



OH MY GOD. YOU'RE A GIRL?

WE NEED MORE FEMALE AND GENDER VARIANT AVATARS IN **VRCHAT**



SOCIAL VIRTUAL REALITY

- WHAT IS IT?
- ~*VIRTUAL REALITY*~
- WOMEN & SOCIAL VR
- HARRASSMENT





WHAT IS IT?

Social virtual reality(VR) is a type of platform that's primarily used for VR headset users to gather and socialize in 3D space.

POPULAR PLATFORMS

- AltSpace VR
- Sansar
- VRchat
- RecRoom
- Facebook Horizon



~VIRTUAL REALITY~



- **EMBODIMENT**

Feeling that you own, control and are inside a virtual body

- **PRESCENCE**

Feeling like you are really inside a virtual world and responding to virtual stimulation as if they were real

- **BEHAVIOUR**

When prescence & embodiment are present immersive virtual experiences can change behaviour and perception

VIRTUAL HARASSMENT: THE SOCIAL EXPERIENCE OF 600+ REGULAR VIRTUAL REALITY (VR) USERS



- 49% of women reported having experienced at least one instance of sexual harassment
- 30% of male respondents reported racist or homophobic comments
- 20% of males have experienced violent comments or threats



WHY WOMEN DON'T LIKE SOCIAL VIRTUAL REALITY

SOCIAL DYNAMICS ARE CHALLENGING

- FLIRTING
- DISRESPECTING
BOUNDARIES
- LACK OF SOCIAL NORMS

NAVIGATING WAS DIFFICULT

- NOT UNDERSTANDING
MECHANICS
- LACK OF CONTROL
- DIDN'T KNOW **WHAT** TO DO

THEY CAN'T EXPRESS THEMSELVES

- CUSTOMIZATION WAS BORING
- DON'T WANT TO BE NOTICED
- FELT EASILY OVERWHELMED



VRCHAT

THE BEST WE GOT





WHY VRCHAT?



- Large user base! 14,804 average concurrent players (vs. other popular platform RecRoom with 1,252)
- Content Creators (YouTube, Twitch, TikTok)
- Online communities naturally populated the platform
- Free to play
- Avatar and world creation (tools & support)
- VR and desktop players

HOW DID I GET HERE?



SYRMOR

In 2019, while working a full-time desk job, I would binge Symor's strange and heartfelt conversations in VRchat.



The juxtaposition between the avatar and environment and the serious conversations was fascinating.

HEYIMBEE

VRchat sat at the back of my mind until I started watching HeyImBee this past summer.



The videos are chaotic and often cringey, but they are also playful in a way that is unique to social VR.

PROS

- Meet LOTS of different people
- Exposure to different ideas and ways of being
- World hopping
- Avatar/identity shopping
- Upload custom content
- Playful environment
- Embodiment & virtual touch
- Safety settings/blocking

