

# Copyright and You

## Ethical Issues in Second Life



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**T**here are many unethical and illegal behaviors that take place in Second Life. This article offers several scenarios which represent some of these behaviors, including copyright infringement. It is hoped that the reader will understand how copyright infringement fits in with other unethical behaviors in Second Life.

### A Brief Introduction to Generation “V” MUVes and Second Life (SL)

Generation “V” (Generation Virtual) has grown up on filesharing, multi-user virtual environments (MUVes), such as Dungeons and Dragons, and considers multitasking in a networked world as a norm in daily life. “Age, gender, class, and income of individuals are less important and less rewarded than competence, motivation and effort” (Lee, 2007). They see voice over internet protocol (VOIP) as convenient (Romme, 2003). It should come as no surprise, then, that this is the group that has vaulted Linden Labs’ Second Life (SL) MUVe as the preeminent “in-world” environment with transaction values averaging \$1.5 million every 24 hours. These values rival the incomes of small countries (businesses), such as Nike, Gucci, and others, quickly finding ways to market their brands (Media Age, 2007).

Second Life (SL) was started by Philip Rosedale and incorporated as Linden Labs in 2003. Its currency is the Linden Dollar with an exchange rate that fluctuates between \$263-\$270 Linden Dollars to each U.S. dollar. Second Life is a 3-D virtual world entirely created by residents, with an average of 60,000 + users per day. Meetings, conferences, research, projects, career exploration, practica, and projects are conducted. A sizable number of users are outside the United States (Steel, 2006).

Many educational groups participate in the Second Life Grid, including Global Kids, Hub2, The Exploratorium, The New Media Consortium, Eduserv, and the Ohio Learning Network as well as special interest user groups in educational associations, such as the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, the International Society for Technology in Education, NOAA, NASA, and state and local educator groups (Wong, 2006). SL also maintains a wiki (a page or collection of web pages designed to enable anyone who accesses it to contribute or modify content) for nonprofit resources—the SL and Nonprofits listserv, and SimTeach (Information and Community for Educators using MUVes).

Various research and ethics groups and listservs have been created around Second Life, such as Second Life Grad Student Colony, Social Second Life

Educators (SLED), Real Life Education in Second Life, Educators Working with Teens Mailing List, and Second Life Researchers, and research is being conducted on SL in education (Annetta, et al, 2008; Fetscherin & Lattemann, 2007).

### Ethical Issues in Second Life

There are many ethical issues in SL. More than one author has noted that these issues, or user-initiated actions, seem to be detached from the fear of consequences in the “real world,” such as illegal file-sharing (copyright infringement), spamming, multiple identities, identity deception, and illicit materials (Kerbs, 2005). Other ethical issues range from breach in privacy, monitoring and eavesdropping, exploitation, professional ethics, confidentiality and proprietary information, to crimes, such as harrasment, vandalism and unauthorized use of computer information, such as passwords, and intellectual property and trademark infringements (Schroeder, 2007; Shutkin, 2004).

### Scenarios for Thought, Reflection, and Prevention

To address some of the ethical issues encountered in SL, the scenarios presented below are based on real-life experiences in SL. Avatar (digital rep-

representations or images of real people in a virtual space) names will not be used to protect the innocent.

### **Scenario One: Exploitation**

Miss Avatar initially came into SL for a professional conference. Miss Avatar had never heard of Second Life or virtual environments, but being curious and adventurous, she virtually flew in (avatars possess the ability to fly in SL). She dutifully attended the conference, but then went about exploring this wondrous and exciting virtual space, meeting interesting people along the way. One day, while visiting a perfectly innocent virtual educational space, she met an interesting creature. Without going into great description of this avatar so that her identity is protected, she is described as part human and part reptile. This most creative creature engaged Miss Avatar in conversation and relayed that she often came to education islands to invite educators out to see the “fun” side of Second Life. Had Miss Avatar been more worldly and experienced, she would never have accepted the creature’s invitation, but she didn’t want to be impolite. So, Miss Avatar was teleported to lands unknown to witness things that cannot be said within these pages. Suffice it to say, the objects and acts shown to Miss Avatar by the creature were not very nice. She was given an education on the “seedy” side of Second Life. Was this a clear case of exploitation of Miss Avatar?

