

Identity configuration and identity content: patterns in domains of life represented in emerging adults' identity configurations.

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Abstract

During emerging adulthood, integrating conflicting parts of one's identity into a coherent identity configuration is a central psychosocial task. This study aims to explore what content makes up the identity configurations of emerging adults, and how these contents may occur together in interpersonal patterns. Therefore, our research question was as follows: What types of patterns are visible in the content of emerging adults' identity configurations? Self-descriptions of 54 first-year psychology students from the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen were coded according to the IMICA manual, and their identity configurations were visualised in a spider graph, which showed the distribution of their identity claims over 10 domains of identity. Through visual analysis of these graphs, five types of patterns were identified, based on the most commonly occurring domains within each participant. These types were the Recreation type, the Personal type, the Education/occupation type, the Relational type and the Double-peak type. This suggests that the content of identity configurations is not fully idiosyncratic, and might instead show interpersonal patterns. In addition, it gives some insights into what domains might be important in the identity configurations of emerging adults. More research is needed to explore if these findings apply to the general population.

Keywords: emerging adulthood, identity content, identity configuration, domains

Introduction

Identity construction occurs in the tension between personal choices and societal restraints. Because of this, different aspects of an individuals' identity can be in conflict with each other. To construct a coherent identity, it is necessary to integrate conflicting identifications into a whole (Schachter, 2004). This is called an identity configuration. In emerging adulthood (between the ages of 18 to 29), constructing a coherent identity is one of the central psychosocial tasks (Arnett, 2015). During emerging adulthood, individuals must find their place in society, and adjust their sense of identity accordingly (Erikson, 1968; Erikson, 1975). The process of this has been extensively studied, but little is known about the actual content of identity, which consists of the topics people consider when they think about who they are (McLean, Syed & Shucard, 2016). Research on the identity content of emerging adults is often lacking, especially in the context of identity configurations (Lilgendahl, 2015). Our aim is to investigate how emerging adults construct their identities in terms of the content they report and the patterns in which this content occurs. This will provide us with a deeper understanding of emerging adults' identities as a whole, and it might inform targeted interventions to help emerging adults who experience problems with identity development.

When talking about the construction of identity, it is important to first look at what identity is, and why it is important for emerging adults. One of the early definitions of identity given by Erikson (1968) described it as a fundamental organising principle which develops constantly throughout the lifespan. Erikson (1968) noted that identity development is a lifelong process, but that constructing a sense of identity is especially important during adolescence. Arnett (2015) further specified emerging adulthood (between the ages of 18 to 29) as a key moment for identity development. This period of life is central for identity development, because

it contains individuals' transition from youth into adulthood and all the challenges that come with this transition (Arnett, 2000; Chen et al., 2007; Crocetti, 2017). In addition, research has shown that a strong sense of identity during this transition into adulthood is linked to better mental health (Crocetti et al., 2009; Ramgoon et al., 2006). A better understanding of the identity of emerging adults could be applied to develop better interventions to support this group in their identity development, and thus possibly support their mental health as well.

When studying identity, two aspects are important to consider: process and content (McLean et al., 2014; McLean, Syed & Shucard, 2016; Syed & Azmitia, 2010; Syed & McLean, 2015). "Process" is the "how" of identity development, and it refers mostly to what activities people undertake when developing their identity. The work of Marcia (1966), which looked at the status of individuals' identity development in terms of exploration and commitment, can therefore be considered to be about process. "Content" refers to the "what" of identity development, so what topics people consider when they think about who they are. While the process of identity has been widely studied, identity content has received less attention (Lilgendahl, 2015). Galliher et al. (2017) emphasised the importance of identity content being studied alongside identity process, because it helps to give a full picture of a person's identity development, and knowing what is developing can help identify the topics on which individuals are getting stuck if they encounter problems with their identity development, which is essential for aiding interventions.

To better understand identity content, we must first look more closely at what this term actually means. As said before, McLean, Syed & Shucard (2016) considered identity content to be the issues, concerns, and topics that people consider when thinking about who they are. Johnson et al. (2022) further specified identity content as any statement about the self except for

temporary states, which are statements about what someone is doing in that moment. Since it is not possible to observe identity content directly, research on identity content relies on self-reports. Considering this, identity must be looked at in the context of self-talk. This means that the way in which individuals describe their identity is used as a measure of what their identity actually is. Using self-talk as a way to measure identity was perhaps best illustrated by Schachter (2015): “identity is not who a person is but a claim about who a person is” (p. 3).

In identity research, the contents of identity are often sorted into domains, which are the areas of life in which the contents occur (van der Gaag et al., 2020). This goes back to the work of Erikson (1956) and Marcia (1966), in the context of identity commitments. They described ideology and occupation as domains of life where identity commitments occurred. Various other domains have been used in later identity research (Bosma, 1985; McLean, Syed, Yoder & Greenhoot, 2016). McLean, Syed, & Shucard (2016) looked at the process and content of identity in 8 different identity domains: occupation, values, politics, religion, family, romance, friends, and sex roles. Their research consisted of asking emerging adults to give narratives for each domain, and measuring their identity exploration and commitment as used in the identity status model (Marcia, 1966). Not only did they find that identity processes varied between domains, they also found that content from certain domains was more likely to occur in narratives where they were not prompted than others. The finding that some contents are more connected to others, has implications for the understanding of identity content: namely that identity content is not a collection of fully independent pieces of information, but it occurs together to form a whole. It might even be that contents in certain domains, like family, provide an integrative function to identity (Fivush et al., 2008).

It is possible for individuals to encounter the challenge of having identity contents that are in conflict with each other, which they must integrate in some way to achieve a coherent identity (Hellinger & Schachter, 2021; Schachter, 2004). The integration of identity content from different domains into a coherent whole is something that Schachter (2004) called identity configurations. He researched the identity configurations of young adults (aged 24 and above) through narrative interviews, and identified four distinct types of identity configurations, based on the different ways people dealt with conflicting identifications. This is in the core about the process of identity: the four configurations show how a coherent identity is formed from different identifications. It is also possible to look at identity configurations in the context of identity content. Identity content can be sorted into different domains, and content in those different domains occurs together to form an identity configuration. The question then is not what method an individual employs to integrate identity content into a configuration, but what content the configuration contains, or how much of each domain an individual includes in their identity configuration.

The development of identity configurations occurs in the tension between identity as an individual accomplishment and a societal process: an individual can develop an identity through active exploration (Schachter, 2004), but also incidental experiences (McLean, Syed, Yoder & Greenhoot, 2016). The actions someone undertakes to explore their identity can be seen as an idiosyncratic process, whereas someone's life experiences are largely dependent on societal factors. There are cultural and social differences in how individuals develop their identity (Côté, 1996; Erikson, 1968; Johnson et al., 2022; Lerner, 2002; Schachter, 2004). In addition, there are sociocultural and historical differences in the demands that society has for an individuals' identity, the identification options that are available for an individual, and the ways

identifications can be integrated (Erikson, 1968; Arnett, 2015). Although an individual might possibly have any idiosyncratic identity configuration, they are constrained by the normative identification options that are available to them (Erikson, 1968). These normative identification options are also called “master narratives”: Stories within a culture that describe what a good member of that culture is like (McLean & Syed, 2016). The development of identity must therefore be considered as something that happens in contexts of normativity. Individuals draw upon these contexts to make sense of their identity, and the master narratives that are available to them give limited options of ways in which they can construct this identity (McLean & Syed, 2016; Weststrate & McLean, 2010).

