Gender Differences in Emerging Adults' Identity Content

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Abstract

This study aimed to find whether there are gender differences in the identity content of emerging adults. As a result of gendered socialisation practices as well as social roles and norms, gender differences may arise. However, research conducted on the influence of gender on identity issues thus far has provided mixed results. To gain a clear sense of self, individuals must assemble different, conflicting parts of their identity into a coherent whole, defined as a workable identity configuration. 64 first year psychology students were asked to describe themselves in a timespan of three minutes. Each participants' identity statements were coded, extracted and finally categorised under one of seventeen domains, after which radar charts were created as a visualisation of participants' identity configuration. By comparing men and women's identity configurations, the current study found no significant differences between the patterns seen in men and women's identity configurations. Furthermore this study tested whether women made more statements in the interpersonal domain, as it was expected that they tend to describe themselves more through social relationships, but no evidence for this was found. The overarching conclusion drawn in this study was that men and womens' identity content shows far more similarities than differences. Finally this study intended to look into the conceptualization of gender and its role in everyday life. It was concluded that, since barely any participants made mention of this, gender does not seem to be a central domain in emerging adults' identity content.

Keywords: Identity content, gender differences, identity configurations, emerging adulthood

Gender Differences in Emerging Adults Identity Content

Acquiring a sense of identity is one of the central psychosocial tasks that stretches from adolescence into emerging adulthood , a period in which individuals navigate the road to adulthood (Arnett, 2015). They are challenged with the task of forming a coherent sense of self. One has to assemble all parts of their identity into a workable whole: an identity configuration. Two parts of identity have generally been considered in research: Identity content, the elements or parts that make up identity (Galliher, McLean, & Syed, 2017) and identity processes, the development of one's identity. As gender is an aspect of identity, gender differences have been studied in many different contexts, and mixed results have been found when looking at the role of gender on identity processes. A comparison between identity contents of men and women has yet to be conducted. This research investigates whether identity content of men and women in emerging adulthood differs, through comparing identity configuration profiles. Additionally, it aims to discover potential differences in the way men and women construct gender identity.

Emerging adulthood

While some research has been done on identity content in the general population, only a few studies have focused specifically on emerging adults. In this stage of life individuals navigate the process of becoming an adult. This means new experiences and situations, as well as a change in the way in which these young people relate to society and their peers (Markovitch et al., 2014; Crocetti, 2017). For emerging adults this means exploring their identity and the issues concerning them, amongst others in the field of relationships, work and education (Erikson, 1968; Arnett, 2014; Markovitch et al., 2014; Vosylis et al., 2018). Syed and McLean (2015) have argued that insight into *what* is developing is necessary to gain a full understanding of the

developmental process of identity. This research can not only provide information on content, complexity, and guide further research, understanding emerging adults' identity contents has many practical applications as wellTo illustrate, this knowledge can lead to improved interventions focused on emerging adults, as well as help form a better understanding of the development and thought processes of emerging adults, leading to a better understanding of behaviour.

Identity content

Identity content is the 'what' of identity, in other words, what topics, issues, concerns and aspects do people consider when they think and talk about who they are (McLean, Syed, Shucard; 2016). Whilst the focus has been more on identity processes, a considerable amount of studies have been conducted on the topic of identity content. For example, Johnson, Odjakjian and Park (2022) investigated adolescents' salient identity content to answer this "what" question. Using inductive content analysis to analyse responses to the question "Who am I?", they found four categories in what the participants wrote: Personal, Social categories, Relationships and Self-evaluation (content codes). They also found two categories in *how* participants wrote their statements: with different Qualifiers and different Verb Tenses (structure codes). They investigated patterns in content, and found that most participants wrote only personal codes, whilst participants including all content codes was the least common pattern. The remainder included two or three content codes. Participants that included multiple types of content codes, who talked about different categories, were more likely to include structure codes, such as verb tense. The results of this research give insight into adolescent's identity content and exemplify its complexity. How and if these findings generalise to different age groups, such as emerging adults, is yet to be studied. Another study concerning identity content has been conducted by

McLean, Syed, Yoder, and Greenhoot (2014). They took content domains that had been identified by status researchers and examined whether these domains appeared in common narrative prompts. What they found was that some domains were rare or absent, such as politics, religion and sex roles, whereas others, like family, were common. This research suggests that some contents are more salient than others.

The development of identity content

Galliher, McLean and Syed (2017) created the multilevel model of identity content, to provide a framework for understanding the development of identity content. Their model consists of four levels, across which identity content is navigated. At the broadest level of influence they situate identity development within cultural and historical contexts. Identity development at this level is given shape by the aspirations and goals that are deemed appropriate within the culture, and the limits on the way one can define themselves. Secondly, social roles are placed at the second level of analysis, pertaining to the relational contexts in which identities are developed and negotiated. In the context of social roles, relational and social identity is developed, which continues to shape an individual's overall sense of self. Through integrating social roles into the overall sense of self, relationship labels become part of the larger identity. One may accumulate an unlimited number of social roles, which are connected to the first level of analysis in that they are defined, as well as given meaning by the culture. At the third level are the ways one navigates and negotiates different aspects of identity across and within content domains, with the goal of experiencing various identity aspects as an integrated whole. Finally, at the fourth level, individuals navigate aspects of their identity within the context of everyday experiences, enacting their identity contents at the level of everyday interactions.

