Avatars for Empowerment: The real potential of virtual selves

Did you know that avatars offer a secret weapon that can be used to help reduce real world social inequities? This talk addresses this question, examining recent theory and research on the psychological experience and effects of avatar use. Building on a broad definition of avatars as mediated self-representations, I will explain how avatar attributes influence users (e.g., the Proteus effect). I will discuss my experimental research on the psychological factors that moderate such avatar effects, as well as my research that applies these principles to meaningful outcomes, emphasizing the potential for avatars to counteract the harmful effects of stereotypes and empower all users in education contexts, especially STEM fields. Finally, I will describe my most recent theoretical directions with this work, building from Social Cognitive Theory to offer a framework for future research on how to maximize the empowering effects of avatars.

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This event is free and open to the public.