Because of the societal and contextual influences underlying identity development, it is reasonable to expect to see patterns in the identity content of which emerging adults’ identity configurations consist. However, what these patterns might look like is still unclear. Johnson et al. (2022) studied the salient identity content of adolescents through use of a ten statement test (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954). The study showed a difference in reported content between groups: participants who identified as part of a racial or ethnic minority were more likely to include identity statements related to race or ethnicity. This is interesting, because it shows a pattern in identity content between groups, which is in line with what McLean and Syed (2016) wrote about the different master narratives of cultural normativity constraining the identification options of individuals within specific cultural groups. It must be noted, however, that Johnson et al. (2022) studied adolescents, and not emerging adults, and although they investigated patterns in which different content occurred together, they did not look at overall identity configurations. It is still unclear what the identity configurations of emerging adults would look like, and what patterns there might be visible in the identity content they report. This is how our study differs

from what has been done before: we will explicitly consider what identity content is reported by emerging adults and how it occurs together to form identity configurations.

Gaining knowledge about the content of emerging adults' identity configurations matters for a variety of reasons. For practice, it is useful to know what the content of someone's identity is, to identify the topics on which someone is getting stuck if they encounter problems with their identity development. This knowledge can help inform targeted and specific interventions. In addition, operating under the assumption that cultural factors are constraining the development of identity, the presence of patterns in the content of identity configurations might provide information about these cultural factors. This could further our theoretical understanding of identity configuration and identity development.

The current research

Configuring a coherent identity out of possibly conflicting parts within the restraints of master narratives that are available to them is an important developmental task for emerging adults (Arnett, 2015; Erikson, 1968; McLean & Shucard, 2015). To find ways to support emerging adults in their identity development and to further our understanding of the cultural forces at play with this development, it is important to gather knowledge about the content their identity configurations consist of. Currently, research on the identity content of emerging adults is still lacking, especially in the context of identity configurations. To gain a more complete understanding of the content and structure of emerging adults' identity, additional research is necessary. In this paper, we attempt to answer the following research question: What types of patterns are visible in the content of emerging adults' identity configurations?

To do this, we use Iterative Micro-Identity Content Analysis (IMICA) to identify identity statements from transcripts of emerging adults describing their identities (Gmelin & Kunnen, 2021), and then sort all claims into domains. We used a hybrid of researcher- and data-driven domains, by using a narrative identity domains coding manual based on work by McLean (2014), but adjusting it to better fit our data. We used the following 10 domains: Personal, Family, Dating, Education/occupation, Friends, Gender, Recreation, Spirituality/religion, Politics and Other. For every participant, we will visualise the distribution of identity statements per domain in an identity configuration profile. Based on prior research (Johnson et al., 2022; Schachter, 2004), we expect that participants will differ in the contents that they construct as salient in their identities. We will do an explorative analysis of the data to investigate these differences.

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 about 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 the research, which was deliberately withheld prior to the study.

Data preparation

The self descriptions given by participants were firstly 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 categorising 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 A. 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.

Analysis

For this analysis, we start by providing descriptives about the age and gender of the participants. Then, we will visualise the average amount of claims per participant and the number of domains reported per participant, and the overall distribution of claims over the domains across all participants. We considered 10 domains (Personal, Family, Dating,

Education/occupation, Friends, Gender, Recreation, Spirituality/religion, Politics and Other). For each participant, the relative frequency of claims within each domain was visualised with a spider graph and displayed in a table. We group participants into types of similar configurations based on ‘‘peaks’’ of domains in the graphs. A domain is considered a ‘‘peak’’ if it contains at least 20 percent of the total claims made by that participant. This number was chosen because it is double of the 10% that each domain would contain if the claims were distributed evenly over the 10 domains. In most cases, peaks were clearly visible in the graphs, but in case of doubt, we referred back to the relative frequency table. We did not decide in advance based on which peaks groups would be formed, and instead explored the data to see which patterns of peaks were the most common.

Results

Descriptives

A subset of 54 participants was randomly selected for analysis ($N = 22$ women, 32 men) ($Mean\ age = 20.8$; $SD = 2.04$; $age\ range = 18-27$). In total, 1888 claims were coded across all participants. There was an average of 34.96 claims per participant ($SD = 10.04$; $range = 15-58$) (see figure 1). Participants had claims in an average of 4.35 domains ($SD = 1.02$; $range = 2-6$) (see figure 2). The majority of participants had claims in either four or five domains, and all participants had claims in at least two different domains. The majority of all claims were made in the Personal domain (e.g., ‘‘I would say I have more of an introverted personality’’) (54%), while only 0.001% of claims were made in the Politics domain (e.g., ‘‘I like having discussions about what’s going on in the world, especially politics’’) (see figure 3). At least one claim was made in every domain, so none were excluded from the analysis.

Figure 1

Average amount of claims per participant.

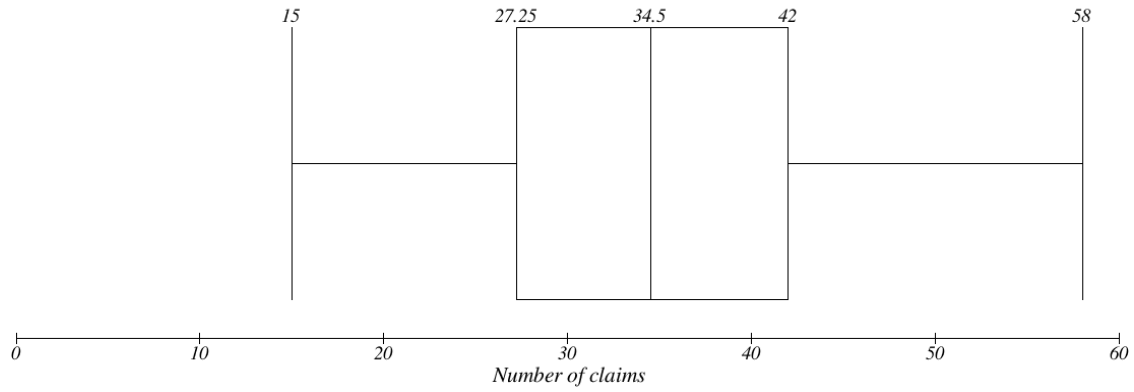


Figure 2

Number of domains per participant.

