalities I have found out since being here. (IC)

> She is also me. I didn't know what to make of that or what to do with her at first, but I realised slowly that she is transgender version of me. She's gay, she's more sub than [TC]. (TC)

Because of such explorations, most participants feel that their time in Second Life has a sense of history, and that over time they have evolved, both as a person in Second Life, and sometimes as a person in the physical world:

> She has become more understanding.... more open eyed to who people really are ... and has become hard in some ways and softer in others. (RW)

Some participants feel that who they are in Second Life is almost the same as who they are in the physical world, a reflection or version of themselves, while others feel it enables them to extend themselves and add different aspects to their 'real life' personality and attributes. Many participants claim that the personality and characteristics they have in Second Life are the same as in the physical world, irrespective of how they appear or what avatar they use:

> … I am who I am. The avatar is more a lens than an aspect. (PS)

However, some participants express how who they are in Second Life is the person who they are inside, the person that no or few people see in the physical world:

> There are great differences in behaviour, but in many ways, I feel that [EZ] much more accurately portrays who I am inside. (EZ)

An example of a particular participant's experience is outlined in Case History Box 4.

Case History Box 4: LW's 'Second Life selves'.

LW, a resident in Second Life since 2006, has seen his experience of being a person in Second Life change over time and has taken the opportunity to explore various aspects of himself. His representation of himself in the virtual world has evolved over time and his avatar has been adapted to circumstance and the community has been involved in (which include those involving such themes as steampunk, Star Trek and dragons) and he has also explored aspects of gender and spending a few hours a month as a female alt. However, while in the 35-50 age bracket in the actual world, he currently represents himself for the majority of the time as an older man and in his words, "[LW] is old on the SL timeline ... maybe I'm playing at being old". He sees himself in Second Life as being quite similar to who he is in the actual world. However, he admits his behaviour and character traits change according to the type of avatar he has in ways that are different to that in the physical world. He views his male avatar as being "comfortable with being old" while he is not and that he "looks dignified, intelligent, wise, a guy I'd want to have living next door".

3.4.2. Relating the findings to the research questions.

The research questions were related and focused on the relationship between the self in Second Life, compared to that experienced in the physical world. This section provides a summary of the related findings. They suggest that the relation between the experience of self in Second Life and that in the physical world is not straight forward and there are a variety of experiences.

To what extent are 'Second Life selves' the same or different to 'real life selves', in terms of characteristics, capabilities, motivations and traits?

The extent to which there is similarity or difference between the self in the physical world and Second Life, varies according to the individual. Some participants claim to be the same person in both lives. Others indicate that that who they are in Second Life is a representation of who they are 'inside', their 'real self' which they feel they cannot reveal in the physical world. Others suggest their self in Second Life is a version of themselves in the physical world, similar but with 'modification' (without disability for example).

To what extent are 'Second Life selves' independent of, or dependent on, the 'real life selves' operating the key board?

The use of an avatar as a mediator for being present in Second Life has a significant effect on how the self is experienced, irrespective of whether the user of the avatar feels they are being the same person as they are in the physical world. The avatar is the person's representative in Second Life and, whether it

represents them as they are in the physical world or some other form, indications are that people have an attachment to and relationship with their avatars. Some people find that avatars take on a life of their own, and begin to exhibit behaviours and personality traits not necessarily evidenced in the physical world. Even if this is not the case, people recognise that the avatar may be a separate entity from them and are able to make observations on how they appear and behave from an outside perspective.

To what extent does a Second Life self emerge as a result of social processes within Second Life, separate from 'real life'?

Social processes within Second Life are fundamental to the overall experience of being within it, and to the experience of being a person in Second Life. From receiving or giving help in becoming fully participating residents, to all the interactions and relationships that occur and are formed with other people, there are many social influences on the self within Second Life. Such interactions help people explore different aspects of their personalities or offer opportunities for personal relationships and emotional experiences potentially difficult in the physical world. Nevertheless, such processes are not necessarily responsible for the emergence of a Second Life self that is separate from 'real life', for as described above, there is a complex relation between the experience of self in Second Life and that in the physical world.

3.5. REVIEWING THE PRESENT RESEARCH

3.5.1. Relating this case study to the theoretical context.

With respect to the self in virtual worlds, supporting the findings ofTurkle (1995, 1996) and Boellstorff (2008), this research shows that virtual worlds such as Second Life offer the opportunity to explore aspects of the self and parallel lives not possible in the physical world, with benefits for 'real life'. However, the research also underlines how the experience of virtual worlds is a personal one, and can vary between people. Some explore parallel lives, others take the opportunity to be the person who they feel they are 'inside', while others see virtual worlds as somewhere to be the person they are in the real world, but in a different environment with different experiences. Additionally, any benefits of virtual life go beyond exploration of the self in the physical world, but also include ways of coping with physical world difficulties, such as illness. This research also supports the observations offered by Taylor (2002), Yee and Bailenson (2007), Boellstorff (2008) and Ducheneaut et al (2009) by confirming that the avatar is used to embody the self and can affect experience in Second Life.

However, it also indicates that people may develop an attachment to them and also remind themselves that other avatars are representatives of other people. By exploring many facets of what it means to be a self in Second Life by understanding the 'insider perspective', the research discussed here is able to add texture to previous research.

