Aging, Time Horizon & Meaning in Life: Thoughts and Experiences of Older Adults

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ABSTRACT

According to the socioemotional selectivity theory (SST), people tend to assess their remaining life span, as being either limited or expansive. SST theorizes that perceived time in life shapes goal pursuits, preferences, and emotional well-being. In detail, older adults who have perceived time as limited focus on immediate need gratification, not in future investments, and are also very much focused on their emotional wellbeing. According to the psychosocial development theory, aggregated changes in social roles bring about different life goals that individuals strive to achieve to promote development. I investigated meaningful goals that older adults hope to achieve before they die. I also explored the meanings that older adults attach to life during later stages in their life.

Data were collected through personal interviews after selecting my informants through convenience sampling techniques. Results showed that older adults are very conscious of the time horizon. However, the length of a time horizon is very subjective to the individual. The findings of the study also showed that the meanings people attach to the time horizon is very subjective, and may be influenced by individual goals and aspirations, culture, religious believes and the environment in which one finds himself/ herself.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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ABBREVIATIONS

SST   Socioemotional selectivity theory (SST)

NSD   The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD)

KFC   Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC)

IO   Interview Object (IO)

NOVA   Norwegian Institute for Research on Upbringing, Welfare and Aging

OsloMet   Oslo Metropolitan University

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

Purpose in life is a defining feature of aging. In old age, maintaining high levels of purpose in life may become more difficult, due to increasing loses (e.g., widowhood, retirement). Old age inevitably comes with challenges and loses that require adaptation. For older people, the physical, mental, or social loses that tend to occur in later life may be difficult to interpret in terms of life story (Fortuin, Schilderman, & Venbrux, 2020). People meaningfully integrate intrusive life events in their life stories, and their worldviews can play a major role (Scherer-Rath, 2014).

Nowadays, meaning in life can be complicated. The cultural narratives of aging envisaged by contemporary Western societies is likely to complicate the task of keeping a satisfying life story going throughout the entire life course (Bohlmeijer, Westerhof, Randall, Tromp & Kenyon, 2011; Freeman, 2004; Laceulle and Baars, 2014). According to Bohlmeijer et al, (2011) and later Kesby, (2017), late modern societies tend to offer two cultural master narratives of aging. On the one hand, they offer narratives grounded in a view of aging as decline (Biggs, 2001; Laceulle & Baars, 2014). This could be viewed as a political narrative emphasizing the dependency of older adults, portraying older adults as a burden on society. On the other hand, late modern societies offer narratives of 'active', 'productive', 'positive' or 'successful' aging (Biggs, 2001; Kesby, 2017). These are embedded in the believe that the capability to stay young and active is the key to a good old age (Liang & Luo, 2012). Although such narratives can stimulate the potentials of older people to live a good life, they can also complicate the search for meaning for those adults who are not able or willing to live up to these standards (Laceulle & Baars, 2014). The difficulty in finding the meaning in later life when the abilities for active aging have diminished has become especially noticeable in modern societies, of which Norway is a part.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

As a result of the improvement in health and sanitation, life expectancy across the world has increased. This means that more and more people are getting older. People now have a good

amount of time (after retirement) before they pass on to eternity. How they use their time, and what they use their time for, to create meaning in their everyday life, is therefore imperative to study. Although the influences of time horizon and age have been extensively studied for general life goals (e.g., Fung & Carstensen, 2006; Lang & Carstensen, 2002), little research has been done on meaningful goals that a person hopes to achieve before they die. Hence, there is a dearth of knowledge about the aging, time horizons and meaning that older adults attach to life. This thesis therefore intends to explore the meanings that older adults attach to life and fill in the knowledge gap. Meaningful goals are typically created when a person realizes the fragility and finitude of life, such as being diagnosed with a fatal disease, facing a natural disaster or at late stages in life (Chu, Gruhn & Holland, 2018).

1.2 Relevance of the Study

Developmental science has attended so little to the subjective sense of time on individual functioning. As more and more people become older, as a result of improved health and sanitation, the monitoring of aging, time horizons and how and what meanings the older adults attach to life, may help to understand the cognitive, behavioural, personality and social of adults. The recommendations of this study will hopefully help in tailoring policies that are designed for the older adults in Norway, and the world at large. The findings and recommendations of this study may also, hopefully, serves as a basis of further research into aging, time horizons and meaning in life of older adults.

The objectives of the study are:

To identify and analyse subjective time horizon of older adults

To identify and analyse what older adults find most meaningful in their everyday life

To identify and analyse if there is any connection between subjective time horizon and what older adults find meaningful in their lives

In short, this study contributes to the question:

What are the thoughts and experiences of older adults on aging, time horizon and meaning of life?

1.3 Chapter Outline

Chapter two presents an in-depth review of literature of previous studies in relation to aging, time horizon and meanings of life of older adults. The reviews touched on the concept of time, time horizon and future time perspectives, goal pursuit, and aging and meaning in life.

Chapter three presents the theoretical framework of the thesis. In chapter four, the methodology and methods of data collection is presented. This chapter also presents the methods used in analysing data collected from the field, and also the limitations of the study.

Chapter five presents the findings of the data collected from the fieldwork. The interpretation uses the theories in chapter three and including the various literature that was used in the review.

Chapter six analyses and discusses the findings from the study of aging, time horizon and meaning in life. the analysis and discussions are done by comparing the data from the fieldwork to the literature review in addition to the theoretical frameworks of the study.

Chapter seven concludes the thesis with recommendations to governments, practitioners, policy makers, researcher and end users who have interest in aging and the meaning in life of older adults.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter present the various literature in relation to subjective time horizons and what older people find meaningful in life. It will, specifically, focus on earlier research on time horizons and meanings in life. The connection between subjective time horizon and what older adults find meaningful is also discussed. The chapter also presents the literature search strategy, the concept of time in relation to aging and time horizon, time horizon and future time perspectives, goal pursuit and aging and meaning in life.

2.1 Literature Search Strategy

Literature search is aimed at generating hypotheses that may further be pursued in the study of aging and time horizon and the meanings people attach to it. The initial search occurred between April and June 2018. This was for the preliminary stages, where I submitted a proposal for approval by the university. Afterwards, there has been a search for more up-to-date and detail studies, which I conducted in October 2018 to June 2019. In December 2020, I made further search for literature to get more detail and up-to-date information about my topic. This search was carried on until the end of April 2021. The literature search strategy was guided by the quest:

i)   To identify and analyse subjective time horizon of older adults.

ii)   To identify and analyse what older adults find most meaningful in their everyday life.

iii)   To identify and analyse if there is any connection between subjective time horizon and what older adults find meaningful in their lives.

In summary, the literature search was guided by the research question: "What are the thoughts and experiences of older adults on aging, time horizon and meaning of life?"

I identified relevant studies through academic and electronic databases, official websites of relevant organisations, articles from the university's library (Oria), inter alia. The databases searched included: social sciences citation index, EBSCOhost, Science citation index, Google

scholar and Zlibrary (a free online academic library).

I also used citation tracking of articles in already identified books, articles or reports, which are relevant for my study. This was possible using search engines such as Google Scholar, Social science citation index, EBSCOhost and yahoo. Reference lists of main studies were also used to check for more relevant literature for the study. My search was limited to English and Norwegian. However, I had to relax the language criterion as some very relevant articles for my study were in French. I used "Google Translate" service to help in translating these articles into English or Norwegian. I used the same search terms in all the searches in the various databases to ensure homogeneity of the literature generated. The main search terms adopted were time horizon, aging, meaning of life, old age and future time perspectives.

The initial search with these terms generated a lot of results. I have to trim it down to the theme of my thesis. I, therefore, adopted a strategy; using related concepts. These concepts include: time horizon + aging, aging + meaning of life, aging + future time perspective, aging + goal pursuit, old age + quality of life, old age + meaning of life, time horizon, aging + how it affects goal pursuit, aging + how quality of life is affected. The information generated from this strategy include reports, articles, books, case studies and conference proceedings.

2.2 The concept of time

The monitoring of time is so basic to human functioning that it was likely instrumental in the evolution of human thought and cognition (Suddendorf & Corballis, 1997). Markings engraved in ancestral bones dating back to the Ice Age reflect systematic recordings of a lunar calendar (Marshack, 1972), and the sophistication of Aztec sundials reveals that time has been interwoven into the social and political fabrics of societies for centuries (Aveni, 1995). Although cultures clearly differ in their treatment of time, such as the tempo with which life is lived (Levine, 1997), a basic awareness of time is ubiquitous in all known cultures and peoples. People are always aware of time, not only of clock and calendar time, but of lifetime. Biologist John Medina (1996) wrote that when we contemplate life, we inevitably assume the presence of an internal clock. Wound to zero at birth, it incessantly and inherently ticks away during our entire terrestrial tenure. So solid are these concepts in our mind that we have coined the term, "lifespan" to denote its boundaries.

As people move through life, they become increasingly aware that time is in some sense

"running out" (Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999). More social contacts feel superficial, trivial, in contrast to the ever-deepening ties of existing close relationships. It becomes increasingly important to make the "right" choice, not to waste time on gradually diminishing future payoffs. Increasingly, emotionally meaningful goals are pursued.

2.3 Time horizon and future time perspectives

According to Piaget and Cook (1954), the monitoring of time is essential in causal reasoning. In the view of Skinner (1933), it is essential for reinforcement learning. And in the view of Neisser (1988), it is essential for self-continuity. In the view of Zimbardo and Boyd (1999), the treatment of time is core to personality traits such as the delay of gratification, internalized sense of urgency associated with personalities and temporal orientations that favour the past, the present and the future. According to Fraisse (1984), the perception of time hinges on two key components: the succession of time – or series of events one experiences – and the duration time – the extent to which an individual perceives time. He was of the view that the duration of time can be fast, slow, or any point in between and varies based on situations and conditions. Studies have suggested explanations for why duration sometimes seems longer and shorter at given times. One view, which takes into account the notion that the time seems to move faster when one is actively engaged in a pleasant activity, suggests that the duration of time is shortest when the span of life is filled with events, and that the duration is longer when the span of time is less filled (Priestly 1968). A second view focuses on how time can seem slower when many events take place in one time span. This view, which is in opposition to the first, suggests that the perceived duration of time seems longest when time is filled with events, and that duration seems shorter when the span of time is less filled (Ornstein 1970).

Culture can also influence individuals' attitudes about time. According to Jones (1988), time in different cultures may vary in terms of the way in which it is measured, and it may also differ in terms of how culturally important it is to adhere to time. Poole (2000), for example, points out that in Western societies individuals tend to think of time as moving in a single linear direction. He was also of the view that African Americans also think of time as moving in a single direction, but their view differs from that of Anglo-Europeans in that they depict time as moving in a spiral fashion rather than linearly. The Hindu representation of time differs from both linear and cyclic

perspectives and proposes that time moves in a circular fashion with no distinct beginnings and end points.

In the view of Shannon (1976), there is evidence that there are interactions between cultural perceptions of time and age, with different age groups of the same culture having different perceptions. He was of the view that these various cultural views are likely to impact both how individuals perceive time, and also the broader context of future values.

Seginer (2008) also pointed out that culture can also have an influence on time perspectives in more subtle ways. An example is that the relationship between future goals and the perception of time may be moderated by whether a culture is individualistic or collectivist in nature, or by how participants ethnically identify (Block & Buggie, 1996).

Time perspectives can be conceptualised as one's attitude towards the future, notwithstanding attitudes toward the past or present (Hershey and Mowen, 2000; Nuttin, 1985; Rakowski, 1982). Zimbardo and Boyd (1999), have identified five personality-based time orientations which they refer to as: past-negative, present-hedonistic, past-positive, present-fatalistic and future. The past-negative category describes individuals who are primarily oriented towards negative events that happened in the past. The present-hedonistic category describes individuals who endorse risk-taking, impulsivity and an orientation toward enjoying the present moment, irrespective of future consequences. The past-positive category describes individuals who are oriented towards past events but focus on positive events (rather than negative events). The present-fatalistic category describes individuals who believe that the future holds no promise and are thus oriented to the present (in a negative way). Finally, the future category describes individuals who are oriented toward thinking about the future and strive to achieve goals and rewards in the future.

