

A Qualitative Exploration of Self Identity Transformation among young adults within Romantic Relationship

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Abstract

The process of self identity transformation among young adults in romantic relationship was explored in this qualitative research. In this study focused on how young adult perceive themselves, before and after entering into their romantic relationship. semi structured interview were conducted to the participants and analysis of the result were subjected to thematic analysis. There are five themes were identified through this research they are self identity as related to growth, redefining values and beliefs through connection, gender roles and societal expression, family impact on relationship identity, relationship as a change agent for self- actualization and interdependence. The result of this research shows that romantic relationship are important settings for personal development, emotional maturity and value re-evaluation which lead to enhance interpersonal awareness and self-concept.

Keywords: romantic relationship, self identity transformation, family influence, societal expectations, personal growth.

1. Introduction

Overview

Romantic relationship plays an important part of our life, which one important role is identifying their self in the journey of romantic relationship. Healthy relationship makes people to grow their self together and able to identify them. Male and female process of identifying their self is different and related to gender expectation. This expectation may be rooted from the cultural norms and gender role. We show that gender expectation has potential access to shape men's self-conception and woman's other- conception. Understanding the play is an important aspect of personal negotiations, self concept self perception romantic relationship.

Background of the Study

Romantic relationships are integral components of identity fluidity, especially during the young adult phase. Research has demonstrated that being in a committed romantic relationship is tied to greater self-sameness and social identity (Kranz, 2025), and that the relationship goal of intimacy engenders relationship satisfaction and positive relational behaviours, while the goal of identity mainly supports self-autonomy (Zimmer- Gem beck et al, 2014). Identity satisfaction is a mechanism explaining the

association between relationship experiences and mental health, as well as depression. The same study by Graziano et al. also indicates that conflict and intimacy can predict depression directly and indirectly (2024). In addition, perceptions of one's partner, such as positive illusions of the partner can enhance relationship satisfaction (George et al, 2020). Finally, gender differences have emerged in self-identity processes with women tending towards accommodation linked to depression and lower self-esteem, while a balanced identity supports greater well-being for both genders (Skultety & Whitbourne, 2004). Clarity of couple identity ("we-ness") similarly facilitates commitment and matching, although there are limited studies on gender effects (Emery et al., 2021). Personality traits work as predictors of relationship quality, with identity exploration and commitment serving as mediators (Grossmann et al., 2023). In sum, research supports that romantic relationships support identity development, though less is known through qualitative, gender-focused research.

Theoretical Background

A well-known developmental theorist from the 1950s, Erikson states that youth must navigate the resolution of two life "crises" in adolescence. Erikson's psychosocial theory of human development, unlike many other developmental theorists from his time period, covers the entire life span including adulthood. Erikson defines "crisis" as a series of inner conflict that are stage-dependent in development. Erikson proposed that the manner in which one resolves the crisis will have implications for one's personal identity and future development. In the first crisis, which occurs generally through early-middle adolescence, is termed identity confusion vs identity. This first developmental crisis is the conflict in which the adolescent has to determine how they can develop their identity yet also be accepted in a social group. Namely, adolescents have to assess and decide who they are going to be identified as and how they want to be perceived by others. Erikson further posited that when adolescents are able to negotiate this crisis successfully, they will emerge with a firm sense of their unique identity and can, without question, navigate this "self" when interacting with others and are thus identified as being healthy and healthy. In other words, they are self-assured individuals who can interact with others and participate in social relationships without lose their sense of self. Yet around the time of crisis, when they're not able to successfully work through the crisis, they don't know who they are. When they don't know who they are, they risk withdrawing from others and experiencing social disconnection, or - in contrast - they can develop an inflated sense of their own significance and gravitate toward extremism. In Erikson's perspective if they get stuck at this stage they will not become emotionally mature adults.(Erik Erikson and Self-Identity, n.d.)

The second crisis occurs during the transition from late adolescence to early adulthood and is called the crisis of intimacy versus isolation. This crisis represents the struggle over resolution to the reciprocal nature of intimacy; that is, achieving a balance between giving and receiving love and support. Consequently, young people must determine how to cultivate close friendships outside the family and achieve reciprocity in romantic relationships.(Erik Erikson and Self-Identity, n.d.)

“Given the importance of narrative identity to well-being, it is important to understand how individuals develop the abilities to engage in the complex process of narrating stories about the self. Building on Erikson's (1963) theory of psychosocial development, McAdams (1985) originally argued that narrative identity emerges in the late-adolescent and early-adult years, partly as a function of societal expectations regarding identity and the maturation of formal operational thinking. Accordingly, Habermas and Bluck (2000) proposed that it is not until adolescence that people can construct stories

about their lives that exhibit causal coherence (a convincing account of how early events cause later events) and thematic coherence (the derivation of organizing themes or trends in a full life). Consistent with their claim, a growing body of research suggests that as people move from late childhood through adolescence, their life-narrative accounts show increasing evidence of causal coherence, thematic coherence, and other markers of a well-formed narrative identity” (Habermas & de Silveira, 2008). According to the model, narrative identity emerges gradually over time as people share stories about their lived experiences to and with other people. Over developmental time, selves create narratives, which create selves (McLean et al., 2007). Through multiple iterations of socially shared experiences with other people, a person begins to process, revise, reinterpret, retell, and receive influence from both social and discursive forms about stories they have told about their lived experiences, and a person develops a wider and more integrated narrative identity. To develop a narrative identity, a person has to learn first, how to share narratives consistent with particular cultural practices, and in particular groups, such as families, with peers, and in other formal and informal arrangements.

