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The Association of Romance Movies, Gender, and Relational Identity Among Emerging Adults

Sara Hare
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Sara Hare

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Review Committee

Dr. Scott Wowra, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Matthew Hertenstein, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Ann Romosz, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2020

Abstract

The Association of Romance Movies, Gender, and Relational Identity
Among Emerging Adults

by

Sara Hare

MA, Walden University, 2014

BS, Towson University, 2009

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

May 2020

Abstract

Emerging adults are motivated to form intimate relationships and explore their relational identity. Little is known, however, about the development of relational identity in emerging adults. Given that external influences such as movies can impact how people view relationships, and that emerging adults are more likely to watch movies than other forms of media, it is essential to explore the relationship between movies and relational identity in emerging adults. The purpose of this quantitative, nonexperimental study was to examine the relationship between relational identity, gender, and the preference for romance movies among emerging adults. The theoretical foundations for the study were Erikson's psychosocial development theory, Arnett's theory of emerging adults, and Cheek and Cheek's tetrapartite model of self. A total of 158 participants were recruited through SurveyMonkey Audience. A 2x2 factorial analysis of variance was used to analyze how romance movie preferences (low, high) and gender (female, male) interacted on relational identity. The findings revealed a significant main effect with a small effect size of movie preference on relational identity; high romance movie preference was associated with a higher relational identity. The study may benefit a wide range of people, including future researchers, people who work on movies, and people who enjoy watching movies. Professionals in the counseling field may also benefit from the study, especially counselors who are involved in couples' therapy and counselors who practice cinematherapy.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. Thank you all for your support and encouragement. I would not have been able to come this far without you all.

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I would like to thank Dr. Wowra, Dr. Hertenstein, and Dr. Romosz. You all have been beyond helpful, and I could have not asked for a better team.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

People between the ages of 18 and 29 years are at a critical time in life between adolescence and adulthood called *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2000, 2004). As emerging adults transition into adulthood, they attempt to understand intimate relationships (Arnett, 2000) and their relational identity orientation (e.g., Cheek, Smith, & Tropp, 2002), which is the value and importance that they place on relationships (Breen, McLean, Cairney, & McAdams, 2017; Eliason, Mortimer, & Vuolo, 2015; Erikson, 1950). Likewise, people often form lifelong friendships and begin to look for significant others at this time (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adults may turn to additional resources to help them better understand themselves and their developing relational identity. Specifically, external influences such as movies can impact how they view relationships; therefore, it is important to understand these possible influences on relational identity (Bond & Compton, 2015; Breen et al., 2017; Galloway, Engstrom, & Emmers-Sommer, 2015; Hefner, 2018; Kretz, 2019; Wright & Tokunaga, 2016). The preference for romance movies was assessed in the current study because romance movies have a strong focus on relationships. As such, the study provides an understanding of the relationship between romance movies, gender, and relational identity among emerging adults.

The findings from the study may contribute to positive social change in various ways. To begin, the findings from the study may provide researchers with a better understanding of relational identity during emerging adulthood, which could also benefit future researchers who wish to explore relational identity. Cheek and Cheek (2018)

highlighted that a significant amount of research is needed to understand relational identity better. Likewise, the results from the study provide insight into whether relational identity is associated with gender and romance movie preference.

Those who work in the movie industry may also benefit from the study. Specifically, people such as filmmakers and scriptwriters may be able to understand the possible influence of the content that they decide to use in their films. Additionally, because many people perceive the information portrayed in media to be true (Breen et al., 2017), people who work on movies may be prompted to carefully consider the types of stereotypes that they reinforce or how they portray relationships.

The findings of the study may also make people more aware of the possible influence that movies have on their identity and their relationships. In turn, people may choose to evaluate which movies they watch more carefully. Finally, professionals in the counseling field may also benefit from the study, especially counselors who are involved in couples therapy and counselors who practice cinematherapy (Eğeci & Gençöz, 2017).

In the following sections, the background research for the study and the gap in the literature are provided. The problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions and hypotheses, theoretical framework, and nature of the study are also presented. Furthermore, the definitions of significant terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations are explained. Finally, the significance of the study is discussed, and a summary of the chapter is provided.

Background

People actively turn to the media as a reference for information related to identity. Namely, media serves as an escape for emerging adults who are stressed (Slater, Johnson, Cohen, Comello, & Ewoldsen, 2014). When emerging adults become stressed by the process of trying to figure out their identities, they may turn to media to cope and gain insight (Greenwood & Long, 2015; Silver & Slater, 2019). Moreover, many people believe the information that is conveyed in media; therefore, they are likely to use media to understand their gender roles, their values, and the traits that they would like to possess (Breen et al., 2017; Greenwood & Long, 2015; Hefner, 2016; Kelly & Garmon, 2016; Kokesh & Sternadori, 2015; Silver & Slater, 2019; van Monsjou & Mar, 2018; Zeglin, 2016). Furthermore, people use media to try on different identities, which helps them commit to and better understand their own identity (van Monsjou & Mar, 2018).

Media can also assist in developing relationships. People actively turn to media to be a part of social conversations. For example, people may decide to watch a popular television show so that they can partake in hype and conversations surrounding the show, which promotes social interactions and bonding with others (Conlin, Billings, & Averset, 2016; Feiereisen, Rasolofoarison, De Valck, & Schmitt, 2019; Tefertiller, Maxwell, & Morris, 2019). Similarly, people who are in relationships enjoy watching television and movies together because this provides a bonding experience, which increases the quality of the relationship (Gomillion, Gabriel, Kawakami, & Young, 2017). People also turn to media to better understand others and the relationships that they are in (Breen et al., 2017; Burt, 2018; Greenwood & Long, 2015; Hefner, 2018). For instance, a person who

recently entered emerging adulthood and is interested in developing a serious relationship might turn to a romance movie to better understand acceptable behaviors in a relationship and learn what to expect from relationships (Arnett, 2000; Breen et al., 2017; Burt, 2018; Greenwood & Long, 2015; Hefner, 2016).

Although people actively turn to media for reasons involving identity and romance, media can also influence people's identity and their outlook on relationships (Breen et al., 2017; Zeglin, 2016). Specifically, people may become immersed in media stories and, in turn, develop traits similar to the main characters in these narratives (Igartua & Vega Casanova, 2016; Richter, Appel, & Calio, 2014). Movies and television also contribute to and reinforce stereotypes, which can alter people's views of themselves and others (Giaccardi, Ward, Seabrook, Manago, & Lippman, 2017; Wright & Tokunaga, 2016). For instance, Giaccardi et al. (2017) found that the more that men watched media that reinforced masculine ideology (such as sports television), the more likely they were to endorse attitudes and engage in behaviors that were consistent with gender stereotypes.

Accordingly, media can impact how people view relationships and their attitudes toward relationships (Bond & Compton, 2015; Breen et al., 2017; Galloway et al., 2015; Hefner, 2018; Wright & Tokunaga, 2016). For instance, people who engage in media that support homosexuality are more likely to accept homosexual relationships (Bond & Compton, 2015). Similarly, people who watch television and movies that endorse romantic ideology are more likely to hold stronger idealistic romantic beliefs (Galloway et al., 2015; Hefner, 2018). Furthermore, romantic media can influence people's fear of remaining single, overall satisfaction with their relationships, and desire to get married

(Galloway et al., 2015; Timmermans, Coenen, & Van den Bulck, 2019; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2017).

In contrast to Hefner's (2018) belief that media influence people's beliefs and attitudes, Tu, Dilley, and Kaufman (2015) proposed that people are active participants in the media that they choose. Likewise, various researchers have found that women are more likely than men to watch romantic media and media that focus on people and relationships (Greenwood & Long, 2015; Tu, Dilley, & Kaufman, 2015; Wuehr, Lange, & Schwarz, 2017). However, there are mixed findings on whether there is a gender difference in regard to holding ideal romantic beliefs and whether there is an association between gender, romantic beliefs, and media genres (Kretz, 2019; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2017).

Although previous research has addressed the association between media and identity, a gap in literature lies in how specific forms of media (i.e., only movies vs. movies and television) are associated with identity (Garmon, Glover, & Vozzola, 2018). In the current study, I attempted to fill the gap in research regarding specific forms of media and relational identity among men and women who are emerging adults. More specifically, Cheek and Cheek (2018) highlighted that minimal research has been done on relational identity; therefore, it remains unknown what can influence or impact relational identity. Additionally, although previous researchers have assessed how a combination of media (i.e., television and movies) is associated with identity formation and how people view relationships, little is known within the scholarly community about how only movies are associated with a person's identity (Breen et al., 2017; Garmon et al., 2018;

Hefner, 2018; Kokesh & Sternadori, 2015; Kretz, 2019). This study was needed to narrow the gap in the understanding of relational identity and the association of identity and movies. Likewise, the study was needed because the information could be beneficial for researchers, people who practice cinema therapy, and emerging adults.

Problem Statement

Within the scholarly community, there is a lack of knowledge of the relationship between watching romance movies and relational identity among emerging adults. Emerging adulthood is a critical time when people aged 18-29 years navigate essential life choices (Arnett, 2000, 2004; Erikson, 1950, 1968). Likewise, emerging adulthood is when people develop significant relationships, attempt to understand their relational identity, and explore how to form and maintain relationships (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1950, 1968). Emerging adults deliberately reference various forms of media, including novels, television shows, and movies, to help with understanding relationships and developing identity (Breen et al., 2017; Kokesh & Sternadori, 2015). In this process, media may impact people's identities and their attitudes toward relationships (Hefner, 2018; Kretz, 2019). In that it is apparent that people reference media to develop identities and understand relationships, and it is apparent that media influence identity and relationships, there may be a relationship between relational identity and media for emerging adults.

In the current study, I built upon previous research by addressing movies and relational identity. The existing lack of understanding of the connection between movies and relational identity is significant because emerging adults are more likely to watch

movies than engage with other forms of popular media such as books (Garmon et al., 2018). Likewise, more research needs to be done on relational identity because it is a distinct aspect of the self-concept that is poorly understood (Cheek & Cheek, 2018). Overall, because emerging adulthood is a critical period for relational identity, it is beneficial to explore possible influences on relational identity among men and women in emerging adulthood.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the relationship between relational identity, the preference for romance movies, and gender among emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 29. Thus, the study used a quantitative, nonexperimental design that featured survey research. The study addressed the gap in understanding related to the association of romance movies with relational identity orientation among men and women who are emerging adults.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1 (Main Effect A): Among emerging adults, how does romance movie preference (low, high) relate to differences in the value placed on relational identity?

H₁: Among emerging adults, romance movie preference relates to a significant difference in the value placed on relational identity.

H₀₁: Among emerging adults, romance movie preference does not relate to a significant difference in the value placed on relational identity.

RQ2 (Main Effect B): Among emerging adults, is there a gender difference (male, female) in the value placed on relational identity?

H₂: Among emerging adults, there is a significant gender difference in the value placed on relational identity.