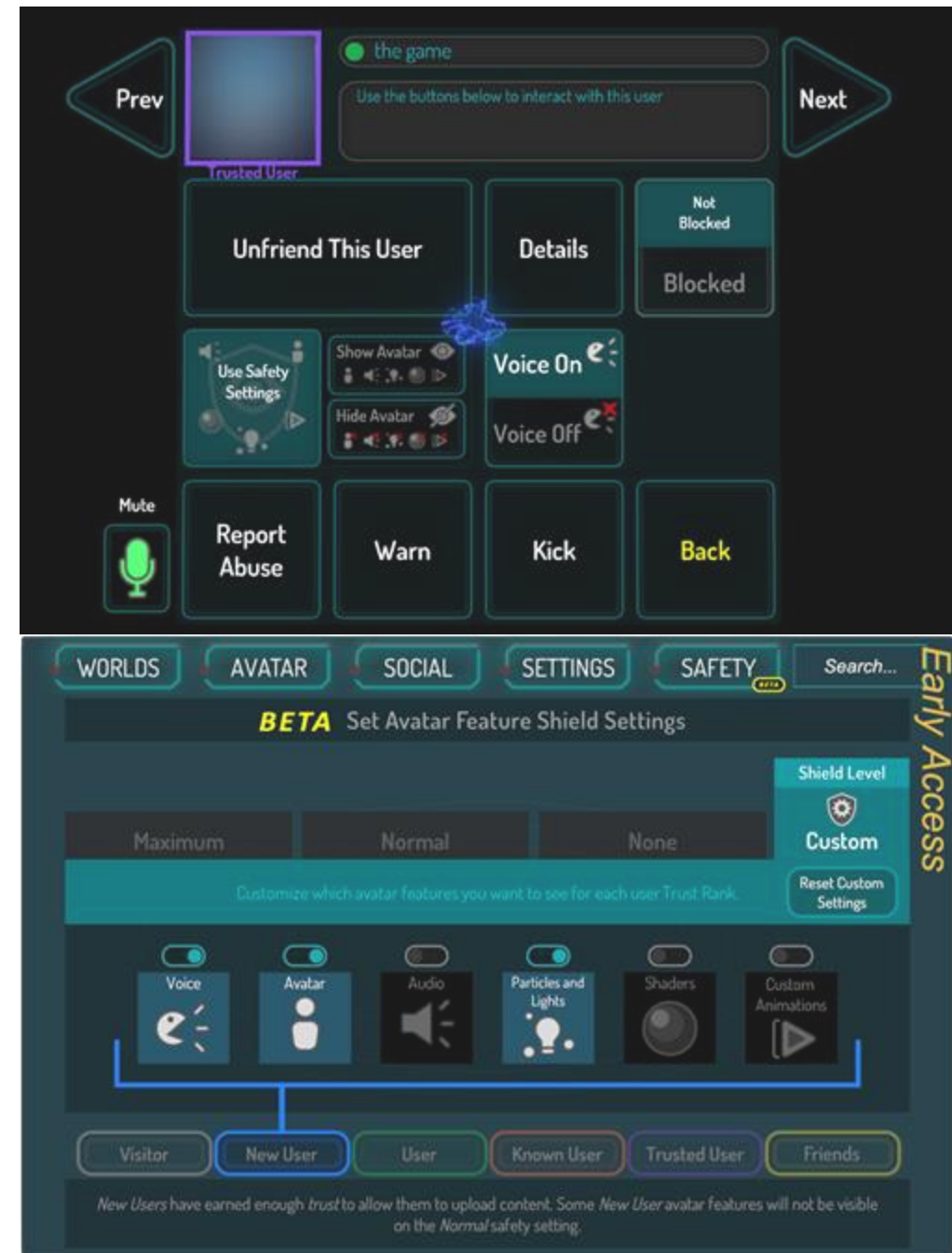
CONS

- Harassment & trolling
- Hyper-sexualization
- Children
- Only options during a hostile or uncomfortable situation is to block or leave (no pause feature)
- Culture shock
- Overwhelming cis/het vibes



