Faculty of Social and Health Sciences

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When giving up is not an option, out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls:

Coping, meaning making, and adversarial growth among young adults with refugee backgrounds

PhD Child and Youth Competence Development
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When giving up is not an option, out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls:

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PhD Thesis

2023

Faculty of Social and Health Sciences

Inland Norway
University of
Applied Sciences

Dedication

To my sister

Kristina Glaser Holthe

(1989 – 2020)

In loving memory

A whole world is taken to the grave with the dead person;

each one of us is unique and unrepeatable

(Zygmunt Bauman)

Abstract

The main focus in psychological research about refugees has been on trauma and psychopathology, and researchers and practitioners have called for more holistic and strength based approaches to post-trauma development (e.g., Keles et al., 2018; Oppedal et al., 2013). Theories about *posttraumatic or adversarial growth*, broadly defined as positive psychological changes resulting from the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p.1), builds on existential, humanistic and positive psychology, and were developed to account for positive changes following adversity (Joseph & Linley, 2005). The last 20+ years, research on adversarial growth among survivors of various forms of trauma show that at least 70% report some positive change in at least one domain of life (Linley & Joseph, 2004). However, adversarial growth among refugees has received less research attention (Chan et al., 2016; Sims & Pooley, 2017).

The main aim of this study was to explore *the role of coping, meaning making, and adversarial growth in explaining how many young refugees show healthy functioning and manage to adapt successfully in their new lives, despite their experiences of trauma and adversity.* Data was collected through qualitative in-depth interviews with 15 young men and women (age 20-28) who had received protection as refugees, and lived in Norway for on average 7 years. The interview material was analyzed using thematic analysis.

The findings lend support to explanations from growth theories and humanistic and existential psychology concerning the *how* and the *why* of positive adaption. The participants emphasized the learning value of adversity and that giving up is not an option, perceived themselves as survivors, drew on cultural strengths, and were optimistic and open to experience – all of which facilitated coping. Despite previous trauma, and challenges related to asylum policies, stigma and stereotypes, the participants displayed several characteristics of growth. They were feeling stronger, wiser, and had changed their perspectives, and were giving meaning to their experiences through helping others. Taken together, the findings stand in contrast to portrayals of refugees as singularly vulnerable, and make up an impressive account of the human capacity for coping and growth. This often co-existed with distress and suffering, and the findings highlight the importance of applying a broadened, curious, contextual, and strengths-based psychological approach that acknowledges the complexity of post-trauma outcomes, and how these are shaped by interplay between individual, cultural, social, and structural factors.

Sammendrag

Hovedfokuset i psykologisk forskning om flyktninger har vært på traumer og psykopatologi, og forskere og praktikere har etterlyst mer bruk av helhetlige og styrkebaserte tilnærminger (f.eks. Keles et al., 2018; Oppedal et al., 2013). Teorier om posttraumatisk vekst, definert som positive psykologiske endringer som følge av prosesser med å håndtere svært utfordrende livsomstendigheter (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, s.1), bygger på eksistensiell, humanistisk og positiv psykologi, og ble utviklet for å gjøre rede for positive endringer etter motgang (Joseph & Linley, 2005). Forskning på posttraumatisk vekst de siste 20+ årene blant overlevende etter ulike former for traumer viser at minst 70 % rapporterer positive endringer i minst ett livsdomene (Linley & Joseph, 2004). Imidlertid har posttraumatisk vekst blant flyktninger fått mindre oppmerksomhet i forskning (Chan et al., 2016; Sims & Pooley, 2017).

Hovedformålet med denne studien var å utforske *hvilken rolle mestring, meningsskaping og vekst spiller i å forklare at mange unge flyktninger fungerer godt helsemessig og lykkes i sin nye tilværelse, til tross for opplevelser av traumer og motgang*. Data ble samlet inn gjennom kvalitative dybdeintervjuer med 15 unge menn og kvinner (alder 20-28) med flyktningbakgrunn, som i gjennomsnitt har bodd i Norge i 7 år. Intervjumaterialet ble analysert ved bruk av tematisk analyse.

Funnene støtter forklaringer fra veksteorier og humanistisk og eksistensiell psykologi vedrørende hvordan og hvorfor positiv tilpasning skjer. Deltakerne la vekt på læringsverdien av motgang og at det å gi opp ikke er et alternativ, beskrev seg selv som overlevere, trakk på kulturelle styrker og ressurser, og var optimistiske og åpne for nye opplevelser – faktorer som sammen bidro til mestring. Det var også flere kjennetegn på vekst i deltakernes fortellinger, til tross for opplevelser av traumer og motgang både før og etter ankomst til Norge. Eksempelvis beskrev at de følte seg sterkere, klokere, og hadde endret perspektiver og verdier, og ga mening til sine opplevelser gjennom å hjelpe andre. Samlet står funnene står i kontrast til fremstillinger av flyktninger som ensidig sårbare, og ikke minst utgjør de en imponerende beretning om menneskers kapasitet for mestring og vekst. Styrker og vekst sameksisterte ofte med vansker og stress, og funnene peker på viktigheten av å bruke en kontekstuell og styrkebasert psykologisk tilnærming som anerkjenner nyanser og kompleksitet, samt at helse og fungering formes i samspill mellom individuelle, kulturelle, sosiale og strukturelle faktorer.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I want to thank the 15 young men and women who shared their stories and knowledge, and thus made this study possible. What I learned from them has been of great value and importance, both professionally and for me personally.

I also wish to thank the members of the competence group for their insights and contributions, and I am incredibly grateful to my advisors, Kerstin Söderström and Berit Berg, who have provided me with continuous engagement, support, trust, inspiration, and motivation. The work with this thesis gave me the opportunity to explore in-depth the topics that I am most interested and engaged in, which has been both rewarding and meaningful. Still, the work has been very challenging in periods. It has been of utmost help and importance that Kerstin and Berit have always shared my dedication to the topic and 'group under study', encouraged me, and believed in my capabilities and the project.

Knut Gythfeldt has read and commented on my work on more than one occasion, which I deeply appreciate, along with his honest and clear feedback. I am very grateful to Mari Rysst and the other responsible persons at the Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences for giving me the chance to do my own independent project, and for providing much freedom and flexibility. My fellow PhD-students have been welcoming and encouraging, and PhD-coordinator Ane-Gunhild Amirnejad has always been available and helpful. Sigbjørn Hernes and Elin Opheim provided valuable guidance in how to conduct systematic literature searches. The LINEUP-study's research group has been incredibly encouraging and supportive, and the people at NTNU Social Research have been wonderful and taken me in as a colleague.

Last, but not least, I am eternally grateful to my friends and family for being so supportive, patient, and caring. The dedication, love, humor, and encouragement from my family has been essential for my ability to finish this work.

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Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into four main parts, and consists of 17 chapters in total.

Part I: Introduction and research context (chapter 1 to 6)

Part I is devoted to presenting the background and rationale for the study, and to positioning the study in a broader context. Chapter 1 describes the study background, aims, purposes, and research questions, and concludes with a section on personal reflexivity, i.e., positioning myself in the field. Chapter 2 to 5 provides clarifications and overview of the global and local refugee situation; stages of forced migration; issues concerning stigma, stereotypes, discourses, and attitudes; and, psychological research perspectives on trauma and refugees. Part I concludes with a summary (ch.6).

Part II: Theoretical framework and literature review (chapter 7 to 10)

Part II present the theories, concepts, and empirical findings used to build the theoretical framework for the study. The framework was inspired by several sources and disciplines, mainly humanistic-existential psychology and the organismic valuing theory of adversarial growth (the OVT). Chapter 7 and 8 goes in depth on central aspects included from humanistic and existential psychology, the OVT, and ecological/transactional models of development and adaption. Chapter 9 consists of a scoping review of adversarial growth among refugees, which provides a comprehensive overview of the knowledge base, and helped identify research gaps that my study would help fill. In chapter 10, the main aspects of the theoretical framework are "sown together", in order to highlight how they together are suited for guiding the research.

Part III: Philosophical framework, methods, and ethics (chapter 11 to 13)

Part III outlines the study's philosophical framework, i.e., the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological assumptions underpinning the research (ch.11). Chapter 12 describes the choice and design of methods, and the practical procedures for recruiting participants, and collecting and analyzing data. Ethical considerations and the measures undertaken to protect the participants are discussed and described in chapter 13, along with reflections on ethical consideration in the writing and dissemination of findings.

Part IV: Empirical findings, discussion, and implications (chapter 14 to 17)

Part IV is divided into four chapters. Firstly, in chapter 14, the empirical findings are presented in three main sections, structured according to the main themes and sub-themes from the data analysis. In chapter 15, the findings are discussed in light of the study's theoretical, philosophical, and methodological framework. The research questions are addressed and answered throughout the discussion. Chapter 16 is devoted to a critical discussion of data quality, and describes the strategies used to ensure trustworthiness and the overall quality of the study, in conjunction with the strengths and limitations of the study and findings. The final chapter (ch.17) outlines contributions and implications of the study and findings, and concludes with suggested avenues for further research.

PART I
INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

Chapter 1: Background and study rationale

The title of this thesis is inspired by the quote "out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seamed with scars" (Chapin, in Gilbert, 1895, p.567). This points to an observation and assumption in much of ancient religion, philosophy and literature; namely, that wisdom and strength can surface and develop in the wake of adversity and suffering. In 1889, Nietzsche wrote that "out of life's school of war - what does not kill me makes me stronger" (p.6). In mainstream psychology and society, however, the strength-perspective is often overshadowed by a more singular focus on human limitations and psychopathology. An overarching focus in much psychological research about refugees has been on trauma and psychopathology, despite that most survivors of trauma and war do *not* show evidence of a diagnosable psychiatric disorder, and even those who do, nevertheless function effectively (Jayawickreme, Jayawickreme, et al., 2019; Olff et al., 2019).

