



Examining Identity and Generativity among Middle-aged Female Activists in Two Cultural Contexts

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Abstract

Erikson (Identity: Youth and crisis, W.W. Norton & Company, 1968) theorized identity and generativity as predominant personality developmental tasks in adolescence and midlife (respectively). However, existing literature reveals that not only can both constructs be equally prominent for midlife women (Newton and Stewart, *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 34:75–84, 2010), they are also dynamically inter-related (Kroger, Whitbourne (ed), *Encyclopedia of adulthood and aging*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), although how, specifically, these two constructs are related, and what role culture and activism might play in their expression are both less well-known. The present study examined middle-aged female activists' expressions of identity in relation to generativity across two cultural contexts. Ten interview transcripts from the Global Feminisms Project (Institute for Research on Women and Gender (2002) Global Feminisms Project. Retrieved from <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/globalfeminisms/>) provided by five Chinese and five American middle-aged female activists were examined. Transcript narratives were coded for themes of identity and generativity using a coding scheme based on Erikson's writings. Findings showed that female activists in both cultural contexts integrated identity and generativity by expressing themes that consisted of both constructs. However, Chinese women activists expressed their identity by integrating generativity more so than their American counterparts. These results underscore identity and generativity as inter-related constructs that overlap among middle-aged women, as well as cultural variations both within and between groups.

Keywords Identity · Generativity · Midlife · Women · Activists

Introduction

Identity formation is a pivotal developmental task in adolescence. It is a recurring theme throughout adulthood as individuals continuously probe the questions “who am I?” and “where do I fit?” by integrating their unique personal experiences within various social contexts (Erikson, 1968;

Kroger, 2016). Empirical research documents that identity continues to develop from mid to later life (Kroger, 2002), particularly for women (Zucker et al., 2002). Generativity, another important construct in women's adulthood, is a vital developmental task in mid-to-late adulthood (Erikson, 1968). It refers to making positive and enduring contributions to current and future generations. Crucially, identity and generativity are dynamically inter-related, and are both prominent during middle age (e.g., Cole & Stewart, 1996; Kroger, 2016).

To the authors' knowledge, there is limited research investigating nuanced relationships between psychosocial identity and generativity across cultural contexts. The present study examines the overarching question of how a personal identity (gender/culture/occupational role/age) as an American/activist or a Chinese/activist is expressed in psychosocial terms. Specifically, we explore Chinese and American women activists' identity, generativity, and the relationship between these two psychosocial constructs.

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Identity and Culture

Erikson (1959) posited that developing a personal identity—a sense of who one is and where one fits into society—is a lifelong process, involving commitment to a vocation, occupational self-representation, and a level of inner sameness that allows individuals to navigate changes as they move through adulthood (Kroger, 2016; Newton & Stewart, 2012; Whitbourne & Skultety, 2006). Thus, a personal identity can also contain elements of an internalized social identity, e.g., as an activist. In the present study, we focus on women's personal identities as activists. Building on Erikson's theory, Marcia and colleagues' moratorium-achievement (MAMA) cycles of identity development highlight the dynamic nature of identity across the lifespan, in which individuals' identity statuses continue to oscillate between moratorium (a state of exploration) and achievement (having explored and decided upon an identity) throughout adulthood (Stephen et al., 1992). The dynamic nature and salience of identity for women throughout adulthood has been examined in several studies. In a longitudinal study of women in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, Stewart et al. (2001) found that women were developing a clear sense of self over the period of middle age. Findings from Zucker et al.'s (2002) cross-sectional study extended these results by showing that a sense of identity certainty increased from the 20s to the 40s and from the 40s to the 60s in three cohorts of women. Thus, researchers acknowledge the continuing importance of identity throughout adulthood, particularly for women.

