

Study: Virtual Men Are Standoffish Too

Study: Men Are Standoffish With Other Men in Second Life Too

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Males stand further away when talking to other males in the virtual world of Second Life and are less likely to keep eye contact, according to a study that shows at least one aspect of human behavior carries over into the virtual realm.

The study led by doctoral student Nick Yee at Stanford University found that male "avatars," or three-dimensional representations of Second Life players, stood on average 7.7 feet away from each other, compared to 6.9 feet for mixed-gender pairs measured, of course, in the virtual scale of Second Life.

Female-female pairs stood only slightly closer to each other than male pairs, but were more likely to maintain eye contact.

Avatars of all genders were more likely to look away from each other when standing close, much like people in the real world face away when crammed into an elevator.

The results, published in the latest issue of the journal *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, indicate that interaction in virtual environments, such as Second Life, "are governed by the same social norms as social interactions in the physical world," according to the authors.

Second Life is a three-dimensional virtual world, superficially similar to many computer games, where users have great freedom to shape their virtual representations. It is run by San Francisco-based Linden Lab.

Yee's research assistants used a small program that took "snapshots" of the environment in Second Life, collecting data on the relative distance of hundreds of avatars, how they were facing and if they were talking. Genders were deduced from their names, which excluded many androgynous avatars. The distance and gaze comparisons looked at avatars within 12 feet of another avatar generally taken to be the upper limit of "social" distance in the real world.

On the Net:

<http://www.secondlife.com>

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