2015

Creativity as a Means to Expression of Emotions by Older Adults

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Abstract

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by

Britt-Marie Saga Eksell

MA, New York University, 2004

BA, Oakland University, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

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Abstract

Numerous researchers have explored the benefit of creative activities for the aging population diagnosed with dementia. However, there is a lack of data available to community administrators and organizers of senior residences about how successful aging may be enhanced, in the relatively healthy older adults, through their participation in creative art-making. Activities that provide mental stimulation, facilitate expression of emotions, and that are related to overall psychological well-being can provide a foundation for healthy aging. Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to explore older adults' subjective experience of engaging in creative artwork. The conceptual framework that guided this phenomenological study was based on Lazarus's cognitive-emotional-relational theory of emotions. The focus of the research questions was on the subjective experience of 10 older adults who participated in 7 weekly art sessions offered at a senior residence. Audiotaped interviews that were held after the last art-making session, together with participants' artwork and field notes, were analyzed, coded, and then categorized into themes. Results indicated the participants learned they can be creative, and that their images became a visual inroad to meaningful expression of emotions, insight, and motivation. The results point to evident social change when community organizers and administrators of senior residences increase activities for residents, especially meaningful activities designed to facilitate expression of emotions and insight during later life. Creative image-making activities can lead to continued learning, heightened social interactions, increased mental fitness, reduced depression, and enhanced healthy aging.

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Acknowledgements

As my body and mind are steadily growing older, the deep insight, grounded acceptance and joy of this aging process, would not have been as clearly present without the countless hours of reading and reflections of studies, research, articles, and anecdotes that contributed to this study. I am deeply thankful to the members of my dissertation committee who generously provided direction and much needed support. Dr. Ellen Levine shared her excellent scholarly insight and understanding during the entire process as my chair. She helped to keep me on track, when my focus wandered off my stated purpose. Dr. Sandra Caramela-Miller provided rich feedback and reassurance through her brilliant attention to details of quality, in both content and writing, that guided me through completion. Dr. Robin Freedman gave beneficial feedback on my methodology and organization of content that boosted my confidence in producing a high quality research.

This study would not have been possible without the voluntary participation of the older adults, who bravely opened themselves to new experiences when they created, discussed, and shared their artwork during the creative circle. I am grateful to all the creative participants, and thankful to the administrators of the senior residences, who allowed me to do my research. The continued support and encouragement from friends and family during the years provided a safe place and kept me going. Finally, I would like to express my love and gratitude to my mother and father, without whom this dissertation would not have been written.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Quality of life is a central issue when individuals live longer. Structuring living arrangements and the delivery of health care are important for older adults. Engagement in creative artwork can be an empowering tool that strengthens older adults' way of coping with the health-related stressors and normative losses associated with aging (Schmidt, 2006). The purpose of this study is to investigate the potential value of the perceived experiences by a group of older adults who engaged in creative activities during 7 consecutive weeks.

The potential benefit of participating in art-making, both individually and as a community, has received wide attention over many years (Hamilton, Hinks, & Petticrew, 2003; Kramer, 1992; Polenick & Flora, 2012). However, awareness of the ways creative art-making may benefit older adults, remains relatively low among policymakers, health staff, and those who commission services on behalf of the older adults (Hanna, 2006; Heenan, 2006). Aging baby boomers, a segment of the American population of about 76 million people born between 1946 and 1964 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014), and who began to turn 65 in 2011, are demanding more sophisticated service programs than were available to their parents. This rapidly expanding group of older adults will likely be more interested in activities with creative and existential purposes, designed to promote health and well-being during later life (Aadlandsvik, 2007; Hanna, 2006).

Studies of the benefits of creativity for the aging population have been conducted with adults who have been diagnosed with dementia (Basting, 2006; Heenan, 2006;

Shorter, 2011; Stephenson, 2006). However, as of this date, a literature search did not reveal any studies related to the benefit of creativity for the relatively healthy older adults in Sweden. In the United States there are a limited number of studies on creativity and aging (Cohen et al., 2006; Flood & Phillips, 2006; Hickson & Housley, 1997). Hickson and Housley (1997) suggested that when older adults participate in art activities, they experience well-being, life satisfaction, reflective thinking, and a stronger sense of self. In addition to other findings that are beyond the scope of this discussion, the four themes discussed by Hickson and Housley, were found in the more recent research carried out by Flood and Phillips (2007) and Cohen et al. (2006). Further, Cohen et al. suggested that engagement with creativity has a link to increased well-being and can aid in recovery from physical illness. These studies show that older adults may benefit from activating their imaginative and emotional processes through engaging in the creative process.

In this study, I explored how creative imagination may lead to expression of emotions and communication among older adults living in a senior residence in Sweden. Voluntary participation in a seven-week creative circle, of 90 minutes per week, was offered at a senior residence in Stockholm. The research problem leading to this study is the paucity of data on the benefit of creative activities offered in senior residences. The data that emerged from this study will contribute important information to community organizers and senior housing administrators, in support of their decisions when budgeting for necessary activities offered to the older adults, who live in senior residences. A phenomenological approach was used in order to explore the benefits that may lead to enhanced quality of life, as perceived by the older adults, who were invited to

participate in the sessions of creative art activities for the purpose of this study. The conceptual framework, which is based on Lazarus's cognitive-emotional-relational theory of emotions and coping, guided an understanding of creativity as a gateway to expression of emotions, insight, and expansion of individual potential. Further discussion is focused on relevant themes and findings in the research literature. These themes include discussions and information about successful aging, creativity as an essential aspect of human life, and the impact on overall general health from active participation in art programs. The participants' view and perception of their creative engagements was critical to the final results in this study. Therefore, the assumption of each participant's capability to be fully present and active, during the weekly sessions was discussed. I have further covered certain aspects of the research problem and delimitations due to the population, which was the main source of information in this study. Finally, the potential contribution of creative activities to enhanced quality in life, for the older adults living in senior residences is presented. The results from this study will clarify the meaningfulness, and significant benefits, of creative art activities for the older adult population.

Background

Finding effective ways to enhance the quality of life for older adults is clearly important, especially considering that according to current projections into the year 2050, the global population of those 65 years of age and older, will exceed those under 65 years of age, for the first time in recorded human history (Powell, 2010). If these current trends continue, the number of adults aged 65 years and over in the United States will more than double in size from 2005 to 2050, translating to over 95 million older adults, or 21.5% of

the population (Cheng & Heller, 2009). These statistics clearly show that aging is a global issue, which is also noted in the U.S. population, aged 85 years and older. This age group of older adults, most likely to require the most health care, is projected to grow from 5.8 million in 2010 to 8.7 million in 2030 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). A further projection by the U.S. Census Bureau (2014) indicated a global increase of 104% for the population age 65 years and over, and a 21% increase for the population under age 65 years by 2030. These same trends can be seen in Sweden, a country with a population of about 9.5 million people, where it is estimated that by year 2050, the number of individuals under 19 years of age will increase by 266,000, while individuals 65 and over will increase by 914,000 (Statistiska Centralbyran, 2012).

As the older adult population expands, the shift from treatment of acute health problems, to care of chronic illnesses and disabilities will become a major focus in providing optimal care for older adults. With chronic disabilities, the style of medicine will need to change, from a one-time intervention aimed at alleviating an acute problem, to the ongoing management of multiple diseases and disabilities. Long-term disabilities often lead to lack of mobility and dependency on others. This development may lead to an ongoing relationship between the disabled and his or her health care staff, designed to help the person cope with an illness, rather than finding a cure (Sade, 2012; Satariano et al., 2012).

Toward the end of the 20th century, scholars developed the view that old age is not always a slow decline into an unhappy existence. Rather, autonomy and life satisfaction during the later stages of life is possible (Bowling, 2007; Ferri, James, &

Pruchno, 2009; Holahan & Verlasquez, 2011; Tornstam, 2005). Baltes (1987) and Erikson (1982) proposed that physical and mental decline were not necessarily irreversible, because they are associated with old age. Instead, they suggested, that these are areas or instances of living on to older age, and a problem that could be modified. Even though there is no standard method for measuring successful aging, there is a wide range of definitions on what successful aging entails. The biggest shift in these definitions is the view that successful aging moves beyond the idea that aging is governed by the restrictions of chronological age. Old age is no longer associated with an inevitable period of problems with negative changes and decline, but looked upon as a period filled with possibilities and ongoing capacities for growth and creativity (Blazer, 2006; Cohen, 2006; Jeste & Oswald, 2014). According to Ferri, James, and Pruchno (2009), many individuals can age successfully, but what is considered success may be different for each individual. Bowling (2007) emphasized that our approach to successful aging needs to be multi-dimensional, and she further underscored the value of considering the influences of creativity, when considering successful aging.

An accepted view of aging until the 1970's were that old age, with the passing of time, was a period of rapid physical and mental decline, and a decreased capacity to cope. However, more recently, aging is being viewed in new ways, and new hypotheses have been formulated. Despite cognitive decline that occur with aging, researchers have found that everyday problem solving, and social and emotional functioning changes little with age (Blanchard-Fields, 2007; Charles & Carstensen, 2009; Jeste & Oswald, 2014; Levy, 2009). Furthermore, older adults have many years of experience, which make them more

likely than the younger generations to deal with everyday problems by using a wide array of accumulated problem-solving techniques. It has also been suggested, that older adults support actions, directly targeted to the source of a problem, with emotion-regulation strategies. This may lead to minimized psychological stress, with a display of more complex, flexible, and emotionally mature functioning. In contrast to previous stereotypes of rigidity in older adulthood, there is a more recent understanding of the older adults' capacity to regulate and balance emotional aspects of problem-solving. There is a wider recognition and respect of the role emotion plays in effective decision-making in everyday life, such as when making important medical and health decisions, leading to well-being and successful aging (Blanchard-Fields, 2007).

Recent research on growth and psychosocial development in the second half of life has led to a new understanding of the brain's ongoing capacity and potential to form new memories, grow entirely new brain cells, and process information in a different way than younger people (Cohen, 2005). Some of these normal, age-related changes in the neurological system produce impairments or limitation in an individual's optimal functioning. Aging processes, that are not perceptible by the human eye, include thousands of changes that occur in organs and tissues, and in their component cells and molecules. When these changes are considered individually, they may not be noticed. However, when all the cellular changes are manifested together, they produce changes that are associated with aging (Pankow & Solotoroff, 2007).

Despite possible problems related to the normal neurological and biological processes, Tornstam (2010) suggested that aging could be accompanied by personal

growth, and creative potentials. When problems experienced by older adults are considered together with a special focus on creativity, engaging in art-making has a positive impact on health (Cohen, 2006). Further, Cohen (2005) suggested that a stimulating environment, associated with creative activities, might result in new dendritic branches developed by individual neurons in the older adults, thus enhancing neurotransmissions that most likely will positively influence memory and intellectual processes.

Older adults often face changes associated with loss, such as losing a family member, friends, and home. Losses may also include physical and cognitive capabilities. Even with the expected effect of neurological and other biopsychosocial changes associated with aging, the way individuals cope with change is different for everyone. Which coping resources are used, and how people make meaning of events and emotions, is uniquely personal. The appraisal of an event, leading to ways of coping, depends on an individual's experiences and present perception of the contextual meaning and personal control (Lazarus, 2006). Although the increase in lifespan is usually regarded as a positive achievement, some might view it as a drawback, in that there are limited opportunities to develop a satisfactory understanding of how to live life well, for the later parts of adulthood (Scheibe, Kuntzman, & Baltes, 2007).

By the middle of the 1980s, a new concept of aging was developed that emphasized the positive aspects of aging. The previous conceptual restrictions of chronological age changed, to a more clarified understanding of the biopsychosocial aspect of aging. The new concept of aging contributed to the introduction of successful

aging as a meaningful construct, that includes enhanced psychological well-being, emotional and social coping, better memory functioning, increased self-care, and higher levels of motivation, to not only retain, but to also enhance functioning and living life well in later life (Blazer, 2006).

When older adults become engaged in explorations and creative activities, these activities can positively affect both mental and physiological health (Flood & Phillips, 2007). Through creative activities, older adults become involved in developing and practicing new skills that may foster creative problem solving in different areas of life. For example, engaging in the art-making process can provide a means for older adults to explore past and present experiences, and for reviewing their life, often referred to as life reminiscence. Some older adults may engage in reminiscence as a way to understand themselves and their lives. However, the majority of older adults engage in reminiscence because it brings pleasure and a sense of well-being from remembering events and experiences in their lives. Reminiscence can also be used as a social ice-breaker among individuals, who may not know each other before meeting at their new home at the senior residence (Sherman, 2010). Findings from research by Cappeliez and Robitaille (2010) supported the hypothesis that there is a link between reminiscence and psychological well-being among older adults. Their findings suggested that the influence of self-positive reminiscences enhance well-being via accommodative and assimilative coping styles. However, in contrast, negative reminiscences were associated with reduced well-being through negative relationships with modes of coping.

For older adults facing increasing physical impairment, creative expression may provide a means to relate to their environment in new ways that are not defined and bound by their physical ailments (Stephenson, 2006). Furthermore, the creative experience of making art can provide support, during and after a loss or crisis, and may facilitate older adults to cope more effectively as they adjust to age-related changes.

Art has been valued as a form of communication and as a healing force throughout history by individuals. It has been used as a means to show social position, express feelings, and to organize or control of experiences in life (Dissanayake, 1988). According to Pennebaker (1990), "the mere act of expressing ourselves verbally or non-verbally can change the ways we think and feel about traumatic events and about ourselves" (p. 145). Yet, words are often not available to describe the felt emotions. That is when the creative process of drawing a line, choosing a color, or molding a piece of clay can become a gateway to unspoken emotions, reminiscences, and musings about the unfolding of life. The images that emerge from the creative process can be seen as a metaphor of unspoken emotions and experiences, and translated into language (Oster et al., 2006). Once the image or metaphor is language-based, the experience can be better understood, and the individual may be able to effectively use his or her created images, to gain insight and meaning to his or her experience, when covert emotions become overt in the art-making. The process of perceiving and reflecting on an act is how individuals come to know the phenomenon that underlies the meaning in their experience, and their relationship to themselves (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, reflecting on the artwork, the

created images, and allowing a dialogue with self to emerge, is an essential part of the way that making art and reflecting upon it may be helpful and healing.

Creativity has been found to be an important part of health and well-being in older adults diagnosed with dementia (e.g., Basting, 2006; Shorter, 2011; Stephenson, 2006). However, there is a gap in knowledge available on the link between creative activities and the well-being of the relatively healthy older adults, who make up the majority of the older adult population. With the exception of anecdotal reports, the older adults' experiences in creating artwork, which support and enhance successful aging and the expression of emotions, has not yet been well documented. This study is an attempt to better understand how participants' created artwork and images may facilitate a connection to the essence of unspoken emotions, potentially unlocking barriers to expression of emotions that may enhance successful aging.

Problem Statement

Most community administrators and organizers of senior residences do not understand the benefit in offering creative activities to their residents, which might help improve their quality of life (Sargent-Cox, Anstey, & Luszc, 2012). This oversight is often the result of stereotypes of aging, based on the mistaken belief that such programs would not benefit the older adults, because this population has reduced motivation and lower physical functioning. These stereotypes surrounding aging add to the poor self-perception by the older adults themselves, which might develop into a self-fulfilling prophecy of lower competency and functioning (Mock & Eibach, 2011). However, art-based activities have been found to directly contribute to increased expression of

emotions, memory, well-being, social interaction, self-care, and motivation in older individuals (Aadlandsvik, 2007; Cohen, 2006; Shorter, 2011; Stephenson, 2006). Older individuals have evidently benefitted from art-based activities, and perhaps these art activities have helped in their successful aging.

There is a paucity of data available on creative art-based activities offered in senior residences that may promote mental stimulation and enhanced well-being experienced by the older adult residents. Although there are numerous quantitative studies on the link between well-being and creative art activates in other populations, such as individuals diagnosed with cancer (Carlsson, Arman, Backman, & Hamrin, 2005; Egberg et al., 2007; Italia, Favara-Scacco, Di Cataldo, & Russo, 2007; Nainis et al., 2006; Oster et al., 2006) and a few recent studies on art-making and mental health (Drake & Winner, 2012; Gillam, 2012; Ryan, 2011), there is a lack of phenomenological research on creative art activities and the older adults, who have not been diagnosed with a life threatening illness or cognitive impairment. The subjective experience perceived by older adults when they engage in creative art activities was explored in this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the relationship between engaging in creative art activities and facility of expression of emotions in older adults. In the face of change, older adults benefit from an outlet and supportive environment to balance losses and potentials. Based on previous research on the link between creative art activities and well-being in other populations (Carlsson, Arman, Backman, & Hamrin, 2005; Drake & Winner, 2012; Gillam, 2012; Egberg et al., 2007;

Italia et al, 2007; Luzzatto, Sereno, & Capps, 2003; Ryan, 2011), older adults living in senior residences may also benefit from engaging in creative art activities in order to meet expressive, intellectual, spiritual, and social needs.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the subjective experience perceived by older adults when they engage in creative art activities. The research questions include:

1. What is the experience of older adults, who are living in a senior residence in Stockholm and who engage in the process of creative art activities?
2. How does art-making facilitate the expression of emotions in older adults?
3. Does engaging in creative art activities support a sense of self-esteem, sense of purpose, and social connectivity?
4. What reminiscences emerge when older adults engage in creative artwork?

Conceptual Framework

Because the way that older individuals cope is integrally tied to successful aging, Lazarus's (1999) cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotions and coping was used as the basis for the conceptual framework in this study, on creativity as a means to facilitate expression of emotions in older adults. Lazarus's (1999) cognitive-motivational-relational theory that includes 15 emotions, each with its own core relational theme, guided an understanding of how created images may contribute to emerging emotions from the participants' point of view. Lazarus (1999) indicated that the process of emotion and the emotional life are essential aspects of appraisal and coping. Emotions are integral to understanding the appraisal process that leads to coping, which supports the way that

individuals manage life conditions, and adapt to daily stress and tensions produced by changing life conditions. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggested that coping is an integral feature of the emotional process, and is related to the way individuals manage life events and conditions, which is directly connected to individuals' quality of life. Older adults use a wide range of emotional coping strategies that have the potential to positively and negatively influence well-being, when managing health-related and normative losses. These losses may include chronic illness, grief and bereavement related to loss of a spouse or friend, and coping with different facets of the aging process (Benton, Christopher, & Walter, 2007; Birkeland & Natvig, 2009; Hansson, Hayslip, Jr., & Stroebe, 2007; Lovegreen, 2010).

An event can be appraised as either a challenge or a threat, and the process of appraising is each individual's attempt to deal and cope with the event. Emotional encounters are processes that continuously change, and provide a flow of actions and reactions, which can generate change in earlier emotions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The concept of action and reaction relates to the creative process in this study, where reminiscences emerging from a created image may allow an unspoken emotion to be *seen* for the first time by the participant. The appraisal of the event (becoming aware of inner dialogue) can enhance the potential for a deeper understanding of self and others, which may lead to beneficial decision-making and positive aging.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) further highlighted that unique individual differences influence the ways that all humans react emotionally to events being appraised. In appraising an emotion with all its complexities and variations, a positive or

negative outcome depends on the encounter that provoked the emotion. Additionally, it depends on the previous experiences and history of the person engaged in the particular event (Lazarus, 1999). The older adults have a lifetime of experiences that shape the ways that events are appraised. A mark of successful aging may be when a person reminisces about events that evoke a sense of well-being and a life well-lived. In contrast, other memories may be filled with regrets and remorse essentially interfering with successful aging. These distressing emotions can lower the quality of life and the sense of aging well,.

To counter the idea that older subjective age may by associated with reduced well-being and lowered motivation (Moch & Eibach, 2011), Frankl's (1959/1963) view that human beings are motivated to find meaning throughout their lives, was included in this research. Frankl viewed the central human activity as the quest for a sense of purpose. He further proposed that when we are faced with a hopeless situation, what matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, turning one's predicament into an achievement, rather than failure. When chronic illness or aging prevent change, an individual must change themselves (Macy & Johnstone, 2012).

Foundational theories that may support an understanding of the various processes in the development of the later stages of aging is more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 2. These theories are addressed by Erikson's (1982) theory of nine psychosocial stages of human development and by Cohen's (2005) four developmental phases of human potential in the second half of life. Additionally, themes from Tornstam's (2005) developmental theory of gerotranscendence that are relevant to the concept of successful

aging is included. The developmental theories underscore the importance of the various phases of aging in connection to Lazarus's (1999) cognitive-motivation-relational theory of emotion. In turn, these theories were further explored when seeking to understand the participants' subjective perceptions of their creative processes.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative method of inquiry was used in this study, when seeking answers to the research questions of how creating art may facilitate various modes of expression of emotions when engaged in by older adults, and their subjective perception of this process. Moustakas (1994) found that the process of perceiving and reflecting on an act is how the individual comes to know the phenomenon that underlies the meaning in their experience, and the relationship to themselves. According to Maxwell (2005), a qualitative inquiry may be used when there is an inductive approach to the study, and the focus is on specific people, with the emphasis on words rather than numbers. Some of the goals for the researchers in a qualitative study, mentioned by Maxwell (2005), are (a) to explore the meaning of an event experienced by the participants, and their perspective of the event as part of the reality that the researcher is trying to understand, (b) to preserve the individuality of each participants' act within the context of an event when analyzing data, (c) to understand the process that takes place during an event or an action, and (4) to allow flexibility in modifying a design during the research that may lead to new discoveries and relationships. Maxwell (2005) further held that the major emphasis in a phenomenological research is on the process by which actions and events take place, and that eventually lead to outcome.

In this study, the data was collected from 10 participants' perceived experience during 7 consecutive weeks (90-minute sessions per week) of creative art activities. The activity was named the creative circle, and it was offered at a senior residence in Stockholm, Sweden. The participants' reflection on their created artwork and images, allowed a dialogue with self to emerge. This, often internal dialogue, is an essential part of the way that making art and reflecting upon it, may be insightful and leading to expression of emotions. The process of realizing emerging emotions from created artwork, which may lead to a sense of purpose, self-esteem, and social connectivity, was discussed from the participants' perspective and investigated from the transcribed interviews. The interviews were held individually with each participant upon completion of the seven weekly sessions. The audiotaped interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The recorded interviews, memos kept during the creative art sessions, analytic journal, and participants' created artwork was included in the analyzed data collection.

Definitions

Coping: In this study, coping is defined as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141).

Expression of emotions: Emotional expression is here defined as observable nonverbal and verbal creative behavior that involves active processing of an event, based on an emotional experience (Hass-Cohen, 2008).

