

**Which Identity Content Domains Do Young Adult Men Use to Construct Identity
Within Everyday Interactions?**

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Abstract

A comprehensive understanding of identity development requires examination of both, processes and content of identity. Still, the concept of identity content has received comparably little research attention. At the social interaction level, identity content is expressed in individuals' claims about themselves, which have traditionally been investigated in terms of assignment to different content domains. By analyzing speed dating conversations of 16 same-sex attracted, young adult men, the present qualitative study aimed at informing which identity content domains were most salient in young adult men's everyday conversations. For this purpose, from a larger dataset on nine speed dating events, audio transcribed data from two of the events were selected for the present study. Upon extraction, identity claims were deductively assigned into content domains. The preliminary analysis was concerned with the group-level prevalence of domains among speakers' identity claims. An additional visual exploratory analysis at the participant level was conducted to investigate patterns of mutual influence in interlocutors' number of dating claims expressed. Results indicated a salience of young adults for construction of identity within ideological, specifically Personal and Education/Occupation domains, while interpersonal domains were infrequently used. Results from the visual exploratory analysis of dating claims indicated that a high disclosure of dating related information by either partner was usually embedded in conversations in which both partner disclosed dating claims. Overall, results are argued to point towards a conversational context-specificity of identity content, which future research should further explore by addressing identity content within differing conversational contexts.

Keywords: identity content, identity claims, content domains, everyday conversations, patterns, young adults, speed dating

Which Identity Content Domains Do Young Adult Men Use to Construct Identity Within Everyday Interactions?

The content of individuals' identities is concerned with those issues that they consider relevant to who they are (McLean, Syed, & Shucard, 2016). Studying identity content typically involves its investigation in terms of different content domains (Schachter, 2015). While it is known that the process of identity formation occurs in social interactions with others (Josselson, 1994; Postmes et al., 2006), within conversations identity content takes the form of claims that individuals make about themselves (Schachter, 2015). Especially during emerging adulthood, establishing an identity, including a sexual or dating identity, is a task of central importance (Arnett, 2000; Lefkowitz & Gillen, 2006; Madsen & Collins, 2018). Therefore, purpose of the present study was to inform which content domains young adults used to form and negotiate their identities within everyday interactions by analyzing unprompted speed dating conversations between strangers. In view of the speed dating setting, the present paper also aimed to investigate potential patterns in the way interlocutors constructed dating claims within a given conversation.

Identity Content

Traditionally, identity has been studied by focusing on two different aspects: Process and content. The process-centered approach focuses on the developmental aspect of *how* identity formation is occurring in examining the processes that drive individuals' identity development (McLean, Syed, & Shucard, 2016). When it comes to identity content, different conceptualizations have emerged within the identity literature (Galliher et. al., 2017; McLean, Syed, & Shucard, 2016). Broadly speaking, however, the content-, or person-centered approach, deals with the question of *what* is developing (McLean, Syed, & Shucard, 2016). That is, it asks which matters, topics or concerns individuals consider when constructing their identities (McLean, Syed, & Shucard, 2016). Within the scope of the

identity literature, the concept of identity content has been largely supplanted by studies focusing on identity in a process-oriented way (Gmelin & Kunnen, 2021; Johnson et al., 2022; McLean, Syed, Yoder, & Greenhoot, 2016). That is, based on the current scientific literature, there is more known about the processes of how identity is constructed than about the content of speakers' identities.

As of more recently, research has begun to address this lack of knowledge in the field of identity content (Johnson et al., 2022; McLean, Syed, & Shucard, 2016). This is important, given that research indicates an examination of both components, process and content, as being essential to a coherent understanding of identity development (McLean et al., 2014; Syed & Azmitia, 2010). Namely, the study of identity content itself includes an investigation of the processes of identity development within content areas relevant to the individual (McLean et al., 2014). Essentially, then, identity content can be investigated by examining the identity changes individuals undergo as they construct their identities in personally meaningful contents. Marcia (1966) initiated the study of identity content in terms of different content domains, which can be regarded thematically distinct categories used to organize and represent individuals' identity content. While over the years different domain taxonomies have emerged, currently within the identity literature relative consensus has been reached regarding the salience of interpersonal (dating, friends, family, gender) and ideological (religion, occupation, politics, values) domains within individuals' identity content (Balistreri et al., 1995).

Despite these domains making a consistent appearance in individuals' identity contents (Johnson et al., 2022; McLean, Syed, & Shucard, 2016), research points towards a high individual variability in the salience of content domains (Johnson et al., 2022; McLean, Syed, & Shucard, 2016). Moreover, a few studies have begun to address potential patterns in the way identity content is constructed in individuals' narratives. For example, McLean,

Syed, and Shucard (2016) investigated adolescents' narratives following conversational prompts on content domains and observed what they termed "spill", the frequent spillover of certain content domains, such as family and friends, to other domains. Similarly, different patterns in the co-occurrence or intersection of certain content domains within adolescents' self-descriptions have been observed (McLean, Syed, & Shucard, 2016; McLean, Syed, Yoder, & Greenhoot, 2016). Notably, these studies mainly focused on intersections between or across content domains, rather than on patterns within individual content domains.