However, little is known about the extent to which psychosocial identity for middle-aged women is affected by sociocultural backgrounds (e.g., Eastern vs. Western societies). Culture is dissected as both symbolic and behavioral aspects that shape individuals' cognitions and behaviors. Individuals, as active participants in their society, also shape the cultural community in which they are embedded (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2010). Generally speaking, the United States, similar to many other Western societies, encourages individualism. That is, people tend to view themselves as autonomous individuals who emphasize personal abilities, uniqueness, and self-actualization (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In contrast, China—as an Eastern society—endorses collectivism, in which individuals are encouraged to focus on maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships and fulfilling others' needs (e.g., Triandis, 1989). Given these cultural differences in values, it is possible that culture plays an important role in identity expression.

Research examining cross-cultural variations in psychosocial identity is scarce, particularly for women in midlife. In one early study, Wang and Viney (1996) examined the

cultural differences of psychosocial development between Chinese and Australian school-age children (age range: 6–18 years). They found that there were no overall differences between children from the two countries; however, nuanced cultural differences were observed. For example, Chinese students scored higher than their Western counterparts, on a scale of identity commitment developed by Viney and Tych (1985) based on Erikson's developmental model. Thus, Chinese children and adolescents (and perhaps adults) might be more likely to make early identity commitments without exploration than their Western counterparts due to the emphasis on high conformity to social norms. Frederick and Stewart (2018) examined the cultural influences on the formation of identity in feminists by analyzing the narratives provided by 45 female activists from five countries, finding that there is not only one but many unique pathways to the development of a feminist identity. That is, activists develop feminist identities based on their culturally-specific experiences. Frederick and Stewart (2018) further identified four broad pathways to the development of feminist identity: (1) education, (2) social relationships and gender-based injustice, (3) violence, and (4) activism and emotion. Among Chinese activists, the education theme predominated, whereas personally-experienced violence or emotion prevailed among American activists. These findings suggest that while adolescent psychological development is universal, sociocultural backgrounds—perhaps most importantly—can affect how individuals express their identities. Thus, culture may also affect how personal identity is expressed in midlife women.

Generativity and Culture

Erikson (1974) defined generativity as “the establishment, the guidance, and the enrichment of the living generation and the world it inherits” (p. 123). It is well agreed-upon in the extant literature that generativity is a multifaceted concept (e.g., McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; McAdams et al., 1998; Newton & Stewart, 2012; Stewart & Vandewater, 1998). For instance, generativity can flourish in the family environment (e.g., parenting) as well as the workplace (e.g., occupational mastery; Newton & Stewart, 2012). Additionally, generativity can involve community involvement or global goals, such as advocating for vulnerable groups in society, and engaging in environmental actions or political activism (Newton & Stewart, 2012).

Based on Erikson's work, McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) developed a model of generativity comprising seven inter-related components: inner desire, cultural demand, generative concern, belief, commitment, action, and narration. These components can exist somewhat independently (Peterson & Duncan, 1999), and levels of the separate

features may differ between countries, given that cultural environment provides norms and opportunities for generative expression (Hofer et al., 2008; Serrat et al., 2017), although mechanisms for the expression of generativity might be cross-culturally similar. For example, Hofer et al. (2008) found that Cameroonian adults exhibited higher levels of both generative concern and generative goals than their Costa Rican or German counterparts; the authors comment that this might reflect the level of interdependence within the cultures (Cameroon culture: most interdependent; German culture: most independent). However, the structure of generativity remained the same. Further evidence for cross-cultural differences in levels of generative concern is suggested by Cheng (2009), whose study of older Chinese adults showed higher levels of generative concern than a similar study of older adults in the USA. In a study of older adults from Cameroon, China (Hong Kong), the Czech Republic, and Germany, Hofer et al. (2016) found that while cultural demand—societal attitudes that specify age-appropriate behaviors—might be internalized to different degrees by individuals, it was associated with generative action through cultural concern in all four cultures.

In the current study, we use five components of McAdams and de St. Aubin's (1992) model as a point of departure for our analysis. Both *generative concern* and *generative acts* are manifestations of the *inner desire to be generative* within the context of *cultural norms*; *generative narration*, provided by interview transcripts, articulates the other four components.