Gerotranscendence: The process of living and shifting to the later stages of life that can evoke a "shift in metaperspective – from a materialistic and rational perspective to a more cosmic and transcendent one, normally followed by an increase in life satisfaction" (Tornstam, 2005, p. 41). Gerotranscendence is a continuous development during aging, with an increase in perspective, which includes the capacity for transcendence in later adult life that can seem cosmic. This perspective is also influenced and modified throughout life by social factors, such as gender and profession, and impacted by incidences, such as diseases and crises (Tornstam, 2005).

Reminiscence: Reminiscing is the process of recalling past events and experiences, which often includes important and meaningful moment in an individual's life (Cappeliez &Robitaille, 2010).

Self-Actualization: An indicator for successful aging that includes mental and spiritual well-being (Blevins & Troutman, 2011) and belief in the capability of successful performance (Wells & Esopenko, 2008).

*Successful aging :*A model of successful aging, suggested by Cohen (2006), encompasses effective coping, increased meaning in life, effective life review, enhanced motivation, and the enhanced capacity to handle the losses and challenges brought about by the normal physiological and neurological process of aging.

Assumptions

I assumed that participants in this study were engaged in art activities, and that they were forthcoming with thoughts, musings, and verbal discussions associated with the creative process and finished artwork. I further assumed that participants created their

own reality, and that they were truthful in disclosing aspects of emotions that may, or may not, have emerged from their created artwork. An additional assumption is that even though the older adults were screened for severe cognitive problems prior to their participation in the sessions, I may have missed subtle symptoms not recognized by participants or detected by others.

Scope and Delimitations

The research problem in this study was a current lack of information on the benefit of creative art-based activities offered to older adults (65 years and older) who live in senior residences. The inclusion criteria for participants in this study were older adults 65 years or older, who had not been diagnosed with a mental disorder, and who were able to communicate in Swedish or English. The participants were not excluded on the basis of reduced vision. Furthermore, the participants have experienced the same event of joining seven weekly sessions of creativity and discussions in a group setting that consisted of 10 participants who met 90 minutes per week. The older adults' engagement in art-based creativities, where overt emotions may become covert in the created images, included not only word-based labels chosen in order to facilitate expression of emotions by the participants. Abstract line drawings, shapes, and painted color fields were also used as a gateway to imagination and emerging emotions.

During my research of activities offered at senior residences, there was a lack of creative activities designed to provide opportunities to engage in continued learning, reflection, and insight. Creative art activities, along with an accompanied narrative about felt emotions that may be brought forward from the participant's observations of their

created images, would expand on the currently, relatively limited, opportunities of activities offered at senior residences. Creative art-making is a dynamic process that allows for an ongoing process of emerging thoughts and emotions, and was therefore the focus of this phenomenological study.

Limitations

The result from this phenomenological study is limited to data that were collected from older adult participants in a specific geographical area in Sweden. Because the study was conducted in one country, the results may not be generalizable to the wider population of older adults. The study was confined to individuals, who have not been diagnosed with cognitive problems, and who were able to speak and respond to questions in the interview that was held at the end of the creative circle sessions.

A number of further potential limitations may be seen in this study. Based on the nature of a qualitative study, inherent limitations of data concerning participants' experience is dependent on their ability to reflect on aspects of their own experience during the art-making sessions, and to effectively communicate what they discerned from their images (Polkinghorn, 2005). The topic of art-making itself may be a limitation. The thought of engaging in creative art activities may serve as a deterrent for some individuals, who may have experiences from early childhood, where they were taught that art had to look a certain way, with little or no room for self-expression. This may have brought up a strong sense of self-criticism to overcome in order to join the creative circle. Creativity and art-making may be seen by some as an activity belonging to a select group, rather than being understood as everyone's birthright, where there is no criticism

and no judgment. Participant selection and interpretation of data may have limited the results, and reflection on this limit is included in the research analysis (Wertz, 2005).

Significance

Ways to enhance the quality of life and aging is a major focus of the social change expcted on a global level. The implications for positive social change from this study are that the results might spur administrators in senior residences to add creative art programs to their available activities. With a shift in focus, from problems associated with the aging population, to addressing potential in later life, creative activities can lead to improved mental and physiological health, a reduction in risk factors such as falls, negative effects of medication, and lowered mood (Cohen, 2005; Hallrup, Albertsson, Tops, Dahlberg, & Grahn, 2009). Creative activities that provide an ongoing sense of control may further reduce the need for long-term care, and contribute to cost savings from the perspective of personal finances, health services, and medical insurance (Cohen, 2006).

Therefore, an important aspect of this research relates to the potential benefit of creative activities for the lives of older adults. The current lack of information and understanding of the mental and overall health benefits of engaging in creative activities by the older adults, may be contributing to the sparse offering of these activities to the older adults living in senior residences. Key reasons for providing art activities to older adults are the physiological benefits of creative activities, combined with the potential for mental health benefits that may lead to successful aging, including possible self-actualization, increased capacity for effective coping, creative decision-making, plus increased motivation(Flood & Phillips, 2007). Creative art-making provides a means of

expression, and offers an opportunity for older adults toexplore potential concerns associated with the aging process.

Most of the studies conducted about the benefits of creativity and aging have been conducted with older adults, who have been diagnosed with dementia (Basting, 2006; Heenan, 2006; Shorter, 2011; Stephenson, 2006). When creativity is stimulated through imagination and cognitive exercises, dementia may be forestalled, and there may be an increased quality of life for the older adults and their caregivers (Basting, 2006; Flood & Scharer, 2006; Hamilton, Hinks, & Petticrew, 2003; Heenan, 2006; Shorter, 2011; Stephenson, 2006). Engaging in creative artwork may further support unmet personal and societal needs in older adults, with possibilities for continued growth, and creative potential throughout all stages of later life.

A limited number of studies (Cohen et al., 2006; Flood & Scharer, 2006; Hickson & Housley, 1997) have been conducted on the potential benefits of creativity engaged in by the older adults, who are relatively healthy, and who make up the largest proportion of the aging population. However, all of these studies have been carried out in the U.S. and did not directly address the subjective experience of creating artwork. This study, which was conducted in Sweden, will add an international perspective to the current literature regarding the creative impact on psychological well-being, and its active contribution to the possibilities of living a satisfied life, during the later stages of life. In visualization and reflection of their created artwork, older adults may have access to a way of coping that potentially can evoke insight and strength. Through an inner dialogue with self, or with others, more effective decision making may be met, combined with improved self-

efficacy in regards to the older adults' needs, to those of their families, and to those of their community (Sowers & Rowe, 2007)

Summary

In this introductory chapter, I discussed how the characteristics of the global aging population, those who are 65 years or older, has changed drastically during the last century. With a rapid increase in the older population, there has also been an increase in the need for participation of older adults in lifelong learning, and activities that support successful aging, such as engaging in a creative art-making process. Changing views about how to address problems of aging in the last quarter of the 20th century, includes increased efforts to understand and define what constitutes successful aging, and how creative engagement can lead to increased coping skills, health, and well-being during the second half of life (Cohen, 2006). This chapter further includes an introduction to my study, where I proposed to explore how the older adult's engagement in creative artwork may facilitate successful aging, when seen through emotional expression, in dialogue with self and others. Relevant research literature to this study is reviewed in Chapter 2. Visual imagery to facilitate expression of emotions by the older adults is furthermore covered, including studies on physiological, psychological, and social aspects of successful aging, and the various emotions associated with the aging process.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the research literature in regards to how successful aging may be enhanced in the older adult population from their engagement in creative activities. Creative art activities engaged in by the older adults may facilitate expression of emotions, and provide mental stimulation that contributes to a positive aging process, and overall well-being. It is therefore important to explore how art-making, created by the older adults, may facilitate well-being, and enhanced quality of life through expression of emotions in later life. The literature review is further relevant to the lack of information available to community administrators and organizers of senior residences, who are in charge of developing meaningful activities for older adults.

Successful aging and good quality of life for older adults will, in the near future, have a major impact globally. By 2050, for the first time in recorded human history, the global population,aged 65 or older, will exceed the number of young people (Powell, 2010).Further, there iscurrently a major shift in health care, from acute to ongoing care,which will hopefully be designed to help raise quality of life, and enhance successful aging. Engaging in creative art activities may support the older adults to cope with, and transcend difficulties associated with aging, therebypotentially maximizing successful aging and quality of life. For older adults living in senior residences there are often a number of activities offered for entertainment. But it is rare to find a program for the older adults that offers access to engagement in creative activities that may initiate

contemplation about the meaning of aging, emotional processing, or the continued process of transcending into the later and final stages of life.

Creativity in the form of drawing and painting has been used as a process of communication throughout human history. Our human tendencies to shape, draw, design, decorate, and express perceptions, thoughts, and feelings creatively are universally valued, both geographically and chronologically (Dissanayake, 2000). When a child is old enough to be able to hold a pen or a brush, he or she may feel those first pangs of joy associated with being able to create something, out of seemingly nothing. A person who is transcending to the later stages of life may likewise feel a need to express him or herself in a creative way that moves beyond the spoken word. Thus, through programs that tap into creativity, there is an invitation to possible enhancement of unspoken communication, and the expression of emotions, that may influence the quality of life in the aging population. A combination of neurological, cognitive, and emotional development that drives us during the earlier phases of life, can likewise be present in our later years, with drives for new perspectives, and new forms of creative expressions (Cohen, 2005).

There is a growing body of evidence recognizing the benefit of art and creativity on the overall health in school children, adolescents, and young adults (e.g., Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Brouilette, 2010; Cumming, 2007). However, there are only a few researchers (Cohen, 2006; Flood & Phillips, 2007), who have explored the importance of creativity for the benefit of health, well-being, and lifelong learning for older adults living in the U.S. Other researchers (Huskey & Carpenter, 2013) are investigating

benefits of engaging in outreach programs in communities in California that provide creative courses for their older adult residents. These programs have led to a slowly emerging understanding of the benefit of creativity and the arts, on the mental and physical health in the older adults (Huskey & Carpenter, 2013).

Although, after an extensive literature search, I did not find any published study on the benefit of creativity for older adults in Sweden. To fill this gap, and to add additional resources (and so counter the limited opportunities available for the older adults to engage in creative artwork), I have explored the experience of engaging in creative artwork by older adults living in a senior residence in Stockholm, Sweden.

Following a review of research strategies used to locate articles and books for references, pertaining to the study of the older adults and creativity in this chapter, I shed light on issues associated with the aging process, such as successful aging, coping, transitions to different stages of aging, and self-actualization including gerotranscendence and ways that finding meaning influences coping. How creativity has been used throughout ages, and how it is currently used, as a means of expression is discussed. The conceptual framework that supports this research is Lazarus's (1999) overall view of coping (emphasizing the emotional expressive aspects of appraisal and coping). The discussion also includes relevant themes from Frankl's (1959/1963) view of creative work as a way to find meaning and purpose in life, and will provide an understanding for the choice of creative exercises used with the older adults,who participated in this study. Important concepts from Erikson's (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986), Cohen's (2005), and Tornstam's (2010) views that relate to successful aging and coping is also discussed.

Literature Search Strategy

When reviewing the literature for this study, I used sources from the U.S. and from Sweden. Most of my sources came from accessing PsychINFO, PsycARTICLES, Academic Search Complete, CINAH, Medline, and books accessed through the Walden online library, the library at Uppsala University, and my own personal library. The general search terms used were:*art, coping, creativity, elderly, emotion, expression, geriatrics, meaning, older adult, and senior residence.* References provided in found articles were used in locating additional articles, which could not otherwise be located, through the above general search. I further used a number of books published no later than 2008, relating to gerotranscendence, aging, and creativity, and a few older sources of historic and seminal work that provide an important perspective about the concepts discussed in this study. A number of articles (Basting, 2006; Heenan, 2006; Shorter, 2011; Stephenson, 2006) were found that related to the study of creativity with older adults, who were diagnosed with some form of mental health condition. However, only two recent articles (Cohen et. al., 2006; Flood & Phillips, 2006) were found that focused on the impact of engaging in creative artwork by older adults, who other than going through the normal aging process, have not been diagnosed with a form of dementia or other psychological disorders.

Conceptual Framework

A central aspect of Lazarus's (1999) cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotions, which support the conceptual framework in this study, are the result of how we evaluate the outcome of our intended goals. How events and memories are experienced

and emotionally appraised is important for the quality of life, because there is a link between various types of reminiscences (self-positive and self-negative) engaged in by the older adult, and his or her mental and physical health (Cappeliez &Robitaille, 2010). In appraising a situation, a person's thoughts shape each emotion that arises, while at the same time, an emotion can be a predictor of what a person is thinking.This suggests that the cognitive aspect of an emotion is part of a person's subjective interpretation of a specific event (Lazarus, 1999). When appraising a stressful situation with negatively toned emotions, variables such as harm, loss, threat, and challenge may be applied, but a fourth type of appraisal, benefit, may invite positively toned emotions. Lazarus (1999) described core relational themes associated with emotions, which are often connected to specific emotions. A core relational theme for shame would be "failing to live up to an ego ideal," and that of hope would be "fearing the worst but yearning for the better" (p. 96). What this means is that both the interpersonal relationship, and the meaning of the appraised event, influence the way that emotions develop. For example, is the event and relationship appraised as a threat and possible loss, such as the loss of health? Is the event appraised as a challenge to overcome, or is the event experienced and appraised as a positive and a benefit, such as gaining wisdom?

It is also important to consider that emotions do not occur in a vacuum, but they happen in relationships with others or a situation. The relationship with self (the internal relationship), and the external (the created objects in art-making), are clearly seen when considering creativity. An emotion that before was covert may become overt in the manifestation of an image, and it may be the first time that different modes of sense

perception become part of an emotion, such as sight in painting, touch in sculpture, or hearing in music (Steiner, 1998). With the presence of a concrete and stable created image, a previous wordless emotion may now invite a verbal dialogue leading to further insight and self-actualization.

Lazarus (1999) proposed that each emotion brings up a different appraisal pattern that has to do with options for coping. Three basic elements are appraised in respect to emotions: blame or credit for an outcome, coping potential, and future expectations. To consider responsibility for an event requires a judgment, a cognitive aspect of information, where blame may be associated with anger, and where credit can bring a feeling of pride. Coping potential can be seen as the personal conviction that a harmful event or challenge can be handled with an action that provides the best possible outcome. Future expectations may have either a positive or negative tone depending on the personal view of both interactive relationships and environmental changes. Each emotion involves a different appraisal theme, and in Lazarus's (1999) cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotions he proposed 15 emotions (e.g., anger, guilt, shame, envy, pride, relief, hope, love, gratitude, and aesthetic experiences) each with a core relational theme. The core relational theme resulting from appraisals of an emotion thus expresses a synthesis of the associated meanings underlying each emotion. In connecting Lazarus's (1999) theory to creativity with aesthetic experiences, which is one of the 15 emotions he proposed that will occur in a transaction, it is important to note that the core relational theme of this emotion is not connected to a specific narrative or emotion, but can be associated with any of the other emotions that he described.

To understand how people change and adapt in later life entails understanding not only the capacity of cognitive functioning, but also understanding how older adults use their cognitive capacities to construct and manage their social reality, and ways of functioning that includes social comparisons. Part of the social reality for older adults is to maintain a sense of agency, and to make choices in a way that gives purpose and meaning to their lives. This may not be easy when having to cope with major life transitions, as well as the biopsychosocial changes associated with aging. Some of the transitions include a decline in physical stamina, which is frequently due to a sedentary lifestyle in older adults. This decline often reflects a negative self-perception in physical efficacy (Birkeland & Natvig, 2009). Physical inactivity also takes its toll on both psyche and body and often results in lowered self-efficacy, and fewer social connections. Inactivity further weakens the functioning of biological systems, including negative changes in cellular and metabolic processes, loss in lean body mass, diminished immunocompetence, and cardiovascular decline (Bandura, 1997).

However, in spite of the process of physical decline, there are other processes, such as social comparison, in which older adults can sustain a high level of efficacy (Bandura, 1997). In the process of physical decline, it can be helpful for older adults to avoid comparing themselves to younger cohorts, and instead appraise their capabilities through selective comparison to people in their own age group. A sense of personal efficacy may be sustained as long as one functions on a level relative to one's age-mates (Bandura, 1997).

An example of coping that illustrates the motivational aspect of Lazarus's theory is when a person's decision-making process (and coping) is done with the motivation and goal of maintaining quality of life. For example, the decision to relocate to a supported residence, with the intention of maintaining or enhancing the quality of life, may involve the recognition of the potential for physical and neurological declines. Part of the complex questions related to making a decision to move to a retirement community is the older adult's hope that an enhanced environment will improve their lives, even though following through with this decision may entail leaving behind some friends or networks of social support (Lovegreen, 2010).

The relational aspect of appraising a situation is the part where emotion is aroused depending on what transpires in the interaction between a person and the environment, where the most important aspects are interpersonal and relational (Lazarus, 1999). An emotional encounter is never a single action, but is a continuous flow of changing interactions among the individuals who are engaged in the encounter. Lazarus described interactions such as social supports, each having a figure and background structure, where the personality characteristics of the person in the encounter make up the field or the background. The figure that is the event, or action of that which initiates the encounter, relates to all the characteristics of a person who is the continuously changing background, where the integration of the event or meeting arouses an emotion.

In a related area, Erikson (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986) proposed that the interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of motivation and development continuously change. This dynamic developmental process in the older adults influences their

continuously changing ways of coping. For example, in each psychosocial stage Erikson (1986) discussed two contrary dispositions, such as basic trust versus basic mistrust during infancy, and integrity versus despair during old age. In each developmental stage, the individual experiences a creative tension between the two opposites, while working on maintaining a dynamic balance of the stage that is presently in focus. Central to understanding the way this developmental process influences coping is that during each successive developmental stage of the individual, there are always tensions remaining from previous stages that were inadequately integrated into the next stage. Not only does the individual struggle with past tensions, and the tension that is in focus at the time, but there is also an anticipation of tensions yet to come.

Erikson named the eighth and last stage of life *old age,* comprising of older adults in the range of the early 70s through the late 90s (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986). The last stage was later extended in 1997 by Erikson (i.e., Joan M. Erikson, wife and coworker of Erik H. Erikson) to include a ninth stage of the life cycle. This ninth stage includes a path leading to gerotranscendence (Erikson, 1997). However, recent researchers (e.g., Cohen, 2005; Plotkin, 2008; Tornstam, 2005) have increased the number of stages older adults experience to more fully honor the deeply imaginative potentials of the human psyche, as it continuously evolves and undergoes developmental transitions. An important additional stage when making transitions after age 60 into late elderhood is the awakening to aspects that bring purpose and meaning to the existence of life. This transition may be supported by taking stock of a life lived so far (Johnson & Ruhl, 2009).

Cohen (2005) recognized the influence of transitional phases in the lives of older adults. Based on studies, interviews, and questionnaires with more than 3,000 older adults, he proposed that there are four developmental phases connected to successful aging (midlife reevaluation, liberation, summing up, and encore) that people enter and pass through in the second half of life. He described these four phases as involving loose progressions that sometimes overlap, intersect, or work with each other, and are steered by the unique pattern of inner drives, desires, and urges that move each person in his or her unique way through life. He recognized that people have reached later life by moving through life in every conceivable way, and that no rigid system will fit all. Cohne's (2005) conception of these inner drives is that this is a fluid and dynamic process, a process that encompasses the shifting appraisals and coping, also described by Lazarus (1999).

The first phase, midlife reevaluation, as described by Cohen (2005) is roughly the time between ages 40 through 65 when people undergo a reevaluation, asking themselves such questions as, "who am I and where am I going" (p. 90). This is not to be understood as a midlife crisis, but rather as a quest to go deeper and search for what is meaningful in life. This development relates to Frankl's (1959/1985) therapeutic approach, which he named logotherapy, where an individual's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his or her life. However, what is meaningful to life is different for each person, and specific to a person's life at a given time and space, thus meaning always changes but never ceases to be. Frankl (1959/1985) further proposed that rather than asking what the meaning of life is, a person should recognize that "man is questioned by life; and he can

only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible" (p. 131).

The second part of Cohen's (2005) developmental phases, liberation, usually occurs between the ages of the late 50s to the 70s and can be a time to recognize a desire to experiment, to innovate, and become free from earlier inhibitions. The summing up phase usually from the late 60s through the 70s and 80s can be experienced as a time of resolution and review. Volunteerism and a desire to give back to family, friends, and society are often manifestations of the inner push during this period (Cohen, 2005).

Cohen's (2005) final phase, encore, generally starts during the late 70s and extends to the end of life. The meaning of this phase of life, encore, is similar to the French word, *encore,* which denotes a sense of wanting to continue and do things again. This phase often contains aspects of the three previous phases. Despite physical limitations that may make it difficult to act according to their wishes, "people in this phase are still driven by powerful forces such as desires for love, companionship, self-determination, control, and giving back" (p. 83). It is further important to note that even though some aspects of intellectual ability may decline with age during the final encore phase, the brain retains key abilities and learning is always possible. Lifelong experiences encoded in the brain are irreplaceable. When older adults are either physically or mentally engaged in creative activities, new dendrites, synapses, and even neurons continue to be created (Cohen, 2005).

A quintessential aspect of successful aging can be viewed as gerotranscendence, or the final stage of natural progression toward maturation and wisdom, where the

individual may experience a series of changes (Tornstam, 2005). Old age has sometimes been referred to as a time for withdrawal or disengagement, but Tornstam (2005) highlighted that successful aging and gerotranscendence involves and incorporates a developmental pattern that moves beyond Erikson's (1982) model of activity versus disengagement (the "either or" way of thinking), to a place of searching for answers to the meaning of life with renewed energy. Thus, in this stage it is not unusual to experience a shift in perspective from interest in material things to a need for solitude and solitary, yet active meditation. Some of the changes that are typically experienced during gerotranscendence may be a redefinition of self, and the relationship to others. This may especially be noted as life reminiscence and review engages and potentially transforms emotional responses from difficult to satisfying and meaningful memories. Furthermore, as an older individual ages successfully and is in the stage of gerotranscendence, that individual becomes less self-preoccupied and more selective in choices of social and other activities. There may also be a new interest in existential questions, with a greater need for solitary reflection on the meaning of time, space, life, and death (Tornstam, 2005).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Successful Aging, Creativity, and Health

In the past several decades, emphasis on what constitutes successful aging has increasingly been discussed and researched. However, currently there is no consensual definition of successful aging. Depp and Jeste (2006) performed a literature search on published English-language peer-reviewed reports on adults over age 60 that included an

operational definition of successful aging. Based on their search, Depp and Jeste concluded that it is imperative to broaden the definition of successful aging by highlighting this multifaceted phenomenon, and to go beyond absence of physical disability and disease, to include other criteria mentioned by seniors themselves, such as attitude and adaptation, security and stability, health and wellness, and engagement and stimulation.

