

**“Oh wow! We’re SO different”: An Analysis of Identity Content Domains within
Everyday Interactions among Young Adults**

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Abstract

The study of identity development involves both, identity processes and identity content. However, only recently attention has been drawn to the content of people's identities. The present paper investigated what identity content is salient in everyday interactions among young adults. Seven rounds of short speed-dating conversations between 16 same-sex-attracted young adult men were analyzed. Based on the Iterative Micro-Identity Content Analysis (IMICA), identity claims within the conversations were identified and coded into content domains. The frequency and distribution of domains were analyzed and patterns of personal content across rounds were explored at the participant level. A high prevalence of ideological domains was found, with the Personal (48.10%), Educational and Occupational (33.50%), and Recreational (12.17%) domains being the most frequently constructed domains. Moreover, three patterns in the distribution of personal content across conversations were identified: high variability, stable and downward. Overall, the results indicated that some domains are more relevant for the identity construction of young adults than others. Further, findings suggest a context-dependence of identity content presentation at the level of social interactions. The results of this study were in line with previous research and enhance the knowledge about what identity content is relevant for young adults and, thus, contribute to a wholesome understanding of identity formation. Future research needs to investigate why certain identity content is more salient than others, as well as aim to clarify possible contextual influences on identity content construction.

Keywords: Identity content, content domains, identity claims, everyday interactions, patterns, young adults, speed-dating

“Oh wow! We’re SO different”: An Analysis of Identity Content Domains within Everyday Interactions among Young Adults

The formation of an identity is one of the central tasks of adolescence and young adulthood (Arnett, 2015; Erikson, 1968). Answering the question of “Who am I” involves identifying which themes and issues are relevant to the self, also referred to as identity content (McLean et al., 2016). Identity content is constructed and negotiated in everyday interactions with others (Josselson, 1994). Within social interactions, identity content is presented as claims that individuals construct about themselves (Schachter, 2015). Commonly, identity content is studied using broad thematic categories, referred to as content domains (Marcia, 1966). While past research has mainly focused on identity processes, concerned with *how* identity is constructed, identity content has been widely neglected in the literature. Therefore, this paper aimed to investigate which domains of identity content are most salient in everyday interactions among young adults in the context of speed-dating conversations. Additionally, patterns in domain-specific content across conversations have been explored at the participant level. By demonstrating what identity content is relevant to the identity of young adults, this study adds to the limited literature on identity content and, hence, contributes to a wholesome understanding of identity development.

Identity

Traditionally, identity has been thought of as cognition and reflection of the self (Erikson, 1968), providing individuals with a unified sense of self. More recent approaches suggest that identity can be thought of as providing an individual with a feeling of internal consistency and sameness across different contexts by linking the self with the external world (Hammack, 2015). Moreover, Owens (2006) pointed out the social-relational function of identity, as it enables the individual to make sense of the social world. Typically, two main aspects of the study of identity have been identified in the literature, namely identity process

and identity content. Identity processes are concerned with *how* people construct and work out their identity (Syed and McLean, 2015), including processes such as exploration or commitment (Marcia, 1966). Identity content, in contrast, refers to the *what* of identity (McLean et al., 2016). However, the focus of past identity research has been mainly on identity processes, while the concept of identity content has been widely neglected in the field (Galliher et al., 2017; Gmelin & Kunnen, 2021; Johnson et al., 2022; McLean et al., 2016). As a result, much more is known about identity processes than identity content. Only recently a shift in the field has directed attention to the study of identity content, acknowledging the importance of understanding what it is, that people consider relevant to their identity.

Identity content

Various conceptualizations of identity content are presented in the literature. In a broad sense, identity content is concerned with what identities are about (Galliher et al., 2017). More precisely, Johnson et al. (2022) defined identity content as the elements that are essential to the individual's sense of self, that is, themes and issues that people consider relevant to themselves (McLean et al., 2016). Another framework for the study of identity content is offered by Galliher et al. (2017). According to their multilevel model of identity content, identity content cannot be conceptualized in terms of a single definition but needs to be understood along with different levels. Precisely, within their model, four levels to the study of identity content are identified, including culture, social roles, domains, and everyday interactions. As of recently, the fourth level of social interactions has received more attention in the literature (see e.g., De Ruiter & Gmelin, 2021; Sugimura et al., 2021), investigating identity content in the context of social interactions and conversations.