The Relationship between Identity and Generativity

Generativity and identity are dynamically inter-related (Kroger, 2016), and this relationship has been documented in several studies (e.g., Cole & Stewart, 1996; Matsuba et al., 2012). Matsuba et al. (2012) found that there was a positive relationship between identity maturity, environmental identity, generativity, and environmental engagement; that is, not only was greater identity maturity associated with greater environmental identity and greater generativity, but greater identity and generativity were also associated with higher environmental engagement. An early study of female activists conducted by Cole and Stewart (1996) also observed that political identity was positively related to generativity, and political identity and generativity were both positively related to women's midlife activism. Put succinctly, although it appears that identity embodies concerns for oneself whereas generativity embodies concerns for others, the theoretical model and the evidence from empirical research indicate that these two concepts are intertwined and equally prominent in midlife for many women (e.g., Newton & Stewart, 2010; Stewart et al., 1988).

The Present Study

Although some research has examined political identity's positive relationship to generativity and women's activism in midlife (Cole & Stewart, 1996), and more recent research indicates that there are contextual influences regarding the pathways to feminist identity (Frederick & Stewart, 2018), limited research has examined how psychosocial identity and generativity are related. Moreover, questions remain regarding the role that culture may play in their expression, and how an activist identity plays into these cultural differences, especially between China and the United States. The current study analyzes 10 interview transcripts provided by five Chinese and five American activists from the Global Feminisms Project (GFP; IRWG, 2002). Our aim was to explore the qualitative differences in their expression of generativity and identity that might be shaped by cultural backgrounds. Specifically, we explore the extent to which (1) culture plays a role in shaping Chinese and American female activists' identity and generativity; (2) identity and generativity are integrated; and (3) the integration of identity and generativity varies based on culture.

Method

Data Source

The present study used data from the Global Feminisms Project (IRWG, 2002), which was initiated by researchers at the University of Michigan (UM). This on-going project records and archives the oral stories of female activists and scholars (in their own voices) within the socio-historical context, with an aim to bolster research and teaching skills to address global issues for women. To date, women scholars and activists from eight countries—Brazil, China, India, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Poland, Russia, and the United States—have been interviewed.

Local project teams were responsible for implementing interviews. The China site was housed at the China Women's University in Beijing, China in collaboration with UM faculty members. After giving informed consent, each activist participated in an individual, semi-structured interview. Across sites, the interviews were guided by four general structures: family background, career and academic experiences, participation in women's studies or organizational activisms, and participants' relationships with feminism/women's movements and global forms of activism and scholarship (Dutt & Grabe, 2014; Frederick & Stewart, 2018).

The present study analyzed three of the four general structures from the interview transcripts provided by female activists from the United States and China. Family background was not available for all participants, and for those

with this information, the length varied considerably (e.g., from a half page to 3 or 4 pages). Thus, we excluded family background. Interviews were videotaped and transcribed by native speakers and then translated into English. The procedure of translation/back translation is not detailed on the GFP website, but translations into English were provided by researchers involved in the project. To ensure consistency in the process of translation/back translation, the English version of transcripts of the Chinese activists was used directly in the current study rather than re-translating the Chinese transcripts. All videos and transcripts are publicly available on the project website (<https://globalfeminisms.umich.edu>) for educational and research use. Participants formally consented in advance for the specific use of their names, interview responses, and “all materials developed from this project will be available through both actual and virtual archives” (Dutt & Grabe, 2014; Frederick & Stewart, 2018).

Participants

Of the original twenty interviews conducted between 2002 and 2006 in two countries (China: $n = 10$; United States: $n = 10$), the present study focused on a subsample of 10 (five from each country) female activists who were middle-aged at the time of the interview. The five Chinese participants were of ages 47–57 ($M_{age} = 52$), and the five U.S. participants were of ages 48–58 ($M_{age} = 51.4$). Specific

demographic information (such as ethnicity, marital, or current family status) was not available. However, information from the interview transcripts showed that American participants were ethnically diverse: European American, African American, Arab American, and Mexican American, whereas all the Chinese participants shared the same ethnicity. More detailed information and a brief job description for each participant are listed in Table 1.