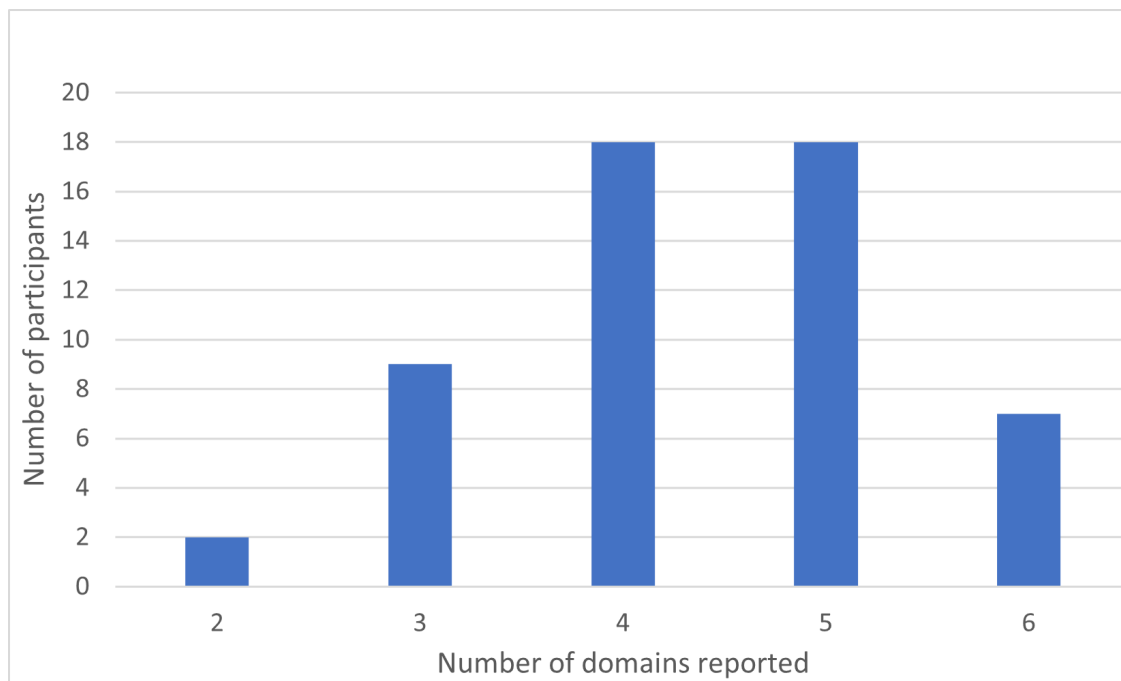
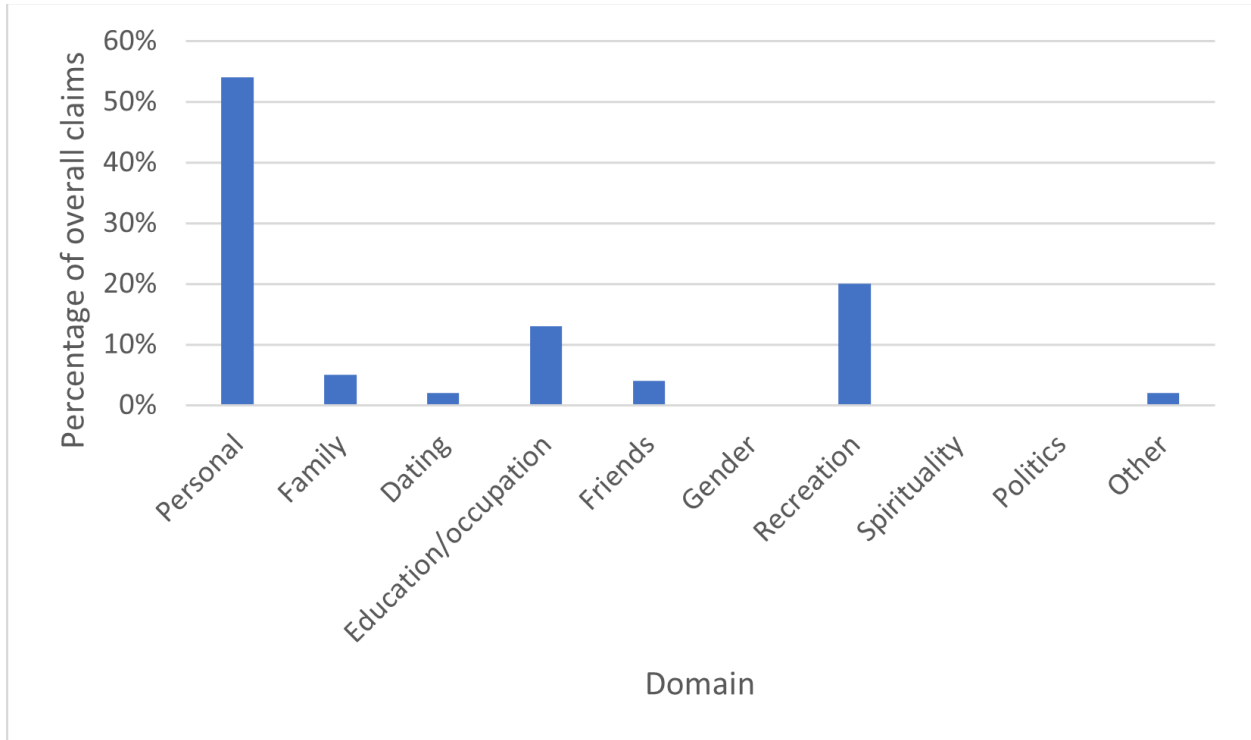


Figure 3

Relative frequency of domains.