Developmental psychologists cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental designs have repeatedly demonstrated that conversations with parents about personal events is fundamental to the development of narrative skills in children (Fivush, Haden, & Reese, 2006).(McAdams & McLean, 2013)

“Gender schema theory was introduced by psychologist Sandra Bem in 1981 and asserted that children learn about male and female roles from the culture in which they live.” The theory states that from the earliest stages of socialization, children will modify their behavior to match the gender expectations of their culture. Gender schemas do not simply influence how a person processes information; they also affect the attitudes and belief systems that drive one to behave in a "gender-appropriate" way. Gender schemas also dictate a person's value and meant to be potential within that culture. For example, a girl growing up in a traditional culture may think there is no other option for her as a woman other than to marry and have children, while a girl growing up in a more liberal culture may want to pursue a career, not have children, or not marry at all. Within this framework, it is understood by both men and women the norms associated with gender, or the penalties for not being gender-appropriate. For instance, a woman might be perceived as "bossy" or "abrasive" in the more traditional sense of culture, or even seen as "disrespectful" or "unmotivated" to her husband, if she does not take his last name after they are married and she pursues a career. Another example might be that even in a more progressive part of the country, a man may be considered "bad" or even "at fault" for taking the stay-at-home role, or a woman may be called "un-progressive" or even "backwards," if she wants to keep the "housewife" role or even be described as an "old- fashioned" style.(Starr & Zurbriggen, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Exploration of self identity transformation mostly based on quantitative study, very few studies focused on qualitative method.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study focuses on how gender role in society affects the romantic relationship. This qualitative study focuses on how romantic relationship affect their own self. This study provides insight of how romantic relationship support their personal growth and self- understanding.

Research question

1. Can you share a specific experience in your relationship that made you feel more aware of yourself?
2. Can you share what are the expectations you have about your partner in your relationship?
3. How do your partner views or expectations that affect the way you see yourself?

Significant of The Study

Through this study people will be identify how romantic relationship influence the self through gender differences. Understanding the gender role and expectation of their cultural is important. This research gives a detailed explanation of how an individual is develop self concept through the journey of romantic relationship. This study emphasizes an often-overlooked factor of how people view themselves and their partners. This a qualitative approach which might give an insight about the personal experiences of an individual of how they perceive personal growth in a romantic relationship.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Dating Goals and Partner Similarity: Intimacy and Identity Goals in Young

The purpose of this research is to identify whether intimacy and identity goal influence the romantic behaviour and satisfaction. The method used to collect is quantitative, dyadic couple analyses the findings of this research are intimacy goal support satisfaction and positive behaviour and identity goals supported autonomy but not directly linked to the satisfaction. The limitation of this research doesn't focus on individual gendered identity formation largely quantitative. (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2014)

2. Conflict, Intimacy, Identity Satisfaction & Depressive Symptoms

This research aims to understand identity satisfaction as a mediator between relationship experience and depressive symptoms. The study utilized quantitative methods which included calculating Descriptive statistics for each variable (mean, SD) and utilizing Pearson's bivariate correlations for all study variables. The findings of the study demonstrate that conflict and intimacy in romantic relationships are predictors of depressive symptoms both directly and indirectly through couple satisfaction and identity satisfaction. The limitations of this research are qualitatively exploring the gendered emotional experience behind identity satisfaction.. (Graziano et al., 2024)

3. The Influence of Self- and Partner-Enhancement, Perceptual Congruence, and Personal Identity on Relational Satisfaction

The aim of this study is to determine how enhanced and perceived identity impact satisfaction. The current study utilizes a quantitative method, using the Dyadic Adjustment Scale as the measure of relational satisfaction. The findings of this study suggest that both partners or the self using positive illusions results in satisfaction. The limitations of the current research is that the domains where enhancement or congruence was assessed is limited, or domains aspects it focused more on perception rather than process.. (George et al., 2020)

4. Gender differences in identity processes and self-esteem in middle and later adulthood

Think about how the process of identity transformation (accommodation versus assimilation) connects to self-esteem in older adults or middle-aged adults, separated further by gender. In adult development, relatively little research considers the gender- based and gendered use of identity adaptation strategies,

and the psychological outcomes associated. Women tended to accommodate identity; in other words, she would change her frame of reference of herself in some way, and accommodation negatively related to self-esteem; however, identity assimilation for her, associated positively with self-esteem. Identity that was more or less equally balanced (i.e. more or less about change and stability) seemed to generate higher self-esteem for both genders.. (Skultety, K. M., & Whitbourne, S. K. 2004)

5. Identity Statuses as Developmental Trajectories: A Five-Wave Longitudinal Study in Early-to-Middle and Middle-to-Late Adolescents

