Virtual Worlds and Avatars

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Presenting Identity in a Virtual World through Avatar Appearance

Carman Neustaedter and Elena Fedorovskaya

Body and Mind: A Study of Avatar Personalization in Three Virtual Worlds

Nicolas Ducheneaut, Ming-Hui “Don” Wen, Nicholas Yee, Greg Wadley

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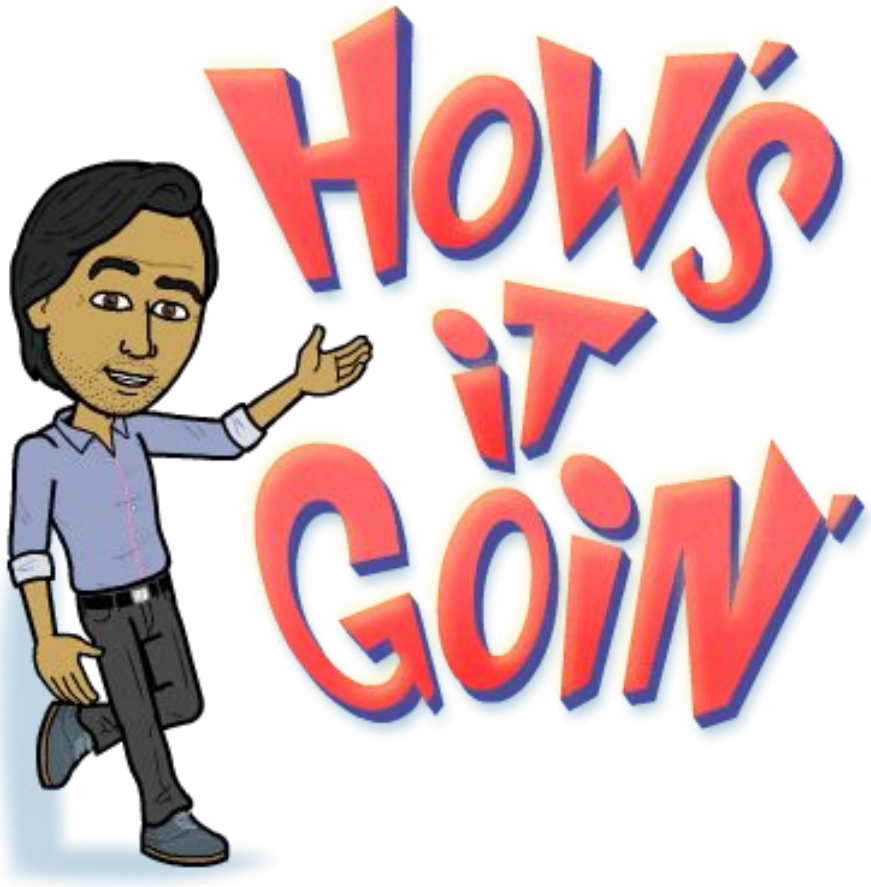


Realistic Self

- Want their virtual identity and real life identity to be the same
- Aim for continuity within the two worlds

Idealized Self

- Create an avatar that overcomes perceived inadequacies
- The avatar will reflect their real life appearance with few changes

Fantasy Self

- Avatar's appearance is much different than real life appearance
- Very few alterations
- Continuous identity

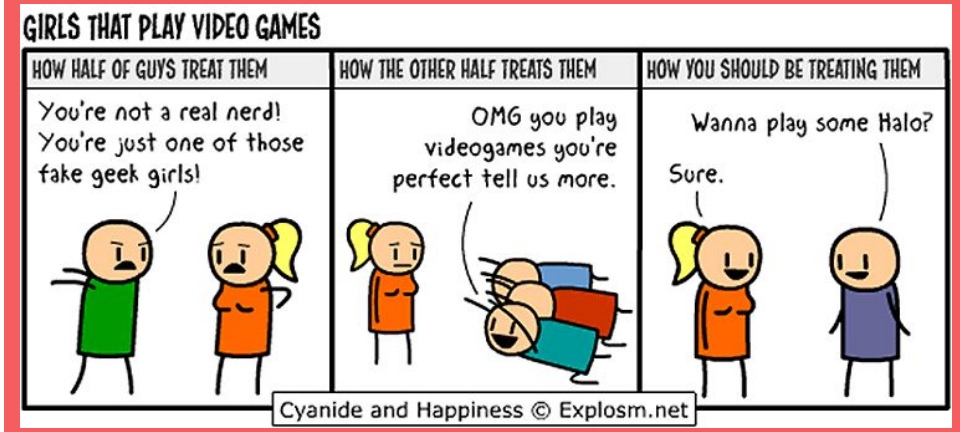
Roleplayer

- Have many avatars/identities
- Change identities for every new situation
- Each avatar may fulfill an identity need