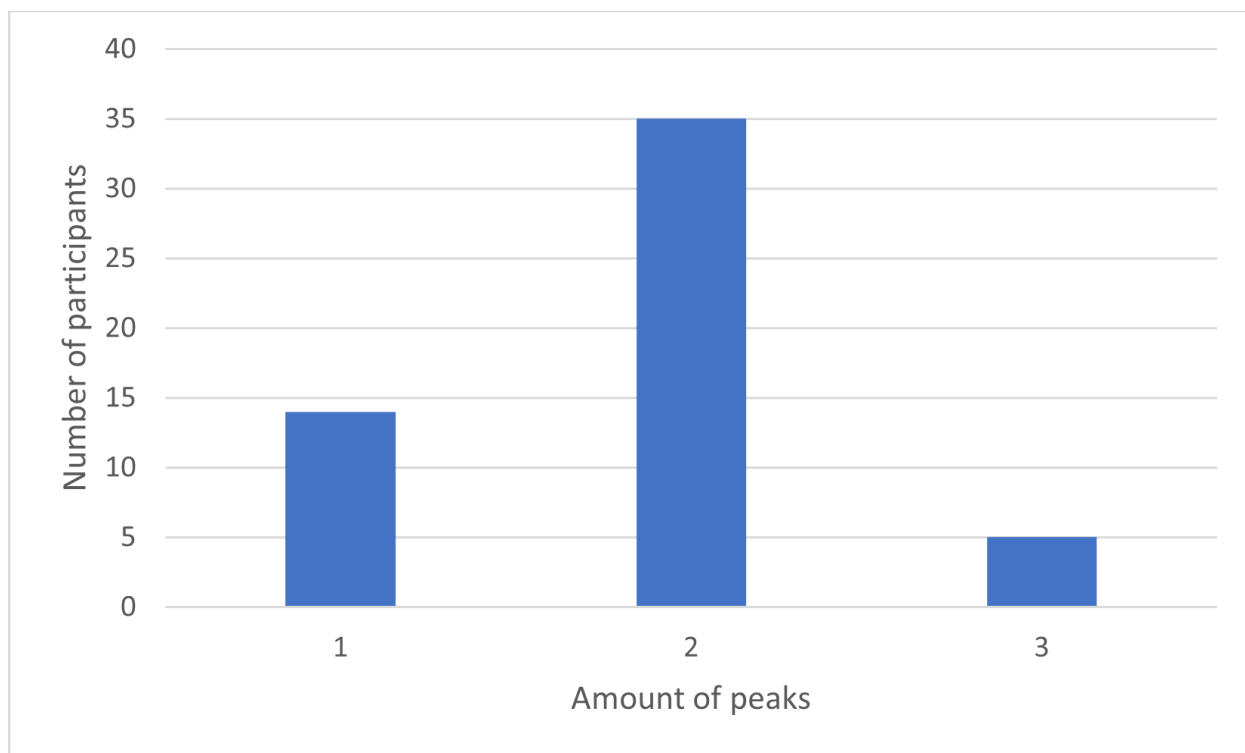


Analysis

The visual analysis of participants' configuration profiles suggested that there were groups of participants with similar identity content, as shown by matching peaks in the spider graphs. On average, participants had 1.84 peaks ($SD: 0.56$, $range = 1-3$). The majority of participants (64.81%) had two peaks (see figure 4). Five types of identity configurations were identified. Below, the characteristics of these five types will be described (The Recreation type, the Personal type, the Education/occupation type, the Relational type and the Double-peak type. For an overview of the number of participants per type, see figure 11).

Figure 4

Number of participants per amount of peaks.



Types

The most common type was the Recreation type, or type 1 (N=25, 46.30%). Participants were considered to fall under this type if their identity configuration profile showed a peak in the Recreation domain (e.g., ‘‘I like listening to music in my free time’’), and no peak in any other domain except for the Personal domain (see figure 5) . In addition, the Personal type, or type 2, was found in 14 participants (25.93%). Participants in this type constructed identity content mainly in the personal domain, with their identity configuration profiles showing a peak in the Personal domain, and no peak in any other domain (see figure 6). In six participants (11.11%), the Education/occupation type, or type 3, was found. Participants were considered to fall under this type if their identity configuration profile showed a peak in the domain of Education/occupation (e.g., ‘‘I am a psychology student’’), and no peak in any other domain except for the Personal domain (see figure 7). In addition, the Relational type, or type 4, was found in a total of three participants (5,56%). Participants were considered to fall under this type

if their identity configuration profile showed a peak in one of the relational domains (Dating, Family, Friends, or Gender), and no peak in any other domain except for the Personal domain (see figure 8). Of the participants in this type, two had a peak in the Friends domain (e.g., ‘My friends are important to me.’), one had a peak in the Family domain (e.g., ‘I’m a family person.’), and none had a peak in the Dating or Gender domains. Last of all, there is the Double-peak type, or type 5. This type was found in a total of six participants (11.11%). Participants were considered to fall under this type if their identity configuration profiles showed two peaks in any domains except for the Personal domain. A peak in the Personal domain can also be present as a third peak, but it is not a requirement to be sorted into this type. Type 5 has two subtypes: the Education/occupation and Recreation type and the Education/occupation and Relational type. Participants were considered to fall under type 5.1 (Education/occupation and Recreation) if their identity configuration profiles showed a peak in the domain of Education/occupation and in the domain of Recreation, and no spike in any other domain, except for the Personal domain (see figure 9). Five participants (7.41%) were sorted into this type. Participants were considered to fall under type 5.2 (Education/occupation and Relational) if their identity configuration profiles showed a peak in the domain of Education/occupation and in one of the Relational domains (Dating, Family, Friends and Gender), and no peak in any other domain except for the Personal domain (see figure 10). One participant (1.85%) was sorted into this domain. This participant had a peak in the domains of Personal, Education/occupation and Family. Within all types, the non-peaking domains varied randomly with no discernable patterns.

Figure 5

Example of type 1 identity configuration profile

participant_45_Male

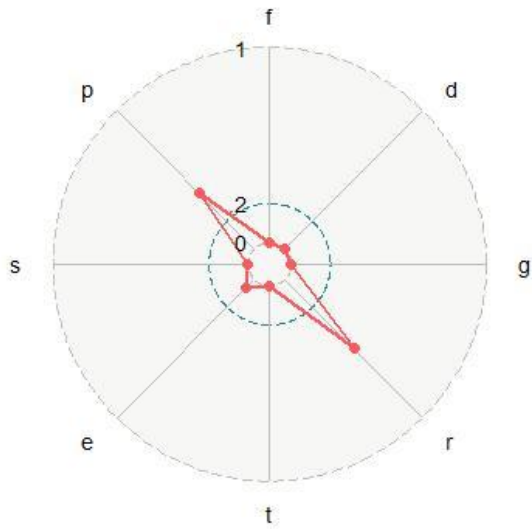


Figure 6

Example of type 2 identity configuration profile

participant_67_Male

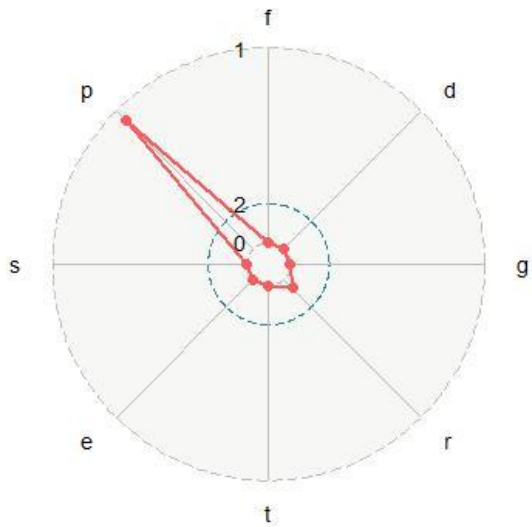
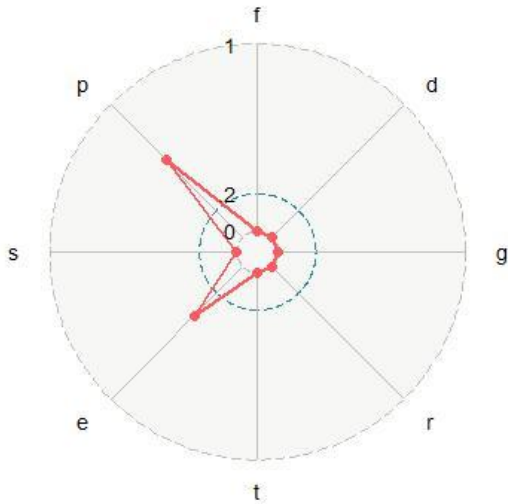