H₀₂: Among emerging adults, there is not a significant gender difference in the value placed on relational identity.

RQ3 (AxB Interaction): Among emerging adults, how does romance movie preference (low, high) and gender (male, female) interact on relational identity?

H₃: Among emerging adults, there is a significant interaction between romance movie preference and gender on relational identity.

H₀₃: Among emerging adults, there is no interaction between romance movie preference and gender on relational identity.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Several theoretical frameworks were particularly useful to consider for the study. The first theoretical framework was Erikson's (1950, 1968) stages of psychosocial development. Erikson (1950, 1968) proposed that individuals develop their identities in adolescence and that individuals go through eight stages of psychosocial development throughout their life span. People can either successfully navigate or fail at mastering each stage. When people successfully navigate through a stage, they learn the necessary skills and traits needed to be successful in the following stage. When people fail at mastering the skills and traits of a stage, then they are likely to have a hard time and may

fail at mastering the following stage. The focus of this study was on Stage 6 (intimacy vs. isolation), which occurs among people aged 18-40 years old. In other words, Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory of psychosocial development was used to explain the reason for focusing on intimacy and connected intimacy and the development of identity with the population's age range.

Another particularly useful framework for the study was Arnett's (2000) theory of emerging adulthood. Arnett (2000, 2004, 2015) proposed that emerging adults are past the stage of adolescence but do not consider themselves adults. Initially, Arnett (2000) proposed that emerging adults were aged 18-25 years old; however, as times have changed, with people engaging in behaviors such as getting married and obtaining a stable career at a later age, Arnett (2015) proposed that emerging adulthood can also take place during the 18- to 29-year-old age range. Likewise, during emerging adulthood, people explore their identities, explore what their occupational future will be, attempt to form relationships with love and intimacy, and seek to find a partner to spend life with. Arnett's (2000) theory of emerging adulthood explains the age range of the participants of the study.

Finally, Cheek and Cheek's (2018) tetrapartite model of self provides insight into the different identity orientations that make up people's self-construct. The self-construct consists of the independent self and the interdependent self. The personal identity orientation is centered on the independent self, while the collective, public, and relational identity orientations make up the interdependent self. Every person possesses all four of

the identity orientations; however, each person values each of the orientations differently. The focus of the study was on the relational identity orientation.

In summary, Erikson (1950, 1968) suggested that people develop their identity during adolescence and believed that society plays an active role in shaping people's identities. Likewise, Arnett (1995) and Erikson (1968) proposed that media are a source of socialization that can influence self-identity. Cheek et al. (2002) proposed that relational identity is an identity orientation that is dependent on how people value romantic and nonromantic relationships. The current study relates to each of the theories by suggesting that movies are associated with a person's relational identity during emerging adulthood. Survey research was used to collect data since participants could self-report information related to the theories. Further insight into the three theories is provided in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

This quantitative, nonexperimental study may reveal whether there is a relationship between the preference for romance movies and relational identity among emerging adults, and how gender is associated with the relationship. Preference for romance movies and gender were the independent variables, while relational identity was a dependent variable. The study was nonexperimental because as the researcher, I was unable to control assignment to levels of the independent variables. Likewise, survey research was an appropriate approach to gather data for the study because participants were able to explicitly identify the information requested about themselves and their preferences (Burkholder, Cox, & Crawford, 2016).

As in much previous research addressing media, relationships, and identity, the variables assessed for the study were measured using self-report surveys. The self-report instrument used in this study consisted of surveys that had been previously developed and found to be valid and reliable. Specifics of the reliability and validity of the instruments are discussed in Chapter 3. SurveyMonkey Audience was used throughout the study to recruit participants, distribute the surveys, and collect data.

Definitions

Emerging adulthood: The time between adolescence and adulthood; people in emerging adulthood do not see themselves as adults and “are trying out different identity possibilities in love and work, and gradually making their way toward more stable commitments” (Arnett, 2015, p. 233).

Preference: The liking or disliking of romance movies (Bowes, Watts, Costello, Murphy, & Lilienfeld, 2018).

Relational identity: One out of the four identity orientations that make up the self-concept; the value that people place on having close relationships with others (Cheek & Cheek, 2018; Cheek et al., 2002).

Romance movies: Movies that include a romantic relationship as either a theme or subtheme of the plot (Lippman, Ward, & Seabrook, 2014).

Assumptions

Previous research has connected the period of emerging adulthood with the desire to understand, form, and maintain relationships. Understanding relational identity can provide insight into how significant having relationships is to emerging adults. Likewise,

it was assumed that emerging adults who participated in this study were concerned with developing their relational identity.

The relational identity orientation is the value that people place on having intimate romantic and nonromantic relationships (Cheek et al., 2002). The current study focused on intimate romantic relationships. In turn, the values reflected for relational identity for the study were assumed to represent romantic relationships.

Finally, it was assumed that people who answered the survey were emerging adults. Specifically, although Arnett (2000, 2015) proposed that emerging adulthood occurs between the ages of 18 and 29 years, there is not a definite cutoff age for emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood ends for individuals when they feel that they have officially reached adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2004, 2015). Accordingly, individuals younger than 29 years old may have entered adulthood. However, it is necessary to assume that all participants aged 18-29 years were emerging adults so that older emerging adults could partake in the study.

Scope and Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to assess the relationship between relational identity among emerging adults, romance movies, and gender. Previous research has emphasized how emerging adults have an interest in romantic relationships. Based on Arnett's (2000) theory of emerging adulthood, the population for this study was identified as consisting of people aged 18-29 years. Additionally, Cheek and Cheek (2018) proposed that all people possess four identity orientations, which make up the self-concept. One of the four identity orientations is relational identity, which is the value

that people place on having intimate relationships (Cheek et al., 2002). Because emerging adults have an interest in romantic relationships, relational identity was addressed in this study (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1950).

Romance movies were chosen as a focus because researchers have previously found that romance movies influence how people view relationships and their desires about being in a relationship. Previous researchers have also found that people reference romance movies for insight on relationships and have found a relationship between gender and romance movies. In other words, researchers have previously addressed the relationship between the variables and the population indirectly. In turn, the current study addressed the relationship between gender, relational identity, and romance movies among emerging adults.

Cheek and Cheek's (2018) tetrapartite model of self demonstrates that people possess four identity orientations: public, collective, relational, and individual. The current study was solely focused on the relational identity orientation as it assessed the value that people place on relationships. The other identity orientations were excluded from the study and are discussed only to provide background information about the tetrapartite model of self.

It was intended that the population for the study to be diverse. To ensure diversity, SurveyMonkey Audience was used to recruit participants online, and an online survey was used to collect data. Using online survey research and an online service for recruitment ensured that a diverse population was included in the study and that a wide variety of people had access to the survey (Burkholder et al., 2016; Kılınç & Firat, 2017).

Likewise, participants who were aged 18-29 years and had a high or low preference for romance movies fit the inclusion criteria. Participants who had a neutral preference for romance media, were not between the ages of 18-29 years, or refused to identify their gender were excluded from the study. In turn, it is assumed that the study is generalizable among emerging adults.

Limitations

Survey research was used to collect data for the study. To begin, participants answered demographic questions. Specifically, they were asked for their age and their preference for romance movies. Identifying preferences for movie genres has been found to be common practice among researchers and has been included in many measures that were found to be reliable and valid (e.g., Bowes et al., 2018; Norman, 2018; Rentfrow, Goldberg, & Zilca, 2011; Wuehr et al., 2017). The Aspect of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ) has also been demonstrated to possess reliability and validity, as further discussed in Chapter 3. Unfortunately, some participants who participate in online surveys may not finish the survey or may respond in a biased manner. To minimize the likelihood of participants not completing the survey, participants received a small reward upon completion of the survey. Additionally, because people may overreport or underreport their assessment of romance movies or their relational identity, anonymity was ensured to reduce response bias. Furthermore, participant recruitment occurred within SurveyMonkey, which minimized the likelihood of selection bias occurring.

Although SurveyMonkey Audience recruited participants, it is important to highlight that there was a low number of males and females who identified as having low

preference for romance movies. Denis (2016) recommended that there should be at least 20 participants for each factor. However, there were only eight females who identified as having a low romance movie preference. In turn, the results of the study should be taken cautiously and would benefit from further research.

It is also important to point out that relational identity orientation consists of the value placed in both romantic and nonromantic relationships. However, the current study focused on romantic relationships. Further, the current study focused on movies that involved romance genres and subgenres. In turn, other movie genres could have had a significant relationship with relational identity.

Significance

More research needs to be done on relational identity because it is a distinct aspect of the self-concept that is poorly understood (Cheek & Cheek, 2018). Likewise, gaining insight into which social environmental factors can influence relational identity and the overall self-concept is significant for researchers who are interested in identity. Furthermore, the current study may advance knowledge in research on movies. Exploring how movies impact people and how people reference movies is of critical importance, especially because movies are a popular form of media. The findings from the study may also provide insight to people who work in the movie industry on the influence of the content that they decide to use in their films.

According to Lippman, Ward, and Seabrook (2014), people's relationships impact their overall well-being. In that media can influence views, attitudes, beliefs, expectations, and satisfaction in relationships, it is beneficial to explore media's potential

impacts on relationships (Babaie, Keshvari, & Zamani, 2016; Bond & Compton, 2015; Breen et al., 2017; Galloway et al., 2015; Hefner, 2018; Timmermans et al., 2019; Wright & Tokunaga, 2016). Similarly, the findings from the study may also help professionals in the counseling field, in particular counselors who are involved in couples therapy and counselors who use cinematherapy to help clients explore their self-concepts (Eğeci & Gençöz, 2017). Furthermore, the findings of the study may help emerging adults better understand how watching romance movies may relate to the development of their intimate relationships. In turn, people may become more aware of the influence that movies may have on their identity and their relationships, which may cause them to evaluate which movies they watch.

Summary

Overall, it is apparent that there is a relationship between media, relationships, and identity development. However, more research needs to be conducted on relational identity as an understudied identity orientation that makes up part of a person's self-construct (Cheek & Cheek, 2018). The importance of movies for people's identities and relationships also warrants further research because emerging adults are heavy consumers of movies (Garmon et al., 2018). This study examined whether there is a relationship between preferring romance movies and relational identity among emerging adults and whether there is a difference between men and women in this regard.

In Chapter 2, the theoretical foundations applicable to the study are provided. Additionally, literature that provides significant background knowledge about the variables is discussed, and the strategy used to find this literature is outlined.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

There is a lack of research within the scholarly community on relational identity orientation and specific forms of media, namely movies. Cheek and Cheek (2018) highlighted that because minimal research has been done on relational identity, little is known about the relational identity orientation. The relational identity orientation is significant among emerging adults because they are attempting to understand and form relationships that could have a significant impact on their lives (Breen et al., 2017; Eliason et al., 2015; Erikson, 1950). Therefore, it is important to understand what could influence the relational identity orientation.

