Exploration of virtual body-representation in adolescence: the role of age and sex in avatar customization

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## Authors

Villani D.;Gatti E.;Triberti S.;Confalonieri E.;Riva G.

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* Internet usage, practices and engagement
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## Sample

63 adolescents aged 11-19

## Implications For Educators About

# Abstract

The malleable nature of the self led researchers to investigate the meaning of virtual identity by exploring virtual self-representation through avatars and its association with users’ identity. The present study aims to investigate the changes in virtual body-representation in adolescence related to age levels and sex and the association with adolescents’ self-esteem and body esteem. Anthropometric features, body esteem and self-esteem were used to assess adolescents’ body image and identity. The scoring code of the “Drawing Me” graphical test was used to evaluate the avatars. The sample is composed of 63 adolescents of different ages—early, middle and late adolescence—balanced by sex. Results show that the creation of a digital avatar changes with age and is partially associated with adolescents’ perceptions in terms of body esteem and self-esteem. Moreover, the creation of avatars occurs differently for boys, who enrich their avatars with many sexual features, than for girls, who prefer to detail their avatars’ clothing to enrich them. Critical reflections and implications for psychological interventions that may use avatars to investigate adolescents’ identity in integration with other tools will be discussed.

# Outcome

"Results show that the creation of a digital avatar changes with age and is partially associated with adolescents’ perceptions in terms of body esteem and self-esteem. Moreover, the creation of avatars occurs differently for boys, who enrich their avatars with many sexual features, than for girls, who prefer to detail their avatars’ clothing to enrich them." (Villani et al., 2016, p.1)