

Interview With Eternity

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Interview with Eternity is a virtual reality experience that allows the player to assume the identity of a soul before birth. The experience uses different aspects of avatar embodiment than the conventional methods. On one hand, the player's perception of self is shaped by this avatar, forcing them to confront the reality of immortality and the existential dilemmas that come with it. On the other hand, the player must think of mortality and death that life brings and what it means to experience life. By embodying this avatar, the player experiences the emotional and psychological effects of choosing whether or not to be born mortal or immortal.

What does it mean to embody a virtual avatar and the psychological effects it can have on the brain? To embody a virtual avatar is to experience life through the lens of a virtual body or character within a digital environment. Although there is a barrier between the physical and virtual world, bridging the two together using technology such as virtual reality as a medium can take to these virtual environments and allow us to experience what the new world has to offer. While embodying a virtual avatar, the user can have a sense of agency, ownership, altered self-perception, as well as identity shifts when they are immersed into their new body. A key aspect of this is the user's perception.

In Interview with Eternity, avatar embodiment goes beyond mere visual representation. From the concepts of immersive media psychology, we can see that the more a user identifies with their avatar, the deeper the psychological connection to the virtual world. I aimed to create an experience that doesn't focus on the experience itself but rather have the user create their own experience from their own perspective on life by calling forth memories personal to each user. The player is locked into the immortal avatar's perspective, with no physical interactions available; only the act of gazing around the eternal void. This design choice heightens the sense of embodiment by reducing the user's agency, aligning their physical limitations with the weight carried by the virtual avatar counterpart. Unable to change the course of time or interact with the world, enhances the sense of helplessness and isolation, key emotional states explored through this virtual experience.

For this project, I drew on concepts from the reading Infinite Reality by Blascovich and Bailenson and Exploring the Relationship Between Attribute Discrepancy and Avatar Embodiment in Immersive Social Virtual Reality by DeVaux et al. In Infinite Reality, I really like the concept of reality being the way we understand perception determined by our psyche while virtual reality being a concept of the mind itself rather than virtual places we interface

with. I want the user to experience Interview with Eternity as a concept of the mind perceived through this experience.

The research article Exploring the Relationship Between Attribute Discrepancy and Avatar Embodiment in Immersive Social Virtual Reality by DeVaux et al explores how embodiment influences the relationship between a user's physical perception of self in reality and the perception of the appearance of their virtual avatar in the in virtual reality. Using social platforms in virtual reality such as Rec-Room and VR Chat, they were able to identify the discrepancy between avatar self and physical self by using data on the user's physical appearance and comparing it to their virtual counterpart's appearance to determine whether or not user's would create realistic, ideal, or different avatars. I found it very interesting that the results of the paper stating the differences between Asian and White participants and the correlation between one race choosing to look different while the other chooses to look similar to their physical appearance. I wanted to know what effect this would have on a user when they have no defined appearance to choose from. In this experience, I don't want to give the player any appearance at all and let them define themselves. One one I wanted to achieve this was by using mirrors in the experience that don't show a reflection to convey to the user that they themselves, both physical and virtual, are a blank canvas waiting to be painted. In a way, the user can view their physical self and virtual self as one.

My inspiration for this project came from my own issues with mortality and how I view the world around me. As a child, I grew up in a Christian household and was told where my faith should lie. As I grew older I realized I wanted to discover faith for myself and seek my own peace with my religion and the concept of life after death. In doing so, there were many times where I would break down and have anxiety attacks when thinking deeply on the concept of "what if there is nothing" after life. Until this day it still scares me to think deeply on this but I find that talking to others and sharing how I feel on the matter makes me feel better. As humans, in any context, whether having a good time with friends and family, watching your favorite TV series or movie, or playing games and socializing with others, a common phrase we always encounter is "why does it always have to end?" I wanted this project to be on the lines of "where does it all begin?" By this, I'm referring to where is the soul born and how does it find its way here? Does it make decisions and do those decisions influence who you are born into the world as? I wanted Interview with Eternity to feed into these questions so that the user thinks deeply on the meaning of life and death. I also wanted to address the previous question of "why does it have to end?" by allowing the user to be able to choose between mortality and immortality, answering and debating questions that allows them to ponder the meaning of life, death, life after death, and the loneliness of immortality.