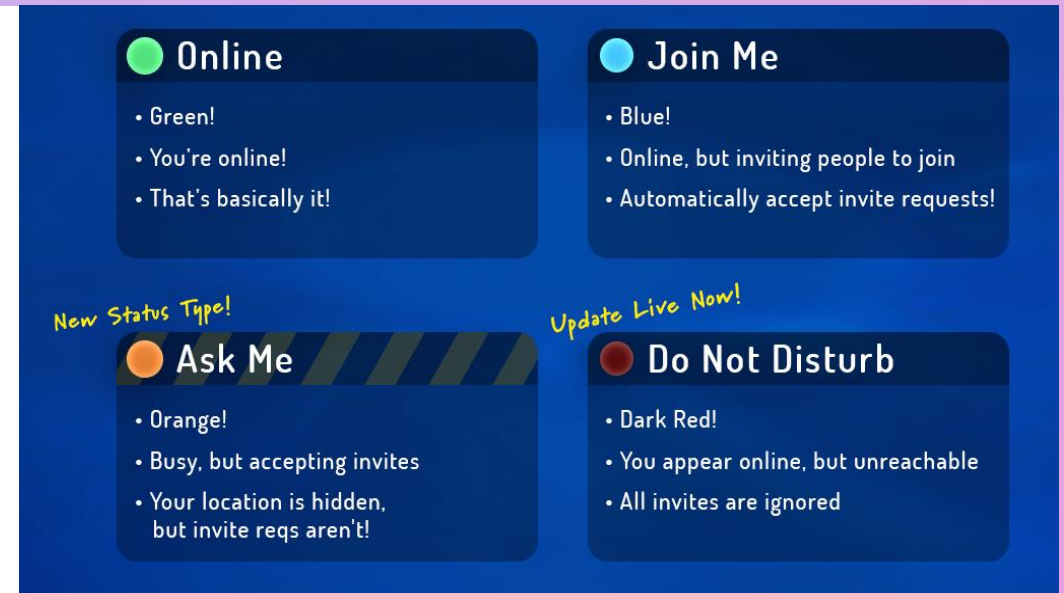
SAFETY

- The Safety features in VRchat are a bit difficult to get used to. I mostly learned from other users who were happy to help!
- Safety settings allow you to hide different elements of a user's avatar depending on their status and if they are your friend or not.
- You can click on any user to show/hide their avatar, mute them, turn their volume down or block them. Blocking makes it so you can't see or hear them and they can't see or hear you.



When going to a world you can choose who you want to join the world with you (public, friends only, friends+, etc..)

You can also set your status to online, join me, ask me or do not disturb depending on the type of social interaction you are looking for.



PUBLIC

- Meeting new people
- Chaos
- Finding musicians
- Trolling people

PRIVATE

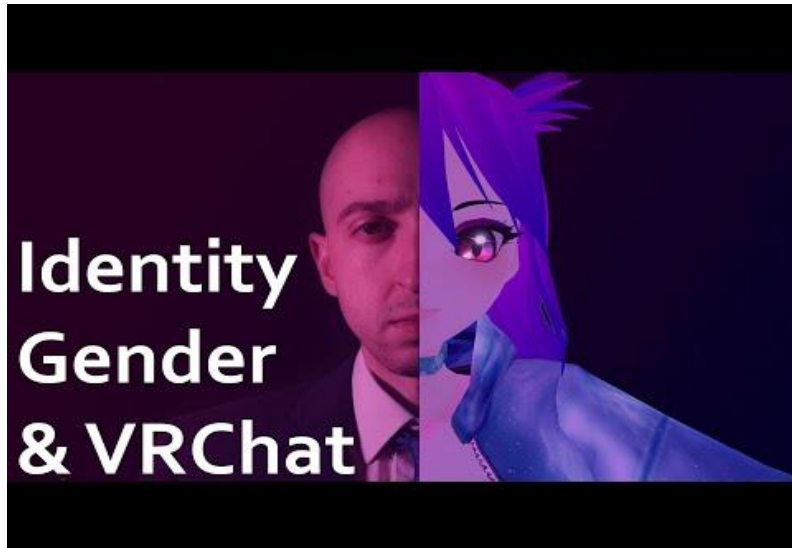
- Spending time with close friends
- Sleeping
- ERP (erotic role play)
- Avoid harassment/trolls/children
- Explore worlds alone





AVATARS

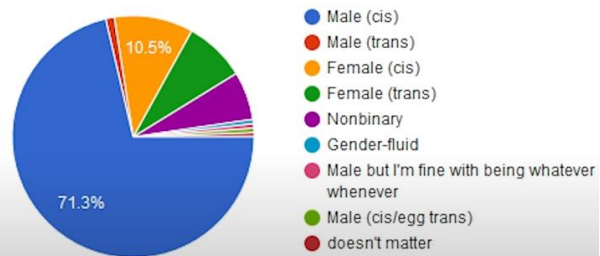
IDENTITY, GENDER, AND VRCHAT (WHY IS EVERYONE IN VR AN ANIME GIRL?)



