Social Utilitarianism & Virtual Performativity
An investigation of real vs. idealized identity
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Introduction: This study focuses on the utilitarian strategy of identity negotiation. In analyses of interaction patterns in emails and texts messages, we found that emojis are used more frequently by women than men. Moreover, minorities are significantly more likely to use emojis with a skin tone lighter than their own. In addition, we found that women report using significantly more exclamation points than men, and men are more likely to report not using exclamation points that much in general. When making avatars for online videogames (MMORPGs), minority women who were self-conscious about their skin tone indicated creating avatars with skin tones much lighter than their own. In analyses of the utilization of skin lightening filters for social media posts, we found that skin lightening filters are used more frequently by women than by men. In addition, people dating interracially were far more likely to use skin lightening filters than those in monoracial relationships. Women and interracial daters may be making themselves appear whiter via lightning filters in hopes that it will maximize the socially utilitarian payoff of their virtual self-brand. In short, they feel that making their skin look lighter will increase their social capital (LIKES, views, etc). Only subjects with the lightest skin gradient indicated using emojis/filters to try and appear darker. Finally, we found a descriptive pattern indicating that straight women and bisexual women dating men use more filters than bisexual women dating women and lesbians.