
Identity Transformation of Elderly Women in Music Performances: An Exploratory Study Based on Grounded Theory

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Abstract

Introduction: This study explores the identity transformation of older women in music performances using grounded theory. The research aims to examine how older women experience identity shifts through participation in music, focusing on identity recognition, social relationships, performance experience, and growth and health.

Method: This study used qualitative research methods to conduct in-depth interviews and data analysis with elderly female participants engaged in music performances. The grounded theory approach was applied to develop a theoretical model based on the collected data.

Results and Discussion: The findings revealed that identity transformation involves dynamic interactions between internal and external motivations. Identity recognition is the core foundation, initiated through self-exploration and motivation to perform and reinforced by a sense of achievement and social recognition. Social relationships, encompassing social interaction, support, family expectations, and belonging, provide emotional backing and social role validation. Performance experience, including enjoyment, stage presence, and technical challenges, strengthens the performer's identity. Growth and health contribute to positive physiological and psychological foundations, enhancing confidence and quality of life.

Conclusion and Recommendations: The constructed model offers new insights into the cultural expression of active ageing, highlighting the multidimensional path of identity transformation. It provides theoretical and practical implications for designing elderly cultural activities, health interventions, and promoting social engagement. Future research can expand the model's applicability across different cultural contexts and explore the role of digital platforms in shaping older women's identity in music.

Keywords: Identity Transformation, Elderly Women, Music Performance, Grounded Theory, Active Aging

1. Introduction

With the global trend of ageing, older groups' lifestyles and social participation are undergoing profound changes. More and more older persons are becoming actively involved in social or cultural activities, especially musical performances. Research has shown that musical performances enrich the spiritual life of older persons and effectively promote mental health and enhance social connectedness, thereby contributing to active ageing (Dingle et al., 2021). In the older age group, older women show different characteristics and needs from men due to their physical, social and cultural characteristics (Bonvillain, 2020), and through their participation in various musical performances, they break the traditional label of "old age" and reshape their self-identity and social identity (Bennett & Hodkinson, 2020). However, current research has focussed more on the health improvements and well-being of music for older people as a whole (Maury et al., 2022) and has yet to delve into how older women can reinvent themselves and their identities through musical performance. Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by exploring older women's unique experiences and identity remodelling processes in music performance through rooted theory, providing theoretical support and practical guidance for older women's social inclusion and active ageing.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Forms of musical performance for the elderly

Older people participate in various musical performances, including choirs, instrumental music, and traditional folk music performances. Choir is a form of musical performance in which older people are widely involved, and choirs enhance older people's sense of teamwork and collective belonging through joint rehearsals and collective performances (Davidson et al., 2014). Older adults promote concern for others through choral singing, evoking empathy from other choristers and listeners in the room, thus forging a virtuous interpersonal relationship (Saarikallio, 2019). Instrumental music is also a favourite form of performance for many seniors. Whether it is a solo instrument (e.g., piano, violin, and so forth.) or a group instrument (e.g., orchestra or ethnic instrument playing), older adults can learn new skills, challenge themselves, and gain a sense of accomplishment through their practice as they participate (Bugos & Wang, 2022). These performances provide entertainment opportunities and serve as an essential way for seniors to expand their social networks and maintain their physical and mental health. By participating in musical performances, it can help older adults alleviate emotional problems such as anxiety and depression and enhance their sense of well-being (Paolantonio et al., 2020).

2.2 The efficacy and value of musical performances

Musical performance is essential in promoting mental health, improving social interactions, and providing self-expression. Research has shown that older adults who participate in musical performances perform better regarding emotion regulation and positive emotional experiences (Creech et al., 2013; Perkins & Williamon, 2014). By rehearsing and performing together, older adults can expand their social circles and receive emotional support from their peers, which can help to enhance their sense of social belonging and self-identity and reduce loneliness (Creech et al., 2013). Breath control during rehearsals and performances, such as in choral singing and hand-eye coordination in instrumental playing, enhances older adults' physical fitness and improves cognitive function and attention (Worschech et al., 2022). At the same time, the immersive experience of a musical performance stimulates neuronal activity in the brain, helping older adults stay cognitively sharp (Hallam, 2010). Through performance activities, older adults can feel their value and gain recognition from others, thus enhancing their self-efficacy.