DENSE 1 HOUR VIDEO WITH GREAT INFO!
(If you have time)

- How avatars impact behaviour
- Cultures and social norms in VRchat (4chan)
- Anime, cosplay and performing identity
- "Play"
- VRchat gender demographics
- Female avatars as a safe way to explore femininity
- The gaze within VRchat is different, it's ok to be cute and pretty.

What is your gender?



"Perhaps nobody knows you are a dog on the Internet, but if you are the only dog you know and you want to know if there are others like you out there, proclaiming your dogness becomes an important part of how you present yourself online. This is particularly true for marginalized groups who are forced to interact in digital spaces where white and male are often the unmarked norm. **When gender, race, and sexuality are considered unimportant in online spaces, it is through the pretense that everyone is the same.** Usually, the assumption is that everyone is heterosexual, white, and cisgendered male—gender, race, and sexuality are considered unimportant only to those people who have the privilege of never being confronted with violence based on them. In other words, those who carry gender, racial, and sexuality privilege are the only ones who can afford to think they do not matter. People of color, queer people, women, genderqueer people, transgender people, and others never have this privilege. "



HETERO-COMFORTABILITY



"Hetero-comfortability is a process of recognition, where feelings of familiarity – historically established through hetero-conditioning – create impressions that allow one to find comfort in the continuing appearance of hetero-signifiers."