The Social Aspects

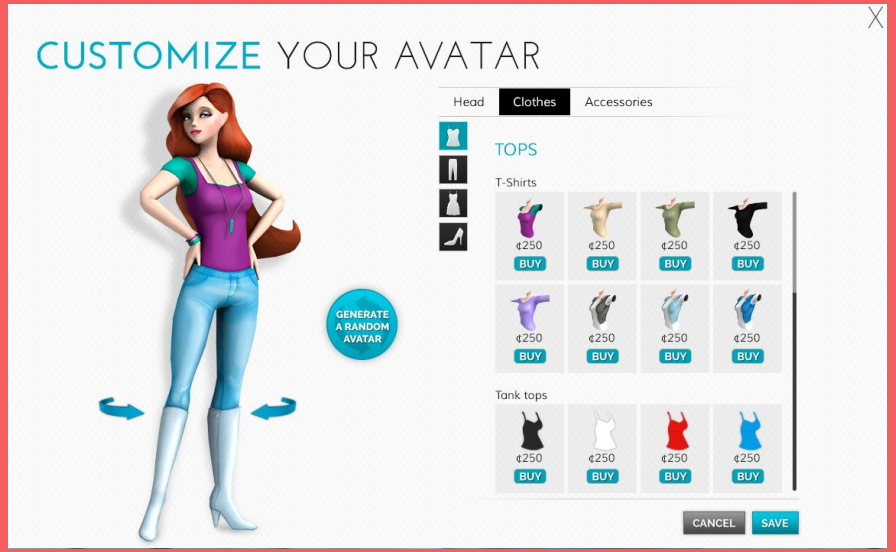
Your avatar determines your experience

The Issues with Avatars



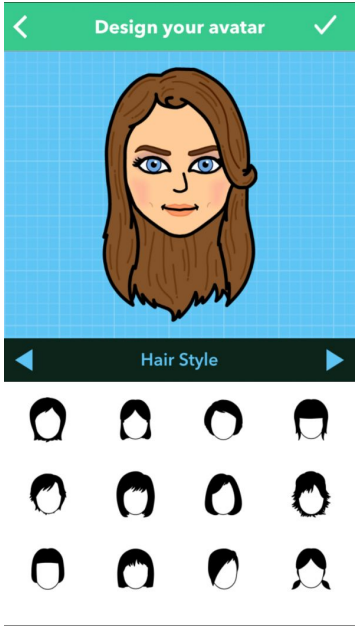
- The Default Character
- Body Proportions
- Gender Affects Experience
- Gender Options in General

Avatar Personalization



Common Avatar Traits

- Hair colour
- Hairstyle
- Eye colour
- Height
- Body type
- Gender
- Age
- Skin colour



The Study

- Second Life
- Maplestory
- World of Warcraft

How do virtual avatars compare to the user's offline appearance?

38% of players gender-swap

Older players generally create younger avatars

32% reproduce their own physical characteristics

Identity Exploration

Idealized Self

- Idealized versions of the self
- Features one wishes to have in reality

Standing Out

- Avatar stands out as much as possible
- Unconventional look
- As different from the player as possible

Following a Trend

- Avatar looks like a celebrity or particular person
- Avatar reflects a popular trend

Hair in the Virtual World

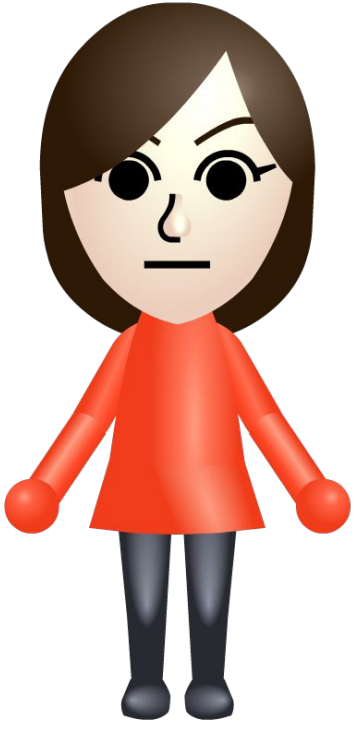
- Malleable identity marker (hair length, colour, style)
- Visibility from third-person perspective
- Central to character’s identity
- Easily recognizable

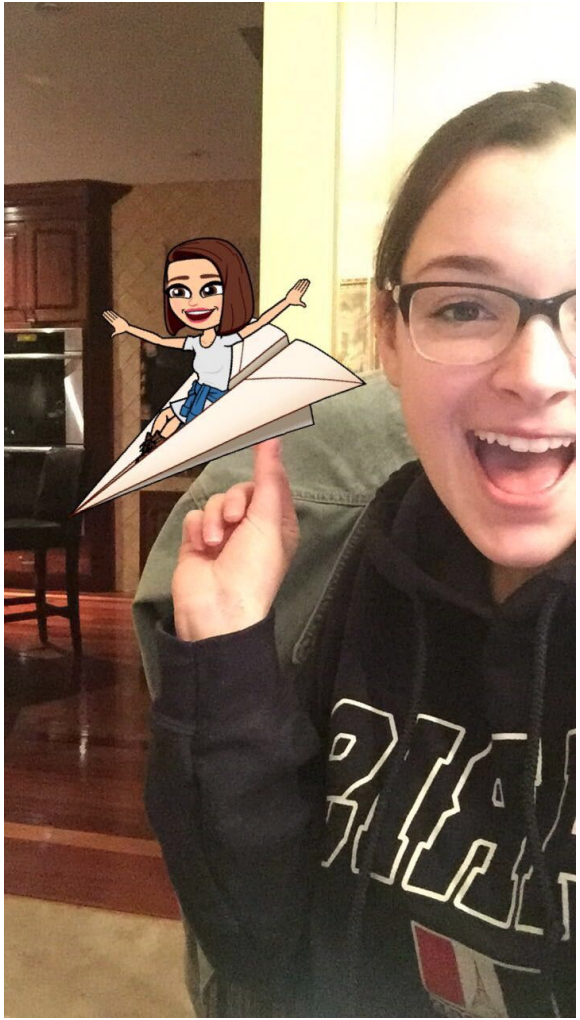
Study Conclusions

- Avatars reinvent the body online
- Virtual worlds allow players to create idealized characters, alternate selves
- Personality characteristics are most appreciated when similar to the player
- Characters created using Western ideals
- Stereotyped vision of the human body