The development of gender differences in the context of identity

This study aims to find whether there are differences between the identity content of men and women. First, the significance of this study within the current body of literature will be addressed by demonstrating why differences between genders could be expected. Gender is a central component of identity in many cultures (Gagnon & Simon, 1974). Research in the field of social psychology has given ever more attention to the performative aspect of gender. Gender is not seen as a set of traits or a variable, but as something a person does within social interaction (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Male and female gender can be seen as a 'set of socially constructed relationships which are produced and reproduced through people's actions'(Gerson and Peiss 1985: 12). The way in which an individual understands themselves as male or female in the cultural contexts in which they are developing, known as gender identity (Wood & Eagly, 2015), develops at an early age. Infants can distinguish gender linked physical attributes, for example faces, within the first year. Two year old's employ gender labelling and at three years people are aware of their own gender (Leaper & Friedman, 2007; Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002). One explanation for the emergence of gender differences is through differing childhood socialisation practices (Fivush, Haden, & Reese, 2006; Reese, Bird, & Tripp, 2007). One study illustrating the outcome of these differing practices demonstrates their effect on the development of narrative skills in childhood. Fivush and colleagues showed that parents tend to socialise more relational themes in their daughters' narratives, resulting in girls' narratives containing more relational content (Fivush et al., 2000; Fivush & Buckner, 2000, 2003). Additionally parents are more likely to discuss and elaborate on emotional states in conversations with daughters than with sons (Fivush, Brotman, Buckner, & Goodman, 2000; Fivush & Buckner, 2000). Gradually, as children narrate the emotional aspects of events, girls focus more on evaluative components and orientation than do boys (Haden, Haine, & Fivush, 1997). Thus, Fivush (1991) suggested

that perhaps parents make more effort harder with their daughters to resolve negative moods than they do with their sons. Consequently girls may develop a more elaborated self concept, especially in terms of emotional experiences (Fivush, Berlin, Sales, Mennuti-Washburn, & Cassidy, 2003).

On top of differing socialisation practices, another contributor to the emergence of gender differences are gender roles and norms. These roles and norms are formed and influenced by culture, and are affected by group- and individual characteristics, such as race and sexual identity. Through social learning they are communicated to individuals (Levant & Pollack, 1995; Wong & Rochlen, 2008). Behaviour consistent with biological sex and gender roles is expected as well as rewarded, whilst simultaneously digression is punished. Thus, the separation of men and women into particular gender roles is maintained (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Rudman & Glick, 2001). These gender roles are introduced at a young age. Children firstly observe them at home, since women are involved in household tasks more than men (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Moreover children's books and toys portray a culture's gender roles and norms (Diekman & Murnen, 2004). In the media, boys' worth is often portrayed through dominance, aggression and power, whilst sexuality and beauty are painted as girl's values (Auster and Mansbach, 2012). Combined, these influences encourage children to adopt and adhere to gendered roles and traits (Schneider & Bos, 2019). Sandberg (2018) illustrates the reinforcement of adhering to gender roles and traits from a young age. She notes that whilst a young boy may be ascribed the label *assertive* when exhibiting leadership skills, young girls exhibiting the same skills are negatively labelled as "bossy". This circles back to socialisation patterns, as individuals straying from cultural gender stereotypes, concerning behaviour as well as interests, are negatively categorised. Wood and Eagly (2012) concurrently note that males adopt agentic traits and are likely to adopt

an identity including agency, whilst girls similarly adopt more communal traits. In short, socialisation patterns and gender roles may lead to identity differences between sexes.

Studies on gender differences in the context of identity have however provided varied, conflicting results. Gender differences in identity have mostly been explained on the basis of different domains. It has been suggested by multiple authors that women's identity develops within and focuses on interpersonal domains, processes and relationships. This could be traced back to parents' socialisation processes. For men, on the other hand, the ideological domain is most salient, focusing on occupational choice, individual competence and knowledge acquisition (Branch, 2001; Douvan & Adelson, 1966). This has also been found by Gilligan (1988), who observed that men define themselves along "traditional masculine lines" of self definition and autonomy, whereas females tend to define themselves through their relationships with others.

Additionally, gender differences on identity content could be embedded in cultural structures. As noted before, culture transmits notions of appropriate ways of being, acting, and feeling (Fivush, 2010; Hammack & Cohler, 2011). It has been suggested by Cramer (2000) that girls in the western world nowadays are stimulated to consider not only stereotypically female, but also stereotypically male paths of development. As a result women might have a much broader range of possibilities when establishing their identity. Whether this is reflected in differing identity content of men and women has yet to be studied.

On the other hand, there have also been studies finding no gender differences on issues related to identity content, structure and context. Kroger (1997) conducted an extensive review on empirical studies utilising Marcia's (1966) identity status paradigm. She concluded that men and women did not consistently differ in terms of the salience of identity defining domains, including occupation, religion, politics, sex role values and other relationship domains such as

dating and friendship. Her empirical investigation further revealed that, rather than gender, identity status was associated with the role relationships in the identity formation process.

Archer (1992) has also noted that, regardless of the aspect of identity that is investigated, in the task of identity formation similarities between men and women far outweigh their differences.