The longitudinal nature of this study suggests that identity development in adolescence (over five different waves) has better conceptualized as a developmental trajectory designated as one of five different identities statuses (Achievement, Early Closure, Moratorium, Searching Moratorium, and Diffusion) rather than as a series of short-term states and found particularly interesting is that "closure" (commitment without exploration) may also be the adaptive and stable approach to an identity. It also connects identity status with normative developmental trajectories model and found that trajectories were remarkable stable change from middle adolescence to late adolescence. While important, one limitation is that the study ends at the late teenage years (age 20), and therefore is limited in examining the transitional phase of these identity pathways into young adulthood including the formation of romantic relationships, which is meaningful for understanding how individual ways of self-understanding are shaped through intimate relationships and whether identify pathways can potentially change in intimate relationships. (Meeus et al., 2012).

6. Self-Construction, Self-Protection, and Self-Enhancement: A Homeostatic Model of Identity Protection

The study examines how identity processes during the period of cultural transition are formed from the interaction of personal, social, and cultural characteristics. They identified that identity conflict and compatibility exist not in the cultures but in how people sense-make their lived experiences. Belonging and discrimination were highlighted as significant mediators in this process. The authors integrate cross-cultural and social psychological perspectives by explaining that culture distance does not predict identity outcomes a priori, but that outcomes are always constructed through personal sense-making and social interaction. A research gap that their study contributes to is the lack of multi-level integrated models that consider the multiple influential levels simultaneously, while also calling for future research in these complex processes to be combined with more nuanced longitudinal designs to fully capture the dynamic process of identity change. (Vignoles et al., 2022).

7. Identity development research: a systematic review of reviews

This research explores how the dynamics of self-concept clarity and romantic relationship quality change over time, documenting a bidirectional relationship in which increased self-concept clarity enhances relationship quality and improved relationship quality leads to greater self-concept clarity, or greater self-concept clarity predicts positive relationship quality, etc. This study uses elements of the self and relationship sciences to show how the linkages between self and dating or romantic relationship dyad are mutual and joint rather than wholly unidirectional. One of the main contributions of this study is to examine more closely the particular interpersonal mechanisms (one's partner's validation of self-concept clarity, identity-related partner support) that allow for a feedback loop to take

place, especially in a more varied relational and demographic contexts. (Slotter & Emery, 2025).

8. The impact of living with long-term conditions in young adulthood on mental health and identity: What can help?

The study investigates longitudinally the way that quality of romantic relationships during adolescence (i.e., warmth and conflict) predicts functional outcomes in adulthood, showing that warmth experienced in childhood predicts greater social competence and relationship satisfaction ten years later; whereas conflict predicts increased negative affect and substance use. This work represents a synthesis of developmental and relational literatures, demonstrating that the emotional context of early romantic relationships, not just the existence or absence of them, are the important sites for adult psychosocial functioning. The work highlights an important gap in the research relating to the long-term impact of these early experiences, and at the same time emphasizes a need for future researchers to attend to the "how" of the experience translating to adult outcomes around parameters such as identity development, and attachment security, etc. (Kansky et al., 2019).

9. Love beyond gluten: self-esteem, illness identity, and social support in romantic rejection concerns among adolescents with celiac disease

In their empirical investigation, they looked at how identity types mediated the relationship between life happiness and family functioning among Chinese college students. The researchers discovered that this association was considerably mediated by an informational identity type (active exploration), which was favorably associated with well-being. A diffuse-avoidant identity style, on the other hand, seems to act as a detrimental mediator. By highlighting identity processes as a crucial mechanism by which family influences a person's later adjustment, this study combines identity theory and family systems theory. The generally underappreciated identity processes that connect childhood family functioning to adult results represent a significant gap in the literature it covers. Li and associates also pointed up certain study shortcomings. (Li et al., 2024).

10. Selected Predictors of the Sense of Intimacy in Relationships of Young Adults

A study that examines the relationships between identity development, romantic attachment, and sexual quality among young adults. They found that achieved identity status and secure attachment style were statistically significant positive predictors of better overall sexual satisfaction, and lower sexual distress. The empirical study blends developmental, and clinical concepts as it explores the notion of a consolidated sense of self and a secure relational base as a prerequisite for having positive sexual experiences – rather than sexual functioning being a discrete domain of the relationship as it often treated separately. A significant gap identified in the study is the lack of integrated models linking these psychological constructs (identity and attachment) to sexual outcomes. They call for longitudinal studies assessing the causal pathways among these variables over time. (Dumas et al., 2019).