A number of recent studies indicate that there is a close link between psychosocial challenges and physical health in the older adults (Asbring, 2012; Brett et al., 2012; Nygren, Norberg, & Lundman, 2007). Even though internal realities vary greatly between cultures and over time, certain cognitive aspects (knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs) and affective aspects (feelings, sensations, and experiences) support not only an individual stance, but also the general beliefs about the nature of the world in which we exist (Asbring, 2012). Due to contextual and individual variations, individuals create different meanings as to why one is sick or healthy, and what in their interpretation may be socially accepted as real. Unemployment, violence, a recent divorce, having small children, and being a single parent may be associated with physical ill health, while poor social relationships, a vulnerable social situation, and social exclusion may contribute to, or be the cause of mental ill health (Asbring, 2012).

Asbring's (2012) study was based on a biopsychosocial perspective. She investigated self-rated health and ill health with 4,000 randomly selected individuals, 18 to 80 years old in Stockholm, who answered a questionnaire. Her aim was to gain a deeper understanding of everyday conceptions of health on a physical and mental level.

The questionnaire consisted of four open-ended questions relating to aspects of lifestyle, physical, mental, and social health, recreational aspects, and work and study aspects. Participation was voluntary and anonymous and the response rate was 36 % (n = 1425). The results showed that the youngest group, of people 18 to 30 years of age, discussed mental health aspects more than the other groups. Individuals who were 31 to 65 years old emphasized issues relating to life balance (such as beneficial life-rhythm and a sense of control over the time spent on different activities), and one's perspective of life (such as individuals' personal stance to different life events that influences internal or external strategies for problem-solving). In contrast, older adults between 66 to 80 years of age mostly described physical care and certain treatment aspects.

Older adults further believed that deficiencies in care, such as medicinal side effects, unsuccessful operations, and lack of appropriate help from health care providers caused ill health. Help from friends, family, caregivers, and in some cases from alternative medicine practitioners resulted in positive views of physical health. When discussing mental health problems, the older adults mentioned that they felt affected by their own previous difficult encounters with health caregivers. Some of the respondents said they were concerned, because they or a relative had been exposed to a mistake in the health sector. On the other hand, positive mental health was often attributed to having a good alliance with their doctor, helpful medicines, psychological therapy, or being offered alternative treatments. After summarizing the key elements that reflected the respondents' answers, a few themes were especially prominent when discussing what factors were important for physical and mental health. The themes that most frequently

emerged were empowerment, a health conscious lifestyle, life balance, and life perspective. Empowerment (similar to events being appraised as a challenge) was described as "having resources to manage one's life, and feeling a certain control over things that happens in your life" (Asbring, 2012, p. 1117).

Brett et al. (2012) investigated the effect of psychosocial factors and a health conscious lifestyle, with two groups of older adults born 1921 (n = 550) and in 1936 (n = 1,091) in the United Kingdom. They suggested that social relationship and support has a crucial role in determining quality of life. The two groups in the study conducted by Brett et al. possessed similar demographic characteristics, but were at different stages in the aging process. An individual's approach to life circumstances, and possible quality of life may alter with age, and was noted in Brett et al.'s study, where the predictors for each of the quality of life measures (such as physical health, psychological well-being, social support, and living circumstances) were lower in the group born 1921, than in the group born 1936. Brett et al. suggested that contributing factors to this difference in perceived psychosocial health could be that the older group was smaller, and that most individuals in this group lived alone. Their finding is in keeping with previous studies, indicating that the role of social relationship and emotional support is crucial when determining quality of life in older adults (Low & Molzahn, 2007).

A variety of creative activities that include access to social relationships emotional support were offered by Shorter (2010), who created a hospital-based arts project for older adults, who were recovering from mental distress. A possible connection to life perspectives emerged through the art activities project, which was well attended.

Upon discharge from the hospital, the patients affirmed that the project had given them means to illustrate their experiences, and they also reported a feeling of accomplishment and increased self-esteem. For many, the art activities played a significant role in the recovery from mental stress (Shorter, 2010). That stress is an aspect of a larger set of issues including emotions was discussed by Lazarus (1999) who noted that "there are more commonalities than divergences in the way these embodied states of mind are aroused, coped with, and how they affect psychological well-being, functioning, and somatic health" (p. 37).

Healthy aging and continued learning may be associated and was discussed by Reichstadt et al. (2010), who interviewed 22 community-dwelling adults, 60 years and older. From their investigation they found that the key ingredients to successful aging mentioned by nearly all participants, were importance of remaining engaged with life, as well as continued self-growth and development. Other themes included the importance for older adults to make contributions to others and society. That meaning can be discovered in the outside world was the most important finding related to successful aging. The way meaning was discovered, was through maintaining or developing social relationships, and developing coping strategies, which allowed adaptation to the physical challenges of aging. Maintaining current social relationships and coping strategies, while being open to new experiences, and creatively meet everyday problems with a beneficial outcome, facilitated the older adults to find meaning in life, and to keep a positive outlook (Reichstadt et al., 2010). This relates to Frankl's (1959/1985) view that the way we perceive the meaning of our life integrally influences how we move through life.

Bowling's (2007) extensive literature review on successful aging revealed that there is not very much in the definition of this construct. Based on the findings from journals and books, when searching numerous databases, using the key term *successful aging* (p. 264), Bowling concluded that few studies included investigations of lay views. She therefore proposed that a multidimensional model of successful aging "needs to incorporate lay perspective for social significance, to be sensitive to differences in opportunities to age successfully, and to variations in values between cultures" (p. 275). Lay views are important, because they ensure that a broader perspective of successful aging based on people's values is investigated. Definitions of successful aging may otherwise only reflect mainstream cultural expectations of aging and norms of behavior of older adults (Torres, 2003). Some of the lay views on successful aging found by Bowling (2007) included: elements of physical health and functioning; mental and cognitive health; psychological well-being and life satisfaction; psychological resources including personality, personal growth, accomplishments, sense of purpose, a meaning of life, self-acceptance, coping, positive outlook, sense of humor, spirituality, lifestyles, neighborhood, financial circumstances, and security.

Bowling (2007) further concluded, that a multi-dimensional, and integrated biopsychosocial model of successful aging should be investigated. This model needs to be seen on a continuum, and include elements of both biomedical and psychosocial concepts. The biomedical approach to successful aging might include aspects of survival, mental, cognitive, and physical health and functioning. Included in the sometimes overlapping construct of the psychosocial approach would be a sense of self-efficacy,

personal growth, psychological and social well-being, autonomy, creativity, and effective coping strategies. Bowling (2007) held that in order to answer the questions of how, and whether, successful aging may be achieved "policy might move on from focusing primarily on morbidity and mortality rates, to incorporate other areas of life, including enhancement of coping strategies" (p. 275).

Caplan, Haslett, and Burleson (2005) investigated the potential health benefits experienced by 41 older adults, residing in a retirement community, after they participated in a study on creative journal writing. The researchers examined the narrative accounts of the older adult participants' significant losses. Even though most journals contained factual information, they also included variations in emotional expression, humor, and reflective questions. Journal writing was used as a creative tool for individual losses in this group. The journal writing led to reminiscences and reflections that served as an inroad to social interactions. Caplan et al. further suggested that information from older adults' journal writing may help health care providers, caregivers, and families develop an understanding and insight into the writer's experience, which may lead to a more person-centered and supportive interaction and for this population. The use of journal writing as a form of emotional expression, according to Cohen (2005) and Fisher&Specht (1999), may be used as a beneficial venue for the individual reappraisal and meaning making process - conceptually two aspects of successful aging.

Creative activities have been linked to successful aging, because it involves a mental preparedness to take on challenges, and a willingness to test one's problem-solving skills, to arrive at helpful solutions (Fisher &Specht, 1999). Finding solutions and

learning to cope with transitions to later life, which often involves a multitude of significant losses, may require individual support for older adults, in order to maintain a sense of self-esteem and psychosocial well-being (Caplan, Haslett, & Burleson, 2005). Creative thinking, self-expression, and communication are essential when personal adjustments have to be made to meet new challenges associated with aging (Fisher&Specht, 1999). The older adults'appraisals of these challenges, influences how they will cope with new encounters and adjustments.

Fisher and Specht (1999) discussed the importance of support when transitioning into old age, suggestion "that successful aging requires creativity since it is difficult to imagine how one could age successfully without defining problems, choosing appropriate strategies, and using insight to meet those challenges" (p. 468). In addition to difficulties related to activities of daily living for older adults, there are the challenges of the gradual losses of physiological functions and cognitive decline, that may lead to depression, anger, and anxiety (Hayslip, Jr., & Chapman, 2007). For the older adults to cope with the process of changes during the latter part of life, the construction of knowledge (including affective, spiritual, somatic, cognitive, and imaginative domains) and the development of creative expressions, may contribute to older adults' meaning-making process (Stuckey, 2009).

Stuckey's finding reflect Frankl's (1959/1985) view that human beings are motivated to find meaning in their lives, in a quest for a sense of purpose, and to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to turn one's predicament into an achievement, while moving toward a desired and realistic goal. When we are no

longer able to change a situation, such as a chronic illness or the onset of natural decline due to old age, we are challenged to change ourselves (Macy &Johnstone, 2012). The appraised meaning of situations, such as effects and consequences of a chronic illness, may influence the coping process involved in successful aging.

In their study of older adults' perspective on aging and creativity, Fisher and Specht (1999) found the following features discussed as contributing to healthy aging: (a) a sense of purpose, (b) interactions with others, (c) personal growth, (d) self-acceptance, (e) autonomy, and (f) health. Furthermore, it appears that being able to express oneself through the process of creating art, where flexibility, adaptability, and coping are inherent, facilitates the older adults to share past experience, wisdom, find meaning in their lives, and to be engaged in successful aging (Johnson & Sullivan-Marx, 2006).

Successful aging is the ability of the aging individual to change and develop, along with the biopsychosocial changes associated with the aging process. A change may be noted in some cognitive processes, such as reaction time, which declines or slows down over time. Other areas of the aging process, seen in wisdom and a perspective of what truly sustains life as a whole, may develop further, and enhance function in later life (Butler, 2008). The role of wisdom is important across the lifespan and critical to successful aging. Cumulative wisdom among the older adults, such as having factual knowledge that is needed to respond to a situation, and procedural knowledge when making decisions and providing advice, may be important in order to to successfully negotiate challenges in later life. Other aspects of the benefit from many years of life experiences, include the recognition of inner relationships, tensions, priorities of different

life domains, and the recognition that no perfect solution exists, but the acceptance of being able to optimize a resolution as well as possible (Baltes, 1993; Blazer, 2006).

When aging individuals remain healthy and continue to be an integral part of the community, their presence may evoke in others a sense of a meaningful pattern in life, and thereby bring a balance to what can be perceived as a confusing, ambiguous, and chaotic world. The current understanding of what it is to be an older adult, and what he or she may contribute to society, is largely colored by measuring chronological aging, loss of functional capacities, and the overall cost to the economy. Besides special advocacy groups, there seems to be limited capacity in the Western thinking for the added value of experience, presence, and creative wisdom that the older generation imbues in society (Plotkin, 2008).

Creativity is not a time bound function of chronological age, but an impulse that does not diminish with the passage of time (Hickson & Housley, 1997). While many accept that wisdom is something that is part of the aging process, there is also a belief that creativity is an expression exclusive of the young, and that it becomes less frequent as the decades pass by. However, Cohen (2005) described this belief as being a myth, with no supportive evidence. He further asserted that creativity is a potential in all ages that often deepens and become richer with age. While creativity involves all our senses, it has also been described as a process that involves thinking and imagination in novel ways, which requires an individual to be open to new ideas and approaches, to seek a solution, or to solve a problem at hand (Flood & Phillips, 2007; Schmidt, 2006).

Being involved with the creative process has the potential to help older adults successfully adapt and solve problems, because of being open to new ideas, and re-appraising situations as positive, rather than negative. Being engaged in creative activities has further been described as involving an attitude of wonder about something, which requires a state of receptive passivity (Aadlandsvik, 2007). This outlook may be seen as a mindful way to stay present and connected to self and other individuals, in a flow of energy and information that involves the brain and body as a whole (Siegel, 2007). Engaging in creative art activities may further be seen as an invitation to a fresh perspective and imagination that may bring satisfaction and enhancement to our everyday lives (Cohen, 2005).

Creativity is an essential aspect of human life, which can be seen in our early ancestors. They were creative in that they were able to use materials such as grass, leaves, mud, bark, stone, and wood to make everything they needed for their lives. Ancestral humans lived in close contact with nature, where everyday challenges of the external world, often life and death challenges, had to be creatively attended to in ways that involved all their senses. Sight, sound, touch, smell, and hearing evolved in order for humans to engage with the natural world (Dissanayake, 2000). By listening to the messages from their senses, individuals used not only their hands or fingers, but often involved their whole bodies, breath, and muscles in their creative endeavors. They used their own agency and energy to create most everything they needed for living, and for their aesthetic pleasure (Dissanayake, 2000).

One of the biological adaptive rewards for working all day in active energetic movements was an increase of the brain chemical endorphin, producing a feeling of euphoria (Dissanayake, 2000). Biologically, this reward of increased endorphins helped people take necessary actions to survive. Today, those who are removed from creatively working with their bodies to be productive may seek the same biological reward from increased endorphins by joining health clubs in order to engage in physical workout, and experience the euphoria that results from exercise. Creative play, art-making, and social interactions may therefore contribute to well-being by an increase in the production of endorphins (Pert, 2006).

Older individuals, who may have put aside their creative urges throughout their active and busy lives, may be at the later stages of life and once again experience and recognize their own individual creativity as a gateway to self-actualization, enhanced personal fulfillment, and expression of emotions. Even though Shorter (2011) and Stephenson (2006) were not measuring the production of endorphins, findings from their studies on recognition of inherent strengths in older people, demonstrated that creativity can be an important part of health and overall well-being in the older population.

Studies on Creativity in Older Adults

Creative activities are often thought of as the actual making of an art form, such as a painting, sculpture, or the writing of a poem. However, the creative act of changing one's attitude when confronted with challenges, or the thought process involved in solving a problem may be more important than a tangible product (Flood & Phillips, 2007). Aging individuals, who are able to engage in continued learning through creative

activities (whether artistic or not) without preconceived notions of the outcome, and without any self-criticism as to the process or end result, might find that the cumulative experience of physical, social, and emotional memories may contribute to an optimal solution for the problem at hand (Cohen, 2005).

Aadlandsvik (2007) supported the importance of continued learning throughout life and suggested that learning new skills later in life, specifically in the area of creativity, could lead to an improved sense of control, mastery, and growth. Aadlandsvik conducted five creative writing and storytelling courses (one course was for people with beginning dementia) for 45 participants in ages of 67 to 90 years. Their focus in the study was on lifelong learning and personal growth, more from an existential viewpoint and enrichment of life than that of learning understood as an instrumental enterprise. One of the important principles in the study mentioned by Aadlandsvik was that the writers and the storytellers must be heard:

> Reading and listening to the texts of other people enlarges our world and sometimes these activities show us alternative worlds. To be *seen* and *heard* by others define my identity. This process does not end at a certain ages, it is a lifelong process. (p. 670)

Cohen et al. (2006) investigated the impact of community based cultural art programs on the general health, overall functioning, and a sense of well-being in older adults aged 65 years and older. They designed a multisite longitudinal study in 2001 to examine creativity and aging using more than 300 participants that were invited from centers for elders in three geographical locations: the metro Washington, DC area,

Brooklyn, and San Francisco. At the start of the study, there were 166 participants (intervention group $n = 90$; comparison group $n = 76$). The participants in the comparison group did not change their ongoing activities, while the participants in the intervention group were involved in weekly participatory art programs, ranging from painting, writing, poetry, dance, oral histories, and jewelry making, to singing in a choir. All participants (mean age nearly 80 years) were interviewed three times: at the start of the study, a year later, and finally two years after the start of the study. The interviews were based on a specific set of structured questions in order to obtain data on general physical health. The research team also used formal assessment instruments in order to assess the mental health domains of depression, loneliness, and morale.

After one year into the study, the self-rating of overall health was improved in the intervention group, while the comparison group reported a decline. The intervention group reported a decline in falls, and the comparison group reported an increase in the number of falls. This is very important, because falls are associated with fear in seniors, and can drastically change the quality of life for an older person. Falls are recognized as an indicator of declining health status (Williams, Hadjistavropoulos, & Asmundson, 2005). The intervention group reported increased overall activities, whereas the comparison group reported a decline in activities during this period. Cohen et al. (2006) found that sustained involvement in participatory art programs for older adults had a significant impact on prevention effects and health promotion, with fewer doctor visits and lower medication usage.

A limitation of Cohen et al. (2006) was that they used established mental health scales to measure mental health in their study. There was no in-depth examination of the participants' own perspectives on the meaning, and possible benefits of creative engagement from a psychological, spiritual, and social view point based on open-ended interviews, which was lacking in this study. Therefore, what was missing in Cohen's study was the possibility of looking at creative activity as an inherent process, where adaptability, flexibility, and coping were engaged in and perceived from the participants' point of view. When an individual remains open to new ideas and approaches that emerge in the creative process, adaptive and flexible possibilities for an original solution to a problem or project may occur (Fisher & Specht, 1999). Dohr and Portillo (1990) described a model of creative behavior based on a four-part process that involved a progression from person (personality) to process to product, and finally, to perception. Perception, in this case, was not only what the artist himself or herself perceived when observing a completed artwork, but also the perception of others viewing the same artwork.

Fisher and Specht (1999) examined the relationship between creative activity and successful aging from the older person's perspective. The 36 participants (60 to 93 years of age) in their qualitative study were contributors to a senior art exhibition.. The purpose of the study was to understand the participant's view of the meanings attached to successful aging and creativity, and further to explore the benefits of creativity as a relationship to successful aging. Criteria used for successful aging was a sense of purpose, interactions with others, personal growth, self-acceptance, autonomy, and health (Ryff &

Heidrich, 1997). An example of how these criteria are related to creativity can be seen in personal growth, which is implied when stretching one's imagination to solve a problem, or to produce something unique (Fisher & Specht, 1999).

When the participants in the study conducted by Fisher and Specht (1999) were asked how creativity contributed to imagination and well-being, their answers fell into two categories: a way of making, and a way of thinking. When involved in creative activity, "the respondents felt connected to a link between the internal world of thought and imagination, and the application or realization of those ideas through the process of making something" (p.65). The first benefit (mentioned by 67% of the older adults) from the creative art process was a sense of accomplishment, connecting to others, and an expansion of self. The second benefit (mentioned by 42% of the older adults) was making a contribution, leaving something behind, and a feeling of accomplishment and discipline in solving challenging problems. The third benefit (mentioned by 33%) focused on interactions with others, who had similar interests, companionship, and support to continue the creative process. However, as mentioned by some of the participants, in order to benefit from creative activity in later life, the essential ingredients were having a sense of motivation, a desire to communicate something, a drive to express the inner self, and a willingness to open up to one's creative abilities (Fisher & Specht, 1999).

Fisher and Specht (1999) also found that creative activity is related to successful aging by fostering a perception of circumstances and challenges, as an opportunity for growth. This links clearly to Lazarus's (1999) cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion, because creative activity appears to have influenced the appraisal process to

view experiences and circumstances as challenges, rather than as threats. Fisher and Specht (1999) proposed that "creative activity involves a mental preparedness to take on challenges, even welcoming them, as part of the process of arriving at newer and deeper understandings about oneself and one's work" (p. 68). Creativity in this group of older artists was further believed to enhance coping skills when faced with challenges in later life, and an ability to innovatively arrive at helpful solutions. Being able to have a sense of mastery, while facing challenges rather than feeling overwhelmed and defeated, is central to successful aging.

Creativity and Emotional Coping in Older Adults

Developing creative coping strategies can support older adults in their adaptation to biopsychosocial changes that occur during the later stages of life (Flood & Philips, 2007). One psychological strategy for effective life management discussed by Baltes and Smith (2003) is the theory of selective optimization with compensation. An example of the meaning of this theory can be seen from a number of interviews with the 80 year old pianist Rubenstein. In response to how he continued to be an excellent concert pianist, Rubenstein said that he only played a few pieces (selection), but practiced them more often (optimization), and used contrast in tempo to hide finger speed (compensation). Referring to this description of a strategy to effective aging, Baltes and Smith (2003) proposed the following:

> People who select, optimize, and compensate are among those who feel better and more agentic, and that the art of life in old age consists of the creative search for a

new, usually smaller territory, that is cared for with similar intensity as in the past. (p. 132)

Rubenstein consciously applied this approach to his music practices, which helped him continue to play at a high artistic level late in life. Coping with changes, and how we overcome physical disabilities and adapt to changes during the later stages of life, can further be seen in the creative work produced by the contemporary painter Georgia O'Keefe. O'Keefe had a long career as an artist of the 20th Century. She was a pioneer of Native American modern art, and became known for her paintings of richly colored, and often abstract forms of flowers, bones, hills, trees, and other natural shapes that became her trademark. When O'Keefe's eyesight was compromised by macular degeneration in her mid 80s, she stopped painting. But with the help of an assistant, O'Keefe began to work in clay and was able to continue expressing herself creatively, albeit in a new media until the end of her life (Castro, 1985).

Creativity as a way to cope with changes during the later stages of life is not only something engaged in by artists who have practiced their craft throughout a lifetime. Many individuals first begin to tap into their creative capabilities after age 65, at the time of retirement, when they finally are free to pursue an interest that may have lain dormant during many years of active involvement in work related situations, and other responsibilities. Johnson and Sullivan-Marx (2006) illustrated this perception in their study on the potential that creative engagement can offer, to address the emotional needs of the frail older adults. This is important, because emotional needs are often overlooked

in the older adults, at a time when physical ailments and challenges become both visually, and functionally apparent, and become the most urgent focus of attention and care.

In their study, Johnson and Sullivan-Marx (2006) offered sessions of creative artwork at a program of all-inclusive care for the older adults (PACE) site in an urban African-American community. The creative process experienced by the participants, provided a tool for portrayal and resolution of emotions, when coping with challenges associated with aging and frailty. The art-making process created a venue for the participants to learn new things, such as ways of handling different art media, ways of looking at pictures, what purpose a picture may serve, varieties and details in a picture, expression in paint strokes, and choice of colors. These exercises built confidence, and the participants learned that it is possible to successfully meet and adjust to new circumstances.