In addition to better understanding the relational identity orientation, it is essential to address how movies are associated with relational identity. Although previous research has assessed the association of media (i.e., television and movies, television and books, etc.), identity formation, and how people view relationships, there is little knowledge within the scholarly community about the relationship between movies as a specific form of media and people's identity (Breen et al., 2017; Garmon et al., 2018; Hefner, 2018; Kokesh & Sternadori, 2015). This lack of understanding about movies is significant because emerging adults are more likely to watch movies than engage with other types of media, such as books (Garmon et al., 2018). In turn, the current study provides further understanding of the relationship between relational identity orientation and romance movies. It is essential to highlight that the current study does not address whether people seek out romance media based on their identity orientation, or whether romance media

cause an increase in relational identity. Instead, the current study provides clarification of the relationship between relational identity and romance movies.

Overall, the purpose of this study was to examine whether there is a relationship between the preference for romance movies and relational identity among young men and women aged 18-29 years. In the following sections, psychosocial development, emerging adulthood, and relational identity are discussed as the theoretical foundation for the study. Afterward, the association between romance media and relational identity is reviewed. Specifically, the various reasons that people actively turn to media and the impact of media on identity and relationships are addressed. Finally, literature that addresses the relationship between gender and romance media is provided.

Literature Search Strategy

A variety of databases were used to find useful literature for the study. More specifically, I searched for peer-reviewed literature in Academic Search Complete, Communications and Mass Media Complete, EBSCO Host, ERIC, Health and Psychosocial Instruments, PsycArticles, PsycINFO, PsycTESTS, SAGE, the Thoreau multi-database, and the Walden University Theses and Dissertations database. I also searched for dissertations that aligned with my study in the Walden Library. The majority of the literature that I searched for and used was written within the past 5 years; however, there were a few older articles. The articles that were older than 5 years were significant to use because they provided necessary background knowledge for theories and measures that were useful for the study.

I used various keywords and combinations of keywords to find the literature that was useful for the literature review. The following keywords were used in the databases that were searched: *movies, film, motion picture, media, identity, identity formation, reference, adults, relational, romance, romantic, relationships, genre, emerging adulthood, emerging adults, intimacy vs. isolation, enjoyment, preference, transportability, transportation, and young adults*. After using the keywords individually, I searched the databases using combinations of the keywords. Some of the combinations that I searched were the following: *movies, film, or motion picture and identity; movies, film, or motion picture and romance; movies, film, or motion picture and identity and reference; movies, film, or motion picture and relationship; movies, film, or motion picture and romantic and relationship; and movies, film, or motion picture and preference*. It is important to note that there was not an abundant amount of literature on relational identity or literature that specifically addressed only movies. In turn, I referenced articles that discussed various forms of media, which included movies, and their association with identity, romance, and relationships (for relational identity). I also citation mined the articles that I found applicable to the study to ensure that I thoroughly exhausted the literature.

Theoretical Foundation

In the sections that follow, I review theoretical foundations that were critical to the study. Specifically, the psychosocial theory of development (Erikson, 1950), emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), and the tetrapartite theory of self (Cheek & Cheek, 2018) are discussed.

Psychosocial Theory of Development

Erikson (1950) developed the psychosocial theory of development from Freud's psychosexual theory of development. Both Freud and Erikson proposed that people's identities develop in stages. However, unlike Freud, who proposed that identities were formed from biological impulses and needs, Erikson (1950, 1968) believed that culture and society played an active role in shaping people's identities. Likewise, media are a source of socialization that can influence self-identity (Arnett, 1995, 2000; Erikson, 1968; van Monsjou & Mar, 2018; Zazymko, Skulovatova, Staryk, & Tonkonoh, 2019). The current study relates to Erikson's theory by suggesting that movies are associated with a person's identity development.

Erikson (1950) proposed that people go through eight stages of development, which last throughout a person's life span. The stages are as follows: trust versus mistrust (Stage 1), autonomy versus shame and doubt (Stage 2), initiative versus guilt (Stage 3), industry versus inferiority (Stage 4), identity versus role confusion (Stage 5), intimacy versus isolation (Stage 6), generativity versus stagnation (Stage 7), and integrity versus despair (Stage 8). People can either pass through a stage successfully, thereby gaining skills and capabilities that will help with upcoming stages, or unsuccessfully complete the stage. For example, a person who can successfully navigate through the intimacy versus isolation stage (Stage 6) by developing close relationships is more likely to have greater generativity (Stage 7) concern, whereas a person who does not successfully navigate through the intimacy versus isolation stage is less likely to express generativity concern

(Mackinnon, Pasquale, & Pratt, 2016). Likewise, if a person fails at one of the stages, then development for the following stages will be negatively impacted.

The stage of intimacy versus isolation occurs among people aged 18-40 years (Erikson, 1950), which covers the age span of the population for this study. During the stage of intimacy versus isolation, people are concerned with developing intimate romantic relationships. Likewise, people who successfully navigate through the intimacy versus isolation stage will be able to form intimate relationships and experience high relationship satisfaction (Erikson, 1950; Starks, Doyle, Millar, & Parsons, 2017). In contrast, people who are unsuccessful at mastering the stage will likely experience issues with forming intimate relationships and may have low relationship satisfaction, undergo loneliness, and develop depression (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Starks et al., 2017). Similarly, when individuals struggle with intimacy development, they have an impact on their partners' relationship satisfaction and levels of depression (Erikson, 1968; Starks et al., 2017).

Marcia (1966) expanded Erikson's (1950) theory of psychosocial development and proposed that there were four different statuses of identity development. Each status contains various levels of commitment and exploration. The first status is *identity diffusion*. People are considered to be in identity diffusion when they are not particularly interested in exploring or committing to an identity. *Identity foreclosure* occurs when individuals are not interested in exploring their identity; however, such individuals are more interested in commitment than people in the identity diffusion status. Individuals in identity foreclosure are likely to commit to an identity that was assigned to them through

their family or community. The third identity status is called *moratorium*, which occurs when individuals are interested in exploring different identities and have not committed to an identity. Finally, *identity achievement* occurs when individuals have extensively explored various identities and have confidently committed to the identity that they have chosen.

Unlike Erikson (1950), Marcia (1966) proposed that individuals do not have to navigate through the statuses in a specific order. It is also important to note that people may possess several identity statuses. For example, Gyberg and Frisé (2017) found that male young adults were likely to be in identity foreclosure in the occupational domain and identity diffusion in the parenthood domain. Interestingly, Gyberg and Frisé (2017) also found that male and female young adults were likely to be in identity foreclosure when assessing participants' romantic relationship involvement. According to Larsson, Eriksson, and Frisé (2019), as people get older, they are less likely to place in identity diffusion in relationships.

People are more likely to reach the identity achievement status in multiple domains the older they get (Arneaud, Alea, & Espinet, 2016; Gyberg & Frisé, 2017). Likewise, Arneaud et al. (2016) found that emerging adults were more likely to place in the moratorium and identity diffusion statuses across multiple domains. They also found that people who were married and were parents were more likely to possess identity achievement in multiple domains. Further detail regarding connections between media consumption and identity are provided in the literature review section.

Emerging Adulthood

Arnett (2000) proposed that emerging adulthood is a significant stage of people's lives that takes place before young adulthood and after adolescence. More specifically, regardless of several demographics such as gender or social class, the emerging adulthood stage takes place among people aged 18-29 years (Arnett, 2004, 2015). Initially, the age range for emerging adults was from 18-25 years of age (Arnett, 2000). However, times have shifted, with people getting married later, beginning their careers later, and staying in school longer (postsecondary education; Arnett, 2004, 2015).

Arnett (2004) highlighted that there is no definite cutoff age for emerging adulthood; therefore, he interchangeably referenced 25 and 29 years as the upper boundary for this stage in his research. Similarly, Wängqvist, Carlsson, van der Lee, and Frisé (2016) conducted interviews with individuals aged 25 and 29 to assess the difference in identity statuses in regard to intimacy and romantic relationships. Wängqvist et al. did not find any drastic differences in identity status between the two age groups. They also found that emerging adults focused on stability in relationships and placed high value on romantic relationships. Although there is current literature citing both the 18-25 and 18-29 ranges, the age range that was used for the study was 18-29 years for inclusion purposes.

Arnett (2000, 2004) cited several theoretical contributors to the theory of emerging adulthood. To begin, he cited Erikson's (1950) theory of psychosocial development. Arnett (2000) highlighted that Erikson (1950) discussed a period of prolonged adolescence in which individuals attempt to find their place in society.

Similarly, Arnett acknowledged Levinson (1978), who also was influenced by Erikson's stages of development. Levinson focused on adult development and proposed that males aged 17-33 years are in a phase (known as the *novice* phase) in which they attempt to figure out the responsibilities of adulthood and explore relationships and love. Finally, Arnett (2000) briefly discussed Keniston's (1971) theory of youth. Keniston proposed that people go through a phase of tension and experimentation before reaching adulthood.

During emerging adulthood, individuals develop traits and gain experiences that typically do not take place during adolescence or young adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2004). The stage usually occurs after people complete high school, when they begin to prepare for a career, make significant life decisions, and explore opportunities for love and commitment (Arnett, 2000). Likewise, people in emerging adulthood tend to be excited and nervous about their futures and attempt to connect their past with where they want to be in the future (Arnett, 2004, 2015; Nelson, Willoughby, Rogers, & Padilla-Walker, 2015). As a result, emerging adults look for ways to understand what to expect in adulthood and turn to additional resources for information, such as movies and television (Breen et al., 2017).

Arnett (2004) conducted numerous interviews with emerging adults and reported five main themes: identity explorations, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and possibilities/optimism. To further expand on Arnett's features among emerging adults, Nelson et al. (2015) conducted survey research among university students to identify specific views and behaviors of emerging adulthood, and how emerging adults adjusted to the stage. Nelson et al. found that risk taking (drug and alcohol use, sexual behavior),

uncertainty, role preparation, possibilities, and stress were factors that were relevant to emerging adulthood. Both studies (Arnett [2004] and Nelson et al. [2015]) identified relationships to be a concern/factor among emerging adults. Similarly, Wängqvist et al. (2016) conducted interviews among emerging adults and found that many people valued romantic relationships and desired marriage; however, romantic relationship involvement was dependent on status of identity (identity achievement vs. identity diffusion).

According to Arnett (2000, 2004), identity exploration during emerging adulthood involves gaining significant experiences to prepare for adulthood, especially in love and relationships. Interestingly, Vannier and O'Sullivan (2017) found that as people get older and gain more experience in relationships, their romantic expectations and ideal beliefs do not drastically change. However, during emerging adulthood, people begin to date with a purpose, to deepen commitments with others, and to begin exploring the possibility of marriage (Arnett, 2000). Interestingly, Nelson et al. (2015) found that men were more concerned with role preparation (as it pertains to preparing for parenthood and married life) than women, and people in committed relationships were more concerned with role preparation than singles. Typically, emerging adults endorse traditional roles when it comes to love and marriage; they believe that people should be married before having children and believe in remaining married to their spouse for the duration of their lives (Arnett, 2015). Similarly, emerging adults tend to believe that love will prevail in tough situations and hard times for a couple (Arnett, 2015). Because emerging adults are interested in forming serious relationships and are forming their identities, people 18-29 years old were recruited for the study.