Sociopolitical Context

We highlight the specific sociopolitical contexts of female activists, given that major sociopolitical events could have had significantly influenced the participants' identity development in both cultural contexts.

The United States

Women activists in the U.S. experienced or witnessed a variety of social movements from the 1960s to the time of interview, including the Civil Rights Movement (1954–1968), the Women's Movement (1960s–1980s), the Anti-Vietnam War Movement (1964–1973), and the LGBT Rights Movement (1972–present) (Savaş & Stewart, 2019). The Women's Movement and LGBT Rights Movement may have been particularly influential in shaping feminist activists' identity and generativity. Most of the American activists in

Table 1 Demographic Information of American and Chinese Activists

Country	Name	Age	Key words	Job description
The United States	Adrienne Asch	58	Disability rights, reproductive rights	An author and an internationally known bioethicist
The United States	Loretta Ross	53	Gender-based violence, minority feminism	An activist and one of the first African American women to direct a rape crisis center
The United States	Rabab Abdulhadi	49	Rural women, reproductive rights	An activist and scholar contributing to the struggle for Palestinian self-determination and the well-being of Palestinian women
The United States	Holly Hughes	49	Art as activism, LGBT	A performance artist and a member of the WOW café
The United States	Martha Ojeda	48	Minority feminism, politics, law	Executive Director of the Tri-National Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladora
China	Chen Mingxia	57	Gender-based violence, family roles, law	A legal researcher and one of the leaders of women's NGO in China
China	Liu Bohong	54	Academia, women's studies, education, politics,	Deputy Director of the Institute of Research on Women of the All-China Women's Federation
China	Ai Xiaoming	52	Academia, women's studies, education	A literary scholar and the co-producer and director of the Chinese version of <i>The Vagina Monologues</i>
China	Zhang Li Xi	50	Academia, women's studies, gender-based violence	President of the China Women's University
China	Li Huiying	47	Academia, women's studies, education, politics	Professor of Sociology and assistant Director of the Women Research Center of the Central Party School

The ages listed in the table are the ages of the participants at the time of interview

this study identified themselves as a feminist (e.g., “I’m a flaming feminist”; “I’m not sure everybody considers me a feminist, but I consider myself one”). Some of them stated that feminism had changed over the years and had had significant influence on their own “cultural expression” (e.g., “I came out in the context of lesbian feminism... There was a break with the birth of lesbian feminism, and there were wonderful things about that moment”). Yet, others thought that they had not experienced substantial feminism changes (e.g., “I don’t think [feminism] has changed... I think that feminism has not done a good job of keeping the notion of gender equality and parenting and gender equality ...in family relations really front and center”; “I’m not a believer in second...in third wave feminism...I don’t think the second wave is over. And I’m not hearing anything third wave feminists are saying that is that original from what women of color have said all along”).

China

The lives of female activists in mainland China were influenced by at least three major sociopolitical events: the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC; 1949), the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), and Chinese economic reform (started in 1978). In 1949, the PRC constitution acknowledged women’s equal rights with men in various aspects of politics, economics, culture, and social life. The Cultural Revolution promoted changes in women’s lives regarding political participation, production relations, and the cultural environment. Many female workers and peasant representatives had opportunities to participate in politics and assume management duties; however, the value of female intellectuals was overlooked to a great extent (Qingshu, 2004). A few Chinese participants provided a general statement of the Cultural Revolution in their interviews (e.g., “We had broken through the ideological confinement and ended the historical disaster of the Cultural Revolution”). A couple of them touched briefly on the influences of the Cultural Revolution on themselves (e.g., “...during the Cultural Revolution, we did not have many opportunities to study”; “I think this context of the Cultural Revolution shaped my experience before college”). Meanwhile, the women’s movement was unified under the All-China Women’s Federation (ACWF). Although it promoted the status of Chinese women and laid the foundation for the organizational mode of the Chinese feminist movement, it lacked the social space of spontaneous movements, and mainly involved urban, educated women (Savaş & Stewart, 2019).