11. Self- and Partner-objectification in Romantic Relationships: Associations with Media Consumption and Relationship Satisfaction

A study on identity denial among Asian Americans, showing that being categorized as a foreigner negatively affects mental health by causing feelings of exclusion and limiting their national identity. This research combines social psychology and identity theory by demonstrating that mental well-being is not only defined by one's identity but is influenced by social validation, or the absence of

social validation. An important gap in the literature this research fills is the psychological impact miscategorization has on people in their own country. The authors suggest future research should investigate the positive strategies people use to cope with the psychological consequences of being miscategorized in their own country and affirm their identity. (Cheryan & Monin, 2011)

12. How Relationship Satisfaction and Negative Communication Trajectories Change in Emerging Adults' Dating Relationships:

A Group-Based Dual Trajectory Analysis using a sample of Italian emerging adults, the longitudinal study investigates the connection between the quality of romantic relationships and three distinct personal identity processes: commitment, in-depth investigation, and rethinking of commitment. The results showed that higher levels of identity commitment predicted future relationship quality and that identity grew more stable as relationship quality rose. By demonstrating a reciprocal, mutually reinforcing relationship between developing a secure sense of self and establishing better, romantic relationships, this study exemplifies a synthesis between developmental and relationship science. This study highlights the directionality of these two fields of study, but it also highlights the necessity for additional research to examine the mechanisms underlying this reciprocity and investigate these connections in many cultural settings (Crocetti et al., 2023).

13. Being in intimate relationships: implications for wellbeing

This study examines identity development and its relationship with intimacy for young adults in India, utilizing a cross-sectional design to map significant gender differences in how the stages of identity predict the ability to develop intimate relationships. This study integrates Eriksonian psychosocial theory with contemporary cultural psychology by documenting the universal stage progression from identity to intimacy in a specific, collectivistic cultural context. Smitha's study fills the significant research gap of non-Western perspectives in this area, however, the methodological approach also demonstrates the need for future longitudinal and dyadic studies to report on the causal and interactive processes involved in development of identity and intimacy in real romantic relationships. (Smitha, 2017).

14. Navigating Body Perception, Affectivity, Intimacy, Gender Identity, and Sexuality: An Exploratory Qualitative Study in Young Adults with SMI, IDs, and ASD in a Community Setting

In a sample of young adults, the study looked at the relationship between identity styles and outcomes related to mental health. It found that while informational and normative styles were linked to better adaptation outcomes, diffuse-avoidant identity styles—which are typified by procrastination and a lack of cognitive engagement with identity issues—were a significant predictor of higher levels of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress. This study positions how people view identity formation as a vulnerability or protective factor for mental health, so integrating identity process theory with clinical psychology. In particular, it fills a significant information gap about the predictive importance of identity processing for psychopathology, but it also highlights the need for interventions that try to change maladaptive identity styles in order to promote better outcomes and for longitudinal research to confirm causation. (Boccia et al., 2023).

15. Social Processes of Young Adults' Recovery and Identity Formation during Life- Disruptive Mental Distress—A Meta-Ethnography

The researchers identified that an informational identity style (indicative of active exploration) was a significant positive predictor of adaptive coping and psychological resilience, while the diffuse-avoidant identity style strongly predicted maladaptive coping strategies and mental health-related problems. In essence, this research connects identity process theory to crisis and resilience literature, showing how individuals process identity-related issues is an important psychological resource that predicts adjustment in times of large-scale stress that affects the society. The study identifies an important gap in the literature, which is the unexplored contributions of identity processes in providing a protective factor of well-being during times of collective distress, and indicates the need for longitudinal research that follows these styles as stable predictors of adjustment over time, as well as research that develops intervention to enhance a more adaptive form of identity processing. (Marcia et al., 2023)

3. METHOD

Statement of the Problem

Exploration of self identity transformation mostly based on quantitative study, very few studies focused on qualitative method.

Objectives Of the Study

- To explore how romantic relationships influence self-identity development and transition in males and females.
- To examine how male and female perceive self identity transformation within relationship.
- To explore how males and females perceive and experience self-identity development and transformation within the context of romantic relationships.

Phenological research Identification of the Phenomenon

This study focused on phenological method which is used to explore the individual lived experiences of male and female in self identity transformation within romantic relationship.

Research Questions

1. Can you share a specific experience in your relationship that made you feel more aware of yourself?
2. Can you share what are the expectations you have about your partner in your relationship?
3. How do your partner views or expectations that affect the way you see yourself?

Participant selection

In this study participant is selected through purposive sampling. The people who are currently in romantic relationship or married and whose self identity transform within the romantic relationship.

Bracketing

The researcher will be following the journal of their own experiences and assumptions about romantic relationship. Through journaling researcher bias about this study will be reduced. The goal of this bracketing is to reduce researcher bias and understand the participant experience, perspective.

Data Collection Methods

Data will be collected by using semi structured interviews through face to face or online interview sessions. The interviews will be recorded with participant consent and transcribed as verbatim.

Data Analysis

Data analysis will be done by thematic analysis. In this type of analysis, the data will be transcribed into verbatim and form codes. After forming codes, the data will divide into themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes. After theme are decided, produce the theme with evidence.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity helps the researcher to maintain the credibility and ethical awareness in qualitative study. To ensure the reflexivity researcher critically evaluate of their own experience, values, beliefs and biases and how these factors influence the study.

Operational Definition

“Self-identity transformation: self-identity is broadly defined as the collective characteristics we perceive as our own, which endure over time and are continuously under construction. self-concept affects the formation of self-identity to a large extent [7, 8]. However, in the process of forming a self-concept, there will always be a gap with self-development. At the same time, due to factors such as values, individual growth background, and cognitive limitations, a distorted or wrong self-concept may be established” [9]. (Hong, Dyakov, & Zheng, 2022).