Identity in Social Interactions

Diverging from the more one-dimensional domain approach, Galliher et al. (2017) suggested the study of identity content at several levels. Within their multilevel framework, they proposed four different levels of analysis. The first level is concerned with the cultural and historical context against which identity content can be studied. Social roles as influential to identity development present the second level of analysis. As a third level, identity content domains, which are idiosyncratically employed and expressed by individuals, is suggested. The fourth level of analysis is concerned with the manifestation of identity content at the level of everyday conversations. Research has long converged on the fact that identities are developed and negotiated within the context of social interactions (Breakwell, 1986; Josselson, 1994; Postmes et al., 2006).

At the social interaction level, identity content can be defined as speakers' statements, or claims, about themselves (Schachter, 2015). Notably, according to Schachter's conceptualization of identity, people's identities are not who they actually are, but who they claim to be. Individuals' identity claims can be either explicit or implicit (Schachter, 2015), dependent on whether speakers directly reference themselves in relation to certain culturally relevant categories (Gmelin & Kunnen, 2021), such as "*I am Dutch*", or more indirectly refer

themselves to these attributes, or as certain “kinds of persons” (Anderson, 2009), as in “*I’m just a small town person, I guess*”.

Much of the earlier identity literature has approached the investigation of identity in cognitive terms by focusing on internalized identity processes, such as reflections and cognitions on the self (Bamberg, 2011). Proponents of this cognitive approach conceptualize identity as something people merely *have*. Opposed to that, the social constructivist view constitutes identity as a result of social interaction and, as such, something people *do* or construct in the moment (Bamberg, 2011; Breakwell, 1986). Notably, it has been argued that a complete understanding of identity requires a combined investigation of both cognitive as well as interactive identity processes (Freeman, 2011). Thus, as of more recently demand has increased for an approach to identity which assumes that identity formation is invariably tied to social context (Breakwell, 1986; Lichtwarck-Aschoff et al., 2008; Sugimura et al., 2021).

Importantly, Erikson (1968) argued that both the immediate (e.g., conversational) and the more distal (e.g., cultural) context are influential to identity development, a thought that is also found in Galliher et al.’s (2017) multilevel model of identity content. Reflective of the contextually distal level, for example, one study investigating discrimination among Canadian indigenous individuals found that aspects which mark these individuals as societally marginalized were evaluated as more central to their identities (Bombay et al., 2010). Similarly, among studies that addressed identity within the more proximal, conversational context, different conversational partners and contexts have been found to impact individuals’ identity development. Notably, it has been argued that conversation partners actively impact an individual’s identity development instead of being merely static actors for projection of identity relevant information (Schachter & Ventura, 2008). For example, emerging adults’ identities are shaped through interactions with friends, family members and in the context of romantic relationships (Larsson et al., 2020; Morgan &

Korobov, 2012; Thorne & Shapiro, 2011). Specifically peers do not only play an important role in identity development, but are also crucial for navigating young adults' dating identities or romantic partnerships (Kerrick & Thorne, 2014; Korobov & Thorne, 2006; Morgan & Korobov, 2012; Norona et al., 2013).

The Current Study

The speed dating paradigm has been proposed a useful approach to studying social interactions (Stokoe, 2010). Within the present context, it offered the possibility of attaining data from two conversational parties within a short amount of time (Tidwell et al., 2013), while simultaneously allowing for the extraction of identity claims. Despite its relatively new employment within the identity literature, researchers increasingly acknowledge the potential of the speed dating paradigm for the investigation of identity processes. For example, Korobov (2011a, 2011b) investigated the disclosure of mate-preferences between young adult speed daters.

Knowing which content domains are salient in young adults' everyday conversations can help inform a more coherent picture about identity development during this central developmental period, and, more generally, extend the currently underdeveloped body of literature on identity content within social interactions. Therefore, the present study investigated qualitative data from speed dating conversations of young adult, same-sex attracted men. Identity claims were extracted from the data and coded into content domains commonly used within the identity content literature. The analysis included an assessment of the overall prevalence of the different content domains among speakers' identity claims, at the group level. Given the speed dating setting, an additional visual exploratory analysis at the participant level was conducted to elucidate potential dyadic patterns in interlocutor's number of dating claims shared.

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. Age of participants varied between 22-33 years, with a mean age of 27 in event 4 and a mean age of 24 in event 6. 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 event 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

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/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 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 intervention sessions were conducted to allow for questions, doubts and seek for shared solutions. Once the data was coded, the extracted claims along with the assigned domain codes were gathered in one final dataset file, which was then used for subsequent analyses.