Identity configurations

Identity is something that is formed by an individual over time. One approach to study the way in which personal identities are developed and shaped is by studying identity configurations (e.g. Schachter, 2004). Identity configurations are representations of the ways in which values, beliefs and experiences are assembled into workable configurations by individuals (Hammack et al., 2009; Schachter, 2004). Identity configurations show the integration of multiple, sometimes conflicting, contents into one's identity. These configurations can be visualised in different manners. An example will be given to illustrate previous visualisations. Firstly, Gaag et.al. (2020) integrated qualitative and quantitative aspects of identity development into their *landscape of identity model*. Their paper describes and visualises Marcia's identity statuses (Marcia, 1993) as identity landscapes, characterised by the level and strength of integration of commitments. The result is four figures, resembling drawn landscapes of what could be comparable to a desert, each consisting of valleys. These valleys, referred to as commitment valleys, are set apart by the content to which an individual is committed, as well as the width and depth of the valleys. This paper is one example of a visualisation of an identity profile.

Current Study

Within the field of identity psychology, studies related to gender in the context of identity have provided mixed results. The majority of these have focused on identity development and identity processes, leaving a gap in knowledge on the potential role of gender on identity content. In the current research we asked 64 first year psychology students at the University of Groningen to talk about themselves for three minutes. We then analysed the content of their self descriptions and converted these into identity configuration profiles. The aim of the study was to test three hypotheses. First, it was expected that women make more claims in the interpersonal domain compared to men, Second, we aimed to investigate whether there is a significant difference in the patterns seen in men and women's radar graphs. Finally, the study aimed to explore whether there is a gender related difference in the manner in which gender is constructed, as seen in the way in which gender is specifically mentioned.

Method

Participants

In this study, a total of 115 participants ($N = 62$ women, 53 men) have taken part (*mean age* = 20.6; *sd* =2.029; *age range* = 18-28). Data from one participant were excluded, due to it being incomplete. Participants were recruited from undergraduate psychology courses, and they earned course credits for their participation.

Procedure

Prior to the study, participants were asked for permission for their data to be used anonymously and securely. Their informed consent was acquired through a form, which included information about the research procedure and about their rights as a research participant, including their right to withdraw from the study at any point in the process. Thereafter, the actual research procedure could start, which was structured along three different phases.

The first phase of the study consisted of participants verbally describing themselves for three and a half minutes using a microphone headset connected to a computer where the statements were recorded. Participants were asked to start speaking freely ten seconds after the recording started, so that the researcher present could leave the experiment room and give the participants the privacy to self-disclose. Participants could say anything that came to mind that was connected to themselves. We used the recorded narratives collected in this phase of the study as the data for our current research. It must be mentioned that, prior to phase one, the participants were aware that they, as well as the researcher, would listen to their self-descriptions after recording them.

In the following two phases, the participants were asked to participate in some follow-up measuring tasks regarding their feelings about their self-descriptions of the first phase, and regarding their feelings about themselves in more general terms. In the second phase, participants were given the task to listen to their self-descriptions and to indicate how they felt during the moment of expression. For this purpose, the Mouse Paradigm was used (Vallacher et al., 2002), which allowed participants to evaluate their feelings of each self-description along a continuum from positive to negative. In the third phase, the Rosenberg self-esteem scale was introduced to the participants (Rosenberg, 1965). After the study, participants were informed about the true purpose of research, which was deliberately withheld prior to the study.

Data preparation

The self descriptions given by participants were first transcribed using online software. They were then uploaded to Atlas.ti. The coding of these transcripts took place in three stages. In the first stage all identity claims made by participants were selected, by coding these statements as being an identity claim. The research group was split into three sets of pairs. Each pair was

assigned between 10 -13 transcripts to code. Coder 1 (C1) coded the first half of the transcripts and Coder 2 (C2) coded the second. Each identity claim was quoted and saved. C2 checked the transcripts that C1 had coded and vice versa.

The transcripts were cross checked to ensure there was interrater reliability and consistency in how the coding was conducted. If there was doubt or disagreement, the pair would revisit the coding manual and discuss it. In the event that the pair could not come to an agreement, the claim was recorded and discussed amongst the complete research group in the subsequent meeting, before reaching consensus. The coding manual was adjusted and embellished after each query was raised. Once the coding was completed, the quotes were imported to excel.

Each quote was then assigned a code categorizing the quote under a domain. The coding manual used for this is based on a narrative identity domains coding manual developed by McLean and Syed (2011). The coding manual can be found in appendix [letter]. Coding of each identity claim was done in terms of the identity content domains that the claim is constructing. Identity content domains are split into relational categories and ideological categories. Both categories include more specific, in depth codes. To be coded as present, the domain has to be related to a central aspect of the claim, it can not be background information. Each single claim was coded with only one domain. This second stage was also completed in pairs, where C1 and C2 coded and checked claims, after which potential differences were discussed and resolved.

In the last phase of the preparation process the data was grouped and converted into radar graphs showing the distribution of individual participant's identity claims over the domains. In other words, the codes attributed to all identity claims made by a participant were used to create a radar graph showing the distribution of claims over the domains. This was done for every

participant. Additionally, in the list of identity statements a search was conducted for mentions of *male, female, girl, guy* and *woman*, since these were partly sorted into the gender domain and partly sorted into the *Personal Demographics* subdomain. The amount of mentions were summed together.

