PERCEPTIONS OF AGE AND AGING AFTER RETIREMENT IN THE CASE OF URBAN PROFESSIONAL WOMEN IN ANKARA

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ABSTRACT

PERCEPTIONS OF AGE AND AGING AFTER RETIREMENT IN THE CASE OF URBAN PROFESSIONAL WOMEN IN ANKARA

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The aim of this thesis is to analyze urban professional women's perceptions of age and aging after retirement with a particular focus on patterns of continuity and change in their public and private lives. It first focuses on the perceptions of elderly women about their chronological ages. It then analyzes, the respondents' perceptions on elderliness and is investigated. Lastly the social life experiences of respondents are analyzed with reference to their position and experiences in the public and private realm after retirement. The thesis argues that elderly women's previous experience and participation in the public realm shape the ways in which they experience and perceive of elderliness after retirement. Their working experiences positively contribute to the process of aging; their involvement in the public realm continues and the social lives remain active. The study is based on the data collected during a fieldwork conducted in Ankara. 29 in-depth interviews were conducted with urban, retired, and educated women aged between 64-75.

Keywords: Aging, elderly women, gender, public sphere.

ÖZ

ANKARADA'DAKİ KENTLİ VE MESLEK SAHİBİ KADINLARIN EMEKLİLİK SONRASI YAŞ VE YAŞLILIK ALGILARI

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Bu tezin amacı, kentli profesyonel kadınların yaş ve emeklilik sonrası yaşlanma algılarını, özellikle kamusal ve özel yaşamlarındaki süreklilik ve değişim kalıplarına odaklanarak analiz etmektir. İlk olarak yaşlı kadınların kronolojik yaşlarına ilişkin algılarına odaklanılmaktadır. Daha sonra, katılımcıların yaşlılık hakkındaki algıları analiz edilip araştırılmıştır. Son olarak, katılımcıların sosyal yaşam deneyimleri, emeklilik sonrası kamusal ve özel alandaki konumları ve deneyimlerine göre analiz edilmektedir. Tez, yaşlı kadınların önceki deneyimlerinin ve kamusal alana katılımlarının, emeklilikten sonra yaşlılığı deneyimleme ve algılama biçimlerini şekillendirdiğini tartışmaktadır. İş deneyimleri yaşlanma sürecine olumlu katkı sağlamakta; kamusal alana katılımları devam etmekte ve sosyal yaşamları aktif kalmaktadır. Çalışma, Ankara'da yürütülen bir saha çalışmasında toplanan verilere dayanmaktadır. Bu kapsamda, 64-75 yaş arası şehirli, emekli ve eğitimli kadınlarla 29 derinlemesine görüşme yapılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yaşlanma, yaşlı kadınlar, toplumsal cinsiyet, kamusal alan

To my family…

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

TUİK	Turkish Statistical Institute
UN	United Nations
MIDUS	Midlife in the United States
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Age and aging are socially constructed since they have subjective meanings and social dimensions; thus, age should not be used just as simple categories people have as objectively in studies. Regarding aging, predominantly chronological age is seen as playing a significant role. For instance, the age of 60 or 65 can be stated as related to the beginning of the old age. However, chronological age may not correspond to the age felt by an individual, so there can be a discrepancy about it. Then, it may not be correct to say that an individual aged 65 is elderly. Therefore, aging is multilayered and also includes the subjective side of the perception of the age of individuals.

Morgan and Kunkel (2007) state, "At least before the age of 85, age is significant primarily because of the social meanings, structures, and processes attached to it." (p.4). In society, there is a meaning ascribed to age and aging in such a way that they can become beyond the objective. Society can assign some roles and "appropriate" behaviors to individuals regarding their age statuses and aging. For instance, when an individual reaches an actual chronological age, that age may imply some roles or behaviors affecting people's social lives. Thus, by subjectively perceiving old age and associations towards elderliness in society, within a subjectively considered elderly stage in life, elderly people can behave towards the role ascribed by society and are thought to be "suitable" for that stage.

The age identity, which means people's interior self–experiences about their aging processes and ages, is significant at that point. Thus, analyzing older people's age identities to be able to see different perceptions about the age they feel, perceptions about their aging stage, and whether there are some roles and behaviors attributed to their age and aging status are significant aspects for analyzing the possible relation of it to the social life experiences of elders.

1.1. Significance of the Thesis and Research Question

Turkey is the second most rapidly aging country (Arun & Karademir Arun, 2011). In addition, the old age population is getting more prominent in the next fifteen years quickly (Arun, 2018). In a country, if the percentage of the elderly population in a total population is between 8 % and 10 %, then it means that the population of the country is regarded as old; however, if that ratio is higher than 10 %, then it is regarded as " too old" (Özkul & Kalaycı, 2015). It is the case that in 2022 the ratio of the elderly population in Turkey, as increasing, has become 9,9%, and it is expected to rise to 12,9% in 2030(TUİK, 2023). Thus, Turkey's population can be regarded as "too old" soon. Therefore, aging is an important topic to study in Turkey. Despite that, it is stated that there are no inclination toward aging studies as an effective way in Turkey, and age is a variable in research (Arun, 2018). However, age is a sophisticated category, so it should not be considered a variable. In addition, old age studies and analyzing how it is perceived and constructed in society are significant.

Furthermore, it is crucial to consider that aging is a gendered topic. In all periods of their lives, women are exposed to difficulties because of gendered dominations, power relations, and inequalities. Older women have different aging experiences in the old age stage than older men. In Turkey, elderliness is feminized due to the higher number of older women than older men (TUİK, 2023). Because of gender-related problems, being an older woman in Turkey becomes distinct from analyzing. First, marital status in Turkey actively determines inequality among older people (Arun, 2011). In 2022, the percentage of older men who is married was stated as 83, 7%; however, that data is stated as 46, 1% in older women in Turkey (TUİK, 2023).

Among the reasons elderly women are not married again after their spouses die their concerns about condemnation in society are stated (Buz & Beydili, 2015). Thus, elderly women in Turkey can experience a lonely aging process (Artan & Irmak, 2018). Secondly, according to 2022 statistics, there are significant differences between the education statuses of elderly women and men in Turkey (TUİK, 2023). In all education levels, the ratio of elderly men is higher than that of elderly women (TUİK, 2023) due to gender-related problems impacting education inequalities. Because of educational barriers, women cannot participate in employment which can

affect their old age experience and cultural capital as another factor important in the aging experience. Due to not being involved in employment or low wages, elderly women have more poverty than elderly men, which can affect elderly women's aging and social life experiences. In addition, elderly women in Turkey live different aging experiences due to unpaid care work. They can look after their grandchildren or elders because of assumed gender roles concerning caregiving which can affect their life organizations and social lives. Elderly women also have difficulties having both gender-based and ageist discrimination. Due to gendered controlling mechanisms on women's bodies, a perception of young and beautiful body image of women can create pressure. Thus, studying aging from a women's perspective in Turkey is especially significant.

When it is looked at the studies about aging in Turkey, there is generally research about aging from a more life quality and health perspective (Boz & Ozsari, 2020; Şahin et al., 2019; Tümer et al., 2022; Çam et al., 2021; Köse,2021; Top et al., 2012). However, discussing age and aging from a sociological point of view is essential. Social roles, attitudes, and behaviors towards old age and aging can be constructed. Moreover, considering the gender-related issues that differentiate elderly women's aging experiences, studying women's aging is peculiarly significant in Turkey.

1.2. Research Motivation

Regarding the significance of studying aging in women in Turkey due to the distinct and peculiar character of elderly women, as stated before, the thesis has been organized accordingly. In Turkey, while some elderly women have an active social life, others cannot, and there is a tendency towards withdrawing themselves from public life to more of a private sphere as home. I have wanted to research that issue because there can be perceptions towards aging and old age on the scene as affecting the social life experiences of elderly women. That is to say, some elderly women can think that she is at such an age and getting older so they can start to have more time at home instead of having an active social life outside. Thus, because of a socially constructed meaning of old age and aging, some can have such a perception and may act accordingly. In addition, gender-related factors such as inequalities in education, employment, cultural capital, and unpaid care work can affect the social lives of

elderly women in Turkey by making their old age period different. Hence, I have formulated the research question as "How can the perceptions of age and aging affect the social life experiences of urban elderly women who are educated and retired in Ankara?" in order to see whether there can be a relation between them and if so, then how that relationship can be. In addition, elderly women's public use after retirement is analyzed.

In the thesis, I want to analyze the age identity of elderly women due to their distinct position as elderly in the old age stage. I have also analyzed their subjective perception of their age and aging status. By analyzing it, the subjectively perceived possible roles and attitudes associated with their ages and aging status are shown to see the relation to their social life experiences. Also, the effects of gender-related issues, making the old age period of elderly women different, on the social life experiences of elderly women are discussed. I have divided the analysis into subtopics. First of all, I have analyzed the age identity of elderly women to have an idea about their age and aging processes. When doing this, I have looked at their subjective perceptions of their chronological ages as to how they feel about their ages, whether they feel younger or older. Also, I have looked at the meaning of being at that age for elderly women. That is, how they define their age status (as a decline or not), and their age can be associated with a new age stage. In addition, I have investigated whether they perceive some roles or attitudes linked to that age stage.

Secondly, I have analyzed elderly women's elderliness perception. I have seen how those older women can perceive 'old age' in order to be able to understand how it is constructed in their minds. To be able to see this, I have researched how they define being elderly and how they think about the lifestyle of older people to see what can be the socially accepted behaviors associated with the elderly, if any, according to their perceptions. In addition, I need to look at whether they are avoiding defining themselves as elderly or not to be able to get information about their old age perceptions.

Finally, as another subtopic, I have studied their social life experiences to comprehend their situation in public/private spaces. That is to say, I have understood whether elderly women have more time at their home (private sphere) or whether

they have an active social life in the public area in order to analyze their age and aging perception and their social life experiences as I stated above in the research motivation and research question. I have researched the life practices they do and do not do in their social lives, and also I have seen why they do not because there can be their ideas and perceptions about aging or the age stage they think they are in affecting their social life experiences. Therefore, I have comprehended if there can be such connections or not. Also, the role of being retired is important for my thesis to analyze because the retirement transition in people's lives can be effective in terms of changing some social roles and their way of life so it can affect their social life activities, i.e., their situations in spending time at private/public sphere of life.

All in all, I have discussed elderly women's subjective perceptions of age status and aging to be able to understand their way of thinking about attitudes, behaviors associated with their age and aging statuses (if any), and their possible relation to the social life experiences of those elderly people.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Profile of the Elderly People in Turkey

In the world, almost all countries, there is an increase in the ratio and the size of elderly people, so population aging is a common fact in the world (United Nations, 2022). Population aging is regarded among the "megatrends," namely; urbanization, population growth, population aging, and international migration, which qualify today's global population (United Nations, 2019). Also, those megatrends are stated to have the capacity to make considerable and permanent impacts on sustainable development in the future (United Nations, 2019). In the world, it is seen that in 2020 the number of people aged 65 and over was 771 million, which is estimated to increase to 994 million in 2030. It is expected to increase to 1.6 billion in 2050, and it is stated that in all regions of the world elderly population size will expand between 2022 and 2050 (United Nations, 2022). It is stated that globally the elderly population is going from nearly 12 percent (in 2030) to 16 percent in 2050(United Nations, 2022). In addition, in the world, it is the case that old women are much more than men in number (United Nations, 2022).

In Turkey also, population aging is a significant issue to be studied. According to the UN data, in 1980, people aged 65 and over formed 4.7 percent of the total population, and that ratio reached 8,7 percent in 2019, and it will be estimated to reach 12,1 percent in 2030 and to 20,9 percent in 2050 according to the population projections (United Nations, 2013 & 2019). As can be seen from the statistics, there is a continuous rise in the elderly population in Turkey. As a crucial point, according to the UN (United Nations), if, in a country, the percentage of the elderly population in a total population is between 8 % and 10 %, then it means that the population of the country is regarded as elderly; however, if that ratio is higher than 10 % than it is regarded as "too old" (Özkul & Kalaycı, 2015). In Turkey, the elderly population is increasing more rapidly than any other population group (Artan & Irmak, 2018). In 2022 the ratio of the elderly population in Turkey is increasing, has become 9,9%,

and is expected to rise to 12,9% in 2030(TUİK,2023). Thus, that means Turkey's population can shortly be regarded as "too old." Turkey is stated as one of the most rapidly aging countries (Arun & Karademir Arun, 2011).

In Turkey, when it looked at the data for the years between 1935 and 2022, it is seen that the ratio of elderly women is always higher than that of elderly men, and it is also estimated to be like that in the next years (TUİK, 2023). For instance, in 2022, the ratio of elderly women is 11 %, whereas the elderly men ratio is 8,8 % (TUİK, 2023). The literature defines that situation as the "feminization of elderliness" (Canatan, 2012).

2.2. Aging with a Gendered Analysis

Not much was known about old women in the past; however, looking at the current life experiences of elderly women, it seems that not much has changed regarding their difficulties (McDaniel, 1989). Because of the gendered power relations and dominations, women face difficulties in all stages of their lives. Thus, in old age, women have different experiences. The interaction between age and gender causes a "double jeopardy" by combining the negative effects of being a woman and elderly. Therefore, that ends up elderly women's old age period more difficult than men' (Krekula, 2007).

When studying old age, many gerontologists approach the topic from a feminist standpoint (Abel, 1991; Artan & Irmak, 2018; Garner, 1999; Richardson, 1999). Aging is studied in a gendered framework because there is an omission of elderly women in gerontology. While aging is analyzed in the context of gender, the power dynamics, dependency, and social justice on the life experiences of women are included in to study (Artan & Irmak, 2018; Calasanti, 1999; Garner, 1999). Thanks to feminist gerontology, there can be a critical way of looking at the elderly period, and the retirement, caregiving, and work concepts are involved in analyzing and the social and economic justice are focused as significant (Hooyman et al., 2002).

In the literature, in the area of feminist gerontology, there are two overlapping approaches: life course approaches and critical gerontology. Firstly, the life course approach deals with the elderly period in the lifetime as reflecting all stages of life

which carry earlier influences in it (Moody, 1999). As a second approach, critical gerontology analyzes the effect of the socioeconomic, political, and also related elements in shaping the elderly period experiences and also those factors' effects on gerontology itself (Overbo & Minkler, 1993). It is the case that there are differences in the daily lives of women and men as a consequence of inequalities and hardships. The social structures influenced by patriarchy in which men's dominance over women is important for gender relations' feminist analysis (Baines, Evans, & Neysmith, 1991; Hooyman & Gonyea, 1995). In all age periods, because of unequal treatment women face in education, employment, and low wages, they live a life that is poorer compared to men. Because women earn less than men, they also have poor retirement benefits that can affect their old age experiences (Hooyman et al., 2002).

Another factor that influences elderly women's life experiences is their caregiving positions in families. When analyzing the retirement process, feminist gerontologists regard the women's role as caregivers in their lives because it is seen that caregiving affects their retirement dynamics (Hooyman et al., 2002). Women can retire because they can conduct their assumed caregiver responsibility. That situation is closely related to the ideology of familism. Familism or familism is an ideology that supports giving the responsibility of caregiving of family members to the family instead of the government (Ochiai, 2014). Familism strengthens women's being in the domestic sphere, which is seen as ideal and natural. In addition, family care is regarded as better as compared to publicly funded care. It is an ideology declined by feminist gerontologists because of its being responsible for causing oppression for women (Dalley, 1988). Because of women's assumed role as caregivers, in different stages of their lives, they can perform it, and in the old age stage, elderly women can be caregivers for their grandchildren.

Furthermore, some social norms affect women's lives in their old age as the understanding of women's having older spouses than themselves. That can cause elderly women's experience a lonely life (Olson, 1992), which can negatively affect their daily life experiences. In addition, because of the double standard in aging towards women, it is the case that while in elderly men, fulfillment is seen as significant, in elderly women, physical appearance is regarded as important. Thus,

they have different old age experiences because whereas elderly men can gain prestige, elderly women can feel dissatisfaction because of their appearance carrying the signs of aging (Sontag, 1978). Thus, that situation can influence and differentiate elderly women's subjective experience of age and aging statuses.

2.2.1. Elderly Women in Turkey

As it is stated before, there is a feminization of elderliness in Turkey due to a higher number of elderly women as compared to elderly men (TUİK, 2023). According to the last statistics, in 2022, the ratio of elderly women is 11 %, whereas the elderly men ratio is 8,8 % in Turkey (TUİK, 2023). Even if the feminization of elderliness biologically seems like an advantage for elderly women, when it is considered the gender-related issues that women encounter, it can be seen that it generates some difficulties in being an elderly woman in Turkey. The gender-related problems seen in old age are significant to analyze in countries like Turkey, with clear gender roles (Efe & Aydemir, 2015).

In Turkey, because of gender-related issues, the subjective experiences of own ages and aging processes of elderly women become distinct from elderly men's. Firstly, elderly women experience a lonely aging process (Artan & Irmak, 2018). That is to say; in Turkey, it is seen that there is a clear difference between elderly women and marital statuses. Whereas, in 2022, the percentage of elderly men who is married is 83,7%; that data is stated as 46,1% in elderly women (TUİK, 2023). In addition, in 2022, while there are 11,2% widow elderly men, that percentage is 46,9% in elderly women in Turkey, which is 4,2 times bigger than elderly men's data (TUİK, 2023). Marital status, especially in Turkey, is an active determinant of inequality among elderly people (Arun, 2011). According to research, in Turkey, among the reasons elderly women are not married again after their spouses die their concerns about condemnation are stated (Buz & Beydili, 2015). Therefore, gender-related problems in such a way can affect elderly women's behaviors. That situation can influence the social life experiences of elderly women as trips and family visits, by causing isolation (Arun, 2011). Secondly, gender-related problems impact the education inequalities women have in Turkey and that affects elderly women's aging experiences. According to 2022 statistics, it is stated that there are significant

differences between the education statuses of elderly women and men in Turkey (TUİK, 2023). That is to say, in all education levels, it is seen that the ratio of elderly men is higher than that of elderly women (TUİK, 2023). Because of education barriers that women face by gender problems, they also cannot take part in employment and become dependent persons in their advancing age (Nazlıer-Keser, 2019). Thus, in such a way, elderly women can be disadvantaged regarding their cultural capital, which can affect their aging experiences. In addition, another point making the situation of elderly women distinct is their poverty levels. Because women cannot get involved in employment equally and have low wages, they can have poverty in their old age (Ulutaş, 2009). According to the last statistics, it can be seen that whereas the rate of poverty in elderly women (65+) is stated as 12,6%, that ratio is shown as 9,9% in elderly men in Turkey (TUİK, 2023). Thus, that factor can affect elderly women's aging and social life experiences.

Furthermore, unpaid care work is another factor affecting the aging experience of elderly women in Turkey. The unpaid care work of grandparents is taken for granted in Turkey (Demirkol, 2022). Because of the assumed gender role in women's caregiving activity, elderly women encounter caregiving for their grandchildren and family elders who are elderly than them in their old age period. It is important that unpaid care work affects the life organization of women (Lumsdaine & Vermeer, 2015). Women can retire from work because they can look after their grandchildren or family elders in Turkey, which can impact their social life experiences in their old age. In Turkey, elderly women's unpaid care work is affected by familism ideology. It is stated:

> *Turkey's care regime is firmly moving from an 'implicit familialism' model, where the state neither offers de-familialization possibilities nor actively supports the caring function of the family through any kind of familistic policy, to a form of 'supported familialism,' where the family is predominantly supported through a range of financial measures* (Aybars, Beşpınar & Kalaycıoğlu, 2018: 133).

Regarding the care regime in Turkey, it is sound to mention the financial incentive for unpaid care work of grandmothers to their grandchildren. In Turkey, if grandchildren are looked after at home by their grandmothers, then there is a payment to grandmothers (Dünya, 2023). However, it is significant that caretaking of

grandchildren at home can influence the social lives of elderly women. The literature states that by looking after grandchildren, the isolation degree of elderly women can increase (Fuller- Thomson, Minkler, Miller & Driver, 2000; Gladstone, Brown & Fitzgerald, 2009).

2.3. The Study of Age & Aging

About the definition of aging, WHO (2022) states, "At the biological level, aging results from the impact of the accumulation of a wide variety of molecular and cellular damage over time." In addition, however, it is also indicated there is an affiliation between aging and life transitions like the death of relatives or retirement (WHO, 2022). It can be seen that only biological factors cannot be related to aging. About aging, the only connection should not be made with physical aging. There are dimensions of aging, like physical, psychological, social, and societal aging (Morgan & Kunkel, 2007). According to United Nations, old people are the ones who are over 60 (UNHCR, 2020). However, the chronological age cannot be considered the only standard that can define and explain aging.

Age and aging should not be thought of as simple. Instead, it can be said that they are questionable entities within social studies. Even if age seems like a basic category that can be used in everyday life many times without question, it cannot be perceived as uncomplicated as it is thought. That is to say, age and aging have layers since there can be the age people can feel at, or the age people can desire to be. Therefore, it is not just chronological age.

Through the comprehensive analyses of human lives, the sociological discourse has been separated into its detailed sides, for instance, the sociology of old age, the sociology of youth, demography, and family studies (Settersten & Mayer, 1997). According to Settersten & Mayer, age, age structuring, and also the life course has to be analyzed by thinking about the three areas (1997, p. 233-234). First, it must be considered that these are related to the connection between the individuals' lives and the changes and evolution of the bigger social collectives and history (Elder 1996; Mayer, 1986). Also, the relation between an individual's occurrence's social, biological, and psychological sides is important (Baltes et al., 1996). Thirdly, the social construction of time is also related to those subjects (Nowotny, 1989). Age is

seen as a major social category. Chronological age is defined as a proxy that indicates and gives information about one's biological and psychological maturity and one's place in a cohort or life course (Settersten & Mayer, 1997). Age structuring is a term that covers the fact that the roles, experiences, and also statuses of people are age-related (Kertzer, 1989).

Age and aging should be analyzed through individual perceptions and experiences (Demakakos, Gjonca & Nazroo, 2007). The chronological age should not be seen as the only criterion by omitting individuals' subjective perceptions about age and aging. For instance, in contemporary Western societies, most old people do not feel their ages as the same as their chronological ages. Instead, they feel younger than their chronological ages (Logan, Ward & Spitze, 1992; Westerhof & Barrett, 2005). Also, they thought the middle age stage ends by the start of sixty years old (Lachman, 2004), and they desire to be much younger than their chronological ages (Uotinen et al., 2006). Moreover, a relationship has been found between age perceptions and age identity to health outcomes, for instance, morbidity, mortality, and also people's perceptions about their health (Logan et al., 1992; Westerhof & Barrett, 2005; Kuper & Marmot, 2003; Westerhof et al., 2003).

Age and aging are socially constructed; therefore, age should not be seen as an objective category in people's lives. There can be different perceptions and also implications people have and thus, it is not correct to state that anyone in society feels alike in a same chronological age. In society, there can be expectations related to chronological ages and those can have the power of shaping age perceptions. Thus, people may behave in line with that situation. Therefore, it can be said that subjective age is a personally constructed composite phenomenon that includes the different ages of an individual, like how old one sees her/himself, feels, desires, look or act to be (Kastenbaum et al., 1972).

According to Westerhof (2008), age identity is defined as people's interior self–experiences with aging processes and ages. It is stated that in the studies, questions related to how old a person feels, the age group that one thinks she/he belongs to, or people's perceptions about their aging processes are tried to be analyzed (Westerhof,2008.). Therefore, in a study on age identity, those points of view seem

to be important to consider. It is stated that age identity is related to the subjective experience of aging, and thus, there can be misinterpretations and personal biases on the scene. However, researchers have found that topic worthwhile to study, and people's own experiences about their ages and aging processes took place in research (Westerhof, 2008). Since the 1950s, empirically, the age identity issue has worked (Barak & Stern, 1986). Studying that topic is seen as important because age identity can give valuable results about the development of an individual over her/him life courses; secondly, it is seen as worthy of study because, in such a manner, people's perceptions about their aging processes (Westerhof, 2008). It is significant to see those ideas when considering the increasing old populations in today's world.

The fact that old people feel younger is a common finding in research about age identity (Westerhof, 2008). Regarding people's aging experiences, it is stated that, generally, older individuals think of themselves as not belonging to the elderly age group. Instead, they think they are better than people of the same chronological age (Westerhof, 2008). Therefore, according to their perceptions, their chronological age did not affect their inner self, even if they had some physical and social changes occurring in their lives. Their inner self is stated as an "ageless self" (Kaufman, 1986). Thus, it is seen that those elderly individuals do not feel themselves in their chronological age and feel younger. Thus, it can be said that their subjective ages are not the same as their actual ages (Westerhof, 2008). Subjective age that indicates one's own perceptions about her/his age is seen as important because it relates to one's social situation and the norms about age in a society (Uotinen et al., 2006).

In the study on Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS), which is about age identity, the data shows that older people (aged 60-74) feel younger than their chronological ages, so they have younger age identity (Westerhof, 2008). According to a research in Turkey (which is done by 24 women aged 42-77), women mentioned " getting on years" about the aging topic because, according to them, there is no a correspondence between their rising chronological age and their felt age, so they feel younger than their age (Güçlü, 2021). On the other hand, again, according to research in Turkey (done with 12 women aged 61-83), it is said the majority of them defined themselves as the elderly age category (Üstel, 2013).

When analyzing the subjective perception of age, there is an "ideal age" defined as the age that individuals want to be (Westerhof, 2008). The ideal age is seen as significant because it provides information about the satisfaction degree of older people about their chronological ages (Uotinen et al., 2006). According to the results of the study on Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS), it was seen that for people whose ages change between 25-74, people's average ideal ages are lower than their chronological ages (Westerhof, 2008). Also, in the same research, people aged 70-74 feel like half of their chronological age, and so their desire is not the same as their ages. Therefore, they do not satisfy with their chronological ages. Those older people want to be younger than their age felt by them. Thus, it can be said that also there is a discrepancy between older people's chronological ages and ideal ages. Also, there is an incompatibility between their felt ages and ideal (wanted) ages.

Moreover, the perception of the range of midlife is also seen as important. That is to say, because leaving midlife can mean starting to a new range, the "old age range" ideas about midlife can provide insights into old age perception. For instance, in the research stated above (MIDUS), on average, it is stated that people (aged 25-74) think the midlife gap is between 44-59. Also, it is important that in all age groups in this research, people stated that the mean ideal age (the age they want to be) is not in the midlife age range. It is before the beginning of the midlife. When their subjective ages are analyzed, the mean of those ages again are not placed in the midlife; they are expressed as taking place below the end of the midlife. Thus, it can be said that according to that study, individuals' felt age is not above midlife, and also, their desired ages are not in midlife. Therefore, it can be seen that their age identities are not older; on the contrary, they are younger than their chronological ages.

Having a younger age identity is stated as related to adjusting the changes related to age (Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003). At that point, the assimilation process is a factor in gaining such a younger age identity. That is to say; when individuals start to have some age-related changes in their lives, like being retired or experiencing physical decline, then it can be the case that they want to sustain their existing age identities (Westerhof, 2008). Thus, they may act to protect their age identities, called the

assimilation process. Furthermore, the concepts of self-continuity and self-enhancement are relevant to the construction of the age identity (Westerhof, 2008). That is, self-continuity means a motivation to be the same person over time, so when thought of from the perspective of age identity, it can be seen that an individual's young age identity indicates the motive for maintaining the same identity.