According to Braley and Freed (1971), having a long future time perspective can lead to many benefits. They are of the view that individuals who are future-oriented are more emotionally healthy, more self-satisfied and more in control than those who are not. Klahr (1994) also noted that future time perspective is also related to effective problem solving and proposed that increased levels of future-oriented thinking are needed to effectively solve complex problems.

There has been a number of empirical studies that have convincingly demonstrated that future time perspective plays a significant role in motivation and planning behaviours among members of a number of different populations. In a study conducted by Oyserman and Markus

(1990), delinquent youth were guided to imagine different perceptions of themselves in the future, and by doing so, the learned to increase their future-oriented thinking, which made them to make more proactive and adaptive decisions. Similarly, a study by Greene and DeBacker (2004), indicated that the future time orientation plays a significant role in motivation for both men and women and for individuals of different ages.

The literature on future time perspectives demonstrates that it is an instrumental variable in five life domains – financial planning, career planning, health planning, social planning and leisure planning – that influence a variety of behaviours and outcomes. This is referred to as future time perspectives in specific life domains.

Under financial planning, a number of studies have been carried out on time perspectives and retirement. In a study by Hershey, Henkens and Van Dalen (2010), path models were constructed to analyse the retirement planning practices of workers. The study indicated retirement goal clarity and perceived financial knowledge. The study suggest that future time perspective is important both independently and as a mediator. Jacobs-Lawson and Hershey (2005) found a 3-way interaction between financial knowledge, future time perspective and risk tolerance that predicted financial savings accuracy. Knoll, Taborini and Whitman (2012) also discussed the importance of taking a long-term perspective on retirement savings and suggest that being married may help individuals to feel more connected with their older selves, and thus, increase one's level of future time perspective. In a study by Ellen, Wiener and Fitzgerald (2012), they concluded that individuals who were able to successfully visualize their future selves were found to have previously engaged in more financial planning activities for retirement.

Health planning is another domain of future time perspective. According to this domain, in general, individuals who are future oriented are more likely to take preventive health measures and live healthier lifestyles, relative to individuals who are present oriented. A study by Mahon and Yarcheski (1994), indicated that higher future orientation scores were significantly correlated with health attitudes such as being conscious of nutrition, having adequate relaxation time, taking safety precautions and avoiding substance abuse. In a related study by Brown, Muhlenkamp, Fox and Osborn (1983), they concluded that the locus of control and future orientation influences individual's broad values. In the view of Hall and Epp (2013), future time perspective influences both health attitudes and actual physical activity level. Similarly, Orbell, Perugini and Rakow (2004) hypothesized that individuals with low future orientation would be less likely to take

preventive measures.

Social relation is another important domain in life and has strongly been influenced by future time perspectives. Waite and Joyner (2001), defined future time perspectives as one's horizon and found that a long time horizon was related to both social and sexual satisfaction in relationships, particularly for women. In a study by Oner (2001), the most satisfied couples, both individuals had high levels of future time perspective, with other variables serving as mediators of satisfaction.

Many individuals plan to spend time in retirement doing leisure activities, such as travelling and visiting family and friends. In a study by Philipp (1992), participants of the future orientation group reported participating in the greatest number of leisure activities. This is because future time perspective is related to many human behaviours involving planning. In a similar study by Zalatan (1996), education and age have been found to be predictive of future time perspective.

2.4 Goal pursuit

According to Kruglanski and Webster (1996) a goal starts as a mental picture of something that people believe they can attain in the future by engaging in an action. This helps to shape individual behaviour towards the goal one wants to attain in life. Goals are, therefore, desired results or end state that is realized only when people believe they have attained it (Guinote, 2007; Libermam, Idson and Higgins, 2005; Markman and Brendl, 2000). This leads to people developing a strong desire towards achieving set goals and targets. In a study by Badozzi and Dholakia (1999) on the effects of goal setting and pursuit on behaviour, they found that people who set clear goals and have a strong desire to achieve them have a strong motivation for processing goal-related information, elaborating on information received and processing a greater amount of information. In the view of Brandtstädter, Rothermund, Kranz, and Kuhn (2010), personal goals and projects that extend into the future leand meaning and structure of life. According to them, with the fading of time yet-to-be lived and the closing of action paths that relate the present self to a projected future self, future orientation goals and activities tend to lose their motivational potential.

According to Reker, Peacock, and Wong (1987), the loss of "future meaning" can breed feelings of alienation and depression. They pointed out, however, that this should not hold true at least as long as people remain attached to the blocked goals and are unable to turn to goals or

ssources of meaning that are less dependent on life-time resources. According to studies by Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith (1999) and later Rothermund and Brandstadter (2003), older people do not differ from younger groups in life satisfaction, self-esteem, perceived control, and related indicators of subjective life quality. According to Lang and Carstensen (2002), the shrinking of life-time researves should induce tendencies to downgrade, or disengage from, goals the value of which depends on personal gains in the future. According to them, by undermining future-related, individualistic interests, a growing awareness towards life's finatude should also strenghten an orientation toward values and sources of meaning that transcend the horizon of personal lifetime.

According to Brandtstädter, et. al., (2010), human activities are essentially oriented toward the future; when we select a particular goal or course of action, we generally assume that we – or our future self – will expereince the expected outcomes. They further stated that "to the extent that egocentric or individualistic interests are dampened through the fading of personal future, ego transcending or 'timeless' moral or ethical perspectives can gain influence on the person's selection of goals and activities" (p: 153). According to Fantino (1995), when future orientation becomes uncertain, it makes obviously less sense to defer gratifications and forgo an immediate advantage for some future benefit. He opined that with the fading of life-time researves, we thus should expect first of all a shift from an investive to a consumptive oreintation. Nozick (1989), in his work considered old age as a phase in life that is particularly suited to accept risky trade-offs for altruistic, ego-transcending purposes.

In the view of Brandstädter (2001) and also Staudinger (2001), shrinking action resources and life-time reserves necessitate a priritization of goals or projects, which in turn enhances deeper reflection on what is really important. This suggest that a shift towards virtuous attitudes may not only or primarily be driven by the amount of time lived but also by the experienced fading of time-yet-to-be-lived. A focus on culturally shared values appears to include – at least to some extent – a shift away from individualistic to more community-oriented goals. On the other side, however, values of personal achievement and social status seeem to be important ingredients of a shared worldview in Western soicieities (Brandtstädter, et al., 2010).

According to Chu, Gruhn, & Holland (2018), different of life general goals, a bucket list is typically created when a person realises the fragility and finitude of life, such as being diagonosed with a fatal disease or facing a natural dissaster. According to them, in particular, a person may have more concerns about preparations for death and the matters after death when they are making

a bucket list, rather than when they are listing general life goals. These concerns might include goals like planning their funeral, leaving estate and spiritual inheritance to the next generation, and restrospection for life, which are largely driven by the motives for self-concept, and the motives of generativity and ego-intergrity. Chu, et al. (2018) are of the view that a busket list reminds a person of both the certainty of death and the uncertainty of life. In such a situation, the person may prioritize the goals that enhance life meaningfulness, and the goals they desired but previoulsly had not prioritize the time to do.

2.5 Aging and meaning in life

Older people are at a stage of life that increases the likelihood of being confronted with multiple losses (e.g., of loved ones, work and/ or health, social roles). Such intense life events provoke existential questions and moral challenges that generate particular senses of (lack of) meaning (Hupkens, Machielse, Goumans, & Derkx, 2018). The trajectory of self-perceptions of aging starts early in life and runs from society to the individual. Internalised aging stereotypes are reinforced in adulthood and become ageing self-stereotypes in older age (Levy, 2003). Older individual's attitude toward ageing can have an influence on their memory performance (Levy, 1996), health (Levy et al., 2000), physical functioning (Sargent-Cox at al., 2012), and longevity (Levy et al., 2002). Many believe, however, that later life suffers from a crisis of meaning. In the view of Polivka (2000), for instance, postmodernism has stripped old age of its intrinsic values. According to another author, Baars (1997), there is little to inspire older adults in current narratives of ageing. In the view of Cole (1992), ageing is impoverished of meaning. Thomas Rentsch (1997, p.270) states: aging is "a communicative, self-reflective process forming a unique totality, a forming that is essentially highlighted by a change of view towards a meaningful and enduring life", and in later life the search for meaning is intensified, the principal task being to become truly oneself.

According to Manheimer (1999, p. 17), meaning conceived as the "product of temporality" puts older adults in a unique position to view and make sense of the lived life. In the view of George (1998), late life is ideally suited to the expression of authentic attitudes and behaviours. According to him, changes affecting the older self are well established. In a related study by Moulaert and Biggs (2012), they suggest that older adults rebalance the self by letting go of certain

dimensions of life and in investing in others. This rebalancing is also reflected in cross-cultural settings, where later life may involve a focus on spiritual dimensions to generate "vital autonomy in older age" (Mines, 1981, p. 21).

Coleman (2010) among others argues that religious beliefs and spirituality become increasingly salient with age. Studies (by for example Davie and Vincent, 1998) have noted that older people tend to be more religious than younger cohorts. According to a study by Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick, 1986), religious beliefs often reinforce the psychological process of integration, which reaches its height during the later stages in life. Mehta (1997) sees religious functions as an effective thread in the integrative process at old age. This is because most religions profess a respect for older age. According to Tornstam (1997), in social interaction, people may feel that they can afford a greater measure of authentivity and nonconformism when possible negative consequences for their personal future are no longer of great concern; older people in fact often report that they feel increasingly less dependent on the expectations and opinions of other people.

There is no single definition of meaning of life. However, in the view of Krause (2004) meaning of life is conceptualised on four dimensions: having a value system, a sense of purpose, goals, and being able to reconcile the past. After studying a variety of social, psychological and philosophical sources, Derkx (2011, 2013, 2015) proposes a model that encompasses a broad concept, which may encompass both active and passive modes of being, such as giving meanings to one's life, finding meaning in one's life or experiencing one's life as meaningful. He proposes seven needs including; the need for purpose, moral worth, self-worth, perceived control, connectedness, coherence and excitement. According to Derkx (2013), these seven dimensions of meaning facilitate an important reflection on what makes life meaningful.

With the need for purpose, Derkx (2011) was of the view that to have a purpose in life means that someone is able to connect his/her current activities to a valued future state or aspired perspective. It can take the shape as an experience of inner fulfilment, caused by the satisfaction that one comes with having developed one's talent, for instance.

Moral worth, according to Derkx (2011) means that one is able to evaluate one's own actions and way of living as morally justified or positively valued. People turn to feel moral worth if they can be reasonably sure that their choices and actions are not morally blameworthy but are in fact legitimate. Self-worth is a positive evaluation of oneself. It is often attained by way of

comparison with others, and crucially depends on being socially recognised. According to Derkx (2011), control pertains to the need to believe that one's life is – to some extent – within one's own control. He indicated that control happens when people feel that they are in charge of their lives. Coherence refers to the need for a coherent understanding of the reality in which one lives. The reality needs to be intelligible and well ordered to perceive life as meaningful.

The need for excitement, according to Derkx (2011), describes the importance of elements in our lives that breach the dullness, monotony and boredom of our routines, that spark our curiosity and that make life interesting for us. Connectedness refers to having fulfilling contacts, and to feeling closeness or communion with others or the other in a broad sense. According to Smaling and Alma (2010), in their explanation of connectedness, emphasise that in order for the need of connectedness to be fulfilled satisfactorily, it is important that we experience the other as fundamentally different from ourselves.

Theory and research clearly illustrate that there are gains and losses at every stage of development (Baltes, 1987). Having fewer social partners and poorer memory, for example, is frequently described as losses that are inherent and unidirectional in the aging process. Yet, through them come emotional gains: Social networks become tighter and more emotionally close, and the information that older adults remember is relatively more positive and emotionally meaningful. In fact, the empirical evidence we outlined above suggests that emotional regulation in the second half of life is characterized by an age-related increase in selection, a fundamental principle of human development (Baltes, 1997). Rather than "spreading themselves thin" by holding on to the large social networks and detail-rich memory that once served them well when they were younger, aging individuals selectively construct a social and cognitive world that maximizes emotional payoffs. Perhaps young organisms are adaptively motivated to learn all sorts of information and, although unspecialized, their facility for new learning is great.