Moreover, given the profound impact of Confucianism, traditional stereotypical beliefs of women’s roles, the lack of a gendered approach to social policies, and social support for reproductive services, Chinese women were still constrained to choose between undertaking paid work or unpaid care

responsibilities (Cook & Dong, 2011). Nevertheless, during this period, especially in 1995, two remarkable events occurred: the Law on the Protection of Women’s Rights and Interests was passed (Qingshu, 2004), and the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing (1995); these two events promoted the spreading of feminist ideas from overseas activists and institutions to Chinese women activists (Savaş & Stewart, 2019).

Coding Procedure

Proposition coding

Participants’ narratives were first parsed into individual propositions as a basic coding unit. A proposition consists of a subject-verb construction (Fivush et al., 1995), such as “I think every generation has the right to define the struggle on their own terms.” Specifically, narratives that were connected by a coordinating conjunction (e.g., and) were coded as two separate propositions, but those containing a relative clause (e.g., beginning with who, that, where, which, whose, and when) were coded as one proposition to maintain the coherency of the coding unit, for example “And then I took that kind of political mentality about how the world had to change into the kinds of discrimination that I and other people with disabilities faced, when I realized that we faced it.” The first author and two research assistants completed the proposition coding. Overall, 4022 propositions were derived from Chinese participants’ narratives, and 2429 from American participants’ narratives.

Personality development themes

Stewart et al. (1988) originally developed a coding scheme based on three specific adult stages of Erikson’s developmental theory (Erikson, 1968): identity, intimacy, and generativity. This coding system was later revised by Stewart et al. (1991) and has been widely used to assess these three themes for open-ended survey, interview, and personal documents, such as diaries or letters (Newton & Stewart, 2010; Peterson & Stewart, 1996). In the current study, we coded identity and generativity themes in participants’ narratives using the revised coding system by Stewart et al. (1991). Specifically, the identity theme has 10 subthemes (general concern, occupational role, traits and awareness of stable characteristics, preferences and tastes, confirmation by society or peers, confirmation by intimates, sameness and continuity, relations with others as a source of self-definition, integration and restructuring of identifications, and values), and generativity has four subthemes (general concern, productivity, caring, and need to be needed). Brief definitions and specific examples of each of the subthemes are shown in the online Appendix.

The first and second authors (both from China) and the third author (from the U.S.) coded each extracted proposition for one of the following three scenarios: presence of any of the identity subthemes (identity-only), presence of any of the generativity subthemes (generativity-only), and presence of both identity and generativity subthemes (identity-generativity). The first author independently coded 10% of the propositions for each participant from *both* countries. The second author independently coded the same 10% of the Chinese activist propositions as the first author, and the third author independently coded the same 10% of the U.S. activist propositions as the first author. The second and the third authors then met separately with the first author to discuss codes and to establish inter-rater reliability. The authors agreed on the majority of the proposition coding; Cohen's Kappa inter-rater reliability was 0.92 for the coding of U.S. participants' transcripts, and 0.87 for the coding of Chinese activists' transcripts. After further discussion, agreement was reached on initial coding disagreements.

After inter-rater reliability was established, the U.S. coder (i.e., the third author) and one of the Chinese coders (i.e., the first author) independently coded 50% of the remaining propositions for American participants. The two Chinese coders (i.e., the first and second authors) independently coded 50% of the remaining propositions for Chinese participants. The authors then met and discussed a small proportion of uncertain propositions, and agreement was again reached for the majority of the coding propositions. For the very small number of propositions on which we disagreed, the first author's coding was used for analyses. To ensure

the consistency of coding across authors, a cross back-check procedure was implemented. Specifically, the first and the second authors checked 20% of each other's independently coded propositions for the Chinese participants, and the first and the third authors did the same for the US participants. Corrections during cross back-check were further discussed and made. In total, 702 (30%) and 681 (17%) of the propositions from American and Chinese participants, respectively, were able to be coded for identity and generativity themes.