Moreover, self-enhancement is related to a motive to sustain a positive self-image. Therefore, if old age is seen as a negative image in society, one can try to maintain her/his younger age identity as a self-enhancement motive. It is stated that as a self-enhancing illusion, keeping the young age identity advances well-being in societies where being old is not valued at all (Heckhausen, Schultz 1998 & Schafer, Shippee, 2010). It is also seen that old people with younger identities have more subjective well-being compared to their peers who feel older or at their chronological ages (Westerhof & Barrett, 2005). Macia et al. (2012) state that it is a universal phenomenon that people feel younger than their chronological ages, so there is such a tendency. Also, old people do not feel at their chronological age; they feel younger, so the chronological age cannot be interpreted as age identity in years (Kaufman & Elder, 2002).

2.3.1. Age Identity Construction

According to symbolic interactionism, identity is a constructed phenomenon shaped by the interactions between society and the self. It is said that the argument about identity depends on the symbolic interactionist theory can also be seen in the identity of age (Sherman, 1994). In the symbolic interactionist perspective, there is a mutuality between society and the self (Sherman, 1994). According to Mead (1934), the self is constructed by people's looking at their selves in terms of how other people around them see them. Identity is an ascribed meaning to the self in social roles or situations. The others around people in a society are found as significant by Mead (1934) and Cooley (1902), it is stated that it is not possible there is a self which is existing independently from the people around us (Stryker, 1981). The aging self, the subjective definition of it, comes from the reflection of the telling of others around people in a society (Karp, 1988). However, it should also be noted that in research, it is found that people do not feel as old themselves only at the age that is

defined by society as old; they feel old at various times in their lives, and mostly, they feel like that when they do not come to that age at all (Sherman, 1994).

Moreover, symbolic interactionist theory also reminds us that when people judge themselves, a comparison is made between their past identity and now. That is, by making such a comparison, they have a chance to see the discrepancies between the previous self and today's self, and when a disaccord is on the scene, it is said that it can be effective on the age identity (Stryker, 1981). Therefore, the age identity construction of old people, that awareness about the past and now can be significant. In symbolic interactionism, it is important to look at how people display themselves to others in a social setting when interacting with society. To give an example, it is indicated by Coupland and Coupland (1995) that according to a case study which is conducted with a 79 years old woman, it is seen that when she has an interaction with a woman who is at the same age as her, then it is the case that she shows herself as not a dependent, inactive. She also states that she goes counter to the stereotypes about being old. However, when she talks to a woman who is 38 years old, she this time behaves like she is dependent and presents herself as fitting the stereotypes of being old by showing herself as having a negative self-image. Therefore, the differences may be affected by who begins the interaction and whether the young person infantilizes the old person. Thus, it can be seen that social interactions should not be overlooked in the age phenomenon.

In the study of age identity, constructing an identity through self that is formed with the effects of culture and society is important to see. It is stated that "when studying age identification, conceptualizations of identity that are based on an idea of self that is both flexible and socially and culturally constructed are helpful" (Uotinen, 2005: 14). Also, it is remarked on the individual experiences in forming the age identity and said, "In general, age identity refers to the subjective evaluation of a person's age, which is subject to individual and historical experiences" (Kaufman & Elder, 2002: 169). Thus, it can be seen that in age identity, there is a subjective evaluation of age in which personal feelings and what means to be old are on the scene (Macia et al., 2012).

2.3.2. Temporary/ Constant Aging

Defining one's self as old should not be thought of as a permanent state (Keller et al., 1989). Thus, self-categorization about age can be temporary and intermittent. Subjective perceptions about age can be affected by changing conditions. For example, if one has an illness, that situation may cause one to feel old. However, when the illness is over, older age identity can be over too.

Moreover, the death of a relative, like the death of a husband or wife, may bring about feeling old. Those kinds of life events should not be ignored when analyzing the age identity, especially since it is thought that old individuals may have more possibility of seeing their relative's death. Thus, analyzing the conditions that may give rise to old age identities and affect their self-view is important.

In the research done by seniors (whose mean age was 68.4 years and twenty-four participants were female and eight participants were male), it is stated that most of them said they could sometimes feel old, but sometimes they may not feel like that, and instead, they can feel young (Keller et al., 1989). Moreover, chronological age should not be thought as the primary principle in shaping the age identity constantly or temporarily. Since, in the same research, it is the case that seniors aged eighty perceive aging awareness as a not constant way; however, the ones aged 57 states they feel it constantly. Also, according to some research, it is indicated that the meaning given to aging is stated as positive. However, the changes related to aging are seen as too negative. When there are some strategies used by old people in order to cope with those changes coming with aging, then there can be a balance. It is indicated in the same research that older people perceive aging positively when they have control over the age-related changes in their lives. Also, it is important to show that some people who perceive constant aging state the outset of that feeling is related to a transition which is retirement in that research. Therefore, it can be significant in showing how society around those older individuals and so they perceive the meaning of being retired. That is to say; if those people interrelate their feeling of aging and retirement, then it can be said that being retired is a social transition that society load meaning to it, which is "getting older." Thus, people may think and feel as if they are getting old by the effect of that stereotype in society

when they pass that period. Thus, in such a case, age identity and the subjective perception of their ages can be shaped by the pattern in society. In addition to it, that situation can be related when one's identity depends highly on a social role that is related to employment (Keller et al., 1989), then in the case of being retired, because that role starts to lose then those people's identity may become more sensitive by passing such a transition like retirement. If older individuals have resistance to those social stereotypes about getting old or do not have an identity that is strongly dependent on employment, then it can be said those people's perception of aging and age identity may not be affected by that transition at all.

As related to permanent and temporary aging awareness, it is stated that health problems should not be ignored. When a health issue affects people's lives, they can feel as aged more densely. Also, when there is such a situation, they may worry about those problems' going from bad to worse, and so they may be afraid of the case that they cannot become self-sufficient anymore and be the one who needs care. Thus, as a consequence of this, they may have an awareness of aging which is impermanent. It is also important that there can be confusion about the evidence of aging and the evidence of sickness in older individuals. That is to say, most of age-related changes indicate the effects of the diseases. Therefore, it can be said that health problems are important in the age identity and the perception of the aging process (Keller, Leventhal, & Larson, 1989).

2.3.3. Gains / losses of the Aging and Expectations towards Age Identity

As stated before, the subjective perception of aging is not simple, like whether an individual feels herself/himself older or younger than the chronological age. It is much more complex and also multidirectional and multidimensional. In various life sections, there can be losses and gains in, for instance, the health, and personal development of people or in their families (Westerhof, 2008). In the nationally representative research conducted in Netherlands, it is asked to people (in the older and middle ages) about their likes and dislikes related to aging (Westerhof, 2003). As related to the negativities of getting older, the perceptions include the social and also the physical decline. For instance, worsening of hearing, vision, mobility, and vitality and a rise in vulnerability are physical losses related to aging. When it is looked at

the social declines, there is loss of respect in the society, and also there is the death of the beloved ones and the loss of independence. However, in addition to those negativities, as positive ones, thanks to aging, there are some social and psychological gains. The presence of grandchildren, autonomy, independence, and the relationship's persistence areare social gains. In addition, as psychological gains, the rising placidity, wisdom, and life experience are largely stated (Westerhof, 2008). Moreover, it is important to see whether age identity affects people's behavior. That is, whether how they act is limited by their age identity or not. Ideas can be related to activities in midlife seen as "appropriate" (Sherman, 1987). In addition, there can be beliefs about the "appropriate" way of behaving when a person is elderly or insufficient (Furstenberg, 1989; Kuypers & Bengtson, 1973; Marshall, 1986).

Nevertheless, in a research done with 101 people (seventy of were aged 60-79), it was not found out such a situation clear (Sherman, 1994). In addition, the rules and expectations associated with family relation and retirement in old age are analyzed in the same study. Among the rules that origins from the larger society and also from the family, there are "activity ("stay busy and involved"), lowered expectations (held by self or by society), freedom ("do the things you want to do that you could not do before," "you have to please yourself"), maintenance of continuity, and a rejection of age-related expectations" (Sherman, 1994: 409).

2.3.4. The Body in the Age Identity and Aging

In postmodernist social gerontology, the age identity is concentrated, and the aging body, the aging, and the aging representations' cultural images are included to analyze (Rapoliene, 2015). Therefore, a new reality exists in which the aging body and the body's relation to the culture of the consumer take place. Therefore, there appears the problem of aging identity, including the choice of lifestyle and also the identity construction (Featherstone & Wernick, 1995; Rapoliene, 2015).

Featherstone characterizes old age mask theory as a postmodern aging theory, and Hepworth is assigned to the second point above, i.e., to the relation between the body and the self (Rapoliene, 2015). According to it, there is a tension between the inner

self which is young, and the aging body of a person (in the body, there are aging signs and the reducing functional capacity). Therefore, the aging body is expressed as a mask that cannot be taken off, and ones who have that mask are subject to the evaluations of the others around them that are made the effect of the bodily changes and those changes' social category implications (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1990). That old age mask is a rigid mask that hides the young self, and to see that self becomes hard because of that mask. Thus, a person's fundamental identity in the inner is withhold by the mask, and even if changes are appearing in the out of the body, the inner self remains the same. That means the changes in appearances do not reach the interior subjective self of the people, which is stated as "real" and stays young paradoxically (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1993; Hepworth, 1991). It is the case that the appearance of the body, which is outside, becomes a "betrayal" of the inner self, which is youthful (Turner, 1995). Moreover, even if there are age-related changes in the body and the mind is starting to become aware of those, there exists an appearance in the body that is not dependable in terms of being an inner young self inside so that can show a mind-body dualism over there (Cunningham-Burley & Backett-Milburn, 1998).

2.4. Perceptions of Age

Consistent with the modernization theory, by the effect of cultural changes, there can be a social setting in which being old is discredited, and youthfulness is valued (Westerhof, 2008). For instance, old people's traditional priorities about knowledge faded away because of the rise in literacy and formal education levels (Westerhof, 2008). Because of the deficiency of studies about age identity in former times, it is difficult to say at that time how older individuals perceived their ages, so the effect of modernization on having young age identities of old people cannot be known at all (Westerhof, 2008). However, thanks to cross-cultural studies, it is known that there is a difference in the age identities of older people in different regions (Westerhof, 2008). For instance, even if individuals tend to feel younger than their chronological ages, there is a difference in people in the different regions. That is to say, in the Asian and European cultures, the variation between age differences is not the same as they are in the United States. For example, according to nationally comparative

research, 74 years old people feel 14 years younger than their chronological ages in the United States; however, in Germany, this duration is stated as eight years (Westerhof, Barrett & Steverink, 2003). Those differences are related to the individual values that can be affected by modernization in those countries(Westerhof, 2008).

Furthermore, the individual variation between people is also seen as important. That is, even if there is a tendency to have young age identities, some individuals do not feel like such a manner. From a life-course perspective, cultural norms can be nonignorable in age identities (Westerhof, 2008). According to a cultural norm in a society, there can be some transitions at which one is expected to enter another section in life. For instance, the time when marriage, retirement, and parenthood "should" occur in an individual's life can be evaluated by society in accordance with those norms. For instance, whether an individual is too old or young to do some activity can be determined so those transitions are settled by age.

People, when they pass a transition period, then they may perceive themselves as getting older. For example, when physical decline is thought to be connected to aging in a society, then when an individual has physical decline, she/he can feel older. Therefore, people in such a case may have an older age identity than their age mates with better health conditions (Barrett, 2003). In such a manner, it can be seen because physical decline is associated with aging (in such a setting), people may use their physical conditions as an indicator of their age identity and aging processes. In addition, having a good health condition can be powerfully connected to young age identities. However, the reverse connection should not be overlooked in addition to the relationship between health and age identity (Westerhof, 2008). That is to say, while the health situation can influence age identity; age identity can also be effective in health. Having a younger age identity and not having a negative perception of aging are associated with good health conditions over time. Also, it is found to be related to longevity (Levy, 2003).

About the connection of health to age identity also, it can be the case that when people with low socioeconomic status can have more difficulties in their lives cumulatively, and therefore, as a consequence of this, they may feel older age

identities. On the other hand, that is not the case that life course transitions occur at the same uniform age (Westerhof, 2008). That is to say, especially for instance, in people with low socioeconomic status, those transitions can happen at an early age, and then, as a consequence of this, they experience those in a shorter time more densely. Therefore, the time of the transitions in the life course, like marriage and childbearing, can change depending on gender, socioeconomic status, and also race. Thus, by having those transitions earlier, those individuals may feel older age identities than their peers, especially if it is assumed that some transitions like marriage or parenthood, for instance, may mean passing a part in their lives and they have become parents now and so that may cause feeling older than before in their lives. Therefore, it is stated that having an old age identity is related to having low socioeconomic status (Barrett, 2003).

It is also stated that the transitions like widowhood or retirement can be related to the people's having old age identities (Barrett, 2003). However, Sherman (1994) states that the connection between age identity and role transitions like widowhood and retirement is not distinct. While a relationship was indicated in some research (Mutran & George, 1982; Peters 1971 & Ward 1977), in other ones, such a relation could not be found (Logan et al., 1992; Ward et al., 1988). The association between widowhood and age identity was stated in some studies (Mutran and Reitzes 1981 & Logan et al., 1992). However, other research does not find it (Ward et al., 1988). As a transition in a person's life course, grandmotherhood is stated as a causal factor in age identity (Bastida, 1987). In addition, it can be the case that in the situations in which the role transitions occur outside of their "time," like, for instance, when there is early retirement, late marriage, late parenthood, or early widowhood, then these role transitions may be more remarkable for the age identity (Sherman, 1994).

Furthermore, in addition to the time of the transitions in the lives of people, the losses when they can occur if those transitions take place are also mentioned (Barrett, 2003). That is, people with higher socioeconomic status may not want to have losses the transitions can bear. If people with higher socioeconomic status leave from their young age identities, then it can be case that they encounter more losses and more loss of their social resources (Rosow, 1967). Therefore, they may perceive retirement

(which can be seen as a loss of a role in the life course) as a threat, and so the desire to protect their young age identity and denial of their age can be the case. On the other hand, if people deny their ages, then that may cause cultural beliefs to proceed as “old age is perceived as a degeneration” in a society, even if those people do this unaware. The retrospective self, which means individuals’ remembering their past and comparing their health in the past and now, can be effective in designating the age identity (Barrett, 2003). Also, it is indicated that people in midlife can start to compare themselves with their old parents’ health, for instance, and that may be important in composing the age identity (Barrett, 2003; Westerhof, 2008). Gender and being an ethnic minority can also be related to people’s age identities (Westerhof, 2008). That is, when comparing a woman and a man, it is said there can be a double standard. While men are aging, that can be seen as elegance; however, when women are the case, then disregard can be on the scene in Western cultures. Therefore, it can be the case that women may want to exaggerate their young age identities to not meet that negativity. Also, ethnic minorities may have older age identities because of the hardships they may have in their lives, like people with low socioeconomic status, so they may feel older when they are aging. However, it is stated that there are not many studies that show it strictly (Westerhof, 2008).

Age identity is studied in terms of psychological/ life span development position and also from the role/social structural perspective. While the first one mostly studied related to transitions occurring in the midlife, in the point of role/social structural point of view there are questions related to self-perceived identity as an old person are analyzed (Sherman, 1994). With aging, some changes can be seen in people’s own selves and also in their environments. In addition to those changes, the lived experience of aging is significant, and that is tried to be analyzed by asking some questions like “What does getting old mean to the ones who experience the aging?” or “What are the changes that can be related to the aging process by those individuals?”. It is stated that social interactions can be effective in the age identity of people; that is, if a person is acted towards as old, then it can be the case that person feels herself/himself as old (Rodin & Langer, 1980). Therefore, social relations between people in society are seen as an important element because how

they perceive themselves and behave with each other can have an effect on forming an age identity.

The social world around individuals is also important in terms of making comparisons. That is to say; when people look at the changes that are happening themselves, and also those that in others (peers), then they may compare themselves with others. In other words, when a comparison in terms of independence, health, and also social contacts are made between peers, it is stated this is effective strongly in age identity because if they are better off, then they can feel themselves younger and not feel as in the old age stage but in the midlife (Bultena & Power, 1978). However, it is said that the reference group used by making comparisons may give rise to old age identities because of its possibility of mirroring a person's age to her/himself (Furstenberg, 1989). According to Ward et al. (1988), health in peer comparisons is associated with age identity. Therefore, it can be said that health is important in people' subjective age perceptions. However, according to Furstenberg (1986), health issues can affect social life by causing a kind of isolation and also losing social roles, and therefore by such a manner, there can be a change in feeling older. Moreover, it is said that education can effectively form the age identity (it can be effective in feeling old) (Markides & Boldt, 1983).

2.4.1. The Perception of Old Age

Rapoliene (2015) has analyzed people's (both women and men aged 60-89) experiences about their aging and asked about "the time when people begin to age" to them. Some participants stated that there is no exact year because of relativity at the beginning of aging in different people in unlike times (Rapoliene, 2015). Also, the same research states that retirement is related to the start of old age. For some, attending some activities after retirement contributes to staying active and not getting older. For some of them, grandchildren and their families enrich their lives. Regarding the relation between health and old age, the perception of the beginning of old age is almost the same, with the diminution in good health and the derogation of physical capacity. Almost all participants, except one of them, perceive aging-related changes as negative. The person seeing it positively states it is positive because it brings maturity. Also, old age itself is seen as negative.

Moreover, according to the theory of gerotranscendence, in old age, there is a disengagement from earthly issues, and there is a shift to transcendental, more spiritual ones in the lives of old people (Tornstam, 2005). However, in the research stated above, no such shift occurred at all except for one person (Rapoliene, 2015). As coherent with the old age mask theory, people state a lack of harmony between the aging body and the ageless, young self or soul in the research. Moreover, not looking after one's body, like self-care, is shown as related to being old, and fitting the femininity standards is seen as important. In the research, old age can be seen as a natural process in life in just some of the interviews. It is also stated as the time previous to the death time. Related to the stigma concept, it is indicated that there is a desire not to be perceived as an old aged person and old people are not willing to mention their aging processes and experiences. Talking about old age issues is not good for them, and there is a refusal to be in old age in social interactions. It is indicated that the denial of being old tells there is stigmatization out there because if there were no stigma, then that refusal would not occur. After all, old age is found as socially constructed, and there are negativities instead of positivity, like physical and mental decline (Rapoliene, 2015).

In the past, there was a tendency towards thinking of the aging process as separate age-related life stages in people's lives. For instance, according to Cumming and Henry (1961), who are disengagement theorists, the changing social and work roles are significant because there is a departure from the productive middle age to an old age which is disengaged. Moreover, regarding the aging experience, another sociological and anthropological study is interested in women's experiences (Gullette, 1997; Lock, 1998; Mercer, 1999). Because of the fact that youthfulness is perceived as valuable in Western cultures, the aging body can be seen as a state of biological decay. Therefore, because indicators of getting old are shaped as culturally stated negativities for female aging, middle age is associated with some decrease.

Moreover, middle age is seen as the start of the introduction of the old age stage, and in middle age, there is no return to the previous young self (Gullette, 1997). However, it is said that the postmodern social theory supporters challenged the strict viewing of those life stages of people in their lives, and instead, it is thought that the

topic of aging includes no longer has rigid meanings (Ballard et al., 2005; Gilleard & Higgs, 2000). There are various "cultures of aging" in which the meaning of aging is associated with the identity formed by people so that their perception and expression of aging can be shown. The aging subject has transformed into a phenomenon that can allow individuals to express their forms of age identities (Gilleard & Higgs, 2000). That situation can be linked to the "third age." It is stated that in the third age, people can engage in more leisure activities and gain self-fulfillment because they have more time for those activities in the retirement period (Laslett, 1989). Also, according to Featherstone and Hepworth (1991), between the stages of midlife and old age, there is no clearness because new identities are formed by individuals not fitting into the traditional stages of life. Moreover, it is also stated that both old age's physical features and inner sense of feeling old and also the 'old age' as a social category are refused by people (Gilleard & Higgs, 2000).

In conclusion, in connection with the thesis, perceptions towards age and old age have been discussed in the literature (Barrett, 2003; Kaufman & Elder, 2002; Kaufman, 1986; Keller et al., 1989; Macia et al., 2012; Rapoliene, 2015). The relationship between individuals with old age has been examined with theories such as old age mask and social mask (Biggs, 1993, 1997; Featherstone& Hepworth, 1990). Regarding the gender context of the thesis, feminist gerontological studies stating elderly women's aging experiences are important in the literature (Abel, 1991; Artan & Irmak, 2018; Garner, 1999; Hooyman et al., 2002; Krekula, 2007; McDaniel, 1989).

2.4.2. Avoidance of Old Age

There are the concepts like "masquerade" (Woodward, 1991), and "social mask and persona" (Biggs, 1993, 1997), and by using those, at that time, an opposite focal point is shown. That is to say, this time, there is a balance between the aging body and the subjective perception of the aging process in the self. A youthful mask is used by people to be safeguarded from a hostile society, and that social mask misleads others in the society and also protects the selves of the people wearing those masks. They do so not to be seen as old because of the negative perception of being old in that hostile society (Biggs, 1999; Rapoliene, 2015; Woodward, 1991). People

can feel pressure to have those masks to hide the signs of aging in the body because there is an environment around those people, making them feel to have a socially acceptable image in society. Thus, people can wear those deceiving masks which obstruct their self-expression because the aging signs in the body are evaluated as negatively by others in the surrounding environment, and so those signs can prevent people from taking part in social life. The aging body falls into the midpoint whenever there is tension between the ageist society and the coherent aging of a person and between the young self and the "betraying" body (Rapoliene, 2015). Regarding the social life of older people, in research (done with women and men whose mean age was 55,23) in Turkey, it is found that 60 percent of those people do not go out of their homes, and mostly they have their time at home so they cannot have an active social life (Aközer et al., 2011).

Moreover, the body is an important phenomenon in the aging topic as it is seen. It is said that lifestyle choice and life planning are integrated into bodily regimes (Giddens, 1993). It is indicated that the body has a valid effect on shaping the self (Giddens, 1993). The significant character of the body heightens in postmodernity. That is to say, the body's integration into the design of the self is enlarged. Thus, that can state the connection of the age identity topic in the postmodern context. Foucault (1988) also provides an understanding of old age. However, in his view, old age is seen as an intended positive goal of existence. According to Foucault's view, in old age, there is a process of separation from the body, and it is time the subject categorizes itself to the inner self while the body is rejected. All theories, like social mask, old age mask, masquerade, and also Foucault's old age view, state that no one admits the cultural representation of aging. If there is such an acceptance, it means that the aging mask is acknowledged, and in this way, they can come across the danger for their positive self-esteem and identity, and also they can take part in marginalized and undesirable status in society (Rapoliene, 2015). It is affirmed that old people do not state themselves as old, so they avoid it (George, 1998).

2.4.3. The Stigma about Elderliness

According to Goffman, the stigma, which is a deviation, happens when some personal behaviors discreditably are not fit into the public norms like standards, those of appearance, and stereotypes (Rapoliene, 2015). It is indicated:

> *Stigma is not concerned with undesirable features, but rather those that are incompatible with the stereotype applicable to an individual of a particular category. The focus, in this case, is not on characteristics but on relationships. The feature itself is neither discreditable nor honorable because it may be stigmatizing for people in one category, but prove their conventionality in the case of another* (Rapoliene, 2015: 7).

Therefore, as Goffman (1986) states, as related to stigma, there is a connection among stereotype and attribute. For him, stigma is a universal phenomenon, and there is a deviation from the norms of identity in stigma. In his usage of the norm, the concept to be expressed is a broad way in which particular properties are hegemonic to a social structure. Those hegemonic features (like physical attractiveness and literacy) are stated as the norms that people in that particular society conform to. On the other hand, conforming to those norms may not be possible every time. That is to say, people's desire for this cannot be sufficient for it. For example, Goffman indicates that in the American culture, a man who is young, white, of good weight and height, married, urban, fully employed heterosexual, in good shape urban, a father heterosexual, northern a Protestant, and is athletic and has a college education is the norm. However, that cannot be the case that all can fit into this norm. For instance, someone may not be appropriate for that norm because of his being older. Thus, it is said that people in society may have more than one stigma in their lives.

On the other hand, if one does not conform to those norms, then it is the case that he can feel incomplete or inadequate (Goffman, 1986). According to Öberg (2003), there should be a distinction between the subjectively experienced aging and the predominant cultural values. That is, there may not be a correspondence between the issues in old age like loneliness, retirement trauma, a decrease in life satisfaction, and individuals' real experiences about their aging processes. Therefore, qualitative

research about people's own experiences of their aging, which can also show how those people perceive and make sense of it is worthwhile to study (Öberg, 2003).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design and Method

For the study, qualitative research is done because the research topic is related to individuals' subjective viewpoints and perceptions to analyze. Because of the fact that qualitative research is a significant way of collecting specific data about a certain group of individuals' values, social contexts, and behaviors to make such research sound for the study. It is indicated:

> *The strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. It provides information about the "human" side of an issue – that is, the often contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals. Qualitative methods are also effective in identifying intangible factors, such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion, whose role in the research issue may not be readily apparent (Mack et al., 2005: 1-2).*

As it is stated above, because of the fact that, in the study, it is needed to analyze the data about the subjective experiences of a definite group of people, the different, unique, and contradictory viewpoints can be seen by doing qualitative research. In addition, the relation of social norms, gender roles, socioeconomic situation, and others can be comprehended, as stated in the quotation above. In addition, a qualitative research method in the study is used, which is semi-structured in-depth interviews. An in-depth interview, a common qualitative research method, is preferred in terms of its ability to provide an intense picture of the respondent's point of view concerning the research topic. About the in-depth interviews, it is stated:

> *One reason for their popularity is that they effectively give a human face to research problems. In addition, conducting and participating in interviews can be a rewarding experience for participants and interviewers alike. For participants – whether members of the study population or someone related to the population in a professional capacity – in-depth interviews offer the opportunity to express themselves in a way ordinary life rarely affords them. Many people find it flattering and even cathartic to discuss their opinions and life experiences and to have someone listen with interest. For their part, interviewers engaged in in-depth interviews are offered the privilege of*

> *having people who are virtually strangers entrust them with a glimpse into their personal lives (Mack et al., 2005, p. 29).*

Thanks to that method, the opportunity can be found to learn about the respondents' lives as strangers to those people. In addition, when asked some questions that are designated earlier, some immediate questions can be asked when it is felt asking sound for the research. By asking such questions, the respondents' ideas are desired to be seen more deeply. Using the semi-structured in-depth interview method is significant for the study because it provides a scene of people's subjective perceptions about their age identity and way of thinking related to the research area.

3.1.1. Sample

The study conducted interviews with 29 urban, retired, and educated women aged between 64-75. Because of the fact that there is an analysis within the gender framework, it has been studied with elderly women, because of gender-related issues that make the aging experiences of elderly women distinct it has been analyzed elderly women's aging in the research. In addition, since elderly women who are urban, educated, and retired are a peculiar group in Turkey because of gendered inequalities in education and employment, it has been decided to research their age identity and aging experiences. When forming the research sample, it has been selected women aged between 64-75 because the research topic, it is studied age identity, the subjective perceptions about old age in elderly women, and also their social life experiences and. I did not want to include elderly women who are at too old ages because they may have more health issues that may already prevent them from having an active social life. Therefore, it has been eliminated such possibilities. As seen from the table below, interviews have been done with 29 elderly, urban retired women who are educated and aged between 64-75. All respondents were from Ankara in the research. The sample has three single, nine widows, two divorced, and fifteen married women. All respondents have professions. Because of gender-related issues, educated and urban elderly women who are retired are a peculiar group of people in Turkey. Thus, the sample in the research has a significant value.