One common approach to the study of identity content is the use of so-called content domains (Balistreri et al., 1995; Marcia, 1966; McLean et al., 2016). Domains refer to

overarching categories of identity-relevant topics. Traditionally, eight content domains have been identified (Marcia, 1966). Within these domains, two categories are distinguished: ideological and interpersonal domains. Content related to personal topics, education, or spirituality is considered ideological (McLean et al., 2016). The interpersonal category, in contrast, encompasses themes concerned with social relationships, like family, friends, or dating. Previous research suggested that some domains are more relevant to the individuals' sense of self than other domains (Johnson et al., 2022; McLean et al., 2016). For example, Johnson et al. (2022) found a high prevalence of personal identity content in their analysis of written self-statements. Other domains, like Dating or Gender, were considerably less frequently addressed. Also, prior research indicated that domains are not entirely distinct categories but may overlap. In their work on prompted narratives, McLean et al. (2016) demonstrated that speakers utilize domains to construct content within other domains, what they referred to as "spill-over". Overall, past research indicates that there is high variability in the salience and relevance of identity content domains.

A few studies have directed their attention at patterns of domain content. In an explorative manner, Johnson et al. (2022) investigated patterns in the co-occurrence of specific content domains. Their analysis identified eight patterns in the way that domain content was constructed simultaneously, indicating that interindividual differences exist in the way people construct identity content. Also, the findings by McLean et al. (2016) revealed a pattern in the way that people provided content in their narratives about themselves. They showed that specific, mostly interpersonal, content, was frequently used in the narratives about other domains, pointing towards a pattern in the way domain content is used to provide identity-relevant information. However, research on patterns of identity content is still rare. This paper, thus, aimed to contribute to a more comprehensive

understanding of identity construction by exploring patterns in Personal domain content over time, namely over rounds of conversations.

Identity Construction in Social Interaction

It has been widely acknowledged in the literature that identity is constructed within social interactions, meaning that people form and negotiate their sense of self within everyday interactions with others (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Josselson, 1994; Postmes et al., 2006). However, identity is commonly studied in isolation from its social context. Basically, two distinct conceptualizations of identity have emerged. Building on the work by Erikson (1968), cognitive approaches view identity as the primary driver of people's behavior, thus influencing their actions in a top-down manner (Bamberg, 2011). In contrast, social constructivists indicate that identity is constructed in social interactions (Breakwell, 1986), emphasizing that identity is embedded in a social context. From this perspective, identity is something that individuals actively do and that develops through an individual's actions and behaviors. More precisely, identity is situated in everyday interactions and can be observed within concrete behaviors (Raeff, 2017). Previous research, for example, studied how people construct their identities by means of specific behaviors, like positioning (Kerrick & Thorne, 2014), or making claims about the self (Schachter, 2015).

Within social interaction, identity content has been commonly conceptualized in terms of identity claims. According to Schachter (2015), identity is not concerned with what people are, but with what they claim about themselves. Identity claims are defined as utterances or statements about the self, such as "I'm [Carlos]" or "I'm studying psychology". Speakers can construct both, implicit and explicit, identity claims (Schachter, 2015). A claim is referred to as explicit when a speaker explicitly aligns with a certain category (Stokoe, 2009), such as "women" or "homosexual". Implicit claims are used when speakers indirectly refer to a

certain category by talking about specific attitudes or values associated with that very category (Anderson, 2009).

Identity is constructed in various types of social interactions, such as in the context of family, friends, or dating (Ferrer-Wreder & Kroger, 2020; Josselson, 1994). Especially, interactions among same-aged peers have been found to be relevant to the identity development in young adults (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2001; Sugimura & Shimizu, 2010). Several studies have found that in the context of peer interactions various identity-related processes occur, such as exploration or commitment. For example, Sugimura et al., 2021 analyzed identity exploration in conversations between college students. Their results showed, among other findings, that peers construct a safe place for their interaction partners to engage in exploration processes. Another study found that in a sample of adolescents, identity exploration is triggered through feedback received from peers (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2001). After receiving identity-related feedback from a peer, participants were found to engage in more identity exploration. Overall, prior research indicates the crucial role of peer interaction in identity content construction during adolescents and young adulthood. Therefore, the current study examines claims of identity content in the context of everyday interactions among young adults.