When recalling previously presented positive, negative, and neutral images, the proportion of correctly recognized and recalled negative images declines linearly with age across younger, middle-aged, and older adults (Charles, Mather, & Carstensen, 2003). Another alternative explanation for disproportionately positive memories concerns mood congruence. That is, the causal link may be reversed: Older people may remember more positive information simply because (for whatever reasons) they are in better moods. However, studies that control for current mood speak against this explanation. Controlling for mood does not change the pattern of age-

related declines in memory for negative images reported above (Charles et al., 2003).

As in antecedent emotion regulation, a limited time perspective may also account for the above age-related increase in emotion-focused coping. Lazarus (1991) emphasizes the importance of choosing appropriate coping strategies on the basis of the type of problem faced, and time perspective often changes the relevance of a problem and problem-solving options.

The strategy of focusing on emotions to handle stress may thus be used more often, and lead to more positive psychological outcomes. Indeed, younger people faced with terminal illnesses—who presumably perceive time as more limited—are also more likely to rely on emotion-focused coping strategies than their healthy peers (Kausar & Akram, 1999) and finding personal meaning in a life-threatening illness slows disease progression (Taylor, Kemeny, Reed, Bower, & Gruenewald, 2000). Research with younger adults further suggests that emotion-focused coping is positively related to meaning and peace in life only among people with a more limited time perspective (Fung, Mcewan, & Kuiken, 2001).

Antecedent emotion regulation refers to the process of proactively avoiding negative emotions. Regulating social contacts is among the most effective antecedent regulation strategies (Carstensen, Gross, & Fung, 1997). Age-associated changes in social network composition, and the emotional experience derived from social interactions, suggest that older adults structure their social worlds to optimize emotionally meaningful, and therefore gratifying, experiences and to avoid potentially negative interchanges. Age-related reductions in social contact have been widely documented in both longitudinal (Lee & Markides, 1990; Palmore, 1981) and cross-sectional studies (Cumming & Henry, 1961; Lawton, Moss, & Fulcomer, 1987). Older people interact less with others and appear to resist efforts by others.

Emotion regulation in childhood has been conceptualized and studied as a developmental process by both clinical and developmental researchers (Rothbart, 1994; Kochanska, Murray, & Harlan, 2000; Shields, Ryan, & Cichetti, 2001). When studying emotion regulation in adults, however, researchers have steered away from ontogenetic change, and instead focused on individual differences in emotion regulation. Moreover, when age has been considered, the focus has been on physical decrements in late life thought to cause emotional dysregulation (see Carstensen & Charles, 1999). Indubitably, there are important individual differences in self-regulatory capacity in adulthood (Rothbart, Ahadi & Evans, 2000) as well as age-related physical decline. However, the overall pattern of findings about emotional experience and regulation points

to developmental gains well into the second half of life.

2.6 Chapter Summary

Time horizons are very subjective to individual. People turn to interpret the amount of time left for them to live their lives subjectively. This turns to have a significant impact on how people perceive the future and their goal pursuit. Culture and environmental factors are also seen as a contributory factor when However, studies have indicated that as people get older, they turn to narrow their goals towards more values and sources of meaning that transcend the horizon of personal lifetime. Time horizons also have an impact on the future time perspectives of individuals and what the meaning in life is to a person. In short time horizons, aging have an impact on the meaning in life of individuals.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical frameworks on which the discussions and findings from data will be analysed. The objective is to provide a logical and theoretical structure for the interpretation of the connection between subjective time horizons and what older adults find meaningful in life. This chapter also serves as a bridge linking the findings, the literature review and the specific study of the senior centre in Oslo. The study would rely on the socioemotional selectivity theory and the psychological development theory.

3.1 Socioemotional selectivity theory (SST)

Socioemotional selectivity theory was formulated to operationalize and understand the consequences of the distinctly human ability to monitor lifetime. According to the socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1992, 2006), people tend to assess their remaining life span, as being either limited or expansive. SST theorizes that perceived time in life shapes goal pursuits, preferences, and emotional well-being. The theory presumes that approaching mortality generates a sense that time is running out. According to the theory, social motives fall into one of two general categories; those related to the acquisition of knowledge and those related to the regulation of emotion. The theory indicates that people with limited time horizon tend to present oriented, focusing on their experience and seeking satisfaction in the moment (Carstensen, Isaaconwitz, and Charles, 1999). They might try to draw an emotional meaning from their current state of mind and pay attention to social connectedness, emphasizing aspects of emotion and intimacy in the social relationships (Drolet, Williams, & Lau-Gesk, 2007). The theory further indicates that, on the contrary, people with an expansive time horizon tend to be future oriented, believing that satisfaction, experiences and feelings in the future are more important than those in the present; therefore, they tend to pay more attention to collecting knowledge and planning for the future.

Socioemotional selectivity theory posits that, because time left is strongly – and inversely

– associated with chronological age, and because goals are always set in a temporal context, age is associated with systematic changes in goals (Carstensen, 1991, 1993). Some 70-year-olds see their futures as limited, whereas other 70-year-olds subjectively sense considerable time left. Because time horizons shift gradually, not starkly, as people age, proponents of SST predict gradual changes along a number of key dimensions. For example, they are of the view that social networks do not narrow suddenly in old age, but rather gradually, the steepest shifts appearing in the 30s and 40s, long before old age loss can account for them (English and Carstensen, 2014).

Empirical research based on SST has enhanced our understanding of how people structure their lives in accordance with their perception of time horizons. The premise of the theory is that goals are always set in a temporal context. According to Liao and Carstensen (2018), the knowledge that we are mortal is easily set aside and largely cognitive in representation early in life. According to them, with seemingly unlimited time horizons, people set goals that help them prepare to make a place for themselves in complex and crowded worlds. According to Carstensen (1991), and later Ebner, Freund and Baltes (2006), the focus lies on preparation, learning and exploring. According to Neugarten (1979), in the second half of life, however, the sense that time is running out grows more salient. In a related study Strough et al., (2016) observed that people begin to report limitations on future possibilities at roughly 50 years of age, which is accentuated further around age 60 when people increasingly report the perception that time is running out. According to Scheibe, et al., (2013), when time is perceived as limited, goals shift to ones that are realized in the doing, and goals about emotional meaning and satisfaction take precedence over those concerning exploration.

According to the SST theory, knowledge- and emotion-related goals together comprise an essential constellation of goals that motivates social behaviour throughout life (Carstensen, Isaacowitz and Charles 1999). According to Carstensen et al., In some cultures, maintaining a satisfying relationship with an intimate partner typically requires that one refrain from seeking novel intimate experiences. In addition, although people are motivated in certain circumstances to seek confirmatory evidence of their self-views, the same people in other circumstances are motivated to disconfirm self-relevant views in order to stimulate growth. Contact with other people provides a primary source of knowledge. Observations of others and direct instruction from them play a central role in human survival. Indeed, the intergenerational transmission of language, values, and culturally shared mental representations are accomplished largely through social

means (D'Andrade, 1981; Shweder & Sullivan, 1990).

On a day-to-day basis, social goals compete with one another, and often emotional goals vie with knowledge-related ones. When knowledge-related goals compete with goals involving the regulation of emotions, the relative importance of the two goals is weighed, and action is taken or not taken accordingly. The cardinal tenet of socioemotional selectivity theory is that the assessment of time plays a critical role in the ranking and execution of behaviours geared toward specific goals (Carstensen, Isaacowitz and Charles 1999). Cognitive appraisal of time assists people in balancing long- and short-term goals in order to adapt effectively to their particular circumstances. Socioemotional selectivity theory suggests that age-related differences in the anticipated future lead to developmental trends in the ranking of knowledge-related and emotional goals (Carstensen, Isaacowitz and Charles 1999). The knowledge trajectory starts high during the early years of life and declines gradually over the life course as knowledge accrues and the future for which it is banked grows shorter. The emotion trajectory is high during infancy and early childhood, declines from middle childhood throughout early adulthood, and rises from later adulthood into old age as future-oriented strivings become less relevant.

3.2 Psychosocial development theory

Psychosocial development theory (Erikson, 1963, 1966) emphasizes the importance of goal management in an individual's social development. According to the theory, aggregated changes in social roles bring about different life goals that individuals strive to achieve to promote development. Erikson developed 8 stages of psychosocial development in a person's life. These includes stage of trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame and doubt, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, identity vs. confusion, intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation, and integrity vs. despair.

3.2.1 Stage 1: Trust vs. mistrust

According to Erikson (1963), this stage occurs between birth and 1 year of age and is the most fundamental stage in life. At this stage, an infant is utterly dependent, developing trust is therefore based on dependability and quality of the child's caregivers. According to Erikson, at

this stage, if caregivers fail to provide adequate care and love, the child will come to feel that they cannot trust or depend upon the adults in their life. At this stage, if the child successfully develops trust, the child will feel safe and secure in the world (Malone Liu, Vaillant, Rentz, Waldinger, 2016).

3.2.2 Stage 2: Autonomy vs shame and doubt

The second stage of Erikson's theory of psychosocial development takes place during early childhood and is focused on children developing a greater sense of personal control. At this stage, the child is trying to gain a little independence and start to perform basic actions. The essential theme of this stage is that children need to develop a sense of personal control over physical skills and a sense of independence.

3.2.3 Stage 3: Initiative vs guilt

This stage takes place during preschool years. At this point in psychosocial development, children begin to assert their power and control over the world through directing play and other social interactions. The major theme of this stage is that children need to begin asserting control and power over the environment. Children who try to exert too much power experience disapproval, resulting in a sense of guilt.

3.2.4 Stage 4: Industry vs. inferiority

This stage, according to Erikson, takes place during the early school years from approximately age 5 to 11. Children begin to develop a sense of pride in the accomplishments and abilities. Children who are encouraged and commended by parents and teachers develop a feeling of competence and belief in their skills.

3.2.5 Stage 5: Identity vs. confusion

This stage takes place during the often-turbulent teenage years (Erikson, 1963). This is the

stage of development of a sense of personal identity which will continue to influence behaviour and development for the rest of a person's life. People turn to explore their independence and develop a sense of self (Malone Liu, Vaillant, Rentz, Waldinger, 2016).

3.2.6 Stage 6: Intimacy vs. isolation

This stage is characterized by the need for people to form intimate, loving relationships with other people. Erikson believed that it is vital that people develop close, committed relationships with other people. He was also of the opinion that a strong sense of personal identity was important for developing intimate relationships. Studies have demonstrated that those with a poor sense of self tend to have less committed relationships and are more likely to struggle with emotional isolation, loneliness and depression.

3.2.7 Stage 7: Generativity vs. stagnation

At this stage, adults need to create or nurture things that will outlast them, often by having children or creating a positive change that benefits other people. Success at this stage leads to feelings of usefulness and accomplishment, while failure results in shallow involvement in the worlds. Those who are successful in this stage will feel that they are contributing to the world by being active in their home and community (Malone Liu, Vaillant, Rentz, Waldinger, 2016).

3.2.8 Stage 8: Integrity vs. despair

The final stage of psychosocial development proposed by Erikson (1963) occurs during old age and is focused on reflecting back in life. At this point in the development of people, they look back on the events of their lives and determine if they are happy with the life that they lived or if they regret the things they did or did not do. Those who are unsuccessful during this stage will feel that their life has been wasted and may experience many regrets; most likely left with feelings of bitterness and despair.

According to proponents of the theory of psychosocial development, four goals emerge during adulthood. These goals are; identity goals, intimacy goals, generativity goals and ego-

integrity goals. Identity goals relates to seeking greater autonomy, self-understanding and self-sufficiency. Intimacy goals occurs when individuals try to seek close relationships or when individual find themselves in relationships. Generativity goals are driven by the motive of contributing to younger generation or the entire society. Ego-integrity goals involves motives of seeking inner peace and looking positively at one's life. In a study by Sheldon and Kasser (2001), they found out that adults reported more generativity and ego-integrity goals.

Psychological development theory suggests that as development progresses from young adulthood to old adulthood, or as time horizon changes from expansive to constrained, the relative salience of the socioemotional motivations would change from pursuing knowledge about the world and oneself to emotional satisfaction and life meaningfulness.