Making decisions and experiencing control in making art, further provided the participants with an opportunity to sense the feeling of choice and control, that often is lost in the frail older adult population. Johnson and Sullivan-Marx (2006) found that the participants benefited from the creative art experience. They suggested that engaging in artwork could be used "to support coping skills when an older person faces loss of independence, loss of choices, or loss of health" (p. 312). Johnson and Sullivan-Marx further discussed the importance of being able to express emotions and musings about our lives, and the meaning associated with how life developed in the past, how it is lived in the present, and how the future is perceived. Creating artwork, as an expression of emotions, can often be helpful when it is difficult to find words for what has occurred,

and when memories are no longer clear. Based on the results of their study, Johnson and Sullivan-Marx proposed that the wordless expressions of emotions, brought forward in artwork can elicit memories. Engaging in creative activities may further spur the individual to write or narrate that, which have filled the life with meaning and purpose.

The importance of creative writing was supported in a study conducted by Nygren, Norberg, and Lundman (2007). They found that the narratives created by the participants in their study brought forth a heightened awareness of their life's path. The participants maintained an open mind when they narrated their life stories, which essentially included memorized events, people, and situations, from the past to the present. The researchers focused on the meaning of inner strength, narrated by 18 participants in northern Sweden (11 women and 7 men) aged 85 years and older. The main purpose of the study was to explore the experience of being very old, and being in the last phase of developmental aging. Nygren et al. used five themes of inner strength, developed by Roux, Dingley, and Bush (2002), to analyze the narratives provided by the participants: knowing and searching, nurturing through connection, dwelling in a different place by creating the spirit within, healing through movement in the present, and connecting with the future by living a new normal. Nygren et al. proposed that in contrast to the young, older people encounter more challenges and adversities. Nygren et al. further suggested that inner strength is a support and resource, which can increase the capacity to meet challenges in old age, which may lead to healthy aging, and a positive outlook towards the later stages of life. Enhanced successful aging based on encounter with creative activities can

therefore be seen in the study by Nygren et al., where the discussed activity was the participants' narratives.

When creativity and imagination is effectively incorporated into programs offered to older adults, these activities might assist individuals to cope with challenges associated with aging. Providing time and space to create artwork for the older adults is a nonpharmacological, nonmedical, and cost-effective exercise, that can become integrated as part of the treatment to meet the emotional needs of this population, in a flexible, innovative, and engaging way (Johnson & Sullivan-Marx, 2006).

Summary and Conclusions

Developmental growth through the last phases of life carries with it biopsychosocial changes, that may require extra effort and agency in older adults. Many older adults, who have not used their creative abilities earlier in life, may find that later in life, creative activities can be a gateway to connect to various aspects of losses and gains, associated with the aging process. Others, who have used their creativity throughout life, may find that as they transcend to older age, the focus for their creativity may take a new turn (Cohen, 2005). Engaging in creative artwork as a link to expression of emotions, can provide a new frame of reference for memories, events, and stories where our lives can be reviewed in meaningful ways (Flood & Philips, 2002)).

There is a widespread recognition that art and creative activities support the well-being of children's social and emotional development (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Brouillette, 2010). However, the benefit of creative engagement during the development of the later phases of life is rarely discussed. Due to the limited research and literature on

the benefit of creative engagement in the aging population, my aim with this study is to provide further insight to this construct. Because creativity is an inherent way to expression of emotions that may lead to self-acceptance, inner strength, and meaning making, I have chosen a phenomenological approach to my study, where the older adults will engage in art-making that may facilitate a connection to their own unique creativity. In Chapter 3, I describe the method and design for the study, how the participants were invited to participate in the creative circle, and how the data were collected and analyzed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the relationship between engaging in creative art activities and facility of expression of emotions in older adults. The information contained in this chapter, lays the foundation for the qualitative paradigm chosen to explore data collected from the participants' drawings and paintings, when used as a gateway to expression of emotions, reminiscences, and creative problem-solving. The chapter begins with a discussion about the design of the study, and the rationale for choosing a phenomenological analysis and representation. Further presentations include research questions of the investigation to this study. My background pertaining to creativity, health, and older adults, plus my role as the researcher with any possible biases and other ethical issues are included. Participant selection at a senior residence is identified, together with a description of the creative circle sessions explaining the process of each art-making session. How data were collected and later analyzed with a connection to the specific research questions is discussed. The chapter concludes with a description of strategies to establish credibility, as well as issues pertaining to ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Questions

The research questions in this study were formulated based on the inquiry into the essence of the subjective perception, of a group of older adults' experience from engaging in seven weeks of creative art-making activities. The design of this study and

the analysis of the collected data were created, followed, and adhered to in order to search for answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the experience of older adults, who are living in a senior residence in Stockholm, and who engage in the process of creative art activities?
2. How does art-making facilitate the expression of emotions in older adults?
3. Does engaging in creative art activities support a sense of self-esteem, sense of purpose, and social connectivity?
4. What reminiscences emerge when older adults engage in creative art-making?

Design of the Study

Qualitative research is an umbrella term that is used in order to describe a variety of research methods that involve the systematic collection of data, organization, and interpretation of data derived from talk or observation (Malterud, 2001). In this study, I investigated the essence of the subjective experience brought forward by the process and images manifested from art-making by a group of older adult participants. Therefore, a phenomenological design was chosen as the most appropriate method of inquiry into the essence of the older adults' individually perceived experiences from participating in the creative art-making sessions. Husserl (1997/1907) believed that one of the challenges facing researchers in the human sciences was to describe things, the phenomena in themselves, and what it is that resides in the essence of the experience. In order to grasp what something is, Husserl (1997/1907) established a procedure that he called the intuition of essence, or the eidetic reduction. He suggested that "things, determinations, and occurrences, such as processes, relations between things, etc., appear. They are given

in individual perceptions and nexuses of perceptions, they are presentified again in memories, they are presented in images, and they are phantasized in phantasies" (p. 118). Moustakas (1994) summarized the phenomenological way of inquiry this way:

> The aim is to determine what an experience means for the person who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions general or universal meanings are derived, in other words the essences of structures of the experience. (p. 13)

In this study, the essence of the experience discussed by Moustakas (1994) will be the information from drawings and paintings, and the subjective emotions of these art activities, as perceived and expressed by the older adult participants. According to Maxwell (2005) a phenomenological research is "typically a study on a relatively small number of individuals or situations, that preserve the individuality of each of these in their analyses, rather than collecting data from large samples and aggregating the data across individuals or situations" (p. 22). The data were collected from 10 individuals, 65 years of age or older, and who have experienced the same event of participating in seven weekly sessions of 90 minutes per week of creative activities and discussions.

Phenomenology that emphasizes the meaning of an experience is different from grounded theory, where the emphasis is to generate or discover a theory (Creswell, 2007). Grounded theory moves beyond description of an experience or interaction, to a process of constant comparison and reduction aimed at establishing a well-integrated theory, built from defined concepts connected to the research under question (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). The development of a new theory that is generated or discovered from collected

data in grounded theory can only take place when the researcher is open to the process, action, or interaction by a relatively large number of participants in a study. Information gathering in grounded theory is a process that needs to be repeated. After the researchers collect data, they realize that new data need to be collected and analyzed. In this constructivist process of interpreting collected data, the focus is more on the researcher's view, and learning about the experience from within a hidden network of situations and relationships (Mills, Bonner, & Frances, 2006).

Ethnography, which is another form of qualitative research, was also not selected for this study, because ethnographic research requires that the researcher stay within the field of study for a long period of time to observe, interview, and reflect on the participants' behavior. Further, the focus of ethnography is the interpretation of a culture-sharing group, where the final product is a holistic cultural portrait of the group that incorporates the view of both the participants and the researcher (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). In contrast, the phenomenological approach of this study does not incorporate my personal description of the essence of an event. Rather, it was important that I bracketed my own feelings and responses as much as possible, and set aside experiences that may have led to a biased interpretation of the phenomenon under examination (Creswell, 2007).

Role of the Researcher

Phenomenological research attitude requires a fresh and unbiased description of the subject matter, where prejudgments and preconceived ideas about things are put aside (Moustakas, 1994). However, because any view according to Maxwell (2005) is from

some perspective, and therefore shaped by the observer, it is important that the researcher is aware of how this experience may affect the study. In order for the researcher to be cognizant of experiences, events, and background that may be brought to the study, Mawell (2005) suggested that the researcher write a description of any expectations, beliefs, and assumption about the context of the study. According to Husserl (1928/2005), phenomenological research begins with a fresh and unbiased description of its subject matter. Husserl discussed two procedures called epoches, which involves maintaining an attitude of abstaining from that, which could influence or bias descriptions. The first epoche includes a natural attitude on behalf of the researcher, with an unreflective state of mind of the world as it is lived in everyday encounters, without any preconceived notions. Previous knowledge of scientific theories, explanations, and conceptualization of the subject matter should be bracketed as much as possible (Husserl, 1928/2005).

The second epoche requires a transformation from a natural attitude to a neutral attitude, where the researcher in a purely unbiased fashion subjectively reflects on how the lived-world presents itself. Contemplations in the neutral attitude can include perceptions, beliefs, emotions, and expectations, but it is all in an as-if attitude, where situations and experiences are bracketed (Husserl, 1928/2005). In order to prevent any possible bias in this study, I followed Husserl's procedure of epoches and maintained a natural and neutral attitude throughout the creative sessions, and later when analyzing data from the interviews with the participants and their subjective perspectives of engaging in creative art-making.

The subject of this study is creative art-making as a means to expression of emotions when engaged in by older adults, who live in a senior residence. When conducting this research, my background as a textile artist and painter, combined with my own experience of aging, may have influenced my perspective on the subject of this study. In addition to my work and interest in the creative field, I have completed an extensive training program in the psychodynamic developmental process of aging. My lifelong passion lies in exploring inherent creative energy in the form of art-making and its contribution to consciousness, movement, health, and well-being during the different phases of life. The way my role as the researcher in this study remains clear, comes in part from my current and past work with bereavement, and counseling patients diagnosed with a life threatening illness. As a previous textile artist, current certified thanatologist, and board certified and licensed art therapist, my work provides me with a grounded sense of objectivity, while still maintaining compassion and presence during the art activity sessions. I maintained strict objectivity throughout the creative sessions and when collecting data, with the awareness that my own perceptions during this time may be contributing information and substance to my study (Merleau-Ponty, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). I have no previous personal or professional relationship with the participants in this study before we met at the beginning of the creative circle sessions, which were held at a senior residence in Stockholm, Sweden

Methodology

Participants in this study were older adults 65 years of age or older, who live full time at a senior residence in Stockholm, Sweden. About 250,000 individuals in Sweden,

age 65 and older (14% of this age group), are currently living in senior residences that offer various levels of care and support (Socialstyrelsen, 2012). To my knowledge, and after extensive literature search, there are no studies in Sweden on creativity as a way of communication associated with older adults. Similar to many senior residences globally, activities that are typically offered to the older adult population in Sweden are bingo, water gymnastics, literary presentations, music events, choir singing, and movies.

Participation in this study was open to all residents, who had not been diagnosed with a mental disorder, and who were able to communicate in Swedish or English. In order to establish the criteria for participation in the creative circle, I screened potential participants during the initial interview by their capacities to speak, orientation to time and place, and their responses to questions, such as what motivated them to participate in the circle, and how did they see their ability to function in a group (see Appendix A). A separate housing unit at the senior residence is available for individuals who are diagnosed with dementia, and where I did not recruit any participants. Potential participants for this study might have been individuals with depressive or anxiety disorder, and I therefore screened for psychoses by asking if they have experienced any hallucination or delusions (see Appendix A).

The older adults participated in seven weekly sessions of creative art-making activities, discussions, and a voluntary individual interview after the conclusion of the sessions. The purposeful sample size of 10 participants was chosen in order to meet sample saturation, based on in-depth and richness of data obtained during seven weekly meetings. Participants in a phenomenological study may range from one person to the

hundreds. However, many phenomenological studies are conducted with a sampling of 20 or less participants (Patton, 2015). Schmidt (2006) applied a phenomenological method in her study on the meanings of creativity within occupational therapy, with a sampling of three participants chosen from a local geographic area in Australia. Nelson and Rawlings (2007) used 11 professional artists from a range of disciplines, in their phenomenological study on artistic creativity being its own reward.

When conducting the research, I used a phenomenological approach to explore the essence of the participants' subjective experience and conscious perception brought forward by art-making. According to Polkinghorn (1983), phenomenological research is a report on the lives of several individuals and their collective understanding of their experience. The older adults' descriptions of perceived experience from participating in art-making activities was fully explored when following Moustaka's (1994) proposed guidelines of analyzing the data for significant phrases, developing meaning, and coded units that merged into specific categories.

Because each person brought his or her specific meaning to this process, the focus of inquiry was each participant's individual perception and awareness of meaning, experienced through the process of creative art-making. The creative act of making something, where before there was nothing, by combining art material such as color, shape, form, or word, may be seen in our tendency to make special or recognizing specialness. Both recognizing and conferring specialness, emanating from within self, according to Dissanayake (1990), is an evolutionary aspect of human behavior, that has been operating and developing from the very earliest times in history.

Allowing time during the creative sessions for the participants' observation, reflection, and processing of their created images was important in this inquiry. After the process of creating an image, the artwork has become permanent, and leaves time and space for the next process: that of individual reflection. There is a difference in the experience of being in the process of making the image, and that of being the witness of the image. While the act of creating an image may invoke absence of focused thought, being the witness involves imaginative thought. The metaphor of the stable image may invoke various emotions, and it is therefore important to allow some time for reflection of the image, where the metaphors may take shape and become a road to self-discovery, and expression of a previous unspoken emotions (Knill, Levine, & Levine, 2005). The complexity of an imaginary reality can emerge when something concrete, such as a painting, or a poem is being formed, and open up to the beginning of a dialogue, either with self or with others.

When considering a continuous fluctuating consciousness suggested by Polkinghorn (1989) that cannot easily be grasped, reflection of a created image may invoke various emotions. Therefore, the created image or object in art-making may provide a tangible and unchanging construct on which to engage in subjective reflection of relationship with self, and the external relationship to the environment. The created image may further provide a stable platform, by holding the tension in our continual attempt to balance the two opposite forces of relations: the internal and the external (Woodman, 1982). This is important, because part of successful aging is bringing resolution and ease, to past emotions and memories. Thus, in this study emotions and

memories was explored in a meaningful way, which was supported by Moustakas (1994) who held that "as we look and reflect, there are acts of memory relevant to a phenomenon that reawaken feelings and images and bring past meanings and qualities into the present" (p. 53).

During the seven weeks of creative art activities I continuously collected data that was later used as supportive information when I conducted the analysis of this study. The data collection that included my field notes and analytic journal, the participants' created images, and the audiotaped individual interviews that were thoroughly transcribed provided sufficient support when answering the research questions.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation and Data Collection

Recruitment of the older adults, who participated in this study live in a senior residence located in Stockholm, Sweden. There are currently 600 individual apartments at the senior residence, ranging in sizes from one to three rooms. The senior residence was established in 1862 as a home for older unmarried women, and is owned and run by an organization called Sällskapet Vänner till Pauvres Honteux (SVPH). The first home of SVPH housed a handful of women with no financial or family support, but where they could enjoy "care, comfort, peace, and respect" (Milton, 2012, p. 7). It was not unusual for older and unmarried women at this time, to have lived a life where they supported and took care of their parents, extended family, and the home. This ongoing caretaking would leave the unmarried women with no time for a family of their own. They were thus left alone, and with little or no financial means after their parents died, and the home or farm was either sold, or inherited by a son.

During the more than 150 years that has passed since the first SVPH home for older women was established, there has been a continuous development and additions, with careful thought as to what needed improvement, and how to best adhere to the founded statues of care, comfort, and respect. One of the more transformative changes to the statues of SVPH came in 1970, when it was decided that also men were invited to establish residence at the now expanded number of available apartments (Milton, 2012).

Today, the 600 apartments at the senior residence are located in three buildings, adjacent to one another and connected by a long corridor, or by a walkway of about five minutes. In addition to the apartments, the facilities include meeting rooms, dining rooms, music room, computer room, billiard room, swimming pool, wine cellar, carpenter studio, weaving studio, exercise room, and comfortable outdoor and garden areas for use during the summer months. There are a number of activities offered to the residents, which include the use of some of the facilities. Additional available activities include bus transportation to such things as shopping, theatre, or other forms of entertainment.

In order to connect with the senior residence where I proposed to conduct my study, I forwarded a letter to the administrator in charge. In the letter, which was sent via electronic mail, l introduced myself and discussed the purpose of the study. When there was an interest for further discussion, a meeting was arranged where I gave a power point presentation of my proposed study. I discussed the process of the creative activity meetings that were called *the creative circle*, the ethical protection of the participants, and future information to the administration of the senior residence of the final results of my study. When an agreement was met that I may proceed with my study at the senior

residence, the administrator in charge of the procedures and activities signed a letter of cooperation (see Appendix B).

All the activities held at the senior residence are announced, either on a large information board inside the entrance to the main building, or they can be viewed on the Internet home page of the residence. A flyer (see Appendix C) announcing that the creative circle would be held in one of the meeting rooms on the second floor of the residence was posted on the information board of activities. There are three other meeting rooms on the second floor, and therefore the residents often frequent this part of the building, which can be reached either by stairs or by an elevator. The creative circle was first offered to a range of 10-15 participants, which provided for flexibility, possible attrition, and for participants who may decide not to give feedback interview at the end of the sessions. The residents who signed up for the creative circle could inform me directly via electronic mail, or via telephone which was stated in the flyer. Before starting the circle, informed consent (see Appendix D) was obtained from the participants who met the inclusion criteria, and were interested in joining the creative art sessions of 90 minutes per week for seven consecutive weeks. Permission to use the participants' images for educational purpose only (see Appendix E) was also discussed at this time. No previous art experience was needed for participation, and information about the weekly art sessions (see Appendix F) was provided at the beginning of each session, together with the appropriate art materials.

The aim of collecting data in a phenomenological research is to provide evidence for the experience that is investigated. It requires a collection of intense and saturated

descriptions of the lived experience, with a focus on understanding, describing, and clarifying what is being explored (Polkinghorne, 2005). In this study, the data were collected from the perceived experience of 10 older adults, who participated in the art-making activities of the creative circle sessions. Throughout the seven weeks of the creative sessions, I continuously wrote memos, where I engaged in serious reflection, analysis, and self-critique. I wrote short phrases, ideas, or key concepts that occurred to me during and after the art-making sessions, either on 3 x 5 cards, or in a computer file that I used for longer memos. These analytical memos contributed to keeping the study fresh, and as a way of working out problems that may come up during the course of the study (Maxwell, 2005). The collected images, together with any and all notes, pertaining to the study, were kept confidential in a locked filing cabinet in my office. I was the only person with access to the cabinet.

The process for collecting data in a phenomenological study further includes an in-depth interview, using specific open-ended questions (Maxwell, 2005). A semi-structured interview (see Appendix G) was held individually with each participant, upon completion of the seven weekly sessions. The interviews were audio taped for later verbatim transcription. During the interviews, I was attentive to the epoche process described by Husserl (1928/2005), in helping me to maintain a natural and neutral attitude, and to bracket any personal biases and expectations. According to Husserl, epoche is derived from an ancient Greek term that describes the moment where all judgments about the existence of the external world are suspended. Husserl proposed that one of the requirements in phenomenological research is the procedure of epoche, which

provides a new way of looking at things: a way that requires that we learn to see with an unbiased mind and natural attitude, that which we can distinguish and describe.

Data Analysis Plan

When analyzing the data, I used a phenomenological approach to gain an understanding of the essence of the participants' subjective experience from engaging in creative art-making. I followed Moustakas's (1994) method of analysis and procedures, consisting of a continuous interrelated process of data collection, analysis, and reporting. I further followed Saldana's (2009) suggesting of the cyclical coding of data into categories because of shared common characteristics. The analytic process in this study included my bracketed and in-depth reflection of the transcriptions from audiotaped individual interviews, participants' created images, field notes, and a reflective journal. The first step in the analysis was the organization and management of data collection. I began this process by listening to the audio recordings a number of times. Then, I transcribed the recordings, and read the transcripts several times to immerse myself in the details of wordings, sentences, and the participants' perspective of their experience during the art making sessions. During the second reading, I made notes of my own observations relevant to the expressions of the participants' experience while remaining aware of horizonalization, where according to Moustakas (1994), the information provided by each participant has equal value. Horizonalization is a never-ending process, where every time that we may feel that we have reached a stopping point or understanding of something, the possibility for yet further discoveries is unlimited (Moustakas, 1994).

An important part of the process of analysis was personal reflection, time to ponder and reflect on the collected data, to find meaning and patterns, and to draw conclusions. I organized the data by labeling file folders and index cards with identified text units. When reading the transcripts, I wrote emerging concepts on the index cards that formed the initial codes, which later were moved into categories. The analysis also included observational notes, which I wrote shortly after each creative session. The process of the analysis developed already when making sense of the data that emerged, while I was still in the field. Recording and tracking analytic insight that may occur during data collection according to Patton (2015) may catch a moment of important field-based analytic insight, which otherwise may be forgotten and lost forever. During the analysis it was important to keep meticulous attention to language, and to deeply reflect on emerging patterns of emotions and meaning, arising from the participants' description of their drawings, and their experience of the art process (Moustakas, 1994; Saldana, 2009). Maxwell (2005) supported this process and mentioned the importance of continued writing of memos during the analysis, which may facilitate and stimulate analytic insight. In moving from a naïve understanding to an in-depth interpretation of the transcribed interviews, I highlighted words or short phrases of expressions relevant to the participants' experience. At this time I did not yet identify codes, but mainly highlighted those words or sentences that emerged as expressions of the participants' perception of an experience, while sifting the trivial from the significant information (Patton, 2015).

In the second step, I started a cyclical act of coding the data. According to Saldana (2009), the first cycle of coding data is rarely perfect, but a second and possibly

third attempt at coding, will contribute to the management, filtering, and highlighting of salient features in the data collection. The coding permits data to be segregated, grouped, and regrouped in order to generate categories, while also removing overlapping and repetitive statements (Moustakas, 1994). Polkinghorn (1989) suggested the use of imaginative variation when coding the transcribed data, as a process to access meaning transformations that were based on responses to the interview questions. When examining the concrete expressions of the participants' experiences, I explored possible alternative aspects of perspectives and meanings underlying their descriptions. Polkinghorn (1989) further held that one way to test the correctness of a meaning transformation is the possibility of working backwards, from the transformed meaning units or themes to the participants' original descriptions.

In the third section of the analysis, I synthesized textural (what the participants experienced) and structural (how they experienced the event in terms of judging, imagining, and recollecting) description of the participants' impression of their engagement in the creative art sessions. During this step of the analysis I segregated the codes into categories that were based on the conceptual framework of Lazarus's (1999) cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotions.