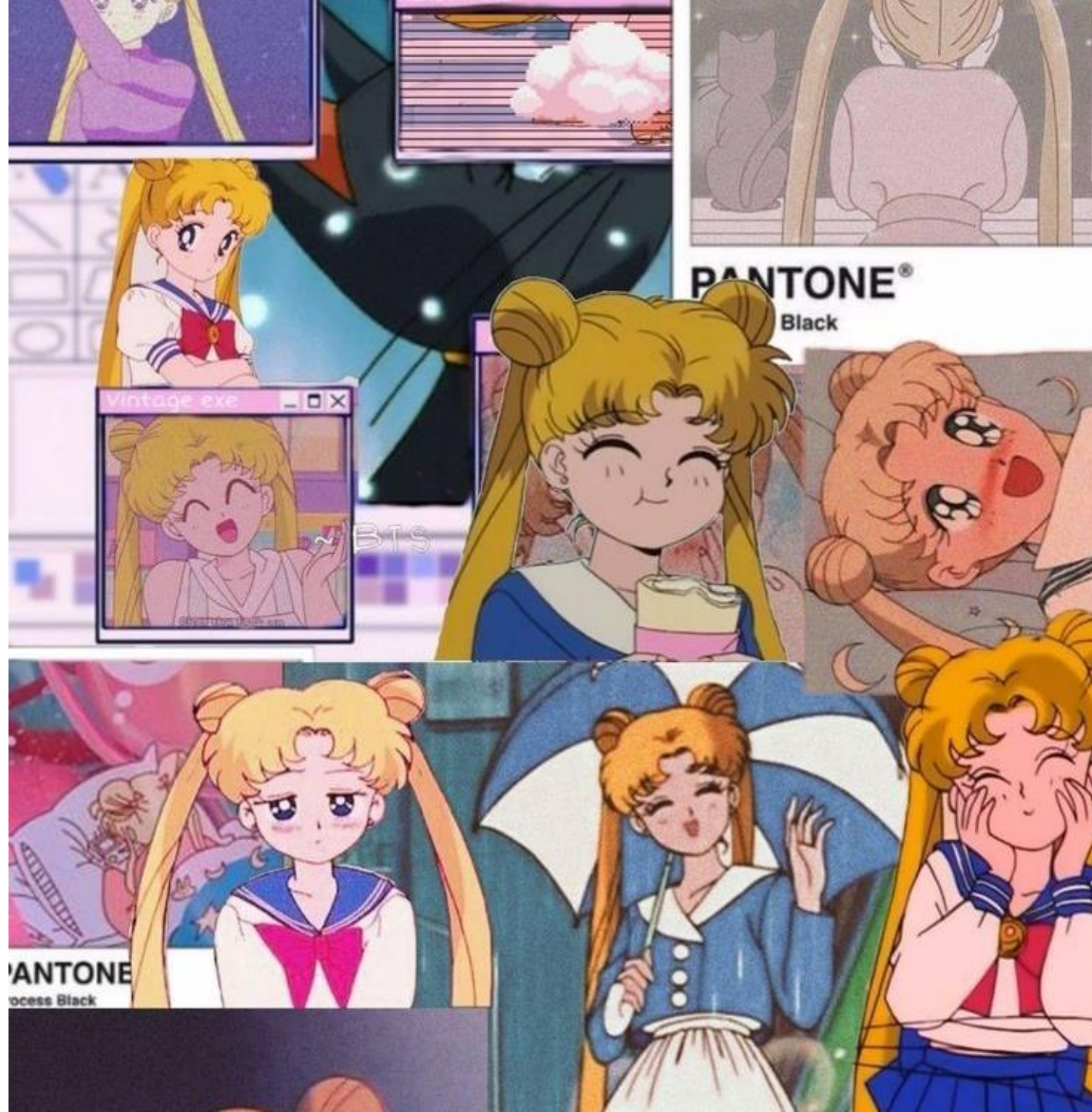


"For the residents of VRChat, the feelings of hetero-comfortability—produced through embodied expectations that emerge as these feelings—continuously make impressions onto avatar bodies. Through repetitions of historical practices of patriarchy and hetero-norms, residents perpetuate the harassment and over-sexualization of the feminine. Whereas for queer residents, who “fail” to reiterate these historical practices, violence is justified by the belief that hetero-comfortable spaces are being taken away from non-queer residents."



ANIME

IT'S COMPLICATED





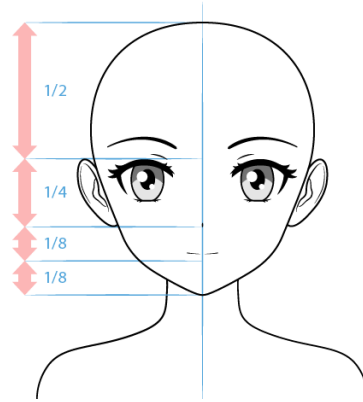
THE APPEAL

DEMOGRAPHICS

- Diverse audiences (age, gender, sexuality, race)
- Wide range of themes, genres and characters
- Accessible



DESIGN



- Perfectly simplified face for viewer identification
- Iconic
- Easy to replicate

COMMUNICATION

- Consistent visual short-hands for complex emotions
- Recognizable characters
- Shared associations with certain hair, clothing and accessories





MMD

mikumikudance

- Infinitely customizable!
- Free software and assets
- Community willing to share skills
- Works well within VRchat