Integrity vs. Despair

Generativity vs. Stagnation

Intimacy vs. Isolation

Identity vs. Confusion

Industry vs. Inferiority

Initiative vs. Guilt

Autonomy vs. Doubt

Basic Trust vs. Mistrust

Infancy   **Adolescence**   **Old Age**
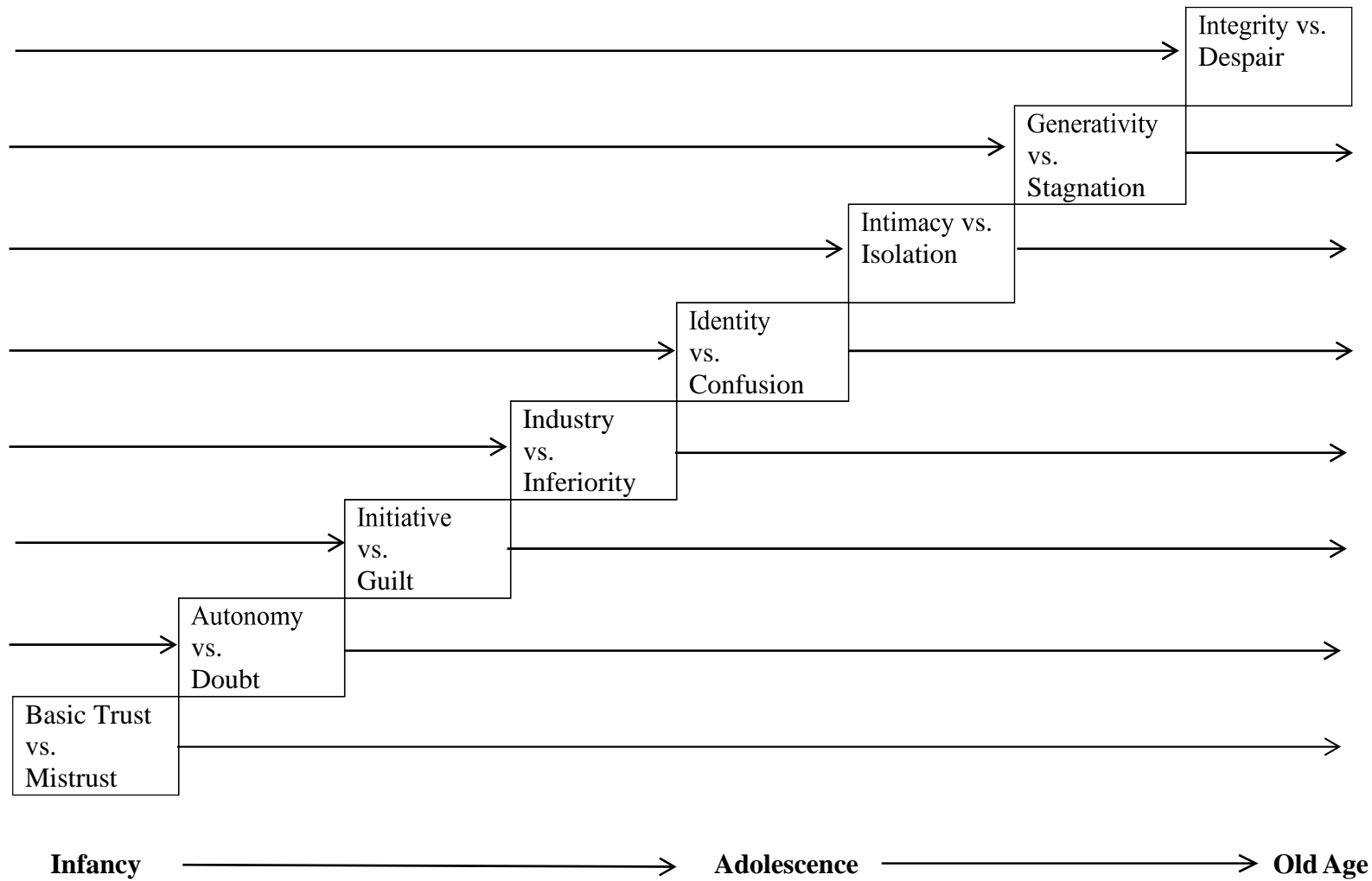
Figure 1. Depiction of Erikson's eight psychological tensions, highlighting how all tensions are present at all points in development, but that certain tensions are salient at particular development periods in the lifespan.

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3. 3 Chapter Summary

      This chapter presented the theoretical perspectives of this study. I have reviewed literature touching on the socioemotional selectivity theory and the psychosocial development theory, touching on the meanings older adults attach to life and what influences their behaviour patterns. The socioemotional selectivity theory posits that, because time left is strongly – and inversely – associated with chronological age, and because goals are always set in a temporal context, age is associated with systematic changes in goals. Psychosocial development theory also emphasizes the importance of goal management in an individual's social development. The ideas from these theories and literature will be used in presenting my work and it will serve as a guide in my empirical analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

4.0 Introduction

The basic premise of any research work is to understand more about the topic and contribute to existing knowledge. The choice of research method is paramount for any research work as the choice of method leads to the set objectives. This chapter discusses various activities undertaken during the period of data collection.

4.1 Why Norway as my study area?

Aging, time horizon and meaning in life has emerged as one of the fields in development science, as it is subjectively seen to affect individual functioning, especially in later years of life. Life expectancy in Norway is 84.49 and 81.48 years for females and males, respectively (Satistics Norway, 2021). Given that the age of retirement of Norwegians starts at 67 years, there is the likelihood of older adults facing the challenges of what meanings they attach to life as they get older, and hence time left in life, may exert a profound influence on their motivations. To understand the meaning older adults attach to life, there is the need to choose a study area which has a relatively higher life expectancy. Besides, in qualitative data collection process, it is imperative to select sites with minimum "gatekeepers" obstacles (Angrosino, 2011). The researcher chose Norway as a study site because, the researcher envisages limited gatekeepers' obstacles in the process of data collection. This is because the researcher has lived all the life in Norway and is well informed about the social structure of the country. The researcher also has good contacts in various departments and organisations relevant for data collection for this study.

4.2 The process of the research

4.2.1 The preparation stage

My preparation for field work took rather a very slow and disappointing start. Per the requirements of the university, the researcher is supposed to seek ethical clearance from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). Getting clearance from NSD was a bit difficult and it delayed the actual start of the data collection process. With the help of my supervisor, I was able to clarify the data collection process to NSD. Subsequently, clearance was given to commence my fieldwork and data collection process.

Prior to the start of the data collection process, (as I waited for ethical clearance from NSD), I abreast myself with relevant literature on the topic. As illustrated in the literature review (see above), I had read extensively on aging, time horizon and meaning in life across the world, especially in Asia and Europe. I took this path because this could be beneficial as it could provide in-depth knowledge for the study. Looking at my topic and the objectives of my study, there was the need to find a study area of where I could find informants to answer my questions. To be able to explore the thoughts and experiences of older adults, there is the need to focus on the elderly (mostly people over the pension age), assessing their views, thoughts and experiences of aging. Since I did not have further guidelines on gaining access to people over 60 living independently, I settled on doing my research at a senior centre in Oslo.

Before the start of the data collection, I did preliminary preparations, establishing contacts with the administrators of the senior centre and potential informants. Mock interviews were conducted with some friends as a preparatory measure for me before the inception of the actual data collection process. This helped me to make some corrections in the interview guide and also foresee how some questions are likely to be answered, and the possible follow-up questions.

At the senior centre in Oslo, I met with the administrative head, who later acted as a gatekeeper for my data collection process. I submitted formal applications and documentations to request permission to carry-out the research at the facility. The administrative head requested further and better particulars before clearance could be given for the interviews. According to the administrative head, their position on requesting further and better particulars was because of the breach of the principles of confidentiality and anonymity and for political capital by previous

researcher who used their facility and clients for research. This was in a sense an interesting initial empirical finding in itself as it indicates that senior centres in Oslo are not wholly isolated from the political process. After submission of the particulars requested, I was granted permission to collect my data at the centre.

In the process of my data collection, I had the chance to meet a number of people, from rich and powerful in society to the poor. Meeting with these categories of people gave me a broader understanding of the challenges of society and how society actually works.

4.2.2 The study area

Since my objective is to find out what the thoughts and experiences of older adults are on aging, time horizon and meaning in life, and the target group is pensioners above 60 years of age who are living independently, I saw a senior centre in Oslo as the perfect study area to gain access to informants for this particular target group. Though my study is about Norway and could have chosen any site in the country, I chose Oslo because, comparing to the other sites, this city would impose the least limitations to the research. My study focused on just one senior centre in Oslo. This is one of the most popular senior centres in Norway and, fortunately for me, I was able to sample more than enough informants for my data collection at this centre.

Accessibility to the senior centre has not been any challenge to the researcher after the permissions given by the administrator. The senior centre offers various services such as café, food delivery, pedicures and hairdressing, and it is also common practice to arrange hobby activities, games, clubs, courses and lectures. One interesting finding is that some of the service providers at the senior centre are at the same time clients of the senior centre. Aside from the workers at the senior centre, all other occupants of the centre are above 60 years of age.

4.2.3 Gaining access and challenges with gatekeepers

Gaining access to the study sites is one of the important aspects of every research work. The aim of the researcher is to be able to negotiate entry to draw resources and relevant information for the research work. As my study seeks to reveal the experiences of the older adults on aging, time horizon and meaning in life, gaining access to this category of the population is a bit difficult.

Seeking the consent of gatekeepers was very necessary. Gatekeepers are people who can grant or withhold access to informants or information. They can refuse or grant access to the research setting, and/or informants (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). With the help of my supervisor and some friends and colleagues, I was able to gather the necessary documentations and written permissions to conduct such a research. I was able to establish contact with the administrators of the senior centre. The gatekeeper at the senior centre I researched was the manager. However, most of the other staff members also volunteered to help during the process of data collection.

Gatekeepers might want to direct the focus of the research, exert some control over it or block access to some aspects of it (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Since my research is about aging, time horizon and meaning in life, and not an evaluation of the senior centre, the gatekeepers were not in a position of criticism and they were very much helpful with granting access of informants. In this way, I did not have any challenges with gatekeepers. The leader of the senior centre was very excited for my research project and choosing that facility as my study site.

4.2.4 Recruiting informants

Qualitative research method entails finding people with the right attributes and experiences relating to ones' research interest. In this study, I used convenience sampling techniques to select the informants for my study. This was to help me achieve the objectives of the study. This is a non-probability sampling method that relies on data collection from population members who are conveniently available and willing to participate in a study. At the study site, I was able to sample users of the senior centre who were present at the time of my visit and were also willing to participate in the study. I have to point out that, though some people were also present and willing to involve themselves in the study, I did include them, partly because I was informed that they have some challenges with dementia and may not be able to articulate their thoughts and give valid responses.

My study was not limited to a specific number of informants because the number or how many to interview is not the focus of interest in qualitative studies, but rather the curiosity of who it is that has the experiences, perspectives, behaviours, practices, identities and personalities among others, that the research questions will require to investigate (Dunn, 2010). According to Dunn, a small number of the right people who are willing to share their experiences are enough to

provide useful insights into a research.

Based on my objectives, which are to assess the thoughts and experiences of older adults on aging, time horizon and meaning in life in Norway, I realised that pensioners above 60 years of age living independently at home visiting the senior centre would be a great source of information for achieving my objectives. In total twenty-one (21) informants were sampled for in-depth interviews in the senior centre I chose, where 4 of them were volunteers. The age gap was from 62 to 96 years old. I identified participants through the leader of the senior centre I visited.

4.2.5 Interviewing

Interviewing helps to fill a gap in knowledge that other methods such as observation are unable to bridge effectively. It investigates complex human behaviours, gather diversity of opinions and experiences, as well as provide insights into them (Dunn 2010).

My data collection used the interview guide approach to elicit information from my respondents. Since it is more than an ordinary conversation, the researcher should focus the interview as much as possible to acquire the maximum amount of information from each conversation, in order words, reach a point of saturation of views (Hesselberg 2013) where the researcher realizes that there is no new experiences or expression of opinions from the participants. My approach helped me to increase the comprehensiveness and make the data systematic for each respondent (Patton, 2002). I prepared my interview guide with the objective that it would guide my interview process and not to miss out on any point or issue intended to be discussed. Semi-structured interviews were used throughout the data collection process. The semi-structured interviews allowed the informants to answer upon their own terms and the interviewer to delve deeper into their responses (May, 1997). My choice of data collection was individual interviews with the informants.