Tetrapartite Model of Self

Identity impacts a person's thoughts, behaviors, and emotions (Cheek & Cheek, 2018). According to Cheek and Cheek (2018), people possess four identity orientations: the collective identity orientation, the public identity orientation, the personal identity orientation, and the relational identity orientation. Everyone possesses all four identity orientations; however, each person places different values on each of the identity orientations. The *collective identity orientation* is the value that a person places on membership in groups related to characteristics such as race, religion, and language. The *public identity orientation* depends on how much people care about how others perceive them. The *personal identity orientation* consists of internal thoughts and experiences such as evaluations of the self, goals, and emotions. Finally, the *relational identity orientation* is the value that a person places on intimate and nonintimate relationships. The collective, public, and relational identity orientations make up the interdependent self, while the personal identity orientation makes up the independent self. As seen in Figure 1, the independent self and interdependent self form the self-concept.

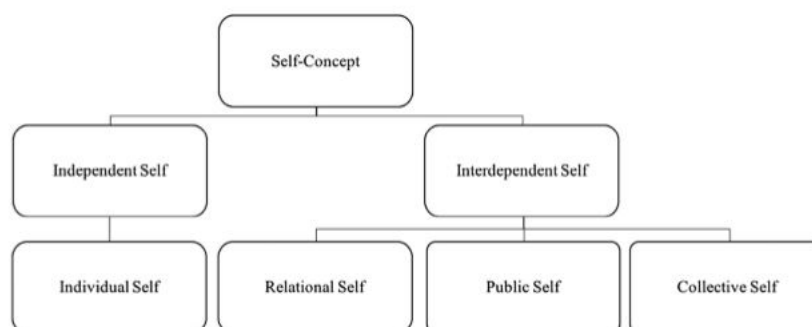


Figure 1. Tetrapartite model of self (Cheek & Cheek, 2018).

To measure each of the identity orientations that make up the self-concept, Cheek and Briggs' (1982) developed an AIQ. The initial version of the AIQ was developed from James' (1890) theory of the inner-outer metaphor, which proposed that people's identity consisted of a personal and social identity. Likewise, the original AIQ consisted of two identity orientations: the personal identity orientation and the social identity orientation. Afterwards, the initial version of the AIQ was criticized and the research field began to highlight the importance of group membership. As a result, Cheek, Tropp, Chen, and Underwood (1994) proposed the collective identity orientation. The researchers found the new identity orientation to be psychometrically distinct from the personal and social aspects of identity, therefore it was added to the aspects of identity orientations. Similar to the collective identity orientation, Cheek, Smith, and Tropp (2002) noticed that research in relationships had become prominent proposed that the relational it should have its own distinct identity orientation instead of being grouped with another identity orientation. Cheek et al. (2002) found that the relational identity orientation was psychometrically distinct from the collective, social, and personal identity orientations therefore, they added relational identity as a separate identity orientation to the AIQ. Finally, Cheek, Cheek, Grimes, and Tropp (2014) renamed the social identity orientation to the public identity orientation to minimize confusion between the collective identity orientation and the social identity orientation.

Interestingly, several researchers have previously addressed the relationship between psychosocial development and identity orientations among emerging adults. Specifically, Gonal and Devi (2018) conducted a study among emerging adults aged 18-

20 years old to understand the differences in values placed on identity orientations between students who were from a professional and students from a nonprofessional college. Overall, women placed higher than men on relational identity, although male students in professional colleges placed higher than women on relational identity. Additionally, Mayo and Aquino–Malabanan (2015) conducted a mixed methods study with adolescents to better understand adolescent's identity. The researchers highlighted Erikson's (1950) psychosocial development theory and placed emphasis on the Identity vs role confusion stage. They also proposed that Cheek et al.'s (2014) identity orientations were a part of adolescents psychosocial development and that the AIQ could help them better understand adolescents' identities. Overall, the researchers found that adolescents did not achieve their identity by the end of adolescence. The researchers also found that adolescents appeared to place less value in the social identity orientation than the other identity orientations.

Similarly, Meca et al. (2015) assessed the relationship between Erikson's (1950) psychosocial development and Cheek, Cheek, Grimes, and Tropp's (2014) identity orientations. In addition to assessing both theories of identity, Meca et al. also included high risk behaviors, positive and negative functioning, and ethnic and religious identity in their assessment. The study was conducted through survey research among college students aged 18-29 years. After conducting a cluster analysis of all the data, Meca et al. found small significant trends in age groups. Emerging adults in the 22-24 year old cluster, in comparison to the 18-21 and 25-29 year old clusters, were slightly more likely to place in the fully engaged and the engaged/public cluster. In turn, the study may

provide insight that 22-24 year olds are more likely to place higher in relational identity. Significant differences were also found between clusters relating to identity orientation. Specifically, emerging adults in the disengaged cluster placed low on all of the identity orientations. Interestingly, men and minorities were more likely to place in the disengaged cluster. Additionally, the researchers found that emerging adults who placed moderately high and balanced values on all of the identity orientations, with the exception of placing lower on the public identity orientation, could be grouped together and were referred to as the fully engaged cluster. The fully engaged cluster was more likely to place higher on positive psychosocial functioning and wellbeing, and was likely to place lower on engaging in risky behaviors such as being impaired while driving and using illegal drugs.

Overall, Cheek and Cheek (2018) emphasized that there is still a significant amount of research that needs to be conducted to better understand identity orientations and provided several of suggestions for future research. For example, they highlighted that the public identity orientation has been extensively studied, whereas there is still a lot to learn about relational identity, especially since it is a newer orientation in comparison to the other identity orientations. In return, the study focused on Cheek and Cheek's relational identity orientation to build upon the existing Tetrapartite Model of Self.

Summary

In conclusion, it is evident that a person's social environment can influence a person's identity. Similarly, emerging adults are actively engaged in identity development and are focused on the relational aspects of self. Relational identity refers to

the value they place on their intimate relationships and can be measured using the AIQ. However, it is unclear how emerging adults use media such as movies to develop their relational identities and whether there are differences between genders.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables

Why People Consume Media

People consume media for various reasons. Some people watch television to experience emotions (Zazymko et al., 2019). For example, people who watch television to experience emotions are likely to watch television shows that focus on romance and relationships (Zazymko et al., 2019). Some people also turn to movies to self-reflect and cope when going through a significant event in their lives (Greenwood & Long, 2015). Specifically, Greenwood and Long (2015) asked emerging adults to recall movies that were memorable to them and found that majority of participants identified a movie as memorable because they were experiencing a major life event or were going through significant social transitions. In turn, the film was used either as a way to cope or a way to identify with others (character identification).

Forming identity. Another reason that people engage in media is because media serves as a method of escape (Johnson, Slater, Silver, & Ewoldsen, 2016; Slater et al., 2014). Accordingly, when people are stressed, they are more likely to turn to media stories as an escape from reality (Johnson et. al, 2016; Slater et al., 2014). Interestingly, women are more likely to watch television and movies to cope with stress than men (Silver & Slater, 2019). Given that emerging adults are at a stressful time in their life of attempting to figure out their relational identity, they may be more likely to turn to media

stories than other people who are at different stages of development.

Many people perceive the information conveyed in media to be true (Hefner, 2016; Kokesh & Sternadori, 2015). Likewise, media is often used as a source of information for people, especially as it pertains to the development of a person's identity (Arnett, 2000; Breen et al., 2017; Garmon et al., 2018; Greenwood & Long, 2015; Kaiser & Quandt, 2016; Kelly & Garmon, 2016; Kosenko, Bond, & Hurley, 2018; Tu et al., 2015; van Monsjou & Mar, 2018; Zeglin, 2016). Similarly, Zeglin (2016) suggested that men identified with movie characters and referenced them for an understanding of what it means to be masculine. Moreover, according to van Monsjou and Mar (2018), people reference media characters for relationships. People who reference fictional couples are able to explore possible selves and their preferences in relationships (van Monsjou & Mar, 2018). As a result, romantic media may help people commit to a romantic identity.

Emerging adults tend to use media to try on possible selves, develop ideal traits they would like to possess, and to learn personal values (Breen et al., 2017; Greenwood & Long, 2015; Kelly & Garmon, 2016; Silver & Slater, 2019; van Monsjou & Mar, 2018). Kosenko, Bond, and Hurley (2018) conducted semi-structured interviews with transgender individuals and found that they often referenced characters in the media who shared similar experiences to make sense of their identity and to gain insights on behaviors (e.g., sex with others, transition options, etc.). Interestingly, print media such as books and social media were found to be more influential than television. However, it is important to note that transgender individuals also used media as a way to promote discussions with others about the transgendered community. In other words, media can be

used to help people understand other people's identities. Unfortunately, most of the individuals that were interviewed were white and others knew about them being transgender. In turn, the population was not completely generalizable.

Understanding, forming, and maintaining relationships. People also watch television and movies to connect with others (Breen et al., 2017; Feiereisen et al., 2019; Gomillion et al., 2017; Greenwood & Long, 2015). Television shows and movies are often topics of conversation. In return, people consume media to avoid missing out on social conversations and to have something to talk about with other people (Conlin et al., 2016; Feiereisen et al., 2019; Tefertiller et al., 2019). Unfortunately, due to easy control and accessibility of media, some people may decide to overly consume media (i.e., binge-watching), which can impede social interactions (Conlin et al., 2016; Feiereisen et al., 2019; Maxwell & Tefertiller, 2019).

People use media as a reference for romantic relationships (Arnett, 2000; Breen et al., 2017; Burt, 2018; Greenwood & Long, 2015; Hefner, 2016). People at a younger age may not completely understand romantic relationships and may turn to media as a way to gather information about them (Hefner, 2016). Accordingly, Burt (2018) found that female emerging adults referenced television shows such as *Sex in the City* and *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* for how people were expected to act in relationships and traits to look for in a romantic partner. Finally, Breen, McLean, Cairney, and McAdams (2017) found that emerging adults used movies and books to better understand other people and the relationships that they are involved in.

Greenwood and Long (2015) conducted a qualitative study to understand how movies are significant to emerging adults. The researchers asked participants to identify a memorable movie and asked them to explain why the movie was memorable. Interestingly, women were more likely to choose romance movies and participants were more likely to identify male characters as more memorable than female characters. Majority of the participants had also stated that they initially watched the memorable movie with at least one other person and had used the movie as a guide for their behavior in their romantic relationships.

Furthermore, watching television and movies can serve as a social experience that can enhance relationships (Gomillion et al., 2017). Specifically, consuming media with a significant other can enhance the quality of a relationship, especially when people do not share the same social circle (Gomillion et al., 2017). In other words, media can provide people a way to bond with their significant other by enabling couples to share experiences with one another, which enhances interdependence in a romantic relationship (Gomillion et al., 2017). Overall, people who watch romance movies and television drama are more likely to be satisfied with their relationships (Kretz, 2019).