Al-Krenawi et al. (2011) point to what they describe as the illness ideology of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM, American Psychiatric Association, 2022) and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD, World Health Organization, 2019), as playing a major role in focusing studies of war trauma in the direction of pathology and victimization. It must be emphasized that research on trauma, psychopathology and clinical interventions has been of crucial importance for the recognition of war and flight related trauma, and for the development of effective treatment options. Still, what I argue for, is that it is equally important to recognize and acknowledge human strengths, capacities, and healthy functioning, and also to include social and structural factors in the understanding of psychological health. Although the pathologizing, problem focused approach is not the full story about psychological theory and practice, Papadopoulos (2007) provides a timely reminder that becoming a refugee is not a psychological phenomenon, but a socio-political and legal one - with psychological implications.

While 'what does not kill me makes me stronger' surely is too simplified if taken literally, so is an understanding of human nature that does not adequately take strengths and coping resources into account. Maybe particularly so in the case of refugees, who have often gone through numerous traumatic experiences, yet still in so many cases manage to find the strength and motivation to rebuild and successfully continuing their lives. Even studies among refugees who have faced the worst trauma in war situations, consistently provide evidence of high levels of human resilience (Murthy & Lakshminarayana, 2006; Updegraff & Taylor,

2000). That is, evidence of the capacity to 'bounce back' from trauma and adversity, and a relatively stable trajectory of healthy functioning after a highly adverse event (Bonanno, 2004). Observations of the substantial number of young refugees who thrive and adapt well, have lead both researchers and practitioners to call for more holistic and strength-based approaches to post-trauma development. This while pointing out that young refugees should be perceived as survivors and active 'copers', and not as passive victims without capacities (Keles et al., 2018; Oppedal et al., 2013).

Theoretical approach and perspectives in the current study

The theoretical framework is mainly based on humanistic and existential psychology, where human beings are understood as active, meaning-seeking and growth-oriented (House et al., 2017). It is supplemented with perspectives from ecological-transactional models of development, where processes of coping, meaning making and growth are understood as being shaped by interplay between individual, social, cultural and structural factors (e.g., Bandura, 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ryan et al., 2008).

I have chosen to concentrate on three closely related concepts that are linked to positive development and health; first and foremost adversarial growth, and additionally, coping and meaning making. Theories about posttraumatic/adversarial growth, broadly defined as positive psychological changes resulting from the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p.1), builds on existential, humanistic and positive psychology, and were developed to account for positive changes following adversity (Joseph & Linley, 2005; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). The last 20+ years, research on adversarial growth among survivors of various forms of trauma show that at least 70% report experiencing some positive change in at least one domain of life (Linley & Joseph, 2004). However, adversarial growth among refugees has received less research attention (Chan et al., 2016; Sims & Pooley, 2017). In a review of empirical studies on mental health and related topics among immigrant groups in Norway, Kale and Hjelde (2017) explicitly state that we need more studies about refugees' resources, post-traumatic growth and resilience (p.40).

It is difficult to talk about growth without including coping, which - in short - refers to voluntary and intentional behaviors and cognitions that individuals use to deal with stress and adversity, and to social-, cultural-, and structural resources implicated in coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1991; Skinner et al., 2003). Meaning and meaning making is central in theories about healthy development, motivation, coping and growth, and is at the core of humanistic

and existential psychology (Hoffman et al., 2016; Weathers et al., 2016). Concepts and theories of meaning making are often centered on how individuals create or extract meaning from events, and on the motivational value and general importance of identifying meaning and purpose in life (Martela & Steger, 2016). Weathers et al. (2016) describe that meaning involves a sense of coherence, value, direction, and purpose in life, and serves as a driving force to continue moving forward in the context of adversity and trauma (p.151).

Considering the complexity and nuances of health and human beings, the young people in this study are understood "as dynamic human agents who are part of dynamic systemic contexts and who at the same time exhibit both vulnerabilities and abilities and capacities" (Vervliet et al., 2015, p.2). Importantly, while I am critical of a singular focus on psychopathology and call for more emphasis on coping, resources and growth, this does not imply that one should overlook distress and dysfunction, or the existing knowledge about psychopathology in response to trauma and adversity (Al-Krenawi et al., 2011; Almedom, 2005). On the contrary, the aim is rather a more holistic approach that recognizes the alternative pathways and scenarios observable among survivors. This includes acknowledging the potential for growth and useful learning that lies in tragedies that force people to discover new aspects of themselves, and take new perspectives on life (Almedom, 2005; Middleton, 2016).

Aims and purposes

The overarching aim of the study was to explore processes of healthy development among young adults with refugee backgrounds, with particular focus on the role of meaning making, coping, and adversarial growth. Further aims were to:

- shed light on the role and responsibilities of host countries for shaping outcomes, through exploring how social and structural post-migration factors influence processes of coping and growth
- acknowledge experience-based knowledge, through using a qualitative, strengths-based research approach, and asking for the participants' own theories and perspectives
- challenge pathology-oriented and stereotypical discourses about refugees, through highlighting the complexity of outcomes of adversity

The main purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of the factors and processes leading to healthy adaption and growth among young adults with refugee backgrounds. This in order to provide knowledge that can be used to:

- facilitate healthy development
- nuance the understanding of young refugees and development after trauma, contribute to balance pathology-oriented understandings, and counteract stigma
- show how people encounter, navigate and create meaning in their situation, as 'active agents eager to convey a story about their life in exile that includes more than their suffering' (Pace & Sen, 2018, p.109).

Research questions

The study was guided by one overarching research question and four sub-questions:

1. *What is the role of coping, meaning making, and adversarial growth in explaining how many young refugees show healthy functioning and manage to adapt successfully in their new lives, despite their experiences of trauma and adversity?*

   1.1. Which personal, cultural, social, structural coping strategies and resources are the young adults using to handle adversity and navigate their new everyday lives?

   1.2. What contributes to motivation to choose healthy coping strategies?

   1.3. How do the young adults create meaning in life and their experiences?

   1.4. What have they learned and/or changed about themselves, others, and life, from their experiences (adversarial growth)?

Method

Data were collected through qualitative, individual in-depth interviews with 15 young men and women (age 20-28) with a refugee background, whom were all resettled in Norway. The methodological design seeks to meet a need for qualitative, bottom-up studies that pays attention to people's own stories and understandings of their experiences and situation, as psychological research on health and well-being among refugees to a large extent has been quantitative and top-down (Edge et al., 2014; Kale & Hjelde, 2017; Puvimanasinghe, 2014). Not least, as Koc (2018) points out, it is people's self-narratives that reveal the complexity, uniqueness and totality of each person's experience (p.181). In addition to in-depth

knowledge, a qualitative approach could contribute to context- and culture-sensitive descriptions of the phenomenon under study, and also had the potential for fulfilling the aim of acknowledging experience-based knowledge. Importantly, this thesis includes both a theoretical and an empirical exploration of adversarial growth among young refugees.

Positioning myself in the field

Maslow (1962/2011) described that, as scientists, "we must make explicit what we all accept implicitly; that our kind of work is often felt deeply and comes out of deep personal grounds […] that we are usually profoundly involved, and that we *must* be if our work is not to be fake" (p.162). To be able to use subjectivity as a strength, and avoid that it serves as a bias and threatens the trustworthiness of the study and findings, transparency and reflexivity are described as essential (Corlett & Mavin, 2018; Finlay, 2002). In the following, I outline how my background, pre-understandings, and values might have influenced my approach as a researcher, and thus, this study.

My choice of topic for this PhD-project reflects interests and concerns that have been with me from early childhood. My grandmother and her immediate and extended family experienced persecution and were forced to flee, and this story has contributed to an engagement in trying to understand how stereotypes, racism, hatred and human separation develop – and how these can be challenged and defeated. Not least, it taught me that people, including my grandmother, can go through severe suffering and challenges, and still end up being stronger and more accepting and loving than many others. These observations and interests have followed me in research work with diverse topics and groups over the years, and have shaped a wish of working to promote understanding, e.g., through highlighting and sharing the perspectives and lived experiences of people who are often reduced to a negative label. Related to this is an interest in exploring and illuminating how hegemonic public and academic discourses shape our attitudes and understandings of reality and each other.

Something that has continued to fascinate and impress me, are the strengths and wisdom among people who have gone through various forms of challenges and adversity. However, I found that these aspects were not well captured or explained by mainstream, clinical psychological perspectives, where the dominating focus is on psychopathology, dysfunction, and individual factors. It was within humanistic and existential psychology that I eventually found the psychological perspectives that I had been missing. Thus, my view in this regard is that human beings are agentic and growth oriented, with potential to deal with and learn from

suffering. Moreover, I strongly believe that no person is an island, and that one's social, cultural and structural context is central in shaping e.g., coping and growth. This understanding has influenced my general view of psychology and development, as well as the theoretical and philosophical framework for this study.

Concerning methods, my appreciation for qualitative approaches is related to an interest in meeting people with curiosity and openness concerning their experiences and perspectives, and a wish of acknowledging experience based knowledge. Not least, my research experience has shown me the nuances, complexity and insights that result from asking people about their personal understandings and lived experiences. My methodological approach is influenced by an aim of presenting balanced portrayals of people that acknowledges complexity, e.g., both struggles and strengths, and to further communicate this knowledge in a way that allows the reader to relate to or grasp someone else's experience. The latter also has to do with a general understanding of human beings as having more similarities than differences, and thus, if the reader can relate to descriptions from and of "the other", that might inspire a sense of commonality and relatedness.

In sum, my background, pre-understandings, and values have influenced my choice of topic, perspectives and overall approach as a researcher. This in a direction or form that involves an emphasis on strengths, transactional processes, challenging of stigma and stereotypes, and on that you learn best from asking the people in question about their experiences and views.

Chapter 2: The refugee situation in Europe and Norway

Say this city has ten million souls,

Some are living in mansions, some are living in holes:

Yet there's no place for us, my dear, yet there's no place for us.

Once we had a country and we thought it fair,

Look in the atlas and you'll find it there:

We cannot go there now, my dear, we cannot go there now.

The consul banged the table and said,

"If you've got no passport you're officially dead":

But we are still alive, my dear, but we are still alive.

Went to a committee; they offered me a chair;

Asked me politely to return next year:

But where shall we go today, my dear, but where shall we go today?

Came to a public meeting; the speaker got up and said;

"If we let them in, they will steal our daily bread":

He was talking of you and me, my dear, he was talking of you and me.

