



***The Dating Metaverse:
Why We Need to Design
for Consent in Social VR***

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Content warning: sexual violence

The dating... metaverse?

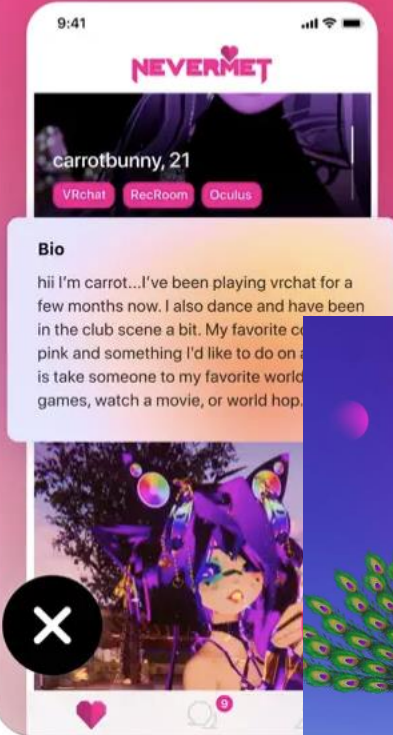


<https://arpost.co/2022/07/29/best-vr-apps-for-socializing-with-friends/>

Dating app for virtual reality



Be your unique avatar



[BMC Public Health](#). 2020; 20: 795. Published online 2020 May 27.
doi: [10.1186/s12889-020-08914-z](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-08914-z)

PMCID: PMC7251668 | PMID: [32460748](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32460748/)

The safe use of dating applications among men who have sex with men: a study protocol for a randomised controlled trial to evaluate an interactive web-based intervention to reduce risky sexual behaviours


[Edmond P. H. Choi](#),¹ [Eric P. F. Chow](#),^{2,3,4} [Eric Y. F. Wan](#),^{5,6}
[William C. W. Wong](#),⁵ [Janet Y. H. Wong](#),¹ and [Daniel Y. T. Fong](#)¹

Understanding Experiences of Sexual Harms Facilitated through Dating and Hook Up Apps among Women and Girls

Elena Cama
The Emerald International Handbook of Technology-Facilitated Violence and Abuse

Dating App Facilitated Sexual Assault: A Retrospective Review of Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examination Charts

Julie L. Valentine¹ , Leslie W. Miles¹,
Kristen Mella Hamblin¹, and
Aubrey Worthen Gibbons¹

Journal of Interpersonal Violence
1–25
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DOI: [10.1177/08862605221130390](https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605221130390)
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Convergence of harms

SLATE

Online Harm Is Real

Many dismissed a woman's complaints about being groped in virtual reality. But that's the wrong way to think about the internet.

In Virtual Reality Is A Big Issue

With the hand of the #MeToo movement coming down heavy on sexual predators, many have found a safe haven for their old and noxious behaviors in virtual reality.

sexual harassment

In striving to make virtual reality as real as possible, this also means the worst of behavior feels as real too

Mic



Virtual Reality Is Full of Assholes Who Sexually Harass Me. Here's Why I Keep Going Back

By Taylor Lorenz | May 26, 2016



FAST COMPANY

04.04.18

VR Has A Harassment Problem

Far from being a utopian technology, free from social norms, VR is just as sexist as meatspace.



Convergence of harms

AR/VR

VRChat addresses 'disrespectful or harmful behavior' as racism and sexism rise on platform