Results

Table 2 presents the frequencies for each theme and subtheme for both the U.S. and Chinese activists. Further examples of themes and subthemes (as well as those outlined below) are available in the online Appendix. Overall, identity-only themes predominated in the narratives of both American and Chinese activists (US: 71%; China: 55%), followed by the integration of identity-generativity (US: 26%; China: 46%). Generativity-only themes were least frequently reported in both cultural contexts (US: 2.4%; China: 0.4%).

Identity

Results from the identity subthemes showed a similar overall trend, but there were some observed cultural differences within each subtheme (see Table 2). Specifically, values (US: 38%; China: 52%) and occupational role (US: 26%; China: 49%) were the two most prevalent identity subthemes

Table 2 Frequency of Themes and Subthemes in coded units

Code	Frequency of themes %	
	The United State (%)	China (%)
Themes		
Identity only	71.00	54.80
The intersection of identity and generativity	26.20	44.80
Generativity only	2.40	0.40
Identity subthemes		
Values	37.60	51.60
Occupational role	26.40	48.80
Integration and restructuring of identifications	14.40	18.00
Confirmation by society or peers	13.80	10.60
Preferences and tastes	13.80	6.60
General concern	13.00	3.40
Traits/awareness of stable characteristics	4.60	2.20
Sameness and continuity	4.60	1.80
Relations with others as a source of self-definition	4.00	3.40
Confirmation by intimates	0.40	0.20

N = 702 and 681, represent the coded units (propositions) from American and Chinese participants, respectively. Given that the frequency of generativity-only themes was low for both US and Chinese activists, generativity subthemes were not calculated

for participants from both countries, followed by integration of identification (US: 14%; China: 18%), confirmation by society or peers (US: 14%; China: 11%), preferences and tastes (US: 14%; China: 7%), and general concern (US: 13%; China: 3%) subthemes. Four subthemes—relations with others, traits, sameness and continuity, and confirmation by intimates—were infrequently reported in both cultural contexts.

American activists tended to express their personal preferences and tastes or aversions in the interviews. For example, Adrienne Asch, an author and a bioethicist who is also sight impaired, expressed her personal identity by discussing how she felt as an individual when other people assumed that she needed help without asking:

I'm...I'm often pushed to the head of lines in a bank. Or given seats that I don't need, because as far as I know, there's nothing about blindness that affects my mobility or my ability to stand. Or people ask a companion who's with me, if they're non-disabled, what I want, rather than speaking to me. Well, all of that is just denigrating and stupid. And I'm indignant about it (2006, p. 6).

In contrast, all Chinese activists tended to address their choice of and commitment to an occupational role, often within a more communal context. For instance, Li Huiying, a Professor of Sociology and Assistant Director of the Women's Research Center of the Central Party School, described how she and her colleagues set up the Women's Research Center in China with emphasis on her occupational role in the institution to reflect her social identity:

So back in 1995 we wanted to create a Women's Research Center. Before then, many of us simply wanted to do something in practice. Thus in 1995 a few of the female teachers and I together requested that the school establish a women's center. After receiving the approval of the school, we established the Central Party School Women's Research Center. I am an assistant director of the Center and am in charge of research (2004, p. 18).

Generativity

Due to the very small percentage of generativity-only propositions reported in both cultural contexts (US: 2%; China: 0.4%), we do not present any illustrative quotations here.

Integration of Identity and Generativity

A high proportion of American activists' narratives mainly reflected expressions or concerns about their personal identities. When expressing generative concerns or discussing generative actions, American activists tended to integrate

their personal identities (e.g., personal preferences and tastes) to underline their own choices. For instance, Holly Hughes, a performance artist working on issues of sexuality and freedom of identity expression, provided a salient example of personal identity expression, while integrating it with her generative concerns and commitments:

Well, I, one thing that I love being able to do at Michigan and that I can only do within the framework of an institution is collaborating with a large group of people, making a piece of theater, for lack of a better word. And I did, I had the opportunity to do that last winter with a group of twenty-five students here at the University of Michigan (2004, p. 21).

