Reviewer's report

Title: Shifting between governing or being governed: a qualitative study of older persons self-determination

Version: 2 Date: 8 August 2014

Reviewer: Michelle Gagnon

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this work. This article touches on an important topic in the area of older adults and was written using clear and concise language. Please see below recommended revisions.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Lines 31-33: “In the health care sector, professionals in general are aware of the importance of persons’ rights to self-determination and engagement in decision-making [8]. Although it is essential, older persons’ self-determination is not fully respected [9-12].” The reason they are not respect and who is not respecting the self-determination is unclear. Is it population specific to older adults or is a lack of implementation of the health care providers? What are the specific implications of this in the context of your study?

2. Lines 44-47: The inclusion of the paragraph on frailty lacks context. Is your goal to introduce the terminology you will be using later? To discuss at which point in life people begin to lose self-determination? Better integration into the introduction is needed for this concept.

3. Lines 65-72 (Research design section): What is unique or superior about Charmaz’ approach the grounded theory?

4. Lines 75-78 (Participants section): Insufficient detail is provided regarding the sample and sample selection. How was the sample identified as being frail? How was the larger initial sample identified? What approach was used to specifically target the 11 chosen? How large was the original sample? Why were 11 individuals selected – was this due to the grounded theory approach of stopping once you reached saturation?

5. Table 1: You refer to personal and instrumental activities of daily living in the table but not in the other sections of the article. It would be important to define this distinction somewhere in the text and it might be helpful to identify how this was measured. The notion of “instrumental daily activities” again shows up in line 219 at which point the concept has been insufficiently defined to the reader. Making this distinction earlier would be helpful.

6. Results: As you discuss the three different areas (i.e., struggling against the ageing body, deciding is relational, and guarding one’s own independence) you mention several different concepts within each area. For example, in the “struggling again the ageing body” theme you mention awareness of unstoppable
aging, sacrificing activities, frustration, etc. It is unclear whether these concepts are subthemes that were identified by the participants or whether these are the links and hypotheses that you have made about the larger theme. Clarification throughout the results of main themes and subthemes as well as ideas that came out of the data vs. ideas that you have generated would help better represent the study’s findings to the reader.

7. Lines 288-310 (section regarding credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness): The evidence provided for originality and resonance is not as strong as the evidence for usefulness and credibility. It is unclear in what way your findings meet both the originality and resonance criteria based on the comments in the discussion.

8. Line 310 to 312: “These findings have not generated a theory construction. However…” This statement may need further expansion, given that by virtue of its name, grounded theory suggests that you would be developing a theory.

9. Line 275-280: The link to self-determination theory in the discussion is interesting, but the implications of the findings on self-determination theory (or vice versa) are not clearly outlined in this discussion. How are the specific results of this study related to SDT?

Minor Essential Revisions

10. Line 110-112: “The initial and focused coding…” confusing sentence (maybe a word missing?).

11. Line 129-130: “It is of importance which specific activity it is” awkward sentence.

12. Line 215: “By constantly guard oneself” should be “guarding”

Discretionary Revisions

13. Line 94: more details regarding the interview guide (i.e., development, content of questions) might be helpful to a reader.

14. Table 1 and quotations: Given that you list your participants in Table 1, it might add a level of detail to provide the participant number of the quoted individual at the end of the quotations provided in the manuscript.

15. Lines 185-188 (quotation): The middle part of the quote is confusing. Is there a way to exclude part of the quote (or perhaps use an alternative quote) that might make it clearer to the reader?

16. Lines 198-200 (quotation): This quotation is also hard to understand. Could you exclude the “and it’s been so that she…”?

17. Line 263: In line 263 you make reference to Cardol and the role of self-determination in rehabilitation. I would argue that rehabilitation may not be central goal for health care professionals working with older adults (or even for the older adults themselves), as they typically are not seeking to return to an earlier level of functioning. The link of this reference to the current findings could be expanded or better explained.
**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare that I have no competing interests.