Data Analysis

The first step was an analysis of the frequency of claims within the individual content domains at the group level, across rounds. For this purpose, the absolute and relative frequencies were computed for claims within each of the ten content domains, across rounds, across participants. Additionally, the total number of speakers constructing each domain was calculated in order to evaluate it against the absolute number of claims made within that domain, across rounds.

The next step concerned an inductive analysis of the content of each domain at the group level. For this purpose and for better familiarization with the data, individual sheets for the ten content domains were created, containing all claims expressed by speakers within a given domain. This enabled for an identification of the different thematic aspects which the distinct domains were concerned with. Due to the particularly high thematic diversity of claims within the personal domain, four subdomains were inductively identified and labelled as subdomains, but were not further included as stand-alone domains in the frequency analysis of domains.

In an additional visual exploratory analysis at the participant level, it was investigated how speakers' number of dating claims were associated with their conversational partners'

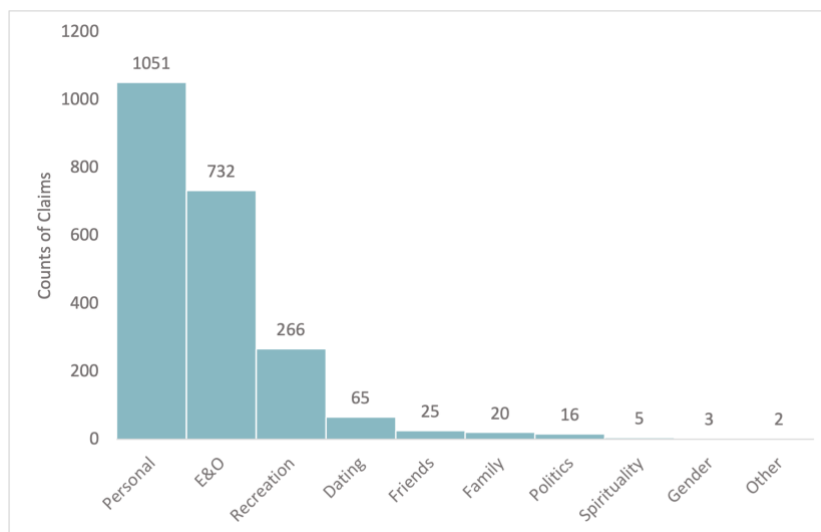
number of dating claims within each round. For this purpose, the total number of dating claims made within each conversation was calculated per speaker. The individual speaker's number of dating claims was then plotted against the number of dating claims of their partner within the respective rounds.

Results

Overall, a total of 2185 identity claims were identified and deductively coded into the ten content domains. As can be seen in Figure 1, each domain was assigned at least once. Comprising almost half of all identified claims, the most prevalent domain was the Personal domain, followed by the Education/Occupation domain and the Recreation domain, respectively. Overall, domains differed in the number of speakers that constructed claims within the particular domain (see Figure 2). While the three most frequently occasioned domains were constructed by all 16 speakers, other domains, such as Gender or Other, were constructed by only one speaker. Explanations on the thematical aspects that each content domain was concerned with, along with exemplary claims from the transcription data are provided below.

Figure 1

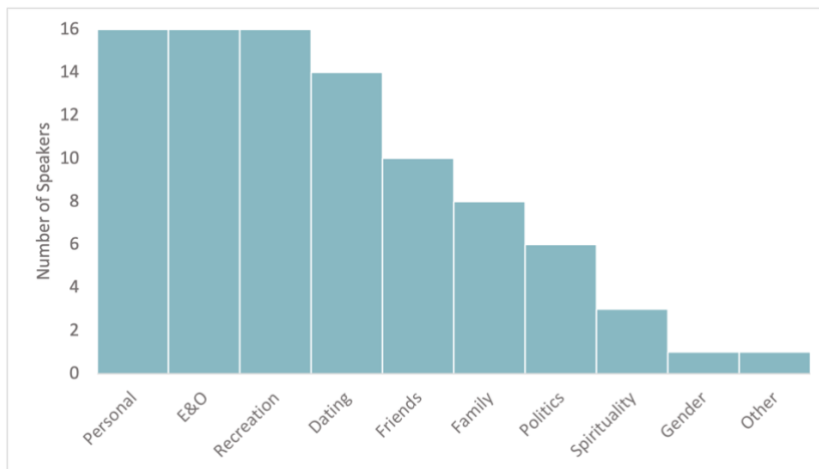
Total Counts of Claims Within the Ten Content Domains



Note. E&O: Education/Occupation.

Figure 2

Total Number of Speakers Constructing Each Content Domain



Note. E&O: Education/Occupation.

Frequency Distribution of Content Domains

Ideological Category

Personal. The Personal domain was the most frequently occasioned domain, comprising 48.10% of all claims. All 16 speakers uttered claims within the Personal domain. Claims within the domain addressed a particular diverse array of topics. Therefore, based on an exploratory inductive analysis of the content of claims, the following four subdomains were identified. Claims within the subdomain demographics addressed multiple aspects of the speaker, such as age (e.g., *"I am 22"*), nationality (e.g., *"I'm Romanian"*), or migration history, (e.g., *"I've lived here all my life"*). Also identified under the demographics subdomain were claims concerning speakers' living situation (e.g., *"I live with two Lithuanian guys"*).