Data analysis

64 participants were selected from the total participant pool. First, the participants were grouped into two categories, *male identifying* and *female identifying*. Based on these criteria 29 male identifying participants and 35 female identifying participants were deemed fit for this research's analysis. Using R studio, radar graphs were created for each participant, as well as graphs combining multiple participants' data. The study used the IMICA manual (Gmelin & Kunnen, 2021; Appendix A) to code identity claims, which includes the domain personal, that is further specified through seven subcategories within this domain. For each participant two radar charts were created to visualise their identity configuration, one displaying the distribution of claims over the main domains and one displaying the distribution of personal claims over the *Personal* subdomains. The identity content profiles were first separated into men's and women's and then sorted into categories based on the number of spikes of domains in the graphs. To be considered a spike a domain needs to contain at least 20 percent of the total claims made by a participant. The reasoning behind this threshold is that if all claims were distributed evenly over the domains every domain would contain 10 percent of the claims, therefore double this amount, 20 percent, is considered a reasonable cut-off point. Categories were inductively created.

Men and women were compared to test the hypotheses that (1) women make more claims in the interpersonal domain compared to men, (2) there is a difference in the patterns seen in men and women's radar graphs and (3) there is a visible difference in the manner in which men and

women construct gender, as seen in the way in which gender is specifically mentioned within contexts. To test the first hypothesis the relative frequencies of the interpersonal domains were summed for each participant, male and female. Domains that fit into the interpersonal domain are *Family*, *Friends* and *Dating*. An independent-samples T-test was conducted to compare the average amount of claims within this domain for men and women. For the second hypothesis a chi-square test of independence was conducted. A qualitative approach was taken to test the third hypothesis. First all mentions of gender were collected, to then be compared based on their content and context.

Results

Descriptives

The group of male identifying participants consisted of 29 participants, aged between 18 and 28 (*M = 20.58, SD = 2.08*). The group of female identifying participants contained 35 participants, between the ages of 18 and 27 (*M = 20.61, SD = 2*). Across all participants a total of 1888 claims were coded, with an average of 36.28 claims made by participants per interview (*SD = 10.14*). Male participants made fewer identity claims (*M = 34.79, SD = 11.02*) compared to females (*M = 37.40, SD = 9.40*), however the difference was not significant (*t* (62) = -0.021, *p* = 0.311). Identity claims were divided over 13, out of the total 17 domains in both groups. In both groups 8 out of the 9 total subdomains of 'personal' were mentioned. On average, participants made claims in 7.67 domains (*SD*=1.64). There were no domains that were mentioned by only one gender. Furthermore, the average of claims in the domains of *Gender*, *Religion/Spirituality*, *Politics* or *Participant* were 0 for both genders. The domains *Recreation* (20%) and *Education* (13%) were mentioned most frequently. Recreation was mentioned slightly more often by women compared to men (21% versus 18%, see figure 1). Men made more claims than women

in the domain *Family* (7% versus 3%, see figure 1). On the other hand, women mentioned *Frieds* more than men (5% versus 4%, see figure 1). The domain *Education* mentioned was equally by men and women (12%, see figure 1) The domains *Dating* and *Other* were mentioned least (2%), with men mentioning *Dating* just more than women (2% versus 1%, see figure 1), and *Other* slightly less than women (1% versus 2%, see figure 1). Overall, the majority of claims were made in the domain *Personal* (24%). On average women made somewhat more claims in this domain compared to men (59% versus 53%, see figure 1)

Figure 1

*Bar graph showing the percentages of claims per domain, separated by gender*
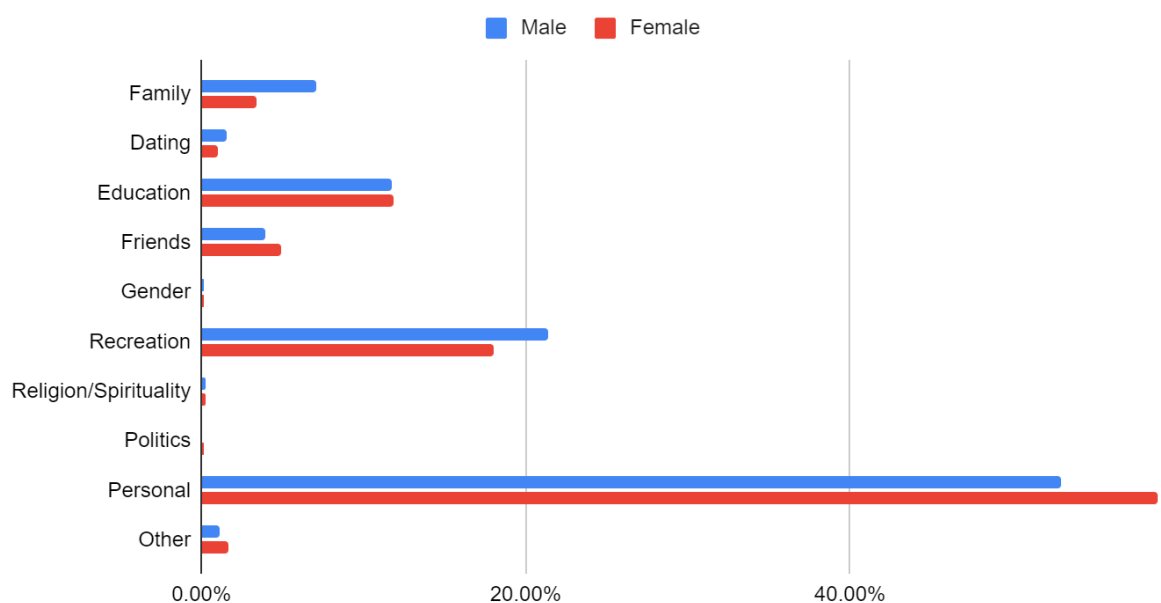
The first hypothesis was that women make more claims in the interpersonal domain than men. The domains *Friends*, *Family* and *Dating* make up the interpersonal domain. The average amount of claims women made in this domain ($M = 0.09$, $SD = 0.02$) was smaller compared to the average amount of claims men made in this domain ($M = 0.12$, $SD = 0.02$). This difference was not significant ($t (62) = 1,26$; $p = 0.22$).