2.3 Initial Explorations of Music Performance and Identity Construction

Youth and professional musicians use music performance as a means of identity construction and expression. Through participation in music performances, individuals can express their self-worth, demonstrate their social roles, and gain recognition and support from the outside world. For example, within the professional musician community, participation in long-term musical performance and practice helps them to develop an identity as a professional musician, which is reinforced and strengthened through stage performance (Frith, 1996). Adolescents can experience increased self-worth through interaction with peers and performance feedback during choir or orchestra participation, leading to the development of a stable self-identity during the critical period of identity transition that is adolescence (MacDonald et al., 2002).

Although some studies have begun to focus on identity construction in music performance, such as how performance helps participants to acquire new social identities or reinvent themselves (DeNora, 2000), the focus of most of these studies has remained on the younger age groups, and less on the processes by which older people, particularly older women, achieve identity transformation through performance. In the older adult population, much of the existing research focuses on the efficacy of music, such as improving mood and social relationships, and there is a lack of in-depth exploration of the dynamic process of how identities are transformed during participation (Hays & Minichiello, 2005). To fill this

research gap, this study further explores the dynamic process of identity construction through older women's participation in musical performances, providing new research directions for the participation and development of older people's musical performances and promoting the development of active ageing.

3. Methodology

3.1 Method

The research methodology employed in this study is grounded theory, which involves coding, analyzing, comparing, and transforming interviews or literature to develop concepts, categories, and themes. This approach entails describing phenomena and underlying factors through a narrative-based method and constructing a new conceptual model (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The research methodology employed in this study is grounded theory, which involves coding, analyzing, comparing, and transforming interviews or literature to develop concepts, categories, and themes. This approach describes phenomena and underlying factors using a narrative approach, ultimately constructing a new conceptual model (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Rootedness theory is highly relevant to the needs of this study. Its strength lies in its ability to extract core concepts from the participants' real-life experiences and, through continuous comparison and analysis, construct a theoretical model closely related to the identity transformation of older women's musical performances, providing a solid and practical methodological framework for exploring the transformation of this group's identity.

3.2 Data Collection

This study adopted a convenience sampling approach, and in-depth interviews were used to collect data. A total of 10 older women aged 55-75 were recruited for this study at the University of the Elderly in Hefei, Anhui Province, China. These recruited participants had participated in different types of musical performances, such as chorus, piano, and music instruments, for more than one year, with the shortest period of participation being 4 years and the longest being 20 years. Semi-structured questions were used to conduct the interviews in this study, with each interview segment lasting between 60-90 minutes. The main interview questions included, for example, what sparked your interest in participating in musical performances? What was the most enjoyable part of the performance for you? How do you think you have changed your life due to participating in music performances? How did you overcome technical challenges in performing music? Participants' consent was sought prior to the interviews, which were recorded using an Xerox recorder, and each interview recording

was finally transcribed into text for data analysis. All interviewees are anonymous. (See table 1.)

Table 1: Participant

Name	Age	Education	Occupation before Retirement	Type of Music Participation	Years of Participation
Xu	64	Associate Degree	Nurse	Choir	18
Liu	59	Master's Degree	Middle Management in a Company	Piano	4
Sheng	75	Associate Degree	Middle School Chinese Teacher	Choir	20
Zhang	65	Associate Degree	Accountant	Hulusi (Chinese Flute)	5
Zhou	70	High School	Company Employee	Choir	15
Wu	74	High School	Company Employee	Opera	10
Zhai	62	High School	Company Employee	Piano	5
Zhu	65	Bachelor's Degree	Civil Servant	Accordion	10
Wang	74	Bachelor's Degree	Civil Servant	Piano	10
Fan	62	High School	Company Employee	Choir	5