In contrast, claims within the subdomain personal experiences constructed the speaker's personal experiences. For example, speakers described their personal experiences of living at a place (e.g., *"I felt at home"*) or described events and incidents in their lives (e.g., *"Yeah, it was the first time I went on holiday without my parents, actually"*). While a

large part of claims within this section referred to experiences that occurred in the past, some speakers also issued claims about current experiences (e.g., “<Yeah, here [I feel more free in terms of my sexual orientation]”).

The subdomain evaluations included claims concerning speakers’ evaluations of themselves or certain matters. For example, one speaker evaluated themselves as “I just- I’m very lazy“, to justify why he did not choose to study medicine. Some speakers used humor to convey an evaluation, such as “I’m very talented, and like, creative”, when asked about why they do not want to pursue a master’s degree.

The subdomain likings and preferences was constructed by claims referring to speakers’ personal likings. This could include personal tastes (e.g., “I hate the Dutch accent”) or preferences (e.g., “Uh, I prefer vanilla?”), but also attitudes or opinions. For example, one speaker described their attitude towards Valentine’s Day as “I think [valentine’s day] it’s a capital-, eh, commercial- I think”.

Education/Occupation. Of all claims, 33.50% were coded into the Education/Occupation domain, which was addressed by all 16 speakers. The domain included statements referring to diverse aspects concerning education/occupation. For example, claims described speakers’ current education or occupation (e.g., “Yeah. (.) I’m studying Medicine”), previous and future career paths (e.g., “I went to art school and now I’m an illustrator” and “Yeah [I want to do a PhD here]”), goals and plans (e.g., “I want to study old people?”) or specific likings with regards to education (e.g., “No, I like cardiology, that’s the thing”). Some claims also reflected uncertainty about occupational or educational issues (e.g., “M:::eh. I don’t know [if that is my dream job]”) Also included were claims stating educational/occupational experiences, such as “I just did an exchange semester in Berlin”, and personal educational/occupational skills, such as “Uhm::, I had the grades to get into it [Psychology studies]”. In general, excluded from the domain were claims not implicitly or

explicitly referencing occupation/education, such as “[I have been here for] Uh::, now::: six months”. By contrast, the claim “[...] Here is the last year, the third one. [...]” would be included in the domain since its latter part contains a reference to the speaker’s studies.

Recreation. A total of 12.17% of claims were coded into the Recreation domain, within which all 16 speakers expressed claims. The Recreation domain was mainly concerned with speakers’ personal interests. For example, some claims expressed personal tastes (e.g., “[I am not into] hardcore”), while other claims described speakers’ preferred leisure activities (e.g., “I like to listen to music, I like to: take pictures, I like to take walks [...]”). Claims that intuitively were thought to be related to the education/occupation domain, but the content of which could be classified as the speaker’s personal interests outside an educational/occupational context were also assigned the Recreation domain. An example of this would be “I was – I was SO into that [literature]!”, where it becomes clear that the speaker also took an interest in literature outside of the school context.

Politics. A total of 0.73% of claims were coded as political, and a total number of six speakers constructed claims within the Politics domain. The domain was represented by claims referring to various political aspects. For example, claims described speakers’ political affiliation or preferences (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 [...]”), or political opinions (e.g., “I like that about The Netherlands, that it’s, like, weirdly progressive in ways that you wouldn’t think of”). Some speakers also addressed political issues or experiences in their lives (e.g., “Even in, like, more conservative societies like back home. <> I would just hang out with girls and <> all of the girls would be okay with it [my sexuality]{...}”) or referred to their own political education (e.g., “[...] I d(h)on’t kn(hh)ow anything about Macedonian politics”).

Spirituality. The Spirituality domain accommodated 0.23% of all claims, constructed by a total of three speakers. Claims within this domain referred primarily to speakers' opinions on spiritual issues, for example "*I think the world would be much much MUCH better off if there we- if:: religion just didn't exist {...}*". Other times, claims described spiritual issues with personal relevance to the speaker, such as "*[My tattoo] It's, like, uh::m, the symbol of Gemini, because I'm Gemini*".

Other. Only 0.09% of claims were coded into the domain Other, with only one speaker uttering such claims. The category was used for claims not clearly fitting into any of the regular content domains. An example of a claim from this category would be "*I know, it's [alcohol] bad for me. (laughs)*".

Relational Categories

Friends. 1.14% of claims were categorized into the Friends domain, which was constructed by 10 speakers. The friends domain was concerned with claims relating to friends or peers, such as "*I've- I've made, like, friends back in the time when people made internet friends?*". Some claims also contained references to relevant identity categories, such as in "*I always have my best friend to rely on*".