Within the *Personal* domain, subcategory *Personality, Emotions and Psychological Traits* was the most prevalent in women's claims (22%) and also mentioned often by men (14%). Men mentioned the subdomain *Reflection, Growth & Personhood* slightly more than women (14% versus 12%, see figure 2). *Appearance* was mentioned more by men than by women (4% versus 2%, see figure 2), as well as *Likes and Interests* (7% versus 6%, see figuer 2). However, men made fewer claims in the *Habits & Behavioural tendencies* domain compared to women (2% versus 3%, see figure 2). The domain *Demographics* was mentioned equally by both genders (10%, see figure 2). Within the *Personal* domain the subcategories *Abilities and Skills* and *Values and Ideals* were mentioned least often, slightly more by women compared to men (2% versus 1%, see figure 2) The subdomain *Participant* was not mentioned at all (figure 2).

Figure 2

Bar graph showing the percentages of claims per subdomain of the Personal domain, separated by gender
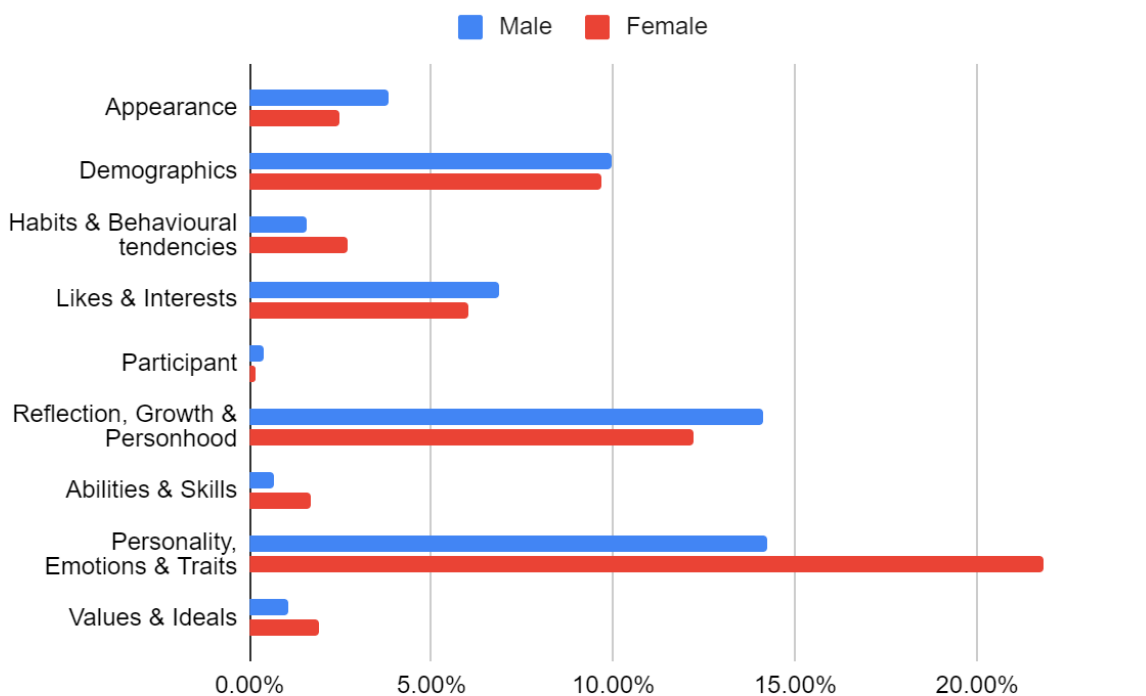
Referring to the third hypothesis, 12 participants in total mentioned their gender:five men and seven women. Of these mentions, five were categorised into the gender domain, seven were categorised into the *Personal Demographics* subdomain. Additionally, one participant made the following two statements concerning gender: "I have the best of two worlds being a girl and having a deep insight into how guys think", "[this] made me a lot more open-minded in regard to how girls and guys interact" (participant 29). There was not enough data to compare men and women's conceptualization and mentions of gender.

Domain radar charts

Four groups can be identified when examining all participants' domain radar graphs (excluding the *Personal* subdomains). The radar graphs could be sorted into the following groups; having one spike in *Personal* (figure 3); having two spikes, in *Personal* and *Recreation* or in *Personal* and *Education* (Figure 4); Charts having three spikes, divided between charts with spikes in *Personal*, *Recreation* and *Education* (N=5), spikes in *Personal, Education and Friends* (N=1) or three spikes in *Personal*, *Recreation* and *Friends* (N=1) (figure 5). Two graphs did not fit into one of these three categories and were thus placed in a fourth category, other (Figure 6). For the amount of participants, sorted by gender, fitting into each group, refer to table 3.