3.3 Data Analysis

3.3.1 Open Coding

Open coding is the initial stage of the rooted theory approach, which requires the researcher to have an open mind, to 'suspend' personal opinions and preconceptions as much as possible, to analyze all the material in its own right, to identify and name conceptual categories, to determine the attributes and dimensions of the categories, and then to name the phenomenon under study. Then, the research phenomenon will be named and genericized (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this study, the Maxqda software was used to collate the textual content

transcribed from the interviews to obtain a total of 180 original utterances, deriving 28 initial concepts and, finally, 13 initial categories, with only some of the coding shown due to space constraints (Table 2).

Table 2. Open coding

Initial Category	Initial Concept	Original Example Sentences
Self-exploration	Potential Release	When I was working, I was busy with work and raising children. Now, after developing these hobbies, my potential has been unleashed.
	Knowledge Transfer	Through learning music, I can also keep my rhythm while walking the runway.
Performance Motivation	Broad Interests	I am learning calligraphy, joining the choir, and learning tea ceremonies. When invited, I am generally very willing to participate in activities like travel and performance.
	Pursuing Performance Opportunities	When I first joined the choir, my biggest wish was to participate in the large and small chorus.
Sense of Accomplishment	Increased Satisfaction	Initially, I wanted to join a vocal class because I liked singing solo. However, the teacher suggested I join the choir, and after considering it, I joined. Now, that was the right decision.
	Increased Confidence and Joy	I used to lack confidence in singing, but after joining the choir and training, I have gained confidence, and singing has brought joy to my life and body.
Social Interaction	Taking Photos and Chatting	During performances, we can take pictures and chat. So, performing is joyful; it makes me so happy.
	Teacher-student Communication	The conductor (teacher) is so lovely, treating us all like friends. Everyone is so happy together.
Social Support	Financial Security	I have a pension after retirement so that I can live well with enough time and energy.

	Public Performances	We often participate in public charity performances, and through these performances, I feel spiritually fulfilled.
Performance Enjoyment	Performance Expectations	It is inevitable that I will make mistakes while singing, and it is occasional to perform well. My expectations for myself are reasonable.
	Enjoying Performance	For older adults, performing, practicing, and wearing costumes is a source of happiness, and I enjoy this process.
Technical Challenges	Difficulty Operating Bluetooth Speakers	I have a Bluetooth speaker but need to learn how to use it.
	Pitch Difficulty	There are some pitch changes in the songs, and for us older people, it is pretty challenging to master.
Physical and Mental Health Benefits	Benefits to Physical Health from Singing	Singing has so many benefits for our bodies. I have never experienced issues like insomnia or anxiety.
	Improved Memory	Now that I sing frequently and memorize lyrics, my memory has improved a lot.
Stage Performance	Singing Effect	When you hear the beautiful harmony everyone creates together, all the hardships are worth it.
	Performance Preparation	I enjoy the preparation process for each performance, like getting the costumes, makeup, and rehearsals ready.
Family Expectations	Family Encouragement	When I practice singing at home, my husband and daughter sometimes "jokingly" criticize my singing, but I know it is their way of encouraging me.
	Family Pride	From my son, daughter, and daughter-in-law to my grandson, they proudly share my performances with their friends, showing everyone my performance photos and recordings.

Social Recognition	Social Identity		From my son, daughter, and daughter-in-law to my grandson, they often proudly share my performances with their friends, showing my performance photos and recordings to everyone.
	Sharing on Social Media		During performances, everyone takes pictures and shares them on social media. For me, performing brings happiness, and I love it.
Social Belongingness	Sense of Contribution		I like this choir organization; it gives me confidence, and I am willing to contribute.
	Sense of Self-Worth		Every time I participate in a concert, it makes me feel very proud.
Personal Growth	Improvement in Musical Skills	in	I used to be tone-deaf, but through training, I slowly found the right feeling for singing. Many melodies and rhythms have been corrected through practice. This progress brings me immense joy.
	Development of Digital Skills	of	I was not very good with my phone before, but our choir often uses WeChat to assign tasks, and now I can use many features on my phone.