Family. A total 0.92% of claims were coded into the Family domain, which was constructed by eight speakers. Claims within this domain mostly involved references to family members. For example, one speaker talked about their sister "*I- My sister lives in Denmark and I really- And she has kids and I- I haven't seen them in SO long, so I really wanna go there*". Additionally, or alternatively to mere references to family members, claims were reflective of the speaker's relationship with those, such as in "*Clearly my parents REALLY liked me? (chuckles)*".

Gender. 0.14% of claims were assigned the Gender domain, with only one speaker uttering claims within this domain. Coded as such were claims referring to behavior and

attitudes about gender and gender stereotypes. For example, in one claim the speaker expressed their opinion on gender concepts “{...} *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*”.

Dating. Of all extracted claims, 2.97% were assigned the Dating domain, with a total of 14 speakers constructing it. As such, in comparison with the most prevalent domains, dating claims were made less frequently but by a similar number of speakers. The dating domain comprised all claims made by speakers with reference to dating and sexuality negotiations. For example, speakers described their dating behavior (e.g., “*Yeah. [I am on Tinder]*”) or expressed their attitudes or opinions about dating (e.g., “{...} *I DEFINITELY wanna try it at least once {...}*”). Other times, claims described personal dating experiences, such as in “*Yeah. (.) Yeah, actually, I- I have- I have never meet a, uhm, interesting boy in that kind of so- uh, social media networks*”. While most dating claims concerned incidents beyond the study setting (e.g., “{...} *being at the gay club is, like, really awkward for some reason?*”), others were specific to the current conversational context, such as “< *You- > You- You're making me even more interested in you*”.

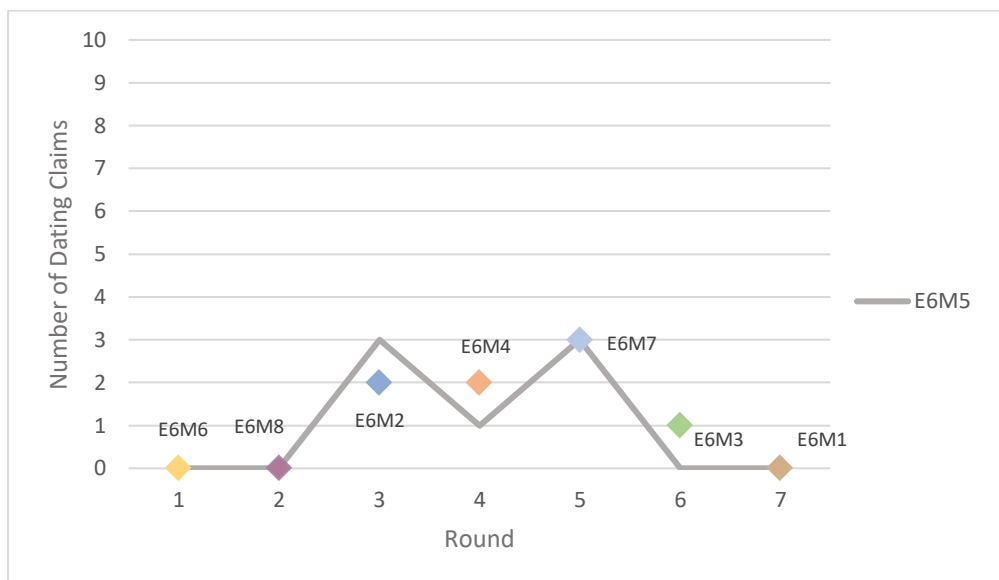
Patterns in Interlocutors' Construction of Dating Claims

To identify potential patterns in interlocutors' number of dating claims made, an exploratory visual analysis at the participant level was conducted, including all 14 speakers that constructed the dating domain. Specifically, it was analyzed whether there was an association between the number of dating claims made by speakers and their respective conversational partners, across rounds. Two exemplary graphs are shown in Figure 3 and 4 (see Appendix for complete collection of graphs), depicting the number of dating claims by two speakers, E6M5 and E4M8, across rounds, plotted against their conversational partners' number of dating claims. Results of the visual analysis revealed that, in general, more dating

claims from either speaker were associated with an increase in claims from the conversational partner. This effect however was particularly pronounced for conversations with a higher number of dating claims, so that more than two dating claims by either speaker appeared to be accompanied by at least one dating claim by the conversational partner (see Graph 3 and 4). This pattern was observed to be pervasive across conversational pairs (see Appendix). Notably, there also appeared to be individual variability in the number of dating claims expressed across conversations (see e.g., Figure 4 and Appendix).