Table 1

Respondent's Profile

Nickname	**Age**	**Educational status**	**Marital status**	**Previous job**
R1	66	Bachelor	single	teacher
R2	75	secondary	widow	nurse
R3	72	bachelor	widow	banker
R4	75	secondary	widow	civil servant
R5	64	high school	single	banker
R6	66	high school	widow	banker
R7	65	bachelor	married	engineer
R8	73	bachelor	widow	teacher
R9	75	high school	divorced	teacher
R10	65	high school	widow	banker
R11	75	postgraduate	single	civil servant
R12	69	Bachelor	married	business manager
R13	72	bachelor	married	pharmacist
R14	65	bachelor	widow	civil servant
R15	68	Bachelor	divorced	teacher
R16	66	Bachelor	married	teacher

R17	65	secondary	married	estate agent
R18	73	Bachelor	married	civil servant
R19	65	postgraduate	widow	civil servant
R20	71	Bachelor	married	teacher
R21	64	secondary	widow	banker
R22	64	secondary	married	teacher
R23	66	postgraduate	married	civil servant
R24	64	Bachelor	married	dietitian
R25	67	Bachelor	married	banker
R26	75	high school	married	banker
R27	69	postgraduate	married	academician
R28	64	high school	married	civil servant
R29	69	Bachelor	married	teacher

In the research, snowball sampling, a purposive sampling, was used. By using it, I could be found other possible respondents thanks to the respondents with whom I already have had an interview. They became a reference for me and helped me to find other respondents. In such a way, I could also gain others' trust to interview more comfortably.

3.2. Research Process

For the research, it has been interviewed elderly urban women who are retired. Because of the fact that respondents are a vulnerable group to the Covid-19 pandemic, at first, I was worried that not all of them wanted to join in the research by

making face to face interviews. However, thanks to lightening up the pandemic, I can make face to face in-depth interviews with respondents. However, to avoid disturbing them about the pandemic, I suggested interviewing outside their homes. Some interviews were made in the garden of the respondent's home. I suggested that because I think the open air may make them more comfortable regarding the pandemic. I think I could not have an interview with elderly women before that period as face-to-face because people in that age group (64-75) cannot be appropriate the risk of Covid-19, and also I did not want to interview online. Thus, the period I did the research was suitable in terms of meeting people in a face-to-face way.

Moreover, the respondents' friend knows and recommending me was influential in the elderly women's acceptance of being a respondent for the research smoothly because some people may keep clear of attending the research because of seeing me as a stranger. I encountered some people reluctant to join because of that kind of worry. Some of them knew about what a master's thesis is, so they attended to my research more comfortably. In addition, I felt some difficulties when I asked the respondents about their views on aging and old age because they may not like such topics to be asked to themselves. Therefore, I avoided asking questions in a manner that included any "you are an elderly person" implication. Therefore, at any moment in the research process, I was cautious about it.

3.2.1. Interview Process and Research Procedure

I have taken ethical permission from METU for my research. Before I started to interview, I informed the respondents again about the research and the questions I would ask. I have also stated to the respondents that their information will be kept secret and they are presented as anonymous. In line with it, I have given each respondent a code by numbers (as R1, R2).

When interviewing, I have protected a certain distance to the respondents to hold to the etic insights as stated by Ergun and Erdemir (2010). During the interviews, I felt I was an insider because of the fact that someone they knew also knows me, so they wanted to help me with my study, and I felt comfortable therefore. They behaved friendly to me, and I could make the interview easily. Even some of them prepared

some meals for me to eat, which was very kind, and also thought about whether there was anyone to whom I can do the interview, and they helped me about it also on that issue. On the other hand, I also felt like an outsider in times when I was declined interviews. There was an elderly woman who did not even want to hear my questions to what and refused to do an interview; at that time especially, I felt like a total outsider, a stranger.

Moreover, some respondents saw me as a student who tries to do her homework for her education, and they were helpful I did not feel any hardship when I communicated with them, so I was an insider at those times. Because of the fact that professional status and age are among the factors that are important about the researcher and the respondent relation in research (Ergun & Erdemir, 2010), I argue that as a student, was played a role in the research positively. Also, the fact that I am a student at METU, a significant university, positively affected the relationship between me and the respondents. They wanted to participate in the research. When I was introduced as a METU student to the other respondent candidates, which was an influential factor for their acceptance to participate in the research. On the other hand, my age can effectively put me in an outsider position because sometimes they can say, "You will understand what I mean when you reach my age, my child," so sometimes my age can form a gap between respondents and me.

When interviewing the respondents, a voice recorder was used, and then voice recordings were turned into text by me. Then I started to analyze the data by dividing them into headings under the subtopics. I grouped the themes from the answers of the respondents. Before starting the research, I had already formed my subtopics and included my questions under those themes. Therefore, after the interviews, I tried to analyze the views of the respondents about each subtopic, and then I tried to group them according to their standard features, but also I remembered to include the different ideas in my data. Because of the fact that in qualitative research, the aim is not making generalizations, I have focused the seeing the patterns in my data. Thus, by considering this, I made my analysis carefully.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.1. Subjective Perceptions of the Age

In the research, as a first part, respondents' perceptions towards their chronological ages have been examined to see their positions in old age. In order to analyze the age identity of elderly women, first of all, how they perceive their chronological ages is a significant part of the study because of the fact that with the subjectivity towards their chronological age, their ideas towards their age can be seen deeper. Concerning that, the question "How old do you feel?" is asked to the respondents to see the age that is felt by them separately from their chronological age.

In contemporary Western societies, most elderly do not feel the same about their ages; instead, they feel younger (Logan, Ward & Spitze, 1992; Westerhof & Barrett, 2005). In my research, mainly the respondents answered that they felt younger than their chronological ages, which is consistent with the tendency in the literature showing an inclination to feel younger than their chronological age. Among the respondents, there are the ones who feel at a very young age than their age, like fifteen or eighteen, and those who feel at ages closer to their chronological ages.

If it is looked at the statements of respondents in my research, the difference between the young ages they feel and the chronological age is not little at all. The discrepancy can rise to even fifty-one years. For instance, one of the respondents stated, "*Believe me, I have never reached 60 yet; I feel much younger. My soul is at the age of 18. For example, I love to ride on a swing. If I feel vigorous, I want to sing a song as loudly." (R12).* The chronological age of that respondent is 69, but she stated that she feels fifty-one years younger than her chronological age. As can be seen, there is a discrepancy between traditional stages of life, stating the old age stage and respondents' feelings towards their chronological ages. That is to say, being at such an age (69) does not mean being at the old age stage. There is a refusal for the inner sense of feeling older, as it is stated in the literature by Gilleard and Higgs (2000).

Furthermore, to see the layers of the age identity of respondents in my study, I have asked whether they perceive themselves as old or not. First, I should express that when I started to ask a question that included the word “old,” I felt some odd moment in the atmosphere. I felt that for the respondents, that is not a good idea to hear “being old.” Therefore, I felt like when I asked the question, “What is the age that they feel?” there was not such a strange situation in the atmosphere because I think it is a question that can be seen as can be asked to anyone in the society like for instance to a woman who is at the age of 30. Thus, in that question, including the age that is felt, there is no word “old.” However, the other question is related to feeling old or not, and so I argue there was that possible effect of the word “old “causing that kind of weird atmosphere. I also did not feel comfortable asking that question, so I felt some hesitation that I could not deny. Therefore, that is significant because of the fact that being old is socially constructed; there were such feelings.

Firstly, the majority of the respondents stated that they do not perceive themselves as an older person. Therefore, it is similar to the results of the previous question, that is, the majority of women in the study both feel at younger ages and do not see themselves as older women. Therefore, it can be said that “old” is not a concept that was inclined by most women in the research. There is such a situation because women are exposed to control mechanisms on their bodies through the negative image of an elderly woman's body. The woman's body is commodified with the image of “young and beautiful.” According to such domination towards women, an elderly woman's body is not considered “acceptable.” Thus, youthfulness can be preferred, and there can be a move to avoid the idea of old age.

At that point, it is seen that there is a tendency towards a young age identity instead of an older one. Most older people remain distant from the label “being old” for themselves (Westerhof & Barrett, 2005). In my research, there is also such a situation. Because of the fact that respondents generally present themselves with a younger age identity, I argue that can be due to a valuable youthfulness in society. Feeling younger is socially constructed as pleasant and worthful, so there is an orientation towards such an age identity. Because of patriarchal capitalism, women's

body is restricted to looking young, and the fashion and cosmetic sectors serve that situation. Therefore, the value of youth is seen as prevalent and favorite in society.

The inclination towards youthfulness can also be explained by the life rhythm in the public sphere. Because those women are retired, they have had public use before retirement and are accustomed to being active. Hence, they feel younger due to that habit of having an active life routine.

4.1.1. The Age that is felt after the Retirement

According to a cultural norm in a society, there can be some transitions at which one is expected to enter another section in life, and retirement is stated among such transitions. It is said that people, when they pass a transition period; then they may perceive themselves as getting older (Westerhof, 2003). Also, that situation can be related when one's identity depends highly on a social role that is related to employment; then, in the case of being retired, because of the fact that that role starts to lose then those people's identity may become more sensitive by passing such a transition like a retirement. Therefore, those people may try to protect their young age identity, and the denial of their ages can be the case. In addition, in research, some people who perceive constant aging state that the outset of that feeling is related to retirement transition (Keller et al., 1989).

On the other hand, it is indicated that the connection between age identity and role transitions like widowhood and retirement is separate in some research (Sherman, 1994). Therefore, because of the fact that it can be significant to analyze in terms of showing how society around those older individuals and so they, themselves, perceive the meaning of being retired. That is to say, if people interrelate their feeling of aging and retirement, then it can be said that being retired is a social transition that society load meaning to it, which is "getting older." Therefore, people may think and feel as if they are getting old of the effect of that stereotype in society when they pass that period. Thus, I asked questions about retirement as a transition that can be associated with age identity in terms of the aspects mentioned above. In order to see about that possible relation, it is asked whether the respondents feel any change at the age that they feel or not. About that question, most respondents in the

research stated there is no change in the age they feel after being retired. Therefore, the retirement transition did not make them feel older according to the statements of most of them, so generally, they did not indicate that they have an older age identity after that transition period. Moreover, most respondents mentioned a significant point related to working and their careers. For instance, a respondent stated:

> *Well, of course, working life keeps you fresh; you change your clothes every day and take better care of yourself; it was good in that respect. Being at home every day and not working affected me because I loved working, and I was active. I was very active in the center where I worked. I was the vice president; I was doing all the work. I loved spending time with disabled children. I felt the lack of it when I stopped working actively. I felt more like a void. Nevertheless, it did not seem like it would lead to depression. However, it is not like I felt older after being retired. (R15)*

Another respondent adds:

> *We had a very intense social event, and it ruined me to put an end to them. I told you it is a 24/7 working life. We were opening the school at 7 o'clock in the morning, I had the keys, at half past one, we were delivering the children to the houses, and then we were going home, can you imagine the tempo? Which teacher opens the school at 6:30 in the morning? We did it; we traveled to many cities and collected awards, which made us very proud. Even when I was ill, I went on trips again with many children. Even at that time, however, I am always thankful that I am so lucky to be with the parents and students. I loved to be a teacher. I did it with great love. Before retirement, I had a very active life. After I retired, I worked with children again. I collected the children in the building; I worked with them; I did my job again; I said, Do not worry. Still, you are a teacher. (R8)*

As can be seen, as related to a transition period of retirement, those older women talked about being active in their business life. Also, after the retirement period, the ending of that active life is stated as unpleasant by them. Also, it is significant that they mentioned their proficiencies, especially the woman (R8) stated how important it is to be a teacher for her. That is also obvious in her efforts to work with children and do her job after retirement. Her job's significance is also evident because she said, "I said to myself, do not worry. Still, you are a teacher." Thus, it can be said that the social role which is related to their employment can be significant in their identities. Therefore, the transition of retirement may make that side of their identity

vulnerable because of the possible loss after retirement, as indicated in the literature. Therefore, especially for the second woman (R8), the effort to protect her identity after retirement can be the case by continuing to be a teacher. In addition, that woman (R15), as it can be seen above, stated that she does not feel older after being retired, and she also talked about the significance of her job and how much she loves working. Thus, it may be the case because of not desire to lose that social role (related to work and essential in her identity) after retirement; she may try to protect her young age identity by stating, "After retirement, there is no such a thing like I felt older."

Moreover, other elderly women seemed to try to continue working. For instance, some respondents stated:

> *There was no change (I did not feel older) because I never stayed at home; I always came here to my son's shop. Because of that, I may not feel that way. I am a very active person; I have a lot of social interactions outside; I am very active. That is why I did not falter and fall into the void after retiring. (R21)*

Another respondent state:

> *No, I did not feel older after being retired. I am pleased; I told my friends not to fear retirement. The reason for this is that my friends retired and got depressed, and I was not affected at all; I said, the retirement is very nice; I have my cats and geese in the back, I look at them, I knit, I am with people and plants. I am a self-sufficient person; I never get bored with why I am retired. I say the children that send your thesis to me so that I will read it. (R27)*

As can be seen, there is an emphasis on staying active after the retirement transition, which is a significant factor in having a younger age identity after retirement. It is also significant that those women mentioned continuing to work after retirement. For instance, that woman (R21) said she continues working by coming to her son's shop. Also the other woman (R27), an academician, also stated that she continues to read her students' theses. They expressed those working activities as essential to feel the same after retirement. Thus, it can be said I argue that the social role in the identity connected to working is tried to be sustained as a way to maintain younger age identities. Moreover, it is crucial that respondents are retired women; therefore, they have had a working life outside of their homes. Thus, it means there is a familiarity

with being in the public sphere, and that prevents them from isolation at home after retirement. Hence, from the previous experience of being in public through employment, there is again a desire to participate in public by working after retirement. In addition, it is important to note that having social relations outside of the home is also stated as a factor affecting not feeling older age identity after retirement. Another respondent also stated, *"No, the same continued; I did not feel older, people around me did not leave me alone, and my work continued, and it is not a shame for me, I was teaching English to those who like travel, and I helped the master students in their theses." (R11).*

That respondent mentioned the social interactions as vital in her not having an older age identity after retirement because she talked about not living alone. Thus, being in isolation and not having social interactions can be effective in having an older age identity. In addition, she also indicated that she continued to do some work as teaching, which is shown as a factor affecting her having the same younger age identity after being retired. Therefore, the importance of the social role gained when working can also be seen from the trying to continue to protect the age identity. In addition, there is also another respondent stated:

> *I have friends who go to work after retirement; they do not accept being retired; they say that I am not old. I say do not do it, my friend; I say they are sending us to rest. The state says to go rest after the age of 65. I want to work until the age of 75. But I loved to sleep so much now I can sleep well. (R9)*

It can be seen from the quotation that sometimes, the meaning of being retired can be perceived as related to being old. Therefore, that can support the view in the literature, which says that when people pass a transition period, they may perceive themselves as getting older. Moreover, there were also some women, who are few, stating that after the retirement transition, they have felt older. It is stated:

> *Of course, there is a change; now it seems like I am too passive, but going out was my favorite thing when I got up in the morning. It was my favorite thing. The pandemic is also going in a wrong direction; I just closed my home. I would not say I liked being retired; I like to work. (R23)*

Also, another respondent added:

> *Yes, I felt a change; I suddenly fell into a void. I was not going to be, but I got a meniscus, so I retired. However, I had the opportunity to do what I wanted. However, we were very active; many people were going in and out of our hospital during the day when I was working. I went down to services in the hospital, and we were eight friends, and we were very sincere. Of course, there was a gap when you suddenly retired, but I am happy because I could not care for my children much; I had the opportunity to care for them. I was able to learn the Qur'an; I went to the course; the course was the best thing in my life. While I was working, I was with a younger group, and you dress and dress up while you work, and you cannot think of your problems in oncology anyway, so before I retired, I felt younger and more dynamic. After retirement, this paused a bit. (R24)*

As can be seen, at that time, there was a feeling towards older age identity after being retired. The feeling of a void because of the ending of the active lifestyle when working is also stated by those respondents. Working life is crucial for them also. When working, they stated they were active; they did not work in isolation; however, because of the passivity after being retired makes them feel not younger anymore. Also, social relations and having an active social environment are seen as influential on that topic. The isolation at home because of the pandemic is also associated with having an older age identity. Therefore, having a dynamic lifestyle outside of the home, also socially, and not in isolation at home can make them have younger age identities. Therefore, because of the fact that the retirement transition can pause and slow down to that, being retired can be effective in having older age identities.

To have an active social life is also stated by another respondent:

> *I did not feel old after I retired. For example, I still have meeting days with my friends from the teacher's school every month; we go to our homes and meet outside; I am a social person, and I did not shut myself completely just because I retired. We are closed just due to the pandemic. I have friends in different neighborhoods; I go to all of them. It did not happen for me that I was more home-bound after retirement. I meet outside; I meet at home, and I am a social person. (R29)*

As can be seen at that time, the woman stated she did not feel older after being retired because of being a social person and having an active social life. Therefore, again not locking herself in the house and maintaining social relations make them young after retirement.

4.1.2. The ideal age

In the research, the respondents are also asked about the age they want to be, which is the age named "ideal age" in the literature (Westerhof, 2008). The ideal age is important to see the participants' perceptions of their age and where they position themselves. It is indicated that the ideal age is significant in terms of its capacity to show about satisfaction status of people from their chronological ages (Uotinen et al., 2006).

In the literature, it is indicated that according to research showing the age people want to be, on average, individuals' desire is to be younger than their felt age (Westerhof, 2008). However, in my research, that is not a primary finding. That is, some respondents stated younger ages than they felt, but it cannot be said that this is the dominating result among the statements because, generally, respondents did not state an ideal age when asked.

However, the respondent stated, *"I wish I were 20 -25 years old now, because today, my thoughts now are completely different. I wish I were then with my current thoughts, current way of thinking. It is about maturity." (R25).* Another respondent adds, *"When I am getting older, I wish I was at the age of twenties with this mindset; I would say that I would have made better decisions in my life." (R29).* In those statements, it can be essential to state that the difference between the age which is desired to be and the age they feel is much higher than the other women stating an ideal age younger than their felt age. There is approximately a forty-fifty number difference between their desired and felt ages. As can be seen from the quotations, people want to such a younger age because they want to evaluate their times in their life course better, like making better decisions. They are happy with their way of thinking at that actual age, at that stage of their lives. However, they desired to turn to their twenties because of regret about the feeling that they could do better by using their mind and the maturity they have now if they were at such a young age now.

There are also other women stating an age that is desired to be:

> *I wish I were at the age of 40s because there are some bad experiences in my life now, and from those experiences, I have learned to limit things*

> *now, so if I were at that age, I would have set them then. Therefore, I would have been more comfortable; I would not have been sad, and I would have been happier. Those things come to my mind why I want to be at that age. (R7)*

First, she also stated a younger age than the age they feel; however, different than the other women above, the difference between the ages she wants to be and the age she feels is less at that time. That is, the gap is approximately fifteen numbers between them. In addition, it can be seen that she also mentions a kind of regret about the past, and again, it is wanted to be in the past with today's way of thinking to manage things better, for instance. Thus, when it is looked at overall, it can be said there is satisfaction about the state of mind at the chronological age; however, by being such younger ages, it is wanted to act better.

In addition, there was also a respondent who stated her ideal age as older than her felt age, the age she feels as different from the other respondents in the research. She said, "I wish I were in my 30s because I think the 30s are the best age in life." (R5). She indicated the age that she feels as 15 years old; however, as it can be seen from the quotation above, she stated her ideal age as 30s. Therefore, the ideal age is older than the age she feels at that time, distinct from the other statements of respondents above.

Moreover, some of the respondents also stated the ideal age as not older or younger than the age that they feel but the same as the age they feel. For instance, "*The age I want to be is the age of 40 because at that age you are neither young nor old, you make your decisions more easily, you enter maturity, and you are vigorous in the body." (R23).* The other respondent stated, *"Let me stay at 65 because I never felt old there." (R26).* The factors affecting why they want to be at those ages can be seen again in the state of maturity and being vigorous are mentioned. In addition, to the question about how old they want to be, not all respondents indicated such an age in the research. Some respondents said they were happy with their chronological ages, so they do not have such an ideal age. Some respondents stated*," No, I never want to my youth. I am satisfied now. Because I did not experience a good life, so why do I want it? We have had deaths. If there is a good part of my life, I would like to return to this age. My best ages are between 60 and 70 because my problems are*

over." (R20). Another respondent also states, *"There is not an age I want to be. My life has been tough." (R11).* The ideal age question reminds those women the bad memories such as the deaths of relatives, illnesses, and family matters in their pasts.

When thinking about the ideal age, they remembered their unpleasant experiences in their life courses, so they matched the ages to those experiences and did not want to go back there. Thus, from those statements, it can be seen that age is not simple; instead, it can be full of meanings in it.

4.1.3. Age Ranges

In the research, age ranges are used as references to the age periods that can define the stage of middle age or old age in people's life. In analyzing the age identity of older women, it can be appropriate to learn about the age range they think they belong to. In the literature, there are also such questions related to the age group individuals consider they are in (Westerhof, 2008). In addition, the perception of the range of midlife is also seen as necessary. That is to say, because of the fact that leaving midlife can mean starting to a new range which is the "old age range," ideas about midlife can provide insights into old age perception. Therefore, to understand respondents' perceptions towards their chronological ages and the aging process, it is important to analyze their ideas about age ranges as middle age or old age.

First of all, in the research, it is seen that respondents generally stated the start of midlife around the age of 50-55. For instance:

> *It starts after the age of 55. Even 50 years old is a young age. People in my surrounding can say that I am 65 years old, and I am old, but for instance, I do not say that I am old; that is, they say that I am old after 65. Before 50, it is young age, not middle age. Between 55 and 70 is middle age. My face or something was different when I was 50 years old. My body was younger at that time. People in Europe, you know, travel even at the age of 80 but we are not like that, there is no economic possibility after the age of 70, I say old age in our country. I have never felt old. I do not think I am that old; what is old age? (R27)*

As it can be seen that respondents considered midlife as the ages between 55-70. She also compared the traveling of elderly people abroad and in Turkey. In that comparison, it is important that a kind of relation is thought of between old age with

traveling because when she is asked about starting age of being old, she thought about traveling activity at the age of 80, for instance, and stated the age of 70 in Turkey related to old age accordingly. Therefore, it is a significant point that traveling as an outside activity, as a social life experience, can be seen as associated with being old or not. Respondents generally state that they like to travel, and they link that activity to their not being elderly. Moreover, financial possibilities can be correlated to feeling young because of providing the chance to travel.

It is important that in the research, generally, respondents view themselves in the midlife age range. One of the respondents stated:

> *Old age starts after 70. If you are healthy, of course. For example, I used to think that my father's aunt was at the age of 90, but the woman was 60 when she died. So the woman died so young because her body was not healthy. I started my second job at 50; what a young age, for example. Being old is not at 50 years old; you are young then. After 50, you go through a physical change, and it reminds you that you are getting old. (R20)*

That respondent considered the old age range as starting with the age of 70, and she also made a comparison by thinking of a relative of 60 years old woman when expressing an opinion about the old age group. That is important because, in the literature, it is said that when a comparison in terms of independence, health, and also social contacts are made between peers, it is stated this is effective firmly in age identity because if they are better off, then they can feel themselves younger and not feel as in the old age stage but in the midlife (Bultena & Power, 1978). Therefore, in that quotation, there is a comparison in terms of the state of health of that woman to the other, and it can be said she stated her perception of the old age group by referring to that comparison. In addition, it is seen that being mobile and flexible are considered vital to not be in the old age range. To work also provides a perception towards not participating in the old age stage due to mobility.

On the other hand, not all respondents indicated definite age ranges; for instance, there is a respondent thinking there are no age ranges like midlife or old age*,” There is not such a thing as middle age. Middle age is what one's heart feels. Old age is sometimes 90 years old, sometimes 50 years old, depending on the person, according*

to the life you live, according to your human relations, environmental factors are effective on that." (R19).

As can be seen, women did not think there were chronological age groups indicating midlife or old age. Instead, according to her, middle age or old age is determined by factors like what one feels inside, human relations, and environmental factors. That is an important point because there is a differentiation between chronological age and being in old age or middle age, for instance, in terms of subjective perception. That is, the age perception is getting independent from an individual's chronological age as it can be seen. In addition, the importance of social interactions between individuals can be seen in the subjective perception of age (on what age is old age). Another respondent also thought:

> *I do not know which age group is old age because I do not want to feel that way. I take as an example for me the 84-year-old one who wants to enter the faculty of fine arts. There is no such thing as age. The moment you say you are old, everything is already over. It ends when saying I do not leave the house anymore. I did not close myself at home even during the pandemic. I went out again at the allowed times. (R1)*

That respondent, as it can be seen, also did not state a definite age group like old age; she even thinks there is not a thing as age, so it can be said there is a kind of vagueness about the age concept according to the statement of that respondent. She also considers there is subjectivity about age. Thus, that can show the importance of not taking the age concept and the age identity as a simple, concrete matter of fact. Also, there is again a disfavor that can be felt about being old in that quotation because being old is associated with an end. Also, isolation from the social world, as it can be seen, is considered as also an end. The thought of being old and not leaving home is stated as an end. Thus, the old age identity and, for that reason, not having a social life can be seen as a finale.

Moreover, a respondent was stating the old age range starts with a younger age:

> *My old age period started at 40- 45 because, with menopause, my body went into destruction. Getting old did not affect my mood because we cannot take it back. I am happy with my age. I see myself in the old age stage. The beginning of the old age stage, I think, depends on the age at which one*

> *reaches menopause. Your osteoporosis begins, and your feet do not carry you. (R17)*

She considers the beginning of the old age group as the age of 40, which is a younger age compared to the others' viewpoints in the sample. In addition, it is important that she connected menopause with the beginning of old age because, in her view, there is destruction in her body. There is also a respondent who stated:

> *I think old age should not begin; you should not feel it; a person should be in life at any age as much as possible. For example, my mother is not like that; I get very angry with her, she does not go out, and she does not socialize. I think being old should be as late as possible for an individual. I think the middle ages are between the ages of 55-70. (R23)*

As can be seen here, she did not specify a beginning for the old age range (stage). On the contrary, she even thought it should not begin in people's lives. Old age is not welcomed by her because, according to her, as much as possible, people avoid being old. That point is significant because it is seen being old is not seen as a "normal" stage in life like other stages, for instance, in midlife. In her viewpoint, there is a meaning load in the concept of being old, which seems to have a negative meaning. Therefore, it can be said that the older age identity is not seen as pleasant and desirable. In addition, another important point here is that related to the context of being old, socializing is mentioned. That is to say, having social life experiences is considered valuable and encouraged, and that is stated as related to not coming old age and not feeling as old. Therefore, it can be said there is a relation between old age identity and social life experiences showing an inverse proportion in it. Having an active social life is the reverse of being old age. Socialization is expressed as an activity done to avoid being old. Moreover, there is another respondent who also cannot state a definite age range for being old:

> *It depends on how old the person feels. For example, our neighbor is 85 -90 years old, and she is full of life. I have never seen her without makeup. The age at which a person feels her/himself is important. I also see some people as if they have finished this world. It is about the way they look at life. A 90-year-old person may not be old, either. However, I feel neither young nor old. I feel middle-aged. (R29)*

As it can be seen, she did not state an age group defining old age because for her being old is related to how one feels about. Also, being an individual full of life is

considered contrary to being old, and care (putting on makeup) is associated with not being old. In addition, it can be felt that not having a tie to life (as one isolated from society) is considered a close relation to being old in that respondent's statement. Furthermore, when analyzing respondents' statements, it can be said that the majority considered the beginning of the old age group as the ages 70-80. However, there were also some people stating it as the age of 60-65. Also, generally elderly women consider themselves in the midlife age group, but also, ones see themselves as the old age group. Regarding the old age range, respondents were asked what they thought of the old age range starting at a later age, such as the age of 80 or more. For instance, one of the respondents thought:

> *Of course, I agree. In the past, when we saw one aged 40, we called it old. People create it themselves. In the past, people could say I am old, so I need your service, so they were passive. Now, since people live more actively on their own, I think the age range has changed. (R6)*

Here I argue there is a significant point related to the old age perception. Old age is considered independent of chronological age; it is stated as an entity created and constructed by people. Therefore, that can show that old age's socially constructed structure. The old age, being old, is not in and of themselves; they have no inherent meaning in themselves. However, society loads some meanings to them. Thus, in terms of that point, it is significant. Another respondent stated:

> *Yes, it is the right thing; I find it correct as long as there is no health problem. In this, nutrition, self-care, mental state, and perspective on events are critical; people who do not stress live longer; this is a fact, scientifically proven. My parents never considered themselves old until they saw the death of a child. My mother was always a smiling person; she did not see any problem from her children; we are four siblings, and she would never consider herself old(R19)*

As can be seen, she talked about her parents starting to feel old because of the death of their child. That can show the idea mentioned in the literature. It is crucial to analyze the conditions that may give rise to old age identities and affect their self-view. For instance, the death of a relative may bring about feeling old. In that statement of the respondent, such a factor which is the death of their child gives rise to having an old age identity. Therefore, such factors can be important in age identity.