The fourth and final step in the analysis led to the goal of reducing the essence of the perceived phenomena of the participants' experience into meaningful themes. Thematic analysis is not unlike coding, in that it is a process of insightful focus that requires comparable reflection on participants' descriptions of meanings and outcomes (Saldana, 2009). When I reduced the participants' experiences of the phenomena to their

essential structures, themes emerged that culminated in a full understanding of the textural and structural experiences perceived by the participants.

Each qualitative study is unique and the researcher's analytical thought process cannot be perfectly replicated. No absolute rules exist and therefore no test can be applied for reliability and validity (Patton, 2015). However, a widely used technique in validity testing when conducting a qualitative research is in the treatment of discrepant cases. It is important to be aware of instances or cases in the analysis that cannot be accounted for, by a particular perception or interpretation. Therefore, during rigorous examinations of both the discrepant and the supporting data, it is helpful to ask for feedback, as a way to check against possible biases and assumptions (Maxwell, 2005). In this study, feedback was received through member checking. If discrepant cases were found, they are included in the report of the final analysis in Chapter 4.

Issue of Trustworthiness

Polkinghorn (1989) suggested that the goal for the phenomenological researcher is to determine that the findings are valid and trusted, and can be the basis of information leading to policy decisions and actions. The concept of validity, according to Polkinghorn is "that an idea is well-grounded and well-supported and thus that one can have confidence in it" (p. 57). The quality and authenticity of data in a qualitative research is dependent on the researcher's skill and fundamental presence required to capture the emic perspective of the participants during gathering, interpretation, and transcription of research data (Natasi & Schensul, 2005).

In order to achieve trustworthiness, several criteria and techniques, as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), was used in this study. Verification of the study was achieved from a comprehensive literature search of both qualitative and quantitative research of creative activities and older adults. Due to the paucity in published journals of creativity, successful aging, and older adults, the search included articles on physical and mental health associated with successful aging. My own past experiences pertaining to this study was disclosed and bracketed in order to identify possible bias. Bracketing is a term used for the process of becoming aware of predispositions and assumptions on the part of the researcher, which was put aside as much as possible to avoid any influence this may have had on the research (Morrow, 2005). To enhance the trustworthiness of this study, I remained attentive to the following four steps of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility in a qualitative data may be established by the use of triangulation, which involves gathering and analyzing multiple perspectives from diverse sources. It is not unusual for researchers to select three or four ways of collecting data, because it will provide access to different kinds of information within the category that is the subject of the study. According to LeCompte and Schensul (1999) triangulation of information on the same subject from different data sources is critical to validity. If only one means of collecting data is used, the study may be subject to criticism for lack of analytic rigor. Member checking is a critical part in qualitative research for establishing the credibility, and strengthen the validity of a study (Doyle, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined member checking as a concept involving the participants' views of the

analyses, interpretation, and conclusion of the study where they were the contributors of the collected data.

Transferability may be found in strategies such as thick description and variation in participant selections, which are important factors in order to establish external validity. A detailed account of the participants or of the setting of the study will provide a thick description. When the researcher provides a thick and detailed description, it is possible for the reader to determine if the finding from the information is possible to transfer to other similar settings (Creswell, 2007). Variation in participant selection is another strategy to establish transferability and external validity. However, sampling strategy for participant selection may vary within the characteristics of the specific group targeted for a study. For example, in maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling, the aim is to look for common themes that emerge out of great variation. But in a homogenous sampling, the purpose may be to describe in detail the individual experiences of some particular subgroup (Patton, 2015).

In order to establish dependability in a qualitative study, the researcher may allow an external auditor to examine the process of the study and assess its accuracy. The auditor, who will have no previous connection to the study, will examine whether the findings of the study are supported by the data. Other approaches to address reliability in a qualitative research may include the researcher's comprehensive field notes and detailed transcription of the audiotaped interviews that indicate crucial pauses, overlaps, and mood sounds. Further, there may be more than one person coding the transcripts, where the extra coder does not have any knowledge of the expectations or purpose of the

study (Creswell, 2009). A further strategy to establish credibility is the use of triangulation (Patton, 2015), which in my study was the use of different data sources in order to determine consistency across the participants' experiences of creative art-making.

Confirmability, the qualitative counterpart to objectivity in quantitative research, is an important part of establishing trustworthiness and can be found in the degree of reflexivity observed in the researcher. Reflexivity is meant to direct the researcher to a particular reflection that emphasizes the importance of "deep introspection, political consciousness, cultural awareness, and ownership of one's perspective" (Patton, 2015, p. 70). Reflexivity reminds the researcher to not only be attentive to and conscious of one's own perspective and voice, but also of the perspective and voices of the participants in the study, and the perspective of the audience, who will receive the findings. A triangulated reflexive inquiry suggested by Patton (2015) is to remain attentive to culture, age, gender, class, social status, education, family, political praxis, language, and values when asking questions of oneself (the qualitative inquirer), the participants, and the audience.

In addition to the above four ways in which I sought to make my study trustworthy, a robust study also includes the substantial experience and skills of the researcher when collecting data for a study (Charmaz, 2006). In order to improve on my research skills before conducting this study, I offered the creative circle as a pilot study, at four senior residences during 2012 and 2013. The procedures of the sessions, with the ensuing individual interviews, were similar to the description of the current study. The participants in these previous creative circles were asked to critique their own interviews,

and the content of the different art sessions. Based of the feedback from these creative circles, I was able to improve on my interview questions, and to alter some of the art sessions to become more meaningful to the participants. This process helped to improve my ability to conduct interviews, and it enhanced the flow of collecting various data, which strengthened the quality and trustworthiness of this study.

Ethical Procedures

When conducting research, ethical concerns and protection of the participants are as important as the data collection To ensure ethical protection of the participants, informed consent and adherence to strict confidentiality was discussed with the participants, prior to their signing the consent form. During our initial information meeting, participants were informed about the purpose of the research, expected duration, procedures, and their right to decline to participate, or to withdraw from the study after the creative circle sessions had begun. Participation in the creative circle group was voluntary, and not connected to the regular activities of the senior residence. This meant that decisions not to participate, or to end participation any time during the seven weekly sessions, would not have any impact on a participant's treatment at the senior residence.

One risk factor for participant confidentiality that was discussed prior to the first session was that their artwork could not be assured complete anonymity. The setting involved a group of participants, where observations of the artwork and discussions were shared within the group. The participants were asked to respect the confidentiality of their co-participants, but because the art was created and viewed together with other participants, full or complete confidentiality of the images could not be guaranteed. Each

participant had been assigned a unique code name, which was written on the back of the respective artwork, in order to protect his or her identity. In between the creative circle meetings, the images were stored in a locked cabinet in my office, until the seven weekly sessions were over, at which time the participants could retrieve their work. If the participants choose not to retrieve their artwork at the end of the sessions, I will store the folders with their artwork in a locked filing cabinet for the required five years, before they will be destroyed. The audio-taped interviews and written transcripts were also given code names for each participant, to ensure that no identifiable information was connected to the interview data. The computer data connected to the study was password protected. All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet for five years and then destroyed. Computer files and flash drives will also be erased at that time.

This study took place at a privately owned senior residence, and no formal institutional approval needed to be submitted according to the administrator in charge, who signed the letter of cooperation. I also submitted an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application to Walden University that was approved before recruiting research participants or collecting data. The IRB approval number for my study is 08-27-14-0104805 and it expires on August 26, 2015. The IRB demonstrated full appliance with the university's ethical standards and showed that the potential benefits of the study will outweigh possible risks and burdens placed on the participants.

Summary

In this chapter I traced the research methodology, from the rationale of the design of the study, to the process of participant sampling, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures. I further covered my role as the researcher and discussed steps to ensure trustworthiness and scientific rigor. The paradigm of phenomenological research was chosen as a general guideline for this study, because it allowed for the development of meaning, associated with the participants' subjective reflections of their engagement in creative art-making. The evolving data,based on participants' reflections, facilitated by their artwork, and verbalized in discussions and interviews, was summarized into coded units and then categorized. The codes were a translation of the essence of the phenomenon of the participants' descriptions of their subjective experience, reminiscences, and musings emerging from their created images. I further discussed the three categories linked to the conceptual framework of Lazarus's (1999) cognitive-motivation-relation theory of emotions: a) emerging emotions – growth, b) appraisal – motivation, and c) creativity – subjective experience. The findings of four themes that emerged from the collected data about creativity as a means to expression of emotions in older adults are presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how the use of creative art activities may facilitate expression of emotions in a group of older adults. A phenomenological method of inquiry and analysis was used to grasp the essence of perceived experience of 10 older adults, who participated in a creative circle of art-making activities during seven weekly sessions. The 90-minute sessions included creative engagement in drawing, painting, poetry writing, collage, color cut outs, and a voluntary participation in discussions of the individually created images and words. Upon completion of the seven weekly sessions, an in-depth interview, using specific open-ended questions (see Appendix G), was held with each participant.

When I formulated the research questions, my intention was to arrive at a topic within the context of creative expression that included both personal significance and social meaning (Moustakas, 1994). The core inquiry from the research questions was intended to explore the meaning and essence of the lived and perceived experience (the phenomena) of engaging in art-making by a group of older adults. Because the purpose of the study warranted answers to a number of different perspectives, four research questions were asked in order to capture the fully lived experience perceived by the older adults.

1. What is the experience of older adults, who are living in a senior residence in Stockholm, and who engage in the process of creative art activities?
2. How does art-making facilitate the expression of emotions in older adults?

3. Does engaging in creative art activities support a sense of self-esteem, sense of purpose, and social connectivity?
4. What reminiscences emerge when older adults engage in creative artwork?

This chapter begins with a description of the setting, demographics of the participants, and data collection. I further describe the process of data analysis, which is summarized and described for a full understanding of the specific codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the audio taped interviews and data collection. Following a discussion of the evidence of trustworthiness, I present the results arranged according to each emerging theme with supporting data.

Setting

The seven weekly meetings of the creative circle were held in Room A at a senior residence in Stockholm, Sweden. Room A is a rectangular room with four windows along the shorter north wall, the entrance is on the opposite south wall, and the walls on either sides are painted in a light beige color, where a few paintings were hung. A rectangular table in front of the windows was large enough to comfortably accommodate eight participants, leaving enough leeway for everyone to create their images. There was still plenty of space left at the south end of the room, where I unfolded three bridge tables. Two of the participants were seated at one table, and I used the remaining two tables to present the different art products, such as colored papers, magazines for collage, scissors, glue, acrylic paint, paint brushes, colored markers, crayons, and water colors. Each week the products changed slightly, according to the creative activity of the respective week. Because the participants were all residents at the same senior residence,

most of them recognized each other but did not know each other on a more personal level, except for random meetings in the dining room or from meeting at some of the other activities that were offered at the senior residence. However, two of the participants were a married couple.

Demographics

Demographic data for the participants of the study are provided in Table 1. The names are pseudonyms and selected before the sessions began. The participants' ages ranged from age 69 to 88 years and the majority of the participants were women (80%).

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Name	Age	Gender	Marital Status
P1	Berit	88	Female	Widow
P2	Birgit	87	Female	Married
P3	Elsa	72	Female	Single
P4	Erik	79	Male	Widower
P5	Greta	75	Female	Widow
P6	Hanna	69	Female	Married
P7	Ida	72	Female	Widow
P8	Jane	73	Female	Married
P9	Lena	88	Female	Widow
P10	Lennart	78	Male	Married

Data Collection

Ten older adults, who lived in the same senior residence participated in this study during seven consecutive weeks of 90 minutes weekly sessions of art-making activities. Data collection included field notes, my analytic journal, the images created by the participants, and transcribed audio-taped interviews held with each participant. In the semi-structured interview protocol, the open-ended questions were formulated to gain an understanding of the participants' view of their experience from having actively engaged in the creative circle. At the beginning of the circle, there were 12 participants who had asked to join the sessions. After the first week, one of the participants announced she now realized, that the dates for the weekly sessions interfered with her previous engagements, and therefore, she would not be able to continue in the creative circle. Another participant did not return to the second session after she had experienced a fall, which resulted in a broken hip and hospitalization. The remaining 10 participants joined the weekly sessions with the exceptions of a few weeks, where one or two participants were absent due to not feeling well.

The creative sessions were held on seven consecutive Tuesdays, between the hours of 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. After all the participants had arrived to Room A and were seated, I offered a few minutes of guided relaxation, with focus on bringing awareness to being present in the room, in the body, and to a place of acceptance and non-judgmental atmosphere. It is not unusual for individuals, with no or little previous practice in creating images, to experience anxiety or inhibiting thoughts, when asked to engage in creative art activities (Pennebaker, 1990). For the older adults, who may have experienced a possible

decline in the physical or productive domains, there may also be an expectation of decline in creative capacity. However, even though outward signs of creativity may be diminished due to physical illness, sensory losses, and other age associated handicaps experienced by the older adult, creativity in itself is not diminished (Lindauer, 2003).

In order to maintain the time limit of the 90-minute sessions, and to allow enough time for each step, I adhered to the following timeline: enter and welcome (5 minutes); guided relaxation (5 minutes); introduction of the weekly art activity (5 minutes); collecting art materials and preparing individual workspace (10 minutes); working creatively on the image (30 minutes); attaching the created artwork to the wall, silent observation, and discussion (30 minutes); closing of the session (5 minutes).

After the welcoming and relaxation exercise, I introduced the art activity of the current week (see Appendix F), and asked the participants to choose their art materials, which were displayed on the two smaller tables in the room. When everyone had collected their art material, and was seated and ready to work on their images, I suggested that each person would work within his or her own space, and not talk to his or her neighbor, as this may interfere with their focus and concentration. During the time that the participants worked on their artwork in silence, I played a compact disc of soft instrumental music on my laptop that was attached with a speaker. The soft music helped to drown out noises that may come from the outside, and held the session together, while lessening the urge the participants may have felt to discuss their image with his or her neighbor. In choosing what music to play, I was careful to find a piece that would not

suggest a special feeling, but would be as non-committal as possible, and therefore choose a soft flute melody.

When I noticed that the participants were close to being finished with their images, I asked them to please give their artwork a title, and to write their given code name on the back of the images. I suggested that the title did not have to have a special meaning, but to write down what first came to mind. The title often assisted the participant later, whether as a metaphor, emotion, or life story, with an entrance into a discussion of their image. After this stage was completed, I collected the images and attached them to one of the sidewalls. The participants then observed the images in silence for a few minutes, before we begun the discussion, which was the last part of the session. The scheduled time of a silent moment, when the participants reflected on the images, was an important part of the process of awakening the creative mind, and opening up to verbally express any questions, emotions, or contemplations that may emerge.

The participants observed and reflected on their newly created images, which were attached to a wall within 5 to 10 feet from where they were sitting. The participants gave their full attention to the images, with as little conceptual thought as possible, but with awareness, which may at a later time (or immediately) lead to an inner dialogue. Consciousness of an object, and categorized by reflection, according to Merleau-Ponty (2012) "*is* existence for itself. The object thus becomes *what,* even if only as an episode that is fleeting, but of which it will always be true that it existed in objective time" (p. 227). The participants were informed that actively participating in a discussion about their reflection was voluntary, and if they would rather hold their thoughts to themselves,

they would have a later opportunity during the interview at the end of the sessions to discuss their reflections. However, during the remaining 25 minutes that were left for discussion, most participants were eager to share what had emerged during the process of the art activity and from their images.

Upon the conclusion of each session, and after the participants had left the room, I used a laptop to make field notes of my own observations during the art activities, during the discussions, and of any other observations that could be pertinent to the data analysis. While the images were still attached to the wall, I photographed each image separately, and then I stored the original images in folders marked with the respective participant's code name. During the week, I kept the folders safely stored in a locked cabinet in my office, but brought them with me to each meeting of the creative circle. The photographs of the images were later used in the data analysis, while the original artwork was returned to the participants when we met for the last session of the creative circle. The images were needed for the last session, when each participant made their individual exhibit of their artwork. The last session gave the participants time to bring all their images together in a way that felt meaningful, to reflect on their creative process, and to explore any feelings that may have emerged during the previous six weeks of the creative circle.

During the seventh and last meeting of the creative circle, I had asked the participants to bring their date book in order to schedule a 50-minute interview within the following couple of weeks. Both the flyer and the consent form stated that participation in discussion and a feedback interview at the end of the sessions were voluntary, and not a requirement for joining the activities of the creative circle. However, all the participants

were generous with their time, and agreed to meet with me for an interview scheduled within the following 10 days.

Moustakas (1994) suggested creating an atmosphere where the participant will feel comfortable, and one that may encourage trust, openness, and self-disclosure during the interview. I met with each participant for a one-on-one interview in the same meeting room, where we had met earlier for the creative circle activities. Before every meeting, I arrived early for our appointed time, to assure that the room was available as scheduled, and that it was presentable to receive the participant. After our initial greeting, I briefly summarized the purpose of the interview, indicated the digital voice recorder, and assured the participant that the interview was confidential. The interviews were audiotaped, and after each interview I made notes of any understandings, and observations that may have emerged during the discussion. An average interview took 50 minutes, with a range from 35 to 60 minutes.

Data Analysis

In the process of analyzing the data, I followed Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological model of organizing, analyzing and synthesizing data. I also followed Saldana's (2009) description of the cyclical act of codifying and categorizing data in order to determine a theme in a meaningful way. During the first step of the analysis, I organized and managed the collected data, which included the transcribed audio taped interviews held with each participant, photographs of the images created by the participants, my field notes, and my analytic journal. The initial process of coding included managing, filtering, and highlighting salient features in the data collection. This

process was challenging and time consuming, where I exercised perseverance, while dealing with deduction, synthesis, evaluation, and critical and logical thinking. I was aware of maintaining an unbiased perspective of the participants' descriptions of their experience and this was especially important when sifting the trivial from the significant information. After my first cycle of coding, and leaving some time for reflection and analytic writing, I went through the transcripts one more time to check for any essences of meaning, which may have been missed the first time around, and addressed each code through the use of imaginative variation.

During the second level of analysis, I began the process of moving inductively from coded units to categories. Throughout the analyses of the participants' words, phrases, and images I reflected and was reflective, while using imaginative variation in order to interpret the essence of the participant's perceived experiences. My aim was to organize the data collection in such a way that an overall pattern would become clear (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, I was aware of the changing and ongoing process of action and reaction of individual experiences, as any experience is never totally stable, but is more like a flickering flame.

In my work with the text of the transcripts, together with the participants' images and my field notes, I found that my computer screen was not able to visually provide me with the spread, which was needed to effectively work on the emerging codes and categories. Therefore, I printed the transcribed interviews and cut out the highlighted areas, which were marked with the respective participant's code name. Then I adhered the cutouts to three large poster boards for an initial viewing. This procedure provided a

visual, and overall perspective of all the relevant and significant expressions of the coded data. In the next step I organized and grouped similarly coded data to emerging categories based on the conceptual framework of Lazarus's (1999) cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotions. The three poster boards had a title and color for each descriptive category, emerging emotions: growth, appraisal: motivation, and creativity: subjective experience. I could now move the cutouts, and adhere them to the category board that best fit the concepts and beliefs expressed by the participants.

During the categorization of the codes, I found that there were instances of possible overlaps of the same code between different categories. However, after going back through the transcriptions and the coded units a number of times, to submerge myself in the full context of a participant's description of her or his experience, there was always one category that stood out more than the other, as an umbrella and appropriate fit for the respective coded message. Throughout the data analysis, when I was acting and reacting to the coded units, interpreting their meaning and attaching them to the appropriate categorized poster board, specific themes slowly emerged that summarized a collective understanding of the participant's voices and perspectives of their individual creative experiences.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility (internal validity) in this study was achieved through the period of seven weeks when I had regular contact with the participants during weekly meetings and creative sessions of 90 minutes. Ten participants fulfilled the criteria for adequate sampling in this study. Saturation of data were achieved by the collection of participants'

images, discussions, and reflections during seven weekly sessions, plus an individual interview with each participant at the end of the seven weeks. All the participants engaged in the same provided art activity, which changed character and information each week. A maximum of 70 images were possible, but due to some absences, there were 62 images available and used as data. The variation in art-making provided a means for the participants to reach their own and unique essence of meaning, which allowed for triangulation of data. Member checking is another critical part in qualitative research for establishing credibility. In this study I electronically mailed five of the participants, who were involved in the creative sessions, the result of my audio transcriptions to explore if the transcriptions were accepted as reasonable representations of their experiences and realities. Participants were encouraged to look for accuracy of wording, and to give comments and corrections of the transcribed interpretation. All of the participants responded and verified the accuracy of the transcripts.

Transferability (external validity) in this study was established through thick description of the participants' perceived experience of engaging in various art-making activities during the seven weeks of the creative circle meetings. Further, the series of seven art activities used during the creative circle sessions can be replicated to other groups of a similar population. The participants were white, middle-class, and older adults of a senior residence in Stockholm, Sweden. Therefore, the findings from this study may not be generalized to a wider international population of older adults. However, because of the homogenous sampling of older adults residing at one senior residence in

Sweden, the experience of engaging in creative art-making by this particular subgroup could be described in detail.

Dependability (reliability) in data collection was carefully and systematically documented each week for fresh analytic insight. The individual voice of each participant slowly emerged over the seven weeks, while I adhered to the epoche process both during the participants' time period of actual art-making, and also during the ensuing discussion period. Immediately after the conclusion of each session, when the participants had left the meeting room, I made detailed notes of what had transpired during the session. Triangulation was established through rigorous analysis of different sources of data collection. The possibility to experience different basis for emergent emotions and understanding, through seven different art activities, allowed the participants to tap into several creative and subjective sources. Through the various art activities, the participants were encouraged to recognize their own creative potentials in areas such as in perception of senses, in visualization of self, others, and the environment, in metaphoricrepresentations of emotions, in putting words to abstract thoughts and emotions, and in the use of various art materials to express individual narratives.

In order to establish confirmability (objectivity) in this study, I engaged in sufficient time for reflection and deep introspection throughout the data collection and the analysis. During the seven weekly creative circle meetings my field notes after the conclusion of each art session included my observations of things such as mood of participants upon entering the room, reactions to weekly instructions of art-making, level of engagement, choice of art material, willingness or reluctance to discuss the created

artwork, what was discussed and how it was shared, the title given to each artwork, and what it represented. I further engaged in an objective (as much as possible) and critical overview and reflection of my own perspective and reactions, as well as wordings or instructions that I felt warranted improvement or clarity.

During our weekly creative meetings, a sense of mutual respect of understanding with no judgment was an important part in creating positive interactions among the participants. An interpersonal dynamic of the group of participants was also established through the common purpose of each member for joining the creative circle: their curiosity, and a wish to tapping into their individual creative potential. This interpersonal dynamic facilitated the participants when drawing, painting, writing, discussing, and interpreting their own unique experience and stories.

