

The impact of gender on identity construction in interactions

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Abstract

Identity occurs in the context of social day-to-day interactions. The identity of one individual is established within different contexts for a specific audience, with a particular purpose.

There is a lack of research investigating the context-dependence of identity construction in the context of gender, although current literature signals that the way people talk with others is different based on the gender of their conversation partners. Thus, the aim of this paper is to investigate potential differences in the way that individuals construct identity claims based on their partner's gender. This was achieved by following the speed dating conversation one bisexual man had with four women and seven men. Patterns of identity construction were extracted and an analysis of function was carried out. The findings illustrate that although identity can be stable and formulaic in construction across gender contexts, it can also be used as a tool and differ in function and construction depending on the partner gender. Further research is needed on identity construction across different contexts.

Keywords: identity content, identity construction, interactions, context, gender

The impact of gender on identity construction in interactions

Identity can be viewed as an individual's sense of continuity and sameness that a person feels and that can be recognized by others (Johnson et al., 2022). Identity content refers to any issues that relate to who a person thinks they are (Hihara et al., 2021; McLean et al., 2016), such as relationships, interests and character traits (Johnson et al., 2022). Since identity emerges in the process of everyday interactions with social others (Lichtwarck-Aschoff et al., 2008), in the context of interactions identity content is defined as claims about the self. Although the identity of one individual is established within different contexts for a specific audience (Gmelin & Kunnen, 2021) and gender is an important factor that affects communication (van Den Brink-Muinen et al., 2002), there is a lack of research on the gender context and its influence on identity construction in interactions. This paper aimed to investigate potential differences in the way that individuals construct identity claims based on their partner's gender.

Identity content

Identity is a complex construct and thus difficult to define (Lichtwarck-Aschoff et al., 2008). Based on Erikson's (1968, p. 50) conceptualization of identity, Johnson et al. (2022) proposed that identity can be viewed as an individual's sense of continuity and sameness that a person feels and that can be recognized by others. In line with this conceptualization, the content of an individual's identity consists of the same elements that are the basis for their sense of sameness and continuity (Johnson et al., 2022). Topics such as relationships, group memberships, social roles, character traits, and interests can be described as identity content (Johnson et al., 2022) since individuals consider these issues to be related to who they are (Hihara et al., 2021; McLean et al., 2016). These identity content elements make up one's identity (Galliher et al., 2017). Within the field of psychology concerned with identity development, research has focused on identity processes, such as identity exploration, while

neglecting the content of identity, the “what” of identity (McLean et al., 2016; Syed & McLean, 2015, pp. 568–570).

Identity content can be better understood if viewed in the context in which it occurs, and Galliher et al. (2017) proposed a four-level framework, through which identity content in context can be analyzed. The framework outlined by Galliher et al. (2017) stated that identity content is formed as a product of the interaction between four elements, namely culture, social roles, everyday experiences, and domains, which represent different life spaces central to an individual's life. Culture comprises factors related to history, politics, and societal structures. The social roles level encompasses the relational contexts in which individuals develop their identities by interacting with others. Domains represent the different categories in which one's identity can be established. Lastly, everyday experiences provide the actions and thoughts that provide the context for one's sense of self. Individuals have experiences that influence their identity in the context of everyday interactions and the incorporation of those experiences leads to a coherent sense of self (Postmes et al., 2006).

Interactions and context

Erikson (1968) proposed that identity is expanded upon in interactions within social contexts. Identity itself was defined by Breakwell (1986, p. 43) as “a product of social interaction”. In line with that definition, identity can be regarded as being socially constructed (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004), as interaction partners are active contributors to the identity development of an individual (Schachter & Ventura, 2008). Echoing those definitions and conceptualizations, identity is broadly considered to be constructed and established in everyday interactions with others (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Korobov & Bamberg, 2004; Lichtwarck-Aschoff et al., 2008). Literature on the relationship between identity and interactions is diverse since, in order to better understand identity, it is worthwhile to study it at the level of interactions. Some studies have aimed to understand how individuals make

identity claims in everyday interactions (Schachter, 2015), while there is literature that has investigated the influence interaction partners might have on identity, such as positioning (Anderson, 2009) or scaffolding (McLean & Jennings, 2012), although no current studies have been conducted on the influence the gender of interaction partners might have on identity construction.