Dreamed I saw a building with a thousand floors,

A thousand windows and a thousand doors:

Not one of them was ours, my dear, not one of them was ours.

Stood on a great plain in the falling snow;

Ten thousand soldiers marched to and fro:

Looking for you and me, my dear, looking for you and me.

The above excerpt from W.A. Auden's poem "Refugee Blues" (1939/2003) provides an example of the individual stories that lies behind numbers, and are affected by the definitions and policies described in Chapter 2. The current chapter provides central definitions and numbers and outline recent developments in the 'refugee situation' in Europe and Norway, before giving a brief overview of asylum policies. This in order to give the reader a contextual overview, and an idea of the situation refugees are facing when coming to Europe and Norway. Auden's poem also illustrates the experience of becoming a refugee (Chapter 3). This often involves losing one's homeland, loved ones, basic rights, roles, and belongings,

while experiencing that one's life and future depends on decisions made by authorities and others. Lastly, the excerpt touches upon the topic of Chapter 4, namely public attitudes, discourses and stigma.

Definitions, numbers, and developments in forced migration trends

The Refugee Convention (1951), Article 1A (2), define a refugee as someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence, and has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or group membership. In addition to these criteria, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2011) recognizes as refugees people who are "outside their country of origin or habitual residence, and unable to return there owing to serious and indiscriminate threats to life, physical integrity or freedom resulting from generalized violence or events seriously disturbing public order" (p.80).

By May 2022, more than 100 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced by persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order (UNHCR, 2022). This means that 1 in every 78 people on earth has been forced to flee. At the end of 2021, the figure was 89.3 million, comprising 27.1 million refugees, 53.2 million internally displaced people (IDPs, forced to flee within the country's borders), and 4.6 million asylum seekers (waiting to be recognized as refugees). 83% of forcibly displaced people are hosted in low and middle-income countries, mainly in the Middle East and Africa (UNHCR, 2022). In comparison, high-income countries, which account for most of the global wealth, hosted in 2021 only 16 % of people displaced across borders. Turkey, Colombia and Uganda were the three largest hosting countries globally, and Germany the second-largest refugee-hosting country in Europe, with 1.3 million refugees (5 % of the global refugee population) (UNHCR, 2022).

While the number of men and women forced to flee are nearly equal, the number of children forced to flee is disproportionately high: while children account for 30 % of the world's population, they make up 41 % of all forcibly displaced people (UNHCR, 2022). In 2021, over 80 % of first-time asylum seekers in the EU and Norway were below the age of 35. Of these, 50.2% were aged 18 - 34 years, and nearly 1/3 were children below the age of 18 - 14% of these were unaccompanied refugee minors (URM) (Eurostat, 2022).

Norway, similar to the EU countries, have ratified the Refugee Convention (1951) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which define legally binding obligations. This includes the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution, which is granted by the UDHR, Article 14, and elaborated on in the Refugee Convention. In order to use this right, people have to get the opportunity to actually cross borders and enter another country. However, this has been made difficult in what is often referred to as "Fortress Europe" (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2018), elaborated on in the following section.

'From a decade of solutions, to a decade of new and protracted displacement'

Over the last decade, the global number of people seeking refuge has increased significantly from earlier times, and at the same time, fewer people have been able to return home or rebuild their lives in a new country. This is the result both of prolonged wars and conflicts, and of potential receiving countries' limited acceptance of refugees (UNHCR, 2020).

During the so-called refugee crisis in 2015, there was a temporary, significant increase from previous years in the number of people seeking protection in European countries (NOAS, 2022). This was quickly followed by more restrictive European immigration policies, on top of already growing right-wing populist and anti-immigration politics and rhetoric in many European countries (e.g., Varvin, 2017). Restrictive policies and international agreements focused on controlling and limiting immigration, such as the Dublin III Regulation (e.g., Davis, 2020) and the EU-Turkey Deal (e.g., Terry, 2021), people coming to Europe as refugees from 2016 have been stuck in transit for long periods, often years, in refugee camps which have become infamous for their dire health- and living conditions (Beşer & Elfeitori, 2018; Hermans et al., 2017). Moreover, there have been a number of reports of e.g., illegal pushbacks, and criminalization of volunteer workers (Bockel, 2021; Gkliati, 2016), while several European countries have set up border fences. Hence, "Fortress Europe".

In 2020, the situation for the world's refugee-populations worsened further due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Kluge et al., 2020; Piguet, 2020). The implementation of strict border restrictions or closed borders in response to the pandemic, followed by asylum systems that slowed or came to a halt, resulted in a 43% drop in the number of asylum applications registered in the EU from February to March 2020 (UNHCR, 2020). The number of residence permits granted by OECD countries in the first semester of 2020 fell by 46% compared with the same period in 2019 (European Commission, Joint Research Centre, 2020).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 have resulted in more than 7 million IDPs and 6 million Ukrainian refugees, making it one of the largest and fastest forced displacement crises since WWII (UNHCR, 2022). A difference between this and other displacement crises, is that refugees from Ukraine have been allowed to move across borders and offered temporary protection status by EU member states, and are hosted by predominately high-income European countries (UNHCR, 2022). In comparison, the UNHCR (2021) point out that many of the 36.2 million refugees and asylum seekers who were already displaced at the end of 2021, faced much more dire conditions. For example, the majority of people forced to flee are hosted by low-income countries, and are heavily impacted by food crises, with many struggling to feed their families. For those who have come to Europe, the waiting time for temporary protection is often very long. The exceptions that are made for Ukrainian refugees is an example of solidarity and willingness to help people in acute need for protection. Simultaneously, it shows that the European preparedness to fulfill the obligations of the Refugee Convention might not apply equally to all groups (UNHCR, 2022). The war in Ukraine, the Norwegian Refugee Council (2022) points out, "has highlighted the immense gap between what is possible when the international community rallies behind a crisis, and the daily reality for the millions of people suffering far from the spotlight" (p.4).

Taken together, we are witnessing a development where a growing number of people are left in long-lasting displacement situations, and the UNHCR (2020) describe that "the world has clearly shifted from a decade of solutions to a decade of new and protracted displacement" (p.10).

Refugees, asylum policies, and living conditions in Norway

In 2022, 4.5 % of the total population in Norway had a refugee background, with the majority of refugees coming to Norway originating from countries in Africa and Asia. Most are coming as resettlement refugees through the UNHCR, meaning they were selected from refugee camps, and then brought to Norway (Statistics Norway, 2022A, July 7). The overall development from 2010 to 2020, shows a significant decline in the number of people seeking protection in Norway, as illustrated in the graph below showing the number of yearly asylum seekers (retrieved from NOAS, 2022). Included in the numbers from 2016 and 2017, are refugees relocated from Greece and Italy through the UN's relocation program, meaning that 1509 additional people got the chance to seek asylum in Norway. In 2020, Norway agreed to relocate 50 people from Greece under the same agreement (NOAS, 2022).
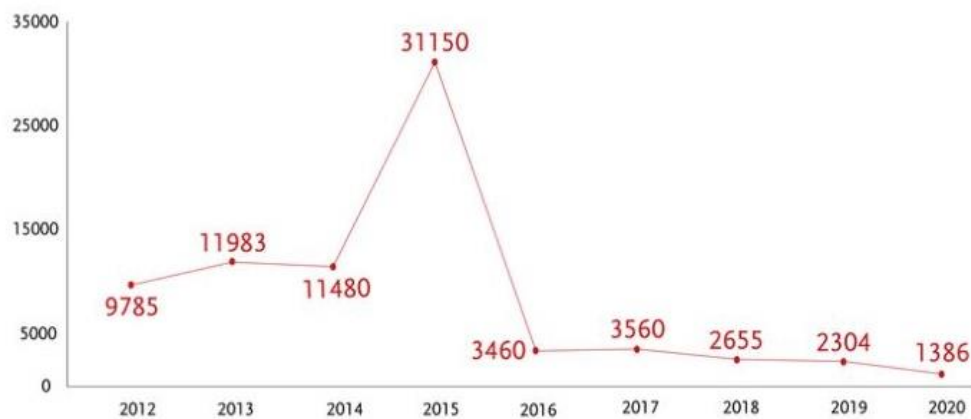
The graph shows that from a temporary, exceptional increase in the number of people seeking asylum in 2015, the number declined about 90 % in 2016, more than in any other European country (NOAS, 2022). In 2020, 3710 persons, nearly all resettlement refugees, were granted asylum. Numbers were somewhat lower than in 2019, due to the travel restrictions implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic (NOAS, 2022). Still, the main reason for the record low number of asylum seekers and refugees coming to Norway in the years following 2015, are the described changes in border and asylum regulations implemented throughout Europe in 2016. These effectively hinder people from reaching Norway to seek asylum, and forces refugees to seek protection in the first European country they are registered in, which for the most part is Greece or Italy.

Asylum and reception policies

Refugees coming to Norway are facing different processes, policies, and living arrangements, depending on age, family status, and whether one comes as a regular asylum seeker, or as a resettlement refugee through the UNHCR (UDI, n.d.). In common when coming to Norway, is registration, health check, information from the Norwegian Organization for Asylum Seekers (NOAS), a few get a quick asylum interview and answer (UDI, n.d.). Thereafter, people are sent to different types of reception centers to wait for an answer to their asylum application, or to be transported out of the country due to early rejection. URM who are younger than 15 are placed under the care of the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir), who are also responsible for services relating to e.g., child welfare for all children in Norway up to the age of 18/21. URM who are between 15 and 18 are placed under the care of the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI), meaning they

are treated and accommodated more like adults. This practice of differential treatment has been a source of controversy and critique for many years (see e.g., CRC, 2018; NIM, 2021)

On average, asylum seekers in Norway live in reception centers for about 4.5 years. Long waiting time in asylum reception centers are described as a great concern due to e.g., uncertainty and forced passivity, which is harmful for health and threatens integration (Weiss et al., 2017). NOAS (2022) emphasize the importance of facilitating conditions that allows people to be active and use their resources from the very beginning of their asylum seeking process, and also recommend increasing the number of language classes in reception centers, after they were reduced in 2015. Economic challenges is another cause of concern, as most asylum seekers are not allowed to work or receive a salary while waiting asylum. A single adult in an ordinary reception center receives less than 2500 NOK per month to cover all living expenses, excluding housing (NOAS, 2022). In comparison, the official estimate of living costs for a single person in Norway, excluding housing, is at least 11000 NOK per month (see oslomet.no/om/sifo/referansebudsjettet).