Little research can be found on exploitation of individuals in SL, and what does exist discusses how cyberterrorists exploited Linden dollars from a target’s avatar, and also hacked his/her PC. Researchers Charlie Miller of Independent Security Evaluators, and Dino Dai Zovi, turned their attention to Second Life during a Saturday morning presentation at ShmooCon, an East Coast computer hacking conference. The researchers didn’t exploit a flaw within Linden Labs’ Second Life, but within QuickTime. They showed how an attacker could make money stealing from innocent Second Life victims.

### **Scenario Two: Ethics, Values and Practices in Virtual Social Groups**

Early in Miss Avatar’s friendship with the snake-like creature, she thought it would be fun to change her avatar shape from a human female to a furry. A furry in SL is a creature that has fur (yes, it’s really that simple). So, Miss Avatar and the creature went shopping for a new avatar furry skin. Miss Avatar settled on a beautiful leopard skin...er...fur, and Miss Avatar and the creature set off in search of new adventures. It only took a short time for Miss Avatar to realize that transforming into a furry was not a good idea. Furies are very different than human forms in Second Life; they are very frisky and tricky creatures and attempt to engage other furies in “fun” activities alluded to in the first scenario. Since Miss Avatar’s beauty as a clearly female leopard attracted many male furies, she constantly had to fend off their unwanted advances. Had she only known about the furry’s ethics, values and practices within their social group, she would not have chosen the avatar of a leopard. Miss Avatar quickly set out to change her avatar back to a female human form.

Research on the ethics, values and practices in virtual social groups led to The GoodPlay Project. GoodPlay is an extensive research project led by Carrie James, Howard Gardner and others from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15-25 year olds in order to better understand the ethical implications of online activities as they relate to a community. Good play is defined as online conduct that is both meaningful and engaging to the participant and responsible to others in the community or society in which it is carried out (James & Gardner, et. al., 2008). The study outlined the promises and perils of virtual identity play that factors in a player’s real-life experiences with ethical behaviors and beliefs (James et al., 2008).

### **Scenario Three: Identity Issues**

As Miss Avatar put the life of a furry behind her, she was befriended by

Mr. Avatar who simply asked her to dance. They hit it off really well and went dancing, exploring and laughing together—every day for days on end. After awhile they began talking on Skype (a free Internet telephone service), but one day the relationship of these two new friends became strained. After one exceptionally difficult conversation, Mr. Avatar said he was leaving and simply logged off. Miss Avatar was mortified. What did she do to make Mr. Avatar angry? She was about to find out. When Miss Avatar was finally able to get Mr. Avatar to talk, he said she didn’t do anything to make him angry; the issue was that he knew he finally had to reveal his true identity to her and he was certain he would lose Miss Avatar as a friend if he did. Mr. Avatar told Miss Avatar he was hiding a real-life identity issue and that he used SL to escape the difficulties of that life. Would Miss Avatar gotten involved with Mr. Avatar if she had known his true identity? (FYI, they are still friends today.)

Research on identity issues in virtual environments was conducted by Dr. Alex Gordon who discovered that 80% of female avatars are actually men and 75% of male avatars are actually women. If this is true, he says, then many people are in virtual environments (such as SL) are there to experiment with their identity. He also said that 43% of the sample group stated they were in virtual worlds to help learn more about their true self (Urpeth, 2008).

