

Virtual women reveal more skin, regardless of body proportions

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In the virtual world of Second Life, female avatars expose substantially more skin than males, independent of their virtual body proportions, according to research published December 26 in the open access journal *PLOS ONE* by Matthieu Guitton and colleagues from Laval University, Canada.

The human tendency to cover up stems from climatic, environmental, physical and cultural constraints, so measuring people's propensity to reveal skin can be difficult in the real world. To study human behavior free of at least some of these constraints, the researchers analyzed how male and female avatars in the virtual, 3- dimensional world of Second Life dressed. [Second Life](#) offers users options to choose the gender, appearance and attire of their virtual avatars, and users can select clothing from several items created in this virtual world, rather than being restricted to a predefined costume.

They found that out of over 400 virtual people studied, 71% of male avatars covered between 75-100% of their skin, while only 5% of females did. In contrast, 47% of the virtual females they studied covered between 25-49% of their skin, compared to 9% of males. The amount of skin covered was independent of traditional gender-specific measures of [physical attractiveness](#) for virtual avatars, such as waist-chest ratios for females. According to the study, "These findings have implications for understanding how sex specific aspects of skin disclosure influence human social interactions in both virtual and real settings."

Guitton adds, "Virtual settings provide a unique tool to study human behavior unhindered by physical and environmental constraints. This tool enabled us to find a dramatic gender difference in the propensity to disclose naked skin."

More information: Lomanowska AM, Guitton MJ (2012) Virtually Naked: Virtual Environment Reveals Sex-Dependent Nature of Skin Disclosure. PLoS ONE 7(12): e51921. [doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0051921](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0051921)

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