Virtual Worlds and Avatars in everyday life

Virtual Worlds for Children





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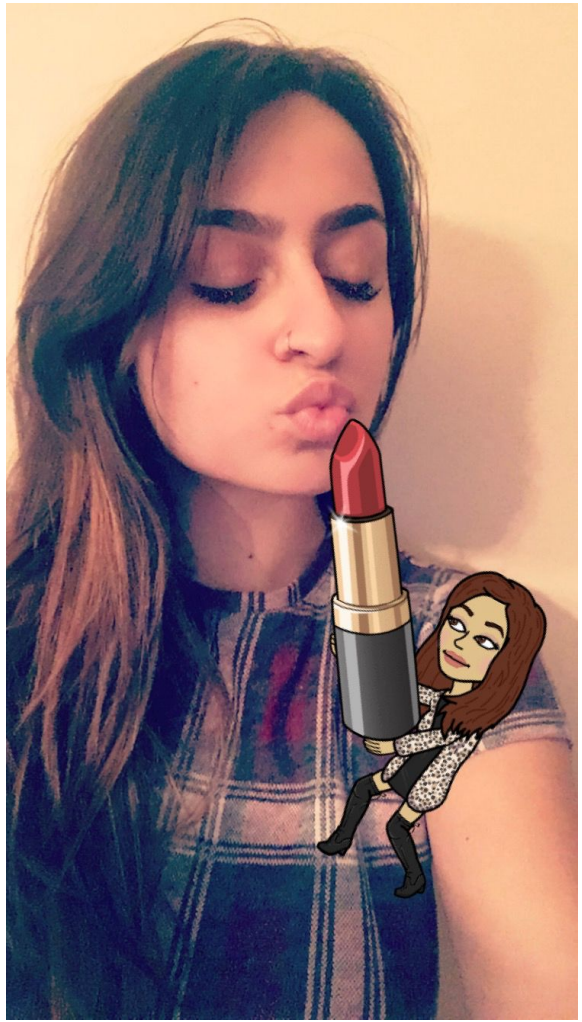
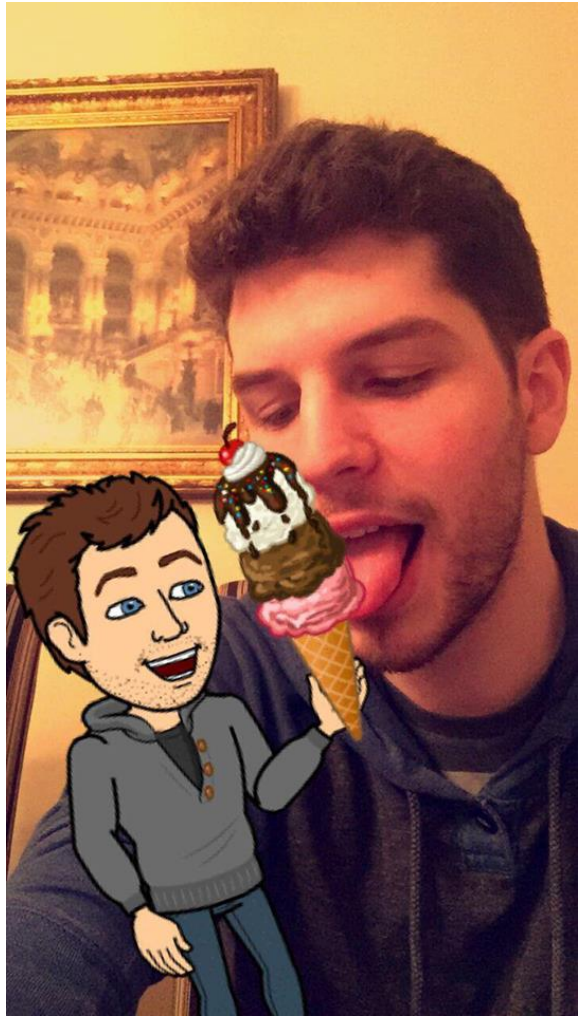
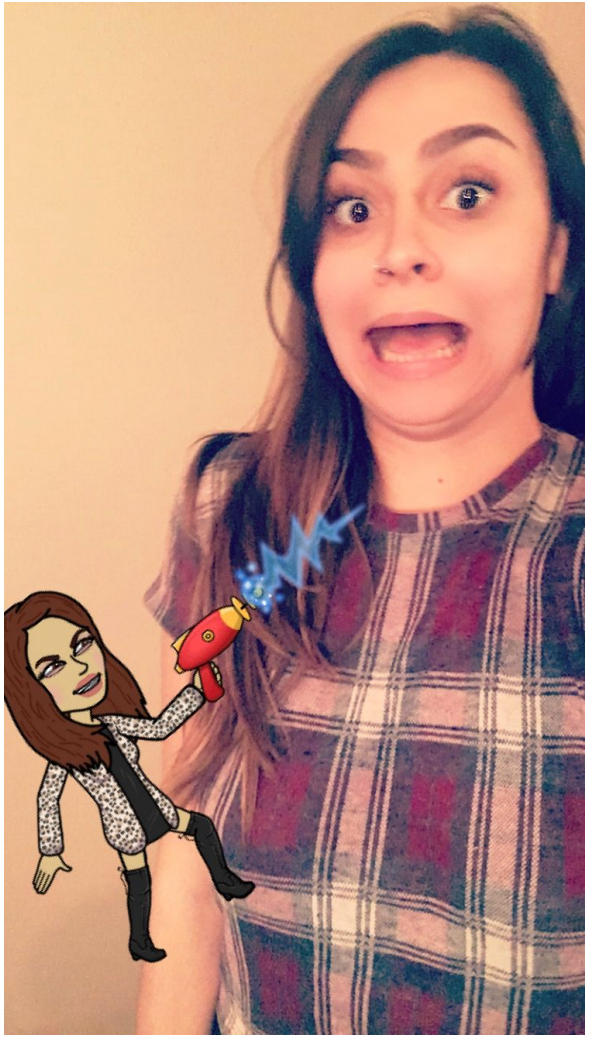
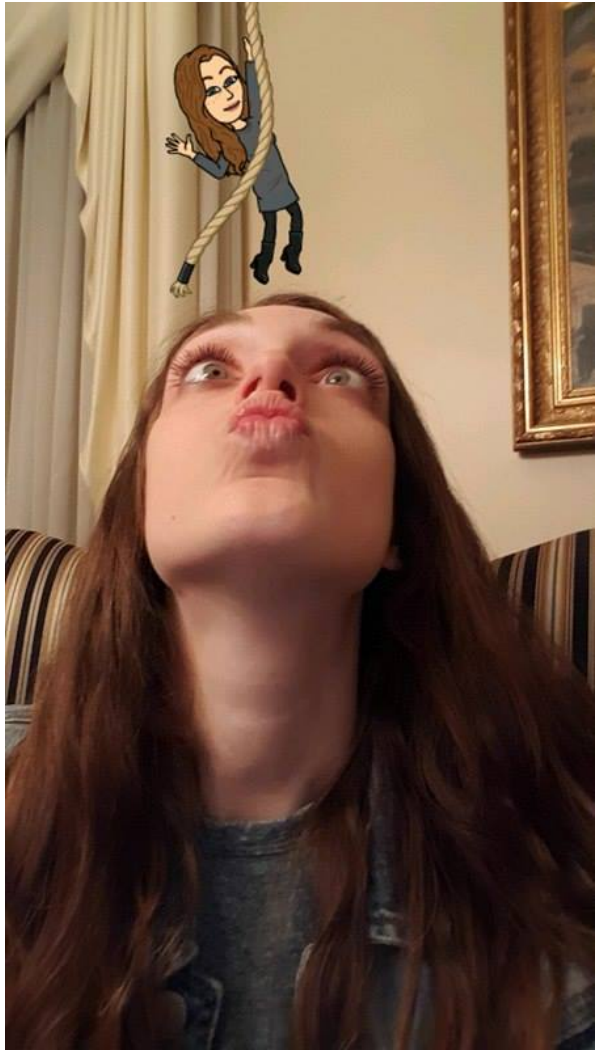
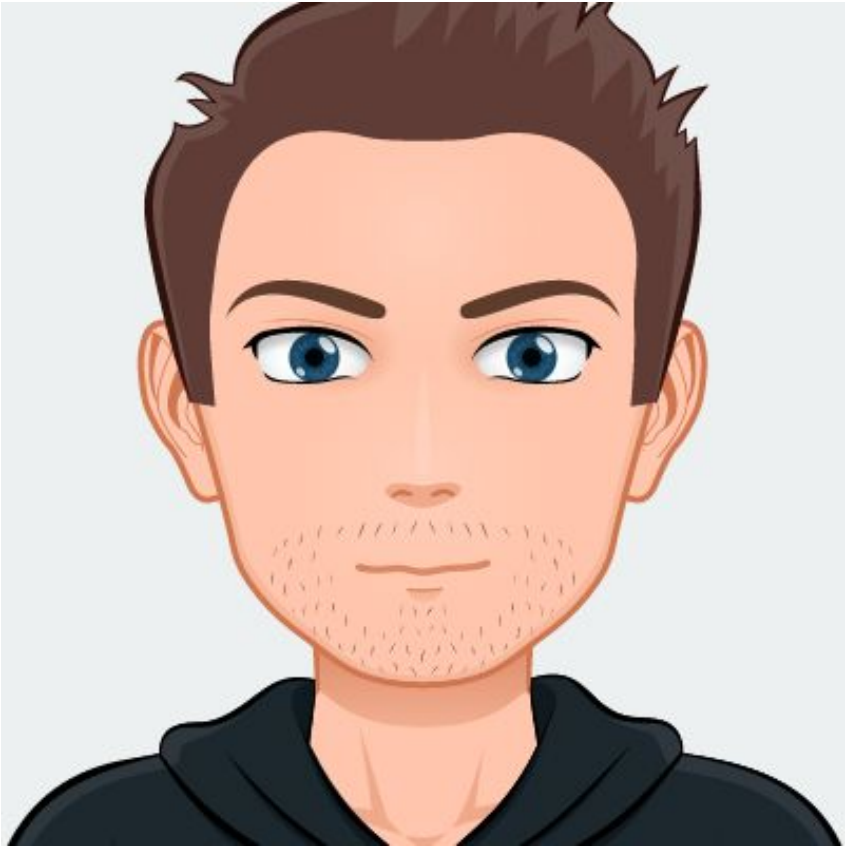
LOVE
YOU