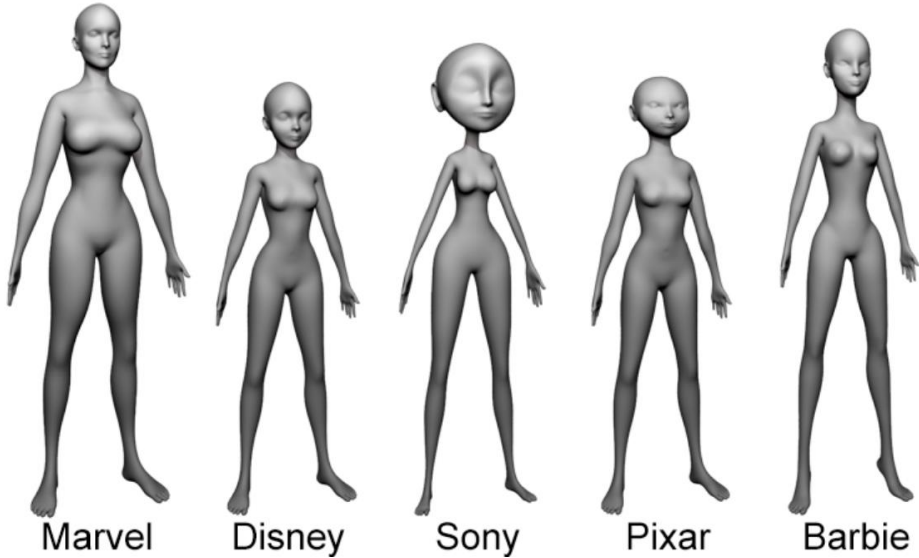
POTENTIAL ASSOCIATIONS WITHIN VRCHAT



- MMD bases can include detailed and exaggerated anatomy that has been designed for the male gaze.
- Figures and other merchandise (such as body pillows) are commonly sold of anime characters for sexual and romantic purposes.
- Hentai - a genre of Japanese manga and anime characterized by overtly sexualized characters and sexually explicit images and plots.



FEMININE BODIES



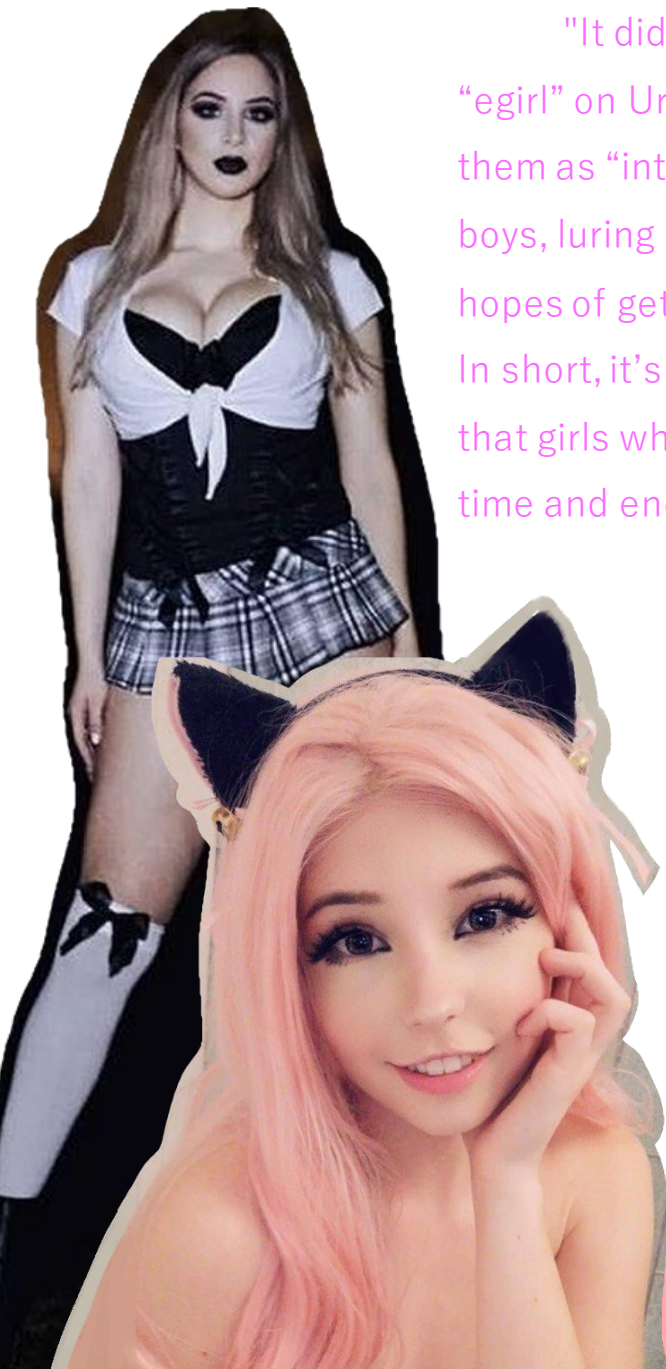
"Many of the attackers voiced a refrain with which many female players of online, particularly console, games are familiar— that women should either display their bodies or leave the virtual space." - *Gaming at the Edge*