However, people may turn to media when their needs are not being met (Mende, Scott, Garvey, & Bolton, 2019; Silver & Slater, 2019). When people experience threats to their self-concept, they are more likely to turn to media stories (Johnson et al., 2016). Additionally, Mende Scott, Garvey, and Bolton (2019) conducted six experimental studies to understand how people's attachment style influenced consumption of different types of romantic media; one of which involved romance movies. The researchers found

that attachment style influenced the consumption of romantic media. Specifically, people who had high attachment anxiety and high avoidance were more likely to consume romance movies. Interestingly, gender and relationship status did not have an effect on romantic media consumption. In contrast, van Monsjou and Mar (2018) did not find a relationship between attachment, relationships, and media. In other words, media was not found to compensate for people whose needs were not being met in their romantic relationships.

In summary, there are many reasons why people deliberately consume media. People may turn to media to experience emotions or because they are going through something significant in their lives. People may also turn to media to form their identity and to assist with relationships. Despite actively turning to media to assist with identity formation and relationships, people also are impacted by the media that they consume in several ways.

Impact of Media on Identity and Relationships

Identity. People tend to incorporate stories and characters in the media in their sense of self (Breen et al., 2017; Zeglin, 2016). Specifically, when people become immersed in a media story or experience character identification, they are likely to incorporate attributes of the main character into their self-concept (Igartua & Vega Casanova, 2016; Richter et al., 2014). Accordingly, Kokesh and Sternadori (2015) found that young females turned to fictional novels as a guide for behaviors and expectations. Unfortunately, the stories often reinforced stereotypes towards females such as being clingy and insecure, and characters within the stories impacted young females' identities,

especially when they saw themselves in a character they were reading about. Also, Giaccardi et al. (2017) conducted survey research among undergraduate university students and found that men were more likely to endorse masculine ideology the more frequently they watched television and movies. Furthermore, Zeglin (2016) conducted a content analysis of popular movies that focused on masculinity and found that males in the movies portrayed three prominent characteristics: emotional control, risk-taking, violence, and dominance. As a result, men may feel socially pressured to exhibit the characteristics, which can also impact their relationships with others.

People are more likely to become absorbed into a story, known as transportation, when watching television as opposed to reading or playing video games (Maxwell & Tefertiller, 2019). However, according to Kaiser and Quandt (2016), introverted people may prefer reading books over consuming other forms of media. Therefore, books are likely to be more influential on introverts in regards to shaping identity, self-expression, and promoting interactions with others, such as other book readers. Additionally, Breen et al. (2017) conducted interviews among people aged 35-65 years old and found that there were several of people who believed that reading was an important part of their identity and helped developed their self-concept. Nonetheless, young adults are more likely to watch movies than engage in other forms of popular media such as books (Garmon et al., 2018). Accordingly, it is beneficial to assess how emerging adults refer to movies to develop their identities.

Relationships. Although it is evident that media can impact people's self-concept, media can also impact people's views and attitudes towards relationships.

Hefner (2018) found that media influenced people's romantic attitudes and beliefs, as opposed to people who endorsed romantic beliefs sought out romantic media. In turn, over time media can influence how people view and endorse romantic relationships (Bond & Compton, 2015; Galloway et al., 2015; Hefner, 2018; Wright & Tokunaga, 2016). Similarly, Bond and Compton (2015) found that heterosexual minorities who watched television programs that were inclusive of homosexual characters were more likely to be accepting of homosexuality (Bond & Compton, 2015). Additionally, people who watched romance comedies that endorsed ideal romantic beliefs and portrayed romance positively, were more likely to have stronger idealistic romantic beliefs and higher life satisfaction in comparison to people who watched romantic comedies that challenged romantic beliefs (Hefner, 2018). Furthermore, people who were in a relationship were more likely to report stronger romantic beliefs after watching films that positively endorsed romance ideals (Hefner, 2018).

Galloway, Engstrom, and Emmers-Sommer (2015) also conducted survey research among undergraduate college students to understand how romance movies influenced people's expectations about romantic relationships. Watching romance movies were found to influence people's desire to get married and influenced idealistic expectations about relationships. People were more likely to believe that love would always prevail over troubling situations, have high expectations for intimacy, and high expectations for standards of physical attraction. Similarly, Vannier and O'Sullivan (2017) found that emerging adults who possessed ideal romantic beliefs were more likely to experience higher relationship satisfaction, although people who were in relationships

that did not meet their relationship expectations were likely to experience lower relationship satisfaction. However, Vannier and O'Sullivan's (2017) study involved only participants in the United States and in relationships.

Media can also prompt people to reflect upon their own relationships and their desires and fears about relationships (Breen et al., 2017). Timmermans, Coenen, and Van den Bulck (2019) conducted a study to find out whether romantic television series and movies influenced fear of being single (long term) among emerging adults. The questionnaires that they used were distributed across several of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, which enabled a variety of participants to respond to the surveys, rather than relying on undergraduate university students. The researchers found that women were more likely to engage in romantic media content than men. Moreover, they found that romantic media was more likely to influence fear only among single females. However, Timmermans et al.'s (2019) study asked participants to identify their overall exposure rather than specific romantic television series they watched, which would instead reveal how certain television series portray relationships.

Also, van Monsjou and Mar (2018) conducted two quantitative studies to understand who becomes invested in fictional relationships and why. They used MTurk and a university participant pool to recruit participants. In the first study, they found that factors such as personality and perceived social support were not significantly associated with fictional relationship interest, therefore they excluded them from the questionnaire in the replicated second study. van Monsjou and Mar (2018) acknowledged that their studies should have aimed to recruit people who had a stronger investment in fictional

couples (fandom). Overall, the researchers found that people who referenced media for information that pertained to romantic relationships became invested in fictional relationships in media. Interestingly, participants were more likely to recall couples from television shows than movies. Additionally, fictional relationships were often perceived to be ideal and prompted people to reflect on what they want in relationships. In return, people who expressed interest in fictional relationships had higher life satisfaction and were more likely to have achieved the intimacy stage of development.

Unfortunately, romantic media can also inadvertently hinder relationships. For example, men who frequently view media that presents objectifying material about women (i.e., porn, reality shows, magazines) are more likely to hold stronger beliefs that women are sex objects and are more likely to hold attitudes that support violence towards women (Wright & Tokunaga, 2016). Babaie, Keshvari, and Zamani (2016) conducted a cross-sectional study and found that television hindered interactions with others and prompted people to become more individualistic rather than collectivistic. Similarly, marital satisfaction, communication between the two partners, and intimacy were hindered among the people who watched television (Babaie et al., 2016). Since romantic media appears to have an impact on emerging adults, it is important to consider its relationship to emerging adult's identity.

In summary, it is apparent that media can impact people's identities. People identify with media characters that they see. They incorporate attributes and traits of the characters in their self-concept and use them as a reference for behaviors. Characters in the media also partake in stereotyping, which may cause consumers to condone in the

stereotyped behaviors or possess the stereotyped views. Additionally, the media may influence how people view relationships, their attitudes, beliefs, expectations, and desires. However, there may be a difference between men and women in regards to their media preferences and how they are impacted.

Gender and Romantic Media

According to Tu et al. (2015) people are active participants in choosing their media instead of media impacting consumers. Tu et al. (2015) found that gender played a role in their media preferences. Specifically, women were more likely to seek communal themed entertainment whereas men were more drawn to entertainment that placed in the dark, cerebral, and thrilling dimensions of entertainment. Communal themed entertainment is considered to consist of media that focuses on people and relationships (Rentfrow et al., 2011). Examples of communal entertainment consist of talk shows, reality shows, romance movies, and family movies. Dark themed entertainment consists of media that focuses on the horror genre, and cerebral entertainment media is centered around factual information, such as news, documentaries, and television shows that discuss economy (Rentfrow et al., 2011).

Similar to Tu et al.'s (2015) findings, Wuehr, Lange, and Schwarz (2017) found that women preferred romance and drama movies whereas men preferred science fiction movies and films with violence. Accordingly, van Monsjou and Mar, (2018) found that women were more likely to engage in romantic media content, such as romance comedies and romance dramas, and were slightly more likely to become interested in fictional relationships than men. Furthermore, Greenwood and Long (2015) reported that women

were more likely to report romance movies as memorable and found that they wanted to have similar relationships that were portrayed in the movie. Overall, it is apparent that women are more likely to consume more romance movies than men and people referenced fictional relationships as models for ideal relationships.

There are mixed findings on whether gender is associated with relationship satisfaction and romantic ideal endorsements (Kretz, 2019). Kretz (2019) found that there were no gender differences in romantic ideal endorsements or relationship satisfaction. Additionally, Kretz (2019) did not find gender to influence the relationship between media genres and romantic beliefs. Similarly, Vannier and O'Sullivan (2017) did not find gender differences in strength of romantic ideal beliefs. In contrast, Hefner (2018) assessed whether gender influenced the interaction between romance movie viewing, ideal romantic beliefs, and life satisfaction. Interestingly, the researcher found that males were more likely to possess stronger idealistic romantic beliefs after watching ideal romantic comedies than females. In other words, both genders look to media for models for relationships and both genders possess ideal romantic beliefs about relationships.

Strengths, Weaknesses, and Trends of Studies

Overall, researchers have not addressed the association of movies and relational identity. However, there seems to be a trend in how researchers have addressed the association between various forms of media and identity and various forms of media and relationships. The majority of studies appeared to have used survey research while few studies used either an experimental approach or a qualitative approach. Many researchers also used emerging adults who are undergraduate university students as a part of their

population which is not entirely representative of all emerging adults. However, there have been several studies that have conducted their survey research online, which provides researchers with a more representative sample. Similarly, data from the current study was collected using online survey research.

Summary and Conclusions

In conclusion, there is a lack of research on the relationship between relational identity and movies. Although from the literature review, there appears to be a relationship between media and identity, especially among emerging adults. There also appears to be an association between media and people's attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs about romantic relationships and gender. Likewise, women seem to be more drawn to romance movies, although there appears to be mixed findings of whether men hold stronger romantic ideal beliefs than women. The current study assessed the relationship between gender, romance movies, and relational identity, which provided insight and narrowed a gap on relational identity.

Chapter 3 will provide insight into the research design and the rationale for the study. The methodology for the study is also discussed. Finally, the threats to validity will be described along with the ethical procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to examine whether there is a relationship between the preference for romance movies and relational identity among young men and women aged 18-29 years. In the following chapter, the research design of the study and the rationale of the study are provided. The methodology of the study is discussed, including a description of the population, sampling procedures, recruitment, data collection, and operationalization of constructs. Finally, threats to validity and ethical concerns are addressed.