The Current Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate which identity content domains are salient in everyday interactions among young adults. Using a qualitative approach, identity claims within speed-dating conversations among same-sex attracted men were examined. Claims were categorized into content domains and analyzed in terms of their frequency. In an additional, explorative analysis, patterns in the distribution of personal claims across conversation rounds at the participant level were examined. Given the explorative nature of the study, no specific hypotheses were formulated prior to the analysis. It can be assumed that

speed-dating conversations are a valuable context for the study of identity content in interactions (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008; Stokoe, 2010). The speed-dating paradigm offers the opportunity to observe identity content within conversations. Especially for young adults, interactions with peers and romantic partners have been found to play a central role in the development of identity (Josselson, 1994). Moreover, the speed-dating setting allows for the investigation of developments and patterns over time, or across rounds of conversations. By analyzing identity content in the context of speed-dating conversations among young adults, the current study enhances the knowledge of what content is relevant to people's sense of self and, thus, contributes to a better understanding of identity formation.

Methods

Participants

A total of nine 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 a homosexual speed-dating event as part of a research project. For the purpose of this study, only events 4 and 6 were selected for successive analysis, resulting in a sample of 16 same-sex attracted male participants. The Age of the participants varied from 22-33 years, with a mean age of 27 in the fourth event (23-33) and a mean age of 24 in the sixth event (22-28). Conversations were held in English, which was spoken as a second language by all but two native English-speaking participants.

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 Process

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 et al., (2016).

The domains used for coding were of two types: *ideological* domains (Personal, Political, Spiritual, Recreational, 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 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.

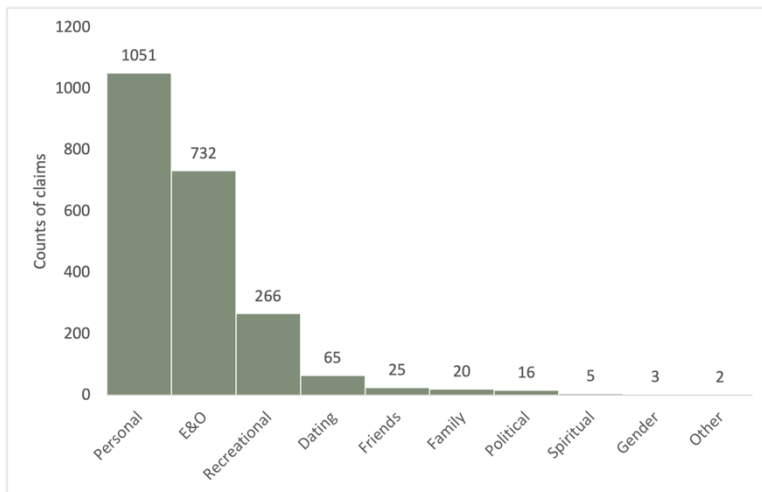
Analysis

As a first step, the frequency of claims coded under each of the content domains across all conversation rounds was analyzed at the group level. The absolute as well as relative frequencies of the ten domains across all conversations were calculated. Moreover, the total number of participants that occasioned claims within the individual domains was computed. In the following, the content within the ten domains was inductively examined at the group level. Common themes and issues discussed in each of the domains were identified.

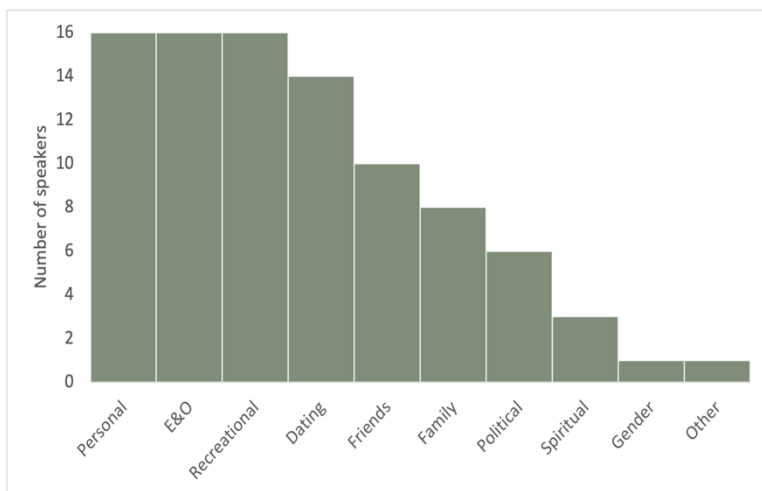
Due to the fact that an especially broad array of topics was identified within the Personal domain, in an inductive manner, four subdomains were suggested, allowing for a more detailed description of the data. However, these sub-domains were not included in the subsequent analysis. In a last step, an explorative analysis of the distribution of claims within the Personal domain over the seven rounds of conversations was conducted at the level of the participant. The Personal domain was chosen for this additional analysis, as this was the most frequently addressed domain in the data. The total number of personal claims of each participant across all rounds was plotted to explore potential trends and patterns.