The last few years, several restrictions have been implemented that makes it more difficult to get permanent residency and seek family reunification (NOAS, 2022). There has also been more use of limited residence status and several examples of revoked residence status, in addition to a long ongoing practice of returning people to internal displacement, especially in Afghanistan. Together, these factors create an environment of fear and uncertainty, hinders integration, and makes it difficult to start a new life (NOAS, 2022).

Work/education, living conditions, and life satisfaction

A survey among URM in the age 18 to 29, who came before 2016 and are granted asylum in Norway, shows that 3 out of 4 were in work and/or education in 2017. Among those who came as minors with their parents, the number was 78 % (Kirkeberg & Lunde, 2019). In comparison, 85% of those in the same age group from the general population was in work and/or education (ibid.). In a recent survey including the Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland) (Ascher et al., 2021), young refugees were fund to have a more disadvantaged position in terms of labor market participation at ages 25 and 30, relative to their native-born majority peers. URM had greater inequalities in educational achievement, labor market participation, and health compared with accompanied minors. According to the authors, this confirms their vulnerability due to lack of family support and a higher burden of psychological trauma, and the special needs of URM should be addressed in policy (Ascher et

al., 2021). It was also found that refugees in Denmark, the Nordic country with the most restrictive immigration policies, were disadvantaged in almost all education, labor market, and health indicators, both in comparison to the native-born population and similar groups of refugees in Finland, Norway and Sweden (Ascher et al., 2021). The authors describe that these inequalities could be a direct consequence of policy – or the lack thereof – in important areas, and that these findings suggest that immigration policy with the intention to send signals to potential asylum seekers outside of the country comes at a price for refugees who have already settled (Ascher et al., 2021).

In a survey of living conditions among immigrants in Norway, language skills stood out as central for work, belonging, and life satisfaction (Vrålstad & Viggen, 2017). Moreover, while 9 of 10 were satisfied with their job, many experienced discrimination on the labor market, at the workplace and in education. Immigrants were also found to struggle more with economy than the general population, and 12 % reported mental health problems, compared to 6% of the general population (ibid.). Another survey found that quality of life among immigrants in Norway was somewhat lower than in the general population, but that on average, there were only small differences (Barstad, 2018). Life satisfaction increased with residence time, and was also correlated with experiences of discrimination, a difficult economic situation, loneliness and mental health problems. The authors point out that in spite of widespread perceived discrimination, and worse living conditions in a number of areas, immigrants were found to have "a surprisingly high level of satisfaction". While the reasons for this are not clear, the findings suggest that religiosity contributes to a higher level of satisfaction (ibid., p.5).

The next chapter deals with stages of forced migration, which has been described as an ongoing journey, consisting of several key phases, stretching from before flight to after resettlement (Hall & Olff, 2016).

Chapter 3: Stages of forced migration

Patel (2003) describe difficulties experienced by refugees in four phases, namely the pre-flight-, flight-, asylum-seeking- and resettlement phase. As follows, adversity and potentially traumatizing events are commonly experienced over prolonged periods of time (Berger & Weiss, 2003). This has changed for the worse over the last decade, as forced displacement nowadays is not only more widespread, but is no longer a short-term and temporary phenomenon (UNHCR, 2020, p.6). The following sections outline the main characteristics of each phase, from escaping threat and becoming 'a refugee', the journey for survival, and the reaching of a destination with the hope of safety and possibility of starting a new life.

Becoming a refugee and living in transit

The circumstances that leads to forced migration, such as violence, torture, armed conflict, and persecution, are widely considered to be potentially traumatic events (Knipscheer et al., 2020). Examples of commonly reported experiences of adversity before and during flight, are: loss of personal relationships and future prospects; destruction of home and belongings; exposure to physical and sexual violence; threats to own life and the lives of loved ones; witnessing the deaths of family and friends; and, being subject to persecution, torture, starvation, and disease (Berger & Weiss, 2003; Brunnet et al., 2020). Moreover, the journey often includes life-threatening experiences, such as crossing the Mediterranean sea in rubber boats, as well as emotionally and physically taxing living conditions in overcrowded refugee camps and detention centers e.g., in Libya and the Greek Islands, which have become infamous for their dire and life-threatening health- and living conditions (Beşer & Elfeitori, 2018; Hermans et al., 2017).

Reaching (potential) safety

Reaching safety means that immediate threats to life are not a concern, and this can be a period of relief and renewed hope for life and the future. At the same time, the asylum-seeking phase, which often lasts for several years, poses its own challenges. It entails uncertainty and fear of deportation, loss of everyday activities and control over own life and future prospects, combined with little or no access to meaningful activities or work. These factors affect well-being and the ability to maintain hope for the future, and this phase has been described as extremely taxing for health (Berg & Tronstad, 2015; Miller et al., 2002).

If asylum is granted, there are several everyday challenges of starting a new life in an unknown country and culture. Common sources of distress in the country of resettlement are discrimination and a political climate which has become increasingly unwelcoming towards refugees, social isolation, economic concerns, conflict in the country of origin, and loss of meaningful social roles and occupations (Fazel et al., 2012; Miller et al., 2002). A growing number of studies show that post-migration stressors not only intensifies symptoms related to earlier trauma, but are of equal or greater importance than war-related trauma for long-term health and adjustment. Years after arrival, post-migration stressors are more predictive of psychological distress than pre-migration adversity, which highlights the role and responsibility of receiving countries for shaping health outcomes (Fazel et al., 2012; Keles et al., 2016, 2017; Montgomery, 2010; Porter & Haslam, 2005; Schick et al., 2016).

The participants in this study were 18 or younger when they were forced to flee, either alone or with family members. Young age is associated with increased risk and vulnerability, but also with better chances for positive adaption (Fazel et al., 2012). For those who are younger than 18, the flight takes place in a period where they are simultaneously going through the transition from child- to adulthood, which is associated with vulnerability for developing psychological distress. Children fleeing alone are at a particularly high risk of being victim to exploitation, while fleeing with family often involves challenges such as taking on responsibilities that are more suited to adults, e.g., communicating with authorities or care for family members (Bean et al., 2007; Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011). At the same time, young age is positively associated with well-being and healthy adjustment in country of resettlement, when provided with adequate support. Young people might for example be more likely to adapt to a new country and context due to more efficient language acquisition, and have more opportunities to see own goals realized and to develop new social networks (Berg & Tronstad, 2015; Montgomery, 2010; Oppedal et al., 2009).

Chapter 4: Discourses, stereotypes, and attitudes

This chapter discusses how terminology, discourses and rhetoric contribute to shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards refugees, including how society sympathizes with people's situation, and feel about their right to protection. It also discusses value talk, polarization, populism, fear, stigma, anti-Islamic sentiments in relation to public debates and immigration policy.

Terminology and discourses

The last years, there has been a shift in the use of terminology among many politicians, media, and the public; for example, boys who are URM are often collectively referred to as men rather than children, and people who are seeking protection referred to as migrants, while refugee camps are described as 'migrant camps'. This is problematic because, as Wagner-Saffray (2020) point out, the term refugee is a precisely defined, legal term for someone who are forced to flee because of a threat of persecution and because they lack the protection of their own country. And, this entails the right to request protection, and places an obligation on receiving countries to help. The term migrant, however, is abstract, general, and not a legal term associated with any rights to protection (Wagner-Saffray, 2020). There is no internationally accepted legal definition of a migrant, who may leave his or her country for a number of reasons that are not related to persecution, and continues to enjoy the protection of his or her own government (Amnesty, n.d.). Thus, Wagner-Saffray (2020) calls the use of migrant and migration stigmatizing in this context, as it "transmits the idea of a free choice and an individual decision motivated only by a desire to join 'our European space'" (p.112). These seemingly innocent changes in terminology and descriptions can gradually turn into acceptance of human rights violations, via influencing public attitudes, policies, and willingness to follow up on laws and regulations.

Sensational headings or statements referring to 'the refugee crisis' or a 'massive influx of refugees' create an image of uncontrolled and high numbers of arrivals, which contributes to shaping people's attitudes towards immigration. For example, while about 2700 refugees came to Norway in 2018, those who believed that the number was higher than 10000 had more negative attitudes, compared to those who believed the number was below 2000 (Brekke et al., 2020. In research and academic discourse, it is also described as important to pay attention to how one portrays people, as this influence how they are perceived by

professionals, politicians and the general public (Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010). As Denzin (2017) points out, we know the world only through our representations of it, and as such, the writing of interviews is a way of writing the world. Thus, research performs in what Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin (2010) calls 'the arena of the politics of representation'.

Victim or threat stereotypes

In early 2019, the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) released a statement expressing "deep concern for the global rise of a political discourse that characterizes refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and migrants as threats to peace and security". IASFM (2019) also encouraged academics to take an active stance against xenophobic and anti-refugee discourse. Moreover, news media contribute to shape political attitudes, including the norms and values held by the public (Herrmann et al., 2021, p.127). As Pop (2016) describes, media discourses "are not simple mirrors of our society, they also build our social understanding, they create social meanings" (p.34). Illustrating this point, are population surveys that show that public attitudes are more benevolent in times where there are no significant negative news stories about immigrants and refugees (Strøm, 2019).

Following the "refugee crisis" in 2015, there was a marked negative change in attitudes towards refugees from 2015 to 2016, combined with increased efforts to prevent refugees from entering Europe (Varvin, 2017). However, even in the years before 2015, Western media portrayals of immigrants developed in a negative and one-dimensional direction, with a particular focus on the potential threat posed by refugees on the host country (Esses et al., 2013). For example, in 2009, the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi, 2009) documented that 70% of the stories on immigration or integration in Norwegian newspapers were problem-focused. Other analyses of newspaper coverage of immigrants and asylum seekers have showed that two news frames are particularly important (Franquet Dos Santos Silva et al., 2018). These frame refugees either as *victims*, emphasizing e.g., vulnerability, psychopathology, trauma, and welfare dependence, or as a *threat* to e.g., "Western values", or in terms of terrorism, crime, or mental instability. Not least, both represent stereotypes and an understanding of refugees as 'the other' (Franquet Dos Santos Silva et al., 2018). Pop (2016) points out that the Western media continue to construct a negative image of Muslims, constantly emphasizing the "danger" presented by refugees, while minimizing their tragedy and suffering (p.38). A study examining over 600,000 Dutch news items in 2016 and 2017,

found that the most frequently used adjectives to describe Muslims, were radical, extremist and terrorist (The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 2019).