On the other hand, other respondents thought it is inappropriate to extend the old age range. For instance, a respondent stated, “I do not know if I can go to my 90s. It is like life got shorter. Not being old until the age of 90 seemed crazy to me.” (R7). That respondent disagrees that the old age range can start after a very old age because she feels the lifetime is getting shorter. Therefore, in her subjective perception, much lower ages can define the old age range. Another respondent also stated,” I do not think like that because there are people over 80 around me, and not all of them are healthy. I have an uncle; he says he wants to die now. They have aged and withdrawn into their shells. I say to myself that there is little left for you too.” (R10). In that statement, being old is stated with going into one’s shell, so that association is valuable in subjective perceiving of being elderly. In addition, she made a comparison between her uncle and herself in terms of the aging situation, and because of the fact that the age of 80 is perceived as an old age for her uncle, she also considered that age as the old age. Thus, that situation can show the significance of interactions between individuals in society. Thus, it can be said that with those social interactions, there is such a perception of old age is constructed. A respondent indicated:

> *It depends on life circumstances. For example, in foreign countries, I visited a museum in Spain. The British tourists got off the bus, all over the age of 80, but they came and went to the museum. This is not happening in Turkey at all. I do not know why it is like that. Our people immediately withdraw into their shells; they do not go outside just because they say they are sick; they step aside. They accept old age very easily. For example, my husband says that I am 67 years old. Why do you accept old age like this? I have come to this age too, but I am never at that age. It could be the conditions of Turkey; I do not know. There is also that economic freedom is also fundamental. So there is no woman with economic freedom. Since this is very common in foreign countries, they go out and travel. (R22)*

According to her view, some people aged over eighty, for instance, travel to even other countries; however, in Turkey, there is not such a situation at all. She is unclear about that topic because when comparing people in Turkey and people in other countries, she stated there are not the same conditions. That is to say, the economic conditions are mentioned as a factor affecting that situation. In addition, she mentioned about old age understanding in those people’s minds. She said that in Turkey, when people reach a definite age level, they can say, “I am sick; I am an old

person, so I cannot go outside," which is not the same as, for instance, those British tourists traveling abroad. Therefore, according to her, people who consider themselves old can withdraw into their shells so they do not go outside or travel at all and are at their homes generally. That point can be significant because the perception of old age is stated as an influential factor in limiting the social life experiences of people at those older ages. That is, it is indicated there is an old age perception promoting isolation at home instead of an active social life.

4.1.4. Factors Affecting Being Young or old

Respondents stated some factors that affect the state of being young or old. Those factors can be named health-related factors, gender-related issues, psychological state of mind, physical appearance, life participation, the death of relatives, and grandparenthood.

First, health-related problems such as pains or illnesses can affect elderly women's perceptions of age and aging. In the research, some respondents state health-related problems affecting their age identity. For instance, a respondent said, "I consider myself old because I have aches and pains; I cannot walk for a long time." (R3). Another respondent stated that health issues as effective in feeling intermittent aging, "I evaluate myself from time to time as old. For example, my knees and back hurt sometimes, and at that time, I see myself as an old woman." (R23). As can be seen, they mentioned health issues related to her feeling old. Subjective perceptions about age can be affected by changing conditions. For example, if one has a health issue, that situation may cause one to feel old.

Some transitions may be understood in line with some cultural norms in a society. When that transition period is passed, then that may affect the age identity of people in that society. For example, physical health is related to such a situation. If, in a society, physical decay is perceived as connected to getting older, then when it starts to be seen (the point of transition happens), people can think they are getting older. Thus, it is said that people with poor physical health have older age identities compared to those with good health conditions (Barrett, 2003). The respondent stated above indicated she perceives herself as old, and the physical decline is stated by her

as connected to her way of feeling. Those health problems may be perceived as a transition towards being old, so feeling old can be the case when passing that transition. Thus, physical problems are seen as linked to the old age period according to the cultural norm in society, so she can associate those health-related difficulties with an onset of an old age identity because of the transition. Therefore, her age identity perception may be affected by such a transition in her life by the impact of the cultural norm. In addition, regarding health situations, self-sufficiency is stated as effective in not having an old age identity. A respondent stated:

> *When a person cannot meet her/his own needs, we can call her/him as old. There may be a physical disability or a psychological problem. For example, I just left the house and walked 15 -20 km until Kızılay. Because I also talked to the doctor, who told me to walk for 2 hours. Of course, I do not have a physical handicap for this right now. (R8)*

As seen from those statements, being able to fulfill needs is perceived as related to being young. Self-sufficiency is associated effectively related to having an old age identity. Therefore, being self-sufficient is included in the meaning of how an individual can be considered old. Secondly, gender-related issues as doing housework as a gender role are mentioned as effective in feeling older. For instance, a respondent stated, *"Sometimes I feel at the age of 30- 40 and sometimes at the age of over 100 because I was both a business and a housewife, I wore myself out a lot." (R17).* As it can be seen, she stated she is so tired because she was both working life and a housewife. Because of being a woman, even if there is a working life outside, she is seen as "responsible" for doing housework, and there is no division in domestic work between males at home. As a consequence of doing housework and working outside, she feels too tired, it affects her old-age identity. Therefore, the effect of the gender perspective can be seen in the topic of the age identity of women. In addition, as it can be seen from the quotation above, gender-related issues are also stated as effective in the temporary aging awareness because at times she feels old, she states gender-related problems as responsible for it. In the topic of aging, there may not always be a constant awareness of it (Keller et al., 1989).

The awareness of aging may also be intermittent way in individuals. My research also shows that for some respondents, the aging awareness and perception of it is not

a perpetual process. They said they may perceive themselves as old sometimes, but that feeling does not have a character perpetually maintained in their lives. In addition, in research done by seniors, it is stated that most of them said they could sometimes feel old, but sometimes they may not feel like that. Instead, they can feel young (Keller et al.,1989). However, in my research, the ones who state intermittent age awareness are not the majority. Instead, they were few as different from the research in the literature. Among the respondents experiencing an intermittent awareness of aging, also another respondent stated*," From time to time, I feel in the old age group. Because I have pain and I have two sons, they are adults, and they live with us; they are single and expect every housework from me. I say you get married now, that is why I am tired." (R7).* As seen from those statements, there is an intermittent awareness of aging. If it is analyzed from the gender viewpoint, it is seen because of the housework load of a woman; she expresses that she is exhausted. Even if children in a family grow, it is the case that the woman keeps continuing to serve in the home as it used to do. Thus, she is worn out because of the overload of work that the woman should do at home. That situation can affect the age identity status of the woman towards feeling old, as it is stated by that respondent in the research.

Thirdly, the majority of the respondents in my research associated their psychological states of mind, as feeling happy, sad, anxious, or alone, to the times when they feel old or young. Thus, the psychological state can also play a role in intermittent aging awareness that should not be overlooked. For instance, a respondent stated, *"Sometimes I feel younger. It is not obvious, sometimes I feel too old. If I am unhappy, I feel old; it can depend on my mood. When I am happy, I feel young, I feel better." (R29).* As seen from that quotation, the sense of well-being can be effective in feeling old or not. That situation can also be important to analyze the relationship between the psychological and physical state of well-being and feeling old because when there is a decline in the moods of both physical and mental situations, a connection can be made to feel old. Therefore, the physiological and psychological state is vital in affecting age identity. For instance, one of the respondents stated:

> *I sometimes feel old, and how old I feel is changing. Sometimes I feel alone and rake over the coals, and I feel old. I will go home now, there is no one, so I will feel again at the age of 90. Being closed at home brings to my mind life experiences from the past; I feel sad and old. I was left alone after my husband died; more responsibility was placed on my back. I think about what my son will do when he finishes school. When you go to bed, you become old(R10)*

As can be seen, she expressed some moods related to her feeling old, like feeling alone, sad, or anxious. Some perturbative emotional states are perceived as effective in feeling old in an intermittent way. Thus, to feel old and old age identity is more than health problems. Another psychological factor perceived as affecting feeling old is stated related to "being connected to life" and "love." For instance, a respondent stated*," I think without dreams for life, without connection to life and love, can cause feeling old. If you love everything, you will not feel old. I am someone who loves everything." (R11).* Also, another respondent adds similarly*," For example, I feel very young because I love life and people. I love old people, children, flowers." (R1).* As it can be seen,' to be old 'cannot be thought of as just related to the chronological age of a person in a way that above that age, one can be counted as old. Being old is not just a simple category implying a stage of the life of people. Instead, that is far beyond when it is started to be analyzed. People can state abstract notions like 'love' or 'to have dreams' affecting feeling old or not, so I argue that physical aging and the chronological age scale for aging are too narrow to mention that topic.

Furthermore, respondents mentioned that physical appearances, such as clothing style or self-care, can affect being young or old. The outlook on the body is important for them regarding where they position themselves, whether old or young. In the literature, there is a view about the place of the body related to aging, and it is stated that the significant character of the body heightens in postmodernity (Rapoliene,2015). It is indicated that "In conditions of high modernity, the body is far less "docile" than ever before concerning the self since the two become intimately coordinated within the reflexive project of self-identity" (Giddens, 1993). Therefore, the relation of the body and the self is expressed as closer to each other to shape the identity, which can be considered in terms of age identity.

In the construction of aging, old age symbols can be recognized easily (Bytheway & Johnson, 1998). In a research, it is stated that about age-related changes, women stated the changes like wrinkles and gray hair as standardized images of an aging identity (Ballard et al., 2005). Almost all of them talk about those physical changes related to aging. On the other hand, it is also stated that those physical signs are not perceived as leading marks related to aging as opposed to the prevalent view (Rapoliene,2015). In my study, a respondent related the time she feels older to her image in the mirror: *" It changes from time to time, sometimes I do not like myself in the mirror, then I feel 90." (R11).* As it can be seen from the quotation, a sign of aging identity on the physical appearance is associated with a factor affecting feeling old. Therefore, in my research, even if not a major factor affecting age identity, those physical signs also relate to feeling old. Therefore, because those signs are socially constructed about aging, they are mentioned in the topic of feeling old or not. However, in my research, physical appearance factors are generally mentioned in terms of care about the outlook. According to the old age mask theory, as a postmodern aging theory, there is a tension between the inner self, which is young, and the aging body of a person (in the body, there are aging signs and the reducing functional capacity) (Rapoliene, 2015). The old age mask is seen as a rigid mask that hides the young self, and seeing that self becomes challenging because of that mask. Thus, a person's fundamental identity in the inner is withheld by the mask, and even if changes are appearing in the out of the body, the inner self remains the same. That means the changes in appearances do not reach the interior subjective self of the people, which is stated as "real" and stays young paradoxically. From the respondent's statements above, it is seen that she feels younger than her chronological age. However, she also stated a duality related to their body and the inner self.

The body shows them the symptoms related to old age, like physical decay (wrinkles can be, for instance); however, their inner self says differently because the self feels like not an old woman. Therefore, the body, as stated in the theory of old age mask, becomes like a mask that is hard to take out. Even if the changes related to aging appear in the body, as can be seen from the statements of that woman, the interior self remains the same independently from the body. Thus, a mind-body duality exists

towards feeling old or young in the age identity. That is, there is an incompatibility between the body and the inner self. In my research, generally, there is an ageless soul in the respondents. The effect of the body is seen because the body is a mask that cannot be removed, like an iron cage. From the quotation above, it can be seen that the respondent feels herself at 30 and has a young age identity even if she talks about the annoying effect of the body (the body as a reminder of aging) seen in the mirror. Therefore, I argue that the body is not the primary role affecting the age identity because she feels younger and does not have an old age identity anyway because she said in the quotation, "usually I do not feel above 30".Moreover, as it can be seen from the quotation above, the same respondent indicated, "I leave aside the age which is in my identity card; I heard that a person has three kinds of age; my mental age is 30" Therefore, there is an awareness about the subjectively separated division of ages, and there is belonging to not the chronological but the felt age. The internalized "mental" age passes the chronological age, so the ageless soul effectively influences the age identity. That situation can be because the ageless soul cannot be caged in a definite stereotype as the chronological age towards the state of old age. Furthermore, another respondent indicated about the physical outlook*," I do not consider myself old. Not with my clothes or anything." (R11).*

As it can be seen, she stated her outlook as effective on the age identity. Suppose the body is thought of as an outer side of an individual when compared to the inner side (soul, heart, or self). In that case, the body at that time affected the perception of age identity because now the respondent thinks she is not old by taking her body, her outer look, as a reference in that viewpoint. Therefore, in that way, the body does not seem to be a passive entity; in contrast, it plays a role in the identity there. That situation can also be related to today's consumer culture. Because of the fact that the body is under the influence of the commodification process in a consumer society, it can be said that the body becomes a commodity that acts like a showcase that people may want to equip. Therefore, the clothing style can be associated with being young, which is also related to promoting youthfulness in contrast to elderliness. That can also be a marketing strategy by saying "clothing styles that are dynamic and new fashion as contrary to clothes that shows people as old "like a grandmother." The statement "the grandmother dress" may be linked to that topic. Therefore, also even

in the dresses it can be the effect of the "valuable, preferred youth." Moreover, about a factor affecting how a person can feel younger, a respondent indicated:

> *I feel young; I do not dress up for someone else; I dress up for myself. I go in front of the mirror and say that I should pay attention if I have gained weight. One must have self-respect. That is why I take care of myself. Even when buying an outfit, I look to see if this has fit to me. I respect myself. I have to like myself first. Whatever I do, I try to put my body in order. These also make me feel young. (R27)*

As can be seen from the quotation, being careful about one's physical appearance is associated with a factor in feeling younger. That also reminds the body discussion on the age identity topic. As I stated before, the body is seen as closely associated with constructing the identity. I argue that the body's power takes part in the age of identity construction. At that time, the body is stated when factors affecting feeling younger were asked. Therefore, the body does not seem docile in terms of the younger age identity if it is analyzed in terms of the perspective of that respondent.

On the other hand, the social mask theory viewpoint should not be overlooked. It can be the case that the body is shown with a social mask by some outlook efforts so that that woman may protect herself from being stigmatized as an old woman in society. She may be careful about her body and physical outlook that she states because she may want to suppress the feeling of being old. Therefore, it may be possible that a woman is careful about her body appearance to avoid the signs of feeling old.

Moreover, there can also be a balance between the aging body and the subjective perception of the aging process in the self. However, a youthful mask is used to be safeguarded from hostile society, and that social mask misleads others in the society and also protects the selves of the people wearing those masks. That social mask protects the negative perception of old age in society. When it is thought from the perspective of social mask theory, because of the negativities about old age in society and the valuable youthfulness also, it may be tried to hide the old age signs and even the own feelings that can remind 'being old' by wearing a social mask to the body like care on appearance so that she can be safeguarded against matching to the old age label. It can be thought of in such a way because that respondent also stated having a young age identity and said she is not old. Therefore, I argue that there may

be a deception to society and herself about showing and seeing herself as young because of moving away from the old age label. She may not also be aware of this situation either. Another respondent also stated physical outlook as effective to age identity, *"For example, our opposite neighbor is 85 90 years old, full of life. I have never seen her without makeup, so they are important to feel old or not. The age at which a person feels her/himself is important." (R29).* As can be seen from the quotation, self-care on the body is considered effective in feeling old or young. The body, the outer appearance, is related to how one is perceived, i.e., old or young. Therefore, with the effect of the body, to which group (old/young) an individual can fit can be determined. The body is significant in the age identity, not just in terms of its aging signs but also in terms of how it is presented to society. In my research, as related to age identity, the body is emphasized much more about its presentation to others instead of the aging symptoms on it. Even if the body, including the aging signs, is not primarily effective on the age identity, it can determine the subjective feeling about age and aging as physical appearance.

Moreover, the respondents state that life participation is another factor affecting being old/young. That is, having an active social life and maintaining social relations are seen as crucial for respondents about feeling young or old. For instance, a respondent stated:

> *I do not see myself as old because I love to do what I need to do by myself. I do them; my human relations and my circle of friends are excellent. I have many groups. We still meet with my faculty friends and go somewhere; the last time we went to the southeast was in 2020. It was a sıra night there; we toured; I do not feel old because my relations are good. I love to travel, and my relationships with relatives and friends are good, so I never feel alone, and my relations with relatives are also very good. It depends on human relationships because they continue; I feel young too. (R19)*

As can be seen from the statement, the social world around people is seen as effectual in having a younger age identity and not being an older person. Being in isolation is not welcomed by the young age identity. On the contrary, going outside and mixing with the society around associated to plays a role in their age identity construction. Therefore, about the relation between age identity and social life experiences, it can be thought that there seems to be an association between the two

because when it is asked about the views of individuals about why they see themselves as younger and not an older woman, they mentioned about their social world and the social relations and experiences in it. In addition, a kind of causality is also expressed, as can be seen from the above quotation. That is to say, it is stated that "my relations with my relatives and friends are good, so I never feel alone. It depends on human relationships because they continue; I feel young too." Therefore, it can be seen that having and maintaining social relations is shown as a kind of causal factor in having a young age identity. Thus, having an active social life and social relations are effective in feeling young.

On the contrary, isolation from the public world seems to be thought about as an old age identity. For instance, another respondent also stated*," A desolate human. I think you are old by then. For example, I experienced them in corona period. I felt so alone, it is making a person too old." (R11).* Thus, social life and taking part in it by meeting with friends or traveling seem the activities that can be associated with being not elderly. However, isolation from social life is stated as effective in feeling old. Therefore, it can be said that in the research, an old age identity and having an active social life cannot be perceived as harmonious. In addition, the public use of respondents as having a social life is seen as necessary for feeling young.

According to the perspective of symbolic interactionism, identity is a constructed phenomenon that is shaped by the interactions between society and the self. Therefore, there is a mutual relation between the self and the social setting (Sherman,1994). The argument about identity, which depends on the symbolic interactionist theory, can also be seen in the identity of age. The others around people in a society are found as significant for Mead (1934) and Cooley (1902), it is stated that it is not possible that there is a self that exists independently from the people around us (Stryker, 1981). From the quotations above in the statement like *"It depends on human relationships because they are continuing, I feel young." (R21)* or *"I felt so alone, it is making a person too old (R11)* ", it can be seen that the human relations are also stated as playing a role on the age identity. That is, maintaining human relations and keeping them alive are seen as important for feeling young. Therefore, an interaction between people and society is stated.

Thus, if the age identity is analyzed through the symbolic interactionist viewpoint, it can be said that there is also the relation between people and society. In the construction of the self, the effect of others in a social structure is stated as seen from the quotation. The social relations of the people (others) in that society are connected to having a young age identity. Therefore, the interaction with society is placed on constructing an identity as an age identity. Thus, by looking through the lenses of symbolic interactionism, an individual's interaction with others in society should not be overlooked in the subject of age identity.

In the research, passing the time with young people is indicated more than once as a factor giving rise to one's feeling young. For instance, a respondent stated*," Being with young people feels like a person as young; I usually hang out with young people, not old people." (R6)*. Also, another respondent adds similar points," *The things feeling someone young are socialization, mobility, spending time with children and young people, cinema and theater." (R23).* As can be seen from the quotations above, in addition to having an active social life, passing the time with young people is stated as a factor to make someone feel younger. Therefore, the social interaction of people from different age stages is effective in age identity construction. Moreover, as related to social interaction with others, working life is mentioned as a factor affecting age identity. Some respondents indicated," *I do not know; I am not old with my actions. It may be because I feel physically vigorous. Because I was with the kids while I was working, that might be effective. I was doing sports with them; I was moving." (R22).* Also, another respondent adds similar points, *"I have always been with young people, my students had just finished high school, and then I attended classes for them first when they were at the age of 18, so being with them made me feel young thanks to my profession. It is also nice to teach them something." (R27).*

As seen from the quotations, as a consequence of interacting with young people or kids, for instance, in a work setting, which is also a social interaction, those respondents said that they could stay younger and more dynamic. Therefore, from those, it can be seen social interaction in terms of symbolic interactionism, and it can be said that again there is a relation between the self and the society (as in

interaction) associated with a young age identity. It can be seen that to whom an individual spends her time through the life course is seen effective for staying young. Therefore, in the phenomenon of age identity, the life course is seen as effective, so the process also seems related. Moreover, because of the fact that being younger is perceived as liveliness and vigor by them, they may state those statements. Furthermore, participating in life by doing something is seen as significant to avoid getting older. Therefore, passivity is seen as related to feeling old and old age identity. For instance, one of the respondents expressed:

> *It is physical. There is also feeling old spiritually; the worst thing is that the physical things are not that much. That is why it is essential to keep good social relations. Some elderly people are like that, for example, I am amazed at this, some of them step aside because they are old, they do not do anything anymore, they take care of themselves now; I think that this makes them age worse, whereas an older person can cook a piece of cake, and should call her children and say I made a cake for you. Therefore, a person should be actively involved in life. You feel old when you step aside and keep saying I am old. Young people do this to their elders too; they say like, "You are old, Mom, do not get tired, sit down," she gets used to it too, then after a while, it seems like she behaves like she does not know how that thing can be done at all. I say to my mother-in-law, for example, I say "Make a little cookie and eat it," that is, you do something, do have no work to do. (R 28)*

As it can be seen, working out by attending something and not being at a loose end in life are effective for not feeling old. Actually, from this, having an old age identity is seen as unpleasant, they stated factors that should be done to avoid feeling old. That is also an example of the valuableness of youthfulness in society. Also, the cultural elements are on the scene, as seen from the respondent's statement above. That is to say, in line with a kind of cultural understanding stating respect for elderly people, one may not want an old person to do work, and instead, the younger one may want to do those simple daily works like cooking or even bringing a glass of water to the elderly. As a consequence, that old person may stay passive by doing nothing. Thus, the cultural values in a social setting can effectively bring about feeling old. Those cultural values perceive the passivity of old people in life as usual, and those cultural items in society passivate them. Another factor that respondents state as affecting the state of feeling old is the death of relatives. Some changes in people's lives can influence their subjective perception of age. The literature indicates that the death of

a relative, like the death of a husband, for instance, may bring about feeling old permanently (Keller et al., 1989). Also, WHO (2022) indicates there is an affiliation between aging and the death of a relative. In my research also, a respondent stated:

> *I actually felt very young, but when my husband died, my heart was broken, and then my brother passed away, and he made me 20 years old both physically and mentally. I lost my mother this year too. I took care of my mother for nine months. I felt that events made me aged 20 years. (R19)*

As can be seen from the quotation, the death of a relative can be effective in the age identity perception and cause one to feel old. It can change the age perception even as increasing to twenty ages older as it is stated. Because of the fact that people in those ages may have the possibility of experiencing the death of their relatives, that factor should not be overlooked when the age identity is studied. Moreover, being a grandmother is stated by respondents as effective in feeling old. Grandmotherhood, as a transition in a person's life course, is a causal factor in age identity (Bastida,1987). My research also shows that being a grandmother is related to feeling old. For instance, a respondent stated," *When I see my grandchildren, I say, for example, we are getting old." (R6)*. As can be seen from the quotation, having grandchildren is indicated as a factor determining the subjective age perception. For the first time, a factor is positively associated with feeling old. However, even if having grandchildren may not be positive for all people, that respondent perceives it positively because, in our conversation, I see she is pleased to have grandchildren. Therefore, the role associated with old age, like being a grandmother, is influential in her age identity.

4.1.5. The Feelings and Perceptions Related to Chronological (actual)/Felt age

It is remarkable that among the respondents who feel younger than their chronological ages, there are the ones who express their young age that they feel as timidly and with some hesitation. For instance, a respondent state," *I am 73 years old. Maybe that is weird, but I feel between the ages of 50-60." (R18*). Another respondent states," *I am 69 years old. I think it is shameful, but I feel at the age of 18." (R27)*. As can be seen from those quotations, not just feeling at a much younger

age, like the age of 18, but also feeling at the age of 50-60 can be stated in such a way as hesitating.

That feeling of hesitation and embarrassment is significant to elaborate. That is to say, it can be the case that they express their younger ages they feel timid because they may think that can be odd as they are women of a certain age. Thus, that is a risk of condemnation in the society. That is, being at the age of 18 can mean "being like a young lady," so a 69 years old woman stating that she feels at the age of 18 may feel the fear of being found strange by others in society because she is like "a woman of a certain age." That feeling of "weirdness" is seen in one of the respondents' statements; however, she feels at her chronological age*," I am 71 years old. I do not feel at a young age; I feel the same age as I am now, it would be weird if I said 15." (R20)*. It can be said that feeling at such a younger age sometimes may be seen as not "compatible" with the older age because that respondent is at the age of 71, and she cannot think it is usual to feel at the age of 15. That is, maybe if those women were at the age of 30 and that question was asked to them to state the age that they feel at, they may state they feel at the age of 18 more easily.

However, in the interviews, some of them hesitated when they expressed the young age they felt, but as can be seen from the quotation above, one of them did not even state such a young age because it was weird, she thought. Thus, that can show a gap perceived between old and younger ages, and I argue that may be because of a way of comprehending old age. Because of the meaning load included in such old ages, they can feel a distance from younger ages. Old ages can make them feel as if they are reaching a definite stage in their lives, so there can be a kind of maturity their age implies and such a manner that can cause hesitation and weirdness. However, at the same time, there is another respondent who mentioned that age of 15, which is seen as unusual by another woman, as the felt age as quickly and did not hesitate*," I feel myself at very younger ages; I do not go up from the age of 15." (R5).* Therefore, the felt age can depend on what an age is associated with and how it is perceived. The age of 18 may imply something very different from the age of 69. That is because the age of 18 and 69 can load different perceptions and states in people's minds; some weirdness is perceived when it is tried to gather and match those different ages.

Therefore, it can be seen that the ages are not just simple categories people have; they have a meaning load in the apprehension of old people.