Results

A total of 2185 identity claims were identified. Each claim was coded into one of the ten predefined content domains. Every domain was used at least twice in the data. While three domains were highly prevalent, comprising the majority of claims, others were addressed less frequently. The frequency distribution of the individual domains is provided in Figure 1. Further, the number of speakers that addressed each of the domains was examined. The results are presented in Figure 2. The number of speakers that occasioned claims within the individual domains varied considerably. The three most prevalent domains were addressed by every participant. For other domains, fewer speakers constructed claims, while two domains were addressed by only one participant. In the following section, a detailed description of the results within the individual domains and illustrative examples are provided.

Figure 1*Frequency Distribution of Domains*

Note. E&O: Educational and occupational.

Figure 2*Number of Speakers across Domains*

Note. E&O: Educational and occupational.

Frequency distribution of Domains*Ideological category*

Personal. The Personal domain was the most frequently occasioned domain.

Approximately 48.10% of all claims were constructed within this domain. Also, all speakers occasioned claims within this domain. A wide range of themes was accumulated in the

Personal domain. Thus, in an exploratory inductive analysis of the content of claims, four sub-domains within the Personal domain could be identified.

The first sub-domain comprised claims that were concerned with the speakers' *demographics*. For example, speakers addressed themes like their nationality (e.g., "*I'm from The Netherlands*") or age (e.g., "*I'm only 22! I'm not that old*"). Some speakers also provided a description of their migration history (e.g., "*Uhm, so I lived- I was born in South Africa, then I moved to Ireland for a little bit [...]*").

Within the second sub-domain, speakers constructed claims touching upon their *personal experiences*. For instance, speakers discussed important events in their life (e.g., "*[...] I- I did a- an exchange during university in Montreal*" or "*Yeah, I stopped, because I almost reached a burnout*") or experiences with places they lived in (e.g., "*[...] I got used to livi- living in a really big city*"). Some speakers also mentioned experiences they haven't made yet (e.g., "*Oh, Canada, I've never been <> to Canada*").

In contrast, the third sub-domain clustered claims around the speakers' *preferences and likings*. Speakers' claims revolved around themes such as their taste preferences (e.g., "*Uh, [I prefer] (hesitantly) vanilla [over chocolate]?*"), or their likings of specific places (e.g., "*Uhm, yeah. I love it here [university town]*"). Also, some speakers addressed specific aversions (e.g., "*Yeah, I don't really like Amsterdam*").

The last sub-domain resolved around speakers' *evolutions and opinions*. Within category, participants discussed their opinion on specific issues (e.g., "*I find French the most beautiful language. < and Spanish. >*"). Some speakers also evaluated aspects of their own person (e.g., "*So I'm (.) very boring, just from around here (chuckles)*").

Educational and Occupational. The domain of Education and Occupation comprised 33.50% of all claims and, thus, was the second most prevalent domain. Similar to the Personal domain, all participants constructed claims within this domain. Claims were

mainly concerned with speakers' present education or occupation (e.g., *“Uhm::, I study Psychology.”* or *“So I've just been an illustrator and mailman since. Ever since”*). However, some speakers also talked about their past careers (e.g., *“Uh, I went to art school, I did illustration”*) or mentioned future career plans (e.g., *“Yeah, I really want to come back <> to do the PhD”*). In contrast, others also addressed their uncertainty about their academic future (e.g., *“ But I don't know if in the future I could, eh, work in a real [praxis]- I don't know”*). Moreover, some participants discussed more general education-related issues like academic interests (e.g., *“Well, I'm also into, like, social sciences a lot”*) or their work behavior (e.g., *“But I have lazy days [in my PhD]. Which I do <<not that much.>”*).