Victim or threat stereotypes might also influence public opinions and judgements about who needs and deserves protection, based on commonly shared ideas about vulnerability. For example, women are often automatically described as more vulnerable and thus in more need of protection than men, although men are more often exposed to violence and torture in war and conflict (Brun, 2021). Another example is from Omland (2020), who describes that societal expectations regarding how refugees should behave, influence how URM are met and responded to by their professional caregivers. For example, URM must show that they *really* struggle in order for their professional caregivers to understand them and give them adequate emotional support. This because "real refugee children" are expected to cry and show similar signs of sadness, while those who do not, are seen more as men - and thus, as less vulnerable (Omland, 2020).

Paradoxically, one-dimensional discourses might be fueled by research intended to improve the health, well-being, and understanding of refugees. Just as hegemonic discourses and understandings shape public attitudes towards refugees, they color perceptions of how individuals are influenced by adversity and suffering. And, as Ingram and Snyder (2006) formulate it, psychology has been obsessed with the negative in people (p.117). An overemphasis on refugees' experiences of trauma and hardship can position them solely as victims who need help (Daniel, 2019), which might give rise to diminished expectations from others. As a young person with a refugee background explains in Edge et al. (2014), the term refugee can evoke certain associations in others; "unconsciously, there are things that run into their mind. It's not like 'oh this guy could be a PhD holder, or a medic'…The things that run into their mind are, oh, he must have been through a lot, he must be struggling" (p.37). Moreover, stigma and stereotypes limits recognition of agency and contributions to society, and can be internalized by refugees themselves, disempowering them as victims lacking agency (Ryu & Tuvilla, 2018; Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017).

Attitudes, 'value talk', and polarization

A general trend in Norway and much of Europe the last two decades, is that attitudes towards refugees and immigration have become more positive and inclusive (Strøm, 2019). Thus, except from the temporary negative change from 2015 to 2016 (Varvin, 2017), the attitudes toward refugees and immigration have gradually become more positive and less polarized

over the last 20 years, both in Norway and many EU member states. In general, more positive attitudes are found among women, younger people, those with higher education, and those who have contact with immigrants (Brekke et al., 2020; Hellevik & Hellevik, 2017; Strøm, 2019).

While the attitudes toward immigration became less polarized from 2010 to 2019, the opposite trend was found in attitudes towards Islam and Muslims, both in Norway and Europe (Brekke et al., 2020; Herrmann et al., 2021). This is visible in different forms, from outright Islamophobia, to increased 'value talk' in public and political discourse on migration and integration, particularly from 2015. The idea of conveying values to refugees has also become more important in integration policy (Brekke et al., 2020; Herrmann et al., 2021). In recent population surveys in Norway, 90% of the respondents meant that in order to be integrated, immigrants must share the foundational values of the Norwegian society. However, 52 % of the respondents meant that the values in Islam (it is not clear which) are not compatible with Norwegian values (Barstad & Molstad, 2020; Brekke et al., 2020). Moreover, skepticism towards religious people was higher towards Muslims than Christians, but degree of religiosity also mattered. That is, respondents were more skeptical of very religious Christians (54%), than of Muslims in general (45%), and particularly moderately religious Muslims (34%) (Barstad & Molstad, 2020; Brekke et al., 2020). According to Brekke et al. (2020), a general skepticism in Norway towards religion in general, and Islam in particular, is likely contribute to explain why many immigrants from Muslim countries experience being subject to discrimination and differential treatment (p.105). Similarly, Bangstad et al. (2022) found that the majority of their respondents had experienced discrimination on the basis of among other ethnicity or religious affiliation.

Value talk becomes problematic when it is connected to groups of people, such as Muslims, based on assumptions that "they" do not share Western and Norwegian culture and values, and is used to create an image of "the other" as representing a threat to national values such as gender equality, or freedom of thought, speech and beliefs (Herrmann et al., 2021). According to Mazrui (1997), **"**Westerners tend to think of Islamic societies as backward looking, oppressed by religion, and inhumanely governed", while in fact, "the cultural distance between the West and Islam is narrower than they assume" (p.118). If one takes a look at what constitutes 'typical Islamic values', examples are charity, gratitude, forgiveness, tolerance, honesty, kindness, justice, patience, and respecting the elderly (Leaman, 2006; Mazrui, 1997). Research also shows that most immigrants endorse so-called Norwegian or

Western values, such as democracy, freedom of speech, and negative attitudes towards corruption (Amundsen, 2017). Moreover, trust in the political system, the judiciary and the police is equally high among immigrants as in the general population, and the majority of both populations will not tolerate racism, the mockery of religion, or harassment in the name of freedom of speech (Vrålstad & Wiggen, 2017).

Discrimination, racism, anti-refugee sentiments and stigma are among daily stressors faced by many refugees in their country of resettlement, and known to negatively influence well-being and integration (Keles et al., 2016; Miller & Rasmussen, 2010; Montgomery, 2011). Stigma involves assigning negative characteristics to a person or group, and then disapprove of or discriminate against people, 'based on these perceivable characteristics that serve to distinguish them from other members of a society' (Goffman, 2009). Structural stigma is when societies and organizations actively limits possibilities for a stigmatized group, which might happen when fear and negative opinions about refugees or Muslims/Islam are used to justify discriminatory beliefs and practices. For example, the 'war on terror' and security and counterterrorism policies have contributed to perpetuate, legitimize and normalize discrimination, hostility and violence towards Muslim individuals and communities (Fangen, 2020; Shaheed, 2021). Value talk and polarization is not a new phenomenon in political and public discourse about immigration (see e.g., Johansen, 1984). Yet, Islamophobia and negative representations of Islam and Muslims have become more visible and mainstream since the turn of the century (Fangen, 2020). Islamophobia "treats Islam as a monolithic and fundamentalist creed that advocates violence, sexism and homophobia, and endangers "Western civilization" (Shaheed, 2021, p.4). The emergence of social media contributed to faster and more global sharing of far-right ideas, and according to Shaheed (2021), mainstream media and politicians chronically reinforce harmful stereotypes. For example, Islam is often portrayed as 'innately antithetical to democracy and human rights', while Muslims generally are underrepresented and often misrepresented in the media (ibid., p.5).

Taken together, value talk, stigma, skepticism, racism, and Islamophobia creates suspicion and separation, with negative consequences for refugees' health and well-being. It also negatively affect integration and inclusion, which is a matter of trust and belonging, and not only education, work and language (Bråten et al., 2017). Stigma and racism is often based on fear, assumed differences or conflicts, and lack of knowledge and familiarity, and as long as refugees and Muslims are underrepresented or misrepresented in media - or research -, stereotypes gets to live on unchallenged. This highlights the importance of including and

listening to the people in question when doing research. Moreover, awareness of language and rhetoric is central, as seemingly innocent changes in terminology can have serious consequences for individual rights and lives.

Looking back to stages of forced migration, the 'transit-period' is often used to describe the flight period between country of origin and that of resettlement, but strictly speaking, it ends first when a person is granted permanent protection. Racism, stigma and Islamophobia are examples of post-migration stressors that might cause high levels of distress and pose a threat to health, both before and after residence has been granted. Traditionally, however, the role of post-migration factors for health has received limited attention in psychological research, where the main focus has been on traumatic experiences before and during flight, and their consequences for psychological health. Paradoxically, research intended to improve refugees' health might fuel certain stereotypes, through overemphasizing vulnerability and psychopathology. These topics are dealt with in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Psychological research perspectives on refugees and adversity

In the following sections, main areas of focus in psychological research about refugees are briefly described. A critical look is taken at the 'trauma discourse', before addressing the question of how people cope and remain healthy, despite trauma and suffering.

Trauma and psychopathology

The psychological research interest in refugees' mental health became manifest following the American Psychiatric Association's recognition of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in 1980, a time which was marked by increasing interest in war- and combat related trauma. Since then, the main focus in clinical and mainstream psychological research about refugees has been on psychopathology and maladjustment following war- and flight related trauma, and today, PTSD is the most widely applied framework for understanding development after various trauma (Al-Krenawi et al., 2011; Pupavac, 2006; Ryan et al., 2008).

A diagnosis of PTSD requires exposure to a potentially traumatic event (PTE), and a number of subsequent symptoms (American Psychiatric Association, 2022; World Health Organization, 2019). Most people report at least one PTE during their lifetime, which involves being exposed to actual or threatened death, severe injury, or sexual violence (Knipscheer et al., 2020). The essence of trauma, as Altmaier (2019) describes it, "is that of devastating force that overwhelms the victim's customary beliefs, sources of support, and meaning in life" (p.1). In understanding the impact of trauma on individuals' psychological health, some have focused on the role of worldviews, which are used to frame perception and experience, and provide individuals with a sense of meaning, controllability, and protection against anxiety (Johnson et al., 2011; Koltko-Rivera, 2004). These world-views might be challenged by trauma, leading to a weakening of e.g., their anxiety buffering effects (Edmondson et al., 2011). According to Janoff-Bulman (1992, 2014), individuals develop and are guided by fundamental assumptions about the world, others, and self, centered on beliefs concerning benevolence, self-worth, and meaningfulness. For example, beliefs in a just, benevolent, predictable world in which one has competence and worth (ibid.). Janoff-Bulman (2014) explains that trauma acts as shocks to our inner worlds, which might damage fundamental assumptions and their protective functions, and lead to a sudden awareness of own mortality and vulnerability. The degree to which this shattering happens, determines the

psychological suffering following trauma, according to Janoff-Bulman (2014, p.83). For some, this leads to symptoms that meet the diagnostic criteria for PTSD, as defined in the DSM-V and ICD-11. Importantly, however, only a minority of people exposed to PTE's develop PTSD, and a number of risk and resilience factors influence individual differences in reactions to similar events (Knipscheer et al., 2020).