Figure 7

Example of type 3 identity configuration profile

participant_15_Male

**Figure 8**

Example of type 4 identity configuration profile

participant_29_Male

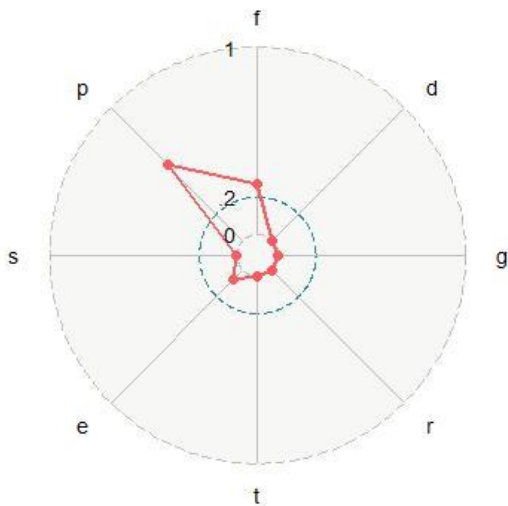
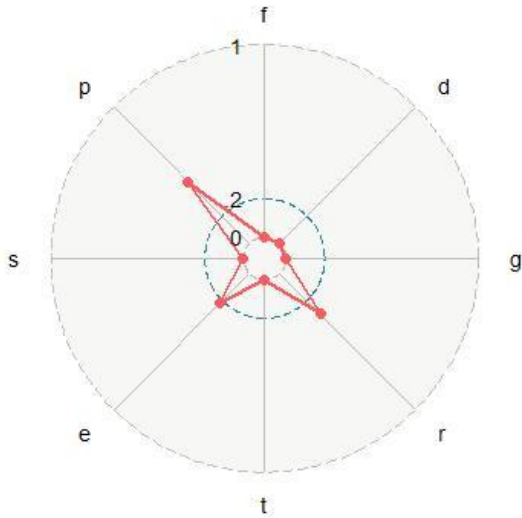


Figure 9

Example of type 5.1 identity configuration profile

participant_35_Female

**Figure 10**

Example of type 5.2 identity configuration profile

participant_50_Male

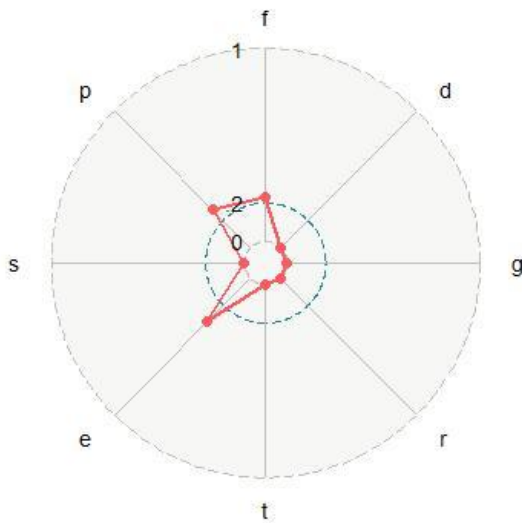
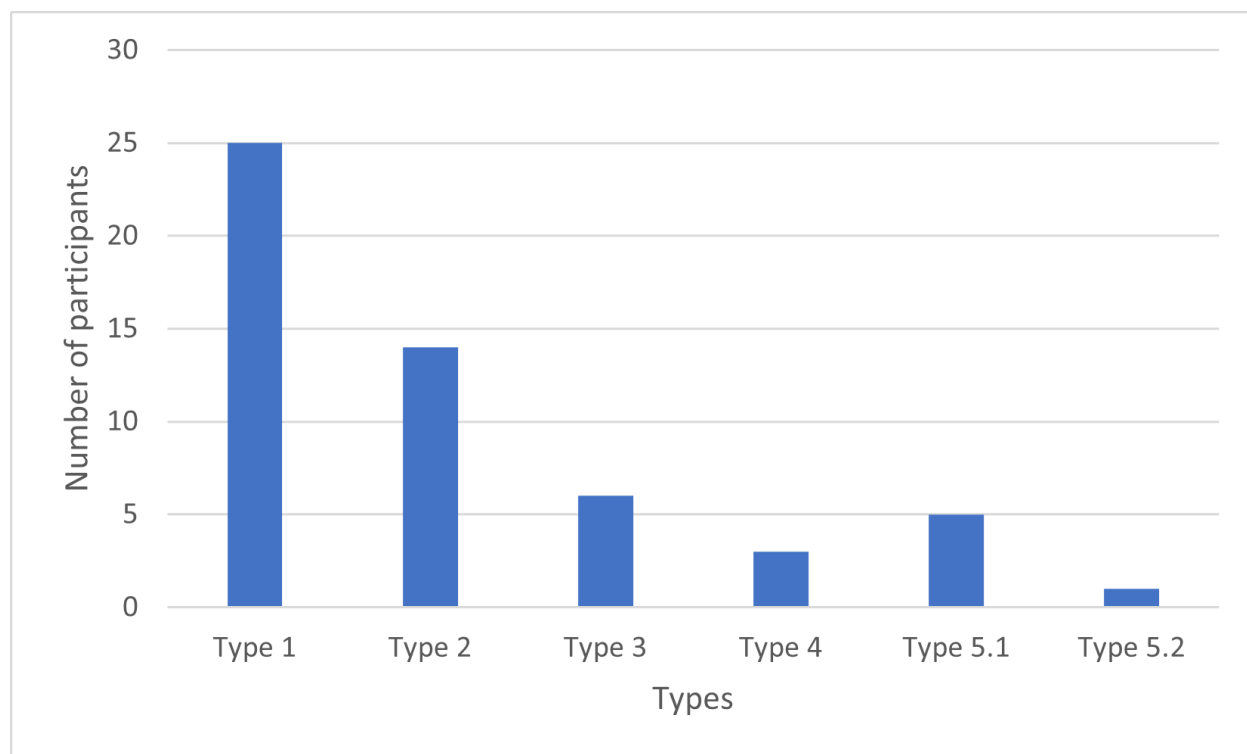


Figure 11

Number of participants per type



In an exploratory analysis, we compared the average numbers of claims per participant between the five types. Type 1 has the highest average number of claims per participant (37.88). The type with the lowest average number of claims per participant was type 4 (28.67). For an overview of average numbers of claims per participant for each type, see figure 12. In addition, we explored the gender distribution for each type. All types contained more male participants than female participants, except for type 1. For an overview of the distribution of gender for each type, see figure 13.

Figure 12

Average number of claims per participant for each type.

