

Digital Fashion Innovation Conference 2024 | Theme: Digital Human and Metaverse

Digital Avatars as Fashioned Bodies: Identity Making and Boundaries in Roblox

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Abstract

Online game company Roblox's report on digital expression, fashion and beauty claims that '[o]ver half (56%) of Gen Z say styling their avatar is more important to them than their physical style' (Roblox Corporation, 2023). According to digital fashion proponents, individuals have more freedom to express themselves in digital spaces because avatars do not have physical or social restrictions, and digital fashion culture could potentially reshape body norms and beauty ideals of the fashion industry. However, self-representation in digital spaces is often an idealised representation of the self, affected by social norms and ideals of the real lifeworlds. Are avatars as socially restricting as dressed bodies in the physical realm? We examine fashioned digital avatars through the lens of Joanne Entwisle's theorization on situated bodily practice and the concepts of social belonging, identity-making, boundaries and vulnerability. The sites of the avatar bodies are the social realities of virtual communities, entangled and interconnected with our fleshy social existence. Our research site is the virtual community of the popular social game Roblox. We propose the concept of sublime phygital embodiment in which the virtual and physical lifeworlds collide, unveiling the processes of identity-making, as well as disguised social boundaries and vulnerability in idealised cyberspaces.