War- and flight related adversity often involves direct threats to life, severe injury and various forms of violence, and/or witnessing others being killed, and is thus associated with increased risk of developing PTSD, depression and anxiety disorders (Fazel et al., 2005). In studies among refugees in Western countries, prevalence estimates of all three disorders vary widely, yet are typically 20 % and above (Bogic et al., 2015; Kien et al., 2019). Although this is higher than the average in the non-refugee population, it also shows that the vast majority of refugees do not develop PTSD, depression or anxiety disorders.

Still, given the hardship and adversity associated with forced migration, concern for negative health consequences is in place. The research on PTSD and other forms of psychopathology following war- and flight related trauma has contributed with valuable knowledge for theory and practice. Not least, it has been essential for the recognition of the suffering and hardship endured by many refugees. A major limitation of a singular focus on psychopathology, however, is that it does not account for the fact that most people, including refugees, *do not* develop psychopathology following trauma (Jayawickreme, Jayawickreme, et al., 2019; Olff et al., 2019). Furthermore, it has been criticized for mainly identifying maladaptive responses and risk factors, while overlooking equally important factors that signal and support resilience and healthy adaptation (Al-Krenawi et al., 2011, p.105).

Limitations of the 'trauma discourse'

Linley and Joseph (2004) argue that much of the psychological research on development after trauma and adversity has been dominated by 'negative clinical psychology', based on the medical model. Moreover, according to Al-Krenawi et al. (2011), the overarching assumption has been that "the normal response to trauma is victimization, distress, and pathology, rather than competency and growth" (p.103). As a result, research on trauma largely emphasize what is *lacking* for survivors of war to experience well-being, and there is less insight into which factors that facilitate positive adaption and functioning (Jayawickreme, Jayawickreme, et al., 2019). Similarly, it has led "mental health interventions to focus on the perceived needs of refugees, rather than to a holistic approach that weighs strengths and resources equally" (Koc,

2018, p.182). A singular focus on individual psychopathology and vulnerability also carries the risks of paying insufficient attention to the social and structural factors that creates adversity in the country of resettlement (Brown et al., 2017; Pupavac, 2006).

Post-migration stressors

Studies show that both pre- and post-migration stressors contribute significantly to the development and maintenance of PTSD, while post-migration stressors have been consistently stronger predictors of depression than war exposure (Keles et al., 2016; Miller & Rasmussen, 2010; Montgomery, 2011; Porter & Haslam, 2005). Post-migration stressors such as racism, discrimination, uncertainty, stigma, and economical concerns, represent daily threats to psychological well-being, and exhaust coping resources. Thus, psychopathology cannot be reduced to a matter of the individuals' psyche, or properly treated by solely focusing on that. As Peisker and Tilbury (2003) points out, "psychological help alone cannot fix emotional distress if social stressors such as unemployment, language barriers, and social isolation persist" (p.83). Similarly, Ryan et al. (2008) holds that to allow the resourcefulness of refugees to flourish, "we need to look at the deficiencies within ourselves as host societies - within our attitudes and policies - and at the types of changes that we need to make" (p.16). Among the policy recommendations that are repeated in the literature, are stable settlement, including rapid resolution of asylum claims and minimization of relocation, and joint action in health, social, economic, and political sectors to reduce inequalities in access to resources (Ascher et al., 2021; Fazel et al., 2012).

In summary, a majority of studies have primarily focused on consequences of exposure to traumatic events before and during flight, and less on post-migration stressors. This has contributed to a one-sided focus on psychological interventions, when structural changes and reduction of daily stressors could have had a greater effect on mental health (Edge et al., 2014; Marlowe, 2010A). Moreover, a one-sided focus on psychopathology, vulnerability and maladjustment risk ignoring people's strengths, resources and agency. This might limit or slow recovery and mask the potential for growth, lead to diminished expectations towards refugees' capacity for coping and positive adaption, and carries a risk of enforcing stigma and stereotypes associated with victimization (Edge et al., 2014; Marlowe, 2010A; Shakespeare-Finch & Lurie-Beck, 2014). Not least, it presents incomplete portrayals of developmental trajectories, or, half truths about lives (Sircar & Dutta, 2011).

Importantly, a number of concepts and theories have been developed to expand the understanding of health and human capacity for coping and growth in the face of adversity (Joseph, 2015). Without denying the negative effects of trauma, these have contributed to the recognition of that "a number of alternative pathways and scenarios are possible and observable among survivors" (Almedom, 2005, p.262).

Why and how do people remain healthy after trauma and suffering?

In the decades following the horrors of the Holocaust, there was a growing research interest in the origins of health and psychological capacities for survival. Positive functioning and health was central within humanistic and existential psychology from the 1960's, and within positive psychology from the 1990's (Joseph, 2015). How do people manage to survive psychologically and continue their lives after going through unimaginable suffering? How come that survivors do not lose their faith or interest in life and humanity, but rather, in many instances, devote their lives to helping others? How can we explain that, in response to similar stressors and adversity, some people develop psychopathology, while others remain healthy or transform in positive ways? Questions like these underlie the development of theories of coping and adaptive responses to stress and adversity. Salutogenesis and sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1987) and resilience (Rutter, 1987) are particularly relevant in relation to theories about posttraumatic/adversarial growth (Joseph & Linley, 2005; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Theories of coping are central in understanding how individuals deal with stress and adversity, through the use of voluntary and effortful behaviors and cognitions (Skinner et al., 2007). A person's environment provides practical and emotional coping resources, and the availability of these influences individuals' perceptions of their coping options. Coping strategies have been grouped into problem-, emotion-, and appraisal-focused coping, avoidance coping, and meaning-making coping (Billings & Moos, 1981; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Skinner et al., 2003). Problem-focused strategies are aimed at resolving the stressful encounter, e.g., through planning, increasing effort and management of priorities, while emotion-focused strategies such as distancing, isolation, and wishful thinking, are used to regulate the unpleasant emotions that arise during the encounter (Ntoumanis et al., 2009, p.251). In addition to describing emotions as central in coping, Lazarus (1991) holds that "the study of coping should never be divorced from motivation" (p.115). He does so by arguing that emotions are reactions to the fate of active goal pursuit (Ntoumanis et al., 2009).

Similarly, from a self-determination theory perspective, motivation and coping are seen in conjunction, i.e., the function of coping is related to attacks on core needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Ntoumanis et al., 2009).

Motivation and coping are central aspects in Aaron Antonovsky's salutogenic approach (1987), which he developed to explain the origins of health, including how people cope and remain healthy when faced with adversity. Central to the theory is the sense of coherence (SOC), which can be understood as a construct that underlies the development and mobilization of coping strategies when faced with stressors (Antonovsky, 1987; Bowman, 1997). According to Antonovsky (1987), successful coping depends on the degree to which events in life are experienced as *meaningful*, *comprehensible*, and *manageable*. More specifically, Antonovsky (1987) defined SOC as:

> "a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable, and explicable (comprehensibility); (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli (manageability); and (3) these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement (meaningfulness)" (p.19).

Antonovsky (1987) considered *meaningfulness* to be the most important dimension of the SOC, because it mediates motivation. Comprehensibility came next, as high manageability depends on this. Positive associations have been found particularly between the meaningfulness dimension of SOC, and posttraumatic growth (Arya & Davidson, 2015; Ragger et al., 2019). A person's SOC develops from infancy, and Benz et al. (2014) describe that the role of culture in framing life situations which give rise to meaning and manageability, was of great interest to Antonovsky. He also emphasized that stressors accompanying "being part of a minority, especially one that is not accepted by the majority, inhibits a strong SOC and thereby threatens health" (Benz et al., 2014, p.21). For asylum seekers, conditions that facilitates mastery through strengthening SOC are described as central for providing possibilities to improve psychological health problems (NOU 2011:10, p.225).

SOC is described as an important mechanism fostering the development of resilience (Mc Gee et al., 2018), which refers to a relatively stable trajectory of healthy functioning after a highly adverse event (Bonanno, 2004). Ungar (2008) describe resilience as the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to health-sustaining resources, and of the individual's family, community and culture to provide these in culturally meaningful ways (p.225). This description reflects and understanding of resilience as shaped by transactional, multilevel

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processes including psychological, biological, social, and cultural factors (Pieloch et al., 2016; Tol et al., 2013). From research with refugees, a strong SOC is among the commonly cited protective factors which promote resilience, along with e.g., high level of family and community social support, a strong collective cultural identity, and religious beliefs (Chan et al., 2016; Siriwardhana, et al., 2014). Resilience is found to be more common than uncommon (Bonanno, 2004), also in studies among refugees, where the concept has been quite extensively explored, particularly among URM (e.g., Keles et al., 2018; Oppedal et al., 2009; Sleijpen et al., 2013).

Resilience and posttraumatic/adversarial growth are defined as related, but distinct constructs (Levine et al., 2009). In simple terms, resilience can be described as 'bouncing back' after adversity, and growth as 'bouncing forward'. That is, growth contains a transformative component, and theories about adversarial growth seek to explain *improved* functioning resulting from the struggle with trauma (Sleijpen et al., 2013; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Still, as Linley (2003) points out, growth does not imply that nothing has been lost due to trauma; growth may be found in some domains, and losses may occur in others (p.602). Thus, growth and distress commonly coexists. Described next, is prosocial behavior and compassion following adversity.