“Romantic relationship: Romantic relationships as mutually acknowledged on- going voluntary interactions; in comparison to most other peer relationships, romantic ones typically have a distinctive intensity, which is usually marked by expressions of affection and current or anticipated sexual behaviour” (Furman & Collins, 2007) **Inclusion Criteria**

- Young adults aged 20-30 years.
- Must have been in a romantic relationship or married.
- Willingness to participate and give informed consent.
- Focused on male and female.

Exclusion Criteria

- Participants who are under therapy session are excluded.
- Participants who are involved in casual or undefined relationships.

Procedure

In this study semi structured interview questions are used to collect data. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. Purposive sampling method is used to select the participant. The data will be analysed through thematic analysis.

Tools Of the Study

A semi structured interview questions were used to collect data from participant. Audio recorder for recording the session with consent from the participant and note book for writing extra information

from the participants.

Research Ethics

- Informed consent will be obtained.
- Confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be strictly maintained.
- Participants may withdraw at any point.

Qualitative Research

In this study thematic analysis is used to analysis the data. The data will be transcribed, separated as themes, patterns in order to analysis the data

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Table 1: shows themes, subthemes, description and example quotation

Theme	Subtheme	Description	Example Quotation
1. Changing Self-Identity as Related to Growth	1.1 Insecurity to Self-Awareness	Participants initially described themselves as immature, shy, sensitive, or unsure before entering relationships.	“Before relationship I didn’t know how to communicate or adjust with people.”“I was very sensitive and cried for small things.”
	1.2 Developing Confidence and Maturity	Through relationships, participants developed confidence, patience, communication skills, and emotional regulation.	“After entering the relationship, I became more confident and matured.”“I learned patience and better listening.”
2. Redefining Values and Beliefs through Connection	2.1 Flexibility and Compromise Learning	Participants learned that sharing space required adaptability and compromise.	“Earlier I liked things my way, but now I think for both.”

	2.2 Change of Social and Moral Beliefs	Some reassessed and shifted previously rigid or traditional beliefs.	“Before I believe in caste and now, I am against it.”“Change is necessary for growth.”
3. Gender Roles and Societal Expectations	3.1 Internalizing Gender Norms	Participants reflected on internalized societal expectations regarding gendered behavior.	“Society expects men to drive and women to cook.”“Men shouldn’t cry, that kind stereotype affects us.”
	3.2 Refusal and Negotiation of Roles	Some challenged gendered norms and redefined roles within relationships.	“I will be the one to buy flowers or plan a date and usually boys do that.”
4. Family Impact on Relationship Identity	4.1 Positive Role Models	Loving and supportive parents served as templates for relationship care and continuity.	“My parents are caring even after years; that inspired me.”
	4.2 Negative Models and Corrective Learning	Exposure to conflict or violence motivated participants to seek healthier relationship dynamics.	“My father beat my mom; I wanted a partner opposite of him.”

5. Relationship as a Change Agent for Self-Actualization and Interdependence	5.1 Discovering the Hidden Self	Romantic intimacy encouraged emotional openness and deeper self-understanding.	“I started expressing things I never shared with anyone.”
	5.2 Redefining Independence and Dependence	Participants realized that interdependence could coexist with individuality.	“I realized it’s okay to depend on someone.”

Discussion

This research sought to examine self-identity change for participants within romantic partnerships. The study had ten semi-structured interviews, and five major themes were identified:

1. Changing Self-Identity as Related to Growth
2. Redefining Values and Beliefs through Connection
3. Gender Roles and Societal Expectations
4. Family Impact on Relationship Identity
5. Relationship as a Change Agent for Self-Actualization and Interdependence

These findings provide an understanding of how relational experiences that occur in the romantic context impact emotional development, beliefs, and self-definition.

1. Changing Self-Identity as Related to Growth

Participant's identity before entering a relationship was noted to be , either immature, insecure, or emotionally dependent. Quite a few participants stated that they were more introverted, shy, or poor communicators before they entered their relationship. But as their relationships progressed, people reported growing confidence, undergoing more patience, and becoming more emotionally mature. This represents a growth across Erikson’s (1968) identity versus role confusion in early adulthood, as relationships develop and become important in helping to cement identity.

For instance, participants stated that they "learned patience," "communicated better," and "became emotionally stronger." In this way, romantic relationships act as a mirror, for the self, to grow emotionally, corroborating previous studies that show intimacy provides a developmental context that encourages empathy, and emotional self- regulation (Arnett, 2015; Montgomery, 2005).

Having someone to be accepted by, and be emotionally supportive of one another seems to encourage the self-validation, and self-worth, to further cement identity reflectively as identity is co-constructed relationally (Mead, 1934).