Table 3

The relative frequency of domain radar graphs per group

Group	Relative Frequency of domain radar graphs per group	
	Male	Female
1 spike, *Personal*	0.24	0.37
2 spikes, *Personal* and *Recreation* or *Education*	0.62	0.49
3 spikes	0.10	0.11
Other	0.03	0.03
Total	1	1

Figure 3

Combined radar graph, 1 spike Personal

Figure 4

Combined radar graph, 2 spikes Personal and Recreation or Personal and Education

Figure 5

Combined radar graph, 3 spikes Personal, Recreation and Education or *Personal, Recreation and Friends*
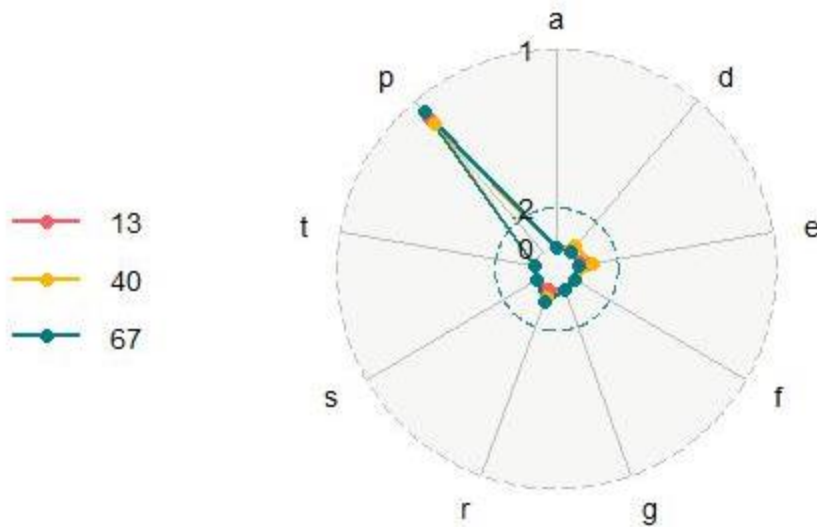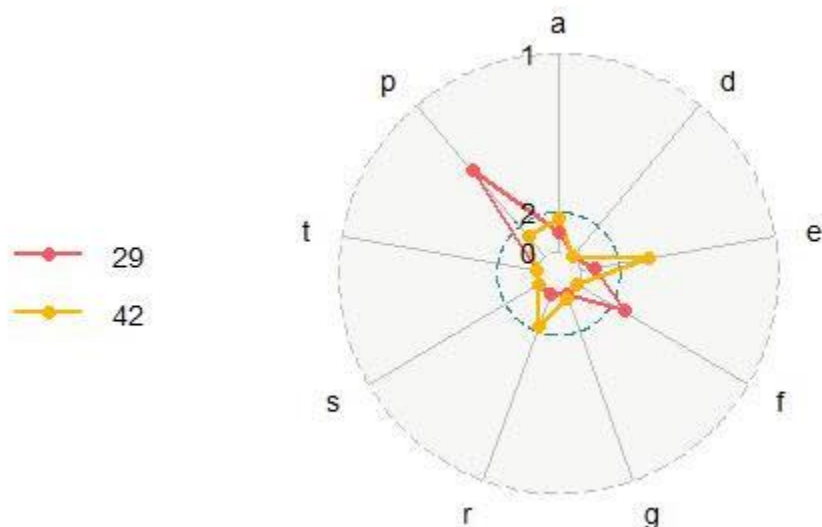
Figure 6

Combined radar graph, Other

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between gender and identity configuration pattern. The relationship was not significant $X^2(3, N = 64) = 1.42, p$ =.7005. Gender does not influence the patterns seen in the domain radar graphs.

Personal subdomains radar charts

The *Personal* subdomain radar graphs were similarly compared and contrasted based on the visual appearance. Four groups could be distinguished. Contrary to the previous grouping, within the *Personal* subdomain groups could only be made based on the amount of spikes without including the specific subdomains. While different participant's radar graphs looked similar on the amount and appearance of spikes, the main subdomain(s) mentioned per participant varied widely. Based on the amount and appearance of the spikes, the *Personal* subdomain radar graphs can be sorted into the following four groups (table 4); graphs with one spike (figure 7); graphs with two spikes (figure 8); graphs with three spikes (figure 9) and one graph that did not fit the visual description of any of the groups mentioned above (figure 10).