The preparations I made prior to the commencement of the interviews was of great help throughout the process of the interview. I was well-informed, as such this placed me in a better position in creating a conducive atmosphere and relationships with the informants. My informants were given the choice of choosing the setting or locations for the interview, where they could feel more comfortable and relaxed. Most of my interviews took place in the rooms of the informants. In the case of one of the informants, she preferred the interview was done as we took a walk

through a garden located near to the senior centre.

To be able to gather enough information for my research, I introduced myself to the informants as a student at Oslo Metropolitan University. I made clear to them the objectives of my research and what the research is intended to be used for. I also assured the informants, before the start of my interviews, that I was not an undercover investigator and as such the information they give me is purposely for academic reason and would not expose them to any risk. This gave them some sort of assurance and were very willing to speak and share more of their experiences with me.

Most of my interviews lasted between 30 minutes and an hour. After the interviews I went through the notes and the recordings I made and transcribed them immediately. This offered me the opportunity to get a deeper understanding of the information from the informants and avoided the possibility of forgetting reasons for some questions and answers from both the interviewer and the interviewee.

Even though I was always conscious of the environment of the interview, preferable in a private room, it was not always manageable. Some interviews were cut off during recording because an activity was going to take place in this room, and the informant and I had to find another place to continue. Sometimes we had to sit in the cafeteria and main room of the senior centre, with other people sitting or walking nearby. It should be noted, however, that informants chose the alternative places of interview themselves in relation to where it was possible to sit down in the senior centre, and they all seemed to be okay with that.

4.2.6 The interview relation

In an interview situation, the relationship that is established goes a long way to determine the kind of information that the researcher is able to lay hands on. The researcher might acquire untrue or true information based on how he/she is seen by the interviewee (Hesselberg 2013). This can for instance happen if the researcher creates a negative impression by dressing in a certain way or behaving in a way that makes the informant give information which sounds culturally acceptable but is not a true reflection of the reality. During my interviews, I adopted an approach whereby I appeared in the context of the situation of the interviewee. I wore casual clothes when I went to the senior centre to interview informants. I wanted to be approachable, polite and careful, harmless

and trustworthy.

Before starting each interview, I explained the theme of my research and assured the interviewees about the use of audio recording device to record what would be said. The informants were informed about their right to opt out of the interview at any time or they could choose not to answer questions. I constantly employed the technique of using "ice-breakers" to help establish a more relaxed atmosphere for the informants. I started the interviews by enquiring from my informants their daily routines and experiences at the senior centre, how they see the care they receive at the centres and things they do for fun in their daily lives. I then started by asking them general questions about their life, upbringing, work and family, to establish a contact between us. This is to enable me to get more detail information from my informants. According to Dunn (2010), information obtained through an interview is likely to be more insightful if the interviewer and interviewee are at ease with each other. I used cues to encourage my informants to talk at length. This helped to maintain rapport throughout the interviews.

At the end of each interview, I asked whether there was any additional information they would like to add, but the response was always positive to what had already been said and they did not have more to say. I asked them if they wanted my contact information to enable them to contact me for clarification or feedback or anything, like transcription of the interview or even withdraw, but they were all okay.

4.2.7 Question ordering

An interview guide is designed to contain primary and secondary questions. The primary questions are used to initiate the interviews whereas the secondary questions are used to encourage the informants to expand on issues they talk about. They serve as prompts (Dunn 2010). The ordering of questions is equally important to consider in order to preserving rapport of the interview situation. Various options exist for ordering questions for interviews. My interview guide had the pyramid structure of ordering. It began with simple, easy-to- answer questions and later graduated to generalized questions which demanded deeper reflections from the informant. This was allowing the informants to get accustomed to the interview, while at the same time limiting the need for deeper reflection or thinking at the initial stage of the interview, thereby maintaining rapport. I asked the general questions which required greater reflection on thoughts at

the later part of my interviews. My interview guide was a combination of primary and secondary questions (see appendix).

4.2.8 Recording the interviews

Every time before I began any of my interviews, I asked the permission of the interviewee to record our conversation. The recording was done with a combination of the techniques of audio recording and short notetaking. I decided to employ the two techniques to fill the gap of each other's limitations. Even though audio recording captured fully the verbal data, I find it beneficial to also be able to take notes in case something happens. During one interview, technical failure of the audio recorder occurred. In this situation it was good to have another alternative form of recording.

4.2.9 Ethical considerations

Research takes place in a society with social norms and structures, and the presentation of the research can affect the society that has been studied (Dowling 2010). Ethics is therefore important in a research process. Ethics can be defined as the responsibility for and obligations to the people involved in the research process, especially the informants. The researcher has to take into considerations ethical concerns and principles when conducting a study. Ethical issues which are usually addressed in research revolve around privacy, confidentiality, informed consent, deception and harm (Matthews, & Ross, 2010). In the following, I will bring out how I dealt with ethical issues that I encountered in the process of my study.

4.2.10 Informed Consent

Consent should be informed, and freely given (Matthews, & Ross, 2010). It is therefore important that the informants will not be forced to partaking in the research work by physical, moral or intellectual means. Before the interviews started, I had a five-minute long presentation in the main room of the senior centre to seek consent before starting interviews. I introduced myself and explained clearly the purpose of my research to all present in the room; director, employees,

volunteers and informants, with the intention of avoiding any issue of doubt on the part of the informant in terms of parting with their knowledge and experiences, which is the bedrock of my study. I also informed them about what was expected of the informants, the intended purpose of the information they would give, the time for which the interview would last and that the decision to give out information for my study was based on "freewill". Copies of the information letter and application letter were given out after my speech and informants consent was sought before the recording of any interview. All my participants willingly agreed to be part of my research; no one was coerced to join in the study. I reminded informants throughout the research that they could choose to opt out of the study if they wanted to or decline to answer questions they saw as personal and private.

4.2.11 Privacy and confidentiality

Qualitative researchers face many ethical issues that surface during data collection in the field and in analysis and dissemination of qualitative reports (Creswell, 2007). It is therefore researcher's responsibility to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the information gathered. As a researcher you have to avoid any form of abuse of the information gathered or use it for any other purpose than this study. In doing a qualitative study, some of the informants might prefer their experiences and opinions to be kept private. To make sure I kept the information given by the respondents safe, I immediately deleted the voice-recordings from the voice-recorder after transferring the interviews to my private laptop. The reason why I chose to transfer these data to my private laptop was because I saw this option as the safest, instead of transferring it to a stationary computer at my university. In this way I would always have control over the data. With the help from an IT employee at the University, I created an encrypted folder and put all the eight voice-recorded interviews in this folder with a password. For a backup, I also copied the encrypted folder into an USB stick.

4.2.12 Protection of informants from harm

According to Bryman (2012), qualitative research, one way or the other, has the potential to cause harm to the informants. Though it is very difficult to determine whether a question might

pose some sort of harm to the informant, it is important to make the informants feel safe and comfortable in the interview setting. As my questions had the risk of provoking different emotions related to memories the informants could have, I was very careful and thoughtful during the interview so that I did not bring up any issues which could get the informants emotional and cause any form of psychological harm. As for my experience, I had the impression that it was not difficult or threatening for them to share the type of information I asked, and the informants were very open to talk and shared their thoughts and experiences. I did not go further into personal information which was not relevant to my questions and I repeatedly reminded them of the privacy they had, to decide not to respond to questions they did not want to or felt uncomfortable.

4.3 Limitations of the study

Only older adults 60 years and above were included in the study, though some adults may be below 60 years and might have been a very reliable sources of information about how aging influences meanings in life. Additionally, the study failed to include some key informants like the managers of the senior centres, family members and caretakers of the informants sampled for this study. Inclusion on these key informants could have brought out more information about the meaning in life or the perceptions and experiences of life as one ages. The scope of the study is another limitation. A study of this nature should have been a longitudinal study with the scope expanded to cover larger sections of the population. Thus, the scope of generalization is limited, since it is impossible to know for certain how representative the opinions of the respondents are for the wider Norwegian community. A much larger study will, therefore, be needed to investigate to which degree the findings in this study can really be generalized to the broader Norwegian society.

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented and discussed the various methodological choices, methods and techniques I used to collect data for my study. Using qualitative method was best suited for me as it offered the benefit of flexibility in the interaction and deeper understanding of each person as I searched for answers to the objectives of my research. The research design explained the choice

of my sampling group and the techniques and methods of sampling. The chapter also looked at how preparations were made to accommodate the fieldwork.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the data collected from the field work by the researcher. My data was collected through in-depth interviews with the users of a senior centre in Oslo. The *ratio decidendi* is to seek answers to the research question of this study, presented in the introduction chapter (i.e. What are the thoughts and experiences of older adults on aging, time horizon and meaning in life?). The chapter is divided into three sub-headings based on the research questions. This are; perceptions of time horizon, ways of life, and the meaning of life within a time horizon.

5.1 Background of informants

My informants are from varied background: males and females, above 60 years, living alone or with family, married or divorced with or without children, widowed, not in nursing homes, mainly Norwegian born, with experiences from varied degrees of occupations and educational qualifications (from High School Diploma to Masters' Degree), chronically ill or partially paralysed. At the time of the interview, almost all the informants I interviewed were out of work, because of retirement, health issues or early retirement. All of the informants lived in Oslo. Most of them relocated from small towns or other cities to Oslo after retirement or few years before retirement/ out of work.

5.2 Future time perspectives

People may shift their goals depending on a person's time horizon rather than age. According to Lang and Carstensen (2002), regardless of age, an open-ended future time perspective was linked to a higher proportion of autonomy or identity goals whereas a more limited time perspective predicted a higher proportion of generativity-related goals. The socioemotional selectivity theory (SST) points out that as a person's time horizon changes, one goal may be

prioritized over the others to meet developmental demands (Chu, Gruhn & Holland, 2018). Young people may prioritize knowledge-seeking goals by spending more time with new contacts and learning new knowledge because these goals usually optimize the future. In older adults, people tend to attach greater importance to emotional well-being by narrowing their social network to emotionally meaningful partners. Adults prefer socially close partners and have fewer peripheral contacts (Fung, Carstensen & Lang, 2001).

My interviews indicated that people have different perceptions about the time horizon. Some people who are above 70 or 75 years have the feeling that there is more time left and hence they still have the chance to achieve what they planned to achieve in future. In one interview, Frederik[1], a 71-year-old man, likened himself to the Colonel Sanders who established KFC after retirement from the army. He said:

> *"...Look at Colonel Sanders. This man was able to establish KFC after his retirement. He used his retirement benefits to start a small table shop where he sold fried chicken. KFC has now grown to become a global fast-food chain. That is what I am talking about! If you still can breathe, why think about that the time left for you is short because people die around that age? You still can do something to change the world, and you still can achieve your dreams. I do not, and will never, see myself as having a very short time left on earth and hence, I have to limit myself to certain things or be preparing for my departure from earth."*

Some of my informants also indicated that they have been very worried that they are running out of time as they age. Some indicated that they started counting down after they were retired. They have to make a bucket-list to be able to achieve certain things they have planned to achieve in life. To them, time is a very important factor in a person's life.

"For me, I have started counting down immediately I have had my retirement. I have seen family and friends dying and as such I have come to the realisation that I am not immortal. I will also die one day, which is soon. If I look at the ages of my family and friends that have died, it tells me that I have very limited time left to live. As such, I have created a bucket list to be able to, at least, achieve certain goals before I die."