As stated above, identity is expressed and constructed in the context of everyday social interactions with others (Breakwell, 1986; Lichtwarck-Aschoff et al., 2008). Schachter (2015, p. 230) defined identity as “not who a person is but a claim about who a person is”, thus in the context of interactions identity content is defined as claims about the self. In this context, identity takes on a descriptor function, as identity is “the description of who one is” (Syed & McLean, 2015, p. 570). Identity claims can be either explicit or implicit (Schachter, 2015 p.232). An explicit identity claim occurs when the speaker aligns or misaligns themselves with a relevant identity category, such as “gay man”, “Dutch” or “Christian”. Identity claims that refer to attributes, such as “curious”, “intelligent” and “funny” are considered implicit (Gmelin & Kunnen, 2021). If an identity claim is repeated across multiple interactions, it is solidified with every invocation and could be considered a stable identity claim of the individual (Schachter, 2015, p. 240).

Context and Gender

The identity of one individual is established within different contexts for a specific audience, with a particular purpose (Gmelin & Kunnen, 2021). Which identity content is salient to be expressed in a specific context is negotiated in the interaction between individual and context (Bosma, 1995), thus identity can be considered context-dependent. Social identity as outlined by Galliher et al. (2017) is developed in the context of different relationship roles, such as a parent, sibling or spouse. Thus in every relationship role context, different aspects of the individual's identity are developed and ultimately expressed. As identity can be a tool of

self-presentation (Baumeister et al., 1989), differing contexts would affect self-presentations differently. As was found by Tice et al. (1995), individuals use different self-presentations based on different audiences, such as self-enhancing in interacting with strangers but being more modest in their identity construction with friends. In addition to the change in effects caused by different social roles of interaction partners, the gender context might have a differentiating effect on identity construction as well.

Gender differences in conversations

Multiple elements of conversation exhibit differences in regards to gender, yet there is no literature investigating if such differences are relevant for identity construction available at this time, although there has been research conducted on gender differences in conversation. The way people talk with others has been shown to be different based on the gender of our conversation partners (Mulac, 1989), as gender is an important factor that affects communication (Van Den Brink-Muinen et al., 2002). Studies on conversation analysis between same-sex versus mixed-gender conversations (Mulac, 1989), reveal that men talked more than women in mixed-gender dyads, as well as more than men and women in same-gender dyads. Men also talked in longer utterances than women, without regard to the gender of their conversation partner. (Mulac, 1989). Along the same lines, men were shown to be more verbally competitive than women when interacting with them, while women exhibited a cooperative conversational style while engaging with men (Grainger & Dunbar, 2009). While self-disclosing, men were more likely to utilize more distancing responses such as negative comments and were less likely than women to make self-disclosure statements (Leaper, 2019).

Current study

This paper aims to investigate potential differences in the way that individuals construct identity claims based on their partner's gender. There is a gap in identity literature

regarding differences as an effect of the context. By exploring identity construction at the level of conversations in different gender contexts, knowledge of the identity field can be improved and a deeper understanding of how people differ in the way they interact with each other can be achieved. Using a qualitative approach, conversations from a series of speed dating events were collected, and the interactions of one bisexual male were analyzed. By following the way the participant constructed his identity while interacting with female participants as well as with male participants, specific construction patterns, as well as analysis of function, could be analyzed. The speed dating setting involving two different gender contexts enables the analysis of identity construction, as identity claims should be studied throughout multiple interactions (Gmelin & Kunnen, 2021).