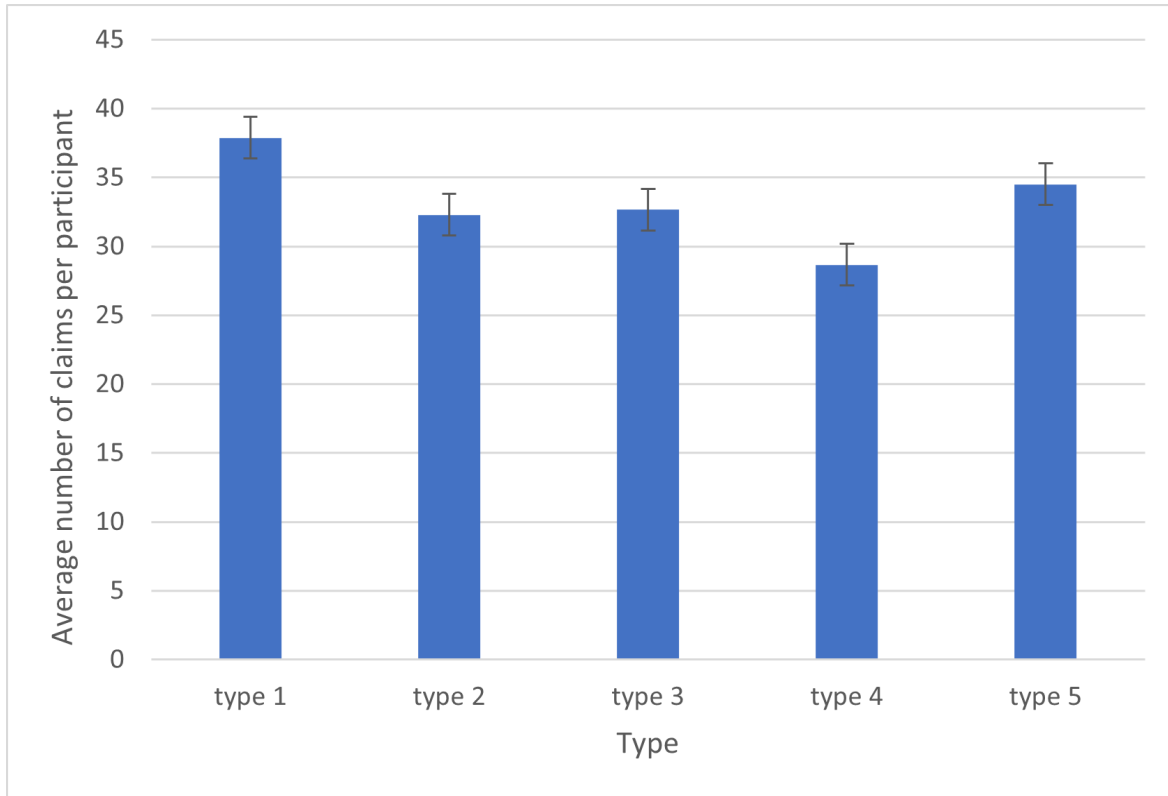
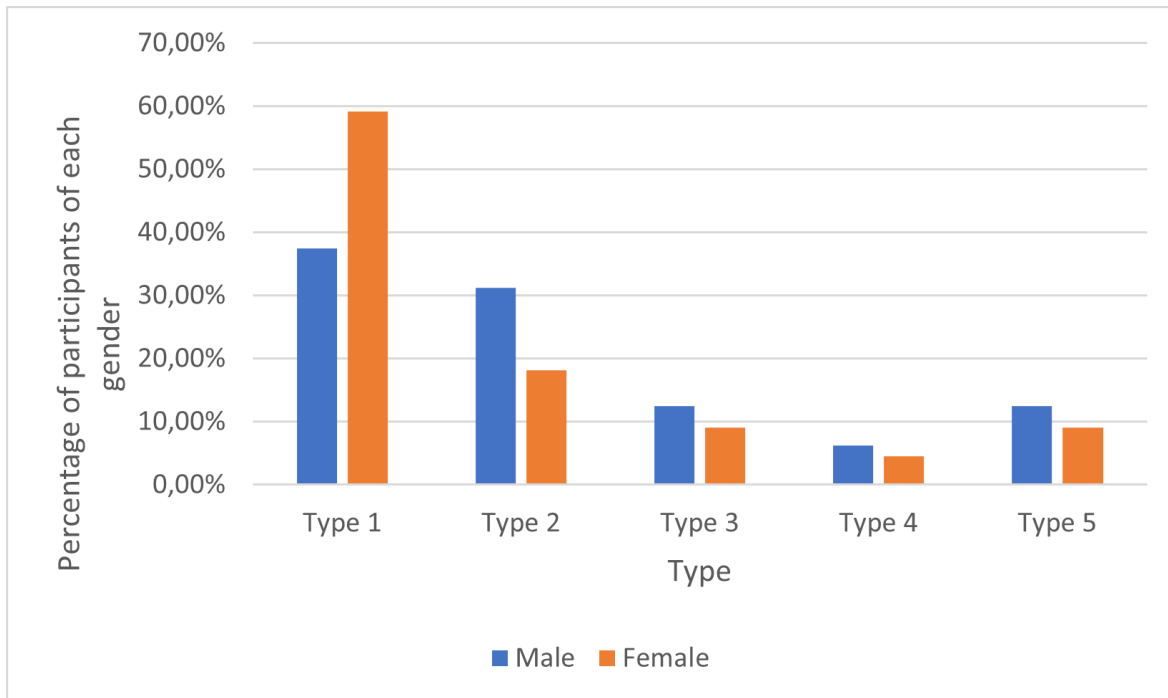


Figure 13

Distribution of gender over the types.



Discussion

The aim of this research was to gain insight in the content of emerging adults' identity configurations. We chose to focus on emerging adulthood because this is an eventful time in identity development, where constructing a coherent identity is one of the central psychosocial tasks (Arnett, 2015). We wanted to gain a better understanding of the content and structure of their identity configurations. Because there are cultural and social differences in how individuals develop their identity (Côté, 1996; Lerner, 2002, Erikson; 1968; Johnson et al., 2022; Schachter, 2004), and cultural-normative restraints to the identification options that are available to them (Erikson, 1968; McLean & Syed, 2016), we expected that individuals identity configurations would not be completely idiosyncratic, and could instead show patterns between individuals. Based on this, we attempted to answer the following research question: What types of patterns are visible in the content of emerging adults' identity configurations? This was done by investigating the identity content reported by emerging adults, and grouping them based on similar configurations to form types.

Findings

After examining the data, our first finding was that the most commonly occurring domains in the data were Personal, Recreation and Educational/occupation. The relational domains of Family and Friends also occurred quite often, but the domains of Dating, Gender, Politics, Spirituality/religion and Other occurred so infrequently that there was no single participant with a peak in one of these four domains. Our results replicate the presence of the eight domains used by McLean, Syed, & Shucard (2016), and also show that the salience of different domains varies strongly. However, our findings differ from McLean, Syed, & Shucard

(2016) in regards to the Personal and Recreation domains, which were the two most commonly reported domains in our study, but were not amongst the domains included in their study. It must be noted that McLean, Syed, & Shucard (2016) mentioned in their study that their eight domains were not the only salient domains for their participants, which is in line with our findings.