2. Redefining Values and Beliefs through Connection

A notable result of engaging in relationships was the reassessment of value system (morally and socially). Research participant stated that they transmitted from self-serving values to integrated understanding of flexibility. Some participants stated that they “started thinking from other person point of view” or “I learned to adjust”, which shows cognitive and emotional flexibility in relationship. According to Vygotsky’s theory, internal value is changed by interpersonal communication in social contact as a zone of internalization.

Rebuilding of societal ideas, concerning to caste, gender and autonomy was the identified pattern in this research. For example, “before I believe in caste but now I am against it” indicates the change in moral values which influenced by relational exposure. According to Gilligan’s (1982) ethics of care, in intimate relationship encourage moral development which focus on empathy rather than social conformity.

In romantic relationship gave an opportunity to learn respect, equality, negotiate differences, and alter identity in order to enhance relational harmony.

3. Gender Roles and Societal Expectations

The result of this research shows that participants, in romantic relationship they were aware of their gender expectations. Female participants state about fulfilling the traditional femininity like acting caring or restriction in expressing their love in public whereas in male participants talk about gender expectation of emotional control and responsibility. Comment like “men shouldn’t cry” and “Society expects women to cook and men to drive” prove that these gendered behavioral norms processed in social interaction and self-expression.

Some of the participants state about experiences these stereotypes and opted to challenge or question the gendered expectation. For example, a female participants state that “I will be the one to buy flowers and makes the dates” her decision shows that she is challenging patriarchal pattern.

Connel (2002) talked about “gender negotiation” in which people try to struggle with norms as well as change the traditional gender norms. This concept illustrated the internalization and resistance phenomena.

For female participants, renegotiating independence with relational expectations were needed for changing their relational identity. In male participants converted from dominance to emotional vulnerability.

These patterns align with research which shar the idea of modern partnership act as reimagining masculinity and femininity which fostering more egalitarian self-models. (Rudman & Glick, 2010).

4. Family Impact on Relationship Identity

In romantic relationship, family experience plays a major role in how a person interpret and express their identities. Participants who described about their parents as loving and caring relationship showed as romanticize commitment and stability,” My parents have cared for each other for years and this inspired me”. Participants who grow in an environment where there are conflictual or abusive familial constructs seek alternative characteristic in their partners. For example, “My father used to beat my mom so I wanted someone the opposite of him”.

This solution is related to social learning theory (Bandura,1977), which explains that an individual observes and develop schemas for interpersonal interactions as adults based on early relations

experiences. Positive parental relationship led to secure attachment, on the other hand negative parental experiences may lead to restructured identity through corrections of relational experiences.

As the outcome, to form an identity in romantic relationship may involve reconstructing their past relational trauma and rewriting their story of love, trust and partnership. These findings related to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988), in which this theory explains secure attachment in early childhood led to adaptive self concept where's insecure attachment led to compensatory identity in adulthood.

5. Relationship as a Change Agent for Self-Actualization and Interdependence

This final theme explains how romantic relationship led to growth-promoting catalysts for extensively uncovering their self. Participants stated that they explored their previously had been concealed or unexpressed parts of themselves through emotional intimacy. Intimate relationship gives a safe place for athletes as one participant's state "I started expressing things I never shared with anyone". This result connects with Maslow (1968) humanistic theory which explains that love and belonging are essential for self actualization.

The notable change was re-examined the independence a dependence in relationship. Many individuals associated with independence with emotional detachment before moving on into the relationship. Over time participants started to reconstruct dependence as mutual support rather than weakness. Participants state that "I realized it's okay to depend on someone" which indicates the appearance of interdependency as a type of relational autonomy (Kagitcibasi, 2007). These results show that relational development enhance identity integration rather than loss of individuality is encouraged by healthy dependency in relationship.

On top of that, the respond in kind of identity formation was reinforce by individual who developed emotional safety, trust, and self -confidence through communication and shared decision in romantic relationship

Emergent Findings

The conclusion from the interviews that a person can in a romantic relationship provide changing environment regarding to self identity creation, challenged and development. There are five interconnected processes which are showed b the participants they are changing Self-Identity as Related to Growth, redefining Values and Beliefs through Connection, gender Roles and Societal Expectations, family Impact on Relationship Identity, relationship as a Change Agent for Self-Actualization and Interdependence. In holistic perspective, these themes identity as flexible and socially co-developed, always changing through communication, emotional bonding, introspection.

1. Changing Self-Identity as Related to Growth

The fifth theme which is Relationship as a change agent for self-actualization and Interdependence to first theme which is changing self-identity as related to growth. Personal evaluation can be achieved through relationship encounters rather in a vacuum, according to the participants narratives. Before the experiences of romantic intimacy, participants viewed themselves as often unsure, emotional-dependent, or socially limited.

However, through emotional intimacy, communication, and conflict resolution with their partners, each participant increased their self-awareness, emotional balance, and confidence. This is indicative of Erikson's (1968) psychosocial stage of intimacy versus isolation, where young adults are engaged in deeper, co-dependent relationships that carry implications for the consolidation of self. For

both male and female participants, the relationship provided a context to independently self-identity test their experiences, to understand their emotional needs, boundaries, and their own behavioral patterns.