Ages can also imply and associate with emotional feelings. For instance, some of the respondents stated," *I feel at my own age, I do not feel young. If you ask me to go back to a year ago, I do not want to go back, I worked too hard, and I am too tired." (R13).* The other respondent states," *I feel at my own age, and I am enjoying this." (R25).* As can be seen, older age is a reminder of life experiences in the past, so people can perceive age as a way of reflecting what they have lived at that time. Therefore, there is such an implication. Because there can be some unpleasant life experiences that age refers to, respondents do not want to go back to those ages. Thus, due to its implication, age can be associated with some negative feelings. Also, to feel the same with the chronological age can be positively mentioned.

Furthermore, as an important part of the age identity analysis, it is asked to the respondents about how they feel to be at that age (chronological age). Learning about their feelings is crucial because it can give valuable information about their way of perception about their actual ages. A respondent stated," *Nothing different, it is normal. It feels like I am old." (R13*). It can be seen that there is a focus on being told about being at those chronological ages. Therefore, the chronological ages of those women state that feeling of being old for them. It can be said that their subjective perception of the ages contains the state of elderliness in it. Some respondents emphasized the physical state of well-being about the question related to their meaning sets about their chronological ages, *"I am happy from time to time, but when I have pains, then I think I guess it is time for me to go (death). Sometimes when the grandchildren come, I am happy with my age." (R3)*. The other respondent states," *Sometimes it feels positive and sometimes negative. It depends on my current mood. For example, it depends on whether I have pain or not. Sometimes I feel excellent. If I do not have pain on that day and wake up well, I am fine." (R17).*

From those statements, it can be seen that the meaning they associated with their chronological ages; the existence of pain is stated as a major item, so here the age is linked to it in the subjective age perception. Also, that pain is shown as a messenger about death's coming up. Therefore, the pain and death association are the concepts

appearing in their frame of actual ages. A respondent state, *"At this age, I feel that everything is over as biologically and hormonally in my body, it is really ending." (R15).* Another respondent also states, "*Okay, you do not feel old, but you are aware of what you are, you are aware of your age, you are aware that you will say goodbye to the world one day." (R20).*

In those viewpoints, there is an emphasis on an end, coming closer to an end in the subjective perception of their age. She(R15) came to mind the end in the body as biologically coming to an end. Thus, the respondent's body is important in her age perception because she stated the body and its changes (an end in it). That situation again reminds the idea about the body in the literature. That is to say, it is not a docile entity at all in the reflexive project of self-identity (Giddens, 1993). Therefore, as it is said in the literature, the body heightens its significance, as it is seen in that statement of the woman because, about the age identity of that woman (R15), it is seen she associated changes in her body with her subjective perception of her age. Therefore, the body can be an emphasized phenomenon in the topic of identity, as an identity of age, in our study. Another respondent also said*," I do not see myself as 65 years old at all. There was no change at all, as I said, being that age did many things in terms of physically." (R19)*. In that respondent's statement also, there is such an importance of the body because when she talks about her age, she mentions the bodily changes. Therefore, there is the body again when making connotations to her subjective perception of age.

Moreover, in the other respondent's statement (R20), there is a connotation about death, going towards an end in the life. Even if she states she is happy with her age and does not feel old, she also emphasizes the view of that end. Therefore, it can be said in the meaning package of her age there is a reminiscence of going towards death, to an end for her. Even if being old is not indicated as a feeling, there is the feeling of that end as related to her subjective age perception. It can be important because being old can sometimes be associated with death; however, in that statement, there is not such a feeling (as old age feeling) as linked to the death phenomenon; it can be said there is the age itself evokes that feeling. Furthermore, about the subjective perception of their ages there, a respondent indicated," *I have*

read and learned a lot, it feels full of maturity, and lots of life experience I have had. It does not make me feel anything negative. Negativity is because the people around me lose some of their value judgments, not because of my age." (R27). Another respondent also states," *I think I am more mature, experienced, and can help my environment better in all matters. I think there is a value in every age." (R29)*. In those respondents' views in the research, there is a perception of positive contributions about their feeling of the ages. That is, their ages bring them to complete development and more life experience so they can go better with those in their lives, it is said. In those perspectives, there is a positive value linked to being that age. They did not think about pain or death, but they connoted the part of being more experienced, for instance, to age. Therefore, there is no reminiscence of an oncoming end in those viewpoints. Another respondent also states:

> *It feels so good, fortunately, to be able to live as reaching up to that age is a valuable thing. I did not have a disease; I am a healthy person, and I realized many things when I came to this age. When we were young, we could not think about things in depth while I am busy, now it is possible to sit down and think about everything, like death, the life as deeply. (R24)*

That respondent also mentioned the positivity brought by her age state of her. Also, there is an interrogation and contemplation status is stated as different from the ones above. She mentioned can think about and make an evaluation of life and also death. In that statement, there is also a reminiscence about death that can be seen in the subjective perception of age. Also, the interrogation and contemplation situation is stated in the inner experience of her age.

Moreover, a respondent in the research said," *Sometimes I say how quickly time has passed. I have experienced what three 100-year-old people go through (hard times) in their lives, but I never thought about it." (R11*). That respondent mentioned the hardships she has lived in her life. The difficulty experienced before comes to her mind when she thinks about her age. Therefore, there is that kind of reminiscence in her subjective perception of age. Moreover, the actual age can be associated with social norms towards it, and in such a way, it can affect the behaviors of people in a social setting. For instance," *For example, is it okay for me to wear a mini skirt and go out now? I get a reaction definitely from society. I have to behave appropriately*

for my age and the setting I participate. It is necessary to say that I am 70 years old and act accordingly. I should act by my age." (R20).

As can be seen, she feels a social norm about clothing type at a certain age (older age) in the social setting. Thus, it is perceived that there is an "appropriate" way of acting by age in society, according to her. There is also a powerful effect of that norm in society because that woman also stated she should act in accordance with it. Therefore, there is a meaning set carried by the actual age (old age) in society, and there is a reflection of it on the perception of her chronological age and, accordingly, her behaviors in society. Suppose it is thought from the symbolic interactionist perspective. In that case, it can also be said that the others in the society, their reactions when there is an interaction, are seen as influential in shaping and affecting how individuals behave or dress. Therefore, through interactions, such kinds of meanings and ways of thinking can be formed, and these meanings can also shape individuals' behaviors. Therefore, it can be said that there is a kind of understanding which is shared, and it has the power to affect the behaviors of individuals. When they interact in society to each other, it can be said that the assigned meaning can be recreated again by acting "appropriate" way in accordance with the age. To sum up, as it can be seen, there are different (some positive and negative) reminiscences of actual or felt age for the respondents.

4.1.5.1. Responsibilities about the Chronological (actual) Age

In order to be able to analyze the age identity of elderly women in the research, it is valuable to continue to look at how they perceive their chronological ages. Thus, it can be useful to ask whether there are responsibilities or roles that they think they should do at that age. First of all, respondents in the research generally think there is no such responsibility. However, sometimes such responsibilities can be associated with their age stage. For instance," *I have been looking after grandchildren for ten years." (R13).* The respondent is considered as responsibility for looking after their grandchildren at her age. She stated as such when it was asked. As can be seen, that respondent sees unpaid care work for grandchildren as a responsibility because of gender issues. That is, because of the fact that caregiving activity is loaded on women in society as an assumed gender role, the respondent perceives it as a

responsibility of her. Moreover, there were other respondents stating," *If I do not necessarily have to, I sacrifice something and think of my family and my grandchildren first." (R27); "Of course, while I used to only do things for just myself in the past, now I have the responsibility of my children and grandchildren. I should think of them." (R22).*

Those respondents feel there is the responsibility of the children and grandchildren on them. Also, there is a sacrificing attitude is considered as it can be seen. Therefore, those are regarded by them as a responsibility at that age. A kind of altruistic position towards their relatives stated above can be seen in their conceptualization of that age. For instance, one of them stated," *My only concern is that I want to live a little longer and take care of the children because you know the economy is very bad; I want to support them." (R27).* As can be seen, there is a self-sacrificing position in caring for their children or grandchildren at that age perception. Moreover, gender roles again can be seen when talking about that topic:

> *My age has not changed the responsibilities in my life. There is again the same iron and dishes, all the same. I used to hire cleaners while I was working, but now I get them more often; even when I hire a cleaner, the cleaning is still ongoing; imagine how worn out I am. When the woman (the cleaner) is not enough, I do it myself. (R17)*

According to her, the responsibilities are the same as in the past. There is no special responsibility that is thought of at that age. However, as an important point here, she talked about housework as a responsibility that was done in the past and is now by her at that age stage. Therefore, it can be seen that housework was regarded as a responsibility in the past and now for a woman as independent of age status in their perception because of assumed gender roles.

In addition, there were also the ones thinking that age does not load any responsibility on them; in contrast, the responsibilities in their life are reduced. For instance, one of them said," *The good things that age brings are comfort, no rush to something, no responsibility because you have many responsibilities while working. However, so more comfortable now I can say." (R28).* Here, being much more independent and more comfortable because of having no responsibility is indicated. Thus, it can be said that age is regarded as an abatement stage from the

responsibilities in the life of some of the research respondents. On the other hand, another respondent stated:

> *Of course, there is responsibility towards that age once you get yourself under control. For example, is it okay if I wear a mini skirt and go out on the street now? I get a reaction, so it is not the right thing. You have to act according to your age and environment. It is necessary to say that I am 70 years old and act accordingly. You have to be in control of your age and behave according to your age. (R20)*

As can be seen from her statement, being under control of oneself is considered a responsibility at that age. That is, acting "taking into account" the age and the social environment is important. Therefore, getting oneself under control is considered a responsibility of the self-view of her age. It is sound to state that it may be because of a worry about condemnation in a social setting where she considers there is a social norm that a woman at her age "should not wear like a mini skirt". Therefore, she may think such a way because of not acting in a way that contradicts that understanding in that social setting and, therefore, not being exposed to condemnation. Moreover, there is also another important point related to ageism. That is to say, in that quotation of the woman above, there is a hidden statement saying that at that age (older age), it is not appropriate to wear a mini skirt. Therefore, there is a limitation due to age which is an ageist attitude.

About responsibilities, there is also a respondent who stated," *Sure, my age brings new responsibility. I pay attention to my food and my actions, for instance, in terms of my health." (R11).* As can be seen, being careful about the health of the body and what is eaten is seen as a responsibility at that age evaluation. Health issues can be linked with old age, which is also indicated in my research, as it has been shown before. Therefore, it can be the case that at that age status, because of seeing those ages as vulnerable in terms of health issues, taking precautions may be seen as a responsibility at that age.

4.1.5.2. The Advantages and Disadvantages of the Chronological (actual) Age

As stated before, the perception of age is not simple as whether an individual feels herself/himself older or younger than the chronological age. It is much more complex and multidimensional. Thus, in order to be able to evaluate the subjective

perceptions towards the actual ages of the respondents, the question about the advantages and disadvantages of their chronological ages is asked. To that question, some, who are few, said there is not such a positive side brought about by being at that age. However, other respondents stated some plusses about their ages, and those are important to look at for evaluating what is involved in their age perceptions. There were some advantages to the chronological ages indicated by the respondents. First of all, in the research, it is seen that some respondents made a statement about their children or grandchildren. For instance," *You see your grandchildren, you see your children's marriage. Every age has its happiness in it, I think." (R16).* Another respondent also states," *Okay, we got older, but we had children, I had grandchildren, they are excellent feelings." (R22).*

As can be seen from those statements, having children and grandchildren is seen as a plus that is a plus of being that age like it is found in the research stated above. Other respondents in the research are stating in this way. Therefore, that is involved in their inner experience of their chronological ages. In addition, a second value brought about their age, being respected, is mentioned, as it can be seen from that respondent's statement," *Being respected can be a positive side. For example, they can give me a seat on the bus. I become happy." (R17).* On the other hand, some respondents stated," *I started to gain more respect. After my retirement, people's perspectives have changed a lot. They respect me more because they say she is our retired teacher." (R9).* Also another respondent stated similarly:

> *At school, I am respected, but it can be both related to being a teacher and the age because people can sleep on the bus so as not to give me a seat, so it is about my profession. I can advise people about plants and say, do this. There are others at my age, but the respect shown to me is not shown to them. It is about the knowledge; the culture you get. Therefore, I may also be respected if I was 40 years old. (R27)*

Those people also talked about respect; however, as can be seen, they mentioned their profession related to being respected. Especially the woman in the second quotation thinks she is respected, but that is not because of her age but because she is a teacher. After all, according to her, people the same age as her cannot be respected like her. Therefore, being respected is not seen as a plus, thanks to being at that age for that women. According to her interpretation of her age, to be regarded is omitted

because she associated it with the profession she has not with her age. Furthermore, another emphasis is made on a gain about their character. Most respondents mentioned the concepts like being more patient, positive, and tolerant at that age, which is a similar finding to the other study above in the literature. A respondent stated:

> *You start to think more logically, do more positive things, and do things that you could not do in the past, and you become more attached to life because after a certain period of time, illness and death come to your mind. You think that you should know the value of your life. When you wake up in the morning, you say fortunately you woke up. (R6)*

Another respondent also stated:

> *I have become much more mature; I can be much more tolerant, I have stricter rules and thoughts, I used to judge people very quickly, in my 40s or something, you think I know the best, now I am not like that. I am more tolerant and softer. We get along better with my husband; I used not to try to understand him; I think I always know the truth. There is less controversy between us now. I understand; I am back a bit myself, so this is a good age. (R24)*

As can be seen from the quotations above, being more tolerant and sensible is stated in their subjective perception of their ages as gains. Also, it is essential that being more attached to life is mentioned due to recollection of the possibility of oncoming illnesses and death. Therefore, there is again an association with death. There is a warning about stepping up to an end at that age's sense-making. However, the critical point is that even if it can give a thought about illnesses and an end, the statement has no negative atmosphere. Knowing the value of life and grabbing life with both hands are perceived about that age status. Also, to be able to empathize is stated in the interpretation of the age. This age is seen as an evaluation period of one's inner world, inner self.

Some respondents stated," *I used to be more impatient in the past, but I am thinking a little more now; I can say you are getting older; I am trying to empathize." (R20).* The other respondent adds," *You can think more positively, you can be more patient. I think it is because of my age." (R7).* There is also another one stating being able to empathize as it can be seen. In addition, being more patient is indicated as a value in their age consideration. Another respondent stated that her age gives her more

objectivity when evaluating her life. However, not all respondents stated such gains about their age perceptions; some could not express positivity related to their ages. Moreover, some respondents in the research thought there was no unfavorable about their ages when asked. However, according to the ones, thinking there are some, when they interpret their age status, not having a well-off body as it was in the past in focused chiefly. On the other hand, some disadvantages were stated about the chronological (actual) ages of respondents. A respondents stated:

> *My movements are restricted a little more; you have to restrict most of the movements you do when you are young because my health does not allow it; the body does not allow it. You cannot eat everything. Fortunately, that situation does not limit my traveling for now. If we can afford it, we participate in tours, but if I cannot have strength at later ages, if I cannot walk, I cannot go anywhere. As compared to before, of course, my social activities outside become less because my movements are restricted. (R5)*

The other respondent also stated:

> *I am not as healthy as before; for example, we were in Samsun last week, I walked a lot, and my knees immediately showed themselves (hurts). My legs are swollen. When I was young, I was very active; I used to prepare many meals for the guests who would come the next day. I can't do that anymore; I feel tired now; that's natural. (R24)*

As can be seen, physical hardships are stated as negativities about their ages. Even if, due to physical issues, they cannot feel as active as they were in the past, that is not indicated as a preventing factor in their social life activities, as it is stated by the respondent above (R5). These physical problems can affect their movements by decelerating them. However, in the research, when looking at the other respondents' statements, it can be said those problems do not prevent them from having social life activities outside their homes. However, as it is stated by the respondent (R5), that is related to the heaviness of those issues because she said, "If I cannot have strength in my body in later ages if I cannot walk, for instance, I cannot go anywhere." In addition, another respondent states," *Of course, old age is terrible, sometimes your heart wants to join a tour or something, but you cannot do it because sometimes you feel tired." (R14)*. As it can be seen from the quotation, it is indicated that social activities outside of the home are become difficult due to a physical decrease in the

body at the old age as her chronological age. Thus, the social life experiences outside of the home are affected by the powerless body, which is associated with being old. At that point, physical health problems are stated as a limiting factor to outside activities.

On the other hand, at least according to the respondents in the research, it can be seen that physical problems do not withhold them from their social activities; however, they are a slowing down effect on them. Another respondent said:

> *My every day is different to each other. I had associations; I went to the association on Thursdays. I was going to brain class in the morning. Those were two years ago. It will start again in September. I was going to another foundation on Mondays. I went to an English course; I do not like sitting just at home and do not listen to myself either. If you say I have pain, so you cannot go anywhere, then it is not right; one should not say that. (R11)*

She mentioned her busy social life, and according to her, physical problems, like pain, should not play a major role in having social activities. For her, even if there may be some pain, for instance, that should not limit an individual. Considering that her chronological age is 75 years old, it can be said she may also have some physical issues; however, despite it, she thinks such a way. Also, a respondent said," *When I go to the sea in Antalya, I go to the disco and play with the children after midnight. I am not the type of person who says let me sit pessimistically; my knees hurt. I create this myself. I love walking and life, so my soul does not age. "(R9).* In her (aged 75) statements also, there is the view about people not limiting themselves by using an excuse for the physical difficulties in their bodies. Those two women's chronological ages are the same, i.e., 75; therefore, as I stated before, they may have some physical hardships too, but from their ideas and active social lives, it can be said some health-related difficulties may not be a factor affecting the social life experiences outside of their homes actually which is a contrast to the view of the woman (R14) above who stated those hardships could limit her activities.

About that effect, a respondent stated," *For example, I used to clean my house myself; I used to clean everything in one day. I cannot do it now. It sounds negative to me. Traveling is like that; for example, I always traveled in the past, but now I*

cannot make it at that speed." (R20). In that quotation, there is again the slowing down effect of the physical exhaustion in their activities, but also, the traveling activity does not end as it can be seen. Moreover, there is also another salient point in the research. In that quotation, the respondent mentions the domestic work that she does. In the research, domestic work is stated more than once in different statements. Therefore, that is also important in terms of gender roles.

Furthermore, a respondent said," *The disadvantages are not because of the age. People often use old age as an excuse, like because I am too old, so I cannot do that thing." (R9)*. Therefore, as it can be seen from that statement, it may be the case that being old or the thought about being old can be stated as an excuse for acting in some way or not. That is, because of the old age idea, one can think, "I feel feeble; I am an old person, so I cannot do this." Thus, whether the idea of being old is the primary factor or not is significant to see because the perception of old age can have the power to surround the apprehension of elderly individuals in such a way that they may look at anything in their lives from the perspective of old age. Therefore, old age perception can passivize them in their social life.

Moreover, some respondents indicated the death of a relative as a minus of being that age," *I lost my mother and my father; there were many deficiencies in the family. You are losing your health. It is not about retirement; it is about your age." (R16).* The other respondent also states," *Emotional things, my father's death, my mother is getting older, the changes I have seen in my siblings." (R23).* Those respondents in the research sense the death of a relative as brought about by their age. Thus, it can be said in their subjective perception of their age, the death of a relative is included. In my research, the death of a relative is stated as a situation that is associated with their age perception by stating adversity brought about by their age. Somehow or other, it can still be said that situation takes part in their age identities and subjective age perceptions. Also, being respected is again seen at that time as related to the minus of their age because a respondent answered the question about the negativities of her age as "not to get respect from others is a thing that hurts." Furthermore, one respondent stated," *When I was younger, I was chirpier, I went in and mix to everywhere, now there is a weight given by age, there is a thought that I should give*

my place to young people." (R6). As related to the opposing sides of her age, she talks about withdrawing herself in social actions because when she compared to the past, there was a more dynamic person who entered everywhere she said as contrary to now. Also, she thinks the young people should be much more in the scene, not her. Therefore, a burden that is given by age can be seen. Therefore, much more inactivity is indicated instead of being easygoing in society. She feels that a kind of passivity and so withdrawal should be in her behaviors. Thus, there is such a perception in her age view.

4.2. The Image of Elderliness

Elderliness is significant for the research because when analyzing the age identity of elderly women and also its relation to their social life, it is stated their perception of elderliness in their minds so that it can be seen its possible effects on their age identities and accordingly their social lives. Their opinions about elderliness are indicated when they are asked directly, "What is the meaning of elderliness for you?" because of seeing the exact picture in their minds about elderliness.

First, in the research, the concept of elderliness is seen as negative by the majority. For instance, one of them said," *It does not sound good. If possible, if we never let elderliness into our lives." (R7)*. As it can be seen, elderliness is perceived as undesirable. Generally, in the research, respondents do not have a positive perception. If it is looked at through a socially constructive perspective, elderliness does not inherently have such a meaning. However, it can be seen in those respondents' minds there is such constructed meaning.

Moreover, not being elderly is stated with some positive personal characteristics. For example, respondents indicated some features as "feeling strong," "determined," "self-confident," and "being at peace with oneself" associated with not being elderly. Therefore, as it can be seen, the meaning of elderliness is encoded in such a way that some personal characteristics are associated with being not elderly in their perceptions. Thus, it can be shown how far the negative perception of elderliness can reach. That situation shows that being elderly can evoke some state of being that they do not welcome. In the research; there is an anxiety about elderliness. Elderliness

evokes fear about the future of the respondents. There is a fear about the future in terms of being someone requiring care. An emphasis on elderliness is about a concern about needing care. For instance:

> *The elderliness is something I never want to come to me because there is a situation of needing someone. There are things that you cannot do by yourself because you cannot afford them. For example, when I think of a situation where I cannot do my own work, I throw myself out to get those thoughts out of my head. I think of that fear. (R6)*

Also, another respondent adds similarly about the fear of requiring care," *How painful it is to be useless, to need someone else. Elderliness means like that. Being dependent on someone else." (R8).* As can be seen, elderliness is understood as the one who requires care. It can be said that in their perception of elderliness, such a definition is constructed. Instead of perceiving elderliness as a normal state defining a stage in the life course, its meaning is constructed in such a way, including that feeling in it. Another meaning constructed towards elderliness is the association with death. For instance, a respondent stated," *The death comes to my mind, I am afraid of requiring care." (R2).*

As can be seen, there is a death connotation in the perception of elderliness. As can be seen from the quotation, society can load some meanings to the age or age stages. Individuals can perceive and act according to the effect of those socially constructed meanings. Moreover, the bodily signs of elderliness are perceived as fear. For instance, a respondent stated," *My biggest fear is having wrinkles and getting fat; except those, I am fine in spirit." (R11)*. As seen from that statement, the signs of elderliness are seen as alarming. It can be the case because of the desired, valuable state of youthfulness in society, the reminders of old age, contrary to youthfulness, are not wanted to have. There can be a motive for retaining the young age identity to escape from elderliness.

Another perception of elderliness is associated with a downfall in the research. For instance, a respondent stated, "*I am not old; I think if I get caught up in that thing, I will go bad. (R20)".* Also similarly, another respondent indicated," *I do not say I am old, I say I feel tired sometimes, but I do not say I am old. I do not want to see myself like that; I do not want to be suddenly collapsed by saying this. being old is more like*

the one worn out for me." (R29). As it can be seen, it can be realized that being old is encoded so that the respondent did not want to be elderly because, in her view, that can make her worse. There is a fear of elderliness because the socially constructed meaning of elderliness includes decay and downfall. Furthermore, elderliness is not associated with vigor and being active. For example, a respondent stated," *I am not old because even if there are no people around me, I go out and walk." (R27).* Also another respondent adds similarly," *I do not consider myself as old. Thankfully, I am on my feet now. Every morning, I can get up and walk." (R18).* As can be seen, being full of action is correlated with not being elderly. Therefore, there is no such relation in the meaning set of elderliness. Elderliness is not perceived in that way.

Elderliness can include negative cultural images in it. For instance, in the American culture, there is such a situation (Westerhof,2008). In addition, in a cultural setting in which youthfulness is seen as related to vigor and oldness is perceived as decay, then it can be the case that people do not see themselves as old and want to associate with youthfulness. They may do this because of sustaining a positive self-image. If old age is seen as a negative image in society, then one can try to maintain her/his younger age identity as a self-enhancement motive. According to the respondents' statements in my research, they are inclined to perceive themselves as not elderly. Therefore, that inclination can be related to such a self-enhancement motive. The young age identity may be desired to maintain because of the positive image of youthfulness in society. They may therefore want to maintain a positive self-image. When the negativities they stated (like collapse and downfall) related to how elderliness is perceived are considered, there can be an effort to sustain a positive self-image by defining themselves with a young age identity. According to modernization theory, by the effect of cultural changes, there can be a social setting in which being old is discredited, and youthfulness is valued (Westerhof,2008). For instance, the traditional priority about knowledge of the elderly faded away because of the rise in literacy and also in formal education levels. Therefore, elderliness is less valuable than it was in the past. The majority of having young age identities may be related to the position of elderliness in today's world.

In addition, the literature indicates that regarding the relationship between health and elderliness, the perception of the beginning of old age is almost the same, with the diminution in good health and derogation of physical capacity (Rapoliene,2015). Therefore, health problems are perceived as inseparable from the definition of elderliness. In the research, there is a similar situation. For instance, one of the respondents stated," If you are healthy, you can feel young even at the age of 80. But if you are not, you can feel old at the age of 30, too."(R17). Similarly, another respondent indicated," Elderliness means health problems, not being able to walk as we want, not seeing as we want. Those limit the people, and if you have those kinds of things, then you feel old." (R23). As it can be seen from the statements of some respondents above and the general viewing of the research, the decay in health and capacity is perceived as equal to getting old, so it is conceptualized almost as the elderliness or the starting of being old. Therefore, in the research also, the situation is dominant wherever the questions related to elderliness are directed to the respondents.

On the other hand, not all respondents in the research stated the elderliness concept as unfavorable. Elderliness is also perceived positively. For instance, one of the respondents stated, "*It is a beautiful thing. It does not evoke death; I think (R1)".* As can be seen, elderliness does not evoke death for everyone. Instead, it is perceived as a pleasant state in life. However, people thinking as such were few. For some of them, it is not a state that should be avoided, as considered by others in the research," *Every age has its beauty in it. Maybe we will be happy when we reach that age, for me, it is not something to be avoided." (R28*). Another respondent adds," *I am one of those who say that every age has its beauty in it. Some people are afraid of elderliness, but I do not have such a fear." (R21).*

From the statements above, it is seen that contrary to the other views above, elderliness is not perceived as not wanting to come and also as being afraid. That situation can exemplify the point about the subjectivity of the perceptions towards elderliness. Therefore, there is no objective meaning of elderliness in itself. Moreover, some respondents define elderliness, including the respect concept," *They show more respect when there is elderliness. Children are more*

interested in me, for instance, so it is a good thing." (R3). Also, another respondent adds," *I see elderliness as one whom everyone respected and cared for love, so it is good." (R11).* As can be seen from the quotations, "be respected" is associated with the state of elderliness. In addition, 'getting attention' and 'being loved' are also situations evoked by elderliness. Also, 'to see the value' is stated in another situation perceived with elderliness as one stated, "*Elderliness means people's giving value to someone's ideas. In this respect, aging is positive. But if your health allows. (R25)".* Therefore, there are also such positive associations in the conceptualization of elderliness. That shows the socially constructed character of elderliness because there is no inherent meaning of it, and there are different meanings, positively and negatively.