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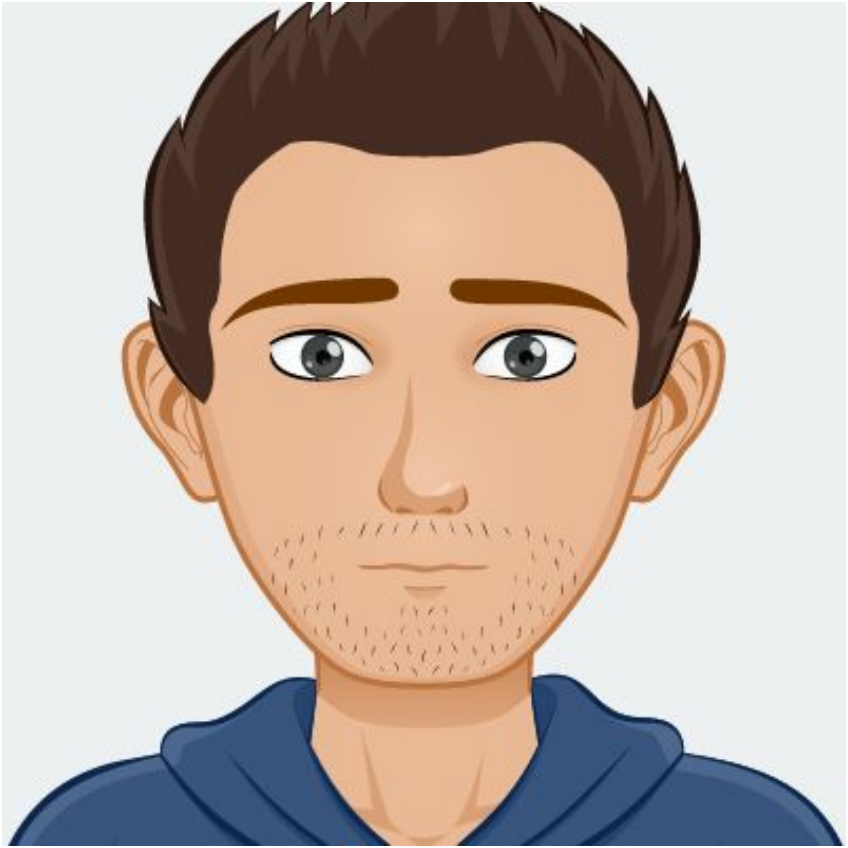
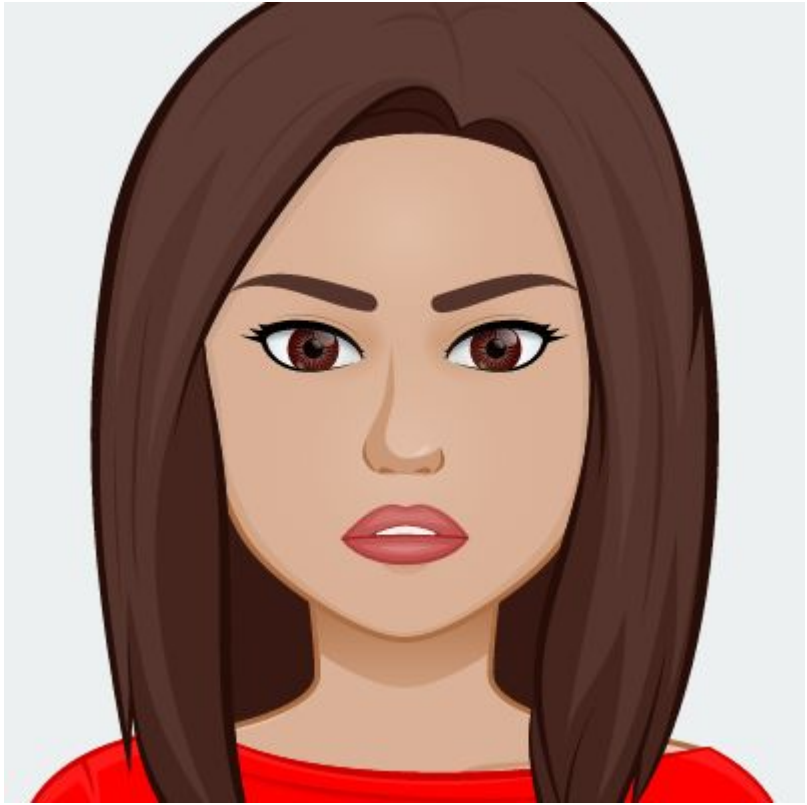