Figure 3

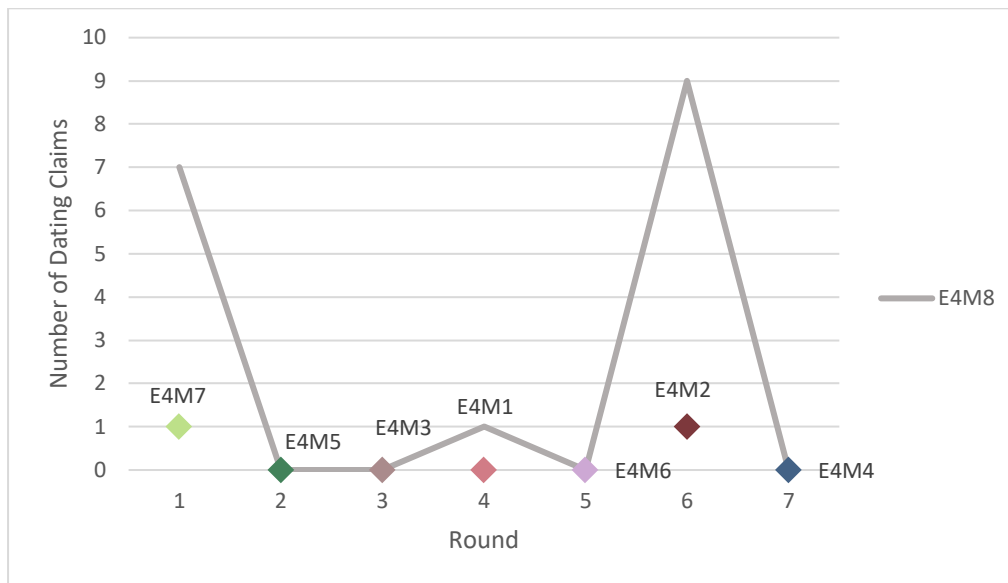
Number of Dating Claims of Speaker E6M5 and Conversational Partners Across Rounds



Note. Denotations, e.g., E6M6, represent labels for conversational partners.

Figure 4

Number of Dating Claims of Speaker E4M8 and Conversational Partners Across Rounds



Note. Denotations, e.g., E4M7, represent labels for conversational partners.

Discussion

By analyzing qualitative data from unprompted speed dating conversations between young adult men, the current study aimed to investigate which identity content domains were most salient to young adults when engaging in everyday interactions. Seeing as emerging adulthood is a crucial period for identity development (Arnett, 2000), informing about the contents in which individuals construct their identities within social interactions is necessary to a coherent understanding of identity in this developmental period. For this purpose, within the current study, identity claims were extracted from the transcribed speed dating conversations and coded into existing content domains. These were then sorted according to their overall prevalence among claims, at the group level. In light of the immediate speed dating context of the study, an additional visual exploratory analysis of the dating domain was conducted to inform whether speakers' number of dating claims was associated with their partner's number of dating claims within each round.

Domain Prevalence

Overall, results show that claims were unequally distributed across content domains. Young adults frequently made use of ideological, in particular personal and educational topics, to negotiate their identities within conversations. Contrarily, interpersonal domains were touched upon less frequently. Moreover, individuals differed in the salience of different domains in which they constructed identities. That is, every speaker referenced personal, educational, and recreational topics to make identity statements, while other topics, such as gender or spirituality, were rarely used.

This pattern of results is consistent with prior research by McLean, Syed, and Shucard (2016) on young adults' prompted narratives, and research by Johnson et al. (2022) on adolescents' written self-descriptions, which also identified high individual variability in salience of content domains. In line with the current results, Johnson et al. also found a high predominance of ideological, in particular personal, topics, and a lower salience of interpersonal domains. Young adults' frequent use of personal topics in constructing identity in the present sample could be argued to result from an increased need for affiliation in the speed-dating context (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008), so that speakers may have attempted to find commonalities within personal topics. However, the diversity of subdomains within the Personal domain, a common problem in studies using pre-existing content domains (Johnson et al., 2022), may have naturally made personal claims more likely than claims within more narrowly defined domains.

In terms of educational claims, Johnson et al.'s (2022) study and another study by McLean, Syed, Yoder, & Greenhoot (2016), investigating prompted self-narratives of young adults, found that educational content was not as salient as within the present sample. This finding could be related to the higher age of speakers in the current sample, given that young adults may be increasingly engaged in exploration of career choice and vocational options

(Arnett, 2000; Roisman et al., 2004), as opposed to adolescents. Alternatively, it could also be hypothesized that in the current sample, young adults used educational topics as a means of creating affiliation in the dating context (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008). Given the homogeneity of the present sample in terms of student status and age range, talking about education/occupation related topics likely presented a simple way of bonding between conversation partners, suggesting the use of identity content as an affiliate tool in interactional contexts.