4.2.1. Ageism in the Elderliness Perception

It will be deficient if it is not mentioned about ageism when such a subject is analyzed related to the perception of elderliness. Ageism is defined as:

> *Ageism can be seen as a process of systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplishes this for skin color and gender. Old people are categorized as senile, rigid in thought and manner, and old-fashioned in morality and skills. Ageism allows the younger generations to see older people as different from themselves (Butler, 1975, p. 35).*

In the research, some statements can be analyzed under the head of ageism because the perception of elderliness can include stereotyping towards elderliness. For instance, a respondent stated," Now, young people do not want to have time with us anyway; they see us as very old." (R10). It can be realized that the respondent mentioned young people do not like to consort with her at all because of considering her as old. In that situation, stereotyping and discrimination can be mentioned about due to being old in the social interaction as it is in the definition of ageism. The young ones conceptualize 'the old' as a distinct category from them, so they do not want to be with her by perceiving her as different from they are. As stated in the definition of ageism above, it can be said that some negative properties associated with elderliness by including in a stereotype are responsible for that situation. In addition, a respondent stated," *Because, in the elderliness, the life is restricted. At*

this age, others say do not eat it, do not wear like that or why do you travel at that age." (R5).

As it can be seen, she mentioned how her chronological age can affect her life. That is, actually, not her chronological age on its own causes such a restriction. However, because of the meaning set loaded to the chronological age (as showing elderliness) in that social setting, others consider women as elderly in the society, and they can also think that at such an age (which is an old age), one should not wear as that way. There is also essential to have another meaning set loaded in the concept of 'elderliness.' That is to say, it can be realized there is such an understanding about how dressing type should be in elderliness because that respondent talked about others' warning her about how she should dress at such an age. Therefore, it can be indicated that because of the age, being elderly, a restriction is felt reminding the ageist attitude. Moreover, in the same quotation, it is seen she also suffers from others' saying, "Why do you travel at that age?" so it can also be shown the understanding "it may not be appropriate for the elderly to travel at all," so there is an instance of ageism also because there is discrimination of old ones about traveling due to an elderliness perspective. Because the fact that being elderly is seen like 'others' in society, some behaviors are not seen as "suitable" for them in society as an indicator of ageist position. It is also crucial whether they are discriminated against because they are women. For instance:

> *I hear many people can talk about a woman's going outside and spending time. We have a relative who goes to the choir, and she is criticized a lot about whether the widow and old woman went to the choir or something. Even my mother criticizes her. They criticize her because she is a woman and a widow, but they do not say that if she were a man. (R7)*

Another respondent added:

> *I experienced, they say. It is a thing that is settled in society. Especially in small places, it is more, it is said oh widow old woman, look at her clothes, she travels, but she should go and sit at home; I have heard this a lot. However, I was making the necessary explanation. I see that these views have decreased slightly, so they are not as much as they used to be. People are a little more conscious. There is also a distinction; if the widow woman is divorced, then it leaves a worse stigma. If her husband is dead, it can be said that the woman cannot dress and talk like that. (R9)*

As can be seen in those quotations, those respondents talked about the reactions stated by others in society towards their spending time outside. As can be seen, they indicated that they had experienced such reactions because being elderly and a widow woman can be seen as not appropriate for doing those activities outside of their home. It is significant because in those statements, there is double discrimination. First of all, attending some social activities like choir or traveling are not seen as suitable for women at a certain age (elderly), so it is thought to be better at home than traveling. Thus, there is discrimination in terms of age, i.e., elderliness. Therefore, there is ageism here. On the other hand, there is also another discrimination which is in terms of the gender perspective. Because of the fact that there is a widow woman, it can be criticized by others in society. It is stated, "If she were a man, they do not say like that," so there is discrimination because of being an elderly woman. Therefore, in addition to the perception of elderliness, there is discrimination regarding widowhood and gender in society. Moreover, another respondent in the research stated," *I have heard people say it, not to me, but to someone else. While I was driving, someone reacted and told me to stay at my home." (R20).* In that statement, ageism can be seen clearly because she is seen as an elderly woman, and others perceive her in an elderliness stereotype. Because of some negative ideas towards elderliness perception, ageist attitudes stated.

Ageist attitudes can have the capacity to affect the relationship between elderly people and their social life experiences. That is, because of the ageist point of view, they may incline to reduce outside activities. They may act in such a way because of not subject to condemnation by others in society. Therefore, they may be much more isolated in society, and they may be much more differentiated. Consequently, it can contribute to ageism being recreated again. That situation can also show the significance of interactions between individuals in society. That is to say, elderly individuals may think others can criticize them in society if they go outside and do some activities, for instance, so they may direct their behaviors following it. As a consequence, it can be said that social interactions between individuals can play a significant role because of their power to create and recreate meanings in the social setting and also the power to control the behaviors of elderly individuals in society.

4.2.2. Stigma in the Elderliness Perception

In the research, as related to how elderliness is perceived, there is a stigmatized way of considering elderliness. The stigma is a deviation when some personal behaviors discreditably do not fit into the public norms like standards, appearance, and stereotypes (Rapoliene,2015). It is indicated:

> *Stigma is not concerned with undesirable features but rather those that are incompatible with the stereotype applicable to an individual of a particular category. The focus, in this case, is not on characteristics but on relationships. The feature itself is neither discreditable nor honorable because it may be stigmatizing for people in one category but prove their conventionality in the case of another. (Rapoliene,2015)*

Goffman (1986) states there are "a special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype" in the concept of stigma. For him, the stigma is a universal phenomenon, and there is a deviation from the norms of identity in the stigma. As related to the stigma, my research shows a state of not being perceived as elderly. Talking about elderliness is not pleasant for them. According to my research on elderliness, there is a stigmatized position of elderliness. There is a hesitation in defining themselves as elderliness and refusal to the label of elderliness for themselves. For instance, a respondent stated," *We do not consider ourselves as old. My husband never wants to hear the word "elderliness," we are still young. We are not getting old; we are growing." (R26)*. Another respondent adds similar views," *I do not say I am old, I feel tired sometimes, but I do not say I am old. I do not want to see it like that." (R29).* It can be seen from those statements to be elderly is not desired by those people, and also, there is a desire to deny defining themselves under that category. It is indicated in the literature that the denial of being old tells that there is a stigmatization out there because if there were no stigma, then that refusal would not occur (Rapoliene, 2015). Thus, if it is analyzed through this perspective, it can be stated that elderliness is not accepted and desired, and it may be because of stigma's effect on elderliness in society.

In the research, the body and the outlook are stated in a position with the power to escape from the elderliness stigma. For instance, a respondent stated," *The most fearful thing for me is having wrinkles and getting fat. When somebody calls me*

"mother" I really do not like." (R11). Firstly, from that statement, it can also be seen that the address form defined the label of elderliness is not desired. There is an undesirable position because of its meaning. There is a usage for matching the elderliness stage in society. Therefore, because of an escape from the elderliness label (as a stigma), those words stating elderliness as "mother" are unpleasant. Addressing associated elderliness can disturb them because she does not want to be labeled the head of the old aged due to the old age stigma. Secondly, as it can also be seen, it is also significant that the physical changes in the body's appearance, like wrinkles as a sign of elderliness, are seen as fearful. That situation is not desired because a youthful social mask is wanted to be put on the body so that it can be safeguarded from the signs of elderliness (and, in that manner, from the stigma). However, if there are wrinkles, for instance, on the body, as a sign, then the younger social mask put on the face is damaged, so there can be an appearance fitting to the elderliness stigma in the social setting. Thus, to avoid this, wrinkles as signs of aging in the body are stated as not desired, even feared.

In addition, there is another respondent indicated," *I like to dress to make me look young. I do not want to be funny, but I love it and I think it looks good and fits me." (R7).* In that quotation, the body is stated in a position for looking younger, so it may be the case the body can be used to be equipped in such a way that can hide the possible ties to elderliness, the old age identity so that she can be protected from the stigmatized situation of elderliness in the society. In addition, there can also be another situation that may be seen in terms of stigma. The respondent mentioned uneasiness about dressing, showing her to look young because she used the sentence" I do not want to be funny." Therefore, it can be because of another societal viewpoint about "the appropriateness" of the dressing style of a woman "of a certain age defining elderliness." There can also be a stigmatized way of thinking in society so that there can be a restlessness in the mind when they dress in such a way which can be thought of as found strange by others in society. Therefore, in that expression, there may be signs of such a situation in society. For example, it is also said:

> *Sometimes I wonder if I can wear what I love at this age because my favorite thing is to dress. I wear it, but society is already in trouble with such things. I do not dress as wearing low-cut anyway, but our society is*

> *oppressive. I could not wear my short shorts; I gave them to the neighbor's daughter so she could wear them by the sea. I said I would not wear it after that age. There is the effect of social pressure, but of course, I should not wear too short clothes at a certain age stage, so there are things that age can be effective. (R5)*

As can be seen, there is a perception about the clothing style of a woman in old age. From that, it can be understood that there is an idea about a "suitable" way of dressing, and even if she wants and likes to wear in a way that is seen as "more suitable" to younger ages in society, she hesitates the ideas about others in the society about her. Therefore, it can be said that she is troubled about the risks of being stigmatized because of not fitting into the norm about old age in society clothing. In addition, it is also a significant point that signs of that kind of viewpoint can be seen in that respondent. That is to say; she stated, "I will not wear it after that age, but of course, I should not wear too short clothes at a certain stage of age," so actually, that norm about clothing according to age also takes part in the way of thinking in that woman also. Thus, that can also show that those understandings in a society may have a kind of powerful position. Hence, the desire to avoid stigmatized behavior may be not weak either.

In addition to a disturbance from addressing forms defining elderliness, there is also a disturbance from some behaviors in the society that culturally indicates elderliness. For instance, a respondent stated," *They give a place because I am old, I feel sad, I do not want to sit, I am not old. I say to the young people, you are more tired, I say sit down." (R9).* As it can be seen, she does not want people giving a seat to her because she said she is not old, so they do not need to give a place to her. She considers herself as not elderly, and she disturbed that situation because of labeling with elderliness. She has a young age identity; however, because of her body, and her physical appearance, she can be perceived as an elderly woman, and as a consequence, some people may want to give a place to her as a cultural norm in society. In that situation also, it can be stated that the dislike because of being subject to such a kind of behavior connected to the state of elderliness happened due to a self and body discrepancy in the identity. That is, she states she has a young age identity; she does not perceive herself as old, so her mind says this, but on the other hand, due to her body, she can be seen and evaluated as an old woman in society. Because of

her body, that woman's younger age identity (the inner feeling) cannot be realized totally; it can be indicated that the body here is the position of a masquerade covering that inner self inside the body. Therefore, she becomes unhappy with being defined as elderliness because her subjective perception, the inner self, does not say that she is elderly.

Furthermore, I have felt when interviewing that respondents and some others stating they are not elderly, there is a kind of atmosphere that they were in a position which states they are far away from being elderly and elderliness is not suitable for them. The idea of elderliness is such a remote distance that some indicated," *I do not want to hang out with old people because I am bored." (R11)*. Also, a respondent stated," *I usually hang out with young people, not old people." (R6).* Thus, it can be seen; they do not see themselves in the same age category as the people "elderly." They show by their statements that they do not belong to that category. Even in such a position, hanging out with elderly people is as boring. Therefore, the distance to being old is so far that they can state the incompatibility between them and being elderly by expressing the "boring" ness of interacting with them, so when there are such views implying a kind of segregation from elderliness, then the old age stigma cannot be forgotten when making analysis. To sum up, there is a stigmatized position of elderliness in respondents' perceptions because there is a hiding from being labeled with elderliness.

4.3. Social life experiences- The public/private sphere dichotomy

Because of the fact that the research it is interested in the relationship between age identity and social life experiences, what elderly women do in their daily life and their social activities are significant issues for the research to analyze. For that reason, it is asked to the respondents in the research about their social lives. In addition, also the retirement transition is considered in terms of seeing whether elderly women have moved away from the social sphere (public) or not by the effect of retirement. Also, the retirement transition can give rise to an older age identity carrying the cultural meaning of old age. Including it can be sound when analyzing the social life experiences of people and age identity. Consequently, it is asked to the respondent about how they spend their time after being retired and today in order to

focus on their social lives. Firstly, some of the respondents, who are not few, stated that after being retired, there was a feeling of faltering and spending more time at home compared to before the retirement period. For instance, one respondent said:

> *After retirement, there are problems such as spending more time at home. Working life made me happier because I was always producing something. I had an important task; I would be happy. Now they do not exist anymore. We are all back home, trying to spend time at home. I had more work life and home responsibilities when I was working. Now that I am alone, I do not know what to do. (R4)*

The other respondent stated," *Before the retirement, I was more active, I was working, I was more outside, I was more in the public area, now I am more at home, but I have not had a situation just to stay home. I am socializing again, but of necessity, I am more at home." (R23).* As seen, there is a difference after and before the retirement transition in terms of their being public or private sphere in their lives. With retirement, they feel that they are more at home (private sphere); however, when working, they said there were more outside their homes (public sphere). Also, there is one respondent stated:

> *Of course, I had a more active life before retirement. I faltered for a while. You falter when you are very active and suddenly stay at home after retirement. You are losing the social circle in which you work. If you create a nice environment for yourself after you retire, you can handle it. After retiring, I felt like I was more confined to the home. (R5)*

Retirement can be compelling in some people's lives because there is a faltering situation between a more active life tempo and the ending of it after retirement. There is also a difference in terms of social interactions. That is, as stated above, there is also a loss in terms of the social circle brought about by the working life and an adaptation process to build a social surrounding again. Moreover, one respondent indicated," *My social level is almost the same after retirement. At that time, we would meet with groups of friends at the weekend. However, after retirement, I felt more at home. When I was at home, every dust in the home disturbed me, so I got a little depressed." (R7)*. As can be seen, being more at home after retirement also can affect their psychological status. In addition, spending more time at home compared to the past can affect the domestic activities of women; for instance, a respondent

state," *My daily life is usually spent doing housework, in the kitchen. I am cooking. But today I went out, for example, they can eat out." (R7).*

After the retirement period, housework can take elderly women more time because of the fact that they are more at home. Therefore, there can be a situation of facing housework more, as it is stated by the respondent (R7). Housework is stated as work that is also done when elderly women are working due to gender roles. That situation also can require them to have an intense tempo in their lives for trying to do both the work at home and the work at the workplace. In addition, about housework, a respondent stated," *I worked until eleven at night, then I came home, and I used to iron the socks, I cooked the next day's food. Now I sit comfortably like this. I lost my husband; loneliness was difficult. However, I also share it." (R4).* Another respondent also stated," *When I was working, I ran to take away the kids to my mother's house, then rushed to go home; I tidied up the home and went to work. It was different, of course. Now I can spare more time for myself, I am more relaxed."* (R28). As it can be seen, women as a "gender role" when they are working, also do the housework, and they stated there is an effort to manage the works both at home and the workplace at the same time. When talking about their daily lives after the retirement transition, they frequently mentioned housework, like cooking.

Moreover, from the respondents' statements, there is a feeling of being more at home after retirement; however, they can maintain their social activities so they do not isolate themselves at their homes. The majority have active social lives also after retirement. In addition, some respondents stated they did not feel in such way as they were more at home after retirement. For instance:

> *I was a social one before I was retired, and I am social still. I am not spending more time in the house. I spend time inside and outside the house; I am not the kind of person who stays home. Right now, we have three meeting days with teachers. We do it outside. I have a friend I love very much; we meet and go outside every day with my friend; we sit somewhere with her and go on tours together. I go to excursions, exhibitions, and fairs. I love theatre. My friend loves movies. We are going there. I also took my students to the cinema while I was working. (R1)*

Another respondent also stated:

> *I do not feel like I am always at home after retirement; I do not stay at home, I was already social, and this did not change after retirement. I prepare my breakfast; I cook it, then I go for a walk, I come from a walk, I take a shower, I read my book as much as I can. We meet with my friends; we go to dinner, our teacher school group is very nice, I see the neighbors, and we have a good relationship with the people in the building. You can think of our building as a single family. (R8)*

As can be seen from the quotations, they have an active social life because they sustain the social life experiences they do in their daily lives. They go to the theatre and meet friends outside, so they do not isolate themselves in the private sphere (at home); instead, they still have a dynamic social life. In addition, in the research, even most respondents stated that they have more time after being retired to do some activities. For instance, a respondent said," *While I was working, I used to have trips, but now I participate in more comfortable trips. My time is wider now, and now I can make trips to places according to my mind." (R8).* Also, another respondent adds similarly," *Now I can spend more time in traveling and seeing different cultures."(R23).* As it can be seen, according to them, after the retirement transition, they have had more spare time, so they said they could travel more. Therefore, it can be said that there is no isolation from the social world after retirement for those elderly women.

Moreover, after being retired, some stated that their social relations with their family members became the same level. However, some of them indicated that their relations have increased after retirement because of their more time for that a respondent stated, "*After retirement, I can spend more time with my family, more time remains." (R16).* Therefore, in their daily lives, their social relations with their families can rise after retirement. However, others were indicated in another way:

> *While I was working, I could do more, but now I just cannot. There is a situation of being tied because, for example, my children go on a trip or they say they need me to care for my grandchild. That is why I dedicate my time to him, but when I was working, I went out every weekend; there was no place we did not see friends, and I was going on tours. There was such a difference. (R6)*

Also, another respondent mentions her grandchildren similarly:

> *Back then, I travel a lot. At that time, I was taking time to travel again; now I have a grandchild who has a special situation; I adjusted the hours to look at him a little at that time. Because her mother works full time, I put him on the service, which takes place in the evening; I can go whenever my grandchild goes. My kids take me out on the weekend. No one could keep me at home if I did not care for my grandchild. Before my grandchild, I was traveling more. I take care of everything in the house and walk around like that. I still continue to be scheduled. I was finishing up before the grandson and went outside, but before retirement, I could go outside much more because I did not care for my grandchild. (R29)*

As it can be seen, at that time, it is stated that before retirement, they can be more socially active, and caring for their grandchildren is indicated as the factor affecting that situation according to them. It is important to note that women at those ages can look after their grandchildren daily. It can be seen from those statements that the situation can be seen the women when they are retired because of their being at home. However, that can limit their social life experiences. In addition, it is also crucial that about social life experiences, one of the respondents stated," *I used to spend more time outside in the past, now I spend more time at home. It is about age or my life. I do not do them now, maybe I have had enough now, I do not know."* (R10). Another respondent also stated," *I do not want to meet up with my friends if I have the opportunity right now; I cannot stand the noise anymore." (R14).* As can be seen, there is a feeling of "it is enough for me" and withdrawing from the active social life. That may be because of an effect of an old age perception. They may, by that perception, have such viewpoints, which is also important.

Furthermore, another point is that some respondents talked about spiritual things in their activities. For instance, one stated," *After I was retired, I started to pray five times a day. I am now able to fulfill my religious obligations. I am reading more books now." (R9).* Another respondent stated," *After retirement, I turned to more spiritual things; I went to courses." (R24)*. In the literature, it is stated according to the theory of gerotranscendence, in old age, there is a disengagement from earthly issues, and there is a shift to transcendental, more spiritual ones in the lives of old people (Tornstam,2005). As can be seen in my research, also in some respondents, there is such an inclination. For instance, one of them also stated, "*My age affects being interested in spiritual things" (R19).* Thus, that statement is also by the theory of gerotranscendence.

Consequently, after the retirement transition, there is a feeling of faltering and a situation of more being at home. However, the majority can still have active social lives, which does not mean they are isolated at home. Therefore, after retirement, there is no withdrawal from the public sphere. Also, it is significant that the ones who actively have social life experiences are the ones with young age identities and those who are associated with having an active social life with a younger age identity.

In the research, the respondents are educated and urban elderly women who have employment experience. They are a peculiar population group in Turkey because of gender-related problems that prevent women's education and employment. Due to the cultural capital gained with education, employment, and economic independence, they can have such active social life experiences in their old age period. In addition, urban facilities and broader social relations, thanks to their education and employment life as friends, also can make their aging experiences socially dynamic. Thus, being an elderly woman who is retired, urban and educated have a significant effect on their aging experiences as liberating them from a passive daily routine to an active social life in the public sphere in the old age period.

4.3.1. The Activities Linked to the Old Age

Because of the fact that the research it is interested in the old age perception and also its potential association with the social life experiences of elderly women of those ages, it can be sound to ask the respondents about the activities they can link to the old age in their minds. By that, it is analyzed whether there is an inclination to have time mostly at home or not. First of all, almost all of the respondents thought that staying active and not being isolated at home are very significant for old ones. Therefore, generally, they associated dynamic social life experiences with being old, so they did not consider a lifestyle in which people (at old ages) go into their shells. A respondent stated," *You should socialize; during this period, I realized that neighbors are essential, reading is very important, that is, one should go out, walk a little, within the possibilities, of course." (R23).* Another respondent stated," *In old age, one will never break away from friends. My classmates and I still meet on the first day of every month; people of those ages should not be separated from their*

relatives. We need to be intertwined with the young and the old, with our neighbor." (R24).

As can be seen, having social relations and maintaining them are significant in the old age period. Therefore, social relations on the outside are considered an activity associated with old age. Also, interactions between old and younger ones are seen as valuable. A respondent also indicated," *People in old age also have friends; they have to meet, so when they meet with friends, it is like therapy. If you shut yourself down completely and isolate yourself, you will age worse." (R29).* Another respondent added:

> *An old aged person never isolated at home! No, what a relationship. Why stay at home? It ruins being at home. Look, I had Corona at first. For example, I would walk very well, my muscles would not hurt, I would climb the wall, and I would do my job, but this two-year pandemic process destroyed me; sitting at home all the time weakened my muscles, limiting my activities, even I could not go out. For example, I went to gymnastics for a long time, traveled a lot, and did many things to keep my body strong. (R15)*

As can be seen, those respondents also mentioned the significance of socializing and not isolating oneself at home in old age. However, they also talked about the negative effect of being only at home, not going out and retiring into one's shell. Also, it can be realized that aging and being old are associated with "ones shutting down of oneself" and "an isolation at home" because she (R29) said, for instance, "If you shut yourself down completely and isolated yourself, you will age worse." Thus, it can be said that in the perception of old age, there can be such an association. Consequently, it can be said that social life experiences outside of the home are considered significant in old age, so it can be said that the perception of being old and having an active social life are seen as going hand in hand. Moreover, another respondent mentioned:

> *I think an old person should travel, enjoy life, read books, and spend time with grandchildren, but unfortunately in our country, they cannot do this much, some people leave their children to the elderly, they are trying to run after the children, they cannot even have spare time for themselves. In other words, let the old be free to do what they want. So I am free. I do not have children, either. (R19)*

She also talked about similar activities; however, she stated that looking after the grandchildren may prevent from them traveling or having other activities for old people. That topic was also stated before by a respondent, "*if I do not look after my grandchildren, I can more go outside, and I do not be at home actually." (R29).* Therefore, looking after the grandchildren can undermine the social life experiences of elderly women at those ages because they cannot go outside of the home quickly. At that point, it is significant that because of gender roles on women in terms of caregiving activity, women at old ages also are exposed to being caregivers, which harms their aging experiences socially. The caregiving role of women as a gender role does not disappear at old ages, and unpaid care work continues to be done by women when they are retired. Thus, the working life that provides women's presence in the public sphere instead of the home as the private sphere is essential for women' moving away from the domestic sphere and, in such a manner, from caregiving roles at home. Working life increases women's ties with the public sphere outside of the home. However, women's retirement begins to reveal their relationship with their " caregivers " roles in the home. The caregiving gender role, serves the patriarchal distinction of the public and private sphere where women are seen as "belong to" the home as private sphere, by increasing women's relation to the home. It has the effect of reducing the life in the public sphere for elderly women who is familiar with being in public due to their working life.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In Turkey, there is a rapid rise in the aging population (Arun, 2018). It is stated that if in a country the old age population ratio is higher than 10%, then it means that the country is an old country (Özkul & Kalaycı, 2015). Soon, Turkey can be named as having a “too old” population because the old population is expected to rise to 12,9% in 2030 (TUİK, 2023). In addition, in Turkey, there is the feminization of elderliness, considering the higher number of elderly women than men (TUİK, 2023).

Aging includes gender-related problems in it. Women have difficulties and inequalities throughout their lives because of patriarchal dominations and control mechanisms. In the old age stage, women continue to have such problems in their lives, and therefore, elderly women experience aging differently than elderly men. Because of gender problems, women cannot reach education and employment opportunities which affects their social life outside of the home in the old age stage. In addition, with the commodification of the woman's body towards “young and beautiful,” the negation made on the elderly woman's body complicates the aging process of women. In addition to “being women,” women are also exposed to marginalization in society because of their old status, and that can affect their women’s public use in society in old age. Nevertheless, studies about women’s aging in Turkey are inadequate within the gender framework. Regarding that, studying women’s aging experience is an important topic.

The thesis researches the perceptions of age and aging of urban professional women after retirement. Morgan and Kunkel (2007) state, “Age is significant primarily because of the social meanings, structures, and processes attached to it.” (p. 4). In the social setting, there are social meanings and perceptions attributed to age and aging, which can affect the life routine. Aging can be perceived as a decline, and there can be an inclination to withdrawal from the public sphere as a social life outside. For instance, while some elderly women in Turkey can have an active social life, others have more time at their home, and therefore, there can be differences in terms of

being in the public sphere, outside of the home, and in the private sphere, as home, in the society.

Aging can affect withdrawal from the public to the private sphere as home. A gendered perspective is significant when studying aging because it contains gender-based issues in it. Aging can be used as a controlling mechanism for women by negative images of elderly woman's bodies. In addition, elderliness also can affect the public/private sphere habits of elderly women. In the thesis, how respondents feel about their age and aging processes and how they view elderliness are studied. The use of the public sphere by elderly women is analyzed by considering the retirement transition. Such an analysis can give insights into women's relationship with the public and how they experience it in their old age. Making an analysis considering retirement is important since working life is effective on women's presence in the public sphere, and after retirement, there can be a risk of reducing that situation. It is also important to conduct such research because aging can be stated as a reason for being more at home, and therefore, that can serve to restrict of women to the domestic sphere. Thus, in the research, it has been analyzed the gender-based public/ private sphere distinction for elderly women within the frame of aging.

The thesis is analyzed under three headings. Respondents' perceptions about their chronological ages are researched in the first part. In that part, whether they see those ages as old or not is figured out. In the second part, respondents' perception of elderliness is researched. In that part, their approach and comprehension of elderliness are investigated. Finally, in the third heading, respondents' social life experiences are analyzed to see their position in the public and private sphere distinction, which has a gender-based structure.

In the thesis, the public sphere is discussed as an area comprising the social life experiences of elderly women outside of the home as, contrary to the private sphere as the home contains domestic activities. The public sphere is a "social product "in which there is domination, control, and power (Lefebvre, 1991). It has a gendered structure, and it is an active place equipped with its social codes (Yılmaz, 2020). Between the public sphere and gender relations, there is a significant relation to analyzing. Whereas the public sphere is seen as a place where men are dominant and

belong, the private sphere is considered a women's place. The public/private sphere distinction is effective for women in all age groups; therefore, elderly women also affect the social construction of social spaces. From this point of view, by using a gendered framework, elderly women's use of the public sphere is discussed in the thesis.

