

# Health Education in a Virtual World



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## Purpose

- To demonstrate how online virtual worlds (Second Life) can be used to deliver health communication messages and health education interventions.



## What is Second Life?

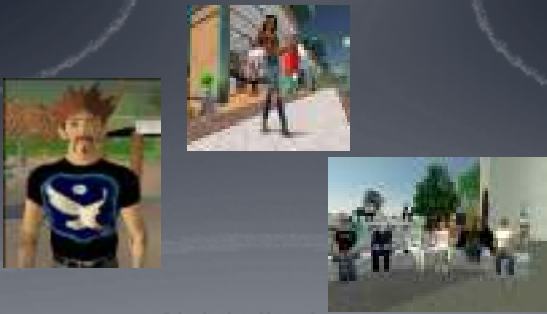
<http://www.secondlife.com>

- Online virtual world (Developed in 2003)
- Inhabited by approx 15 million residents from around the world.
- Web 2.0 social networking technology
  - Simultaneously shared space
  - Fosters real time social interaction
  - Gives users a sense of presence
  - Self representation through the creation and use of 3-D Avatars

## Orientation Island



## Avatars



## Health in Second Life



## Communication in SL

- Multiple Mechanisms
- Text and Voice Chat
- Streaming Audio and Video
- Virtual libraries
- Live events: concerts, lectures, classes
- Note cards & Objects

## Intervention Space

- Open air amphitheatre
- Owned by NMC
- Common area on Education Island



## Intervention

- Located on an island in SL
  - Eastern Michigan University owns a small part of this island
- Participants sent a link to Teleport to location
- Lecturer: Health Educator Avatar, Ms. Howlett
- Communication:
  - 'Chat' feature: type with text appearing on screen



## Intervention

- Lecture: 15 minutes
  - Covered physical activity and nutrition
    - Recommendations and guidelines
    - Tips
  - Approx 10 min Q & A & Discussion
- Interactive signs: allowed for a closer look
- Note cards: to keep sign information in avatar's inventory
- Participants: N=40 college students, no prior SL experience.

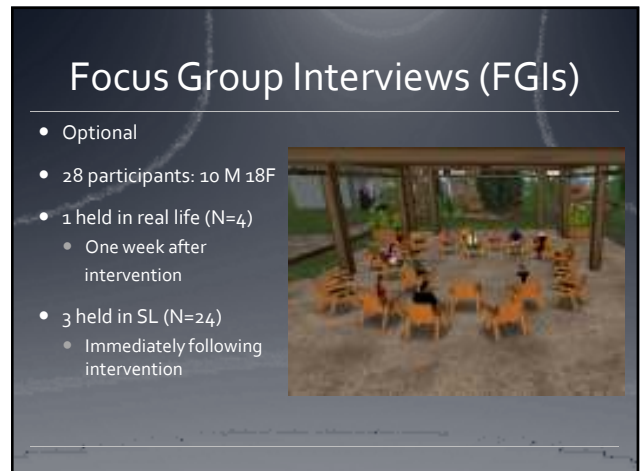
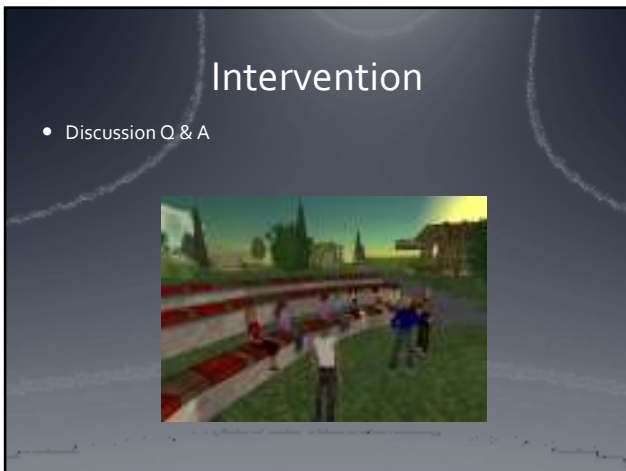
## Intervention

EMU stage and signs



## The Health Educator: Ms. Howlett





## Results: Participant Satisfaction

- Overall participant rating:
  - Excellent or very good (60%)
  - Information useful and helpful(80%)
  - Easy to understand/relevant (92.5%)
  - Interested in other SL health related programs (62.5%)
  - Intend to continue to explore SL (62.5%)
  - Intend to search for health information in SL (52.5%)

## Focus Group Key Themes

- Information was useful and informative
- Intervention was creative
- Health Educator was professional, credible, and looked physically fit
- Appreciated anonymity of the format
  - Encourages more people to ask questions
  - Ensures confidentiality
- Intervention encouraged them to think about their own behaviors

## Conclusions

1. Participants were receptive to receiving health information in SL.
2. Prefer a more traditional intervention method with a credible source.
3. Potential to deliver health info to targeted groups if done in a structured and credible manner.
4. Need to continue to create strategies that work within this user defined culture.
5. Use of avatars is unique regarding the receptivity and processing of health messages.
6. Future projects should include how experiences change with long term participation in SL.

## Second Life Locations

- Healthinfo Island Path of Support  
<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Healthinfo%20Island/111/92/22>
- Teaching 6  
<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Teaching%206/148/146/23>
- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)  
<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Teaching%206/148/146/23>
- Medical Library  
<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Healthinfo%20Island/172/209/26>

## Selected References

- Au, W.J. (2008) *The making of Second Life: Notes from the new world*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Hanson, C., Thackeray, R., Barnes, M., Neiger, B., & McIntyre, E. (2008). Integrating Web 2.0 in health education preparation and practice. *American Journal of Health Education*, 39(3), 157-166.
- Kamel Boulos, M.N, Hetherington, L., & Wheeler, S. (2007). Second Life: An overview of the potential of 3-D virtual worlds in medical and health education. *Health Information and Libraries Journal*, 24, 233-245.
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