Research Design and Rationale

The study used a quantitative, nonexperimental method that compared the relational identities of women and men with different romantic movie preferences in a 2 (gender: male, female) by 2 (romantic preference: low, high) factorial design. The study revealed whether there is a relationship between the preference for romance movies and relational identity among emerging adults, and whether gender moderates the relationship. Preference for romance movies and gender were the independent variables, and relational identity was the dependent variable. The study was nonexperimental because as the researcher, I was unable to control assignment to levels of the independent variables.

Survey research was used to answer the three research questions proposed for the study. All research variables were assessed quantitatively. Participants identified their gender as male, female, or other. The Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ) was used

to measure relational identity. Although the questionnaire contains items that assess four identity orientations, only the questions assessing relational identity were used.

Specifically, the AIQ uses 10 Likert-scale items to determine the value that an individual places on having intimate relationships. Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Bowes et al., 2018; Rentfrow et al., 2011), preference for romance movies was also measured using a Likert-scale item.

Overall, there were no major time or resource constraints on conducting the study. However, to ensure that data collection did not take a significant amount of time, SurveyMonkey's recruitment service was used to collect data. Likewise, the current study was conducted using online survey research, whereas previous research relating to media, identity, and relationships had frequently used survey research among undergraduate college students. Using online survey research provided a more diverse sample for the study.

Methodology

Population

Consistent with Arnett's (2000) theory on emerging adulthood, the target population for the study was participants aged 18-29 years. The desired population consisted of approximately 128 people who either strongly liked or disliked romance movies; however, the final sample size was 158. Besides age and preference for romance movies, there were no restrictions on who could have participated.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

SurveyMonkey provides a recruitment service, known as SurveyMonkey Audience, that finds participants based on the inclusion criteria set for a study. Specifically, SurveyMonkey Audience invited people aged 18-29 years to participate, and afterward, participants answered a screening question regarding preference for romance movies. Participants who had a high or low preference for romance movies met the inclusion criteria. Finally, participants had to disclose their gender because gender was a variable for the study. People had the option to select male, female, or other; however, people who did not feel comfortable disclosing their gender were excluded from the study.

Similarly, people who were outside the age range of emerging adulthood or had a neutral preference for romance movies were excluded from the study. Because the recruitment service looked for participants who were willing to participate in surveys located within SurveyMonkey's system and fit within a certain age range, nonprobability sampling was used. Furthermore, the goal during recruitment was to obtain a population that was evenly distributed by gender. Specifically, the sample size needed for the study was at least 128 participants. Therefore, the goal for recruitment was to have close to 64 female participants and close to 64 male participants. In other words, the sampling strategy that was used for the study was quota sampling.

The sample size needed for the study was 128. To determine the sample size needed for the study, G*Power software (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) was used. Because a factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze data, the F

test and the ANOVA: fixed effects, special, main effects, and interactions statistical test were selected. A priori power analysis was used to calculate the sample size. The effect size was set to .25 for a medium effect, the alpha level was set to .05, and the power level was set to .80.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

SurveyMonkey Audience was used to find volunteers and recruit participants for the study. Likewise, the people who participated were unknown to me and remained anonymous. It is also important to note that the survey took place on a secure and encrypted site. After the inclusion criteria were identified for the study, SurveyMonkey sent an email invitation to people who had an account and fit the inclusion criteria. Once people volunteered to participate, they were provided with a consent form and identified whether they wanted to proceed with the study. Participants were provided with the consent form on SurveyMonkey's secure site before taking the survey. The consent form was provided to participants upon opening the email invitation to take the survey. Participants who choose not to provide consent were not be able to proceed with the survey and were thanked for their time.

Participants who chose to proceed with the survey after providing consent were directed to a new screen to answer a question regarding their preference for romance movies. The question was presented with a 6-point Likert scale; a rating of 1 was identified as *dislike strongly*, 2 was *dislike*, 3 was *dislike slightly*, 4 was *like slightly*, 5 was *like*, and 6 was *like strongly*. Participants who had a neutral preference (identified by a rating of 3 or 4) toward romance movies were disqualified and redirected to a new

screen that thanked them for their time. The participants who had either a high preference (identified by a rating of 5 or 6) or a low preference (identified by a rating of 1 or 2) for romance movies continued to the survey to answer demographic questions involving age, gender, ethnicity/race, education, and relationship status.

Although demographic details are shared in the results section, the information does not reveal participants' identities. After participants answered the demographic questions, participants answered survey questions about relational identity. Once participants completed the survey, they were thanked for their time and participation. SurveyMonkey provided participants with compensation through their secure site. Before taking the survey, each participant either chose to receive a monetary gift of \$.25 or chose for SurveyMonkey to donate \$.50 to a charity of the participant's choice (SurveyMonkey Audience, n.d.). There were no follow-up actions needed from the participants after survey completion.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

Preference for romance movies. Bowes, Watts, Costello, Murphy, and Lilienfeld (2018) conducted a study using 429 participants from a local community. The researchers attempted to understand how music and movie genre preferences were related to personality traits. Preferences for 41 different music and media genres were measured using a 6-point Likert scale; 1 had the lowest ranking and was identified as *dislike strongly*, while 6 had the highest rating and was identified as *liked strongly*, Bowes et al.'s music and movie genre preferences measure yielded six factors. The movie genre factor that the romance genre was placed with also contained comedy, musicals, family,

and dance and produced an intercorrelation value of .21. Reliability was established through interrater reliability, and the measure had construct validity. Overall, the researchers found that there was a significant relationship between personality, age, gender, and music and movie genre preferences. The researchers found that the romance movie genre was negatively associated with cold-heartedness using Cohen's method and yielded an $r_s = -0.27$.

Gender. Participants identified their gender (male, female, other) while answering demographic questions and before answering survey questions relating to relational identity. Because gender was an independent variable for the study, participants must have selected a gender option when they were asked to do so.

AIQ. The Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ) is used to measure the degree of importance that a person places on four identity orientations. The questionnaire contains a total of 35 questions that measure the public, collective, relational, and personal identity orientations using a Likert scale. The scale ranges from 1-5; the lowest rating identifies the item as not important to the person, and the highest rating identifies the test item as important to the person. As previously stated, there was a focus on relational identity orientation for the study. Therefore, the survey used for the current study contained the 10 questions that measure the relational identity orientation.

People vary in the value that they place on each aspect of identity, and it is essential to understand the values that each person places on each of the identity orientations. The AIQ was initially developed by Cheek and Briggs (1982) and reflected the personal and social identity orientations. As time and research developed, new

identity orientations were added, and the social identity orientation was renamed the public identity orientation. The last identity orientation that was added was the relational identity orientation. Cheek et al. (2002) developed the relational identity orientation to reflect increased interest in research focused on relationships. College women were sampled to develop the relational identity measure.

Overall, the relational identity subscale measure was found to display good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .92$, as well as acceptable discriminant and convergent validity (Cheek & Cheek, 2018; Cheek et al., 2002). Convergent validity was established by comparing the scale to other scales that were previously developed to measure the self-construct. When assessing relational identity from the AIQ with other measures of self-construct, the following correlational values were found: Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal scale ($r = .60$; Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000); the Relational, Individual, and Collective Self-Aspects scale ($r = .62$; Kashima & Hardie, 2000); and the Self Construal scale ($r = .37$; Singelis, 1994).

The AIQ has also been used and validated in other studies. Jowkar and Latifian (2006) developed a Persian version of the questionnaire with Iranian participants. The researchers found the measure to be reliable using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .79$ for relational identity) and found the measure to be valid using factor analysis. Mehri, Salari, Langroudi, and Baharamizadeh (2011) used the Persian version of the AIQ to assess the relationship between identity orientations and the Differentiation of Self measure. Their population consisted of 18- to 44-year-old males and females who attended college and lived in Iran. Overall, Mehri et al. found that there was a negative association between the

questionnaires; regression analysis yielded a value of 0.10, and fusion with others from the Differentiation of Self measure predicted relational identity from the AIQ.

Additionally, Mayo and Aquino–Malabanan (2015) and Meca et al. (2015) used the AIQ to understand the relationship between identity formation and psychosocial development. Mayo and Aquino–Malabanan conducted a study among people aged 12-22 years. The participants were first instructed to complete the AIQ, and afterward, validity was established by conducting follow-up group discussions and personal interviews. Meca et al. conducted their study using participants who were aged 18-29 years. Participants took the AIQ, Dimensions of Identity Development questionnaire, Multi-Group Ethnic Identity Measure, American Identity Measure, and Religious Identity Measure. The researchers established clusters from their data and used the clusters to look for additional trends in their data (i.e., differences between cluster membership and gender). Likewise, cluster validation and the split-halves method were used to determine reliability and validity.

Threats to Validity

External Validity

There were a couple of threats to external validity present in the study. First, there was a threat to external validity because data collection took place online (Kılınc & Fırat, 2017). Participants may have provided misleading information during their responses (Kılınc & Fırat, 2017). For example, participants may have lied about their age or their actual preferences for romance movies. In an attempt to minimize participants providing misleading information, participants were reminded that they would remain anonymous

and were asked to confirm their age. Participants were also reminded that their participation was voluntary; therefore, if they did not feel comfortable answering a question, they could withdraw from the study. Because a monetary incentive was provided for survey completion, some participants may have tried to complete the survey more than once. To verify participants and to ensure that participants did not take the survey multiple times, participants were required to have their phone number and email identified in their personal account. SurveyMonkey ensures that people do not take surveys more than once by requiring people to sign into their account to take surveys.

Additionally, the data collected were not completely generalizable because there were people who did not have access to a computer or the Internet to provide their input (Burkholder et al., 2016; Kılınç & Fırat, 2017). However, it is important to highlight that a significant amount of previous research has been conducted in universities with undergraduate students. Employing the online survey method made it possible for a more diverse population to participate (Burkholder et al., 2016). Over 2.5 million people have a SurveyMonkey account and participate in taking surveys through that platform (SurveyMonkey Audience, n.d.).

Furthermore, selection bias could have been present when determining which participants to include in the study. A goal for recruitment was to have a close to an even number of male and female participants to thoroughly explore the relationship between gender, relational identity, and liking or disliking romance movies. Similarly, people who had neutral preferences toward romance movies were disqualified from the study. SurveyMonkey's crowdsourcing service was used to recruit U.S. participants, and

participants remained anonymous to me as the researcher; therefore, selection bias was not present.

Internal and Construct Validity

Overall, there did not appear to be many threats to internal validity. However, according to Rouse (2019), people who complete online surveys may multitask and search other sites on the Internet due to getting bored while answering online questionnaires. Thus, participants' full attention may not have been given to the survey, and questions may have been answered incorrectly. The complete questionnaire used for the study contained 17 questions to minimize participants getting bored. Additionally, compensation was provided to participants for survey completion to motivate them to complete the survey. Compensation was kept under \$.50 to minimize participants feeling bribed.