Methods

Participants

A total of 9 speed dating events were conducted, including a total number of 75 participants. Participants were recruited by means of posters, flyers and social media posts on Facebook, advertising hetero- and homosexual speed-dating event as part of a research project. For the purpose of this study, only events 3 and 4 were selected for successive analysis, resulting in a sample of 12 total participants, out of which 4 were female participants and 8 were male participants. Event 3 was arranged for opposite-sex attracted couples while event 4 was organized for same-sex attracted couples. The age of participants varied between 22-33 years, with a mean age of 27 in event 3 (23-33) and a mean age of 25 in event 4 (23-30). Conversations were held in English, which was spoken as a second language by all but one native English-speaking participant.

Materials and Procedure

The speed dating event took place in the cafeteria of a University building in the Netherlands. Prior to the speed-dating events, demographic and contact information of all participants were gathered. Before the start of the conversations, participants were equipped with a headset, a recording device, and a nametag. The procedure of the speed dating event was elucidated and participants were asked for their consent. No detailed information about the objective of the study was provided at this stage.

During the various rounds, a group of men remained at their specific table, whereas the other participants rotated from table to table after each conversation. The tables were set up in a way to provide participants with more privacy and anonymity as well as enable the conversation to be as uninterrupted as possible. This was achieved by firstly separating the tables with sufficient space from each other and secondly, installing partitioning walls in the

area around the event. Each conversation was six minutes long, and the researchers indicated the beginning and the end of each round. All communication preceding and following those six minutes was recorded as well. Upon the end of each round, subjects answered a scorecard revealing if they were interested in seeing the conversation partner again. This scorecard was sealed away and later opened by the organizers. In case of both participants having stated to be interested in the other, a notification of a “match” was sent out the following day. After completion of the speed-dating participants were debriefed

Coding and Analysis

The current study used a qualitative approach. For the analysis of the conversations, the *Iterative Micro-Identity Content Analysis* (IMICA; Gmelin & Kunnen, 2021) methodology was used. After the initial familiarization with the data through repeated reading of the conversational transcripts (step 1), the analysis focused on the identification of identity claims (step 2). These claims consisted of references of the speaker to a certain aspect of their identity, such as categories (e.g., “I am a clumsy person), general tendencies (e.g., “I never know how to deal with conflict”) and stable states (e.g., “I am Dutch”). By reading through the transcripts of the conversations identity claims were identified and extracted from their context to have a comprehensive list of all identified claims. Subsequently, identity claims were deductively coded for their identity content domains based on the existing taxonomy by McLean and Syed (2016).

The domains used for coding were of two types: *ideological* domains (personal, politics, religion, recreation, education and occupation) and *relational* domains (dating, family, friends, gender). Depending on the core theme of the claim, each claim was assigned to one individual domain. As illustrated below, the domain coding process involved several steps: after having preliminarily assigned domains to each claim, multiple coders would

compare their work to determine whether the domain was unanimously assigned. The final domain codes were collected and used for subsequent analysis.

The coding was carried out by seven trained coders. Prior to the coding of the data, in an effort to achieve consistency, all coders went through a period of training, during which codings were applied to sample data, and group discussions followed until a shared understanding of the coding process was established. In order to assure the reliability of the data analysis, coders were always placed in either pairs or groups of three, in order to allow for comparisons of the coding outputs. In line with this structure, the transcripts were equally divided across the sub-pairs and groups. Throughout the coding process, regular group intervision sessions were conducted, to allow for questions and doubts and seek shared solutions. Once the data was fully coded, the output was collected in a comprehensive file, ready for the individual analysis to take place.

Analysis plan

In order to investigate differences in the identity construction of claims based on partner gender, the conversations of bisexual participant Ghost in two contexts were utilized. The identity claims made in his interaction with both male and female participants were read carefully and counted for each context, as well as for each domain. Identity claims made about the same domain were sorted together and specific themes and topics were identified within each domain. In the first step of identifying construction patterns, within each topic, similar and consistent formulations of identity construction were extracted, as well as differences in formulation about a certain topic. Utilizing the extracted identity claims, patterns of construction were established within specific topics across gender contexts, as well as within contexts. Lastly, an analysis of function was performed for the formulation of the identity constructions for all of the found patterns.