Recreational. A share of 12,17% of claims was categorized into the Recreational domain. All speakers occasioned claims within this domain. Claims in this domain were related to speakers' leisure activities. While some participants mentioned specific hobbies (e.g., *“[I do] Swimming a::nd, uh:, lacrosse”*), others discussed more general interests or activities (e.g., *“[...] Uhm, I love music. That's, like, my main one”* or *“[...] In my spare time I usually just go out with friends, go to clubs or something like that.”*). Notably, some participants also mentioned activities they particularly do not enjoy (e.g., *“I don't like sports, I don't- (.) No, I don't like sp(hh)orts at a(hh)ll”*).

Political. The Political domain accounted for 0.73% of all claims. Less than half of the participants constructed claims within this domain. Claims were merely related to speakers' political opinions on certain issues, such as personal evaluations of political situations (e.g., *“I don't really like the political <> landscape [in England]. I don't know, like, <> it's (...) just n- it's not a nice place to be right now, especially with Brexit, <> everyone's, like, really”*) or political preferences (e.g., *“I like that about The Netherlands, that it's, like, weirdly progressive in ways that you wouldn't think of”*). Notably, claims mainly addressed political issues surrounding homosexuality (e.g., *“I mean... Like, I can*

imagine in the MORE conservative cities it's a bit- like, it's even worse [sexuality] than in [university town], right?" or "I do not know! I would- I would- (.) I would actually go back to Romania (.) if it wasn't that homophobic. And the stigma[tisa]tion. Ah, sure, I'd go back").

Spiritual. In the Spiritual domain, a total of five claims (0.22%) were made by three of the participants. These claims were mainly concerned with speakers' opinions on religion in general (e.g., "[...] I think the world would be much much MUCH better off if there we- if:: religion just didn't exist <> at all. (.) It's not like I wanna eradicate it, but if it just (.) wasn't there in the first place, I think we would be MUCH better off"). One participant also mentioned his star sign as an indicator of spirituality (e.g., "Yea:::h? Can say. {[My tattoo} It's, like, uh::m, the symbol of Gemini, because I'm Gemini (chuckles)").

Other. The domain of Other was addressed by only one participant (0.09%). Specifically, this participant made two claims about his personal relationship with drugs ("No, I don't smoke." and "I know, it's [alcohol] bad for me. (laughs)").

Interpersonal category

Friends. About 1.27% of all the claims were coded in the domain of Friends, which were constructed by ten participants. Claims addressed, for example, speakers' friend groups (e.g., "Uhm: (.) luckily I got- met quite a few cool people in my course. Uhm, so I have a nice group of friends") or were concerned with making new friends in their university town (e.g., "[...] now, just, like, my entire social network is here" or "I think I have, ehm, many friends, eh much more friend here than I was at my back university, my home university").

Family. The Family domain encompassed 0.92% of all claims and was addressed by half of the participants. Claims in this domain covered topics like family background (e.g., "Yeah::, I just, uhm, like, my mum's Spanish.") or typical activities with family members (e.g., "Well, the first one [concert by Marco Borsato] I'm going to with my mother, <>

because we always go to his concerts.[...]”). Moreover, two speakers talked about the relationship they hold with specific family members (e.g., “> (Ind.) *problem. (.) Yeah, [I speak to my parents] fairly often. <> Uhm, still in contact with them, of course.*” or “Clearly my parents *REALLY* liked me. (chuckles)”).

Dating. The Dating domain was coded for 2.97% of all claims. Almost all participants, 14 in total, constructed claims within this domain. For example, speakers talked about their dating experiences (e.g., “*It's [dating], like, <> WAY different [where I am from]. (chuckles)*”), including the use of dating apps (e.g., “*Yeah. [I am on Tinder]*”). Notably, many speakers referred to the current speed-dating context, mostly by stating that this is their first experience with these kinds of dates (e.g., “*Yeah, that's true. (.) For me it's <> the first time speed dating, so <> that's also a thing*”).

Gender. A total of three claims (0.13%) were made by one participant within this domain. The speaker addressed this domain by talking about his perception of gender roles (e.g., “*But it is- that's- I think only amongst men. Maybe <> it's the burden of masculinity, I think*” or “*Yeah, but I think it's been understated. Like, I < And I also, like, don't want concepts such as masculinity and femininity to just completely die out and dissolve, like... I think that (.) < Yeah, like, they're exciting, I think*”).