Results

The aim of this study was to explore the relationship between engaging in creative art-making activities and facility of expression of emotions in a group of older adults. In the study, I investigated the potential value of engaging in creative art-activities in support of opportunities to awareness and expression of emotions, self-efficacy, problem-solving, and meaningful discussions that may lead to healthy aging. During the data analysis, my focus was to seek an answer to how a group of 10 older adults perceived their experiences of participating in seven weekly 90 minutes creative art sessions. The data collection included the participants' transcribed audiotaped interviews, participants' created images, field notes, and analytic journal.

Through reflexivity and systematic synthesizing of the perceived and expressed experiences by the participants, four central themes emerged and are identified in Table 1. The themes were identified as central if there were similar descriptions from nine different participants of a related experience. Each theme stated below, was organized in response to one of the four research questions (RQ), and coded units for the respective theme were sorted within one of the three categories discussed above. Brief summaries of the participants' responses to the individual interviews in support of the emerging themes are included below. A few images are also inserted as examples of the participants' descriptions of the actual process of what emerged in their artwork. They are shared here to offer the reader a deeper insight into the participants' discussions and experiences.

Table 1

Central Themes

Themes
1. Engaging in creative art activities lead to insight and new initiatives. 2. Created images support self-expression. 3. Sharing perception of images: A visual link to meaningful discussions. 4. Reminiscences from images lead to shift in awareness.

Theme 1: Engaging in Creative Art Activities Lead to Insight and New Initiatives.

- RQ 1: What is the experience of older adults, who are living in a senior residence in Stockholm, and who engage in the process of creative art activities?
- Category: Emerging emotions: growth.

Most of the participants noted that they came to the creative circle because they were curious, and interested in the creative aspect that was described in the flyer. The creative circle and the format of the different art-making projects that were offered each week became a new experience for all the participants. During the first meeting there was a felt mix of joyful expectation and insecurity of own creative potentials. However, the participants soon settled into a sense of comfort in their creative abilities. Theiractive engagement in the art-making process evoked further curiosity, and a willingness to go deeper into self-discovery. The participants felt stimulated to learn more from the perception of their own images, and also from sharing with other group members in the circle. Following are a few summaries from the participants' responses during the interview.

> P1: This circle has helped me to become more energetic, and to be able to feel and act on new initiatives. After the loss of my husband two years ago, I became very despondent. But I enjoyed coming to the circle. It was fun, and one of the best things I have done for myself this year. It all came as a surprise…even when I did not know what to do, and that fit me perfect.
>
> P2: From my image I learned that I can change and that the first emotion is not always the most beneficial. It was an affirmation that I easily judge people too fast, and that is what happened here… and that I later revised my judgment. I have to give it a chance… that is what I now realize.
>
> P3: I enjoyed getting to know the other participants in the circle, in a different dimension than the more superficial way, when we meet over dinner, or theatre,

and such. There are many things that we just don't talk about… but words came to me when I looked at my images …

P4: I was very hesitant about joining the circle. But when you sit down and get some inspiration and get going…maybe not so bad. I feel very happy to have discovered this! To use colors and words that came up within a short time without any effort… it was not so difficult …

P5: I feel that we are all like a bunch of little packages…some remain unopened…and I look forward to begin to open some of my own boxes next year.

P6: We got to know each other in the group in a whole different way than when we just sit and eat together. When we are together in a group and paint, I feel that after a while you also give more… you are able to contribute something to the collective …

P7: When we started the sessions, I had no idea what I was going to make. We were all together, yet feeling as one. Maybe that is why we had the courage to open up. The sessions made us all reflective and I now can say that I am very grateful for my life …

P8: It was interesting to learn from the others in the circle, and fun because we were all so different, and different ages. It was unexpected to get to know all the other personalities through their artwork.

P9: These last two years have been very difficult for me after I lost my husband. But coming to this circle has helped me to become more energetic and to be able to feel and act on new initiatives.

All the participants mentioned the benefit they felt from engaging in the discussions of the artwork after they had observed their mages on the wall, and reflected on what they perceived. Sharing in the circle also facilitated a discussion among the participants' perceptions about the benefits and challenges of the social aspects of living in a senior residence. The created images invited a gateway to a different viewpoint in learning more about themselves, and also about others in the group, as adjustments in perception and expectations were discussed. P1 voiced her surprise when learning more about the other residents:

> The discussions within the group were interesting. We all live here, but as individuals I don't know the other participants that well actually… and it was interesting to see how different we all think about the meaning of a word… even though I realize that we are all very different.

P9 discussed her concern for the other participants in the group, when she mentioned special relationships that may have emerged between residents who have known each other for a relatively long time:

> I felt that the discussions in the group were good for me, but I wondered if the other participants were aware of the background of one of the women who complained a great deal and took up much space in the group talking about her miseries. But I don't mind because I have known her for many years and am used to her complaints. Living here has always been good for me… it is exciting, meeting people. I like people and then I want to be by myself and I go to my apartment and close the door… I guess I have both sides …

Theme 2: Created Images Support Self-expression.

- RQ 2: How does art-making facilitate expression of emotions in older adults?
- Category: Emerging emotions: growth.

It is not uncommon that it may take some time to see the possibilities, of expressing ourselves by nonverbal means, provided during the process of art-making. For most people, communication and sensing of emotions has usually been conferred via verbal or written means, or within a repeated inner dialogue and thought processing. Therefore, discussions among the participants that arose from the process of creative art-making during the creative circle, was for some individuals experienced as a new way of expressing themselves.

> P1: When making the images… I felt like I could actually just focus on one task…without thinking about anything else…no nagging thoughts or emotions… it was really relaxing.
>
> P2: For me, this was a different way to self-discovery. I think this is important and it was an exciting, fun, and interesting way to evoke emotions…to become conscious of things… it invoked reactions very fast.
>
> P3: I was surprised to learn creativity as a form of self-expression aside from using words…it felt like an extremely powerful means of communicating.
>
> P4: I felt like I didn't know where to begin when I first started creating my shapes, but once I got into it, it became a very calming process.

P5: First I was a little nervous. I don't feel at all creative, but then it just came together…I was so surprised… that I could actually do that! It was a great learning experience.

P6: When discussing my image I learned that you have to adjust… it felt like you probably just have to manage and not get into feeling sorry for yourself and get offended.

P7: I never felt that I had a complex or was insecure… but I feel more secure now… or else I have found myself in a different way…maybe I have found a new platform to stand on.

P8: I learned that being creative is a way to get in touch with oneself… to self-discovery…well I thought it was great.

P9: I suddenly understood what my image meant and that I found very interesting.

P2 was ambivalent over her image that she created during the first creative circle session and described the process:

In one of the first images that I made: "Ambivalence" (see Figure 2), I made a strong black line, and then I added some other colors.But it was that black line that stood out for me, and I could not understand why. Then later in the afternoon, when I was with some friends…aha…that is why I put that black line… it should have been an exclamation mark! I suddenly understood what it meant, and THAT I thought was very interesting. The reaction I could feel immediately as I entered the room and saw a person I did not want to be with … the exclamation mark… and the black in the image somehow caught the emotion… that, I thought was

exciting. And I called it ambivalence, because at the time I could not understand what it meant to me. Later I got to know this person and understand her, and why I had had my opinions about her… I learned that I could change, and that the first emotion is not always the most beneficial (laugh). I learned, or rather it was an affirmation, that I easily judge people too fast… and that is what happened here with this person …and that I later revised my judgment… I have to give it a chance… that is what I now realize.

Figure 1. Ambivalence.

P8 discussed her emerging shifts in perspective, when she realized what the conscious process of engaging in creative artwork had done for her. When a life becomes constructed from everyday habits, decisions, and routines, a shift may not occur unless an unexpected transition, trauma, or illness may cause an interruption in our everyday functioning. However, changes are inevitable, and access to our imagination when responding to emerging emotions may provide a wider scope of reference and protection, which was expressed by P8:

I don't think that I have been very creative in my life, other than when I worked as a teacher for grades one through three. I taught drawing and painting, but I would never sit down and do it myself… I just did not have the time. But when I came home to my husband, and talked about the creative art session… we have absolutely never sat down and talked about emotions, and translated them into colors… and sort of contemplated anything deeper within us… we have only done things. But to sit down as we did in the creative sessions and relax, that I thought was very comforting, and I learned that there is a way to get in touch with ourselves… to self-discovery … and I said to my husband: we are now over 70… what have we done with our lives!!! (Laughter)

P9 discussed a sense of challenge in entering into dialogue with self, from what emerged through her images:

I don't know how to say this… but sometimes I may be misjudging my own emotions… at times I don't think that I was able to verbalize that which I had in mind… I felt, that emotionally I was present when I was cutting out color shapes or painting an image, but now I feel that maybe I could have moved deeper, and expressed more of myself… but that is all that I was able to do at that moment. I put together colors emerging from different tones within myself… but maybe I am too concerned to make sure that it should look like something, and that the image is supposed to be held together. I feel as if I am returning to my old way as a child, when I had to be very clear with my family, and everything …

When P7 worked on her image of chaos, her initial emotion was anxiety in response to the forms and colors. However, when she continued working, she also became aware of another perspective, from a deeper viewpoint that emerged from the images. She had never before visualized her emotions. After P7 moved into stillness from her image of chaos, to her second image of order (see figure 4), she rested her ontological awareness in a large painted heart, and could for the first time visualize the pain, that she still held in her own heart from losing her brother to suicide. P7 mentioned that she felt a great relief in being able to move her ontological anxiety (the seeming meaninglessness fate and death of her brother) to an image that became a tangible metaphor of her brother.

> P7: When we were doing the images for chaos-order, I was just painting and putting colors down. I was not thinking, maybe it was just airing of emotions… I just let it happen…first there were a lot of colors, and then it began to crystallize when I was working… when I started to take in the chaos … what I have been through in life, the regrets, and the sadness, divorce… unfaithfulness… everything painful… and then this knife came out in the painting… and the tree… they just appeared. But when I looked at it later, I had painted something red…and in the end, it became a big heart in the second image. Then, suddenly it hit me! I asked the person sitting next to me what date it was… the 19th of September she said… the same date in 1979 when my beloved brother committed suicide, by hanging himself in a tree… so, I probably think of it every day… but I was not aware, that I was thinking right then. And it feels wonderful that I made

this painting, I have never before been able to visualize what I have in my heart… and I just feel so grateful!

Figure 2. Heartache

P6 had worked as a civil engineer before retirement, and was still active by volunteering in the local community. She had expressed her willingness to learn something new, especially within the creative arts. Engage in creativity art-making was something that she always wanted to do, but which she never before had found any time to pursue. For older adults, to discover new ways to enter into dialogue with self, via imagination and the process of art-making, can be very empowering. P6 described her delight, and surprise in meeting and overcoming the challenge of writing a poem for someone who is dyslexic.

P6: I was very excited and a little nervous to come to the circle, because I thought that I was expected to create and accomplish much more. Especially when you

> said that we were going to write a poem… then I felt that … WOW! … I am dyslexic, and words as a dyslexic is not my favorite…and then I make it, and I don't know if you noticed at my exhibit? I put the poem u p on top. I was so happy! It was not at all difficult. All I had to do, was to sense a feeling, it was not about accomplishing purely from words… it all came from within… describing an emotion… and that is not where I am dyslexic! No, and I did not sense that it came from any performance anxiety. Actually, I wonder… maybe it has to be a little challenging.

Theme 3: Sharing Perception of Images: A Visual Link to Meaningful Discussions.

- RQ 3: Does engaging in creative art activities support a sense of self esteem, sense of purpose, and social connectivity?
- Category: Appraisal: motivation

During the process of analysis that emerged into theme 3, I paid attention to the participants' descriptions of their reflections of what emerged from their images that evoked a sense of purpose, motivation, and social connectivity. During the individual interviews, all of the participants mentioned that they enjoyed the venue to discussions and conversations offered by the circle, which was different from those of other activities offered at the senior residence. The social connections made during the sessions left a sense of closeness and caring between the participants. The relatively short sessions allowed for a time to share concerns in a group, without a feeling that there had to be an ongoing relationship between friends.

P2: It surprised me that we all were so ready to share… and I think it has something to do with this thing we are doing with colors and drawings…it all became more relaxed, a more playful situation with crayons and sharing… and then I think that we are more ready to let our guards down …

P3: Discussing our images provided times to talk about more emotional and deeper issues, than what we usually have time for. We shared life experiences with each other and you got behind the surface.

P4: I wrote that affection tastes like honey…it is a complex taste, not always sweet…it also contains so much…it is difficult to explain…it is an experience.

P5: To get to know people this way was wonderful and relatively fast… that usually does not happen. It takes a long time to discuss these things about the meaning of life and to get to know their thoughts on a deeper level rather than mostly superficial discussions. We usually don't allow people in to share our thoughts.

P6: By looking at their images I felt as though I was learning their story, feeling their emotions, and creating meaning for myself… I was really impressed by the ease and discussion it could prompt about deep issues …

P7: When making my poem I realized how important curiosity is to me and to keep a sense of curiosity fresh and going and to allow myself to be curious and to see what will come from this…the eternal hope…and maybe that is what makes it OK to grow older and to become old. The curiosity and hope of what may happen…

P8: I love the possibility of being able to dialogue with myself through my images…

P9: It was difficult for me to make the collage, but I cut out words that came to me and used them together with cut out images… and then I was happily surprised that it came together so easy.

The participants met and shared, they were heard and seen, even though it was only for a couple of hours every week. However, these hours helped to ease a sense of loneliness that was shared by a number of participants, who recently had lost a spouse after many years of marriage. P1and P3 expressed their feelings of loneliness, and challenges finding a purpose and motivation after the death of their husbands.

P1: I came to this group with expectations… and I was not disappointed. I am in a personal crisis right now as a widow. My husband died last year after we were together for 70 years… it is unbearable that he is no longer alive… so I am very vulnerable in different ways… but I thought the circle was very positive and interesting. I have never experienced anything like this… a whole new experience and way of thinking for me. I enjoyed getting to know the people in the group, on a different level than when we just meet at dinner or in playing bridge. When my husband lived we had an active social life, and we were always together… always… maybe that was not the best thing in the end. Now when I think about it, maybe that is why it is hard to learn to be alone… he was always there, we even worked together. I never dreamt that I would feel so lonely, even here in the senior residence with so many people around. I am learning to accept my new life,

but it is hard work… to have to go down for dinner, to be outgoing, and try to be a friend. Before I used to say: I take it one day at a time… now I say, I take it an hour at a time… that helps my mind… otherwise I get a sense of panic, as if going down into an abyss… Right now, I am seeing you, and then I will go to my apartment and have some lunch… that is all.

P3: This is the first time that I have used the color red since my husband died. The chaos and difficulties that I have felt around me the last year cannot reach me any more. I painted myself into the comfort of a cocoon, where I am resting in the calmness of one color. It feels like a great liberation, and that is what I will name my painting.

Figure 3. Liberation

During the discussion period in the sessions, after the images had been attached to the wall and there was a time for reflection, it became apparent to the participants that a lifetime of experiences contributed to their present state of emotions. Finding the words

to express emotions that emerged from their images, often contributed to the participants' understanding of their motivation, and purpose in their present daily lives. A collage that P1 made contained images of both sadness and joy. Observing the images together made it easier for P1 to discuss her emotions, and to accept that she carries both feelings within her. Instead of an either-or fluctuating consciousness, the variation in images helped P1 to accept, and to hold, the tension between joy and grief. P1 described with she perceived as her experience based on the images:

> P1: What I have been through after my husband of 70 years died is impossible to explain; the grief that I feel has changed me as a person. But on the top of my collage there is a picture of light, and that means hope to me. I also feel hope as in the images of light… hope of eternal love and that it does not have to do with sex or similarly, but to be able to feel the deep care, to care for someone and to truly be there for another person.

P8 mentioned that there are certain things that are not discussed because the subject matter may induce emotional fear that they are not ready or willing to recognize. A fear that she mentioned may be particularly prevalent in a senior residence.

> P8: I enjoyed getting to know the other participants in the circle, in a different way than the more normal and superficial. There are many things that we otherwise just don't talk about…and I was happy to see that Nancy joined us… she has something now that nobody talks about. Her husband, a wonderful person, has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, so she is having a very tough time of it.

That is a thing that is horrible for us all… it is the big fear… absolutely! I am afraid of nothing else…worse than cancer… worse than all!

Even though P4 mentioned that he always have had difficulties to express himself in a creative way, when he read the words that emerged fromwriting his poem about senses (see Figure 4.), the underlying emotions evoked deeply held memories.Erik was grateful to connect with,and discuss his memories that supported an overview of his life experiences.Erik's own words in his poem became a meaningful inner dialogue about the experiences thathe had found both difficult and enriching.

P4: In my poem I wrote that if affection were a color, it would be blue. Blue for me, it is the color of hope … and space, the cosmos, the possibility, it is open wind somehow, yes the possibilities to become someone, to make something, to understand…And affection feels like a warm hand, it probably has to do with my upbringing, a faith in God. Of course I have had both good, and some not so good sides, things that I could have done better. But I have had the gift of being able to apologize when I was young and did something bad… somehow I learned to do that… and later in life,I understood the importance of asking for forgiveness… something that I have tried to give to my children. Then I wrote that affection tastes like honey…it is a complex taste, not always sweet… it also contains so much… it is difficult to explain… it is an experience. You experience color if it s a painting and… it is a lot of work and experience to create a spoon of honey and somehow that is manifested in the taste… It sort of fits together those two words… affection and honey.

My Poem Today

(transl.)

If affection were a
color it would be blue
It sounds like a gift
from God
It feels like a warm
hand
It tastes like honey
It smells like a
summer breeze
It gives you a feeling
of deep joy

Figure 4. Affection

P2 had been hesitant to return to the circle after the first meeting, because of another participant, whom she had judged with negatively toned emotions. However, after deciding to stay in the group, P2 found social enrichment and connection with the participants, while gaining an insight to both her own behavior, and to that of the others in the group. When P2 listened to other people in the circle discussing their individual experiences, it evoked memories of her own experiences, and how those may have shaped choices and transitions throughout her life. While learning what may be meaningful to others, it evoked a deeper awareness of P2's own perspective of meaning and quality of life, as illustrated by her statement:

> I found it interesting to learn from the lifetime of experiences of the others in the group when they discussed their images, and especially to listen to the older participants discuss death, and a life that is coming to an end… that meant a great deal to me. To get to know people this way was wonderful, and relatively fast…

that usually does not happen. It takes a long time to discuss these things, about the meaning of life, and get to know their thought on a deeper level, rather than mostly superficial discussions …

A sense of purpose emerged for P5 when she appraised her present situation as a recent widow after a long marriage. When P5 was making her collage, she found words that facilitated insight and awareness that helped her to gain new initiatives, while regaining the sense of energy that she had enjoyed before her husband's death two years ago. It was with joyful expectations that P5 talked about her collage:

P5: I found it a little tricky to make the collage (see Figure 5.) and because I am more used to words than images, I cut out words that came to me and used them together with images…and then I was happily surprised that it came to me so easy… but this is not something that I would get started with on my own. I began with this picture of little packages… I feel that we are all like a bunch of little packages… some packages remain unopened…and I look forward to begin to open some new boxes next year…

Life (transl.)

I refuse to be put in readymade boxes

Discover… the reality… of flowers
Time to
- Beautify
- Ask questions
- Dance
- And communicate!

Figure 5. Life.

Theme 4: Reminiscences From Images Lead to Shift in Awareness.

- RQ 4: What reminiscences emerge when older adults engage in creative artwork?
- Category: Creativity: subjective experience

The fourth and final theme emerged from the coded units of memories, sometimes long-held and almost forgotten. There was a sense of felt gratefulness by most of the participants when they experienced a sense of reuniting with memories as if they were old friends, and that were still there for them, even today:

> P1: Doing art projects brought me back to my childhood in a way. I am in a state of mind where I feel like understanding my emotions and spiritual self is more important to me…interesting because I think that intelligence is connected to both spirituality and emotion.
>
> P2: It surprised me to see what came out in my collage…I suddenly had a deep visceral experience…it felt good that somehow emotions that had been lying in my body came to the surface. I feel an enormous gratitude that I for the first time can put words to those held emotions…it is such a relief!
>
> P3: For the first time I can visualize how I feel about my memories …and I feel so grateful for this new experience!
>
> P5: When I was with my dying mother, it was beautiful, we had a lovely goodbye… it was a wonderful sacred moment…and it was not dramatic. I am so grateful that I got to experience that. Those feelings also emerged when I was making the image…gratitude…I will never forget that.

P6: When making my self portrait I was somewhat surprised to see that I had made the conscious decision to relegate an important part away from the rest of me … so it made me realize that no matter how much self-reflection one makes, people can continue to discover and rediscover part of themselves every day no matter what age.

P7: So many things came out when doing my self-portrait, things that I have not been thinking about. I became so much more when making these paintings…it feels like a new dimension, as if doors have been opened to a new awakening.

P8: I was not thinking, maybe it was just emotions coming up… I just let I happen…first there were a lot of colors and then it began to crystallize…

P9: I named my collage *Peace, forgiveness, and longing*. This is what I now see from my perspective at this age, a self-portrait from many parts of the world. You have to learn forgiveness, so much comes up…early loss… you have to learn to live with grief… death is sad but natural.

Emotions that are held in our body may not be consciously recognized and accepted until some time has passed after an emotional, and sometimes traumatic experience. During one of the sessions, P2 was making her collage (see Figure 7.) when she suddenly became conscious of deeply held emotions of loss and gratitude. Facilitated by her own creative artwork, P2 recognized a held emotion that she now could let go off from her body, and relax into giving words to an otherwise abstract sense of loss and fear.

P2: What really surprised me was when I was doing the collage… one year after my daughter… you can say she got her life back after a double lung

transplantation… Not until now, a whole year later, did the true emotions emerge. Yes, I have felt gratitude before, an intellectual gratitude that my daughter is now feeling healthy and restored … but I did not feel it like that in the body, and I have not been able to talk about it before… it surprised me… from just sitting here in the group, and cutting out different words for the collage… when I put them all together and saw her lungs in the image, I suddenly had a deeply visceral experience… It felt so good, it felt good and I think that somehow the emotions had been lying there, somewhere in my body… and then it was like "puff"… and there it came out (laugh). I feel an enormous joy and gratitude, that I for the first time can put words to those held emotions… it is such a release!

Figure 6. Joy

After P2 had finished her collage, she asked if it was OK to take a picture of the image with her cell phone, and send it to her daughter. A sharing of emotions that could

clearly be seen in the image was important to P2. Interpersonal sharing of memories can, according to Siegel (2007) "widen the window of tolerance for knowing about painful past events" (p. 294). When memories are shared in a safe and supportive environment, where there is room for reflection of an experience, the held nature of the particular memory can actually transform into a wider, reassuring, and compassionate inner dialogue.