Results

In all eleven of his conversations “Ghost” made 281 identity claims, out of which 44.8 percent of identity claims were about the personal domain, 40.3 % corresponded to the educational/ occupational domain, while the rest of 14.9 % of claims were about the other domains. Looking at the percentages of identity claims made in the same-sex versus the opposite sex context, analysis reveals that the participant made 12.31 % more claims on average in conversation in the female context. Ghost made on average 77.73 % of identity claims in conversation with female participants and his female partners made the rest of 22.27 % in the first context, in contrast to the 65.42 % of identity claims made by Ghost in conversation with a male partner and 34.58 % made by the other male participants.

Stable identity claims construction across contexts

An example of Ghost's consistency in identity construction in both gender contexts can be observed in similar formulations of his educational identity as an exchange student. As Tables 1 and 2 indicated Ghost's formulation is similar between contexts. During his participation in the two speed dating events, Ghost made use of the phrasing “I am an exchange student” in seven conversations out of eleven, three times in the conversations with women and four times in the conversations with men. Ghost's identity as an exchange student is characterized by stability due to the repetition of the same identity claim with the same formulation regardless of the gender of the conversation partner.

Table 1

Speed dating conversation between Ghost and male partner Mike

Mike: So, what brings you to The Netherlands?

Ghost: Uh, **I'm an exchange student right now. I've been studying already for, uh, six months? Something like that. I'm for the full year.**

Mike: Cool.

Ghost: And, yeah, I chose The Netherlands because it had, like, the best program for me.

Mike: Ok. So what are you studying?

Table 2

Speed dating conversation between Ghost and female partner Jessica

Ghost: I am from the Western part [of Romania].

Jessica: Okay.

Ghost: So yeah, Ehm but, ehm I have moved to Bucharest two no, three years ago by now. Ehm, yeah, you would ask me I am now in Groningen?

Jessica: Yeah.

Ghost: Ehm, I am in Groningen, **I am an exchange student, actually, I am an exchange student.**

Jessica: Okay.

Ghost: Yeah.

Jessica: So doing the Erasmus program?

Ghost: Yeah, **I am for the full year, I am already for 6 months here? Something like that.**

The similarities extend to the elaborations that Ghost adds to his original claim. He specifies the amount of time he will continue to be an exchange student as well as how long he has been one, offering definite time limitations on his identity. The amount of time he will continue to hold this identity is illustrated by “I am for the full year” which was expressed to both his male and female conversation partners, as can be seen in Table 1 and Table 2.

Furthermore, Ghost offers the amount of time he has held this identity with “I am already for 6 months here?” and “I’ve been studying already for, uh, six months?”. While slightly differing in formulation, both claims have a questioning, unsure tone that is further reinforced by the use of the phrase “Something like that.” in both contexts. The two excerpts illustrated the stability of Ghost's identity as an exchange student across contexts, which is constructed the same, regardless of the gender of who he is addressing. In both contexts, the identity claims function as descriptors used to inform conversation partners of a fact about himself.

Unstable identity claims construction across contexts

Contextual differences that Ghost exhibited in his identity claim construction were illustrated by the pattern of maximizing and minimizing. As Tables 3 and 4 indicated, Ghost's formulation of identity claims related to his educational identity exhibited patterns of

minimizing while interacting with male partners while maximizing with female partners. The pattern of minimizing academic-related identity claims was found in all of the seven speed dating conversations with men, while the maximizing pattern exhibited while talking to women was observed in three out of the four conversations with female participants. As can be observed in Table 3, when Ghost was conversing with Mike, the topic of education was only briefly touched on “I’m studying Computer Science.” and was in response to a question the other participant had asked. In the elaboration “It’s actually a bit of Engineering too”. the modifier “a bit” functioned to minimize his initial claim about his academic accomplishment. Mike reacted with the minimal encourager “cool” to Ghost’s initial statement about his study, as well as replying to Ghost’s elaboration with a minimal observation “Yeah, makes it less complicated that way”. Ghost’s identity claims function in this context as descriptors about himself offered in the conversation and Mike does not interact with the claims besides superficial responses that indicate active listening.