While the Personal and Recreation domains were not amongst the eight domains used in the study by McLean, Syed, & Shucard (2016), they are clearly reflected in the research done by Johnson et al. (2022). In their study, identity content regarding personal characteristics was the most frequently reported, with identity content regarding hobbies being the second most frequently reported identity content. This is in line with our findings, despite our difference in data collection methods, since Johnson et al. (2022) used the ten statement task to collect data for their study while we used IMICA coding and a free self-description prompt. The prevalence of identity claims in the Personal and Recreation domains in our study might indicate that these domains play an important role in the lives and identities of emerging adults. This is in line with prior research that suggested that individuals experience pronounced personality development during emerging adulthood (Lucas & Donnellan, 2011; Roberts et al., 2006; Wrzus et al., 2023), and that emerging adults can use leisure and recreation as a context for identity development (Layland et al., 2018).

The prevalence of identity claims in the domain of Education/occupation is not surprising, considering all our participants were first-year university students who received course credit for their participation in this study. The salience of Education/occupation as a domain of identity is in line with a variety of studies that described some variation of Education and/or occupation as being central to identity (Bosma, 1985; Erikson, 1956; Marcia, 1966; McLean, Syed, Yoder & Greenhoot, 2016). In addition, our findings are in accordance with

previous studies that suggested that education and occupation are important domains of identity for emerging adults (Arnett, 2014; Erikson, 1968).

Within the relational domains, some domains were mentioned more often than others. The Family domain and the Friends domain were relatively common, while the domains of Dating and Gender were rarely mentioned, with not a single participant having a peak in one of these two domains. A similar finding was done by Johnson et al. (2022), where family and friends were often mentioned in identity statements, but romantic relationships were not. Previous research reflects the importance of friends and family for emerging adults: during this period of life, friendships are very important (Tarrant, 2002), while relationships with parents stay relevant as well (Eckstein et al., 1999).

Claims in the ideological domains of Politics and Spirituality/religion were very rare in our study. None of the participants had a peak in either of these domains, and overall, only one participant had identity claims in the domain of Politics, while only two participants had identity claims in the domain of Spirituality/religion. The lack of salience of these domains is surprising, considering ideological domains like politics and religion have been considered important domains of identity in a variety of studies (Bosma, 1985; Erikson, 1956; Marcia, 1966; McLean, Syed, Yoder & Greenhoot, 2016). However, findings by Johnson et al. (2022) did reflect the relatively low frequency of identity claims regarding politics, religion and spirituality. This suggests that, for the identities of emerging adults, the domains of Politics and Spirituality/religion might not be very salient.

Our second finding was that many participants showed similar patterns of domains in which their identity content occurred. Five groups of similar identity content were made, thus

identifying five types of identity configurations: the Recreation type, the Personal type, the Education/occupation type, the Relational type and the Double-peak type. The Recreation type was the most common, while the Relational type and the Education/occupation and Relational subtype of the Double-peak type were the least common. Most types were characterised by two main domains, except for the Personal domain, which was characterised by only one domain, and the Double-peak domain, which was characterised by up to three domains. All participants were sorted into a type, although it must be noted that some types only contained a low number of participants. Nevertheless, distinct types of patterns are clearly visible in the data. These findings are in line with research that supports the idea that identity is not completely idiosyncratic but shows patterns between individuals (Côté, 1996; Erikson, 1968; Johnson et al., 2022; Lerner, 2002; Schachter, 2004). We cannot make conclusive claims about the origins of the patterns visible in our data, but a possible explanation could be that these patterns might be linked to the cultural and normative restraints of the different contexts in which individual identity development occurs (Erikson, 1968; McLean & Syed, 2016).

Implications

Our findings pose a variety of theoretical implications in regards to emerging adults' identity development. First of all, the prevalence of identity content within the Personal and Recreation domains implies that these domains of identity might be important aspects of emerging adults' identity configurations, even though these two domains have not been explicitly considered in most research about identity content, such as McLean and Syed (2015). In addition, the patterns in our data suggest that types of identity configurations are not only visible when looking at the process of identity configuration, as described by Schachter (2004), but that the same can be seen when looking at the content of identity configurations. The

presence of types of identity configurations in our data suggests that individuals that fall within the same type might construct their identity in similar ways. The visibility of patterns in the content of emerging adults' identity configurations imply that the limited available cultural and normative identification options may influence individuals' identities in distinct ways. This then implies that these contextual restraints guide the development of identity configurations that fit one of a select number of types.

Our findings also pose some practical implications. Knowledge about the domains of identity that are common in the identity configurations of emerging adults might give insight into the topics that interventions should target when individuals experience problems with their identity development. The possible similarities in identity content of emerging adults within a type imply that there may also be similarities in how individuals of that type can be best supported. This implies that knowing an individuals' identity configuration type might inform interventions in case of hindered identity development. Further research could explore this possibility.

Limitations

There are several factors that limit the applicability of findings of this research. First of all, the study had a small sample size of only 54 participants, which were all first year psychology students. Therefore, our participants were not a representative sample of the entire population of emerging adults, and this study must therefore be considered exploratory in nature.

Second of all, this study relied on self-reports of identity content, and while describing their identity, participants knew that they were recorded and that a researcher would listen to their descriptions. This may have influenced their descriptions. We also saw examples in the data

of people being aware that they were describing themselves to an audience, even though no researcher was present in the room. These examples consisted mostly of extensive physical descriptions (e.g., ‘‘I am 1,75 tall’’, ‘‘I weigh slightly less than 60 kg’’), possibly because the participants felt these details had to be included because they were describing themselves to someone who could not see them. Since physical descriptions were considered to fall under the Personal domain, it is possible that those claims have inflated the total number of claims in that domain. In addition, since we relied upon self-reports with no alternative way to gain insight into the participants' identities, we had to assume that the claims participants made about themselves were accurate representations of their internal identities, without knowing if this was actually the case.

Recommendations

To investigate the generalizability of the types described in this study, future research could repeat this research with a larger and more varied sample of participants. This could make it possible to draw conclusions about the identity configurations of the general population of emerging adults. In addition, future research could use deception to prevent participants' knowledge of being recorded from influencing their identity descriptions. This could possibly be done by telling participants that a recording will be made so they can listen back to it themselves, and only informing them that a researcher will listen to the recording as well after it has been recorded. In addition, making participants listen to the recordings of their own identity descriptions would make it possible to ask them to indicate to what extent they consider their descriptions to be accurate representations of their internal identities. This knowledge can then be considered in analyses.

Conclusion

This study focused on investigating the content of emerging adults' identity configurations. We expected to see patterns of similar content between individuals considering the frequency in which identity claims were made within ten domains of identity. Our research question was: What types of patterns are visible in the content of emerging adults' identity configurations? We can now answer it as follows: five types of patterns were visible in the participants' identity configurations, based on the most frequently occurring domains within each participant. These were the Personal type, the Recreation type, the Education/occupation type, the Relational type and the Double-peak type. Although this research does not provide any conclusive evidence that these types will apply to the general population, the findings suggest that the identity configurations of emerging adults are not purely idiosyncratic and instead show interpersonal patterns. This could imply that the development of identity content configurations is restrained by limited cultural and normative identification options. Future research could further investigate the identity content of emerging adults to gain a deeper understanding of the patterns that occur in the identity configurations of this group and how they are influenced by their cultural context.