Table 4

The relative frequency of Personal subdomain radar graphs per group

Group	Relative Frequency of *Personal* subdomain radar graphs per group	
	Male	Female
1 spike	0.21	0.17
2 spikes	0.72	0.71
3 spikes	0.07	0.09
Other	0	0.0.03
Total	1	1

Figure 7

Combined subdomain radar graph, 1 spike

Figure 8

Combined subdomain radar graph, 2 spikes

Figure 9

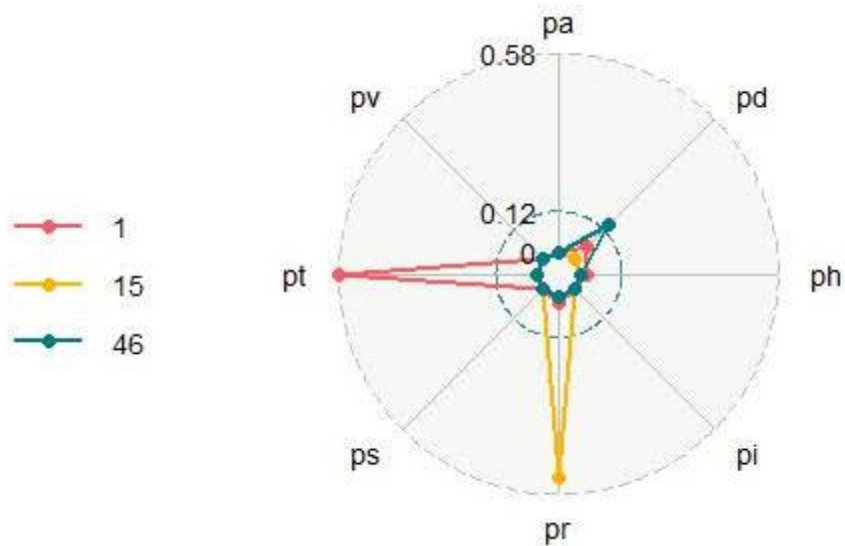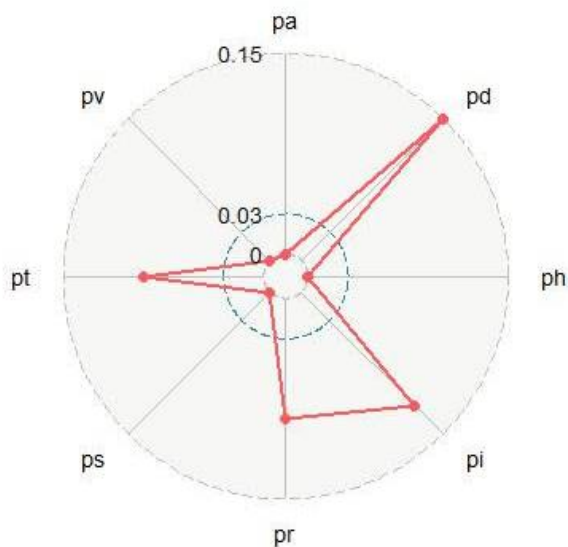*Combined subdomain radar graph, 3 spikes*

Figure 10

Subdomain radar graph, other

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between gender and subdomain identity configuration pattern. The category *other* was excluded from this test, as zero is not a value compatible with this calculation. The relationship was not significant $X^2(2, N = 63) = 0.15, p = .9268$. Gender does not seem to influence the patterns seen in the subdomain radar graphs, according to these findings.

Discussion

Emerging adulthood is a time in which individuals explore their identity and the accompanying issues. This thesis studied these young people's identity content, the topics, issues, concerns and aspects that are salient when they think and talk about who they are. Individuals assemble all these aspects into workable configurations, defined as identity configurations (Hammack et al., 2009; Schachter, 2004). Through gendered socialisation processes as well as gender roles and norms, gender differences in identity may arise. However, research on gender's influence on identity has provided varied results. On the one hand,

researchers have found that women tend to define themselves through their relationships with others, focusing on the interpersonal domains, whilst to men self definition, autonomy and the ideological domain are most salient (e.g. Gilligan, 1988; Branch, 2001; Douvan & Adelson, 1966). On the other hand, other studies have found no significant gender differences on identity related issues, noting that similarities between men and women far outweigh the differences on these issues (e.g. Kroger, 1997; Archer, 1992). The current study aimed to provide clarity on the relationship between gender and identity content.

Findings

The first hypothesis was that women would make more claims in the interpersonal domain compared to men. No evidence was found to confirm this hypothesis: there was no significant difference between the amount of claims men and women made in the interpersonal domain. Previous research on gender in the context of identity provided mixed results. The results of the current study match Kroger's (1997) conclusion that there is no consistent gender difference in the salience of identity defining domains, including relationships domains. Thus, the current findings are not in line with the findings of other authors, such as Gilligan (1988), who observed that men define themselves along "traditional masculine lines" of self definition and autonomy, whereas females tend to define themselves through their relationships with others. The current research signifies that women do not talk more about their family, friends or dating compared to men when asked to talk about themselves.

The second hypothesis was that there is a difference in the patterns seen in men's and women's radar charts. When examining the data we found that in both groups participants showed similar patterns in the domains they mentioned. Based on these patterns, the same four groups were found for both genders in both the main domains and the *Personal* subdomains. The

hypothesis that men and women showed different patterns was tested for the main domain, as well as the *Personal* subdomain radar charts using a chi-square test of independence. No significant difference was found, contrary to what would be expected based on previous findings. Cramer (2000) suggested that in the western world, girls are given the opportunity to consider and follow stereotypically female- and male paths of development. Consequently women would have a broader range of possibilities when establishing their identity, compared to men, which would result in womens' identity configurations differing from mens'.

Furthermore, it was hypothesised that there is a difference in the manner in which men and women construct gender, as seen in the way in which gender is specifically mentioned within contexts. Gender was only mentioned by 12 participants, who referred to their own gender, stating that they were male or female. Only one participant, who identified as female, addressed the role of gender in their life. Since no other participants touched upon the subject of gender, aside from mentioning their own, no further deductions or comparisons could be made to contrast and compare men and women's construction of gender.