Habermas (2010) considers that publicness can be only secured when economic and social conditions serve the same possibilities for all in society. The women who cannot have economic power are pushed from the public sphere, and because there is patriarchal domination in public, women get stuck in the private sphere (Çiçekli, 2019). For women, to have economic independence is significant as a way to escape from the private sphere, which is a place where women are seen as "belong to." Even if women with education opportunities started to take part in employment, because of gender inequalities, the rate of education and employment women have is not adequate levels (TUİK, 2023). It is seen that while the labor force participation rate was 72.5% for men, it was 36.1% for women in last statistics (TUİK, 2023).

Due to the last statistics also in all education levels, elderly women are behind elderly men in Turkey (TUİK, 2023). For instance, while the rate of elderly women having a higher education is 4,3%, that proportion is 12,5% for elderly men in Turkey (TUİK, 2023). In parallel, elderly women who had employment opportunities are also at low levels in Turkey. Because of the fact that "home" as the private sphere is seen as a women's place for her performing housework and caring for "duties," education and employment are also considered as not primary for women. Thus, since women are prepared for the "home" as a private sphere, elderly women who are educated and have employment are rare in Turkey.

Regarding the importance of education and employment for participating in the public sphere, it is the case that not having those opportunities sharpens the discrimination of public/private for elderly women. Women, who are restricted and identified to the home by the role of wife, mother, or responsible for housework, can escape from that situation to some extent through education and employment opportunities. In the research I have done, some findings support that situation. The respondents are a peculiar group of people in Turkey because of the fact that they are

educated, urban retired women having a profession. When it is analyzed the social life routine outside of their home as private sphere, it can be indicated that they have generally active social life experiences in their lives. Thus, those women use the public sphere actively so they are not restricted by their homes in society.

Thanks to the education and, as a result of this, the employment possibilities the respondents have had in their life course, they take place in the public. Education achievement paves the way for attaining the working life, and thus, no path is planned for on behalf of restriction with "the home." During the time the respondents were in working life, they were in public, contrary to the private sphere, and it is also understood in their statements that they also had a social life outside of their homes, for instance, with their friends from work or school life. Thus, because of the fact that those women are already acquainted with spending time in public by working life or social life activities, the same pattern of use of the public sphere after retirement in their lives can be seen due to the findings of the research.

Liberal feminism emphasizes equality of educational opportunities between men and women, and it is thought that as long as the opportunities are provided, it will be easier for women to reach their freedom (Çiçekli, 2019). Thus, having education opportunities can make the woman active towards the public/private distinction in life. Through education, women can have cultural capital and contribute to transforming that distinction in society by freeing themselves from their homes as the private sphere. That can make women question the patriarchal order and the roles that are imposed upon women in society and eases the transition from the private to the public sphere (Donovan, 2001). In the research, women frequently mentioned social life activities in public throughout the interviews, so it can be seen that spending time in public has an important place in their lives. In their aging perspective, that is also significant for them. Therefore, they were in public, and they are also in public now. In those women's life, there is not an orientation towards home as a private area at those ages and also at their elderliness perceptions. On the contrary, the respondents think that socialization in public and not isolating themselves at home is significant for them. Thus, freedom from private to public throughout their lives can be seen thanks to their profession and the cultural capital

they have. As it is in Habermas's (2010) statement, when there are economic and social possibilities, then that can affect the usage of the public in the social setting and make a difference in the patriarchal dominance in the public.

Because of the fact that by marriage, women are exploited with the "identified" gendered roles as mother and wife, they are kept away from the public, defined as the "place of men." Even if for women, there is a passing to the public by working life because traditional gendered roles on women at home may not totally free them from the domestic sphere. Because of housework which is expected to be done by women, although they have professions outside of the home, can in a way attach the women to the home as contrary to men who do not have such a tie and are already in public. Thus, that situation can damage the women's transition process from private to public. When it is analyzed the respondents' statements, it is seen that the housework is stated as performed by them both before and after retirement. There is a try for managing both housework at home and working life at public. Thus, the domestic responsibilities for women do not disappear for women even if they can pass the gendered private/public distinction on behalf of the public, and those "responsibilities" can blur the boundary between private and public for women. Therefore, the domestic role of women that links them to the private sphere as the home is still present. In addition, it is seen that the respondents frequently stated those domestic "responsibilities" after the retirement transition. That is, due to the fact that they have more at home after retirement, housework duty, as a gendered role, is done by those elderly women even if they have a social life in public. It is seen that domestic work takes the respondents more time after retirement because of being more at home.

It is the case that women's relation with housework in the private sphere as a gender role increases when those women leave from working life in public. Therefore, ceasing of employment can assist the gendered distinction of public/private on behalf of private as home. However, it is also a significant point that those women do not restrict themselves to their homes; they have an active social life, so their public use does not decrease after retirement. That can also be explained by the respondents' accustomedness to being in the public sphere. That is, before retirement, they also

had a life in public thanks to their working life, and in such a way, they were actively in public. Therefore, after they retired, there was no return to home supporting the gendered distinction between public and private. Because of the fact that those retired urban women have been able to pass to the public in their lives, they do not have unfamiliarity with the outside of their homes. Therefore, while some other women at those ages can spend time mostly at home, stating that elderliness is the reason, those women do not have such a tendency and continue their social presence in public also at those ages.

Furthermore, as related to the role of marriage as the supporting character for viewing women as belonging to the domestic sphere by the role of wife or mother ascribed to women, some of the respondents' properties are significant to analyze. That is to say, it is seen that some of them are single women, so they were not married in their lives. It is important in terms of the exploitation of women through the roles of mother or wife at home. By those roles, women are seen as belonging to the domestic sphere, not the public, which serves the male dominance outside of the home as public. Those women's being single can show that they do not have such relation to those roles brought about by marriage in their lives. Therefore, that can ease to break the bond with the domestic space and take part and have a life in public throughout their lives and consequently in their aging periods. Moreover, also some of the respondents are widows and divorced women. That also means those women do not have a marriage tie, which raises the women's relation to the home. Therefore, those women define themselves as "free" because they do not feel a role that attaches them to the home. They do not have the gender-based role as responsible for housework in the domestic sphere, and they have a social life outside of the home liberally.

Unpaid care work, as a gender role, restricts women to domestic space as home. The caregiving role is seen as taken for granted by women in society, and therefore, women are expected to perform that activity at all periods of their lives, including the old age period. That is, women in their old age, when they are grandmothers, they care for their grandchildren due to the caregiver role of women. In the research, it is seen that some respondents have unpaid care work for their grandchildren after the

retirement transition because of their being at home. It is significant that even if those respondents maintain their social life activities in public after retirement, unpaid care work is stated as a factor that can reduce the social life activities of those women outside of the home after retirement. Hence, it is important that by turning to the private sphere by retirement, the gendered affinity of women to the home can start to push women into the boundaries of home. At that point, retirement is an important point in women's lives in terms of ceasing working life as a tie to the public for women.

It is significant that familialism (or familism) is effective in the experience of women with the public in society. Familism is an ideology that supports a welfare system in which the care of the members of a family is supposed to be provided by family members instead of the government (Ochiai, 2014). In Turkey, there is a transition to a supported familial form in which financial measures are given for supporting the family (Aybars, Beşpınar & Kalaycıoğlu, 2018). Thus, the family is regarded as a responsible caregiver to its members. It is important that by family, actually, women are referred to as caregivers in the family due to the gender role ascribed to them in society. In Turkey, that familialistic understanding makes it difficult for women and, therefore, elderly women's usage of public.

Because of the fact that women at old ages are desired to be caregivers, that supports their connection to the domestic sphere as home. Also, in the research, it is the case that not only for grandchildren but also for elders, the caregiving activity is performed by women at old ages. Therefore, unpaid care work as a gender role is so adhered to by women that even at old ages, it is expected to be performed by them as an activity that negatively affects the outside-of-home activities of elderly women in public. Even if some of the respondents, as grandmother looking after grandchildren, have a social life in public space, the unpaid care work at home increase their connection to the home and supports for the time elderly women spend time at domestic space instead of in public. Thus, even if there are economic and social possibilities women have as education and working life, which further the public experiences of women instead of women being confined to the home, gender roles can decrease the time spent in the public sphere. The familialistic policies are,

therefore, harmful in terms of consolidating women's use of private space in the patriarchal private/ public sphere distinction.

Because of the fact that they are exposed to the distinction between the private and public sphere, which is constructed socially on gender inequalities towards regarding public as men's and private as women's place, women in all their stages of the life course are narrowed by the boundaries of their home. When there is no way to break that distinction as education, employment, or cultural capital, it can be hard to mix the social life outside of the home. Thus, in their old age period, the perception of elderliness can also serve as a supporter for staying within the limit of the domestic sphere by a kind of understanding towards elderliness as senility. On the other hand, when women have a routine in public both through their working life and social life, as is seen in the respondents of the research, then, in old age, there is also maintenance of that social routine for the public. Moreover, the use of public can be more after retirement in old age due to their having more time.

In society, women's public sphere experience has not been an easy relation because of gender norms towards women's relation to the public. From past to present, not men's but women's physical outlook is considered as an important factor in society for how women "should" be seen in the public places in which they are regarded as not inherently belong to. In the research, it is seen that the respondents mention some "norms" in the society towards the clothing style of an elderly woman. That is, some "appropriate" dress styles are indicated for elderly women, and wearing short dresses are not indicated as "appropriate" for a woman of those older age in public. It is also mentioned about a kind of condemnation if wearing such a way by the society. Thus, that situation can confirm that women are questioned in terms of physical appearance in public in accordance with gender norms. That situation continues in old ages for women at that time by combining and putting forward the factor of age. Therefore, aging can be used to serve the tense relationship of women in public spaces in society. Elderliness can be another challenge besides being a woman in the society outside of the domestic sphere. In this manner, a combination of gendered and ageist manners towards women can be seen.

Everything related to the body bears the stamp of gender (Çakır, 2020). The body is seen as the place where social control is applied concretely (User, 2010). The value given to the aging signs on the woman's body in society is an example of that control. The woman's body always has been a focus in public, and defining women over the body is also seen in the old age period. That is, whereas women are valued over their bodies, men are perceived by the achievements and prestige they gain in society in the aging stage (Sontag, 1978). Thus, in old age, women can be dissatisfied with their physical appearance because of the pressure on them over the body. In the research, even if it is not mentioned mostly, there is also that kind of displeasure because of aging symptoms seen in the mirror. Therefore, aging symptoms such as wrinkles or gray hair can be a focus in elderliness, while men do not have such concerns at all because they are not judged by their bodies.

In addition, there is also an effort to reduce the aging symptoms on the woman's body through cosmetic operations in old age due to the pressure women have felt throughout their life through their body. In consumer society, problematic body images are produced as related to a woman's body; then the commodities that overcome that situation are introduced (Orbach, 1993). Therefore, there are such images related to aging in women's bodies, and they are tried to be “fixed” by using the services capitalism serves as fashion or cosmetic operations on women's bodies. There is a completion of the industry's profit chains through the system's codes which reduce women to "having a beautiful body" (Topateş, 2015).

Patriarchal capitalism serves for women's body’s commodification, and the fashion and cosmetic interventions restrict women's bodies at the old age period to not be seen as elderly and looking beautiful and young. Respondents mention their clothes as an example that they are not elderly women; therefore, that shows the effect of consumption culture on the female body over aging. The patriarchal capitalist system at that time pumps the clothing styles which “look young,” and in such a way as related to aging, women's body commodification is maintained in public. As another way of controlling a woman's body as related to aging, cosmetic operations are mentioned by respondents as a negative and unwelcome situation for women to have aesthetic interventions for signs of aging. That can be analyzed from two sides. That

can also be analyzed as a reflection of controlling mechanisms towards a woman's body in public. That is to say, throughout their lives and also at old ages, women are restricted and dominated over their bodies, and their appearances outside of the domestic space are exposed to judgments in terms of how the woman's body should look. Thus, criticizing and disapproving of women's cosmetic operations can be seen as a result of that domination of the woman's body in society. Secondly, that can be seen as a liberation and resistance movement towards the domination of women's bodies which is a focus of the capitalist consumerist market.

According to the respondents' statements, there is a tendency towards feeling younger than the chronological age. In addition, respondents do not define themselves as elderly. The fact that the research is done with urban elderly women who are both educated and have had an employment life is significant for their having younger age identities in their old age period. Because of being able to have education and employment that, unfortunately, many women in Turkey could not have, they can have financial opportunities, and they do not have low socioeconomic levels. Thus, that can make their aging experiences different. That is, they do not feel as "weary of life" because they do not live in harsh conditions throughout their life span and do not work in hard conditions because of the poor financial and living conditions, which can have an effect on feeling younger or older. Therefore, with the effect of those factors, they may not feel older. The respondents' social network is also rich due to their education and employment life as friends from schools or work, making their aging experience different. That is to say, respondents state that social relations as a factor affecting feeling young. Therefore, because of being able to have such social relations can make those women perceive old age differently.

The sympathy towards youthfulness and unwillingness for elderliness can exemplify the problematic image of elderliness which is produced in the consumer society because there is an "ideal" woman body defined, and that body is a young, beautiful woman body. Thus, over the woman's body, youthfulness is promoted as a controlling mechanism on the woman's body. In such a way, the elderly woman profile is avoided and not preferred. It can be that is why respondents want to define themselves as young and not as elderly women. They take a position far from

describing themselves as old and clearly separate the definition of elderly from themselves. Hence, there is an obvious orientation in the direction of youth which is a domination mechanism on a woman's body over its outlook.

Respondents' tendency towards youthfulness and unwillingness about elderliness can be an example of a social mask about aging. That is to say, as related to aging, a social mask can be used for a youthful description to be protected from defining as elderly, which has a negative meaning in society (Rapoliene, 2015). Therefore, it may be the case that respondents as women may prefer to define themselves as young due to the fact that they can save themselves from the negative descriptions of an elderly woman's image in society. The negative image of aging, as an extent of controlling dominance on a woman's body, can be tried to be removed by respondents by identifying themselves with not elderliness but youthfulness. It can be a move done to avoid gendered ageist labeling in public.

As related to the perception of elderliness of respondents, it is seen that aging evokes negativities. That is, respondents connect elderliness with decline, downfall, and there is a fear of aging. That situation can be due to the negation of aging in women. Because of the fact that aging is perceived as a kind of "deterioration" of a woman's body, elderliness for women can be suffering. Thus, women in old age can feel disturbed by the word "aging". Generally, aging is not thought of as implying "respect" for the respondents. Because of the fact that elderliness brings about prestige and gain for men, and not for women, the respondents did not perceive aging with that kind of positive implications. Thus, the differentiation between the implications of elderliness on women and men can be realized from the duality of aging connotations.

There is a double jeopardy thesis in social gerontology stating the double discrimination women are exposed to in terms of both age and gender dimension, and that approach indicates that inequity is generated over each factor, namely gender and age (Pamuk, 2018). The effect of old age on women's public life, which is one of the reasons for this study, is valuable in this respect. The woman, who is excluded from the public sphere due to being a woman, may face the danger of being stuck in the domestic space in her old age with the label of being old. Therefore, the

combination of the two types of discrimination poses a danger in terms of affecting the public sphere activities of women in their old age. By aging, there can be a withdrawal from the public in society through domestic space as home.

However, I argue that stating aging as a factor affecting social life activity outside of the home is actually for women a continuation of gender inequality regarding the use of the public and private spheres in society. That is, in the research, some respondents mention condemnation by others in society related to an elderly woman's outside activities in public due to the fact that she is a woman. It is seen that when elderliness comes together with being male, there is not such a reaction; however, if there is an elderly woman, then elderliness can be shown as a reason with gender factors as being women. Therefore, the expression of "a woman at such an old age" towards the social life experiences of elderly women as public use is asserted in society with the meaning of disapprobation. Therefore, aging is used as a dimension of gender problem about women's usage of public and private spaces in society. Women, who are already tried to be restricted within the limits of the domestic space as their home, at that time, in the name of "elderliness," are tried to be kept away from the public experience. Hence, aging does not have the same implications for women and men in society. In their old age period, women are exposed to discrimination through aging towards their public use, and the synthesis of age and gender inequalities makes women's elderliness experience more painful.

Furthermore, for respondents, elderly women should have an active social life, and they should not isolate themselves at home. Therefore, there is a consideration towards having an active social life outside of the home in old age period for women. That shows the maintenance of public use in old age. Respondents have such a view because they are already accustomed to use the public where they have social experiences. Thus, they see it as important to continue that activity in elderliness. As it can be seen, there is also maintenance of liberation from the domestic sphere as home in old age. While elderliness is used to limit women to the private sphere as home, it is not perceived by the respondents in this way. Because of the fact that they are urban retired women who are already using the public due to their education and working life, they do not have such an understanding related to aging.

Moreover, it is seen that some of the respondents return and continue to work, for instance, by helping students in their lessons or helping their children at their shops after retirement. That is an effort to maintain the social role related to their working life, and in such a way, they try to protect their young age identities, which can be shaped in accordance with the youth that is constituted by working. In addition, continuing work is an activity that eases their presence in the public space and prevents their isolation in their homes as private spaces. Because they already have previous experience of using the public as outside of the home thanks to working life outside, the preference to continue working is seen also after the retirement transition.

The public sphere is significant for total freedom, and it is a necessity. The private sphere experiences mean a lack of publicity, and it is a kind of deprivation (Alkan, 2000). The private and public distinction equals to a gender-based division (Alkan, 2000). Women throughout their lives experience a tense relationship with public use because the public experience is socially constructed as containing gender inequalities for women. It is seen as a dominant area of men in society. Therefore, women can be deprived of public experiences.

All in all, even if there are gender-based ageist attitudes towards women's use of public, it is seen that having education and working life pave the way for women' freeing themselves from the domestic sphere and being in public. When the relations of women to the public sphere surrounded by gender-based inequalities are examined in their old age stage, it is seen because respondents are urban women having education and employment; they continue to have public experiences easily after retirement. Retirement did not stop their public activities because of their public social routine gained by them before retirement. It is important that for women's usage of the public, aging actually can include a risk because of perceiving it as a slowing down effect on the life rhythm. Therefore, analyzing the already problematic relationship of women to public space in old age is significant. It is seen that urban retired women do not perceive and state aging as a factor preventing them from public life experiences. Because of the fact that they have been accustomed to having social life experiences outside of the home, they perceive the old age only as a

continuation of their usual life routines. Thus, perceptively, aging does not have a slowing effect on those women.

The important point here is that old age does not strengthen the relationship these women have with the home. Aging could increase women's use of the private sphere as home when there is already a habit of being at the boundaries of home instead of being in public. Aging can be asserted as a reason that serves for gender-based inequality between public and private usage of space for women. That is, women, who have tried to be isolated from the public sphere in a gendered way throughout their lives, are restricted to their homes in old age by stating elderliness as a reason. However, in the research, it is seen that aging cannot have such an effect on women's experiences in public because of the fact that they have already left the boundaries of the private sphere at home and have a life in the public sphere before retirement. Even if it is felt that there are signs of gender-based control mechanisms on woman's appearance as the clothing style continued at that time by using elderliness as a reason in public, urban retired women have succeeded in not being limited by the home. Hence, the research exemplifies Habermas's view that publicity can gain through economic and social possibilities. It is important that even if there is still a continuation of gender roles related to the domestic sphere as doing housework or caring in the respondents' daily routine, those women can liberate themselves from domestic space, and aging is not perceived as a factor that slows down and restricts them at home thanks to the habit of public use before retirement.

Therefore, the familiarity of taking part in public before retirement is very significant in the old age period for women's socialization outside of their homes. The familiarity factor is so effective that thanks to it, even after retirement, which carries the risk of withdrawal from public life, women have a social life in public. Old age is seen as a period where respondents can travel and socialize as they wish after retirement. The old age of the respondents does not mean "being old," so there is not slowing down of the life rhythm and isolation from the social life in the public sphere due to elderliness. Instead, their old ages are for them a chance to live freely after retirement. The period after retirement is a "third age" stage in which they have leisure activities and more time (Laslett, 1989). As it is stated by Featherstone and

Hepworth (1991) also in the literature, respondents do not belong to the traditional stages of life. They mostly feel they belong to the middle age instead of the old age range. Thus, their age range can be defined as a “third age” and it refers to the social life outside of domestic sphere (home) after retirement.

Old ages are not a period that strengthens women's relationship with the home after retirement; on the contrary, it can be said that it is a period that leads women to socialize outside of the home. It can be said that if those women have a routine that refers a belonging and accustomedness to the domestic sphere as home throughout their lives, then it can be the case that old age and aging can be easily stated as a reason and excuse to be more at home instead of the public sphere. Aging and old age can be asserted as a factor that increases women’s relation to the private sphere as home, and therefore it can serve the gendered distinction of the public and private sphere. However, this study shows that old ages are not perceived within such a frame by elderly urban women who are educated and retired with the effect of the life routine they have had. Therefore, old ages for those women are the period that is in favor of the public use of women.

Therefore, the social routine respondents are accustomed to has such importance that it can completely affect the relationship they establish between old age, retirement, and social life in public. Because of the use of public habit, there is seen as a desire for the maintenance of public use. The retirement and old age stage are actually seen as leisure time in which many social life activities like traveling or meeting with friends can be made real. Thus, the retirement transition is perceived as the opposite of the time for going home. Even there is a feeling of alienation at home for respondents after the retirement transition. They felt that way because those women are accustomed to being in public as out of their homes. Therefore, there is an elderly woman profile who feels belonging to the public sphere more than home.

Even if Turkey is an old country, aging is generally studied within the frame of health or life quality, and it is not analyzed in all its aspects (Boz & Ozsari, 2020; Çam et al., 2021; Köse, 2021; Şahin et al., 2019; Top et al., 2012; Tümer et al., 2022). That is, how elderliness is perceived or perceptions towards old age actually remain missing. Moreover, it is also significant that in Turkey, aging is not studied

adequately from a gendered perspective, although there is the feminization of the old population. This thesis is important because, first of all, the respondents are a peculiar group in Turkey. That is, being an elderly urban woman who is educated and retired is a rare situation when it is considered the gender-based issues on education or employment for women in society. Second, in the thesis, respondents' perceptions towards age and aging are studied, and it is important to contribute to the aging topic in Turkey as an old country. Third, the thesis is significant because it analyzes women's public space experiences within the scope of elderliness. Thus, the thesis combines elderliness and women's use of the public sphere by making an analysis of the gender perspective, which is a significant contribution to literature for Turkey.

For future research, there can be making an analysis of elderly women who cannot have an education and working life so that the topic can be analyzed deeper and in all its bearings. By doing such an analysis, there can be a more comprehensive analysis of the perception of age and aging for elderly women. In addition, with such research, the gender-based distinction of private and public sphere usage can be seen more clearly because, at that time, the activities outside of the home can be analyzed for elderly housewife women who do not have an employment life. That can support a gendered analysis about aging and the public experiences of women because having education and working life positively affect the usage of the public sphere.

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APPENDICES

A. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

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ORTA DOĞU TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSI

20 HAZİRAN 2022

Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Prof.Dr. Ayça ERGUN ÖZBOLAT

Danışmanlığını yürüttüğünüz Selin Yünter GÖRÜCÜ'nün "Yaş kimliğinin sosyal yaşam deneyimine etkileri" başlıklı araştırması İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülerek gerekli onay **0374-ODTUİAEK-2022** protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Bilgilerinize saygılarımla sunarım.

Prof. Dr. Mine MISIRLISOY
Başkan

Doç. Dr. İ.Semih AKÇOMAK
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B. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Yaş ve yaşlanma öznel görüşler içerir ve bu çerçevede değerlendirilmesi gerekir. Bireylerin içinde yaşadığı toplum, yaşa ve yaşlanmaya anlamlar yükleyebilmekte ve böylelikle konu nesnel olmanın dışına çıkabilmektedir. Yaş ve yaşlanma bağlamında toplum, bireylere bazı roller, "uygun" davranışlar atayabilir. Örneğin, bir birey kronolojik bir yaşa geldiğinde, o yaş onun sosyal yaşamına bazı roller, davranışlar yükleyebilmektedir. Bireylerin zihninde sübjektif olarak algılanan yaşlar ve yaşlanma algısı olabilir. Örneğin 65 yaş yaşlılık olarak görülmeyebilir ama bir başkası bunu yaşlılık olarak algılayabilir. Ayrıca yaşlanma düşüncesiyle bazıları toplumun kendisine biçtiği ve "uygun" gördüğü role doğru davranabilmektedir.

Türkiye hızlı yaşlanan bir ülkedir bu nedenle de yaşlanmaya yönelik yapılacak çalışmalar önem taşımaktadır fakat bu yönde eksiklikler görünmektedir ve yaş, çalışmalarda bir değişken olarak yer almaktadır (Arun, 2018). Ancak, yaş sübjektif ve bu yönüyle de karmaşık bir kategori olduğu için araştırmalarda sadece bir değişken olarak düşünülmemelidir. Ayrıca Türkiye'deki hızlı yaşlanma belirgin bir gerçek olduğundan, yaşlılığın bireyler tarafından nasıl algılandığı ve toplumda nasıl inşa edildiğinin araştırılması önem arz etmektedir. Türkiye'de yaşlılık ile ilgili çalışmalara baktığımda Türkiye'de insanların yaş kimliği (bireylerin yaş ve yaşlanma süreçlerine yönelik içsel sübjektif algıları) ile ilgili çok fazla çalışma görülmemektedir. Genel olarak yaşlanmayı daha çok yaşam kalitesi ve sağlık açısından ele alan araştırmalar bulunmaktadır (Boz & Ozsari, 2020; Çam vd. 2021; Köse, 2021; Şahin vd. 2019; Top vd. 2012; Tümer vd. 2022). Ancak, yaşı ve yaşlanmayı sosyolojik bir bakış açısıyla ele almak önemli bir meseledir çünkü kişinin kendi yaşı ve yaşlanması ile ilgili farklı sübjektif algıları ve sosyal olarak inşa edilmiş çağrışımları olabilir.

Örneğin, bir yaşa ve yaşlılığa yönelik sosyal olarak inşa edilmiş roller, tutumlar ve davranışlar olabilmektedir. Bir yaş, bir toplumdaki tüm insanlar için aynı algı ve imalara sahip olmayabilir ve aynı kronolojik yaşta tüm insanlar aynı hissetmeyebilir. Toplumun da bir yaş ve yaş evresi (yaşlılık) ile ilgili ve insanların bir yaş durumu

hakkındaki algılarını etkileme ve şekillendirme potansiyeline sahip bazı beklentileri olabilir ve bu nedenle bireyler de buna göre düşünebilir ve hareket edebilir. Bu nedenle Türkiye gibi hızlı yaşlanan bir ülkede bireylerin yaş ve yaşlılık kavramsallaştırmalarını incelemek anlamlıdır. Ayrıca, yaşlılık toplumsal cinsiyete dayanan bir konudur. Kadınlar hayatlarının her döneminde toplumsal cinsiyet kaynaklı tahakkümler, güç ilişkileri ve eşitsizlikler nedeniyle zorluklara maruz kalmaktadır. Yaşlılık aşamasında, yaşlı kadınlar yaşlı erkeklerden farklı bir yaşlanma deneyimine sahiptir. Türkiye'de yaşlı kadın sayısının yaşlı erkeklere göre daha fazla olması nedeniyle yaşlılığın feminizasyonu söz konusudur (TUİK, 2023). Türkiye'de yaşlı bir kadın olmak, toplumsal cinsiyete bağlı sorunlar nedeniyle analiz edilmesi gereken konuların başında gelmektedir.