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Appendix A

Coding Manual: Content Domains

The following coding manual is based on a narrative identity domains coding manual developed by McLean and Syed (2011). Each identity claim is coded in terms of the identity content domains that the claim is constructing. To be coded as present the domain has to be related to some central aspect of the claim, not just background information. One way to test whether a content domain is present is to ask: “Would exchanging the domain content change the claim?” Each claim should only be coded with one domain (though different extracts of the same turn may have different domains assigned to them).

Relational Categories			
<p>For these categories to get coded as present the claim must address what “kind of person” is constructed within a specific domain. Claims that construct personal characteristics within a specific relational domain are often coded as “personal”. This means that the relational domain should be the content, rather than the context of a claim. Recall that to determine if this category is present, ask yourself if the other person is replaced with someone else (e.g. mother for friends) does the claim change? If not, do not code the category as present. The questions provided are not exclusive and may be suitable across domains.</p>			
Dating	Family	Friends	Sex Roles (Gender)
<p>This category is defined as dating and sexuality negotiations. Claims can inform about relevant identity categories (i.e. relationship status, sexual identity, being “a virgin”, etc.). Claims may provide answers to questions such as:</p>	<p>This category focuses on claims about family, both biological and chosen and includes positive or negative aspects. Claims can address identity categories (i.e. child, mother, sister). Claims may address questions such as:</p>	<p>This category is related to friends and peer groups. These can be claims about relevant identity categories (i.e. friend, best friend, etc.) Claims may address questions such as:</p>	<p>This category captures claims that address expectations for behavior and attitudes, that are based on gender, as well as claims about gender stereotypes. Claims may address identity categories (i.e. woman, guys, chicks, etc.).</p>

<p><i>What kind of person is the speaker...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>in regard to dating</i> - <i>as a partner</i> - <i>when it comes to sexual encounters</i> <p><i>What is important to the speaker...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>regarding love, romance, dating, and desire</i> - <i>in a sexual/romantic partner</i> <p><i>What does it mean to be single/LGB/in an open relationship?</i></p>	<p><i>What does it mean to be a son/sibling/grandchild/parent?</i></p> <p><i>How does the speaker feel about their familial relationships?</i></p> <p><i>What was the speaker's life like growing up?</i></p> <p><i>What is the configuration of the speaker's family?</i></p>	<p><i>What kind of friend is the speaker?</i></p> <p><i>What does the speaker value in friendships?</i></p> <p><i>How would others describe the speaker as a friend?</i></p> <p><i>What are friendship rituals?</i></p> <p><i>What characterizes the speaker's friendships?</i></p>	<p><i>What does it mean to be a man/woman/trans?</i></p> <p><i>What is the importance of gender in the speaker's life?</i></p> <p>Tip: If exchanging the gender of the speaker (or who is spoken about) makes a difference, sex roles should be coded.</p>
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Ideological Categories

For these categories to get coded as present the claim must be related to the speaker, in terms of their own attributes, characteristics, or values. To determine the presence of this category, ask yourself what the identity issue at stake is. Occasionally, speakers will construct claims that provide information on issues such as “values” in a relational domain (“It’s important to me that my boyfriend is honest with me”) - these should be coded as relational (i.e. Dating). In contrast, claims which extend beyond the specific relational context are coded as ideological (“Honesty is really important to me, especially in a boyfriend”).

Personal			
<i>Values, Principles & Insight</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	Politics	Other

<p>Values: Claims that focus on the development, questioning, or elaboration of personal values, or negotiation with a larger (someone else's) value system.</p> <p>Principles: <i>Personal ideals, what is important for a (good) life, general life rules, personal satisfaction.</i></p> <p>Insight: <i>Realizations, insights, and reflections <u>about</u> the speaker.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is important to a good life? - What characterizes a "good" person? - What behavior is characteristic of the speaker? 	<p>This category is coded when a claim describes the speaker's self-image in terms of characteristics, personality traits, or traits:</p> <p><i>Mental well/ill-being, or personality traits (extraversion, reliability, etc.), preferences, as well as typical behaviors or actions.</i></p> <p>Demographics: <i>Demographic information (living situation, nationality, age).</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is characteristic about the speaker? - What would someone need to know, to really know the speaker? - How does the speaker view themselves/how would others describe them? - How do speakers feel about how others see them? 	<p>Captures claims that address political issues at a very local level (e.g. school elections) to a very distal level (federal politics).</p> <p><i>What is the political identification of the speaker (also in terms of left/right/woke/etc.)?</i> <i>What is the role of politic in the life of the speaker?</i></p>	<p>Is coded when claims to not fit any of the major domains.</p>
		Religion	Occupation/Education
		<p><i>What does it mean to be a muslim/Christian/Sikh/atheist?</i> <i>What spiritual values does the speaker hold?</i></p>	<p>Claims that emphasize engaging in experiences that give reporters clarity about what they are good at (and not), and that helps to direct them towards an occupation.</p> <p><i>How do you describe yourself in the domain of occupation?</i> <i>What is the value of education?</i> <i>What are future/past jobs?</i> <i>What are career aspirations?</i></p>
		Recreation	
<p>Note: Both of the sub-types should be coded as "Personal", a distinction is not required (nor possible).</p>		<p><i>What does the speaker do for fun?</i> <i>What is relaxing/stressful?</i> <i>What does define the speaker in the domain of 'leisure'?</i></p>	

Sub-Domains: Personal			
Abilities & Skills	Appearance	Future Aspirations	Participant
<p>The speaker refers to things they can do, and/or things they are good/bad at</p> <p>Examples: <i>I am quite good with technology.</i></p>	<p>The speaker references any physical traits (e.g., height) or features of their appearance (e.g., clothing style, make up).</p> <p>Examples: <i>I have curly hair, dark skin</i></p>	<p>The speaker references something they would like to have/achieve in the future/life.</p>	<p>Participant references being a participant in the study.</p> <p>Example: <i>I'm not very good at describing myself</i></p>
Likes & Interests	Psychology, Emotions, & Reflection	Demographics	Values & Principles
<p>The claim includes things the speaker likes or is interested in AND does NOT constitute a claim in another domain.</p> <p>Examples: <i>I think Psychology is super interesting</i> <i>I like kids</i></p>	<p>The speaker references their psychological dimensions, including thoughts, psychological traits, and psychologically-relevant aspects</p> <p>Examples: <i>1. I like to think about, evaluate, like, my feelings</i> <i>2. I don't like insecure situations; they make me feel real bad and sometimes I like have physical reactions</i> <i>3. I think I also have problems with depression or something</i></p>	<p>Speaker introduces demographic information (e.g. nationality or age)</p>	<p>The speaker talks about their personal values and principles.</p> <p>Examples: <i>And in that way I try to make a change, in my direct environment</i></p>