### **Scenario Four: Vandalism and Harrassment**

Mr. and Miss Avatar continued their friendship in SL and one day other avatars visited the land where Mr. and Miss Avatar played. They were welcomed to the land, but the welcome quickly turned to hostility when the visitors became confrontational. Mr. Avatar confronted the pair, as Miss Avatar came down from a mountain to see who was visiting. As Miss Avatar approached the visitors, she saw a flash and presto! Miss Avatar’s knees were on top of her waist, her feet were on top of her knees, her shoes on top of her feet, and her head on top of her shoes! In

other words, a script had been thrown at Miss Avatar to distort her avatar. A script is an internal, event-driven, C/Java-style language which allows you to control object and avatar behavior, up to and including mini-games and other complex programs. Thus Miss Avatar learned the lesson of “griefers”—those who vandalize and harrass in SL. (For those concerned about the welfare of Miss Avatar, she merely had to log off and log on again to restore her avatar.)

Ethical issues regarding vandalism and harrassment in SL generally revolve around “griefers”—persons who derive enjoyment from being obstructive, diminishing the enjoyment of others, preventing the enjoyment of others, and wasting a person’s time.

Depending on the environment, there may be a wide variety of specific grieving behaviors (killing, stealing, blocking, distorting, and/or virtual spamming, throwing down a multitude of objects that may cause servers to crash). Griefers don’t enjoy SL the way most participants do. They enjoy it when they make someone else sad, unhappy, or frustrated—especially when it shows. To them, it’s easier to destroy than to create—and it requires comparatively little effort or talent (Nino, 2006).

### Scenario Five: Crime

After some time, Miss Avatar decided to set up shop in Second Life providing digital products that she created. Other avatars paid Linden Dollars for her virtual goods (clothing, textures, trinkets, etc.). One day she noticed that avatars were in possession of her goods yet she had received no compensation for them. Someone had used a Copybot to steal her digital coded goods (not to mention her trademarked logos and name brands) and was peddling them elsewhere (Reuters, 2007; Granick, 2006). Miss Avatar promptly filed a notification of possible copyright infringement according to the Digital Millennium Copyright Act following the guidelines found on: <http://secondlife.com/corporate/dmca.php> She then had to wait until real-world lawyers stepped in and adjudicated her case.

We turn away from the adventures of Miss Avatar to a real-life headline:

“Woman kills husband’s video game avatar in virtual murderous rage” (Siemaszko, 2008). The virtual murder of a digital persona in a computer game (Maple Story) landed a Japanese woman in a very real jail. The 43-year-old piano teacher told cops she was so infuriated when her online “husband” suddenly dumped her—she hacked into his site and killed his avatar.... “I was suddenly divorced, without a word of warning,” she told investigators.... “That made me so angry.” Luckily for the victim, who lived 620 miles away from the alleged “killer,” the woman had not plotted any revenge in the real world, the official said (Siemaszko, 2008, p. 1)

It transpired that the “husband” had given the woman his password to his MapleStory account and she went in and killed off his character. (MapleStory is a free-of-charge, 2D, side-scrolling massively multiplayer online role-playing game developed by the South Korean company Wizet.) “Now, the piano teacher has to face the music. She faces a max of five years in prison and a \$5,000 fine if she is convicted of committing an electronic execution” (Siemaszko, 2008). The official crime, if charged, is reported to be “illegally accessing a computer and manipulating electronic data.”

Other recent crimes related to Second Life have been reported. In August 2008, a woman was charged in Delaware with plotting the real-life abduction of a boyfriend she met through Second Life (Associated Press, 2008). In Toyko, police arrested a 16-year-old boy on charges of swindling virtual currency worth \$360,000 in an interactive role-playing game by manipulating another player’s portfolio using a stolen ID and password (Associated Press, 2008).

It is hoped that the scenarios above and the resources below will guide the reader into making ethical decisions about the use of SL for educational and other uses.