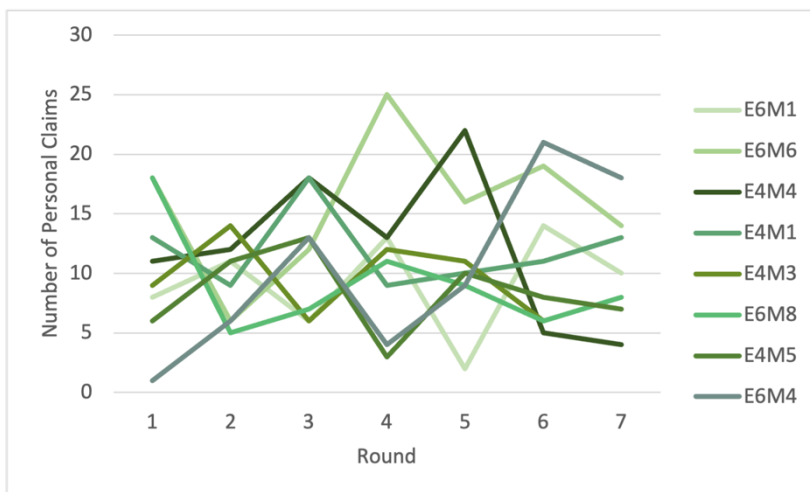
Patterns within the Personal Domain

At the participant level, an explorative analysis of the frequency of claims within the Personal domain revealed three patterns: high variability, stable and downward. Eight participants showed high variability in the number of personal claims they constructed (Figure 3). This group was characterized by high peaks and significant jumps between conversations. In contrast, 4 participants showed a relatively stable distribution of personal claims (Figure 4). These participants constructed similar amounts of personal claims over the course of conversations, showing no significant peaks or bumps. For four of the speakers, a decreasing

pattern in the number of personal claims they occasioned could be observed (Figure 5). These participants constructed considerably more personal claims in the first rounds compared to the last rounds of conversations. Further, the distribution was characterized by a more gradual decline, rather than big jumps between the rounds. Notably, all participants displayed variability and irregularity in the distribution of personal claims.

Figure 3

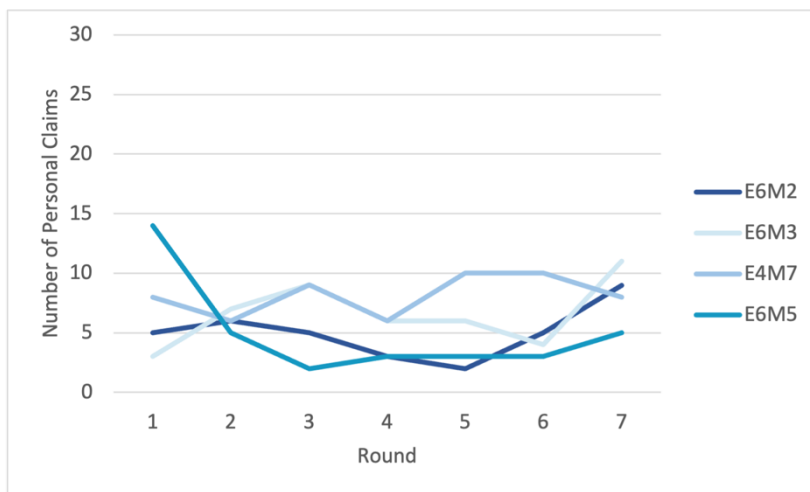
High Variability Pattern of Personal Claims across Rounds within Participants



Note. Labels, e.g., E6M1, represent individual speakers.

Figure 4

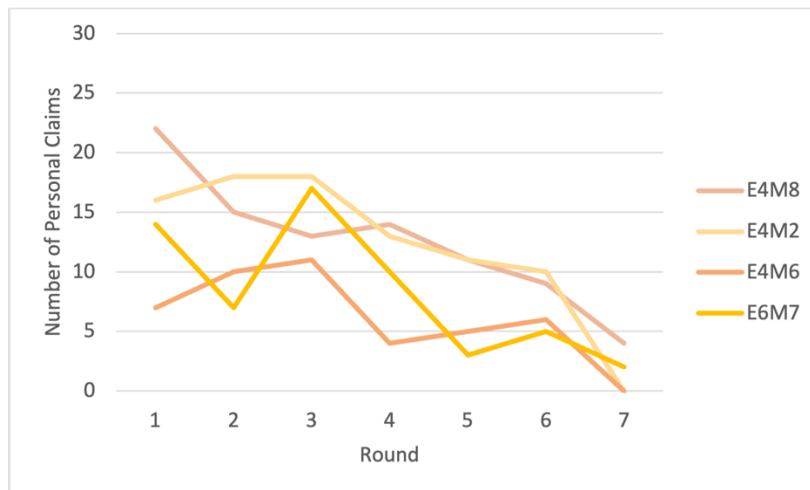
Stable Pattern of Personal Claims across Rounds within Participants