P3 was agitated and angry when she came to the session the day we were making the image of chaos and order. However, after she had finished her painting (see Figure 8.) and had been able to spend some time reflecting on what she observed, her anger dissipated when she could see that the emotion of anger was not primary for her. In that spacious place of reflection, P3 began to see the fullness of her life from her past. She saw a new image behind her metaphor of anger, which gave her hope.

> P3: I am so angry and disappointed at how I am being treated, and angry with my daughter, who does not want to listen to me… Yes, I am angry and I show that with the dark blue color in my first painting about feeling of chaos, and I call it "Overcome." The second painting where I show more calm and order, I call "Surrender." There is much light in the painting, and a small blue circle… it looks calm and hopeful… and there is a light behind the anger… it feels that it is there for me and I am on my way into the light.

Figure 7. Surrender

The visual images that emerged in P4's mind from the creative act of writing his poem (see Figure 5.), evoked sensations and memories of a warm, carefree, and joyous time in his young life. These memories brought feelings of comfort, which he now have time to engage in, with a deeper understanding and appreciation. The previously unspoken emotion connected to the joy of early summer memories was discussed and held by P4, as a continued rich relationship with his sisters:

> P4: In my poem of senses I wrote that the scent of affection was like a summer breeze… because I remember as a child, where we lived there was a beautiful meadow, and I remember how my sisters picked flowers there and used them to tie a wreath … and the sunand the lake was all around us. It sort of fits together in my mind, like a bright painting… it is a very positive memory, a memory to live on in my old age. The memories do not pale… it is almost the opposite: they

become more alive, and in a way I feel that I appreciate them more now. It is like a delayed appreciation, and it feels good to be able to say that. If I could paint, it would be a beautiful painting, but I keep it in my imagination.

When P8 observed what had emerged from her image (see Figure 8.), she saw a metaphor of depression that she had experienced, and observed via her mother's challenging life during menopause, and from a girlfriend who was grieving the loss of her husband. Even though the depressions, as she mentioned, were not her own, Jane's close relationship to her mother, and to her best friend, influenced her state of mind and emotional awareness. P8 mentioned that the emotional energy felt like fire (not something that you can control), but behind the chaos she could also sense that there was a light, to keep her company. Emotions may have a different character in interpersonal relationships, than what they seem in isolation, and this difference is attributed to the special influences (mother and friend) that emerged from the characteristic of their specific organization, structure, and configuration (Polkinghorn, 1989). P8 could see in her image, that even if things got too hot around her (fire-menopause), she could find her way out, and there would always be a light supporting her.

P8: I don't think that I have ever been really depressed… of course, I can feel down some days, but that is not the same as depression. I remember that my mother got very depressed when she was going though menopause… and that was not good… my kind mother turned into a horror! We, in the family, could not recognize her… and that is when I decided, that I would never allow that to happen to me. So, when I was going into menopause, I took estrogen and I did not

suffer mood swings…but it gave me breast cancer. I was treated, and now I am fine, and my family did not have to suffer from any depressive side effects of menopause. But my girlfriend cannot get out of her depression after her husband died suddenly of a heart attack three years ago. Now her grief has turned into physical problems for her… So, I thought of her after I made this painting (see Figure 9.). When I looked at the first one, it reminded me of a big contained fire in the springtime, so I called it "Burning Flames." The second image, which was the enlargement I called "There is an Opening"… because, I could see that there was a small light coming out of the fire… these words came to me when I thought of my girlfriend. I had asked her: Don't you see any light in the tunnel? She has four beautiful children… and she said…"yes, I think about them and want to help, but it is impossible now when I feel so terribly sick and down" that is when these words came to me… there is an opening.

Figure 8. There is an opening

During the reflection of emotions from held memories it was a comfort to P8 to see, that there was an opening of light behind her perceived chaos and uncertainty. P8 discussed having observed challenging situations in her close relationship, and immediate environment, which motivated her to become conscious of a way to find stability and safety in her own life, if or when, she would be faced with similar difficulties.

When P7 was making her self-portrait (see Figure 6.), she reminisced about her life and career, and how it had brought her to where she is today. Putting her perception of self into an image opened up new doors to a dimension of herself, which she had not thought of previously. Excited about a new way to communicate, she wanted to share this dimension of herself with her husband, and attached her image to their bedroom door. P7's reflections and realizations about herself became both intrapersonal and relational:

> P7: I feel that I am creative, and I have been able to use it in my work as a dental hygienist. I always wanted to be an actress when I was young, but my father did not think so… instead, I became a dental assistant, because that is what my best friend was doing. In the end that led to the most important thing that I have done in my life; that of working with children, who have cleft palettes… it feels like the most valuable time in my life. And when we were doing these self-portraits… all these things came out about my life… I feel that it awoke so many things that I have not been thinking about. I don't know how to say it… maybe I am thinking also, but not conscious of it. I feel that I become so much more when making these paintings… it feels like a new dimension, as if doors have been opened to a new awakening… it feels as if what I have here (hand on chest) have just come

out. I have become more aware of what was held inside me! My self-portrait makes me so happy, I want to have big eyes, and I love the flowers and all that is included in the word: cozy Fridays… my title. When I came home, I attached the image on the door to our bedroom, so now my husband can also see a different dimension of me.

Figure 9. Cozy Friday (Fredagsmys).

Discrepant and Nonconfirming Data

An area of discrepant data that did not conform to the major findings of the study emerged during the data analysis, and needed to be identified. The lack of data on emerging emotions was noted in P10, who outwardly seemed fully engaged in creating his artwork during the sessions, but he did not verbally express any emotion, curiosity, or interest in his images. The interview at the end of the sessions with P10 was noticeably different from the interviews that I had with the other participants. P10 avoided answering my questions, but spoke readily about his early professional work, and about

his family. When I tried to bring the discussion back to my questions, I sensed that P10 became uncomfortable, and I therefore decided to allow the interview to become P10's storytelling for the allotted time of 50 minutes. Because this study is based on the participants' perceived experiences of the circle, in combination with their images, and my field notes, I consider P10's participation as a discrepant case, primarily because he did not discuss his images after the reflection period, or during the interview.

P10 was very active in creating the different images during the sessions, but rarely discussed his own images after the reflection period. P10 mentioned that he enjoyed the social aspect of meeting in a creative group. During the interview, P10 discussed his work as an engineer for more than 40 years, where everything had to be followed according to stated manuals, leaving little or no space for personal creativity. P10 had hoped to be able to use more of his imagination after his retirement. He still harbors hope, that he will be able to let himself move into a different perspective, and to learn more about himself:

> P10: When I look at what I have done, I of course understand myself what it is…I just put some colors together and then something comes up that has form. If I can be honest, there was nothing that surprised me. When you said that we should do something, like the collage, well, I just put pictures together that reminded me of my life… it is sport, volunteer work, and my grandfather…no, I did not have that much time, so I thought that I just put some things together. I don't think about anything more than what I can see in the images… I don't go into any depth of thinking about what it is that I have done, or what any artist has

painted. I always thought that when I retire I would try to start painting. So, when will I begin to paint…well, I have my whole life ahead of me.

Summary

In this chapter I summarized the setting for the study, the demographics of the participants, and how data were collected, transcribed, coded, and categorized. Results from the study revealed four central themes that emerged from the older adults perceived experiences from engaging in creative art-making. The four themes that address the research questions are: (a) creative art-making activities lead to insight and new initiatives, (b) created images support self-expression, (c) sharing perceptions of images: a visual link to meaningful discussions, and (d) reminiscences from images lead to shift in awareness. Credibility and evidence of trustworthiness were discussed, and lastly, discrepant and nonconfirming data were noted. In Chapter 5, I provide an interpretation of the findings in the context of the conceptual framework. The findings are compared with what has previously been found in similar research that was discussed in Chapter 2. Limitations of the study are reviewed, and finally, I describe options for further research and the potential impact of this study for positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the potential value of creative art-making activities in support of healthy aging. In the study I explored the perceived experience by a group of older adults, who engaged in creative art-making activities, during weekly meetings in the period of seven consecutive weeks. Relatively healthy older adults belong to an understudied group in the current research literature on the value of engaging in creative art activities. Creating images is a form of self-expression and communication that may promote mental stimulation, social interactions, enhanced quality of life, and well-being in later life. It is important to note that, according to numerous studies, there is a significant link between well-being and creative art activities in other populations (Drake & Winner, 2012; Egberg et al., 2007; Gillam, 2013; Italia et al,, 2008; Luzzatto et al., 2003; Ryan 2011). Although, in the rapidly growing population of older adults, there is a gap in the literature on research, with a focus on creativity as an activity that may facilitate expressive, intellectual, spiritual, and social needs in this population.

Participants in this study engaged in creative art activities, and some of the significant findings that emerged from the analyses of the participants' perceived experiences, illuminate the relationship between personally felt awareness, and the experienced object-image perception. The central themes that emerged in this study are: (a) engaging in creative art-making activities lead to insight and new initiatives, (b)

created images support self-expression, (c) sharing perceptions of images: a visual link to meaningful discussions, and (d) reminiscences from images lead to shift in awareness.

Interpretation of the Findings

Overall, the creative image-making activity engaged in during the creative circle was a new experience to most of the participants. During the first weeks of our meetings, a number of the participants mentioned that they felt nervous, because they did not believe that they were creative, and they would not know what to make. Even though there was a feeling of discomfort during the initial meetings, the benefit from engaging in creative activities in each session was clear. Participants described that engaging in creative art-making led to a feeling of ease, delight, and surprise. Many participants felt a combination of curiosity and hope while also experiencing a new way of evoking intimacy by sharing created images. In the following interpretation of the findings, the discussion will be organized around the four themes that emerged from the collected data. The discussion will further relate the data to previous literature and to the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 2, in support of this study.

Assessing Themes Against Previous Literature

Aging is an increasingly important topic for research, and even though engaging in creative activities has been shown to positively affect mental and physiological health among older adults, there are surprisingly few studies today that support these findings. Because of the limit in previous research on the subject of creativity and older adults, I have compared some of my findings to those found in studies on the benefit of creativity and adults, who have been diagnosed with milder forms of mental or physiological

disabilities. The four themes that emerged in my study, and discussed here, will follow the order described in Chapter 4.

The first theme, engaging in creative art activities lead to insight and new initiatives, was based on data relating to participants' described perception of their felt experience from joining the creative circle. Even though most of the participants were hesitant at the beginning of the circle and felt insecure about their own creative potential, they soon realized how the ease from guided support in art-making provided a road to insight of wordless emotions. The activity of creating an image without judgment or projection of the end result was for many a new experience. Observing their own and others images in silence, while allowing time for inner dialogue to occur was also discussed as a felt surprise and new thought process. The participants further mentioned that the learning experience from realizing their creative capabilities, and to observe the other participants' images, gave them new initiatives and an enhanced way to view their own potentials.

Previous researchers (Baltes & Smith, 2003; Cohen et al., 2006; Flood & Sharer; 2006; Schmidt, 2006) have shown that productive or purposeful activities, such as engaging in creative art activities, are related to well-being in later life. Cohen et al. (2006) specifically discussed the importance of staying or becoming creative during the later part of life, based on findings from their longitudinal study on creativity and aging with 300 recruited participants, nearing the average age of 80. Findings in their study based on self-reported measures, and established assessment questionnaires showed: (a) self-rated improvement in overall health, (b) sense of control and mastery leading to

increased activities, and (c) reported decline in falls. Cohen et al. (2006) suggested that the sense of control reported by the participants was evoked from the feeling of mastery in a new area, such as creative activity, where the common reflection was "if I'm good in this area that I was not aware of, could there be other endeavors that I might also be good at that I was not aware of?" (p. 732).

This is relevant to the current study, where it was not unusual for the participants to voice a sense of surprise and delight, when they realized that they had made something concrete during the relatively short period of the art-making sessions. A feeling of growth and learning emerged from the images, as noted by the participants' descriptions of their art-making experiences. Choosing art materials, colors, images, and words for their images, contributed to a sense of control, mastery of problem solving, and well-being. The opportunity to make decisions and feeling in control of events, leading to a sense of well-being was discussed by Johnson and Sullivan-Marx (2006) in their study on addressing the emotional needs of frail elderly through the use of art-making. They found that guided art-making provided an experience of control and also introduced an opportunity to both express and manage emotions.

The second theme, created images support self-expression, revealed that when participants found a new venue of expression through their created images, it facilitated communication of a previously wordless emotion. The new experience of visualizing a perceived emotion that emerged from a created image evoked both surprise and comfort for some of the participants. Surprise was described when images evoked an emotional reaction relatively fast, or when an image unexpectedly appeared as a form of inner

dialogue or self-image. A feeling of comfort was noted when the participants were able to visualize in tangible form, that which before had only been perceived of as an abstract and free-floating concern or emotion. The healing power of expressing emotions was discussed by Pennebaker (1990) who conducted a number of studies investigating the effect of writing as a means to self-expression, and to prevent inhibition of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Creative writing as illness prevention according to Pennebaker (1990) entails expressing inhibiting thoughts and emotions in a format that fosters communication with self and others. Inhibition of thoughts, emotions and behaviors requires physiological work, and contributes to short-term biological changes and long-term health. Overtime, the physiological stress on the body from active inhibitions increases the risk of illness, and other stress-related symptoms affecting body and mind. Active inhibition may further change the ways we think because the perception of an event will not be translated into a language. The event will therefore not be understood or assimilated into daily living, but may surface in rumination, dreams, or disturbing thoughts (Pennebaker, 1990).

Fisher and Specht (1999) in their investigation of the meaning of successful aging, and its relationship to creative activities in a group of older adults, found that self-expression and communication were essential. Creative activities as a form of self-expression contributed to successful aging in this group by fostering a sense of competence, trust of inner resources, and growth. Self-expression through creative activities was mentioned as a reflection of the need for ongoing opportunities for self-discovery and acceptance. Furthermore, Dissanayake (2000) discussed the importance of

self-expression from a historical perspective. With limited resources in the use of words and sounds to communicate, individuals throughout ages have found other creative means to self-expression. Today, the interactions of images through numerous electronic resources have become an accepted and widely used form of communication and self-expression, the latter observed in millions of selfies posted daily on the Internet. The continued need to self-expression may become even stronger in older adults, who often do not enjoy the same access to communication and interactions from networking, family, and social activities, which they enjoyed in previous years. The transition and experience of change when moving into older age may carry with it a sense of loneliness, from the loss of an ingrained lifestyle of many years. Therefore, access and an opportunity to continued expression of self, from ongoing personal growth and new perspectives, may contribute to well-being and healthy aging in the older adult population.

Another interpretation of the second theme was noted from how the participants through their use of creative self-expression, found they learned a new way to self-discovery. It was often a feeling of surprise when they tapped into hidden areas that had not been otherwise communicated, or thought of previously, as part of their self-image. Aadlandsvik (2007) mentioned that creating text or images opens a door to what is inside, and when we observe the image later we will remember the emotion, event, or person, who is behind the created image. Caplan et al. (2005) suggested that while self-expression as a form of meaningful communication may be valuable to the individual older adult, it is particularly critical to understand how expression of emotion and communications process changes in the older adults.

The third theme, sharing perceptions of images: a visual link to meaningful discussions, defines how participants' perceptions of their images became an inroad to sharing, and to learn from each other. Sharing and listening to each other was one of the important principles in the study, mentioned by Aadlandsvik (2007), who argued that the writers, and the storytellers must be heard:

> Reading and listening to the texts of other people enlarges our world and sometimes these activities show us alternative worlds. To be *seen* and *heard* by others define my identity. This process does not end at a certain age: it is a lifelong process. (p. 670)

Results from studies by Asbring (2012) and Brett et al. (2012) supported the findings of the third theme. In their studies, it became apparent that social connection, meaningful discussions, and sharing of emotions and motivations were important factors, when predicting well-being and quality of life. Asbring found that the lack of social contacts or interactions was associated with the underlying causes leading to mental ill health. The importance of being involved in activities in a social context was emphasized in Asbring's study as contributing factors to enhanced creative agency, personal development, and a healthy lifestyle. That social interaction has a crucial role in determining quality of life, was also suggested by Brett et al. based on the findings from their study on the determinant factors contributing to quality of life in two groups of older adults. After taking into consideration a number of various aspects that determine quality of life in older adults, such as previous life history, personality traits, and self-reported measure of quality of life, the researchers found that the current access to social

interactions together with safety and support in living arrangement, were the main contributors to perceived quality of life, by the older adult participants in their study.

The third theme further relates to what is considered meaningful if life, and to find an access to express and to communicate current musings or concerns. Fisher and Specht (1999) investigated the meaning associated with the relationship between creative activity and successful aging, from the perspective of 36 older adult participants. Their findings revealed that active engagement in creativity led to opportunities for growth, and a strong sense of purpose, with something to look forward to. The older adults in their study specifically mentioned, that engaging in creative activities opened up new possibilities in learning how to cope with age-associated challenges in a creative way. Motivation, and a drive to be understood, and communicate something about themselves were mentioned by most of the participants, as a road to expression of emotions in creative artwork. Other participants in their study mentioned the desire for personal growth, which was reflected in the on-going openings to self-discovery, and the possibility to see things from different perspectives, especially when they were engaged in a sharing environment.

The fourth and final theme, reminiscences from images lead to shift in awareness, is supported by the participants perceived experience of a shift in awareness. When the participants' noticed how memories, senses, and emotions emerged from their images, they felt grateful to learn more about themselves, especially at this age. Aadlandsvik (2007) and (Shorter (2010) suggested that learning new skills later in life, specifically in the area of creativity could led to an improved sense of control, mastery, and growth.

Aadlandsvik conducted five creative writing and storytelling courses, where the focus in the study was on lifelong learning and personal growth, more from an existential viewpoint and enrichment of life, than that of learning, understood as an instrumental enterprise. Fisher and Specht (1999) further stressed the linkage of creativity to successful aging, because the mental preparedness involved in taking on a creative activity is part of the process, of arriving at a newer, and deeper understanding of oneself. In order to age successfully, it requires a creative use of abilities and insight, when choosing appropriate strategies for meeting new challenges, and unavoidable instances of change. This relates to the fourth theme in my study, wherein many of the participants mentioned that they experienced a shift in perspective from their creative activities, and a feeling of surprise and self-discovery emerged. They noted a clear sense of living in the present, while at the same time, there was a strong feeling of living both in the past, and in the future

Assessing Themes against Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that guided this study was based on Lazarus's (1999) cognitive-motivation-relational theory of emotions. Three descriptive categories developed from this theory, which holds that appraisal of an environmental condition lies behind each emotion. Lazarus indicated core relational themes for each of the 15 emotions in his theory and he further believed that "each appraisal component is a partial meaning rather than a complete one with respect to the emotions involved" (p. 94).

The three categories that emerged from Lazarus's (1999) cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotions, and that became the guides to segregation during the data

analysis were: (a) emerging emotions: growth, (b) appraisal: motivation, and (c) creativity: subjective experience. The literature review in support of Lazarus's theory is discussed in Chapter 2, and the guiding principles for the above categories are described below. The category emerging emotions: growth supported the first and the second theme of the result in this study: (a) engaging in creative art activities lead to insight and new initiatives, and (b) created images support self-expression.

Emerging emotions: growth. In light of the category emerging emotions: growth, I examined how the participants used their cognitive capacities to construct and manage their social reality, based on their perception of created images. As human beings, we are probably the most emotional and expressive creatures on earth (Lazarus,1999). Our ability to reason, in combination with our emotions, can provide much information. According to Lazarus (1999), there is a belief in Western society, including among many scholars, that emotions are irrational, and that they do not follow logical rules. However, emotions are the product of reason, because they emerge from how we appraise what is happening in our lives. But Lazarus also pointed out one problem with this premise, which is that in order to be rational, we have to know what our self-interests are, and we also must be aware of other important human values, plus being concerned with fairness, justice, and compassion. Emotions thus follow logic "as long as we view them from the standpoint of an individual's premises about self and the world, even when they are not realistic" (p. 87).

During the act of appraisal, there are two conflicting appraisals at the same time. One appraisal is conscious and can therefore be communicated, while the second

appraisal takes place on a deeper level, where it may not so easily be acknowledged or accepted. The second appraisal may be an unwillingness to face the deeper matters that lie behind the perceived emotion (Lazarus, 1999). Emotion always occurs in relation to meaning, according to Lazarus (1999), but cognition can occur without awareness of a linked emotion. However, even if we are not fully cognizant of how events in our life affect us emotionally, the nonverbal act of creating art can help us to observe our abstract emotions with the support of a tangible object, and put words to a felt, but unspoken emotion. The cognitive framework discussed by Lazarus entails an appraisal of a situation or an event, but rather from a distal (cold) knowledge, than an appraisal attributed to a proximal (hot) or emotional knowledge. The cognitive aspect thus allows for an inroad to awareness that is pre-emotional, or what Lazarus considered a response variable, such as "having a goal at stake, locus of responsibility, of what some treat as accountability" (p. 32). Lazarus further held that the complexity and subtlety of our mind's and body's adaptation to our environment, and how we relate to other people, are all relevant to how we flourish and continue our learning process as individuals, and as part of the collective whole of the population.

When I interpreted the data collection for this category I was attentive to the participants' descriptions of their awareness of new learning experiences from the process of art-making, and the emotions that often unexpectedly emerged from their images. I further focused on the participants' wording around any shift in perspective and possible newfound insight, when reflecting on their created images. I found that there was more coded unites that belonged to this category of emerging emotions: growth, than

to either of the other two categories. However, after much reflection and deep insight into the meaning of the coded units under this category, two different themes slowly emerged. One of the themes was an insight into a different personal perspective, while the other theme supported confidence in self-expression.

In the first theme of this study, the participants' discussion of their images often revealed a sense of surprise from their observations of emerging emotions, rather than a deeper curiosity of what lay behind the emerging emotions. However, in the second theme, created images support self-expression, which also emerged from the category emerging emotions: growth, the participants felt that they were *seen* from a different perspective, which enhanced their self-image. All of the participants mentioned that they had discovered a new way, through their images, to express themselves. Art-making activities had for most participants always entailed trying to depict something from an external observation. They also mentioned that when viewing a piece of art, or other created images, the experience was more enjoyable if the image was recognizable. To practice silent time for observation of their images during the art sessions with a sense of presence, without searching for an object of recognition, but rather to allow an emotion to slowly emerge from what they observed, was for most participants a new learning experience.