On the other hand, as can be seen in Table 4, while conversing with a woman, besides stating like in the male conversation what he studies “I study computer science”, Ghost ensured that Ana is made aware that he is not “only” studying computer science but also engineering. Ghost elaborated further by expressing having studied “lots of subjects”. The participant then highlighted how incredible his accomplishments should be perceived by his partner by exclaiming “I mean you would be amazed, but I study mathematics, physics, chemistry, I haven’t studied biology!”. This phrasing offers the conversation partner the implication of what conclusion she should draw from this shared fact, namely amazement and awe at his academic success. In contrast to the phrasing of “a bit” of engineering where he minimizes his accomplishment that he utilized when talking to his male companion, the use of “you would be amazed” while describing his studies to his female partner does not serve the same function, since the phrasing is constructed to cause admiration. The method in which

this identity claim is constructed offers the explicit implication that Ana should exhibit amazement in her response, but that function is not fulfilled by her answer. Ana asked a related question “Is that like a future goal as well to study biology?” and does not verbalize any awe at the claim that Ghost perceives should he be admired for.

Table 3

Speed dating conversation between Ghost and male partner Mike

Mike: Ok. So what are you studying?
 Ghost: **I'm studying Computer Science.**
 Mike: Sorry?
 Ghost: Computer Science.
 Mike: Cool!
 Ghost: Yeah.
 Mike: Ooh, nice!
 Ghost: **It's actually a bit of Engineering too, but I just- I always say it's Computer Science.**
 Mike: Yeah, makes it less complicated that way.
 Ghost: Yeah. It's way less complicated.
 Mike: Yeah, I feel you.
 Ghost: Yeah.

Table 4

Speed dating conversation between Ghost and female partner Ana

Ana: So what do you do actually?
 Ghost: Ehm I am here with an Erasmus scholarship.
 Ana: Ohw okay.
 Ghost: And **I study computer science.**
 Ana: Okay, computer science.
 Ghost: **The thing is that, not only computer science**, it's a bit more difficult to explain, but my home university, **ehm its engineering, my specialty is engineering**, in information technology.
 Ana: Hmm Hmm.
 Ghost: And **I have studied lots of subjects, I mean you would be amazed, but I studied mathematics, physics, chemistry, I haven't studied biology!**
 Ana: Is that like a future goal as well to study biology?
 Ghost: No, my future is to study psychology, actually.
 Ana: Psychology? Okay.

Unstable identity claims construction across contexts and within context

An additional pattern of context-dependency was found across the two contexts, whereby Ghosts' identity claims related to the recreational domain, more specifically sports, in the female context were characterized by their absence. Of note is that the two speed dating events were held one week apart and Ghost himself mentioned how “yesterday I had, like, my first training”, in regards to lacrosse. This signals how new this facet of his identity is, thus it enables inspection of a new identity aspect as it develops through multiple interactions. As in the female context, there is an absence of sport-related claims as can be seen in Table 5, in contrast, in the male context, Ghost made identity claims about his sports-related identity in five out of the seven homosexual conversations. This incongruity between contexts results in a pattern of total absence in the heterosexual context as seen in Table 5 and of high frequency in the homosexual context.

Table 5

Speed dating conversations between Ghost and female and male partners

Round	Female partner	Male partner
2	-	Ghost: I'm multiply more sporty. I play lacrosse , I'm swimming- I know it's- It's not clear on my body (chuckles) but, uh- Yeah, I'm actually playing lacrosse now , uh, swimming, I once- I'm doing some health classes, because why not.
3	-	Ghost: I'm not that into sports, not that much, I mean it's clear that I'm not, like, fully sporty, but, I'm doing lacrosse . And, for example, yesterday I had, like, my first training and it was SO cold outside! I was freezing!