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[1] Names used in the research are pseudonyms to make respondents anonymous

It can be realised from the interviews that the subject about time is very subjective. Some people see themselves as not time-bound, others see themselves as time bound, whiles another group found themselves in the middle. They, *"…did not have a choice, because I know God determines that and whatever God says is what mankind has to follow."*: said 90 years old Ole. One interesting revelation was that the cultural orientations and the religious belief of a person has an impact on the way they perceive time horizons. In my study, the indication was that people who are more religious tend to perceive time horizons as very short. For them, they believe that even if they do not die from natural causes, the world was going to end soon. As such time on earth is very short. Similarly, people who have cultural beliefs rooted in the other cultures than the European cultures also seem to be very much of the view that time horizon for a person was very short. They believe that, *"...though man has the freedom to do everything they want on earth, God decides. As such we cannot say that we have so much time left to live on earth. Even infants die, so are the youths and adults. It is not only the older adults that die. It is, therefore, important for us to see time as short no matter the age of a person"*, Lise, 69, highlighted.

> *"In my culture, time horizon is categorised as the stages of life. One has to go through all the stages, and we even attach names to the stages of life of a person. So, we are very much aware of time horizons as we age. Every stage of the horizon has an age category. So if one is not able to achieve what is expected of him at a certain stage, for example marry by 30 or 35 years, the person is seen as has missed out on a stage in the time horizon. In such a case, the person may see his time horizons as shorter, and vice versa."*

Lam, 68,

Some of the informants indicated that where a person finds himself or herself, may also contribute to the way they perceive the time horizon. For example, Sigrun, 77, indicated that: *"I am lucky to be born in Norway and also grew-up in Norway. As such we have a longer life expectancy rate. Imagine if I was to be born and raised in a developing country, I may not be able to live up to this age. The environment and the support systems that we have in Norway is quite different than some developing countries. As such, a person growing up in a developing country may try to achieve a lot within the shortest possible time, because of the life expectancy."*

During my interviews with the users at the senior centre, I realised that most of the people I interviewed had generativity-related goals. Most of them indicated that they thought they had a lot of time when they were younger and as such did things in a more specific manner and, as one man indicated, *"I did one thing at a time"*. As such they had a feeling that they did not use their years well and did not do enough during their youthful days. Therefore, they are now burdened with a lot of general goals that they would like to achieve in life before they pass on to eternity.

"I have so many things on my bucket list. When I was a bit younger, I suffered from a number of health issues, which prevented me from being active in planning my future and how I wanted to live life before I die. I was able to get the treatment for my condition and got better few years ago. However, though I am a bit okay now, I am on retirement. I actually wanted to work more, but my workplace did not let me continue. As such I feel not self-actualized yet. I still have so much I want to do for myself."

- Ingeborg, 69

Almost all the informants interviewed for this study indicated that they have narrowed their social networks and focused mainly on their emotional well-being. *"We are not working anymore or looking for jobs. We are on retirement, so we don't need such large networks as people who are still active may do",* has been the response of most of the informants when I asked a question about their social networks and connections.

"I am not on any social media. Since I stopped working, I have stopped contacting most of my friends I worked with. They are working so they don't get time for me, because we have different schedules now. I live alone. The only place I go to meet people to talk to, as friends, is this senior centre. When you grow old, you become a bit isolated from society."

- Tore, 70

"I have been struggling with depression and stress. As such, I have issues being with people. So, I have to cut myself from friends and family. At the moment, I live alone and only come to this senior centre for my emotional well-being. I feel more relaxed coming here to have some time with other users."

- Signe, 67

"The senior centre means a lot to me. Because of my disabilities and illness, I have been confined in the home for some years now. As such, I have very limited social contacts. I come to the senior centre because they are my social contacts. I have no aim of making new friends or expanding my

social contact, because I have no use for it. I rather focus my attention on my emotional well-being rather than focusing on social networks."

- Roy, 62

"I only contact my family, and some few friends who give me emotional support when I need it. I have reduced my social networks since retirement."

- Frederik, 71

Though informants had very general goals they want to achieve in life as they age, prioritizing of these goals has been seen as very common amongst them. They are very much aware that they may not be able to achieve all the goals they have envisaged, given the time horizon, resources, health and emotional conditions.

"I have many plans that I want to execute before I die. But I don't think I can be able to achieve all. I have to put some goals over the other. For example, I was planning to renovate my house and give it an upgrade, then change my car afterwards. However, I have to prioritize buying a car first, because I need the car for my daily movements since I cannot walk normally, as I used to."

- Anders, 68

"For me, I have prioritised my emotional well-being and health over all other things. I have so many plans initially, but as you can see now, I am not very well and as such need to invest more of my energy and resources to keep myself active and alive. So, all other plans are put on hold now. My health and emotional well-being first."

- Gudrun, 88

In summary, older people have generalized goals because of the limited time horizon. However, they turn to prioritize some goals over the other. Besides, their social networks dwindle and much of their focus changes from reaching self-actualisation or reaching set goals to emotional well-being.

5.3 Quality of life in old age

According to the National Report on Aging (2016), health, family and friends are the most important factors for a meaningful life. When people get old, they are more concerned about their lifestyles because they are more susceptible to ill health. Most older adults tend to choose health as their foremost priority.

"I have been a lucky one. At my age (69 years) I am still able to swim five hundred metres daily. Initially, I did not care about my health or how I want to be like when I get old. It all happened when I was 50 years. I developed high blood pressure as a result of excessive smoking and drinking. I was told I have a short lifespan if I continue my habits. This struck me very hard, because I think I have not achieved much in life to die at that age. That was when I decided to give priority to my health."

- Lise, 69

"I have always been scared to die. I have never been on a diet. However, I have to resort to dieting and exercising daily, because I know it is very important for me if I have to continue to live in good health."

- Hans, 75

Family patterns have been seen as changing, with more older people being divorced, remarried or living alone. Most of the informants I interviewed for this study revealed that they had families and friends, but they chose to live independent lives because they were *"more at peace with themselves and the world when they are alone."* The transformation of society has led to situations whereby caring for the elderly by the family members is becoming a thing of the past. Older adults have to be able to care for themselves or employ the services of a homecare service. *"I have children and grandchildren. I have brothers and sisters and cousins. However, I live alone. I have to do almost everything for myself. I am divorced and did not marry again. Society has changed and we, the elderly of today, are missing the love and care from family members."*

- Ole, 90

Though family and friends are seen as very important to a meaningful lifestyle, the indication from my study is that the elderly are continually becoming isolated. As summarized by 83 years old "Ester" from Kolbotn, *"I don't remember the last time I saw my family. My children only call me on the phone once a while to check on me. I have not had a visit from any of my children or family members in the past 4 years",* is an indication of the growing levels of isolation the elderly is caught in.

However, some of the people I interviewed also indicated that they still have very good relationships with their families and friends. That said, they chose to live alone so as not to be a burden on already burdened and busy members of their families.

"I have very good friends and family members who, apart from making my life emotionally

meaningful, also make me feel positive in life and I know that someone is always there when I need to talk. However, I chose to be alone so not to burden them with more stress than they can handle."

- Nils, 81

In recent years, epidemiological research on lifestyle factors that may promote and maintain cognitive function has increased tremendously (Stordal et al. 2012). One of the key areas which have been suggested as promising, is active social engagement. A participant shared his thoughts on what was important to him:

"I have some thoughts about having to get yourself busy with something. You can't just rot away in a chair because you've become a pensioner. I think it's social by going to, for example the senior centre, and doing some volunteer work. In doing this, at the same time I feel that I'm contributing with something and I see people appreciate it. That, I also think is definitely a value. I have led a pension association a few years since I became a pensioner. This is not volunteer work, but in a way, it is a bit the same. You do get to gather people for socializing and cultivate old colleagues and friendships and things like that."

- Kristian, 71

Travelling and experiencing the world or involving in some activity was also seen as one form of socialization for some of the informants.

"I travel a lot to experience the world. I have been to most countries in Europe and the US. For me, meeting and experiencing new people is a way of life and a very good way to socialize."

- Sigrun, 77

For her the socialization by travelling was meaningful for her to engage with others.

Volunteer work is another aspect of social engagement. After retirement, people often need something to do that feels meaningful to them. One interesting finding from the senior centre was that the centre was actually managed by volunteers who also were users of the centre.

"We all help in managing the centre. This is like our home, so we all help in keeping it safe and sound for all users. We are not paid for that. We do it as a volunteering work and as a form of socializing with each other. It is also a form of contributing to the society after active work life."

- Lars, 68

In general, older people in Norway have good living conditions with a safe material and financial situation. Among the lowest-income pensioners only ten per cent report financial difficulties (National Report on Ageing 2016). All of the participants I interviewed revealed that

having enough money in life was important. Some of the participants also had an extra good pension, which gave them a lot of economic freedom. One informant said,

"I receive full pension. I have money in the bank, in addition to being debt free and having a good pension."

<div align="right">

- Sigrun, 77

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In short, the quality older people attach to life is very subjective. However, most older people place more emphasis on health as a priority because of their susceptibility to ill health. They try to engage in all sorts of activities as a way of keeping themselves active and to keep contributing their quota to the development of the society.

5.4 Time horizon and meaning in life

Based on the interviews with the informants, when the future becomes uncertain, there is a shift from an investment to consumption orientation. Almost all the informants for the study indicated that they have particular goals or actions they planned to execute. However, because of the uncertain future (i.e. not experiencing the expected outcomes), they rather use their resources to satisfy their immediate gratifications.

"I don't know when I will die. If I have to invest now into a business, when will I enjoy the profits?"

<div align="right">

- Jorunn, 72

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"I am planning to use much of my savings to travel the world. I haven't been to South America so that would be my first destination. I have a bucket list of countries that I would like to visit before I die. I do not have to invest my money into anything now. I have to just enjoy my savings before I die."

<div align="right">

- Ingeborg, 69

</div>

"My wife and I have planned to use our retirement money to travel around the world, now that we have time and the health to do it."

<div align="right">

- Fredrik, 71

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In the interviews with informants for the study, they revealed that as the time horizon grows shorter, future-oriented goals for long-term becomes less important. Most of them were of the view that the present-oriented goals related to their emotional meaning and well-being is a priority.

"Why should I invest? For me, I think if you are not able to finish your investments before your

retirement age, you should stop. Rather, you have to focus on your well-being and emotional meanings in life. That should be a priority"

- Kirsti, 73

"When I was younger, I was very ambitious about my career. Status was very important for me. However, as I grew older, I came to the realisation that status is not any longer important to me."

- Ingeborg, 69

Based on the interviews, as people grow older and have a shorter time horizon, they fail to seek new knowledge and experiences. My informants indicated that they wish they could have done more when they were younger to reach the point of self-actualization. However, they have decided to embrace life as it is now because they could not go back to correct their mistakes.

"I have always wished to be a lawyer when I was young. I invested my time rather in doing other things, thinking I can still become a lawyer when I get older. But I could not. I cannot go back to school now. At my age, when will I finish the law education, become certified to practice and get the experiences needed to practice as a full-fledged lawyer?"

- Kristian, 71

"At my age, I can still study to become a lawyer or even a judge. However, most firms or agencies would not like to hire my services. They would rather prefer the younger ones for contracts. As such I see no need for development of new knowledge."

- Roar, 61

"I used my days reading the news and story books. I don't see any need for me to study for new knowledge. I am on retirement and as such studying to acquire new knowledge doesn't help me or the society in any way."

- Nils, 81

It was interesting to discover that people tend to orient themselves towards the regulation of their emotions rather than the acquisition of further knowledge when they grow older. They focus on books that gives them the emotional satisfaction and help them to be at peace with the world.

"I have been focusing these days on reading books a lot. However, the books I read are not for the acquisition of new knowledge, because I may not have any use for it. I have been focusing on religious books and other books that gives me the emotional comfort that I need to be with in these later days of my life."

Throughout my interviews, the informants indicated that they have a bucket list of goal preferences for life. However, they indicated that due to their "short time left to live" they may not be able to achieve these goals. *"My bucket list may not be achieved before I die",* has been a common response from the informants when I asked about their bucket list.

My study also revealed that people viewed themselves as "not have done much" for themselves and the society. As Ingeborg said, *"If I had a longer time horizon, I think I would have contributed more to my society, family life and social network."* Similar sentiments were expressed by Kristian. According to him, *"...most part of my life has been with working offshore and spending little time with my family and friends. My community actually did not have a feel of me. Now, I feel I did not do enough for myself and my family as well as my community. Unfortunately, I cannot go back and change it."*

Almost all the informants indicated that they have been investing their free time to the transfer of their knowledge and skills to the younger generation and taking up activities in the community in a bid to contribute whatever they can to the development of their communities.
"I have been helping in the teaching of Norwegian and German languages in my community voluntarily. It is way of saying thank you to the community that brought me to where I am today."
- Signe, 67

During my study, one interesting revelation was that as people get older and see themselves as having a shorter time horizon, they preferred to live independent lives.
"At my age, I just want to live a peaceful and independent life. I have children and grandchildren, but I only want them to visit me occasionally."