There also did not appear to be many threats to construct validity. Cheek and Cheek (2018) highlighted that the AIQ possesses construct validity. The Likert-scale item that was used as a screening question to measure people's preferences for romance movies was adapted from Bowes et al.'s (2018) study. The measure was developed among the researchers and edited until all involved researchers agreed upon it. Participants in the study were asked to rate their preferences for movie genres using a Likert scale. Other previous researchers measured movie genre preferences in a similar matter (e.g., Galloway et al., 2015; Norman, 2018; Rentfrow et al., 2011; Tran, Swami, Seifriedsberger, Baráth, & Voracek, 2019; Tu et al., 2015; Wuehr et al., 2017).

Ethical Procedures

After permission was received from Walden University's Institutional Review Board to conduct the study (approval number: 01-31-20-0369751), the survey was uploaded to SurveyMonkey, and SurveyMonkey Audience recruited participants. People who participated in the study were anonymous, and people who were a part of a sensitive population were not targeted. However, people from a sensitive population may have participated, as long as they met the inclusion criteria. Since SurveyMonkey Audience was responsible for recruitment and data collection, and the survey took place online, there was no researcher contact with participants. Similarly, the participants remained anonymous to me and were not requested to provide any personally identifiable or confidential information. In turn, participant recruitment was noncoercive.

The survey took place over a secure and encrypted site (SurveyMonkey Audience, n.d.). Participants were required to use their email address and phone number to access their accounts. Data from participants were transmitted to my account, and I was able to view and analyze data in real-time. No one has access to my SurveyMonkey account that was used to store the collected data. Data from the study will be saved for at least five years.

Participants were provided with a consent form before participating in the study. They were informed that the study was voluntary and were be able to withdraw at any time. Data provided by participants who withdrew from the study before completion were not included in the results. Additionally, the consent form provided information on compensation for participation. It is common practice to provide a monetary incentive to

people who participate in online research. In turn, a monetary incentive of \$.25 was provided to participants for completing the study if they participate in SurveyMonkey's rewards program, or \$.50 was donated to a charity of the participant's choice if they are a part of SurveyMonkey's contribute program. Participants make a choice to sign up for the rewards or the contribute program upon making their account with SurveyMonkey. All funds were provided by SurveyMonkey.

Overall, the study posed minimal risk and there were no foreseeable risks for participating in the study, which was explained in the consent form. However, some participants may not have felt comfortable identifying their gender. Participants who did not feel comfortable identifying their gender were not eligible to participate and were thanked for their time and consideration. Walden's Research Participant Advocate contact information and my email address were provided in the consent form in case participants had any issues or questions. Furthermore, the consent form reminded participants that their participation was voluntary; therefore, they were able to withdraw from the study at any time. No conflicts of interest or power differentials were present, and there were no burdens or time constraints on data collection.

Summary

In summary, data for the study were collected using an online questionnaire. Participants were required to be aged 18-29 years, should have felt comfortable identifying their gender, and not had a neutral preference for romance movies. Participants remained anonymous throughout the process and was recruited by SurveyMonkey Audience. In other words, non-purposeful sampling was utilized.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and people were able to withdraw from the study at any time. Overall, the study did not pose any major ethical concerns.

In the following chapter, a brief review of the study and research questions are provided. Also, details about data collection and the results from data collection are provided.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore the relationship between relational identity, the preference for romance movies, and gender among emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 29 years. The research questions and hypotheses are listed below. A quantitative, nonexperimental survey approach was used to collect data.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1 (Main Effect A): Among emerging adults, how does romance movie preference (low, high) relate to differences in the value placed on relational identity?

H_1 : Among emerging adults, romance movie preference relates to a significant difference in the value placed on relational identity.

H_{01} : Among emerging adults, romance movie preference does not relate to a significant difference in the value placed on relational identity.

RQ2 (Main Effect B): Among emerging adults, is there a gender difference (male, female) in the value placed on relational identity?

H_2 : Among emerging adults, there is a significant gender difference in the value placed on relational identity.

H_{02} : Among emerging adults, there is not a significant gender difference in the value placed on relational identity.

RQ3 (AxB interaction): Among emerging adults, how does romance movie preference (low, high) and gender (male, female, other) interact on relational identity?

H₃: Among emerging adults, there is a significant interaction between romance movie preference and gender on relational identity.

H₀₃: Among emerging adults, there is no interaction between romance movie preference and gender on relational identity.

Chapter 4 is used to provide more detailed information about the study.

Specifically, the data collection process is explained, including the time frame for data collection, discrepancies from the data-collection plan presented in Chapter 3, and the descriptives of the population. Afterward, the results are presented, and assumptions for the ANOVA and findings from the study are discussed.

Data Collection

The Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) provided approval to conduct the study on January 31, 2020. The survey for the study was posted on January 31, 2020, and SurveyMonkey Audience was hired immediately afterward to recruit participants. After providing consent to participate in the study, the participants identified their preferences for romance movies. Participants who had high preferences ($n = 120$; 44 males, 75 females, 1 other) and low preferences ($n = 19$; 14 males, 2 females, 3 other) were able to proceed to questions pertaining to demographics and relational identity. Participants who provided answers that identified them as having a neutral preference for romance movies were unable to proceed. Data collection for the survey was completed within 15 hours.

The goal was to collect a sample size of 128 participants, with 64 male participants and 64 female participants. Initially, a total of 244 participants provided responses to the survey, although 101 participants did not fit the inclusion criteria. Thus, the initial survey received a total of 139 responses from participants who fit the inclusion criteria; for gender, 78 participants indicated female, 59 indicated male, and four indicated other.

Because these initial data included a low number of participants who indicated a low preference for romance movies, the survey was sent out again by SurveyMonkey to obtain more participants who disliked romance movies. All procedures were kept the same as when the first survey was distributed; however, people who identified as having a high preference for romance movies were excluded. In turn, sampling methods changed from Chapter 3 from nonpurposeful sampling to purposeful sampling. The data collection process took 14 hours; 297 participants initially responded to the survey that was redistributed, but only 23 participants fit the inclusion criteria ($n = 6$ female, 17 male, 0 other). Because the total response rate for participants who identified as other for gender was low, participants making this selection were excluded from the overall data analysis.

Overall, there were a total of 158 participants ($n = 83$ females and 75 males) who fit the inclusion criteria and were used for data analysis; 77 participants were single, 52 participants were in a relationship, 28 participants were married, and one participant was divorced. The population for the study was representative of the overall population in regard to location in the United States. Specifically, there were participants from the following regions: New England ($n = 6$), Middle Atlantic ($n = 19$), East North Central ($n = 25$), West North Central ($n = 12$), South Atlantic ($n = 26$), East South Central ($n = 8$),

West South Central ($n = 15$), Mountain ($n = 14$), and the Pacific ($n = 31$). Table 1 provides more specific demographic data for the population.

Table 1

Frequency Table for Participant Demographics

Variable		<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Male	75	47.5
	Female	83	52.5
Relationship status	Single	77	49.4
	In a relationship	28	17.5
	Married	52	32.5
	Divorced	1	.6
Education	Some high school	10	6.3
	Graduated from high school	33	21.3
	1 year of college	15	9.4
	2 years of college	29	18.1
	3 years of college	11	6.9
	Graduated from college	43	26.9
	Some graduate school	8	5
Race	Completed graduate school	9	6.3
	White	78	50
	Native American or Alaska Native	3	1.9
	Multiracial or multiethnic	8	5
	Middle Eastern or North African	2	1.3
	Hispanic or Latino	31	19.4
	Black or African American	11	6.9
	Asian	23	14.4
Other	2	1.3	

Results

Descriptive Statistics

As hypothesized, those who had a high preference for romance movies ($M = 41.22$, $SD = .64$) were likely to have a higher relational identity compared to those who had a low preference for romance movies ($M = 36.24$, $SD = 1.33$). Because gender could

have also had an impact on relational identity, gender was included as a variable for the study. Similarly, women ($M = 39.98$, $SD = 1.24$) tended to have a higher relational identity than men ($M = 37.49$, $SD = .78$). More specifically, women who had a high preference ($M = 41.08$, $SD = 6.75$) for romance movies had a slightly higher relational identity than men who had a high preference ($M = 41.36$, $SD = 5.49$) for romance movies. Likewise, women who had a low preference ($M = 38.88$, $SD = 9.17$) for romance movies had a slightly higher relational identity than men who had a low preference ($M = 33.61$, $SD = 7.38$) for romance movies. See Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Relational Identity

Gender	Preferences	N	Mean	SD	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Men	Low	31	33.61	7.38	31.24	35.99
	High	44	41.36	5.49	39.37	43.36
Women	Low	8	38.88	9.17	34.20	43.55
	High	75	41.08	6.75	39.55	42.61

Assumptions

There are two main assumptions of an ANOVA test. The first assumption is that the dependent variable is normally distributed (Hae-Young Kim, 2014). Through the use of Shapiro-Wilk, it was initially determined that the sample was not normally distributed ($p < .01$). In turn, z scores were calculated for the dependent variable to determine if there were any outliers. There were two outliers within the data set; both outliers produced $z = -3.68$.

It was difficult to determine whether the outliers were due to error because both participants for the cases had answered *like strongly* or *dislike strongly* for all of the questions. According to Osborne and Overbay (2004), it is recommended that any outliers that were ± 3 from the *SD* be removed. In turn, both cases were removed from the data set, and the results displayed reflect the data set without the outliers.

According to Denis (2016), the violation of normality is a common violation among ANOVA tests; therefore, it is acceptable to proceed with conducting the analysis using the ANOVA method. The last assumption is that the data set should indicate that there is a homogeneity of variance (Hae-Young Kim, 2014). Using Levene's test, it was determined that there was no violation in homogeneity ($F(3, 154) = 1.70, p = .169$).

Statistical Findings

A 2 x 2 analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the research questions and hypotheses. The independent variables were romance movie preference and gender, and the dependent variable was relational identity. The findings of the study are organized by the research questions for the study.

RQ1 (Main Effect A). The first question was the following: Among emerging adults, how does romance movie preference (low, high) relate to differences in the value placed on relational identity? The results indicated that there was a significant main effect with a small effect size of movie preference $F(1,154) = 11.46, p = .001, \eta^2 = .06$. Emerging adults who had a high preference for romance movies ($M = 41.18, SD = 6.29$) had a higher relational identity than emerging adults who had a low preference for romance movies ($M = 34.69, SD = 7.95$).

RQ2 (Main Effect B). The second question was the following: Among emerging adults, is there a gender difference (male, female) in the value placed on relational identity? The analysis indicated that the main effect of gender was nonsignificant with a small effect size ($F(1,154) = 2.87, p = .092, \eta^2 = .02$).

RQ3 (AxB interaction). The last research question was the following: Among emerging adults, how does romance movie preference (low, high) and gender (male, female) interact on relational identity? The results indicated that there was a nonsignificant interaction with a small effect size between gender and movie preference on relational identity ($F(1, 154) = 3.56, p = .06, \eta^2 = .02$).