While male participants indicated growth in responsibility, patience, and maturity, female participants indicated growth in expression of emotions, communication, and self-worth. Therefore, relationships acted as vehicles to mirror self, to give individuals permission to recognize, modify, and accept aspects of self that were not accessible prior to establishing intimacy in the relationship.

2. Redefining Values and Beliefs through Connection

The second theme, Redefining Values and Beliefs through Connection, represents the mechanisms of change described in this study. Participants say that in a relationship their preconceived notions, moral frameworks and societal notions were challenged through communication, empathy and exposure to different perspectives, they start to comprehend the harmony between relationships and self interest.

The changes in self concept from self-absorption to connection orientation can be seen change towards rigid individualism to mutual understanding. According to Mead's (1934) symbolic interactionist theory states that through social feedback and role-playing an individual identify construct. For example, a participant says "learn to adapt", "become more flexible", or "began thinking in a different way than they had previously". These changes show that the capacity of empathy, make concessions and manful proximity are connected to restructuring of one self regarding to identity. There are gender differences in this transformation, as female participants were more likely to experience emotional and moral changes whereas male participants showed behavioral and attitudinal shift. Both male and female participants reported that inclusive sense of self that combined relational values into identity structures.

3. Gender Roles and Societal Expectations

The third theme which give contextual foundation for understanding the restriction on self identity negotiation. In relationship how a person perceives themselves, make decisions, express their affection are influenced by social expectation in which was confirmed by both male a female participant. Women were limited in terms of independence, display of affection in public and compliance, while males were expected to be financially independent, emotionally stable and less outspoken.

This conflict between personal authenticity and social conformity produced an internal negotiation of identity. For others, defying stereotypes became a process of self-definition i.e., women initiating affection expression, or men opening up emotional communication to vulnerability. This is consistent with Connell's (2002) hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity framework, where people internalize or resist cultural scripts in order to recreate their sense of gendered self. To what the discussion is, we see that relations gave all participants an opportunity to talk about and change social norms, thus enhancing agency and individualization. Simply put, this confirms that identity formation is social located (and may renegotiated) action that happens within cultural framework.

4. Family Impact on Relationship Identity

The fourth theme, Family as a Template of Relational Identity, refers to the idea that, as adults, our family dynamics represent the template for our relationships. When the participants had positive, attentive, and loving family dynamics, they enacted these dynamics with partners because they had been socialized in these dynamics at home. For participants with experiences that involved parental conflict

and emotional or physical neglect, they were intentionally seeking to disrupt those cycles and create different forms of relational identity.

These findings can be viewed through Bandura's (1977) social-learning theory, which proposes that behaviors and values are modeled through observation early in life and later become interwoven in the self-concept. Additionally, Bowlby's (1988) exploration of attachment theory can help explain the influence of secure or insecure attachment models on future patterns of loving and dependence in adulthood. Romantic relationships ultimately became a way to further repair, reframe, and imagine love with another based on earlier family dynamics.

5. Relationship as a Change Agent for Self-Actualization and Interdependence

Drawing across all themes of the study, the final result of identity transformation is interdependence, a mature relational identity that combines self-autonomy and mutual connectedness. In the beginning, participants aligned independence with emotional disengagement, and dependence with weakness. As a result, they started to rewrite their conception of healthy dependence which was defined by emotional management, respect for each other uniqueness, encourage each others dreams and personal goals through experiences in their relationship.

This shift from identity as people to identity as relational is in line with Kagitcibasi's (2007) theory of an autonomous-related self, in which autonomy and connectivity coexist rather than clash. Participants remarked that they were able to maintain uniqueness while fostering unity by sharing decisions, encouraging one another's aspirations, and candidly discussing any problems. This idea of balance is the culmination of self-identity transformation—not as a loss of self, but rather as a co-created development of selfhood that advances toward personal honesty, empathy, and emotional maturity.

5. SUMMARY AND SUGGESTION

Summary of Findings

The current study looked at how people, both male and female, negotiate the changing terrain of their self-identity in romantic relationships. The following five main themes emerged from the analysis of 10 semi-structured participant interviews Changing Self-Identity as Related to Growth, redefining Values and Beliefs through Connection, gender Roles and Societal Expectations, family Impact on Relationship Identity, relationship as a Change Agent for Self-Actualization and Interdependence.

The findings demonstrated how romantic relationships might influence moral, cognitive, and emotional growth. In general, individuals talked of transitioning from feelings of uncertainty, insecurity, or immaturity to a condition of more compassion, empathy, and self-worth. They also talked about developing a faith in their self-concept based on relational experiences, as well as learning to be adaptable and compromise. Additionally, participants' enactment of trust, communication, and dependence on others was influenced by familial relational experiences, whether they were positive nurturing ties or bad conflictual interactions.

It was found that there were gender disparities in transformative experiences: male participants stressed responsibility, emotional control, and negotiating male/female roles, while female participants highlighted relational experiences centered on emotional expression, social judgment, and self-worth. Despite gender variations, every participant stated that partnerships were growth-based activities in

which love, introspection, and support for one another enhanced identity. All things considered, the study shows that self-identity is malleable, socially produced, and constantly being negotiated in a relational setting.