E-GIRLS

Success in the Virtual Patriarchy



"It didn't start on TikTok. The earliest definitions of "egirl" on Urban Dictionary, dating back to 2013, describe them as "internet sluts." They're girls who seek out gamer boys, luring them in with good looks and flirtation in hopes of getting their most prized commodity — attention. In short, it's a misogynist insult born of boys fantasizing that girls who share their hobbies are clamoring for their time and energy." *-TikTok Has Created A Whole New Kind Of Cool Girl*



- Simp Culture & Success
- Anime/Hentai Influence
- Hyper-sexualization / Fetish-wear / Lolita



THE CUTENESS MATRIX



"We talked about the scarcity of decent dudes (for those of us who date/are into dudes/masculine folks), how there are so few guys who do not have serious issues with being misogynist and fucked up towards feminine people, and there is an overflowing abundance of cute, rad, bably, smart feminine people. And we, as feminine people, are expected to compete with each other for the attention of the few masc people who are decent. And then there's this pressure, that if we are less than perfect in any way, we can easily and readily be replaced." - *The Cuteness Matrix // Jealousy, Polyamory, Femininity*

THIS IS "NORMAL"

SO. If you come onto the platform, as a woman or feminine person, without any context (*cough* like me *cough*) you might find this all a bit overwhelming! Many users in VRchat are cis men who are used to "virtual girls" performing in a particular way, and often make demands or assumptions of feminine users. On top of that, feminine users may feel the need to compete or perform sexuality in order to be accepted or feel safety/belonging in these spaces. Avatar design may not remove these issues but I wonder if there are ways to actively challenge them.

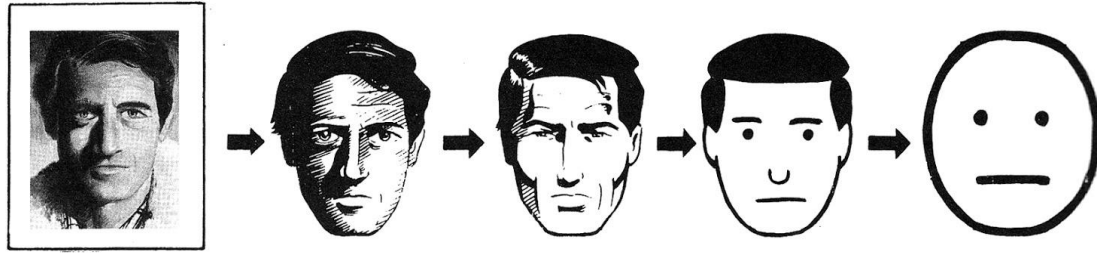




THE PROJECT



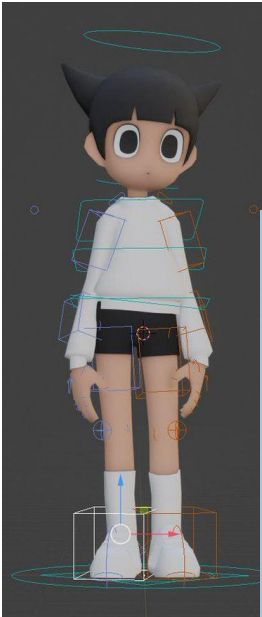
AMPLIFICATION THROUGH SIMPLIFICATION



- The objectifying power of realism, how might that relate to depictions of the body?
- What are characteristics that need to be amplified? How to go about that?
- De-sexualize without being non-sexual (boobs are not the problem!!!)



BASE MESH



- DESIGN ALTERNATIVE BASE MESHES
- ABSTRACT BODY & FACE EQUALLY
- INCLUDE A WIDE RANGE OF FACIAL EXPRESSIONS
- MAKE IT EASILY EDITABLE
- COMPATIBLE WITH MMD ASSETS
- QUEST COMPATIBLE

THANK YOU!