@UPLOADV @UPLOADV JANUARY 13, 2018 3:34 AM

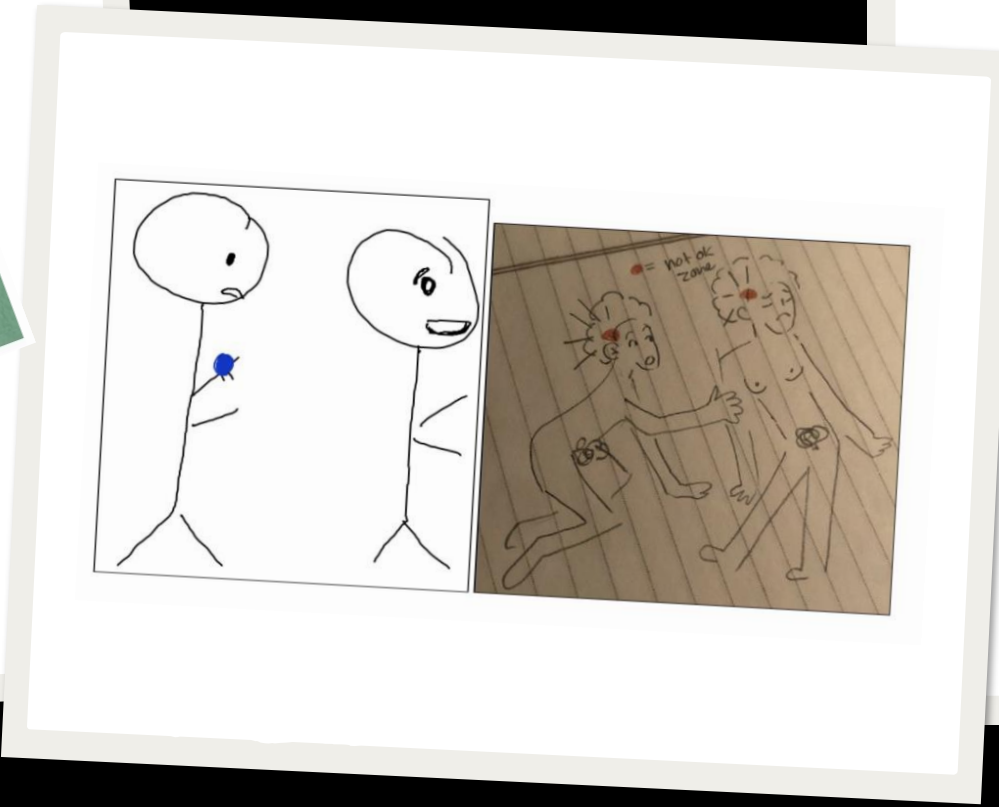
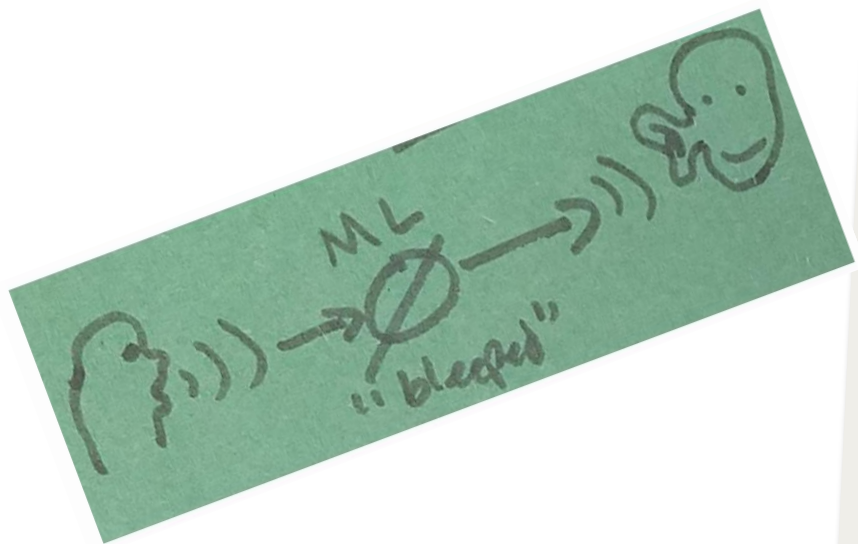
<https://immerse.news/designing-safer-social-vr-76f99f0be82e?gi=bfa4956529dd>



What harms should be anticipated and prevented in the dating metaverse?



How can the dating metaverse be designed to prevent such harms?



Method

Participatory design with online daters and social VR users of diverse gender and sexual identities

How do users define harm in the dating metaverse?

- Users reject the notion of objectively harmful behaviors
 - + Example: anti-harassment policies
- Instead, users understand harm as any action or behavior without permission of the recipient/observer.
 - + Harm = Nonconsensual behavior





Examples of nonconsensual acts in the dating metaverse

- Unwanted sexualized verbal dialogue or simulated bodily movements
- Nonconsensual observation of sexual interactions between other users
- Interactions agreed to under misinformed pretenses
- Unwanted sexual activity during in-person date

How do we prevent nonconsensual acts in VR dating?

Instead of features that *react* to harm that has already occurred (blocking, muting, reporting), we can design...

Consent mechanics: features intended to support the giving, receiving, and denying of agreement to interpersonal behavior through virtual and augmented reality.

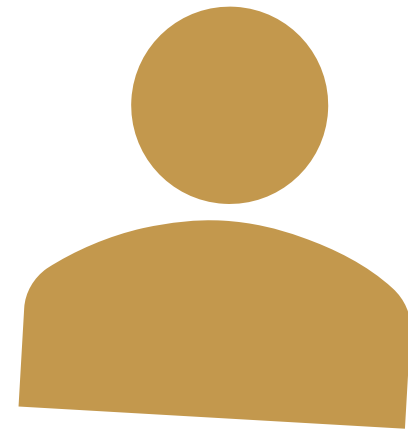
Why consent mechanics can be effective

1. Victims often find it difficult to say no (and thus would not report the perpetrator).
2. Sexual harm often occurs without conscious intent due to misunderstanding of consent.



Absence of technology to support saying no

Grace: "So I remember he said can you send me a picture because your ones on [your dating profile], they were old or whatever. So I sent him like a face shot. I'm in the library. So I can't really do much, right? I just take a selfie. [He was] like, no, I want a full body shot. So I was like, okay, whatever. It's fine. I'll just go into the bathroom. Took a full body selfie in the mirror. He's like, well, I was hoping for more than that. [...] I told him no, indirectly. So it was kind of like, I'm not. I don't know."



Unreliable signals of consent

Ethan: “[During messaging on the dating app] she was like, ‘Yeah, I was a Catholic school girl.’ She gave me a winky face [emoji]. It's like, alright. Yeah. I know. I know what she's trying to do here. [...] I was really hoping for sex. Which was a lot, which is, which, which like, okay, here: a guy doesn't drive over an hour and leave empty handed.”