3.3.2 Axial Coding

Spindle coding is the discovery and establishment of various connections between conceptual categories to express the organic associations between the various parts of the material (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher not only explores the correlations between these conceptual categories but also the intentions and motivations of the researched person who expresses these conceptual categories, placing the words of the researched person into the context of the time as well as the socio-cultural context in which they are situated. Based on the 12 initial categories, four main categories were eventually formed and refined (Table 3).

Table 3. Axial coding

Main Category	Corresponding Category	Category Content
Identity Construction	Self-exploration	Older women discover themselves through participating in music performances, exploring their potential interests, abilities, and emotional needs while re-evaluating their roles and values.
	Performance Motivation	For elderly women, music performances are a hobby and a path for self-realization, driving them to express themselves and their inner world on stage.
	Sense of Accomplishment	By completing performances, elderly women experience self-affirmation and satisfaction, which enhances their confidence and sense of self-worth.
	Social Identity	Music performances allow elderly women to gain recognition and respect in their communities, redefining their roles in society and family and enhancing their sense of social identity.
	Social Interaction	Through music performances, elderly women have the opportunity to interact with peers, teachers, and audiences, building and strengthening social relationships and group belonging.
Social Dynamics	Social Support	Older women can receive support from communities and music groups, allowing them to participate in performances and expand their social networks and emotional support systems.
	Family Expectations	Family encouragement and expectations significantly impact older women's participation in performances. Family support provides them with greater motivation to engage in music activities.
	Social Belongingness	In participating in musical performances, older women establish emotional connections and psychological identification with their teams, society, and families.
Performance Experience	Enjoyment of Performance	Emotional engagement and stage performance bring elderly women joy and satisfaction, increasing their interest in music and motivating them to continue participating.

Stage Performance	Older women show multi-dimensional performance characteristics in music performances. This involves their technical skills on stage and their emotional expression, confidence, teamwork, and interactions with the audience.
Technical Challenges	Older women face challenges in music techniques and performance skills during performances, but through continuous learning and practice, they overcome these difficulties, enhancing their abilities.
Promoting Physical and Mental Health	Music performances help elderly women improve their physical and mental health by relieving anxiety and stress through singing and performing, leading to psychological well-being and positive physical changes.
Growth and Well-being	Through participation in music performances, elderly women continuously improve their skills, build self-confidence, and promote emotional and psychological growth, fostering a positive lifestyle in old age.
Personal Growth	

3.3.3 Selective Coding and Model Building

Selective coding is the final stage of the grounded theory approach, which involves more in-depth analysis and refinement of the core concepts in the spindle codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher selects a "core category" after systematically analyzing all the conceptual categories found and focuses on those codes that relate to that core category. The core category is overarching, placing most of the findings within a broad theoretical context, to create a more precise and insightful theoretical framework to explain essential patterns and relationships in the field of study. A model of identity transformation and generation paths of older women in music performance was constructed around the core of "older women's identity transformation in music performance" (see Figure 1).