The inspection of the recreational domain yielded a pattern of inconsistency within a context, which illustrates the changes in the formulation of Ghost's identity construction while referring to his sports hobbies across the male context. The fact that the two speed dating events were held one week apart should be taken into consideration, as Ghost himself mentioned how “yesterday I had, like, my first training”, in reference to lacrosse. This signals how new this facet of his identity is, thus it enables inspection of the change in the construction of a new identity aspect as it develops through five interactions. As can be seen in Table 5, while interacting with his male partners, Ghost formulated his identity claim relating to his sport-related interest with different levels of involvement. First, he stated that “I’m multiply more sporty.”. “Multiply” functioned in this identity claim as a maximizer, amplifying the level of “sporty” from average to considerable interest. In the next conversation round, a shift in the formulation of the same identity claim is made “I’m not, like, fully sporty.” This construction of the claim functioned as a minimizer in the identity construction, by underestimating Ghost's overall sporting ability and skill.

Discussion

Identity emerges in the process of everyday interactions (Lichtwarck-Aschoff et al., 2008) and is established in different contexts for a specific audience (Gmelin & Kunnen, 2021). This paper aimed to investigate potential differences in the way that individuals construct identity claims based on their partner's gender by examining how identity is constructed in two different gender contexts. This was achieved by following the interactions of one male participant in two different speed dating settings, one where he interacted with same-sex partners and another where he interacted with opposite-sex partners. The speed dating conversations were analyzed utilizing the IMICA framework (Gmelin & Kunnen, 2021). The findings of this study reinforced the past research which found that identity can have different functions in the contexts of social interactions such as a tool of self-presentation (Baumeister et al., 1989) or identity exploration (Sugimura et al., 2021). The results illustrate that formulation differences in identity construction are dependent on who individuals are interacting with, men or women, with patterns that emerged the same across one gender context, yet are opposite in the other. Overall, the findings of this paper expanded the knowledge about the intersection of identity and interactions and had significant future implications.

Findings

The present study yielded several key findings. First, it was found that the male participant made more identity claims while interacting with women than with other men. The current results echo past findings which showed that men tend to talk more than women in mixed-gender dyads (Mulac, 1989). Overall this indicated the impact gender does have on conversations (van den Brink-Muinen et al., 2002). An additional result highlighted the consistent and stable nature of identity construction across gender contexts, illustrated by the pattern of consistency in repetition across seven conversations of the same formulation of an

identity claim in two different contexts. The finding of consistency across contexts is a good illustration of the definition of identity as being an individual's sense of continuity and sameness (Johnson et al., 2022). Our results are in line with the idea presented in Schachter (2015) which stated that if an identity claim is repeated across multiple interactions, it is solidified with every invocation and can be considered a stable identity construction of the individual.

In contrast to the finding of consistency across contexts, the third result illustrates how identity was used as a tool of self-presentation (Baumeister et al., 1989) and adjusted according to context as formulations of identity claims were maximized in interactions with males and minimized with females. This pattern of findings echoed the idea that the identity of one individual is established within different contexts for a specific audience (Gmelin & Kunnen, 2021). Individuals expressing their identities differently when talking in different contexts illustrated that identities can have a function in the context of interactions (Morgan & Korobov, 2012), such as maximizing patterns of identity construction having the function of invoking amazement in partners. Since relational identity develops within the context of interactions with others (Galliher et al., 2017), the findings of the current study reinforce past findings that the identity of the conversation partner has an impact on the construction of an individual's identity. An additional pattern of context-dependence was observed due to the absence of sports-related identity claims made in the female context and high frequency in the male context. The found patterns reflected the findings of Schulster (2006) that the topic of sports is more likely to appear in conversations between men, while it is much less likely to be discussed in an opposite-sex dyad.