Note. Labels, e.g., E6M2, represent individual speakers.

Figure 5

Downward Pattern of Personal Claims across Rounds within Participants



Note. Labels, e.g., E6M8, represent individual speakers.

Discussion

This paper investigated which domains of identity content are salient in everyday interaction among young adults. Specifically, the frequency of identity claims within content domains in speed-dating conversations between same-sex attracted young adults was analyzed. Additionally, at the participant level, an exploratory analysis of the frequency distribution of personal content across conversation rounds was conducted. The results demonstrated high variability in the frequency of identity content domains. A predominance of personal and educational content was found. Furthermore, three broad patterns in the distribution of personal content across rounds were identified. For a comprehensive understanding of identity development, the study of identity processes and identity content is necessary. However, to date, identity content has been widely neglected in the identity literature. The current paper indicates what themes young adults consider relevant to their identity and thus enhanced the understanding of identity content construction in young adulthood.

Frequency of Content Domains

The results on the frequency of content domains generally supported the use of identity content domains (Balistreri et al., 1995; McLean et al., 2016), however, they point out variability in the distribution of domains. In general, ideological domains were found to be more prevalent than interpersonal domains. While some domains, like Personal, Educational and Occupational, and Recreational, were addressed by all speakers and comprised most of the identity claims, other domains, like Gender or Spiritual, were scarcely addressed. In line with the existing literature, these findings embrace the importance of ideological information when constructing identity content (Johnson et al., 2022). In contrast, the work by McLean et al. (2016) on prompted identity narratives pointed out the high prevalence of interpersonal domains. However, due to the fact that their analysis was based on prompted narratives, the results are hardly comparable to the current conversation-based study, as the prompts provided by the researcher most likely affected the salience of certain contents. Overall, findings point out variability in the relevance of content domains, with a predominance of ideological themes in the construction of young adults' identity content.

Specifically, the two domains of Personal and Educational and Occupational were found to be highly dominant, indicating their relevance in presenting and negotiating identity content. The high prevalence of the Personal domain in the current study is consistent with previous research by Johnson et al. (2022), who identified the Personal domain as the most prevalent domain in their analysis of written self-statements. In contrast to the current findings, they found a considerably lower prevalence of the Educational and Occupational domain. In contrast to the current analysis of young adults, the work by Johnson et al. (2022) was based on a sample of adolescents. During the phase of adolescents, career choices and educational issues can be assumed to be less relevant to the sense of self than in emerging adulthood (Erikson, 1968). Moreover, it can be argued that in the current sample of merely

university students, especially discussing educational, but also personal, issues might have served to create a sense of sameness among conversation partners. Within the current speed-dating conversations, this appears reasonable as this is usually a context where people try to establish similarities and affiliation with their conversation partner (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008). These findings point towards the use of identity content as an affiliate tool to create a sense of sameness and connectedness among conversation partners.

Identity Content within Social Context

Based on the explorative analysis, results revealed the existence of patterns in the distribution of personal identity claims across rounds of conversations. At the participant level, three patterns could be identified. While some speakers appeared to be consistent in their presentation of personal identity content, most speakers showed variability in the occasioning of claims. Moreover, for some individuals, a downward trend could be observed. Although cognitive identity approaches suggest identity as the precursor of behavior (Bamberg, 2011; Erikson, 1968), the presence of observable patterns in the distribution of identity claims over time suggests the existence of possible contextual factors influencing the presentation of domain-specific identity content. Indeed, social constructivists describe identity as a being embedded in its social context (Breakwell, 1986). Within the current context of speed-dating conversations, potential influencing factors might have been changing conversational partners or setting, as well as factors across conversations like salience or fatigue. Future research needs to investigate how identity content presentation is affected by social context and clarify the nature of influencing factors.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Within the widely neglected field of identity content, the present study contributes to the understanding of identity content at the level of everyday interactions. Specifically, findings provide insights into which identity-related themes people address when talking to