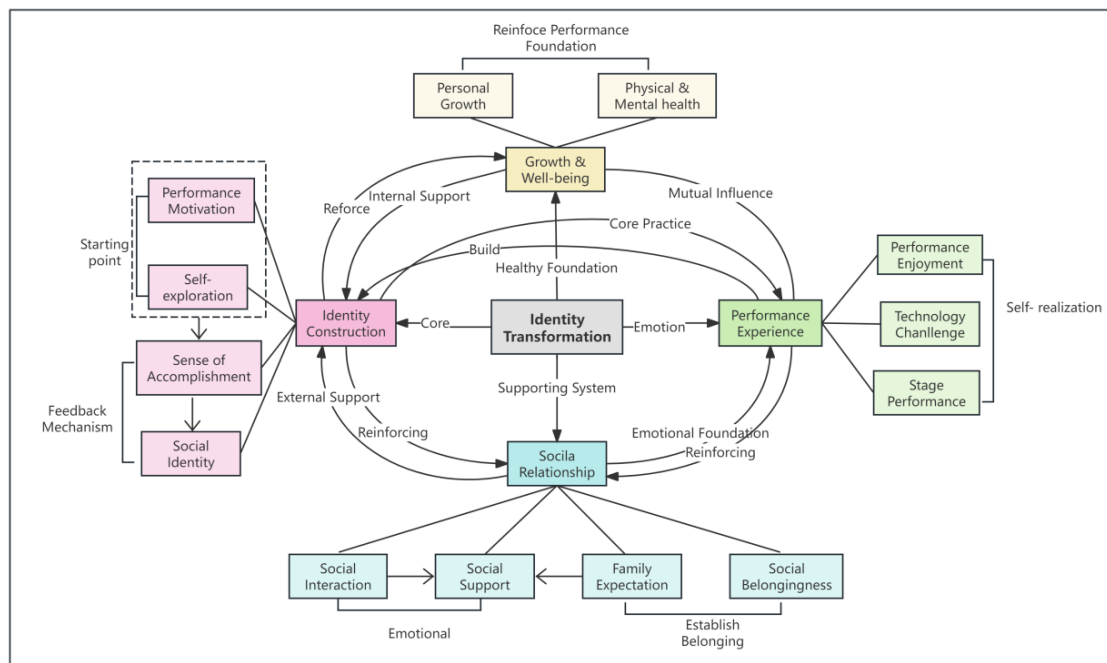


Fig1. Identity Transformation Model

3.3.4 Theoretical Saturation Check

In this study, the transcribed text of three interviewees was set aside in the interview data as a saturation test. The saturation test was conducted by sequentially re-running open, axial, and selective coding following the steps described in the previous section, which resulted in no new main categories emerging. As a result, this study has largely achieved theoretical saturation of the model of older women's identity transformation in music performance.

4. Results and Discussion

Based on in-depth data analyses, we identified and constructed a model of identity transformation in older women's participation in music performance. The model aims to explain how older women achieve identity transformation through the interaction of multiple factors involved in music performance. Next, we will elaborate on the model.

4.1 Identity Construction

Identity is the core foundation of older women's identity transformation, initiated through self-exploration and the creation of motivation to perform. Self-exploration is older women rethinking their identity in the face of age and changing life roles. They rediscover their musical talents and passions by participating in different performance activities, and this

process of self-discovery is the starting point of identity (Huang et al., 2022). For example, "When I used to work, I was simply busy with work and educating my children. Now, with these hobbies, the potential is realized". Performance motivation further facilitates the process of self-exploration. Older women's performance motivations include, but are not limited to, the need for self-expression, the continued pursuit of youthful dreams, the expectation of social interaction, and the desire for a sense of fulfillment, e.g., "I have loved music since I was a child, so I would love to join a vocal class because I love to sing." The positive self-motivation they derive from their participation in performances drives them to become more actively involved in performing activities, thus further establishing their identity as 'performers' (Lamont, 2017). When older women participate in performance activities and achieve specific results, a sense of achievement is essential for their self-identity. The sense of achievement comes from the joy of completing a performance or mastering a new skill and from external recognition of their efforts and performance. Their sense of identity as "performers" increased by repeatedly obtaining such a sense of achievement. In addition, social recognition is also an indispensable part of "identity." Positive comments and recognition of performances by audiences, family, friends, provide crucial social feedback for older women (Greenberg & Rentfrow, 2017). This recognition from society further strengthens their positive perception of their identity. It gives them more confidence to face the audience and society as "performers." Establishing this identity is a spiritual and psychological reorientation for them. They are not just "participants" but "performers" with specific performance skills and experience.