Prosocial behavior and compassion following adversity

Compassion is the feeling that arises when people are confronted with someone's suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering (Strauss et al., 2016, p.16), and prosocial behavior is defined as voluntary behavior intended to benefit another, characterized by acts of kindness, compassion, and helping behaviors (Eisenberg et al., 2006). Traditionally, the research and understanding of compassion and prosocial behavior has primarily explained these as rooted in positive experiences, while adverse experiences have been seen as contributing mainly to psychopathology or antisocial behavior (Frazier et al., 2013; Vollhardt, 2009). However, the relationship between adversity and outcomes is far more complex. For example, studies among Holocaust-survivors showed that a large number engaged in prosocial activities, where they discovered that they could both experience healing and transform the meaning of their trauma through making it the basis for social action (i.e., 'survivor mission') (Herman, 1998; Kahana et al., 1986; Lifton, 1980). Later studies among war survivors have confirmed positive associations between trauma exposure and prosocial outcomes (Macksoud & Aber, 1996; Raboteg-šaric et al., 1994), as does studies with survivors of childhood abuse and other

trauma (Frazier et al., 2013; Greenberg et al., 2018). Examples of prosocial behavior, without this being explicitly investigated, are also plentiful in studies among young refugees. For example in the form of efforts and a general desire to help others and give back to society, often described as rooted in gratitude and compassion (Goodman, 2004; Lee, 2012; Luster et al., 2010; Omland & Andenas, 2017; Oppedal et al., 2013).

How is it explained that individuals, after experiencing trauma and suffering, can end up becoming more compassionate and engaged in helping others than they were before? According to 'the norm of reciprocity'(Gouldner, 1960), individuals who receive help, support and care, or are exposed to altruistic role models, are more likely to help others afterwards. Batson and Shaw (1991) hold, in their empathy-altruism hypothesis, that empathic emotion evokes genuine altruistic motivation. In line with this, are findings from Lim & DeSteno (2016) showing that 'past adversity is associated with a tendency to experience compassion', hypothesized to stem from adversity's links to heightened perspective-taking and empathy. This again predicted costly behavior directed at alleviating the suffering of others (Lim & DeSteno, 2016, p.180). Similarly, findings from Vollhardt and Staub (2011) show that "prosocial responses toward outgroups in need were higher among those who had suffered than among those who had not. This effect occurred for different types of prosocial attitudes and behaviors, including volunteering and short-term emergency helping" (p.313). In their theory altruism born of suffering, Staub and Vollhardt (2008) focus explicitly on post-trauma changes in the form of increased altruism and compassion, and on how this can both inspire and find a meaningful form through prosocial behavior. One hypothesized mechanism, is that adversity leads to increased perspective taking and feelings of responsibility for the welfare of others, and then to altruism and actual efforts to help (ibid.).

Compassion and pro-social behavior are also described as outcomes of adversarial growth, and largely attributed to changes in wisdom and perspective, important priorities, and life philosophy (see ch.8).

Chapter 6: The key points and essence of PART I

The purpose of Part I has been to provide the reader with a context for understanding my motivation for and the relevance of this study, based on personal background and interests, the current situation for refugees, and needed research perspectives. Moreover, to aid an understanding of what it can entail to be a refugee, and exemplify how pre-, peri- and post-migration factors play together in creating lived realities.

According to Bauman (2016), "humanity is in crisis – and there is no exit from that crisis other than solidarity among humans" (p.18). We are witnessing a development where people are stuck in refugee camps, in liminality and indefinite waiting, due to closed borders and increased restrictions of movement, economic derailment, and growing populistic and nationalistic sentiments across potential receiving countries. The asylum-seeking and resettlement phase presents both challenges such as waiting time, passivity, uncertainty, fear, and economic challenges. Yet, population surveys show that although many experience a slow and difficult start, much tends to go well for people after a few years, for example when it comes to work and life satisfaction. In terms of development in political trends and asylum policies in Norway, this mirrors that in many European countries, e.g., more right-wing populism and changes in attitudes and rhetoric, more restrictive asylum policies and decreased immigration.

Forced migration and accompanying adversity is an ongoing journey, and does not end the moment people arrive in a country of potential resettlement. Continuing adversity in the post-migration phase, in the form of waiting time, uncertainty, forced passivity, and stigma, stereotypes and polarization, negatively affects health. However, in psychological research, the role of post-migration factors for health has traditionally received limited attention, though with a few exceptions, while the main focus has been on trauma, psychopathology, and individual factors. This has left a need for research that explore and explain strengths, coping and growth, and include the role of post-migration factors in development and health.

In Part II, I further elaborate on strengths, meaning making, and growth as I present and discuss the theoretical and empirical framework of the study, which creates the foundation for understanding and evaluating the empirical findings.

PART II
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 7: Humanistic and existential psychology

> The science of psychology has revealed to us much about man's shortcomings, his illness, his sins, but little about his potentialities, his virtues, his achievable aspirations, or his full psychological height. It is as if psychology has voluntarily restricted itself to only half its rightful jurisdiction, the darker, meaner half (Abraham Maslow, 1954, p. 354).

The quote from Maslow relates to the challenge of finding a psychological approach and framework able to account for positive changes following trauma. The young participants in this study have experienced suffering and its negative consequences, and there is no denial of the potentially devastating consequences of trauma and hardship. Yet, I needed a theoretical framework that could help me explore and get a better understanding of the motivations and conditions facilitating coping, meaning making, growth, and wisdom following adversity, in the context of forced migration. Such a framework was not easily available within mainstream or clinical psychology, which to a large degree has focused on psychopathology in response to trauma and adversity. Eventually, I landed on a humanistic and existential psychological approach, which accounts for people's underlying drive and capacities for positive development. In the following sections, I delve into what Maslow refers to as the other part of psychology's rightful jurisdiction, namely the more hopeful, strength- and growth-oriented part, which has been well theorized within humanistic and existential psychology. Growth theories, with main focus on the organismic valuing theory of adversarial growth, are presented in Chapter 8.

Human potential, drive, agency, meaning making, and growth

Humanistic and existential psychology share an emphasis on human drive and capacity for awareness, authenticity and growth. Development is understood as a lifelong process, driven by intentional, meaning seeking and responsible individuals who supersede the sum of their parts. This holistic and phenomenological approach to human beings and experience represents an anti-reductionist stance and rejects 'mechanistic' view of human beings, as psychoanalysis and behaviorism was seen to represent (Cooper, 2008; House et al., 2017; Whitehead & Groth, 2019). While the existential tradition if often said to emphasize the more tragic dimensions of existence, humanistic psychology is marked by more optimism and pragmatism (Yalom, 1980; Winston, 2015). In the following sections, central perspectives from humanistic and existential psychology on growth, motivation, and meaning making are outlined.

Innate need and motivation for self-actualization and self-transcendence

Among the core assumptions of humanistic psychology, are that human beings are inherently good, have personal agency, and are intentional, goal oriented, and meaning seeking. A fundamental need or innate drive for improvement of self and the world, through self-actualization and self-transcendence, is seen as a key motivator of behavior. One explanation for this drive is the organismic valuing theory, which posits that human beings are active and growth-oriented organisms, naturally inclined to search for meaning and integrate their experiences into a unified sense of self (Joseph & Linley, 2005; Whitehead & Groth, 2019; Winston, 2015).

The notion of an organismic valuing process

The humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers held that human beings are 'innately oriented towards growth and self-actualization, know what they need in order to live a fulfilled life, and are active in meeting these needs' (Rogers, 1959, 1961). Rogers (1961) described that when individuals follow their organismic valuing process, they could reach what he called the 'fully functioning state', or, self-actualization. This state was characterized by authenticity and existential living, trust in oneself, openness to experience, and greater well-being, fulfillment, and satisfaction of innate psychological needs (Rogers, 1961). In the context of adversity and crisis, Rogers (1959, 1961) discussed how the process of breakdown and disorganization of the self-structure, and reintegration of self and experience eventually can lead to improved functioning and growth. According to Rogers (1959, 1961), growth happens when individuals confront problems, struggle to master them, and through that struggle develop new aspects of their abilities, capacities and perspectives on life. As such, young refugees should have ample opportunities for self-actualization, which has similar characteristics as growth.

While he saw the actualizing tendency as innate, Rogers (1961) emphasized that the process of self-actualization is facilitated by a safe, non-judgmental environment that provides genuineness (openness and self-disclosure), acceptance (unconditional positive regard), and empathy (being listened to and understood). Although Rogers here primarily focused on characteristics of the therapeutic relationship, his points are also relevant for understanding how social and contextual factors might influence possibilities for self-actualization among young refugees. For example, the importance of getting access to safe and nurturing social

surroundings and relationships, considering that many have lost much or all of their social network and sense of safety.

From Carl Rogers and humanistic psychology, I have included particularly the key concept of *self-actualization* and the notion of an *innate organismic valuing process*. The latter is central in the organismic valuing theory of adversarial growth (Joseph & Linley, 2005, see ch.8).

Self-transcendence as the ultimate developmental need

The humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow is particularly known for his motivational theory of human needs (Maslow, 1943). Self-actualization was long described as the highest developmental stage, and Maslow (1962/2011) described self-actualizing people among other as altruistic, compassionate and able to receive compassion, accepting of self and others, and as having concern for the welfare of humanity. Moreover, he found that the fully developed - and very fortunate - human being working under the best conditions tends to be motivated by values which transcend his *self* (Maslow, 1971, p.2). Self-transcendence involves the ability to realize the unity of all being and the connectedness between all things (Koltko-Rivera, 2006; Maurer & Daukantaitė, 2020), and towards the end of his life, Maslow (1971) added self-transcendence as the ultimate human need. This represents a significant change to his theory, as it involves that the characteristic of 'the best developed human being' went from being self-centered, to being altruistic (Koltko-Rivera, 2006; Maurer & Daukantaitė, 2020).

One challenge concerning Maslow's hierarchy of needs is that it implies that basic needs must be met before individuals can be motivated by higher needs (see Maslow, 1943). However, this is not supported by findings from e.g., growth studies, and Koltko-Rivera (2006) points out that Maslow failed to explain that individuals who do not have their primary needs for survival and safety met, can still be motivated by higher needs for love, meaning, self-actualization and self-transcendence.

From Maslow, I add to the theoretical framework the motivation and need for *self-transcendence*, and the notion of altruism, pro-sociality and *devotion to a task outside oneself* as a characteristics of self-actualized people.