DENISE’S REPRESENTATION



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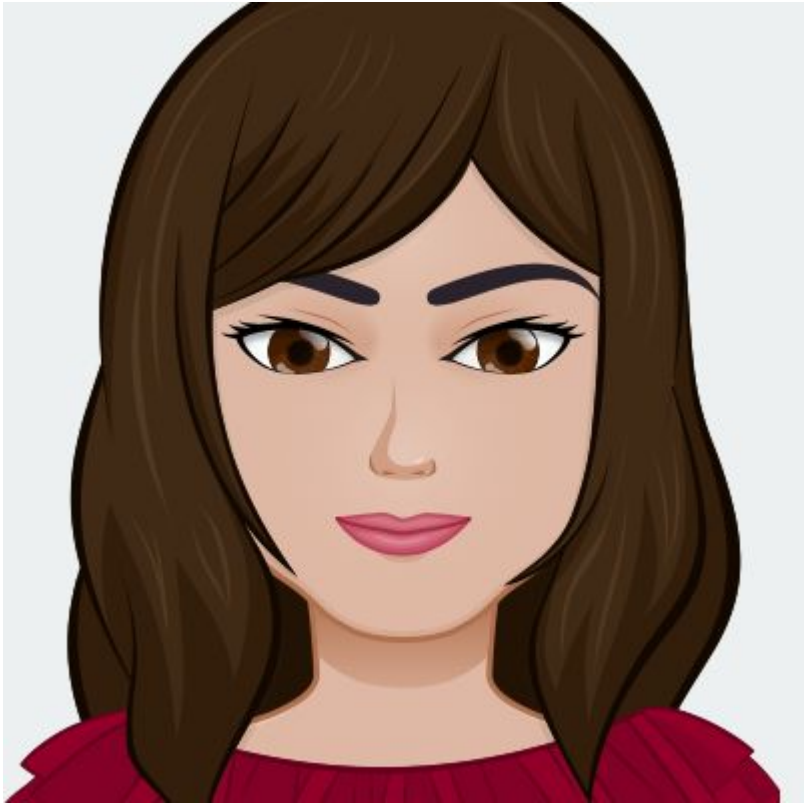
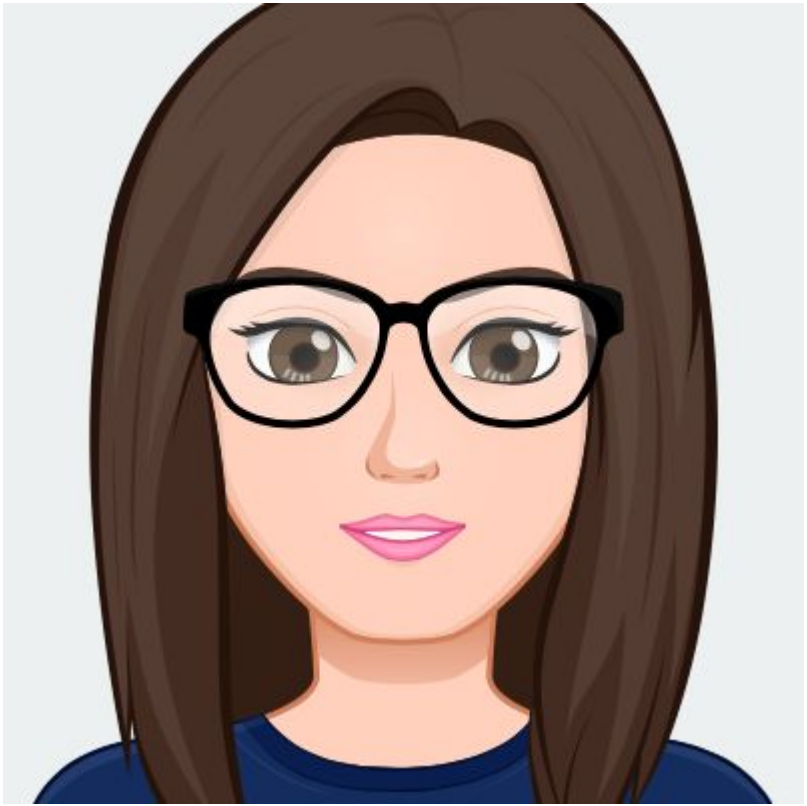