4.2 Social contact

Social relationships provide necessary socio-emotional support and interaction opportunities for older women's identity transformation through four dimensions: social interaction, social support, family expectations, and social belonging. Through social relationships, older women gain recognition of their social roles in music performance and further strengthen the deepening of their "identity," thus forming the basis for identity transformation.

Social interaction refers to older women's ability to form deeper social bonds and emotional resonance in cooperation by meeting new people and exchanging musical and life experiences through participation in music activities, and the emotional experience of music activities can deepen the depth of social interaction (Hemakom et al., 2016). For example, "When attending a performance, we can take photos and chat, which is especially fun." Social support is an integral part of social relationships, and older women receive multiple aspects of emotional support from performance team members, teachers, friends, including not only direct care and encouragement but also psychological support and peer help when facing performance

challenges (Pecen et al., 2018). For example, "We would listen to each other's recordings and point out problems in the group, and that did improve quickly. "Social support boosts older women's confidence and makes them feel valued in the group, further enhancing their sense of identity as performers. Family expectations are a more complex but essential part of the equation. Positive family expectations, such as support and approval from children and partners, may allow older women to be more actively engaged in music performance activities (Warnock, 2009); negative family expectations may increase the psychological burden of participation for older women and affect feelings of engagement (Bullerjahn et al., 2020). Social belonging refers to older women's sense of belonging in society and contributing to the group by participating in musical performances. For example: "I like the choir very much; it always brings me self-confidence, and I am willing to pay for it." This sense of belonging comes not only from the collective identity within the performing team but also from the recognition and acceptance of the external audience (Lamont et al., 2018), where they feel part of the community and find their new position in this social interaction.

4.3 Performance Experience

The performance experience helps older women gain emotional satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment, and affirmation of their self-efficacy in music performance through the three dimensions of performance enjoyment, stage presence, and technical challenge. This experience reinforces their identity as "performers" and helps them to transform and reshape their identities in the process of performing.

The pleasure of performing is one of the core feelings that older women experience when participating in music performance activities. They express themselves and experience the beauty of art through different types of performances, such as choral singing and piano playing, and gain pure joy and satisfaction, as well as increasing their self-confidence and motivating them to participate more actively and consistently in performance activities (Hays & Minichiello, 2005). For example, "The process of going on stage, rehearsing, and putting on make-up and dresses is a source of joy, and I enjoy it." Stage performance will allow older women to feel a sense of being the main character on stage and to enjoy and revel in this feeling, increasing their confidence in life. For example, "All the hard work is worth it when you hear the wonderful harmonies everyone makes together." The experience of success in stage performance contributes to the self-esteem and self-efficacy of older adults (Zarza-Alzugaray et al., 2020). The community recognises this performance and further strengthens their sense of identity in society. The technological challenges older women face in their participation in music performance are also important drivers of their growth and progress. These challenges involved improving musical skills and adapting to modern music

performance's digital technology requirements. For example, "At first, I learned to sing on my mobile phone and had to record it to send my assignments, and I could not operate it, but then I fumbled around and asked for advice from others, and slowly adapted to it as time passed." By facing and conquering these technological challenges, older women continue to learn and master new skills, further enhancing the recognition of their abilities (Cheng, 2019).

