Who is Portrayed in Second Life: Dr. Jekyll or Mr. Hyde? The Extent of Congruence Between Real Life and Virtual Identity

Bernadett Koles, Peter Nagy

Abstract

Virtual social environments opened the door to individual experiences that may not be feasible or possible in real physical settings; in turn bringing to question the applicability of certain more traditional theories to digital environments. Addressing some of this gap in the available literature, in the current study, we compare virtual and real life identities simultaneously, as well as explore the impact of self-consciousness on virtual identity. Our results indicate that while some of the overall trends are similar between identities constructed in the physical world and those constructed in virtual settings, different identity elements and dimensions tend to be emphasized to different degrees. Furthermore, we find evidence for the role of private in addition to public self-consciousness as influencing virtual existence.

In other words, in addition to the general emphasis concerning the role of socially influenced external elements in the formulation of virtual identities, the current study highlights the importance of more internalized and individual level attitudes and perceptions, including one's inner thoughts, emotions, and perspectives. Implications and future directions are discussed.

Keywords

Virtual Identity; Real Life Identity; Virtual Social Worlds, Self-consciousness; Second Life

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