SAM’S REPRESENTATION



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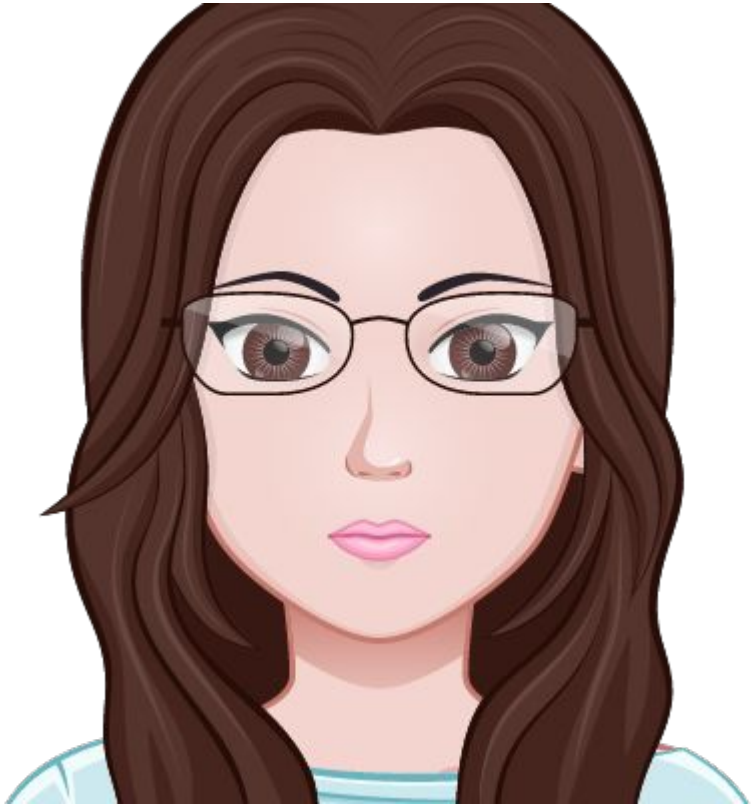
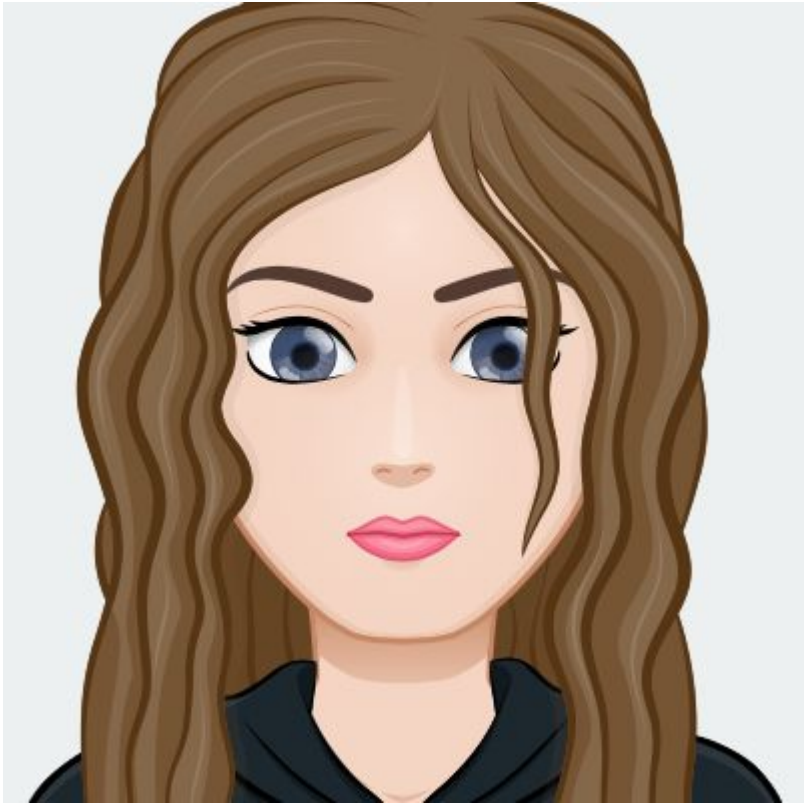