A post hoc analysis was conducted of the results with the outliers. There was a significant main effect with a small effect size of movie preference when the outliers were present $F(1, 156) = 4.34, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$. An additional analysis showed that there was a significant relationship with a medium effect size between males and movie preference on relational identity $F(1,156) = 24.85, p < .001, \eta^2 = .137$. Accordingly, there was a nonsignificant relationship with a small effect size between females and movie preference on relational identity $F(1, 156) = .44, p = .51, \eta^2 = .003$.

Summary

Overall, the study was a quantitative, nonexperimental study that was used to understand the relationship between romance movie preference, gender, and relational identity among emerging adults. The results indicated that there was a nonsignificant main effect between gender and relational identity, and a nonsignificant interaction effect

between movie preference, gender, and relational identity. However, there was a significant relationship between movie preference and relational identity.

In the following chapter, the interpretation of findings is provided along with how the findings from the study relate to previous theories and literature. The limitations of the study and recommendations for further research are also discussed. Finally, implications regarding positive social change, theoretical implications, and recommendations for practice are described.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore the relationship between relational identity, the preference for romance movies, and gender among emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 29 years. The study was conducted to better understand relational identity because this is an understudied identity orientation that makes up part of a person's self-construct (Cheek & Cheek, 2018). The study was also conducted to better understand the relationship of movies to people's identities because emerging adults are heavy consumers of movies (Garmon et al., 2018). To understand the relationship between the variables, a quantitative, nonexperimental study was conducted. As such, the study was not conducted to investigate causation related to whether people seek out romance media based on their identity orientation or whether romance media cause an increase in relational identity.

Overall, it was found that there was not a significant interaction between movie preference, gender, and relational identity. It was also found that gender was not a significant main effect on relational identity. However, the results indicated that movie preference had a significant main effect on relational identity. Likewise, people who had a high preference for romance movies were likely to have a higher relational identity than people who did not prefer romance movies. Similarly, people who had a low romance movie preference were more likely to have a lower relational identity than people who had a high preference for romance movies. In other words, the value that people place on romantic relationships was associated with their preferences for romance movies.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings from the study extend knowledge within the scholarly community about relational identity and movies. As stated in Chapter 2, Cheek and Cheek (2018) highlighted that additional research needed to be conducted to better understand relational identity. This study informs the scholarly community that relational identity is not dependent on gender. In other words, it is not apparent that men have higher relational identities than women or vice versa. This study also informs the scholarly community that there is a significant relationship between romance movie preference and relational identity. Likewise, the study narrows the gap in knowledge on relational identity and the association of identity and movies.

In that there was a significant relationship between relational identity and romance movie preference, the study confirms previous literature that was discussed in Chapter 2. Specifically, previous researchers have found that media may influence how people view relationships, and their attitudes, beliefs, expectations, and desires toward romantic relationships (Bond & Compton, 2015; Breen et al., 2017; Galloway et al., 2015; Hefner, 2018; Kretz, 2019; Wright & Tokunaga, 2016). Similarly, the current study expands on previous research and clarifies that media (romance movies) have a significant relationship with relational identity.

The findings from the study also clarify the relationship between gender and media. In previous literature, researchers have found that women were more likely to prefer romance movies than men (Greenwood & Long, 2015; Tu et al., 2015; van Monsjou & Mar, 2018; Wuehr et al., 2017). Similarly, there were more women than men

in the present study who identified as having a high preference for romance movies. Gonal and Devi (2018) also found that with the exception of male students in professional colleges, generally women place higher than men on measures of relational identity. The findings of the current study indicate that there is not a significant relationship between gender and relational identity.

Furthermore, the study aligns with the theoretical research theories that were presented in Chapter 2. Specifically, Arnett (1995) and Erikson (1950, 1968) proposed that societal factors shape identity. Additionally, Arnett (2000, 2004) suggested that emerging adults are concerned with intimate relationships, and Erikson (1950, 1968) proposed that people aged 18 to 40 years old are focused on intimacy. Likewise, the results from the study indicate that there is a relationship between romance movies and identity among emerging adults.

Finally, Cheek and Cheek (2018) proposed that people possess four identity orientations, which make up the independent and interdependent self. Everyone places different values on all four of the identity orientations. The relational identity makes up part of the interdependent self, and the overall self-concept is comprised of the interdependent self and the individual self (Cheek & Cheek, 2018). The results of the current study suggest that because there is a relationship between movies and the value that emerging adults place on relational identity, there is a relationship between movies and the interdependent self, and potentially the overall self-concept.

Limitations of the Study

There were a couple of limitations that were presented to the study. To begin, the number of females who had a low preference for romance movies was low. Simmons, Nelson, and Simonsohn (2011) suggested that researchers should have at least 20 participants in a group to establish enough power to correctly detect an effect. It was particularly difficult to find females who had low romance movie preferences; out of 541 total responses from both times that the survey was distributed, eight females identified having a low romance movie preference. In other words, there were not enough female participants that had low romance movie preference to establish enough power to appropriately detect an effect.

Another limitation was that the assumption of normality was violated. The assumption of normality is when the sample means from the data samples fit within a symmetric bell curve (Denis, 2016). The assumption of normality is commonly violated when using an ANOVA test and should not stop researchers from continuing their analysis (Denis, 2016). To remedy the violation of normality, researchers should assess the data to determine where the outliers lie (Osborne & Overbay, 2004). Afterward, researchers could discard the outliers, transform the data, or choose to leave the data as they are (Osborne & Overbay, 2004). The outliers were discarded from the current study because they had z scores greater than ± 3 , as discussed in Chapter 4. Because sample size can influence whether normality is violated or not (Osborne & Overbay, 2004), it would have been more beneficial to stay closer to the sample size of 128 as determined

by using G*Power than to keep collecting data. Overall, because the assumption of normality was violated, there may be concerns with the validity of the results.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations for future research. One recommendation is for researchers to conduct additional studies with other movie genres. There are various movie genres that people may prefer watching (Bowes et al., 2018; Galloway et al., 2015; Norman, 2018; Rentfrow et al., 2011; Tran et al., 2019; Tu et al., 2015; Wuehr et al., 2017). Given that other people may have a higher preference for other movie genres, other movie genres may impact their identities more. In other words, it would be beneficial to understand whether other genres have more of an impact on relational identity. Similarly, previous researchers have also found common themes among movie genres and grouped them together (i.e., Rentfrow et al., 2011). For example, communal entertainment consists of talk shows, reality shows, romance movies, and family movies; therefore, researchers could further investigate the relationship between communal entertainment and relational identity (Rentfrow et al., 2011; Tu et al., 2015).

In that there has been little research focusing on the relationship of movies and identity, it would be beneficial for researchers to conduct further research on the relationship between movies and identity (Garmon et al., 2018). For example, researchers should consider using the complete AIQ to discover whether there may be a relationship between the other aspects of identity and movies. Conducting a study using the complete AIQ may better inform the scholarly community about the relationship between movies

and the overall self-concept. Specifically, future studies could reveal whether movies are more likely to influence the independent self or the interdependent self.

The relationship between movies and the interdependent self, and potentially the overall self-concept, may be complex. In turn, researchers should consider assessing other variables such as the frequency of watching romance movies and relational identity. Assessing the frequency of viewing romance movies could provide the scholarly community with a better understanding about the relationship between relational identity and movies. Likewise, assessing the frequency of viewing romance movies could provide insight as to whether this negatively or positively impacts relational identity.

The scholarly community may also benefit from understanding how other factors, such as relationship status, are associated with relational identity. Likewise, Gomillion, Gabriel, Kawakami, and Young (2017) found that watching movies with others can serve as a social experience that can enhance relationships. There may be a possibility that relational identity differs for people who watch romance movies with a significant other versus people who watch romance movies alone.

Researchers may also want to consider replicating the study. There was not a significant interaction effect of movie preference and gender on relational identity when the outliers were not included in the dataset. However, there was a significant interaction effect of movie preference and gender on relational identity when the outliers were included in the data set. It would be beneficial to follow up with additional participants to better understand the interaction.

Furthermore, future researchers should also consider following up the current study with additional study methods. An experimental study might provide more insight about whether romance movie preference influences relational identity or whether relational identity influences romance movie preference. A qualitative study would be beneficial because a relatively low number of participants identified as having a low preference for romance movies. Specifically, there was a lower number of females than males who identified having a low preference for romance movies. As such, it may be beneficial to follow up with a qualitative study focusing on females who have a low preference for romance movies to better understand their relational identity.

Finally, a mixed methods study would be beneficial to conduct as a follow-up study. Researchers should consider collecting data using alternative methods such as distributing surveys on college campuses, in different countries, or at public events such as movie conventions or movie premieres. Collecting survey data from a different population might provide valuable insight about the relationship between movie genre preference and relational identity. Afterward, researchers might further benefit from conducting follow-up interviews based on the trends that they found in their data to gain a deeper understanding of movie genre preferences and the relational identities of the participants.

Implications

The study presents several implications for positive social change. To begin, the study may help researchers who wish to better understand relational identity and its potential impacts on identity. Because minimal research has been conducted on

relational identity, the results from the study narrow the gap within the research on relational identity. Likewise, the study provides researchers with knowledge that there is a relationship between romantic movie preference and relational identity during emerging adulthood. In that it offers researchers a better understanding of the relationship between romance movie genre preference and relational identity, the study may inspire future researchers to further investigate other movie genres that may influence relational identity, which would further narrow the knowledge gap on relational identity. Similarly, the study also provides researchers with research recommendations that may help members of the scholarly community to better understand relational identity.

The findings of the study may also benefit emerging adults. As discussed in Chapter 2, previous researchers have found that people reference movies for identity development and exploration. The findings from the study may make emerging adults more aware of how romance movies are connected to relational identity. Likewise, emerging adults who wish to further explore their relational identity may decide to turn to romance movies. Overall, emerging adults appear to benefit from watching romance movies, especially in that emerging adults who had a high preference for romance movies were likely to have a high relational identity.

People who work in the movie industry may also be impacted by the study. Given that previous researchers have found that media can influence people's sense of self and their identities (i.e., Breen et al., 2017; Zeglin, 2016), people who work in the movie industry should consider how they portray relationships in romance movies. People in the movie industry may also want to consider adding a romantic theme or focus to their

movies because romance movies appear to be popular and to be associated with a high relational identity among viewers.

Finally, counselors who work in couples therapy and counselors who use cinematherapy may be able to benefit from the study. The findings of the study support that there is a significant relationship between romance movies and relational identity. In turn, counselors may consider using romance films to assist people who have a low relational identity.

Conclusion

Overall, there is still a lot to be understood about relational identity, although this study narrows the gap in knowledge and in literature about relational identity. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between relational identity, gender, and the preference for romance movies among emerging adults. The results indicated that there was a significant main effect of romance movie preference on relational identity. However, gender was a nonsignificant main effect on relational identity, and there was a nonsignificant interaction between gender and romance movie preference on relational identity. The results of the study may benefit emerging adults, people who work in the film industry, and counselors.

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