Overall, young adults in the present study rarely engaged in interpersonal identity negotiations. Theoretically, young adults would be expected to be considerably focused on constructing their sexual or dating identities (Arnett, 2000; Lefkowitz & Gillen, 2006; Madsen & Collins, 2018), which would suggest a centrality of dating related disclosures in instances where individuals' identities are constructed, such as everyday conversations. This is also what has been found in prior studies on conversations between close friends, in which dating and sexual identities are negotiated (Kerrick & Thorne, 2014; Korobov & Thorne, 2006; Morgan & Korobov, 2012; Norona et al., 2013). Furthermore, in the specific context of speed dating, Korobov (2011a, 2011b) observed the presence of mate-preference talk among young adult opposite attracted speed daters as a way of creating affiliation. Thus, prior research suggested a salience of dating related disclosures within friendships, but importantly, also within dating contexts.

The finding of dating disclosures within conversational contexts was not recurrent in the present sample. It could be hypothesized that in heterosexual as opposed to same-sex attracted dating, the dating context is more salient. That is, bonding over the shared objective of speed-daters to find a potential romantic partner (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008), may present a relatively straightforward way of establishing affiliation between heterosexual daters. Considering that same-sex attracted individuals score higher on openness to experience

(Allen, 2020), these individuals may be more open to relational outcomes other than only romantic partnerships, rendering the dating context less salient. Thus, it could be speculated that young adults in the current sample refrained from talking about dating in favor of bonding over topics imminently shared with the conversational partner, such as education. Essentially, this would suggest that conversational context (i.e. sexual orientation of interlocutors) affected the construction of identity content.

Contextual Embedding of Dating Claims

Results of the visual exploratory analysis of dating claims at the participant level within the current sample suggested that conversational partners mutually influenced each other in the amount of dating disclosures. Specifically, young adults who shared a high amount of dating related information appeared to elicit at least one dating claim from their interlocutor. This suggests that interlocutors actively influenced each other's identity constructions as opposed to only being static and neutral observers (Schachter & Ventura, 2008). Moreover, individuals varied in the number of dating information they disclosed across conversations, which could be speculated to result from adaptation to changing conversational partners. In combination with the aforementioned findings, this suggests that identities are no static constructs, but instead are embedded in particular contexts (Erikson, 1968). In support of the notion that identity acts as a self-regulatory system, for example by managing impressions or directing attention (Adams & Marshall, 1996), results from the current study suggested that identity claims are used as affiliate tools to fulfill a person's psychological needs, e.g. affiliation, in a given conversational context. Overall, findings point towards a context-dependence of identity content within conversational contexts, and more generally, direct emphasis on the importance of considering identity in context (Breakwell, 1986).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Given the unique approach of studying identity content in a conversational, i.e. speed dating context, the current study can make important contributions to the literature. Overall, the present study adds to the relatively recent body of literature by demonstrating that identity content can be observed in moment-to-moment everyday interactions (Gmelin & Kunnen, 2022). Further, as mentioned throughout, many prior studies did not investigate identity content in the context of social interactions, but in a self-narrative manner, often using conversational prompts (Johnson et al., 2022; McLean, Syed, Yoder, & Greenhoot, 2016). The current study advances these findings in showing salience of content domains within unprompted conversations.

The current argumentation that identity content is specific to the conversational context in which it occurs supported the essence of prior researchers who emphasized the necessity of taking into account the context in which identity formation occurs (Breakwell, 1986; Erikson, 1968). Due to the present focus of identity content, findings specifically contributed to an understanding of Galliher et al.'s (2017) multilevel model of identity content by proposing that conversational context (i.e. the speed-dating setting) affected construction of identity content in the present sample. This finding of a context-dependence of identity content needs further exploration, but may have important implications for clinical practice. Acknowledging that individuals' identities are not static, but constructed depending on the conversational context could be crucial in recognizing that differing approaches to adaptive identities may be needed for different contexts in which problematic behavior occurs.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

Findings of the current study must be evaluated in light of several limitations and strengths surrounding its design. Importantly, due to the number of coders involved ($N = 7$),

the reliability of the domain coding was ensured to be relatively high. Another strength was the investigation of identity content in a quasi-natural design frame. Arguably, the speed dating events were staged for research purposes and participants were aware of being recorded, raising questions about a potential “observer’s paradox”. However, the act of recording can also be a way of displaying identity in interactions through speakers’ acknowledgment of and interaction with the recording device (Gordon et al., 2012). Another limitation refers to the fact that speed dates represent a shortened version of normal dates (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008), and so identity constructions may have differed from those occurring in ordinary dating contexts. In order to validate the current suggestion of a context-specificity of identity content, future research could thus investigate whether differences exist in construction of identity content between these two, and other conversational settings, such as friendships, romantic or family relationships. Importantly, research would benefit from taking a within-subjects approach to observe individuals’ construction of identity content across different conversational contexts.

Another limitation of the present study centered around issues of generalizability. Included in the analyses was only a small sample ($N = 16$) of young adult, same-sex attracted males, so rather than implying inferences, results should be seen as adding to the recent field of identity content and as inspiring future research to investigate identity content in conversational contexts within more diverse samples. This could enable for example the discovery of potential age-related differences in construction of identity content. Lastly, one further constraint was the use of pre-existing content domains as well as a very broadly conceptualized Personal domain. Notably, since this is a pervasive problem in the identity content literature, future research would benefit from taking an inductive approach to identity content. This would facilitate the identification of new and more nuanced content domains,

which more accurately represent the contents in which individuals construct their identities within everyday conversation (McLean, Syed, Yoder, & Greenhoot, 2016).

