SL & WoW

- both have more than 12 million subscribers worldwide

  - Linden Lab’s Second Life
    - social
    - more popular for dating
    - allows scripts that allow avatars to have cybersex
    - can be played without purchasing anything

  - Bilzzard’s World of Warcraft
    - gaming
    - cannot have cybersex
    - roughly $12 a month
continually improving technology has made virtual dating more attractive

- chatrooms and dating websites vs virtual reality

- virtual dating, online relationships and cybersex are easiest achieved in virtual worlds
Virtual dating, online relationships, and cybersex offer:

- sexual encounters without fear of disease or pregnancy
- anonymity
- a chance to cheat on a partner without ever leaving home
Gem & Zupy

Dave Barmy & Laura Skye

- unemployed and considerably overweight from the UK
- met in SL, married in SL and in real life, but later divorced in both worlds (due to Dave’s cheating in SL)
- online personas are handsome, fit, trendy, and successful making it easy for media to poke fun at virtual relationships for being fake/made up

NYC couple
Perks of Online Dating

- sexual freedom & anonymity
  - role play, exploration of (freaky) desires, no chance of pregnancy or STD contraction
- less emotional and financial cost
- freedom to disengage
Problems of Online Dating

• satisfaction gained can be considerably lower

• anonymity also means never knowing who you are flirting with or having virtual sex with
Is this Polygamy?

- no, not in real terms
- virtual adultery or infidelity has begun to be cited as a reason for divorce in some US states
Lying vs. Cheating

- Is it permissible to lie to one’s virtual partner, given that role-playing and taking on virtual identities which are quite distinct from one’s IRL persona are generally assumed to be the norm in an online environment?
• anonymity makes it easy to lie

• it is generally acknowledged that people are lying about themselves

• if VR partners are lying to heighten the sexual experience and the role-playing involved for both partners, lying is ok.
Lying vs. Cheating

- do virtual relationships and cybersex count as cheating, assuming the existence of real world partners are unaware of the virtual hanky-panky?
• cheating involves possible harm caused to a person outside of the virtual relationship

• engaging in multiple online relationships without informing one’s multiple virtual partners is considered cheating

• it is morally problematic when one IRL partner is unaware of the virtual relationships of the other’s

• if the IRL partner is aware of these relationships, it is harder to argue that cheating occurred
• VR dating and cybersex can be damaging to a real life couple, especially if lying is involved

• intimacy IRL vs VR can be just as intense

• even if virtual sex isn’t grounds for divorce, neglect is

• cheating is usually much more complex than sex

• argues that emotional infidelity is more harmful than physical infidelity
Real or Not

- IRL vs VR relationships are as real as you allow them to be
- Lying is a problem, so is emotional infidelity
- Use virtual dating with caution