The last findings of this study are illustrated by the changes in identity construction and formulation within the male gender context. Claims about a newly added identity facet relating to the same topic were formulated in different ways in interaction switch male

partners. Identity emerges in the process of everyday interactions with social others (Lichtwarck-Aschoff et al., 2008) and this identity process can be seen in the unstable formulation of identity constructs, where the process of identity exploration and the changing nature of an identity that is not yet stable can be seen. This finding echoes the past findings of Sugimura and Gmelin (2021), which stated that the exploration of a new identity is a gradual process instead of an instantaneously stable identity. The findings of the current study illustrate that an inconsistent formulation of one's identity claims could indicate the identity process, more specifically exploration and it does not yield a consistent construction, thus no stable identity.

Implications

The findings of this study reinforced existing identity-related literature, which presented identity as a sense of continuity and sameness (Johnson et al., 2022) with findings of consistency in identity construction across contexts. These identity claims serve as a descriptive function, in line with the definition of identity as “a description of who one is” (Syed & McLean, 2015, p. 570), that stays constant in interactions with different gender partners. In addition, the current study facilitated the support of findings such as that identity is under the influence of the context it is constructed in (Galliher et al., 2017), illustrated by the patterns of maximization and minimization. Identity also can be utilized as a tool of self-presentation (Baumeister et al., 1989), for instance as a means of invoking feelings of amazement through maximization, as a way to serve the individual in different contexts (Gmelin & Kunnen, 2021).

These findings imply that current literature is aware of the context-dependence of identity and the current findings support the frameworks in which identity is conceptualized, although there is a gap in the literature on the particular context-dependence related to gender. As these findings revolved around how one constructs their identity differently based on their

audience, there might be a significant implication for a field such as clinical practice. By understanding that a man might be prone to maximizing some parts of his identity while talking to a female mental health professional while minimizing them while conversing with a male mental health professional, one can actively look out for those minimized or maximized identity constructions and keep them in mind while offering treatment.

Strengths and Limitations

The strength of this study lies in its novel approach to identity in interactions. There is a lack of research concerning the context of gender as relating to identity construction. Research that links conversation analysis with identity research is lacking as well. Exploring identity construction in different social contexts is a direction identity research should orient itself toward in the future due to being an overlooked topic of research in identity literature. Identity is formed in interactions with social others (Postmes et al., 2006) thus by looking at identity in interactions a better view of identity overall can be achieved, which in turn can lend itself to a better understanding of identity exploration as well as identity stability and context dependence across interactions.

On the other hand, this study does suffer from some limitations. Due to its reliance on interpretation, the results of a qualitative study like the current one could be influenced by bias (Kääriäinen et al., 2014). However, to safeguard against this issue, the analysis of function was discussed within the thesis group. An additional limitation is posed by the fact that this study is a case study focused on the identity of a single white Eastern European bisexual male participant. While this topic of research has only been made possible by the bisexuality of the participant, which allowed the comparison between his romantic interactions with same-sex as well as opposite-sex participants alike, the results found can not be generalized to a broader population. Such generalization would require future research to use a bigger and more diverse sample size to assess if context dependence, as well as

consistency of identity construction, can be found across other genders, cultures, and sexualities. For future directions, it would be worthwhile to investigate if similar patterns and results as the current study can be found while looking at identity in interaction in other contexts besides gender, thus enabling the solidifying of the connection between identity and its context dependence.

Conclusion

Individuals have experiences that influence their identity in the context of everyday interactions and the incorporation of those experiences leads to a coherent sense of self (Postmes et al., 2006). This study highlighted how identity construction can be context dependent, by aiming to investigate differences in the way that individuals construct identity claims based on their partner's gender. The findings illustrate that although identity can be stable and formulaic in construction across gender contexts, it can also be used as a tool and differ in function and construction across the contexts. These findings expand our understanding of identity and its gender context-dependency in interactions as well as identity exploration with social others. Further research is needed on identity construction differences across different contexts.

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