

Inclusiveness in a Virtual World

A faculty member worked with a team to build a virtual space in Second Life to showcase the adaptations that could meet the needs of people with disabilities. She had written a script with various characters that would interact in supportive and real-life ways. These characters were professionally designed in Second Life as avatars. She wanted to convey stories of their continuing interactions over episodic time. The technology could not provide full [machinima](#) captures, and the human-embodied avatar faces weren't realistically expressive. However, she could take screen shots of the avatars in the online spaces, and she could bring in amateur voice actors to play the roles. She wanted to have characters whom a range of people could relate to, in terms of race, age, ethnicity, culture, and other aspects.

An immersive and interactive space demonstrates accessibility in action. Note the placement of the heat adjustments on the stove — up-front, they will not require reaching to the back of the stovetop — and the lower-height countertop to accommodate wheelchairs.



Kitchen at the LiveAbility House on Morrill Island

Challenge: How could this professor address diversity in avatar representation in a sensitive and inclusive way?

What should she do?

- A. She might design the avatars visually and in dialogue and behavior to be strategically ambiguous in terms of backgrounds.
- B. She could make each of the characters clearly represent a different demographic niche.
- C. She could ignore this issue and go with “generic” avatars. She could just assume a diverse audience would relate to characters derived from the mainstream.
- D. She could just use the pre-made avatars without any changes but using a variety of diverse voices and accents for the actors.
- E. She can abandon the series idea and just use different avatar characters each time. This way, she could have diverse characters at a small cost, with a kind of narrative and character-based continuity.

Answer: A. In this case, the principal investigator chose to go with strategic ambiguity in the characters.

A variety of options were considered, and many others would have been possible, too. All projects balance competing interests and constraints. All options except C are reasonably appropriate.

In further developing the concepts introduced in this virtual world, a series of videos were created showcasing problems faced by caregivers and healthy solutions to them.



[Focus on Healthy Caregiving](#)

[Chapter 1: Laying the Foundation](#)

[Chapter 2: Understanding Options](#)

[Chapter 3: Moving Forward](#)