ANDREW’S REPRESENTATION



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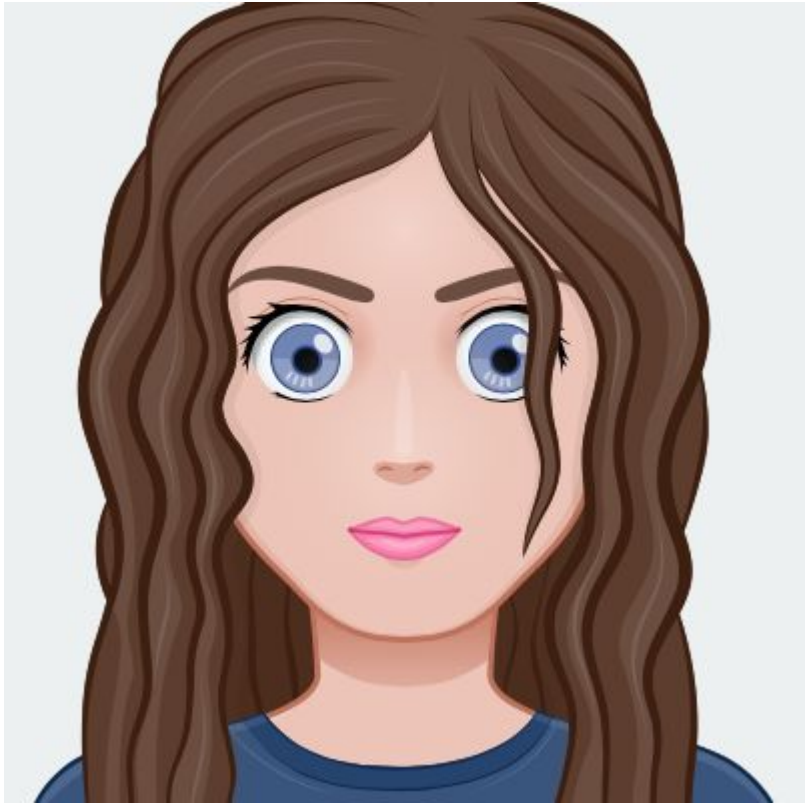