4.4 Growth and Health

The main category of growth and health provides a positive physiological and psychological foundation for older women's identity transformation. Personal growth refers to the process by which older women continue to improve themselves and expand their horizons in music performance. In participating in musical performances, they learn new musical skills and improve their performance techniques and gain emotional nourishment and intellectual enlightenment through cooperation and communication with others. More importantly, they have become more active psychologically, stepping out of the passive life they might have had and starting to actively pursue self-improvement and breakthroughs, redefining their roles and values in life. They gradually realize that they are no longer just "spectators" or "participants" but "performers" who can achieve self-expression and create value through musical performances (Joseph, 2022). For example, "I do not have a perfect singing foundation, and after participating in many performances in the choir, I slowly found that feeling of being a singer, and that moment was my high point." Participation in musical performances contributes to the mental health of older women. Performances provide opportunities for emotional expression, helping them to release negative emotions and foster positive emotional experiences. In particular, it reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression in older adults and enhances feelings of well-being and life satisfaction (Chan et al., 2012). For example, "I got through the menopause with little feeling and no irritability or anxiety at all. The key was what music brought me, and many my worries were cathartic when I sang". Older women involved in music performances also gained positive impacts on their physical health. Physical activities during rehearsals and performances, such as breath control and movement coordination, help them to maintain their physical vigor. For example, "I feel like physical exercise after every practice, I feel like I have done a sport and I am comfortable." In addition, the positive stimulation of the brain from the use of memory and coordination skills in performance can help prevent cognitive decline (Creech et al., et al., 2013). Such activities improved their physical fitness and enhanced cognitive acuity, improving overall quality of life.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Based on rooted theory, this paper focuses on older women's identity transformation in music performance and constructs a theoretical model of identity transformation through in-depth interviews and data analysis. This study found that older women's identity transformation consists of four main categories: identity, social relationships, performance experience, and growth and health. These four categories contribute to reshaping older women's identities from participant to performer through interdependence and mutual reinforcement.

Compared to previous literature, the present study further enriches the understanding of older women's participation in music performance on identity construction. While much of the existing research has focused on the effects of musical performance on older adults' emotions and health (Hays & Minichiello, 2005; Creech et al., 2013), the present study, through in-depth analyses rooted in theory, reveals the specific mechanisms of musical performance in contributing to older women's identity transformation. This study extends the theoretical perspectives of cultural activities in old age and complements existing research on how older women achieve identity reconfiguration through music (van den Elzen et al., 2019). Additionally, the dimensions of social relationships, performance experiences, and growth and health work together to further older women's personal growth and self-identity. While previous research has demonstrated the positive impact of social interactions and musical experiences on older adults' health (Creech, 2013), the present study demonstrated how these dimensions influence older women's identity transformation through systematic analyses. The results show that musical performance is not only a form of artistic expression but also an essential way for older women to reconstruct their identity. This model provides critical insights and theoretical support for understanding older women's cultural expression in active aging.

5.2 Practice Implication

This study is of great significance at the practical level in the following four areas: Firstly, it promotes the diversification of cultural activities for the elderly. This study provides communities and cultural organizations with new ideas for designing cultural activities for the elderly, i.e., not only focusing on the artistry of musical performances but also their functions of social interaction and personal growth, thus promoting a sense of participation and a sense of social belonging among the elderly. Secondly, new educational strategies are provided for music education for the elderly. The findings inspire music educators to design music programs and performance activities that address the characteristics and needs of older people

in order to enhance their self-confidence and sense of achievement in the learning process. Third, it provides practical tools for physical and mental health intervention for older adults. This study provides a theoretical basis for health intervention. Medical institutions and elderly service centers can use music performances as an intervention tool to help older people maintain a positive mindset, enhance self-confidence and a sense of well-being, and promote their physical health. Fourth, to enhance the social role identity and social participation of older women. This study reveals that older women strengthen their social role identity in music performance, which provides a reference for the government and social organizations to enhance older people's social participation in an aging society. Encouraging older persons to participate in social and cultural activities promotes their sense of social belonging and identity and achieves positive aging.

5.3 Limitation and Future Research

The limitations of this study are the sample limitation and the geographical location. The study focuses on older women in specific regions of China, so the results may only partially represent different cultural backgrounds and social groups. Future studies should incorporate a more diverse sample, including older adults from different geographic regions and cultural backgrounds, to better validate the identity transition model's generalizability and explore the similarities and differences in identity transition among older adults in different cultural contexts.

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