Implications

In our view, an important contribution of the current study is the insight into the identity content of emerging adults, andwhich domains are salient and which domains are rarely mentioned. Specifically, the current study shows that there are far more similarities than differences between men and women in the context of identity content. This creates more clarity in the conflicting findings of gender related differences on identity issues. It also demonstrates that, when asked for a self description, no effect of socialisation practices or gender roles and norms can be seen in men and women's self descriptions. Nevertheless, studies have found the effects of these in different settings, such as gender differences in narrative storytelling (Fivush

& Buckner, 2003; Grysman et al., 2016). This could go to show that, whilst gendered socialisation practices and social roles and norms do not have a significant effect in explicit self described identity content, its effects can be seen in more implicit, subconscious ways, for example through (social) behaviours and manners.

Moreover, no significant difference was found between the identity configuration patterns of men and women. Firstly this could indicate that Cramer's (2000) findings are not congruent with the actual situation, in other words, that women do not have more possibilities when establishing their identity. Alternatively it could also imply that it is no longer only women, but also men who are given the opportunity to consider stereotypically male- and female developmental paths.

Additionally, in the current study there were almost no mentions of gender and its role in individuals' lives. This shows that, in the current context, gender is not a central domain in people's identity configurations. However, previous studies have found gender differences on other identity related issues (e.g. Fivush & Buckner, 2003; Grysman et al., 2016) . This implies that gender identity, and more specifically participants' elaboration on gender, is context dependent. In practice this implies that in order to study gender identity one needs to provide a way to contextualise gender identity in experiences and interactions.

Limitations and future research

There are several aspects that limit the interpretation and application of this study, but can simultaneously shape future research. First, the results are not in line with previous research which found that women tend to define themselves more through their relationship with others, compared to men. The current research however, neglected identity statements referring to viewpoints of others (eg "my friends describe me as an outgoing person", "family members see

me as shy most of the time"). These statements were not coded as identity statements, however they could be interpreted as a self-definition through the relationship with another. Additionally this study only looked at the content of an identity statement when categorising it into a domain, the phrasing of the statement was not taken into account. Both of these could be a possible explanation for these results being out of line with previous findings. If women tend to define themselves through their relationships with others, identity statements concurring with this might have been omitted in the current research. Thus, future research should reconsider the categorization of statements as being identity statements, and the viewpoints included in this.

Additionally, barely any participants mentioned gender. It was therefore impossible to infer anything about the conceptualization and construction of gender, as well as its role in men and women's lives. To compare men and women on this aspect, future research should incorporate gender as a prompt for participant's to talk about. On top of that, gender might play a different role at different developmental stages. It has been suggested that gender is more central to one's identity in childhood, as gender plays a significant role to a child's self-concept at this stage, and with gender segregation and differentiation having a prominent role in middle childhood (Fivush & Buckner, 2003). Future research might therefore also consider the influence of age of the centrality of gender on one's identity. Moreover, cultural effects on gender identity could be a topic of interest in future research, as culture transmits appropriate ways of being and acting (Fivush, 2010; Hammack & Cohler, 2011), thus embedding gender identity into culture.

It is also important to consider this study's sample. This study asked first year psychology students to describe themselves for three minutes. The first year of university is a year in which one comes into contact with many new situations and people. As a result, a first

year student is often required to, briefly, introduce themselves. This could mean that emerging

adults in their first year have a general script they follow when doing this, as this is something

that has become routine. In such situations a prompt is often given, specifying what information

to provide. This will subsequently be integrated into the script. As a result, it is possible

participants did not only give information they considered integral or central to their identity, but

were simply calling upon the script based on previous introduction prompts.

Additionally, there are emerging adults who have opted not to attend university or did not

get the chance to. These emerging adults are therefore excluded from this current study, since

participants were first year psychology students, meaning that it might not give a representative

impression of the identity content of emerging adults. It is possible that for emerging adults who

have opted straight into a working career, or who got married and started a family young,

different domains would be salient. In conclusion, these issues clearly speak to individuals

regardless of their educational background, and future research could examine identity content in

a broader demographic group.

Conclusion

As previous studies on the relationship between gender and identity related issues have

come up with mixed, conflicting results, the current paper aimed to provide clarity on gender

differences in identity content. Firstly, we tested whether women made more claims in the

interpersonal domain compared to men. No evidence for this was found, implying that women do

not define themselves more through interpersonal relationships in self descriptions. Secondly, we

tested whether there was a difference in the patterns seen in men and women's identity

configurations. Once more, no significant difference was found. The patterns seen in the domains

participants talked about did not differ based on gender, implying that men and women are not

necessarily provided with different or more abundant possibilities when establishing their identity. The overarching conclusion can be drawn that there seem to be far more similarities in identity content between men and women than there are differences.

Lastly, this study aimed to look into the conceptualization of gender by men and women and its role in their everyday life. Yet, barely any participants made mention of gender, implying that, in the current context, gender is not a central domain in people's identity content. Future research could include gender related prompts to stimulate participants to talk about gender. Subsequently future research could explore the influence of age on gender identity and it's centrality as a domain, as well as the relationship and effect of culture on gender. A broader demographic group should be included in future studies to study and compare identity content of individuals with a different educational background.

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