- Ole, 90

"Living alone at this age is the best thing. You have your peace of mind, no responsibilities or commitments. I feel free."

- Kirsti, 73

However, some people also indicated that they preferred to live with close family and friends, but they have settled on living independently because of the social structure in which they found themselves.
"...for me, I have always loved to be with my family. Every weekend, I bring my grandchildren to my house to enjoy their presence and play with them. Being with them gives me so much happiness

and fulfilment."

- Roar, 61

"I had a big house in the countryside. I had to sell it to buy an apartment in the city when I realized that my daughter needed me to be closer to her. So, I bought an apartment only 3 minutes away from her. In that case, I can take care of her children, my grandchildren."

- Bjørg, 70

More than half of the informants revealed that after retirement, they had to sell their houses and big apartments and rather buy smaller ones. To them, they have no kids to raise again and living in bigger apartments or houses was not practical for them. Though they have finished the payment of the mortgage loans on the residences, they found it expensive to maintain and even "boring" and "tiring" to live in.

"I have sold my 4-bedroom house and rather bought a 1-bedroom apartment. All my children are working and have apartments on their own. I am divorced and living alone in such a huge apartment was just too expensive and boring for me."

- Nils, 81

"I had a 3-bedroom house. I have only one child. He is all grown and has his own businesses. He has 2 apartments on his own. We used to live together, and at that time, having a 3-bedroom house was very convenient for us. For now, I live alone. Having that 3-bedroom house was too big for a single person. I therefore bought a 1-bedroom apartment in the neighbourhood and moved in. That fits my needs. I used the money from the sale of the house to travel the world rather."

- Hans, 75

Regrets has identified as something almost all the informants had. Most of the informants indicated that they took chances when they were younger and did not focus on very concrete goals. However, as they realized that they were having a shorter time horizon, they tried to focus on more concrete goals. Because they might have executed their plans at a very late stage, they were not able to realize or achieve the goals they planned.

"When I came to Norway, I didn't know how things work. People told me to buy a house, invest in a business, and other things for my future. I did not do that. As I grew older, people started to ask me (and I also asked myself), why didn't you by a house, why didn't you do this or that. I realised that they were right when they advised me to buy a house or invest when I was younger. I made many mistakes in life and now I regret all. Today, I cannot go back and correct. I see I could have

done things differently in my life earlier."

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- Roy, 62

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Interestingly, almost all the informants indicated that taking up activities is very essential when one has a short time horizon. In the view of many, life expectancy is increasing and as such people who initially thought they had very few years to live after retirement end up living for even more than 20 years. As such it is very essential to take up activities.

"It is very important that people get occupied with something as pensioners. In these days, we become pensioners for a very long time. We are pushed out of work life way too early. We live longer now, and not being occupied with some activities, because one feels he or she has a shorter time horizon, may be very boring. It is very important that you live a good life and experience something new. I always like to meet new people, experience different cultures and so on."

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- Fredrik, 71

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About half of the informants for this study indicated that they have become more "religious, spiritual and closer to God or their maker" as they grow older. They were of the view that having a shorter time left on earth is a reminder for one to become at peace with his "maker" and prepare for the next world. As such, one way of doing that is to become closer to religion or becoming spiritual.

"I have never been to church after the age of 14 when I had my confirmation. I always knew I will have a time like this when I am old so that I can make peace with my maker and prepare to meet him in the next world. Now, I go to church and participate in Bible classes frequently. I pray every night, telling God to forgive my sins and grant me entry into his kingdom when I die."

<div align="right">

- Marianne, 96

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"Religion means a lot to me. It's very important for me to believe in Jesus Christ as my saviour and what he has done for me. For that I am grateful and thankful. I try to thank him, at least once a day, or the times I come home and are still awake. When I am too tired, I say goodnight God, we shall talk in the morning. I feel that I am at peace with God and that is the most important for me in these later years of life."

<div align="right">

- Signe, 67

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"For me, when I retired, I became very sick. I had the chance to travel to Asia. That was when I found the need to get a bit religious. I visited a shrine where the priest said some prayers for me. I got my healing through that. From that time, I became more religious and performed all the

religious ceremonies that I believed in. I think getting closer to God is a source of healing and also it gives peace to the mind and soul.''

- Ingeborg, 69

Throughout the whole study, informants seem not to care about the "material world" any longer. For them, being old is a chance for a reflection upon the life one has lived. "Booz and bling" is now a thing of the past for them. They would rather invest their time and resources on recreational activities and for relaxation and self-reflection.

"I have been one of the people who always want to buy any new or 'latest' item in town. I was very obsessed with collecting material stuff. I even travelled to Paris to buy things for myself and my family. But now, I don't have that interest any longer. If I see people doing this, I wish they would understand how unimportant that really is.''

- Kristian, 71

"I have sold or given away all my jewelleries. I used to have my wardrobe filed with top designers across the globe. As I grew older, I did not see any use for those items. I sold some and gave the money to charity. Now, I live a very simple life and I am happy with a that.''

- Sigrun, 77

"After I turned 70, my life has been very simple. I mainly focus on recreational activities and volunteering at organisations to keep myself active and useful to the society. I have detached myself from material stuff, even before I went on retirement. When you are a bit younger, you fancy those stuff. But, as you grow older, the interest fades away.''

- Nils, 81

5.5 Chapter Summary

In summary, the meaning people attach to life when they grow older is very subjective. However, one can see a pattern which transcends the various meanings older people attach to life; they care more about their emotional well-being, they become more detached from the "material world", they may maintain stronger family ties, or become increasingly isolated from the rest of the population. This hints that, *ceteris paribus,* aging and time horizon has a connection to the meanings one attaches to life.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

6.0 Introduction

This chapter synthesizes the findings presented in chapter five and the literature review and theoretical frameworks of the study. The chapter is divided into three sections: the subjective time horizon, the meanings in life of older adults and the connection between the subjective time horizon and meaning in life.

6.1 The subjective time horizon

My study indicated that time horizon is very subjective and, in some cases, personal. The perceptions people have about the time horizon may be influenced by several factors, from personal to environmental to culture to religion, health and even to attainments or achievements in life. A person who has been able to, for example, achieve so much in life before retirement, may see himself to be having a longer time horizon before they depart the earth. On the other hand, a person who has not been able to achieve much before hitting the retirement age sees himself/ herself to have so much left to achieve before departing the earth. In such a case the person may count the number of years left (the time horizon) as very short. The same can be said about a person who has been struck to the bed with a disability. On the other hand, a person who sees himself/ herself to be very fit and strong would perceive himself as having a longer time horizon.

My study supports the findings made by Levine (1997) on the treatment of time. Levine was of the view that time is ubiquitous in all known cultures and people. This is similar to my findings in this study. However, my study also made some other important discovery; cultures may influence the way in which people perceive and interpret time horizon. Cultures which are not European, tend to be more aware of the time horizon and have very distinct way in their treatment of time. They treat time horizon as the way people have to live their lives during a lifetime. In those cultures, time horizon is categorized as when one is a child, when one enters puberty, when one has to get married and start a family, when one has to become grandparents and when one has

to retire and be taken care off by the children and grandchildren. They turn to attach certain names and titles to the stages of life (time horizon), as such people in these cultures are very much aware of the time horizon. This is likely to influence their actions and activities. Missing out or delaying in one stage of the time horizon means that they have very little time left to achieve those pursuits they have in life. For example, when a woman fails to have children by the age of 30, though they are aware that the woman can still have children after that age, they see it as the time horizon of the woman has shrank significantly, compared to a woman who had children at the age of 20.

Another important discovery in my study was that religiously, people also turn to perceive time horizon in a very different way. In some religions, the time horizon is very short. To them, it does not matter whether a person dies naturally or not. In their view, the time horizon that mankind has on earth is short because the world may soon come to an end. To some of them, no one can be able to say that "I have a long-time horizon or a short time horizon", because in their opinion, God gives and takes life. Having a long life and hence a longer time horizon is based on a person's good deeds and closeness to God.

My study also indicated that environmental factors can also be seen as an influencing factor to how people perceive time horizons, as longer or shorter. As realized in the study, most informants for the study indicated that they have longer lives, and hence longer time horizon because of they were born and live in Norway. A person who lives in an environment where life expectancy is expected to be low is likely to perceive the time horizon to be short. On the contrary, a person who lives in an environment where life expectancy is high, ceteris paribus, is likely to perceive the time horizon to be long.

Findings of my also study supports the stand taken by Priestly (1968). He was of the view that the duration of time can be fast, slow or any point in between and varies based on situations and conditions. In my study, the indication was that older adults who have a long list on their bucket list sees their time horizon to be shorter and limited. On the other hand, people who do not have much or nothing on their bucket list sees their time horizon to be longer.

As Carstensen et al. (1999), in their definition of the socioemotional selectivity theory indicated, as people move through life, they become increasingly aware that time is in some sense "running out". It should be noted from my study that, though people become aware that time is running out at certain points in life, it is purely subjective to the individual who defines the time. To some people, time is not "running out", because they have "achieved" their goals and objectives

in life and are ready to depart the earth, but they are still alive. To others, every single minute that passes is a reminder of the popular saying that "time and tide waits for no man".

6.2 Meanings in life of older adults

My study agrees with the socioemotional selectivity theory that people with limited time horizon tend to present oriented, focusing on their experience and seeking satisfaction in the moment (Carstensen, Isaaconwitz, and Charles, 1999). In fact, this has been one of the most talked about feature of the older adults during my study. Older adults turn to shift from an investment to consumption. According to Carstensen el. at., this happens because of a greater uncertainty about the future. Similar perceptions of uncertainty about the future were displayed by my informants. They were not sure whether their investments today would be enjoyed before they depart the earth. As such, there is a significant decline in investment activities by them. They spend most of their time and resources in immediate need gratification and clearing their bucket list before they die. In my study, I discovered a new pattern of investment by the older adults who wanted to invest. They channel their investments into very quick returns business. Long term investments become very much unattractive to them.

My study of older adults in Norway supports the theme of the theory of psychosocial development. The theory indicated that four goals emerge during adulthood. These goals are: identity goals, intimacy goals, generativity goals and ego-integrity goals. Ego-integrity goals involves motives of seeking inner peace and looking positively at one's life. Findings from my study indicated that in later stages in life, people turn to seek more of ego-integrity goals. Besides, my study also made an interesting revelation about knowledge acquisition of older adults. Older adults do not want to seek to acquire new knowledge of any kind. They may rather develop the knowledge they have or focus on transmission of the knowledge to the younger generation. They turn to fucus their attention towards the regulation of their emotions through the adoption of new hobbies and activities that put them at peace with themselves and their environment. For them meaning of life at the elderly ages means that one having an inner peace with himself and the environment in which they find themselves. This findings in my study confirms the findings of Erikson (1963). According to Erikson, at this stage of the psychosocial development of an individual the focus is on reflecting back in life. According to Erikson, at this point in the

development of people, they look back on the events of their lives and determine if they are happy with the life that they lived or if they regret the things they did or did not do.

My study also confirms and throws more light on the study caried out by Malone et. al. (2016), on the meaning of life as older adults. My study indicated that people who feel that they have limited time horizon, reflect on their lives and become a "generative material" or a "stagnation block" in the society. This means that at this stage, older adults look to either transfer their experiences and expertise to the younger generation. This is characterised by people who have lived meaningful lives becoming involved in community activities that aim at impacting the community or the younger population. Those who are successful in this stage will feel that they are contributing to the world by being active in their home and community (Malone Liu, Vaillant, Rentz, Waldinger, 2016).