Türkiye'de bazı yaşlı kadınların aktif bir sosyal hayatı varken bazılarının olmadığı ve bu bireylerin yaşamlarında kamusal hayattan ev gibi daha özel bir alana çekilmesi yönünde bir eğilim olabileceği izlenimi doğrultusunda bu çalışmada bu konu araştırılmak istenmiştir ve bu durumun bazı yaşlanma ve yaşlılık algılarıyla ilgili olabileceği öngörülmüştür. Başka bir deyişle, bazı yaşlılar, artık "belli bir yaşa" geldiğini ve yaşlandığını düşünebilir ve bu nedenle dışarıda aktif bir sosyal yaşam yerine evde daha fazla zaman geçirmeye başlayabilir. Dolayısıyla yaşlanma ile ilgili toplumsal olarak inşa edilmiş anlamlar nedeniyle bazıları böyle bir algıya sahip olabilir ve buna göre hareket edebilir.

Buradan hareketle bu tezde araştırma sorusu "Yaş ve yaşlılık algıları Ankara'daki eğitimli emekli ve kentli yaşlı kadınların sosyal yaşam deneyimlerini nasıl etkileyebilir?" şeklinde oluşturulmuştur ve böylelikle aralarında bir ilişki olup olamayacağını ve varsa, bu ilişkinin nasıl olabileceği görülmek istenmiştir. Çalışmanın amacı doğrultusunda nitel bir araştırma yapılmıştır. Araştırma konusu analiz edilecek bireylerin öznel bakış açıları ve algılarıyla ilgili olduğu için ve nitel araştırma, belirli bir grup bireyin değerleri, sosyal bağlamları ve davranışları hakkında özellikli veri toplamanın önemli bir yolu olduğundan, böyle bir araştırma yapmanın çalışma için uygun olduğu düşünülmüştür. Çalışmada yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşmelerden oluşan nitel bir araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Nitel araştırmaların yaygın bir yöntemi olan derinlemesine görüşme yöntemi, araştırma

konusuyla ilgili olarak yanıtlayıcının bakış açısı hakkında yoğun bir resim sunabilmesi açısından kullanılmak istenmiştir. Çalışmada yaşları 64-75 arasında değişen 29 emekli kentli ve eğitimli kadınla derinlemesine görüşme yapılmıştır. Toplumsal cinsiyetin kadın yaşlılık deneyimini farklı kılması nedeniyle araştırma örneklemi oluşturulurken 64-75 yaş arası kadınlar seçilmiştir. Yaşı çok ileri olan bireylerin sağlık sorunları daha fazla olabileceği ve bu durum onların aktif bir sosyal hayata sahip olmalarını baştan engelleyebileceği için bu yaş grubundaki kadınlar araştırma örneklemine dâhil edilmemiştir. Katılımcıların Covid-19 pandemisine karşı hassas bir grup olması nedeniyle, ilk etapta hepsinin yüz yüze görüşmeler yaparak araştırmaya katılmak istememesinden endişe duyulmuştur. Ancak, pandeminin hafiflemesi sayesinde, katılımcılarla yüz yüze derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirilebilmiştir.

Katılımcılardan bazıları yüksek lisans tezinin ne olduğuna dair bilgi sahibi olduğu için araştırmaya daha rahat katıldılar. Ayrıca, bu tür konuların kendilerine sorulmasından hoşlanmayabilecekleri için, katılımcılara yaşlanma, yaşlılık hakkındaki görüşleri sorulduğunda bazı zorluklar hissedilmiştir. Bu nedenle bireylerin yaşlı olduğuna dair ima içeren şekilde sorular sormaktan kaçınılmıştır. Bu nedenle araştırma sürecinin her anında bu hususa çok dikkat edilmiştir.

Katılımcıların bir bölümü görüşmeler esnasında şahsımı okul ödevini yapan bir öğrenci olarak gördü. Bu nedenle içtenlikle yardımcı olma noktasında gayret gösterdiler. Bu durum, kendimi 'içeriden biri' olarak hissetmemi sağladı. Bir araştırmada araştırmacı ve yanıtlayıcı ilişkisinde mesleki durum ve yaş önemli faktörler arasında yer aldığından (Ergun & Erdemir, 2010), bir öğrenci olarak görülmemin araştırma sürecinde olumlu rol oynadığını düşünüyorum. Ayrıca önemli bir üniversite olan ODTÜ'de öğrenci olmam ve diğer görüşmeci adaylarına ODTÜ öğrencisi olarak tanıtılmam da katılımcılarla aramdaki ilişkiyi olumlu yönde etkiledi ve araştırmama katılmak istediler. Öte yandan, yaşımın beni biraz grubun dışındaki kimse pozisyonunda bıraktığını hissettiğim zamanlar oldu çünkü bazen görüşmeler esnasında "yaşıma gelince ne demek istediğimi anlayacaksın evladım" gibi cümleler duydum.

Katılımcılarla derinlemesine görüşmeler yaparken, cevapları dikkatlice ve tarafsız bir şekilde dinlenmiştir. Çalışmada güvenilir bir sonuç elde etmek için katılımcıların görüşlerini etkileyebilecek yönlendirici sorular sormaktan kaçınılmıştır. Ayrıca, katılımcılarla belirli bir mesafe de korumaya çalışılmıştır. Görüşmeleri yapmaya başlamadan önce katılımcılara araştırma ve sorulacak sorular hakkında tekrar bilgi verilmiş ve onlara bilgilerinin gizli tutulacağının bilgisi verilmiştir. Buna uygun olarak, her bir katılımcı için tezde rakam ve sayılardan oluşan (R1, R2 gibi) bir kod verilmiştir.

Görüşmelerin hepsi Ankara'da gerçekleştirilmiştir.. Araştırmada amaçlı örneklemenin bir türü olan kartopu örneklemesi kullanılmıştır. Bunu kullanarak, daha önce görüşme yapılan katılımcılar sayesinde başka olası yanıtlayıcılar bulunabilmiştir. Bu kişilerin referans olmasıyla diğer katılımcıların bulunmasına bu şekilde yardımcı olundu. Bu sayede başkalarının da güvenini kazanıp görüşmelerin daha rahat gerçekleştirilebilme imkânı elde edilmiştir.

Konu hakkında araştırma yapmak için tez konusu alt konulara ayrılmıştır. Öncelikle yaşlı kadınların yaşları ve yaşlanma süreçleri hakkında fikir sahibi olabilmek için yaş kimlikleri incelenmiştir. İkinci olarak yaşlılık algısı üzerine bir analiz yapmak istenmiştir. Yaşlı kadınların zihinlerinde 'yaşlılığı' nasıl algıladıkları görülmek istenmiştir. Bunu görebilmek için yaşlı olmayı nasıl tanımladıkları ve yaşlıların yaşam biçimleri hakkında ne düşündüklerini araştırmak, varsa yaşlılarla ilgili algılarına göre toplumda kabul gören davranışların neler olabileceğini araştırmak planlanmıştır. Son olarak, bir başka alt konu olarak, kamusal/özel alandaki durumlarını anlamak için sosyal yaşam deneyimleri incelenmek istenmiştir. Başka bir deyişle, yaş ve yaşlılık algıları ile sosyal hayatları hakkında bir analiz yapabilmek için evlerinde (özel alanda) ve kamusal alanda geçirdikleri vakte bakmak için aktif bir sosyal hayatları olup olmadığı anlaşılmak istenmiştir. Bu konuda sosyal hayatta yaptıkları ve yapmadıkları yaşam pratiklerini araştırmak ve ayrıca yaşlanma ya da yaşla ilgili inşa edilmiş fikir ve algıları olabileceği için bunların sosyal yaşam deneyimlerini etkileyip etkilemediği görülmek istenmiştir.

Araştırmada ilk alt konu olan katılımcıların yaş kimlikleri incelendiğinde araştırmaya katılanların büyük çoğunluğunun kendilerini kronolojik yaşlarından daha genç

hissettikleri için daha genç yaş kimliklerine sahip oldukları söylenebilir. Ayrıca, araştırmadaki bazı kadınlar kendilerini kronolojik yaşlarından bazen daha yaşlı bazen daha genç hissettiklerini ifade etmişlerdir ancak bu kadınların sayılarının az olduğu görülmüştür.

Katılımcıların büyük çoğunluğu kendini yaşlı kadın olarak algılamamaktadır. Bu noktada yaşlı olmanın olumlu bir özellik olarak algılanmadığı söylenebilir. Yaşlı yaş kimliğine sahip olmamada kendi kendine yeterliliğin etkili olduğu ve kişilerin aktif bir sosyal yaşam ve sosyal ilişkilere sahip olmalarının, genç yaş kimliğine sahip olmalarında etkili görülmekte ve evde izolasyon, genç yaş kimliği ile ilişkili olarak düşünülmemektedir. Araştırma sorusu için, yaş kimliği ile sosyal yaşam deneyimleri arasındaki ilişki hakkında, ikisi arasında bir ilişki olması muhtemel görünmektedir çünkü yaşlı kadınların kendilerini neden yaşlı değil de genç olarak gördüklerine ilişkin görüşleri sorulduğunda sosyal dünyaları ve bu sosyal yaşam içindeki dinamik sosyal ilişki ve deneyimlerinden söz ettikleri görülmüştür.

Çalışmadaki kadınların yaş kimlikleri hakkında bir zihin-beden ikiliği olduğu görülmektedir. Başka bir deyişle, kadınların ifadelerinden de anlaşılacağı üzere, yaşlanmaya bağlı değişiklikler vücutta görünse bile, iç benliklerinin bedenden bağımsız olarak aynı (genç) kaldığı görülmüştür. Çalışmadaki yaşlı kadınların görüşlerine göre bu kadınlar yaşlanmayan bir benlik ve daha genç yaş kimliklerine sahiptir. İnsanların hayatındaki emeklilik geçişi, yaşlı yaş kimliğine sahip olmalarında etkili olabilmektedir (Westerhof, 2003). Ancak araştırmada çoğunlukla emeklilik geçişinin kadınların yaşlı yaş kimliklerine sahip olmalarını etkilemediği görülmüştür.

Tezdeki bir diğer alt konu ise katılımcıların yaşlılık algılarına dair bir analiz yapmaktır. Araştırmadaki katılımcılara göre yaşlı yaş aralığının başlangıcı çoğunlukla 70-80 yaş olarak gösterilmiştir. Ancak yaşlılığı belirten kronolojik yaşların olmadığı da düşünülmekte ve bu nedenle bu durum sübjektif yaş algısının kronolojik yaşlardan bağımsız olduğunu göstermesi açısından önemli bir noktadır. Araştırmada yaşlılık, olumlu olarak algılanabilse de (sayıca az) çoğunlukla olumsuz olarak algılanmaktadır.

Çalışmadaki son araştırma alt konusu ise yaşlı kadınların sosyal yaşam aktivitelerini incelemektir. Araştırma sonucuna göre genellikle yaşlı kadınların ev dışında aktif bir sosyal yaşama sahip olduğu görülmüştür. Araştırmadan önce, emeklilik geçişinin yaşlı kadınların sosyal yaşam deneyimlerini, kamusal alandan (dışarıdaki sosyal yaşam aktiviteleri) çekilmelerine ve evlerinde (özel alan) daha fazla zaman geçirmelerine neden olacak şekilde etkileyebileceği öngörülmüştür. Ancak araştırma sonucunda yaşlı kadınların çoğunluğunun emeklilikten sonra dışarıda sosyal aktivitelere daha fazla zaman ayırabildiklerini belirttiği görülmüştür. Emekli olduktan sonra bir nevi daha evde olma hissi olsa da katılımcılar kendilerini evlerinde izole etmemekte ve sosyal hayat deneyimlerini devam ettirmektedirler. Ancak aktif olmanın ve dinamik bir sosyal hayata sahip olmanın yaşlı yaş kimliğiyle değil genç yaş kimliğiyle ilişkilendirilmesi önemlidir ve araştırmada çoğunluğun genç yaş kimliğine sahip olduğu ve aktif bir sosyal yaşama sahip olduğu görülmektedir, dolayısıyla genç yaş kimliği ile sosyal yaşam deneyimleri arasında böyle bir ilişki olabilir. Başka bir deyişle, aktif olarak sosyal yaşam deneyimlerine sahip olanların genç yaş kimliğine sahip olanlar ve aktif sosyal yaşama sahip olmayı genç yaş kimliği ile ilişkilendiren kişiler olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Bu bulgular araştırma sorusundaki yaş kimliği ile sosyal yaşam deneyimleri arasındaki ilişki açısından önemli veriler vermektedir. Araştırma, yaşlanmaya ilişkin toplumsal cinsiyet bağlamında yapılan bir analizin çok önemli olduğunu bir kez daha göstermektedir çünkü araştırmada, eğitim, istihdam ve ücretsiz bakım emeği üzerindeki cinsiyetçi eşitsizlikler nedeniyle cinsiyete bağlı konuların yaşlı kadınların yaşlanmasını ve sosyal yaşam deneyimlerini etkileyebileceği görülmektedir.

Tezde kamusal alan, yaşlı kadınların ev dışındaki sosyal yaşam deneyimlerini içeren bir alan olarak ele alınırken, özel alandan farklı olarak ev ev içi etkinlikleri içermektedir. Kamusal alan, tahakkümün, kontrolün ve gücün olduğu "toplumsal bir üründür" (Lefebvre, 1991). Kamusal bölgenin toplumsal cinsiyetçi bir yapısı vardır ve toplumsal kodlarıyla donanmış aktif bir mekândır (Yılmaz, 2020). Kamusal alan ile toplumsal cinsiyet ilişkileri arasında analiz açısından anlamlı bir ilişki vardır. Kamusal alan erkeklerin egemen olduğu ve ait olduğu bir yer olarak görülürken, özel alan kadınların yeri olarak kabul edilir. Kamusal/özel alan ayrımı tüm yaş gruplarındaki kadınlar için geçerlidir; bu nedenle yaşlı kadınlar, sosyal alanların

sosyal inşasını da etkiler. Bu noktadan hareketle tezde toplumsal cinsiyetçi bir çerçeve kullanılarak yaşlı kadınların kamusal alan kullanımı ele alınmıştır.

Habermas (2010), kamusallığın ancak ekonomik ve sosyal koşullar toplumdaki herkes için aynı olanaklara hizmet ettiğinde güvence altına alınabileceğini düşünmektedir. Ekonomik güce sahip olamayan kadınlar kamusal alandan itilmekte, kamusal alanda ataerkil egemenlik olduğu için kadınlar özel alanda sıkışıp kalmaktadır (Çiçekli, 2019). Kadınlar için ekonomik bağımsızlığa sahip olmak, kadının "ait" görüldüğü bir yer olan özel alandan bir kaçış yolu olarak önemlidir. Eğitim olanaklarına sahip kadınlar istihdama katılmaya başlasalar da cinsiyet eşitsizlikleri nedeniyle kadınların sahip oldukları eğitim ve istihdam oranları yeterli düzeyde değildir (TUİK, 2023). Örneğin son verilerde kadınların işgücüne katılımı %36 iken bu oran erkeklerde %72,5 tir (TUİK, 2023).Tüm eğitim kademelerinde son istatistiklere göre Türkiye'de yaşlı kadınlar yaşlı erkeklerin gerisindedir (TUİK,2023). Örneğin Türkiye'de yükseköğrenim görmüş yaşlı kadınların oranı %4,3 iken yaşlı erkeklerde bu oran %12,5'tir (TUİK, 2023). Buna paralel olarak, Türkiye'de istihdam olanaklarına sahip olan yaşlı kadınlar da düşük seviyelerdedir. Özel alan olarak "ev", kadının ev işlerini yaptığı ve "görevlerini" yerine getirdiği bir yer olarak görüldüğünden, eğitim ve istihdam da kadınlar için öncelikli görülmemektedir. Dolayısıyla, kadın "ev" e özel bir alan olarak hazırlandığı için, Türkiye'de eğitim görmüş ve istihdam edilmiş yaşlı kadın sayısı azdır.

Eğitim ve istihdamın kamusal alana katılım açısından önemine bakıldığında, bu olanaklara sahip olamamanın yaşlı kadınlar için kamusal/özel ayrımını keskinleştirdiği görülmektedir. Evle eş, anne ya da ev işlerinden sorumlu olarak sınırlandırılan ve özdeşleştirilen kadınlar, eğitim ve istihdam olanaklarıyla bu durumdan bir ölçüde kurtulabilmektedir. Yaptığım araştırmalarda bazı bulgular bu durumu destekler niteliktedir. Araştırmaya katılanlar, eğitimli, şehirli, emekli ve meslek sahibi kadınlar olmaları nedeniyle Türkiye'de kendine özgü ve nadir bir gruptur. Özel alan olarak ev dışındaki sosyal yaşam rutinleri incelendiğinde, yaşamlarında genellikle aktif sosyal yaşam deneyimleri yaşadıkları söylenebilir. Böylece bu kadınlar kamusal alanı aktif olarak kullanmakta ve toplum içinde evleri tarafından kısıtlanmamaktadırlar. Araştırmaya katılanların yaşamları boyunca sahip

oldukları eğitim ve bunun sonucunda sahip oldukları istihdam olanakları sayesinde kamuoyunda yer almaktadırlar. Eğitim başarısı, çalışma hayatına kavuşmanın yolunu açar ve bu nedenle "ev" ile sınırlandırma adına bir yol planlanmaz. Katılımcıların çalışma hayatında bulundukları süre boyunca özel alanın aksine kamusal alanda yer aldıkları ve ev dışında da sosyal bir hayatları olduğu ifadelerinden anlaşılmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, bu kadınların çalışma hayatı ya da sosyal yaşam faaliyetleri ile kamusal alanda zaman geçirme konusuna zaten aşina olmaları nedeniyle, emeklilik sonrası yaşamlarında da kamusal alanı kullanmaya devam etmeleri araştırmada görülmektedir.

Kadın, evlilik yoluyla anne ve eş gibi "tanımlanan" toplumsal cinsiyet rolleriyle sömürüldüğü için "erkeğin yeri" olarak tanımlanan toplumdan uzak tutulmaktadır. Kadınlar için bile çalışma hayatıyla birlikte kamusal alana geçiş söz konusudur çünkü evdeki kadınlara yönelik geleneksel cinsiyetçi roller onları ev içi alandan tamamen kurtarmayabilir. Çünkü kadınların yapması beklenen ev işleri, ev dışında meslekleri olmasına rağmen, böyle bir bağı olmayan ve zaten toplum içinde olan erkeklerin aksine, kadını bir bakıma eve bağlayabilmektedir. Dolayısıyla bu durum kadının özelden kamusala geçiş sürecini zedeleyebilir. Cevaplayıcıların ifadeleri incelendiğinde, ev işlerini hem emeklilik öncesi hem de emeklilik sonrası yaptıkları şeklinde ifade ettikleri görülmektedir. Hem ev işlerini evde, hem de çalışma hayatını kamusal alanda yönetme çabası vardır. Dolayısıyla, toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı özel/kamusal ayrımını toplum adına geçebilseler bile kadınların ev içi sorumlulukları ortadan kalkmaz ve bu "sorumluluklar" kadınlar için özel ve kamusal arasındaki sınırı bulanıklaştırabilir. Bu nedenle, kadınların onları ev olarak özel alana bağlayan ev içi rolü hala mevcuttur. Ayrıca, ankete katılanların emeklilik geçişinden sonra ev içi "sorumluluklarını" sıklıkla dile getirdikleri görülmektedir. Başka bir deyişle, emekli olduktan sonra evde daha fazla vakit geçirdikleri için, toplum içinde sosyal bir hayatları olsa bile, toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinden biri olan ev işleri bu yaşlı kadınlar tarafından yapılmaktadır. Emekli olduktan sonra ev işlerinin daha çok evde olmasından dolayı daha fazla zaman aldığı görülmektedir. Kadınların toplumsal cinsiyet rolü olarak özel alanda ev işleriyle ilişkisinin, kamusal alanda çalışma hayatından ayrıldıklarında arttığı görülmektedir. Bu nedenle istihdamın sona erdirilmesi, ev olarak özel adına kamu/özel cinsiyetçi ayrımına yardımcı olabilir.

Ancak bu kadınların kendilerini evleriyle sınırlamamaları da önemli bir nokta; aktif bir sosyal hayatları vardır, bu nedenle emekli olduktan sonra kamusal kullanımları azalmaz. Bu durum, katılımcıların kamusal alanda bulunmaya alışık olmaları ile de açıklanabilir.

Toplumda kadınların kamusal alan deneyimi, kadınların kamusal alanla ilişkilerine yönelik toplumsal cinsiyet normları nedeniyle kolay bir ilişki olmamıştır. Geçmişten günümüze, kadının doğası gereği ait olmadığı düşünülen kamusal mekânlarda nasıl görülmesi gerektiği konusunda, toplumda erkeğin değil kadının fiziksel görünümü önemli bir faktör olarak kabul edilmektedir. Araştırmada, katılımcıların yaşlı bir kadının giyim tarzına yönelik toplumdaki bazı "normlardan" söz ettikleri görülmektedir. Başka bir deyişle, yaşlı kadınlar için bazı "uygun" giyim tarzları belirtilirken, toplum içinde bu yaştaki bir kadın için kısa elbiseler giymek "uygun" olarak gösterilmemektedir. Ayrıca toplum tarafından bu şekilde giyilmesi durumunda bir tür kınama olarak da bahsedilmektedir. Dolayısıyla bu durum, kadınların toplumsal cinsiyet normlarına uygun olarak toplum içinde fiziksel görünümleri açısından sorgulandığını teyit edebilir. Bu durum, yaş faktörünü bir araya getirip ortaya koyarak o dönemdeki kadınlar için yaşlılıkta da devam etmektedir. Bu nedenle yaşlanma, kadınların toplumdaki kamusal alanlardaki gergin ilişkilerine hizmet etmek için kullanılma durumu olabilir. Yaşlılık, ev içi alan dışındaki toplumda kadın olmanın yanı sıra başka bir zorluk olabilir. Bu şekilde, kadınlara yönelik cinsiyetçi ve yaş ayrımcı tavırların bir kombinasyonu görülebilir.

Bedenle ilgili her şey cinsiyet damgasını taşır (Çakır, 2020). Beden, sosyal kontrolün somut olarak uygulandığı yer olarak görülmektedir (User, 2010). Toplumda kadının vücudundaki yaşlanma belirtilerine verilen değer bu kontrolün bir örneğidir. Kadın bedeni toplum içinde her zaman odak noktası olmuş ve kadını beden üzerinden tanımlamaya yaşlılık döneminde de rastlanmaktadır. Başka bir deyişle, kadınlara bedenlerinden daha çok değer verilirken, erkekler yaşlılık döneminde toplumda kazandıkları başarılar ve prestij ile algılanmaktadır (Sontag, 1978). Bu nedenle yaşlılıkta kadınlar vücutları üzerindeki baskı nedeniyle fiziksel görünümlerinden memnun olmayabilirler. Araştırmalarda çoğunlukla bahsedilmese de aynada görülen yaşlanma belirtilerinden dolayı bu tür bir memnuniyetsizlik de söz konusudur. Bu

nedenle, kırışıklıklar veya beyaz saçlar gibi yaşlanma belirtileri yaşlılıkta odak noktası olabilirken, erkekler vücutları tarafından yargılanmadıkları için bu tür endişeleri yaşamamaktadırlar.

Gençliğe duyulan sempati ve yaşlılığa isteksizlik, tüketim toplumunda üretilen sorunlu yaşlılık imajına örnek olarak gösterilebilir çünkü tanımlanmış "ideal" bir kadın bedeni vardır ve bu beden genç, güzel bir kadın bedenidir. Böylece kadın bedeni üzerinde gençlik, kadın bedeni üzerinde bir kontrol mekanizması olarak teşvik edilmektedir. Bu şekilde yaşlı kadın profilinden kaçınılmakta ve tercih edilmemektedir. Katılımcıların kendilerini yaşlı kadınlar olarak değil de genç olarak tanımlamalarının nedeni bu olabilir. Katılımcıların kendilerini yaşlı olarak tanımlamaktan uzak bir pozisyon aldığı ve yaşlı tanımını kendilerinden net bir şekilde ayırdığı görülmektedir. Dolayısıyla, kadın vücudunun dış görünüşü üzerinde bir tahakküm mekanizması olan gençlik yönünde bariz bir yönelim vardır.

Sonuç olarak, kadının kamusal alanı kullanmasına yönelik cinsiyete dayalı yaşlı ayrımcı tutumlar olsa da, eğitimli ve çalışma yaşamına sahip olmanın kadınların ev içi alandan kurtulmasına ve kamusal alanda yer almasına zemin hazırladığı görülmektedir. Kadınların toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı eşitsizliklerle çevrili kamusal alanla ilişkilerine ileri yaşlarda bakıldığında, yanıtlayıcıların kentli, eğitimli ve çalışan kadınlar olması; emekli olduktan sonra da rahatlıkla kamusal deneyimler yaşamaya devam ederler. Emeklilik, emeklilikten önce kazandıkları kamusal sosyal rutinleri nedeniyle kamusal faaliyetlerini durdurmamıştır. Kadınların kamusal kullanımları açısından yaşlanmanın aslında yaşam ritmini yavaşlatıcı bir etki olarak algılanması nedeniyle bir risk içerebilmesi önemlidir. Bu nedenle, kadının yaşlılıkta kamusal alanla zaten sorunlu olan ilişkisini analiz etmek önemlidir. Kentli emekli kadınların yaşlanmayı kamusal yaşam deneyimlerinden alıkoyan bir faktör olarak algılamadıkları görülmektedir. Ev dışında sosyal yaşam deneyimlerine alışkın oldukları için yaşlılığı sadece olağan yaşam rutinlerinin devamı olarak algılarlar. Bu nedenle, algısal olarak, yaşlanmanın bu kadınlar üzerinde yavaşlatıcı bir etkisi yoktur.

Tez, katılımcıların Türkiye'de özel bir grup olması nedeniyle önemlidir. Başka bir deyişle, eğitim görmüş ve emekli olmuş yaşlı bir kentli kadın olmak, kadınların

toplumdaki eğitim veya istihdam konusundaki cinsiyete dayalı sorunları düşünüldüğünde nadir görülen bir durumdur. Tezde ikinci olarak, katılımcıların yaş ve yaşlanmaya yönelik algıları incelenmekte ve yaşlı bir ülke olarak Türkiye'de yaşlanma konusuna katkıda bulunmak önemlidir. Üçüncüsü, tez, kadınların kamusal alan deneyimlerini yaşlılık kapsamında analiz etmesi nedeniyle önemlidir. Bu nedenle tez, Türkiye için literatüre önemli bir katkı sağlayan toplumsal cinsiyet perspektifinin bir analizini yaparak, yaşlılık ve kadının kamusal alanı kullanımını birleştirir.

İleride yapılacak araştırmalar için eğitim ve çalışma hayatı olamayan yaşlı kadınların analizi yapılarak konunun daha derinlemesine ve tüm yönleriyle incelenmesi sağlanabilir. Böyle bir analiz yapılarak yaşlı kadınlar için yaş ve yaşlılık algısının daha kapsamlı bir analizi yapılabilir. Ayrıca bu tür araştırmalarla özel ve kamusal alan kullanımının toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı ayrımı daha net görülebilmektedir çünkü böylelikle o dönemde iş hayatı olmayan yaşlı ev hanımı kadınlar için ev dışındaki faaliyetler incelenebilmektedir. Böyle bir analiz, kadınların eğitim almaları ve çalışma yaşamlarının kamusal alan kullanımını olumlu yönde etkilemesi nedeniyle, kadınların yaşlanma ve kamusal deneyimlerine ilişkin toplumsal cinsiyetçi bir analizi destekleyebilir.

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