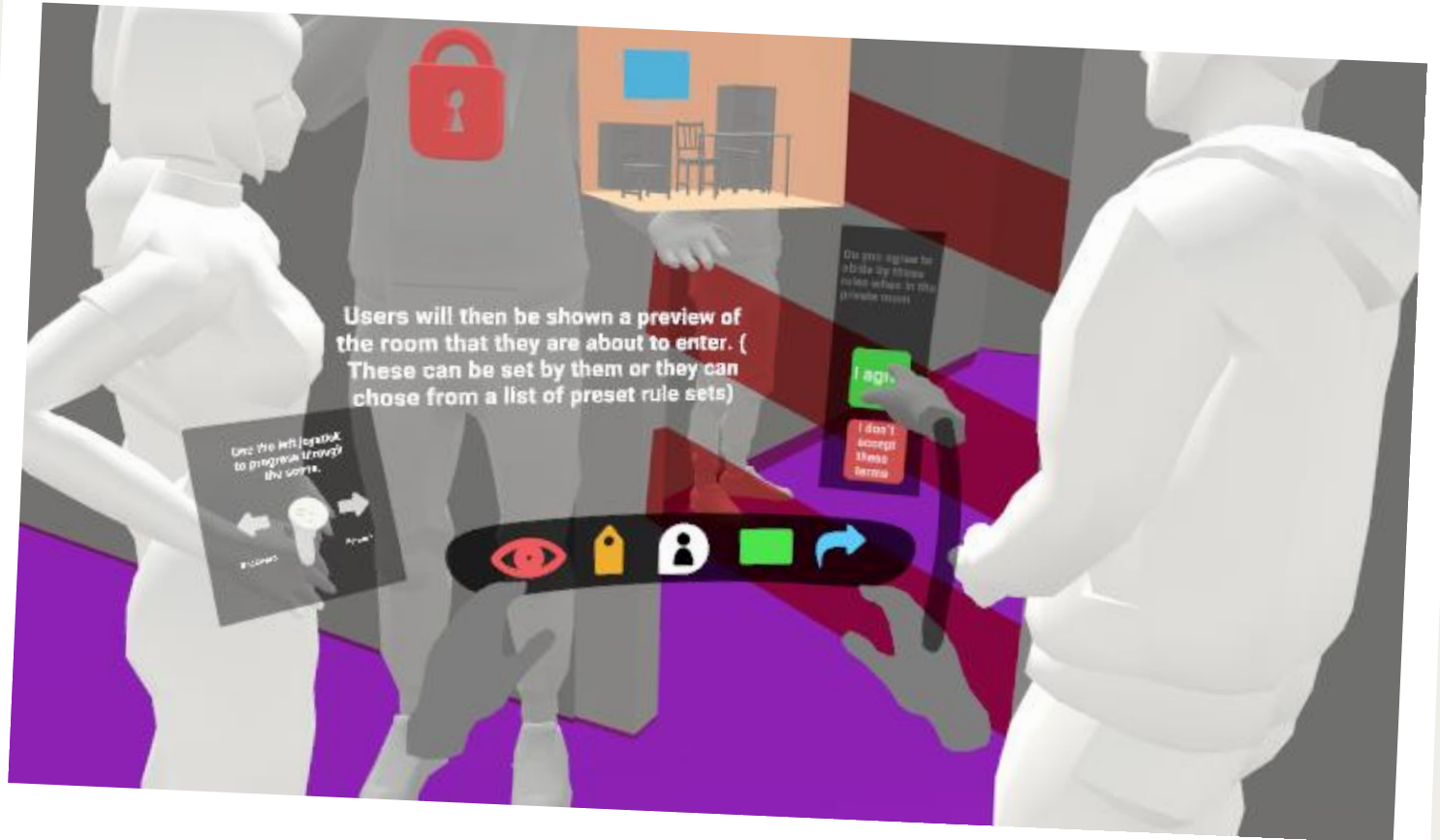




***Asking for and giving consent to
enter personal space in AR/VR***



Environmental consent





Next steps

- Developing and testing consent mechanics with users of diverse gender and sexual identities to assess ease and willingness to use
- Deploying consent mechanics in VR-to-AR interactions to study influence on behavior and mitigate adverse impact

Thank you!

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National
Science
Foundation

Grant No. IIS-2211896

Thank you!

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For further reading...

Douglas Zytko and Jonathan Chan. "The Dating Metaverse: Why We Need to Design for Consent in Social VR," in *IEEE Transactions on Visualization and Computer Graphics*, vol. 29, no. 5, pp. 2489-2498, May 2023, doi: 10.1109/TVCG.2023.3247065.

Douglas Zytko and Nicholas Furlo. 2023. **Online Dating as Context to Design Sexual Consent Technology with Women and LGBTQ+ Stakeholders**. In Proceedings of the 2023 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '23), April 23-28, 2023, Hamburg, Germany. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 17 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3544548.3580911>