Crucially, Chinese activists largely integrated their generative concerns and generative commitments when expressing their identities. For example, for Chen Mingxia, a Chinese legal researcher, her commitment to an occupational role was fused with generative concerns about her ability to care for others. Moreover, her narratives also demonstrated salient collectivistic values, by integrating her social identity with generativity:

Thus, our management committee collectively decided that we must make a transition. We wanted to change the original system in which the management committee managed the projects as well as got involved in decision-making and execution, and was both in charge of funds and operation. We wanted to change this whole process into a council system. The council members should all be volunteers, not in control of any funds but have the power of oversight. We hoped this new system would enable the NGO to function better. This was decided collectively (2005, p.14).

Discussion

The present study explored the relationship between culture, identity, and generativity among five Chinese and five American female activists by examining transcripts of interviews conducted in midlife by the Global Feminisms Project (IRWG, 2002).

Cultural Influences on Identity

In general, consistent with the previous research (e.g., Newton & Stewart, 2010; Zucker et al., 2002), the results underscore the continuing importance of identity throughout adulthood for women, given that identity themes predominated in the narratives of both Chinese and American activists.

Our results shed some light on the cultural variations in the expression of psychosocial identity for midlife women. Specifically, to a large extent, Chinese activists' statements reflected their concerns for or commitments to occupational roles. In other words, their identity development was partly tied up with their specific occupational roles. Comparatively, American activists appeared to be less bound by their occupational roles, as they expressed their identities in an idiosyncratic way by emphasizing their personal preferences and tastes. These findings resonate with Markus and Kitayama's (1991) notion that collectivistic and individualistic values are (respectively) predominant in Eastern and Western societies. In other words, the emphasis on collectivist values in the East may encourage women to be committed to their occupational roles as representatives of their institutions/communities. By contrast, the emphasis on individualist values in the West may encourage women to prioritize their personal values.

Crucially, we also speculate that our study participants' activist identities might level the cultural differences in identity to some extent. The findings showed that, although the occupational role and values themes were more frequently cited in Chinese activists' responses, there were salient identity subthemes for both Chinese and American activists. Thus, there were similarities in participants' expression of their identity, which may be due to the unifying role of female activists across both groups. Moreover, it should be noted that the ten women in this study participated in a semi-structured interview under the global feminism theme; consequently, they might have been provided more opportunities to talk about the specific occupational roles that fulfill their visions as an activist. Given that being an activist often involves advocating for ideas and activities that collide with mainstream culture, activists may have a strong sense of agency that encourages them to buck traditional beliefs. Conceivably, the female activist identity for participants in the present study could be more expressive of their values, thus smoothing any cultural differences.

Cultural Influences on Generativity and the Integration of Identity and Generativity

Both Chinese and American activists seldom reported generativity-only themes: they both tended to generally express the concerns about making a lasting contribution to disadvantaged populations. Comparatively, American activists also expressed their contribution through the generation of products or ideas. However, both Chinese and American activists expressed generative concerns in ways that were integrated with some aspects of their identities. We speculate that it may be difficult to examine generativity independent of identity, especially when using participants' narratives. Supporting this notion, McAdams and

de St. Aubin (1992) proposed that individuals develop a personal narrative that synthesizes generative components, and that generative efforts will be integrated into a broader narrative identity.

Identity and generativity are both multifaceted. Identity can be embodied in many layers; for the women activists in the present study, their identity contains a broad psychosocial identity (e.g., values, occupational roles, traits), various intersecting social identities (e.g., Chinese/American, middle-aged, woman), and specific identities (e.g., activist, feminist). Generativity can also have multiple manifestations, including personality characteristics (e.g., responsibility, empathy), work productivity, parenting, health concerns, family and community, and political activism (Peterson & Klohnen, 1995). Each layer of identity and generativity may integrate with other layers of each; for example, political activism can be intertwined with one's activist identity to promote generativity, and the overlap between these two can form and strengthen one's identity (Matsuba et al., 2012). This might take the form of feminism, or feminist identity and generative concerns or actions for some women in the current study. Overall, the results indicate that female activists in both cultural contexts successfully integrated their identity and generativity, often as generativity appearing as an outward expression of identity.