Conclusion

The present study aimed to inform which content domains were salient in young adults' everyday conversations by investigating unprompted speed dating conversations between same-sex attracted, young adult men. Results from the preliminary analysis suggested a high salience of ideological, in particular personal and educational/occupational topics, and a low salience of interpersonal topics for young adults' identity constructions in everyday conversations. Moreover, individuals varied in the salience of content domains. An additional exploratory analysis of patterns within conversational partners' use of dating claims suggested a contextual embedding of dating claims in that higher frequencies of dating related disclosures by either partner were usually embedded in conversations in which both partner disclosed dating claims. Based on findings from both analyses, arguments are made for a context-specificity of identity content in conversational contexts. By investigating identity content across different conversational settings, prospective studies should aim to clarify the link between identity content and conversational context.

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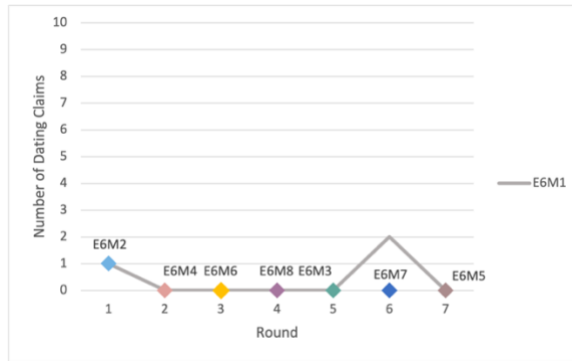
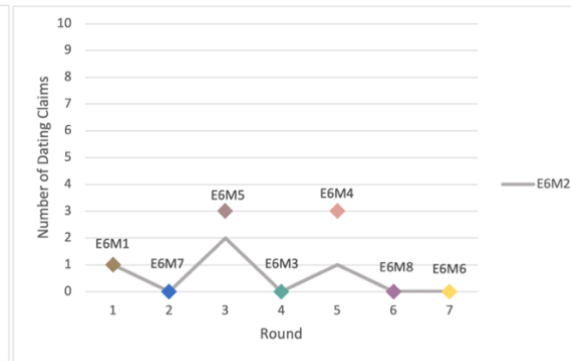
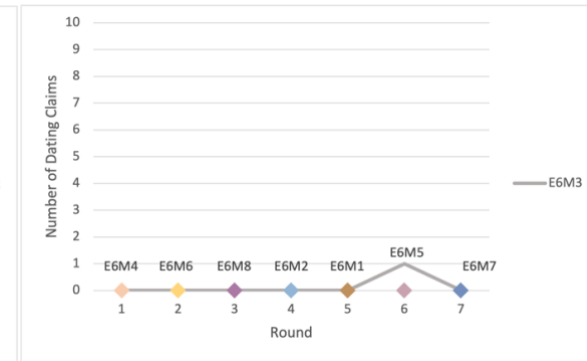
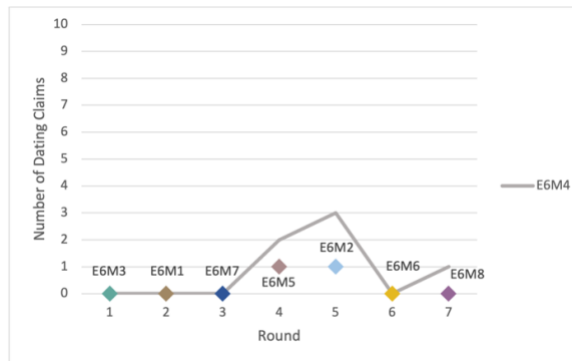
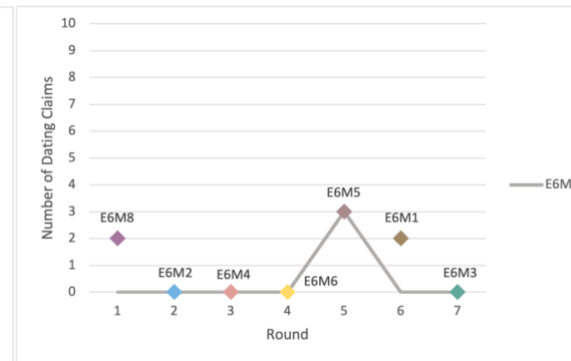
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Figure A7*Dating Claims of E6M1 and Interlocutors***Figure A8***Dating Claims of E6M2 and Interlocutors***Figure A9***Dating Claims of E6M3 and Interlocutors***Figure A10***Dating Claims of E6M4 and Interlocutors***Figure A11***Dating Claims of E6M7 and Interlocutors***Figure A12***Dating Claims of E6M8 and Interlocutors*