



Your Avatar, Your Guide

**Seeing a digital
doppelgänger
can change your
mind—for better
or worse**

By Samantha Murphy

Your favorite coffee shop is crowded with harried people, and you are standing shoulder to shoulder in a slow-moving line. Each jostling shift of the crowd aggravates your severe social anxiety. You start gasping for air; your heart quickens and you want to run.

But you force yourself to stay. You manage that feat only because you are not actually there. You are living this experience through your avatar, an animation that represents you in a virtual environment. In reality, you have never made it to the counter during the morning rush; instead you bolt out the door in a sweat. But you can get there on a computer. The experience of watching your digital look-alike uneventfully reach the front of the simulated line and order a pretend drink

VERONIKA SUROVITSEVA / iStockphoto