The period of silence, when the participants observed their images from a short distance, while allowing space for inner dialogue to emerge, was mentioned as a welcoming eye opener in how to recognize different aspect of self, and that it also instilled a feeling of empowerment. When observing their images in silence, matters

behind the initial perception often emerged and could become the important thread to further dialogue. This is discussed in the third theme, sharing perception of images: a visual link to meaningful discussions, which was supported by the appraisal: motivational category.

Appraisal: Motivation. The category appraisal and motivation provided a ground to examine the participants' descriptions of a lifetime of experiences and influences that may have shaped their way of being in the world, while evoking both well-being and regrets. Maintaining quality of life, and the motivation to find meaning in life, according to Frankl (1959/1985) is the primary quest of individuals throughout life. What is meaningful in life is different for each person, and changes continuously during a person's life at a given time and space. It is not what the inevitable challenges are that we meet, but how we meet those challenges, which may have an impact on our life. One of the primary components that lead to motivation, according to Lazarus (1999), is goal relevance in appraisal of whether a transaction is viewed by a person as relevant to well-being. "In effect, there is no emotions without there being a goal at stake…" (p. 92). Lazarus further proposed that appraisal lies behind each emotion. We do not only think in terms of harm, and or loss, threat, and challenge, when we appraise a situation. There is also a fourth type of appraisal, where we may experience a feeling of benefit from more or less stressful situations, that may encompass both negatively, and positively toned emotions.

Once a decision has been made, of whether what is taking place is appraised as a threat or a challenge, which has to be dealt with accordingly, there is a second appraisal.

The secondary appraisal is a subjective voice of what one must think to feel a given emotion. While both primary and secondary appraisals can occur subconsciously, Lazarus (1999) proposed that with respect to the choice of an emotion, basic issues such as blame or credit for an outcome, coping potential, and future expectations need to be evaluated.

In Lazarus's (1999) discussions on individual appraisal, he considered what it is that motivates the aging person to cope with increasing mental and physical limitations. Lazarus mentioned that one of the most difficult coping problems with aging is existential. A sense of motivation is almost impossible to impose from the outside, and for the older adult "the existential dilemmas are often characterized by a lack of motivation to seek a satisfying commitment to a constructive activity" (p. 174). The transition in the aging process may bring up a search for meaning in everyday existence, and it may also entail a loss of previously enjoyed activities, in exchange for acquiring new coping mechanisms that support healthy aging. A challenge for clinicians is not so much to take care of emotional problems of aging that is associated with functional losses, but there is more of a challenge when seeking to assist the older adult, where there is a motivational deficit (Lazarus, 1999).

In the current study, the participants mentioned the importance of the discussions they enjoyed during the art-making sessions. The observation and musing concerning the images motivated a search for a deeper insight, both into themselves and to the other participants. This important phase of the art-making activities had the possibility of stimulating meaningful and thought provoking discussions. The visual link to meaningful

discussions was particularly appreciated by a number of participants who had lost their spouses. The often, wordless emotion associated with the loss of a beloved person, became a color, form, or shape during the art-making process. In the transformation from a previous covert emotion to an overt emotional image, the loss could now be discussed from a deeply meaningful perspective with the image present as a *third.* A third, in this example, is the image that holds an emotion, and that can be discussed from a comfortable distance, that feels sincere without the fear of initiating an inappropriate catharsis in a shared environment. The final category, creativity: subjective experience, support the fourth theme, reminiscences from images lead to shift in awareness.

Creativity: Subjective Experience. The category of creativity: subjective experience provided a place to examine the participants' remembrances, perceptions, and imaginations that emerged from their created images. I was attentive to possible emerging shifts in perspectives from engaging in reminiscences and life review. A previously unspoken emotion may for the first time be seen in the image, and facilitate a continuous changing interaction with self and others, while enhancing the potential for a deeper understanding of complex interacting layers, such as levels of abstraction, awareness, and control (Polkinghorn, 1989). Emerging emotions associated with creativity and subjective experiences are not appraisals, but according to Lazarus (1999) "a complex organized system consisting of thoughts, beliefs, motives, meanings, subjective bodily experiences, and physiological states, all of which arise from our struggles to survive and flourish by understanding the world in which we live" (p. 100).

The first reaction when we observe an image is usually based on individual aesthetic values, experiences, and how we view the world. An aesthetic observation is an important first step when we look at an image, before we can proceed to the second step of a reflective discourse. When we engage in a reflective discourse in this important second step, and stay with the metaphor of our created image, there is a possibility of invoking subjective experiences. However, a barrier to our felt subjective essence of an event may be noted in our unconscious projections on an image, developed through our life's history of experiences (von Franz, 1980).

The biological aspect of what may take place in our body and mind when we consciously focus on an object or abstract thought was discussed by Sigel (2007), who noted that "when we feel open to embrace what arises in the field of awareness, we will sense an opening space, an encircling embrace, that can contain what before was unbearable knowledge, emotion, or memory" (p. 295). In his discussion on well-being and coherence of mind, Siegel (2007) described nine distinct domains of neural integration. Vertical integration is one of the domains, where the wisdom of the body enables access to the mind. This means that input from the body is brought up via the spinal cord and bloodstream, into the limbic system and frontal cortex, thereby forming an integrated circuit. These constant neural activations are normally outside of our conscious awareness. But with the assistance of a created image, we may bring awareness to the dynamic process of our body, and this new awareness may become the beginning of conscious choice and change.

Through the physiological and mental changes during the aging process, our perspective and appraisals of emotional events likewise changes character. When reminiscences emerged through the images, the participants often expressed a wider, deeper, and richer mix of emotional experiences of memories from the past, and how they were felt to relate to the present. My focus in this category of subjective experience was to explore if there were aspects of inter and intrapersonal relational emotions that were evoked from the participants' created images. Deeply held memories may surface from observing their created images, and subjective emotions from those early memories may invite awareness of a shift in perception after a lifetime of experiences, and a richly held history of insights and growth. The conceptual memory that we carry with us from past events may through the created images, for the first time, be viewed from a different perspective. The newly observed image may invite a new set of emotions that enhances the subjective experience of held memories.

Limitations of the Study

There are a number of limitations to trustworthiness in this study that need to be addressed. The older adults in the study were volunteers, rather than randomly selected individuals, and there were more women than men that participated in the study. The study was carried out in a suburb of Stockholm, Sweden where the participants were relatively independent, well educated, and enjoyed living in a materially privileged environment. Because the participants lived in a senior residence, they had easy access to social interactions, and opportunities to participate in various activities that is offered by the residence. The participants in the study do not adequately represent the older adult

population in Sweden, where many older adults live alone in their homes, and do not enjoy the same opportunities for social contact, or for activities that provide continued education, and other form of creative undertakings. The findings of the study can further not be generalized to apply to the older adult population on a global level, because of differences in traditions, cultures, and individual approaches to engaging in creative art activities.

Participation in the study was further limited to older adults, who had not been diagnosed with any cognitive disorder, or where the onset of dementia had not been recognized. The participants in the study were older adults, 69 to 88 years old, who except for normal age associated physical challenges and changes were relatively healthy. During the creative circle sessions, they were cognitively present and committed to complete the weekly art activities. Seven weekly meetings of art-making activities during the creative circle was a relatively short-term experience for the participants to engage in, and awaken, their creative side, and is a limitation in this study.

It was further noted that art-making itself, as a source of deterrent for individuals who may feel insecure about their creative side, and noted as a possible limitations to the study in Chapter 1, did not occur. According to the transcriptions of the interviews, all of the participants mentioned that first they were curious, and then they were surprised when they realized their creative potential, from observing their newly created images. However, there may still be a limitation in reaching a wider range of participants, because it may be that only those individuals, who were not afraid of, or hesitant to engage their creative side, were the people who volunteered to participate in the creative circle.

Recommendations

Findings from this study support previous research (Cohen et al., 2006; Fischer & Specht, 1999), showing a link between engaging in creative activities and well-being in older adults. However, further phenomenological studies should be conducted to investigate the long-term influence of older adults' participation in creative art activities. During the seven weeks of the present studies, there were numerous occasions for new insights, and growth perceived by the participants. Due to the relatively short time of seven weeks, the possibility of maintaining openness in learning new skills, and problem-solving developed during the art-making sessions, might be limited and not be long-lived. As human beings, we easily fall back on lifelong learned habits, even though newly acquired understanding may promote enhanced living, and feelings of well-being (Lazarus, 1999). There is an accepted myth that wisdom is a special provenance of aging, and that creativity belongs to the youth with a rapid decline with each passing decade. But the question of long-term benefit of creativity for older adults needs to be explored more fully, especially when considering Cohen's (2005) finding that there is overwhelming evidence of creativity as a potential drive in all ages, which "can deepen and become richer with age"(p. 168).

The sense of playful activity in creating artwork, mentioned by many of the participants in my study, has its own dynamic. This dynamic process allows for movement of held emotions, without the necessity of previously cognitively directed ideas for creative artwork, with an end result in mind. Rather, the transformation of abstract thought processes to tangible artwork (during absence of cognitive direction), is

an evolutionary process, where we evolve in our depths of viewing self, others, and the world (Harlan, 2007). One of the major findings in this study is that the participants experienced a new way to express themselves through their created images, which led to meaningful discussions with self and others. It is therefore important, to more deeply investigate the flow of creative thought processes that may emerge from a group of older adults, who are engaged in art-making, especially when this is for a period of six months or more. It would further be important to investigate the participants' perception of newfound insight against any change, or alterations in handling everyday challenges, as well as from interactions with others.

It is not unusual to experience fear associated with loss when transcending into old age. However, expressing these fears verbally is often a challenge, and words may not be enough to communicate worries about how to cope with fears associated with the development of old age. There is no doubt that creative art-making is a powerful tool for self-expression and communication both with self and others, in regards to changing, and sometimes personal, health problems. Future research should therefore include a longitudinal study in consideration of a potential relationship between expression of emotions and ability to cope with future, or current health problems in older adults.

Since the creative circles appeared to fill a gap in providing meaningful discussions and activities, it is important to find practical ways to offer these experiences to older adults living in senior residences (and perhaps finding ways to offer these creative experiences to those living independently). This could be done by creating an outline of the rationale, and an outline of the procedures shared with staff, who would be

trained to provide access to this creative process. Implementing this process would be a relatively straightforward way to support and enhance well-being in older adults.

The critical and essential aspect of this study was the emphasis on the participants' subjective experience of their creative art experience, with an inherent potential for deepening an understanding of oneself, and to cultivate purpose and meaning. Further research is needed to find out whether the findings from this study would be significant in a more demographically diversified sample.

Implications

In this study I explored the relationship between engaging in creative art activities, and facilitating expression of emotions in older adults. The participants were living in a senior residence in Stockholm, where art activities in combination with group discussions had not previously been offered. Engaging in the creative circle was a new experience for all the participants. When the older adults, who participated in the creative circle engaged in art-making activities, they experienced a sense of connection to held emotions, that could now emerge into a dialogue with self and others via their images. In Jung's (1971) discussion about the ways the unconscious mind and the quality of creativeness attaches to the mind, he asserted that: "when images are created, they often emerge from the unconscious, manifesting as forms or patterns belonging to no time in particular, being seemingly eternal, they convey a peculiar feeling of timelessness when consciously realized" (p. 498). In this study, the participants' images became an inroad to meaningful discussions of experiences, hopes, and motivations: past, present, and future. These are all important contributors in leading a fulfilled life during the second half of our existence.

For many people, it is hard to see what the second half of life has to offer, with its intrinsic values, and that it does not compete with the intrinsic values of youth (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986; Tornstam, 2005), which may render a sense of unsatisfied demands on an unlived life, when transitioning into old age. However, in a way that reflects Frankl's (1959/1985) view around living meaningfully, it is necessary to experience a shift, from focusing on problems associated with old age, to recognizing and addressing potentials, accomplishments, hopes, and dreams during the later part of our lives. This can be facilitated by engaging in creative artwork, which may become a gateway to fulfill, not only the rational part of meeting the demands of old age, but also enrich cognitive and emotional experiences.

According to recent statistics by the National Institute of Aging (NIA; 2015a), in many countries the oldest old (people aged 85 or older) are now the fastest growing part of the total population. This age group has increased so quickly during the 21st Century that the NIA has decided to raise the bar of the oldest old to age 90 and older. The older adult population is increasingly growing, and there is currently a steady increase of life expectancy of about three months of life per year, based on data from life expectancies between 1840 and 2007 (NIA, 2015). Although many of the oldest old adults remain in fairly good health, some of the drawbacks of aging are related to functional and cognitive impairments, while many can expect decades of active and healthy years. For this age group of older adults, it is not so much medical care that is needed, but rather care for everyday living, for access to creative outlets, and for being able to engage in social activities (Martin & Poon, 2014). What it is that defines longevity and quality of life,

according to Butler (2008), is highly individualized and a subjective experience for each and everyone. However, what seems to remain as constant in quality of life, after considering everything from health to material influences, is care for everyday life, and not surprisingly, social contact with others (Martin & Poon, 2014).

In this study, participants who engaged in creative art activities in the format of a guided creative circle had access to continued learning, to a variety of creative ways to express emotions, and meaningful dialogues (enhanced social interactions), while at the same time getting to know a deeper side of both self and others. Many of the older adult residences attempt to approximate the social support that older adults previously counted on from extended family, friends, and neighbors. In order to assist the increasingly elderly population, it is imperative that an active life style is supported and maintained. But the reality is, that many older adult residences often fall short of providing an outlet for purposeful, and creative activities. However, there is a strong potential for positive social change, implemented with the support of administrators in senior residences, who include creative art activities in their program of activities offered to their residents. Older adults, an underserved population, will then have access to meaningful experiences and to social interactions that contribute to well-being and healthy aging in later life. Creative art activities provide a means of expression, with possible self-actualization, increased capacity for problem-solving, and heightened motivation that can lead to effective coping-skills, health, and enhanced well-being during the second half of life.

Conclusion

We live in a time where there is a rapid growth of the older adult population as a result of increased longevity. There is also a substantial change in what it means to be an older adult. During earlier centuries most people did not reach old age, life was relatively short, and they often died at a time we today call midlife. But due to extraordinary breakthroughs within medicine and health care in the 20th Century, the longevity revolution has begun something that has never happened before. With this increase of an aging population come requirements for new services, new thinking, new ideas, and a new language (Dychtwald, 2015).

Extended families, communities, and society as a whole are in a learning process, while striving to meet these new demands, where newfound procedures and policies are constantly changing. One of the main changes is a shift in focus of the current health care system, that revolves around treating episodic illness, to a focus on preventive care, early interventions, and effective care coordination in order to achieve a healthier population, and facilitate well-being into old age. Aging successfully will be different for everyone. For many older adults, who transition to retirement, this will be a time of looking forward to what may turn into decades of leisure time, finding new ways to invite purpose and meaning during the later part of life, while enhancing personal fulfillment. This may be an unexpected challenge.

Part of preventive care as, discussed by Olshansky (2013), is to maintain a healthy, robust, and interactive lifestyle, where interconnectedness within extended families and local communities support outlets for continued learning, creative activities, social

interactions, and enrichment of everyday activities. Senior residences that provide a comprehensive living environment for many older adults, need access to meaningful innovations that will help keep older adults creatively active, involved, and independent, as they age. Being involved in creative art activities can be viewed as preventive care, while serving as a gateway to expression of emotions, insight, and self-actualization, while lessening the possibilities of depression, which is a high risk for older adults. This risk was supported by Wenzell (2014), who confirmed that continued engagement with activities that are consistent with our values and beliefs serve as a strong buffer against negative emotional shifts and depression.

There are currently no studies on older adults, conducted in Sweden, where the potential benefits of engaging in creative art activities by this population is addressed. Most activities that are offered at senior residences do not provide a forum, where participants may have the opportunity to tap into their creative energetic side. The findings from this study clearly show, that when the participants engaged in creative artwork, they experienced a new way of expression, an inroad to social interactions, and a shift in awareness that invited deeper insight and self-discovery. Furthermore, a creative engagement in art-making has the deep potential of leading to meaningful discussions, and social interactions that will actively support older adults, while promoting a sense of recognition, sharing, and well-being, with the opportunity for growth and meaning during the later part of life

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Appendix A

Screening Questions

Demographic information:

- What is your age?_____ Gender _____

When screening for dementia:

- What day of the week is it? (e.g. Monday)
- What month and day is it?
- What year is it?
- Where are you?
- Who is the Prime Minister?
- What motivates you to participate in the creative circle?
- How do you see your ability to function in a group?

When screening for emotionally disabled individuals:

- Do you ever hear voices that no one else seems to hear?
- Do you ever have problems distinguishing what you experience as real or a dream?
- Do you think that other people can read your mind or you can read other people's minds?

Appendix B:

Letter of Cooperation

SÄLLSKAPET VÄNNER TILL PAUVRES HENTEUX
NOCKEBYHUS
Nockeby Backe 8
168 40 Bromma

July 14, 2014

Dear Britt Saga Eksell,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled The Creative Circle within the Nockebyhus Senior Housing, Bromma. As part of this study, I authorize you to invite the residents by placing your flyer announcing the creative circle on our activities board, to provide seven weekly creative sessions of 90 minutes each, to invite potential participants for an optional individual feedback interview at the end of the seven sessions, and to use the collected data as part of your dissertation. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibility is to provide a room with tables and chairs within the senior residence that is suitable for the creative sessions. We also understand that you will be responsible for all the art supplies that will be needed for the sessions. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

KristerLewenton
Verksamhetschef
Nockebyhus
+46 (0)8 579 777 21
krister.lewenton@svph.se

Appendix C: Flyer

THE CREATIVE CIRCLE at NOCKEBYHUS

THROUGH DIFFERENT EXERCISES WHERE WE USE COLOR, FORM, LINES, AND WORDS, YOU MAY FIND YOUR OWN UNIQUE CREATIVITY.

Seven meetings, starting AUG 5 – 16, 2014
Tuesdays @ 10:00 – 11:30 AM on 2nd Floor, Room A

NO PREVIOUS ART EXPERIENCE NECESSARY

This invitation is for a research study and partial fulfillment of the requirements for my degree in health psychology at Walden University. Following the final creative session an optional feedback interview will be scheduled. Please note that you are welcome to join the creative sessions also without participating in an interview.

REGISTRATION AND FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT BRITT ON 702 732 0898

WELCOME!

BRITT SAGA EKSELL, PhD(C), CT *
britteksell@gmail.com 072 732 08 98
* CT: Certified Thanatologist
PhD(C) Health Psychology (candidate)

Appendix D: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study of creativity as a means to expression in older adults. The researcher is inviting the residents of Nockebyhus senior residence to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.
This study is being conducted by a researcher named Britt Saga Eksell, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore how creativity can facilitate expressions of emotions in older adults.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be invited to:

- Participate in seven weekly meetings of 90 minutes
- Fulfill a creative exercise described by Britt Saga Eksell, followed by a short discussion about the participants' perception of their completed creative activity.
- Participate in a voluntary 30-40 minute individual interview that will be scheduled after the seven sessions are finished.

Here are some sample questions:

How did you perceive the experience of engaging in creative art activities?

What, if any, reminiscences emerged from your images?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at Nockebyhus senior housing will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue or becoming upset from emerging memories.

Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or well-being. If you would experience any emotional upset there is an option of referral for counseling with Ingrid Stenmark, who is a counselor on staff at Nockebyhus and can be reached at 08 579 777 20.

Potential benefits from participating in this study may include access to your creative side, insight to different aspects of your creativity that may be helpful in daily life, such as in decision making, facilitating articulation of thoughts and emotions, and a deeper insight to self actualization that may lead to successful aging.

Payment:

There is no reimbursement provided for participating in this study.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Original artwork will be returned to the participants after the last session. (Note: please see a separate consent form in regards to possible future use of participants' images where you will have the option to decide not to share your artwork publicly.) Data will be kept in a secure locked cabinet in Britt Saga Eksell's office. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email: britteksell@gmail.com or telephone 072 7320898. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 001 612 312 1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 08-27-14-0104805 and it expires on August 26, 2015.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant _____

Date of Consent _____

Participant's Signature _____

Researcher's Signature _____

Appendix E: Consent Form (images)

The Creative Circle at Nockebyhus

I give permission for the images made by me during the creative circle sessions to be used for educational/research purposes provided that my name and identity are not disclosed.

I may decide not to sign this consent form if I do not want my art shared publicly and this will not have any impact on my participation in the creative circle.

Signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's signature:_____

Appendix F: Weekly Creative Sessions

Week 1: Four Aspects of Self

- Aim: To express something about yourself that may be difficult to say with words
- Choose colored paper to represent your physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual self
- Make each color into form or shape, arrange forms on piece of paper, glue down
- Choose a title

Week 2: Collage

- Aim: Introduce yourself with images
- Choose about 20 images that captures your imagination without focus on why or what
- Reduce to 10 images and arrange collage in an overall picture format, add title

Week 3: Chaos/Order

- Aim: to accept and use feelings of confusion to discover an inner clarity, where tension of the opposites can be held
- Make image of chaos, using lots of colors to rapidly cover a page
- Look at the details, find small portion in chaos that stands out for you
- Copy and enlarge detail to another page
- Give both images a title.

Week 4: The Poem of Senses

- Aim: To explore vision, sound, touch, taste, and smell of words and your capacity to make meaning
- Decide on a word that emanate an emotion in you and explore your perception of senses in association to that word by filling out the following:

……. if it was a color it would be ……..

It sounds like……

It feels like ……

It tastes like …….

It makes me feel as if …….....

- Add a visual image from a magazine or from your own drawings to your poem, think of a title

Week 5: Self Portrait

- Aim: To express something about your physical self from an inner viewpoint
- Choose medium and make a face that resembles your own image
- Choose colors that express your emotional sense of self
- Add a picture that may express something about yourself in a real or in a metaphorical way. Give your image a title.

Week 6: Family Portrait

- Aim: Experience self in the social context of family and friends, past, present, and future
- Choose a tree that will provide the ground for your social experience
- Choose colors and shapes of leaves and/or branches representing social connections and add their names.
- Choose a title

Week 7: Putting it all Together

- Aim: To explore feelings and thoughts about yourself, and to recognize subjective feelings when viewing others' artwork. To read in a word or two how others may perceive and experience your artwork.
- Choose an area for an exhibition of your artwork
- Arrange images to recreate one whole picture that is meaningful to you
- Spend silent time with others' exhibitions and sense what words of emotion come to you. Write down a word or a sentence and leave in front of exhibit

Appendix G: Interview Questions

1. How do you perceive your experience of the creative activities during the sessions?

2. What, if any, emotions do you feel that you can put words to when you look at your images?

3. How would you describe your experience with the unfolding of the creative process during the sessions?

4. From the images that you have created, do you notice something about yourself now that you may not have thought about before the sessions?

5. What, if any, decisions based on the creative process seem new and open to you now?

6. What reminiscences emerged from your images?