others. While the existing literature has studied identity primarily in the context of, often prompted, self-statements (McLean et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2022), the current, conversation-based approach demonstrates that identity content is constructed in everyday interaction between speakers. Thus, results provide support for the study of identity content at the level of moment-to-moment interactions (De Ruiter & Gmelin, 2021; Gmelin & Kunnen, 2021), suggesting that identity development can be observed within concrete behavior. Moreover, in support of social constructivist approaches (Breakwell, 1986), findings from a pattern analysis give rise to the idea that identity content might be context-dependent, implying that potential contextual factors exist that affect how identity content is constructed and presented within social interactions. Practical implications from the current analysis are concerned with its application to the clinical practice. To improve the diagnosis and treatment of identity-related disorders, a wholesome understanding of identity development is crucial. By demonstrating that identity content is constructed at the level of everyday interactions, this study adds to the knowledge of young adults' identity construction.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

One of the strengths of the present paper can be considered the general study design. The analysis of unprompted speed-dating conversations allowed for the observation of natural, or real-life, interactions. Further, the speed-dating paradigm enabled the investigation of participants in the interaction with varying conversational partners, and this allowed for the analysis of patterns across rounds. Another strength of the current analysis was the use of multiple coders (N=7), resulting in high reliability in the coding procedure.

However, the results of this study need to be interpreted under consideration of several limitations. First, even though generalizability of findings was not the aim of this study, it needs to be considered that due to the small sample size (N=16) and the qualitative nature of the analysis, no inferences can be drawn about how these findings generalize to the

general population of young adults. Future research, thus, needs to investigate the salience of identity content in other populations, like women or different age groups.

Despite the fact that the coding process was conducted by at least two independent raters, subjective influences might have affected the identification and categorization of identity claims. Although subjectiveness in current data analysis can't be ruled out completely, the use of a clear, straightforward coding manual (Gmelin & Kunnen, 2021) and open discussions of ambivalent cases at the group level limited raters' subjective impact on the interpretations of the data. Thus, the results of the current findings can still be assumed to be valid. Still, similar investigations by altering researchers would enhance validity.

Another limitation was concerned with the conceptualization of domains in the current approach. The Personal domain was found to be too broad, resulting in an imprecise representation of the observed data. Similar findings have been made by previous research that found an overarching prevalence of the Personal domain (Johnson et al., 2022). In the current study, additional sub-domains of the Personal domain were inductively identified. These results provide potential suggestions for further classifications of personal identity content in future investigations of identity content domains.

Considerably, the implications that can be drawn from the results on patterns of domain-specific identity content are limited, as these findings are based on an entirely explorative analysis. However, findings point out that the investigation of patterns can enhance the understanding of how people present identity content and suggest possible future directions for investigations of patterns in identity content construction. For example, in the current speed-dating context, patterns within other domain-specific content, such as Educational and Occupational or Dating, should be addressed by in subsequent research, as well as contextual influences on identity content.

Moreover, as the current findings indicate the influence of contextual factors on the presentation of identity content, the influence of specific contextual factors within the present study design needs to be considered as a potential limitation. For instance, the occasioning of dating-related content might have been influenced by the fact that this was a dating study. Similarly, the prevalence of the Educational and Occupational domain could be affected by the study's set-up within the university context, possibly resulting in higher salience of educational-related topics in speakers. The investigation of identity content in other contexts than the current speed-dating paradigm, like conversations among friends or long-term romantic partners, is needed to clarify the influence of contextual factors on identity content.

Conclusion

This study investigated what identity content is salient in young adults, by means of a content analysis of identity claims within the context of speed-dating interactions. In line with previous research, variability in the frequency of content domains was found, with personal and educational topics being most frequently discussed. Furthermore, an explorative analysis of the distribution of domain-specific content across rounds of conversations revealed patterns at the participant level and pointed towards a context-dependence of identity content. By demonstrating what identity content speakers construct in everyday interactions, the current study adds to the limited literature on identity content and contributes to the understanding of content as an essential aspect of identity development. Future research needs to investigate why certain content appears to be more relevant to an individual's sense of self than others as well as what potential contextual factors might influence the construction of identity.

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