## Resources

### Blog

Your2ndPlace. Our Realities. Our Worlds.  
<http://www.your2ndplace.com/aggregator/sources/1>

### Introductory SL Presentations

3D virtual worlds in education  
<http://www.slideshare.net/iconolith/second-life-for-education>

Teaching and Learning in Virtual Worlds: NSCC and Second Life 2008 <http://www.slideshare.net/lmockford/nscc-and-second-life-2008-presentation>

An Introduction to Virtual Worlds: Second Life and Beyond. <http://www.slideshare.net/ialja/virtual-worlds-introduction-second-life-and-beyond>

Second Life 2008  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8L9QCFyID4>

Second Life Educational Groups  
<http://www.techlearning.com/secondlife/groups.php>

### Newsletters/Special Interest Groups

AECT in Second Life  
[www.aect.org/SecondLife](http://www.aect.org/SecondLife)

Virtual Worlds Connect  
<http://www.virtualworldsconnect.com/>  
This newsletter has forums on statistics, social networks for teachers and kids, SLM and web services in vQorlds, and Badumna network suite. It also has Second Life and Education in Virtual Worlds groups.

Virtual Worlds in the Classroom  
<http://www.virtualworldsconnect.com/group/kids/forum/topics/1131819:Topic:50087>

Kids Virtual Worlds  
<http://www.virtualworldsconnect.com/group/kids>

Education in Virtual Worlds  
<http://www.virtualworldsconnect.com/group/educationinvirtualworlds>

Facebook: Second Life for Educators  
<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2370947641>

### Conferences

Second Life Community Convention  
<http://www.slconvention.org>

Virtual Worlds: Libraries, Education and Museums Conference  
<http://www.alliancelibraries.info/virtual-worlds/>

Second Life Education Community Conference (SLEDcc)  
<http://sledcc.wikispaces.com/>  
K12 Online Conference 2008  
<http://k12onlineconference.org/>

SLACTIONS 2009  
 Research conference in the Second Life  
 world.  
<http://www.slactions.org/>

Virtual Worlds London  
<http://www.virtualworldslondon.com/>

**Research Groups**

Second Life Research  
<http://secondliferesearch.blogspot.com/2008/01/gartners-generation-virtual.html>

Srlr – Second Life Research Listserv  
<http://list.academ-x.com/listinfo.cgi/srlr-academ-x.com>

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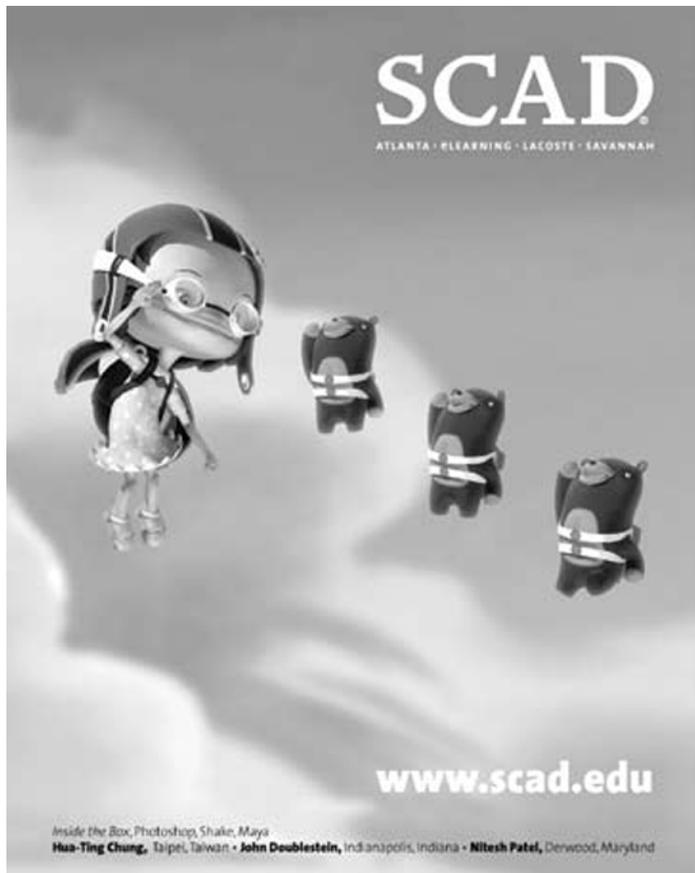
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