Turning to theories of the self in general, traditional theories, such as those of Mead (1962) and Goffman (1959), emphasise the role of social environment in the construction of the self, with an emphasis on the ability of the self to be reflexive. More contemporary postmodern theories suggest traditional theories overemphasise the singularity and reflexivity of the self and that contemporary society saturates the self with myriad responsibilities and voices (Gergen, 1991), with new communications technologies promoting a self that is "decentred, dispersed and multiplied" (Poster, 1990, p. 6). However, the research outlined here indicates that while multiple selves may be facilitated through new technologies, those participating in them are neither saturated, decentred nor non-reflexive. Residents of virtual worlds take the opportunity to reflect on themselves and actively explore different aspects of their personalities and capabilities and use this experience to bring benefit to being a person in the physical world. Rather than being saturated, they are taking new opportunities and enhancing their 'real' lives. Rather than being decentred, residents have a strong sense of self and its relation to who they are in the physical world, whether their self in the virtual world was their 'real life' self, a part of it, an addition to it, or a reflection of who they believed themselves to be 'inside'.

This indicates that experience of being a self in virtual worlds may have more in common with traditional views of self than contemporary theories suggest. Being resident in a virtual world gives unique opportunities to have a mind in a virtual rather than physical body, to actively take on new roles in situations not possible in the physical world, and to take an outsider viewpoint to observe oneself in those roles by witnessing events on the computer screen. These factors add a new twist to conventional theories, where being able to interact with a virtual body rather than a physical one, the notion of physically being able to take on the view of others, or the ability to take on new roles to the extent that is possible in virtual worlds, were never envisaged. Overall, this research indicates that contemporary views of the self may overemphasise its potential for instability and neglect the potential for a self that is active and reflexive. As Adler and Adler (1999) suggest "[The] postmodernists' most pessimistic view of the demise of the self has not been borne out; rather, the core self has adapted to contemporary conditions and thrived" (p. 54).

3.5.2. Assessing the present research.

Besides addressing the questions posed, this research also raises considerations related to the fact that it concerned an area relatively new to social psychology specifically and research as a whole. Although research has taken place in virtual

worlds, there are still uncertainties with regard to appropriate methodologies. With respect to this particular study, a bespoke approach was developed that revealed that the experience of being a person in a virtual world is very varied and complex, demonstrated by the scale of the thematic network. This validates the taking of a qualitative approach that emphasises the 'insider viewpoint'. Despite this, in hindsight, its structure may have placed limitations on the findings. For example, the strategy meant that all data was textual, which may have restricted the nuance of insight it could offer. Going beyond individual interviews and conducting group discussions would have added greater depth to the understanding of how the self arises through social interactions within virtual worlds and 'in situ'. As Gaskell (2000) suggests, group discussions are more representative of what occurs in reality, since they encapsulate the processes occurring in society. Additionally, the scale of the findings suggests it would have been more beneficial to have a deeper focus on just one aspect of being a self in a virtual world. Nevertheless, the fact that so much varied experience was captured in any case indicates the potential for further fine textured analysis of the data or even develop the basis of a grounded theory.

There is also potential for further research in the area of understanding and conceptualising the self both in Second Life and other virtual worlds, and hence in contemporary society generally. Within Second Life, further research amongst residents who participate in specific activities, groups or cultures, such as role play, 'age play'[17], or who take on non-human forms, for example, will offer further understanding of how the self is being expressed and constructed within virtual worlds. Meanwhile, replicating the research in other virtual worlds, which may have different raisons d'être, such as Worlds of Warcraft, may provide alternative findings.

3.5.2.1. The role of the researcher.

While the months spent as a participant observer bore fruit in terms of being able to understand the insider viewpoint of participants and to quickly build rapport with them, it was not without its risks. Boellstorff (2008) indicates that the term participant observation is intentionally oxymoronic as one cannot fully participate and fully observe at the same time. Consequently, as a participant, in the time prior, during and subsequent to, the interview phase, the researcher became socialised and fully immersed within Second Life and experienced some of the issues with respect to self that were the purpose of the research. As an observer of others' experiences, the experience of being a participant informed the research questions and the interview topic guide.

Consequently this approach offered a fine-textured understanding and analysis of the issues at stake in being a self in contemporary society. As a participant in Second Life, the researcher observed and became aware of research

[17] That is, having an avatar appearing of a different age to their 'real life' self and acting in accordance with that age.

taking an outsider viewpoint of the processes that occur within Second Life, in the areas of marketing, education and psychological therapy, for example. It can be argued that such approaches take risks: they risk underestimating the complexities of life in virtual worlds and misconstruing virtual worlds as places of utility, rather than in their own right. Places such as Second Life are not just tools to be exploited by the physical world but for many people they are a fundamental part of 'real life' itself.

3.6. CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined research that offers both theoretical illuminations and methodological challenges. In terms of theoretical illuminations, it indicates that the postmodern theory of a self that is saturated by social influences, dissipated and decentred may be exaggerated. By using Second Life as a case study, the research has been able to take an 'insider viewpoint' to consider how CMC, and the phenomena of virtual worlds in particular, is influencing the sense of self that people in contemporary society are experiencing. While it indicates there are a wide variety of experiences among people who are residents of virtual worlds, it also shows that they are taking the opportunity to explore new aspects of themselves and even to improve their lives in the physical world. It indicates that traditional theories that emphasise the role of reflexivity in the emergence of self may continue to be relevant, albeit in modified form.

The methodological challenges are based on the relatively 'youthful' nature of research in virtual worlds. While research and theorising has begun, the time involved in the research process, the variety of disciplines and epistemological perspectives mean that insight is in its infancy. The research outlined here involved bespoke recruitment and executional procedures. As a result, in addition to 'current' insight being attained from the present research, it could be said that more expertise in the area of research in virtual worlds has been gained.

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