

DEAKIN UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE



PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

Full Project Title: Body Image in Real and Virtual Environments

Principal Researcher: Dr. Alexander Mussap

Student Researcher: Mr Jon-Paul Cacioli

Your Consent

You are invited to take part in this research project. This Plain Language Statement contains detailed information about the research project. Its purpose is to explain to you as openly and clearly as possible all the procedures involved in this project so that you can make a fully informed decision whether you are going to participate.

Please read this Plain Language Statement carefully. Feel free to ask questions about any information in the document by emailing Jon-Paul Cacioli at jcaci@deakin.edu.au. You may also wish to discuss the project with a relative or friend or your local health worker. Feel free to do this.

Once you understand what the project is about and if you agree to take part in it, by completing the questionnaire you have consented to be part of the study. Please do not initiate the questionnaire unless you understand the information provided regarding the study and that you give your consent to participate in the research project.

A [PDF](#) file of this form is available for download to keep for your records.

In order to take part in this study you must:

- Be over 18 years of age
- Be Male
- Be a regular user of the Internet
- Be able to read English fluently

Purpose and Background

This is a student research project which is a requirement of the Doctorate of Clinical Psychology at Deakin University. The results of the study will be collated into an academic research thesis and will be possibly published in a peer reviewed psychology journal.

A total of 300 people, all males over 18 years of age, will participate in this project.

Previous research has shown that the way people feel and interact with each other can be influenced by the individual's perception of themselves. A discrepancy between how an individual perceives their own physical appearance compared to how they wish to look can lead to depression, higher levels of stress and anxiety and a poorer overall quality of life. The Internet has recently reached a level of sophistication whereby an individual can create a digital representation of themselves, such as an avatar, controlling each physical dimension. The purpose of this project is to investigate the differences between individuals and their avatars and examine their experience of how appearance affects them in real life and on the Internet, such as in programs as Second Life and World of Warcraft.

You are invited to participate in this research project because understanding the psychological effects regarding appearance over the Internet is an area which has not been explored.

The results of this research may be used to help researcher Jon-Paul Cacioli to obtain a Doctorate of Clinical Psychology.

Funding

This research is totally funded by Deakin University.

Procedures

Participation in this project will involve completing a questionnaire on a secure web based server. The questionnaire will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete, depending on your reading speed. The questionnaire is in English and will require you to select answers based on a provided scale. Please answer each question. The questionnaire will measure aspects of your psychological and physical dimensions, such as:

- Body image and the body dimension of your internet avatar
- Body satisfaction

- Your views on body image
- Some questions regarding the importance of your avatar

Possible Benefits

The insights gained from this project will not be of direct benefit to you as a participant, however, it will further the understanding of the psychological effects of body image on the Internet.

Possible Risks

Some of the questions asked may cause you some discomfort, particularly if you have concerns with your appearance or have high levels of depression and anxiety. Examples of the questions and statements used include:

- Have you ever felt ashamed of your body size or shape?
- I feel extremely guilty about overeating.

If you find that the questions cause you discomfort please do not continue with this study. If you experience an adverse reaction from participating in this project we encourage you to see your local General Practitioner or a qualified counsellor for support. If you are a Deakin University student, we encourage you to seek assistance from a qualified university counsellor on campus available free of charge. Lifeline (13 11 14) is available Australia wide for 24 hour confidential counselling and referrals for the cost of a local call. Alternatively, if you are currently receiving psychological treatment we strongly recommend that you seek assistance from your regular clinic or agency.

There may be additional unforeseen or unknown risks.

Privacy, Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information

Any information obtained in connection with this project and that can identify you will remain confidential. The questionnaire you complete will remain entirely anonymous - you will not be asked for any possibly identifying information. Upon completion of the questionnaire a separate page will ask for your email address so that you can go into a random draw for a \$100 AUD Amazon.com gift voucher. Your email address will be kept separate from your answers to ensure anonymity. Your collected information will only be disclosed with your permission, subject to legal requirements. If you give us your permission by completing the questionnaire, we plan to collate and discuss the results within a doctoral thesis and to publish the data in an international peer reviewed psychology journal. In any publication participants will not be identifiable as only aggregated data will be reported.

The information obtained from this study will be kept in secure storage in digital hardcopy for 6 years after the final publication, after which it will be destroyed.

Results of Project

The project will be completed and results written up by September 2011. It is not possible to contact you regarding your individual results or regarding publications due to the anonymity of the study. If you would like further information please email jcaci@deakin.edu.au.

Participation is Voluntary

Participation in any research project is voluntary. **If you do not wish to take part you are not obliged to.** If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage and the data will not be used and will be destroyed. **Please note that due to the anonymity of the project it will be impossible to remove your data once the questionnaire is submitted.**

Your decision whether to take part or not to take part, or to take part and then withdraw, will not affect your relationship with Deakin University.

Before you make your decision, a member of the research team will be available to answer any questions you have about the research project via email jcaci@deakin.edu.au. You can ask for any information you want. Only initiate the questionnaire, signifying your consent, after you have received satisfactory answers to your questions.

There are no foreseeable risks to you in regards to withdrawing.

Ethical Guidelines

This project will be carried out according to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007) produced by the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia. This statement has been developed to protect the interests of people who agree to participate in human research studies.

The ethics aspects of this research project have been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Deakin University.

Complaints

If you have any complaints about any aspect of the project, the way it is being conducted or any questions about your rights as a research participant, then you may contact:

Should you have any concern about the conduct of this research project, please contact: The Secretary HEAG-H, Dean's Office, Faculty of Health, Medicine, Nursing and Behavioural Sciences, 221 Burwood Hwy, Burwood, VIC, 3125. Telephone: (03) 9251 7174, Email: hmnbs-research@deakin.edu.au

Please quote project number **HEAG-H152_09**.

Reimbursement for your costs

As reimbursement for your time, you will be placed in a random draw for an Amazon.com voucher valued at \$100 AUD. The draw will take place after data collection has been completed. To be entered into the draw your email address will be collected after the questionnaire, however this will be stored separate to your answers to ensure that your anonymity is maintained.

Further Information, Queries or Any Problems

If you require further information, wish to withdraw your participation or if you have any problems concerning this project (for example, any side effects), you can contact the researcher via email at [jcaci \[at\] deakin.edu.au](mailto:jcaci@deakin.edu.au).

The researchers responsible for this project are:

Mr Jon-Paul Cacioli

Dr Alexander Mussap (principle researcher)

School of Psychology,

Deakin University,

221 Burwood Highway.

ph: 03-9251 7777 (BH), 03-9251 7777 (AH)

CONSENT FORM

- I have read and I understand the attached Plain Language Statement.
- I freely agree to participate in this project according to the conditions in the Plain Language Statement.
- A copy of the Plain Language Statement was made available to me for download.
- The researcher has agreed not to reveal my identity and personal details, including where information about this project is published, or presented in any public form.
- By initiating this questionnaire I understand that I have given full and informed consent to taking part in this study.

I Agree