Conclusion

According to the qualitative study, changing one's self-identity in romantic relationships necessitates combining social, family, relational, and personal elements. People develop emotional salience, value flexibility, and self-awareness via connection. Behavior is shaped by familial responsibilities and conventional societal expectations, but both men and women may develop a more cohesive personality by reflecting, articulating, and reconstructing ideals. In the end, romantic partnerships evolve into ecological settings for relational sophistication, self-improvement, and empowerment in addition to being emotional attachments.

Implication

According to the qualitative study, changing one's self-identity in romantic relationships necessitates combining social, family, relational, and personal elements. People develop emotional salience, value flexibility, and self-awareness via connection. Behavior is shaped by familial responsibilities and conventional societal expectations, but both men and women may develop a more cohesive personality by reflecting, articulating, and reconstructing ideals. In the end, romantic partnerships evolve into ecological settings for relational sophistication, self-improvement, and empowerment in addition to being emotional attachments.

Limitation

The study included only ten participants, all of the same cultural background. Therefore, findings are not necessarily generalizable to a larger population. The study relied on self-reporting as a data source; thus, responses may have been affected by social desirability or faulty memories. The cross-sectional design captured identity transformation at a single point in time, not allowing observation of identity transformation across stages in the relationship. Accurate representation of participant experiences in thematic analysis may also have been subject to researcher interpretation; in other words, researchers might not have preserved the objectivity or clarity of themes despite best efforts.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Future research may consider utilizing a larger and more heterogeneous samples to study cultural and gender differences in self-identity transformation. Longitudinal and mixed-method approaches can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the temporality of identity transformation. Researchers might also study couples who are married, long-distance, and/or LGBTQ+ to provide a wider range of understanding.

Additionally, intervention-based research can provide researchers the opportunity to study counseling or educational programs for increasing emotional awareness, communication, and/or personal development in intimate relationship.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION SHEET

This informed consent form is for the participants, who have been invited to participate in research on the title “ A Qualitative Exploration of Self Identity Transformtion among Male and Female within Romantic Relationship”.

Name of principal investigator & department: Shanmugapriya C Research supervisor: Dr. Smitha A G
Name of organization: Kristu Jayanti College (Autonomous), Bangalore.

I am Shanmugapriya C, studying as a postgraduate student in the Department of Psychology at Kristu Jayanti College (Autonomous), Bangalore. I am researching the influence of caffeine intake on memory functions. I will give you adequate information and invite you to be a part of this research. You can decide whether or not you will participate in the research. Before you decide, Please feel comfortable talking to me about the research.

This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information and I will take time to explain. If you have questions later, you can ask them, I will be providing my contact details for the same.

Purpose of the research:

To explore the self-identity transformation among male and female, who are all in romantic relationship

For demographic factors:

- Participants who are in relationship
- Participants aged between 20 -30
- Focuses on heterosexual relationship.

You are being invited to take part in this research because we feel that your responses will aid as a very important tool to help us identify the factual details of the concerned experiment.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. The choice that you make will have no bearing on your role here. You may change your mind later and stop participating even if you agreed earlier.

The information recorded is confidential, your name will not be included in the data collected, and no one else except me and my supervisor will have access to the form. Nothing that you share today or with me will be made public with anybody outside the research, and nothing will be attributed to you by name.

Participation in this study does not pose any risks. There will be no direct benefit to you, but your participation will help us identify the factual details of the concerned experiment. I am now available to answer any questions.

This research proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Psychology that includes the research scholar and the supervisor at Kristu Jayanti College (Autonomous), Bangalore the rights of the research participants are protected.

Certificate of Informed Consent

I have been invited to participate in research on the title “ A Qualitative exploration of Self Identity Transformation among Male and Female within Romantic Relationship”

I have read the foregoing information, and it has also been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been answered to my satisfaction, I understand that participation is voluntary and it has been explained that choosing not to participate will not cause any consequences. I understand that I have the right to withdraw at any point during the data collection.

I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Appendix B

- 1) Will you share about how you think about yourself?
- 2) How did you describe yourself before you entered the relationship?
- 3) How do you describe how you felt after you entered the relationship?
- 4) In what ways do you think that you and your partner value change in your romantic relationship?
- 5) In what ways do you think societal norms influence your role based on your gender within a romantic relationship?
- 6) In what ways do you think your family members influence your role, based on your gender, within the romantic relationship?
- 7) How does your partner support your goals and interests in the relationship?
- 8) Has your partner's way of expressing love, support, or criticism shaped your self-view? If so, how?
- 9) Can you describe your part in the relationship that had the biggest influence on how you see yourself?
- 10) Have you adjusted or changed the way you are in your relationship? If so, in what ways?
- 11) Have you faced any situations where you struggled to keep the balance between your personal space and spending time with your partner? If so, in what ways?
- 12) Has your self ever felt threatened in your relationship? If yes, how did you handle it?
- 13) Can you share what expectations you have about your partner in the relationship?
- 14) Can you share your experience where disagreement or conflicts influenced the way you think about yourself?
- 15) Is there anything else you'd like to share about how your relationship has influenced your sense of self?