In the view of Erikson (1963), when people become older adults, they are faced with the issue of intimacy and isolation. Similar results were also were seen in my study. Most of the people interviewed for this study indicated that they either lived alone, because of the death of a partner, or divorce or by choice. One would have thought that being old means one has so much needs that one has to be helped in doing. Why then do they decide to live alone? It is very surprising that modernization has changed the culture of many societies to the extent that care for the elderly has shifted from family roles to being a "business" paid for by the family or government for other people to take care of the elderly for money. It indicates that the meaning of life to many people, as they might envisage it, is that of loneliness and little or no intimacy from love ones. The end results may be that, despite the increase in the life expectancy as a result of improved medical care, people may wish not to live longer to ages where they may become lonely and not get the care and affection from the loved ones of their lives.

Add to this is that, my study showed that as people grow older, their social connections narrow the more. As people retire from work, they lose most of their friend networks because they may not have retired the same time as their friends, and because they may have different schedules which does not allow them to fit into the daily routines of the working populations. As such, meaning of life to them means, fewer and fewer social connections of family and friends. They end up having just connected to close family and friends. This has the tendency to increase the levels of isolations and loneliness they experience. This findings from my study is in line with conclusions made by Tornstam (1997). He concluded that in social interaction, people may feel

that they can afford a greater measure of authenticity and nonconformism when possible negative consequences for their personal future are no longer of great concern; older people in fact often report that they feel increasingly less dependent on the expectations and opinions of other people. In the view of older adults who are religious, meaning of life at after retirement is getting closer to one's maker and preparing for the next world. Here again, my study confirms the findings of Coleman (2010), who indicated that religious beliefs and spirituality become increasingly salient at the later stages in one's life. This was also noted by studies by Dvie and Vicent (1998) and also Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick (1986). In my study, according to older adults, meaning of life in the later stages of life is an opportunity to reinforce the psychological process of integration and an effective thread in the integrative process at old age.

6.3 Connection between subjective time horizon and meaning in life

The connection between the subjective time horizon and meaning in life can be seen under five life domains. These include financial planning, health planning, social planning and leisure planning. In the planning of the future of most people rate financial planning as the penultimate of the ultimate. Retirement goal clarity and perceived financial knowledge of the future is one of the most sought-after information by people as they grow older. In Norway, though there is a very well-established pension and retirement policy and regulations, it can be realized that most people invest their time well during the working years to accumulate more in pension contributions. This is to enable them to afford a good living standard even after they retire from active labour force. However, as people get older and retire, most of them do not engage in any form of economic activity or jobs for salary. This was revealed by some of my informants as "not of need because the pension is enough to sustain a person until he dies" My study is consistent with the conclusions drawn Jacobs-Lawson and Hershey (2005) on a 3-way interaction between financial knowledge, future time perspectives and risk tolerance that predicted financial savings accuracy. In my study, it was realized that the older adults did not take financial risks because of the perceived time horizon that they have.

Subjective time horizon also has an impact on the health planning of older adults. According to a study by Mahon and Yarheski (1994), in general, individuals who are future oriented (in this case individuals who perceive themselves to have a longer time horizon) are more

likely to take preventive health measures and live healthier lifestyles, relative to individuals who are present oriented. This findings by Mahon and Yarheski is very consistent with my findings in this study. In my study, older adults who perceived themselves to have a longer time horizon were being conscious of their nutrition, they had adequate relaxation time, took safety precautions and avoided substance abuse. The implication of this findings is that healthy lifestyles of people can be attributed to their perceptions about the time horizons. People who see themselves as going to have a longer life try their best to get a longer life through healthy lifestyles.

The social relations of older people are very much determined by their subjective time horizon. As people grow older, their social network and connections shrink. People turn to lose partners and love ones as their time horizon become longer and longer, than their partners and love ones. As such satisfaction and sexual satisfaction dwindles, especially for women, because they have a higher life expectancy rate than men. This has been one of the concerns highlighted by most of the informants for my study. In a study by Waite and Joyner (2001), they found out that a long-time horizon was related to both social and sexual satisfaction in relationships, particularly for women. It, therefore, means that when both couples have a longer time perspective, they turn to have good social relationships and vice versa.

My study also confirms and agrees with studies by Zlatan (1996), and earlier by Philip (1992), who found out that when people get older, where they perceive their time horizon to become shorter, they end up switching from investment to consumption, in this case consumption on leisure. Older adults turn to have a greater leisure activity compared to younger people. They have long bucket list of leisure activities that they want to accomplish in life before they depart the earth. It was worth nothing during my study that some older adults have already sold their houses or have plans to sell their houses, move into smaller apartments, so that they can be able to afford vacations throughout various destinations across the globe before the pass on to eternity. Their goals change from personal goals and projects that extend to the future to leisure goals (Brandtstädter, Rothermund, Kranz, and Kuhn, 2010).

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.0 Conclusions

In this thesis, I examined the subjective time horizons and the meanings in life of older adults in Oslo, Norway. I have addressed significant related issues in this study. These encompasses the future time perspectives of older adults, quality of life in old age, the subjective time horizon, meanings in life of older adults, and the connection between subjective time horizon and meaning in life.

The findings from my study suggest that there are variations in time horizons, based on a number of factors including the environment, the culture, health, religious beliefs and even the life expectancy of the population. The findings indicate that people are very much aware that they are mortals and as such time bound on earth. As much as one ages, time is running. However, the findings indicates that the perceptions about whether one has a longer or a shorter time horizon is very subjective. Besides, the meanings an individual attaches to the time horizon are very much subjective. Two 70-year-old men, "A" and "B" may have different perceptions of the length of the time horizon and the meaning of the time horizon. "A" may perceive himself to be having a longer time horizon, but "B" will not. Similarly, "B" may see himself as having more to achieve on his bucket list and has very limited time to achieve what he intends; a case of regret and disappointment.

7.1 Recommendations

Considering the number of older adults in modern years, as a result of the improvement in medical care and practices, I am convinced that studies into the time horizons and meanings in life of older adults can play a vital role in the planning, formulation of policies and the implementation of programmes that will consider the plight of the older adults in society. The study focused on the time horizon and meanings in life of older adults but, however, it was limited to a senior centre in Oslo. The study also did not include the views of the care takers of the senior centres and members of the households or close family and friends of the informants. These are people who the older

adults may communicate with on frequent basis. These people may be having important information about the meanings in life of older adults.

As a suggestion for further research, the scope of the data should be broadened to include more communities and older adults, their close family and friends and also the care takers of the senior centres which they patronize. This result will enable researchers to make more certain generalized statements about time horizon and meanings in life of older adults.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

The questions are set up in an order that is followed unless the interviewee himself or herself follows another order, i.e., answers later questions before they are asked. The interview shall be a conversation. The interview guide is intended as a checklist of the topics that should be included, unless the IO does not want to talk about certain topics. Questions are formulated here but may be asked differently as it comes naturally in the conversation.

1. Can you tell a little about your life, where you were born and raised (big city, small town, village), what you worked with, when you left work, do you have children, grandchildren. Background information: gender and age (or year of birth), financial situation (spacious / problems getting the money to reach).

How is life now? What gives you joys in life? Is there anything that worries you?

How would you rate your health right now? Excellent, very good, good, bad, very bad (do not go into diseases that IO may mention)

 How often are you at the senior centre? What would you say the senior centre means to you?

2. How long is the time horizon?

- How old do you expect to be? (How long do you expect to live?)

- Some say they take one day at a time. How do you think?

- Are you planning for the future? Have you made any plans for tomorrow, the next few days, the next week, the month or the next year?

- Do you have any appointments about things you should do in the future? (travel, visits, celebrations, tasks for others, grandchildren, at the senior centre? A bucket lists?)

- Do you volunteer at the senior centre?

-If you volunteer at the senior centre, do you have plans for how long you will continue with it?

-Is there anything you are looking forward to now, the next few days, weeks, year?

- Is there something that dread you the next few days, weeks, year?

- How do you see the possibility that you may will need (more) help and care?

3. What are important values?

What do you think is important to have a good life? ……………………………

How important do you think:

- Material standard of living is? ……very important / quite important / not very important /

- Good with money?   not important

- Good health?

- Friends and family?

- Social networks and connections?

- Volunteer work (if applicable) or helping others?

Interests / Hobbies

- Faith and religion

- Nature and outdoor life

- Association life (organization / meetings / lectures)

- Education and investments

- Your residence

- Art and culture (exhibition / concert / theatre / ballet / opera)

- Physical training / exercise

- Travels

- Is there anything else that is important to you? ……………

- Do you look differently at what is important in life now, compared to what you thought a few years ago? (while you were at work?, when the children lived at home (if relevant), possibly 10-20 years ago?)

How far back do you think then?

Imagine that…

If you knew you had 20 years left to live, what would you think was most important?

If you knew you had 1 year left to live, what would you think was most important?

If IO answers health, ask if you assume that you will have good health in the future, what would you say is most important (in addition to good health)?

4. Is there a connection between the time horizon and the meaning in life now?

I want, as mentioned, to find out if the time horizon (how long one expects to live) has any connection to (influences) what one think is important in life. Do you have any views on such a possible connection for you?

5. Well-being

How satisfied are you with life right now? (well-being, quality of life) …… Very satisfied, mostly satisfied, dissatisfied/miserable

Is there more you think I should ask, or is there more you want to say, or add?

Thank you so much for showing up!

Thoughts afterwards, contact me by e-mail or tel.

Appendix 2: Registration List

Do you want to participate in an interview about aging, meaning and time horizon?

Tuesday 15th of January

09:00-10:00

10:30-11:30

12:00-13:00

13:30-14:30

15:00-16:00

Wednesday 16th of January

09:00-10:00

10:30-11:30

12:00-13:00

13:30-14:30

15:00-16:00

Thursday 17th of January

09:00-10:00

10:30-11:30

12:00-13:00

13:30-14:30

15:00-16:00

Friday 18th of January

09:00-10:00

10:30-11:30

12:00-13:00

13:30-14:30

15:00-16:00

November 2018

Appendix 3: Information Letter

Do you want to participate in an interview about aging, meaning and time horizon?

My name is Maria Hecimovic and I am a master's student associated with the Welfare Research Institute NOVA at OsloMet - the metropolitan university (formerly Oslo and Akershus University College). Now I am working on my master's thesis which aims to shed light on how users of a senior centre in Oslo experience aging, time horizon and meaning in life.

The purpose of this information letter is to invite informants to my research project. I want to interview people who visit the senior centre, about their lives and what gives meaning and joy to life.

Everything that is said in the interviews is kept confidential. No list of names will be kept that can link you to what you say. I plan to use a sound recorder to make sure I get everything that is said in the interviews. Audio recordings and transcripts from the interview will only be available to me and my supervisor. It is completely voluntary to participate. If you want to be interviewed, you choose what you want to say. If there are questions you do not want to answer, or if you change your mind along the way, it is perfectly fine to withdraw.

I reckon that the interview will take approximately one hour, but this may vary.

When I finish the task by the end of June 2019, I will delete the audio recording and shred the notes. All interviews will be anonymized, and no one will be recognized in the thesis.

If you have anything to ask before you decide if you want to participate, contact me or my supervisor. You can also ask questions in person before you decide if you want to join.

If you change your mind after the interview or want to change something you have said, it is perfectly fine to do so. You can get a copy of the transcribed call if you wish.

On behalf of NOVA, NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with the privacy regulations.

Your rights according to Act on the processing of personal data:

As long as you can be identified in the data material, you have the right to

- access to which personal information is registered about you,

- to have personal information about you corrected,

- have personal information about you deleted,

receive a copy of your personal information, and

- to send a complaint to the Privacy Ombudsman or the Data Inspectorate about the processing of your personal data.

Information about you is processed based on your consent.

If you have questions about the study, or want to use your rights, contact NOVA, Oslo-Met by Per Erik Solem, pesol@oslomet.no, tel .: 93833384 or the privacy representative at Oslo-Met Ingrid S. Jacobsen, ingridj@oslomet.no, 67235534 / 99302316. You can also contact NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, personverntjenester@nsd.no, tel .: 55582117.

Hope you are interested!

Best regards,

Per Erik Solem   Maria Hecimovic

Project manager   Student

Project manager: pesol@oslomet.no   Student: mariah@oslomet.no

Tel.: 93833384   Tel.: 90920824

Consent to participate in the research study

I have received information about the research project and want to participate

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(Place and date, signature)