HELENA’S REPRESENTATION

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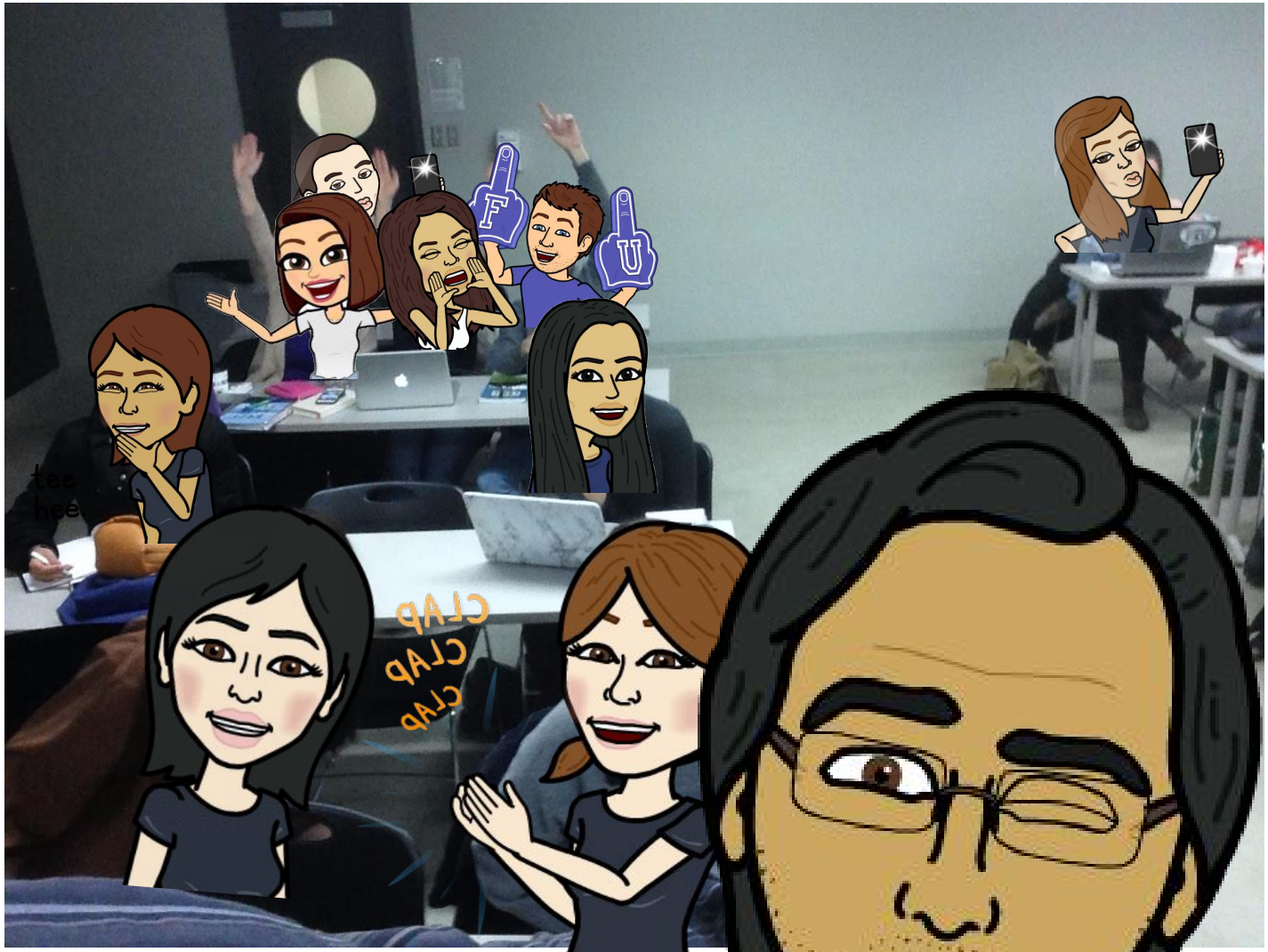
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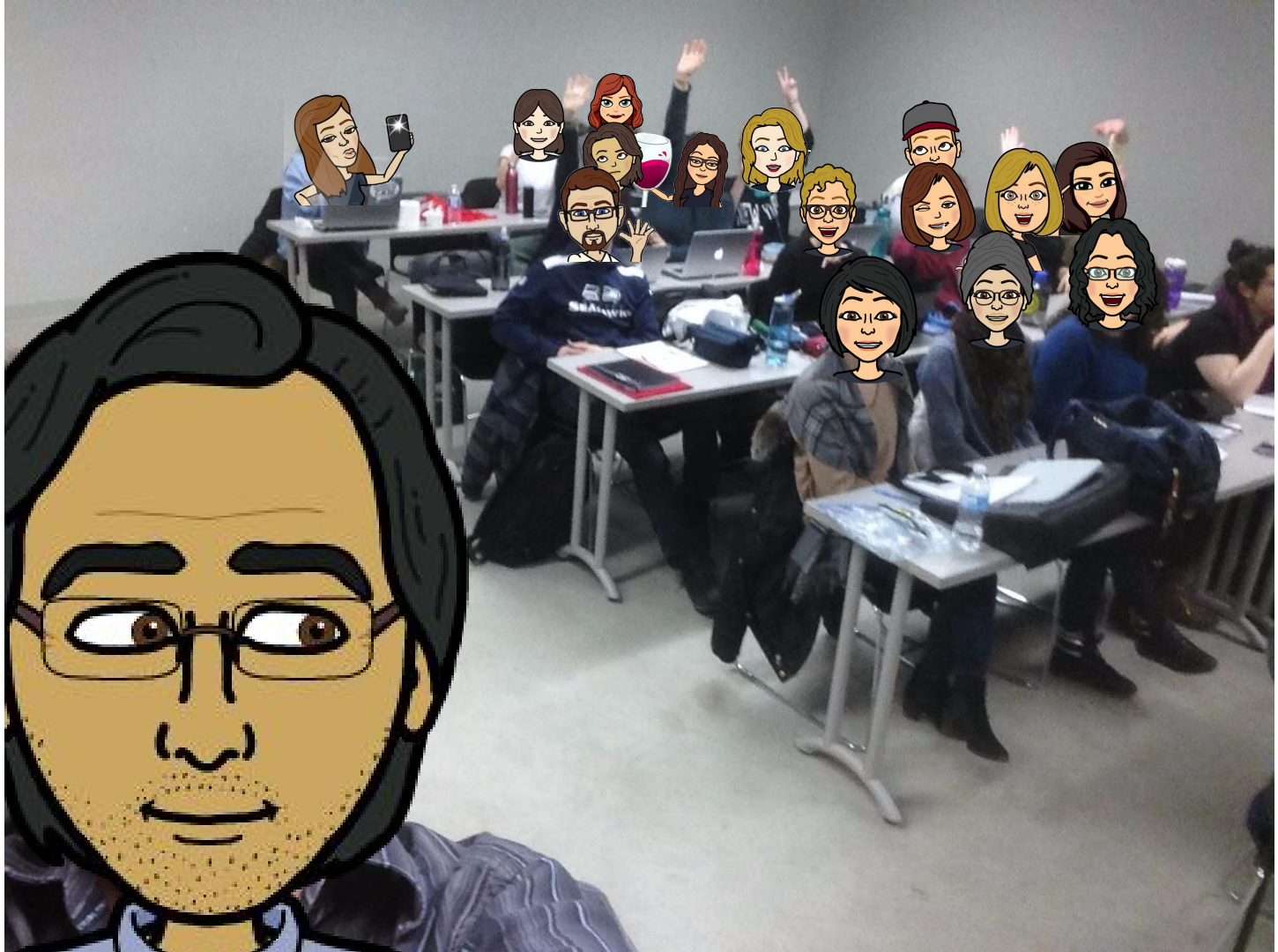
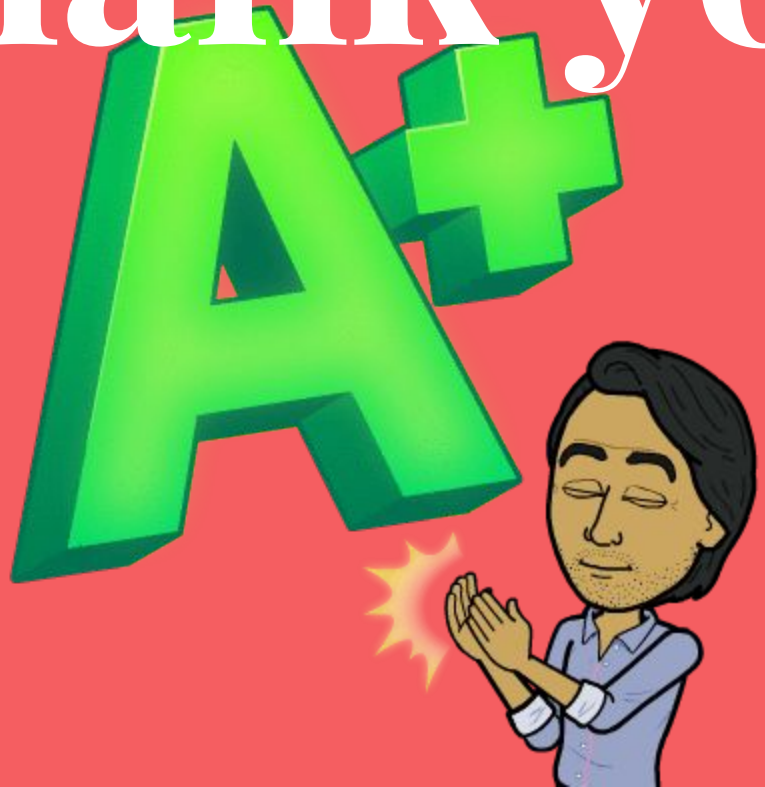


Questions

- In terms of gaming such as Wii Sports, for instance, what is the purpose of having a mii? (By holding the remote as a tennis racket, one's already in a first person situation- no character needed.)
- What can explain the niche for avatars in kid games, specifically?
- With the increasing popularity of VR and AR goggles, should we be concerned with the blending of real and artificial?
- According to research, most creators construct avatars who are idealized versions of themselves. Are there ideological differences between the avatars we create (in games) and our social media profiles; "virtual" life we portray online.

Thank you!