Furthermore, perhaps due to collectivistic values, Chinese participants expressed or understood their identity by integrating generative components (e.g., cultural demand, concerns, commitment; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992) more so than American participants. In contrast, perhaps due to individualistic values, American participants appeared to decontextualize their identity more frequently from both generative components and institutions that contextualize their occupational roles. These cultural differences could also manifest as the discrepancies we found in the number of propositions and the percentages of codable propositions: codable units/the total units of proposition: 681/4022 or 16.9% (Chinese) vs. 702/2429 or 28.9% (American). Thus, although Chinese participants' narratives had more propositions compared to American participants' narratives, Chinese participants' narratives were more repetitive and had fewer codable propositions than Americans' narratives. In addition, these cultural variations could be manifested in word use. For instance, we found that activists from both countries used more relational pronouns (e.g., we, us, our) than singular pronouns (e.g., I, me, my), but Chinese activists reported a higher ratio of relational pronouns than American activists. Specifically, they were 2.8 times more likely to report relational than singular pronouns, whereas U.S. activists were 2.4 times more likely to report relational than singular pronouns. Therefore, culture, as a broad context, might not only shape individuals' thoughts and behaviors in explicit ways, but might also influence the formations

and narrative expressions of psychosocial constructs, such as identity and generativity.

Taken together, the observed differences in the degree of overlap between identity and generativity not only demonstrate the cross-cultural variations in personality development among female activists, but also capture the integrated relationships between identity and generativity.

Limitations and Future Directions

The present study has several limitations. First, given the diversity of ethnicity in the sample of U.S. activists, it should be noted that the interplay between ethnicity and culture may be more complex than is captured here. Additionally, although the qualitative analysis of the select number of activists provides insight into the relationships between culture, individual psychosocial differences, and narratives, a larger sample size would allow for more in-depth inquiry as well as quantitative analyses for both within- and between-group differences. It would also be helpful to examine other contextual factors (e.g., socio-historical forces) that could provide an in-depth reflection of the intersectional positions. One such example is the fact that Chinese activists' narratives were relatively repetitive and contained more proposition units but fewer of them were codable compared to American participants' narratives. More data would help elucidate if this is a meaningful difference or if, as we suspect, the discrepancy of the number of coded propositions is unlikely to affect results given that we used proportion scores.

The coding scheme employed here, based on Erikson's theoretical writings (Stewart et al., 1988, 1991), helped assess the intersection between identity and generativity, but it might be limited in its ability to comprehensively capture relationships between these two constructs within the feminist activist context. For example, "relations with others as a source of self-definition" (i.e., one subtheme of identity) is defined as "attempts to define self via hero-worship of others" (Stewart et al., 1991). When activists defined themselves via non-hero-worship of groups rather than individuals (e.g., their colleagues or organizations they chose to join), the coding scheme may have failed to apprehend what they wanted to express. Therefore, further review of the existing coding scheme could be beneficial.

Given the specific database (feminist) and the unique nature of the participants (activists), the results should be interpreted within the specific context, and cannot be generalized. A promising avenue for future research would be to include activists of other genders, other types of activism (e.g., environmental, workers' rights), or non-activists and other cultural groups to validate whether a consistent pattern of results would emerge. However, as Clinton (1995) declared, "Women's rights are human rights"; feminist

activism can therefore be conceived of as human activism, and other activist labels could also be subsumed under "feminist." Thus, the current study's findings are illuminating, and provide a preliminary understanding of the association between culture and personality development among activists.

Conclusion

The present study examined the role of culture in personality development among middle-aged female activists in two countries. Our results showed that for these women, identity and generativity were, to a large extent, integrated, and that there were cultural variations in the expression of identity as well as its overlap with generativity. Our findings shed light on the development of psychosocial constructs from a cross-cultural perspective.

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Declarations

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