Existential concerns and the will to meaning

In contrast to humanistic psychologists, existentialists do not assume that individuals have an innate tendency towards growth. Rather, individuals are what they choose to be, and, in line with an anti-deterministic stance, behavior is seen as orientated toward the future and not

driven by the past. This means that personal identity is shaped just as much by one's meanings, purposes, and goals in life, as by one's early experiences (Cooper, 2008; Yalom, 1980; Winston, 2015). Here, existential psychology is particularly concerned with how people come to terms with four universal existential concerns, namely; death, freedom, isolation and meaninglessness. In short, awareness of life's limitations, the inescapability of death, and that freedom comes with responsibility, might cause existential anxiety. Confronting this anxiety is seen to promote greater engagement with life, and competence to handle life's difficulties (Cooper, 2008; Yalom, 1980; Winston, 2015). Ultimately, the process of awareness, confrontation, and acceptance of existential concerns is what allows a person to live an authentic life and become fully human. That is, to discover one's personal meanings, purposes, and goals - as opposed to living in a state of avoidant, passive and inauthentic existence (Winston, 2015; Yalom, 1980).

The will to meaning

The existential psychologist Victor Frankl described that the primary motivational force of human life, is the will to find and fulfill meaning in what we do and experience (1959/1992). Also in relation to his own survival of the Holocaust, Frankl (1959/1992) held that life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose. According to Frankl (1959/1992), meaning in life can be discovered by "creating a work or doing a deed; by experiencing something or encountering someone; and, lastly, by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering" (p.64). When individuals are facing situations that cannot be changed, which might often be the case in the context of forced migration, they are ultimately challenged to change themselves (Frankl, 1959/1992, p.51). This might involve efforts to extract some form of value or meaning in own suffering, or identifying a future purpose to feel positive about and simply committing to stay alive in order to actualize this future purpose and meaning (Grace, 2017).

Frankl (1959/1992) developed logotherapy, a form of existential analysis aimed at helping people access their personal meaning and purpose in life. Future meaning is in focus, and the point of departure is people's healthy core, where Frankl held that one can find will to meaning, imagination, faith, love, self-transcendence and humor, along with the capacity to strive towards goals and take on commitments and responsibilities (Frankl, 1959/1992; Southwick et al., 2016). While referring to the healthy core as the spiritual dimension of existence, Frankl did not identify the spiritual with the religious (Ryan, 2019). He did

however "view religious values as potential sources of strength in the search for meaning and self-transcendence" (Southwick et al., 2016, p.140).

Pro-sociality, belonging, and self-transcendence were central ideas for Frankl, who described self-transcendence as the essence of existence and the marker of authentic living (Frankl, 1966, p.104). He called it "a constitutive characteristic of being human that it always points, and is directed, to something other than itself", and held that the true meaning of life is to be discovered in the world rather than within the self (Frankl, 1966, p.97). Frankl (1959/1992) held that "the more one forgets himself - by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love - the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself" (p.50). As such, self-actualization is possible only as a side-effect of self-transcendence, just as happiness is a 'by-product' of fulfilling a meaning, and not accessible as a state on its own (Frankl, 1959/1992, 1966).

Taken together, Frankl offers a holistic approach to healing that finds potential for learning and growth in unavoidable suffering, and highlight the value of focusing forward and outward. Frankl also emphasized that the most central is not necessarily to have basic needs for living met, but rather to have a clear idea of what one is living for (Grace, 2017). This perspective might serve to complement Maslow's ideas concerning lower vs higher needs. From Frankl's work, I add the *will to meaning* as a building block to the theoretical framework. Moreover, the emphasis on *future meaning and purpose*, happiness as a 'by-product' of fulfilling a meaning, and self-actualization as a side-effect of *self-transcendence*.

Chapter 8: Adversarial growth: main theories

> It is when tragedy strikes and our previous sense of self or identity is swept away like leaves on a breeze that we are at our greatest potential for growth. When we begin to question not only what we know, but who we are, we are able to pick up the pieces of ourselves that we want to keep, leave the ones we don't and construct a new identity that is authentic to our true selves (Kazimierz Dąbrowski, in Ackerman, 2017).

The assumption that facing and struggling with major difficulties in life can lead to useful learning and positive change and transformation, is part of ancient myth, literature and religion (Joseph & Linley, 2005; Calhoun et al., 2010; Middleton, 2016). The above excerpt from Dąbrowski's theory of positive disintegration (Ackerman, 2017) captures some of the essence of growth processes, namely how trauma can aid personality development and the reconstruction of a more authentic self. In his psychological practice, Yalom (1980) noted that patients who had survived adversity and crises, surprisingly often described they had become more compassionate, changed priorities, lived more 'present', and felt a stronger appreciation of life and deeper connections with loved ones. According to Weathers et al. (2016), all these aspects are closely associated with the concept of meaning, which highlights the theoretical roots of growth theories in meaning and purpose in life (p.154). Moreover, the core ideas and aspects of adversarial growth have been central topics within humanistic and existential psychology from their beginning. However, it was first in the 1990's that Western psychology's scientific interest in adversarial/posttraumatic growth began to increase (Linley et al., 2006).

Growth theories were developed to account for and explain such positive changes following trauma. Importantly, it is not the trauma itself, but the processes individuals go through in its aftermath that potentially leads to growth, broadly defined as "the positive psychological changes resulting from the struggle of coping with and processing highly challenging events and their aftermath" (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p.1). Two of the most comprehensive growth theories are Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1995, 2004) theory of *posttraumatic growth* (PTG) and Joseph and Linley's (2005) *organismic valuing theory of growth* (OVT).

The PTG is the most widely used, possibly due to its precise and operational definition and measures (Brunnet et al., 2020). It provides a functional-descriptive model of how people grow, focusing mainly on social and psychological explanatory factors (Joseph & Linley, 2005). Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) developed the 21-item Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) to measure the manifestation of growth in five life domains/main factors, namely;

Relating to Others, New Possibilities, Personal Strength, Spiritual Change, and Appreciation of Life. The PTGI and the 10-item PTGI-short form (SF) (Cann et al., 2010A), are the most commonly used measurement scales of PTG.

The OVT was chosen in this study, mainly because it builds more explicitly on humanistic and existential psychology; aims to integrate knowledge and explain processes of both stress and growth; and, accounts for *why* people would be motivated toward growth in addition to *how* (Joseph & Linley, 2005).

The organismic valuing theory of growth through adversity (OVT)

The OVT aims to provide an integrative explanatory account of both stress- and growth processes, and a meta-theoretical framework for explaining *why* people would be motivated to grow in addition to *how* they grow (Joseph & Linley, 2005, p.264). The latter is explained largely by the organismic valuing process, which posits that human beings are naturally inclined towards growth and to integrate their psychological experiences into a unified sense of self and integrate themselves into larger social groups and structures (Joseph & Linley, 2005, p.269).

Joseph & Linley (2005) hold that an integrative theory of growth must be able to, firstly, account for an underlying completion tendency that serves as the driver for cognitive–emotional processing of posttraumatic stress reactions (p.267). Second, specify how new trauma-related information is processed. Third, explain the role of meaning making in the experience of growth. Fourth, account for the characteristics of both growth and PTSD, through bridging two traditions of well-being, namely the eudaimonic (psychological well-being) and the hedonic (subjective well-being) (p.268).

The growth process

In line with Janoff-Bulman's (1992) shattered assumptions theory, the growth process is set in motion by the occurrence of a trauma or major life crisis that challenges or shatters a person's assumptive world, and previous ways of managing emotional distress (Linley & Joseph, 2004; Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Joseph & Linley (2005) describe that such experiences poses significant existential challenges, as they 'show us that we are fragile, that the future is uncertain, and that events can be random. As such, they show us the limits of the human condition and our assumptions about ourselves and the world' (p. 268). In order to cope and resolve these feelings, individuals will strive to reconstruct the assumptive world in ways that

integrate the new trauma-related information (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Joseph & Linley, 2005). This process includes ruminative activity, states of intrusion and avoidance, and a search for meaning, as people try to make sense of what happened and deal with their emotional reactions (Joseph & Linley, 2005, p. 268). According to the OVT, "this process is resulting from the intrinsic motivation towards integration and growth, which is part of the organismic valuing process" (Joseph & Linley, 2005, p.269).

Meaning making plays an essential role in this process, and the OVT specify how meaning as *comprehensibility* - which PTSD theories tend to be concerned with - may characterize the initial struggle with meaning after trauma, while a shift to meaning as *significance* is necessary for growth (Joseph & Linley, 2005, p.273). This represents a shift from making sense of events, to searching for and getting a sense of life's inherent value and worth (Janoff-Bulman & McPherson Frantz, 1997; Joseph & Linley, 2005). This feeling of significance can come through understanding the implications of the event for how to live one's life, and for one's worldview and life philosophy (Joseph & Linley, 2005; Martela & Steger, 2016). Importantly, this requires that one is open to the existential issues raised by the event, and follows one's organismic valuing process (Joseph & Linley, 2005, p.273).

To account for the characteristics of both growth and PTSD, the OVT emphasize two broad theoretical traditions of well-being. Joseph & Linley (2005) describe theories of PTSD as theories of hedonic, or subjective, well-being, which refers to general affective states and global satisfaction with life (p.269). The characteristics of growth, on the other hand, are primarily related to eudaimonic, or psychological, well-being. This is associated with increased feelings of authenticity, purpose, meaning, self-acceptance, closer relationships, and deeper spirituality (Joseph & Linley, 2005, p.273). Psychological well-being may not make people happier in terms of increasing subjective well-being, but might lead to a more authentic way of being and leave individuals feel wiser after what they went through (Joseph & Linley, 2005). As such, its characteristics are similar to those of individuals described by Maslow (1962/2011) and Rogers (1959, 1961) as self-actualized or fully functioning. As Joseph & Linley (2005) point out, the fully functioning state is primarily a description of the development of psychological well-being. The OVT also posits that over time, higher levels of psychological well-being will lead to higher levels of subjective well-being (Joseph & Linley, 2005).

The OVT explains that the post-trauma coping process can result in experiences being assimilated, i.e., fit into existing models, representing a return to pre-trauma baseline, or

accommodated (Joseph & Linley, 2005). The latter means that existing models of the world are revised and changed to accommodate the new trauma-related information, either in a negative direction, associated with psychopathology and distress, or in a positive direction, associated with growth (Joseph & Linley, 2005). Individual differences in trauma responses are explained in terms of "the degree of disparity between the trauma and preexisting expectations and beliefs; whether the social environment – before and after the traumatic event - impedes or promotes the organismic valuing process; and, the extent to which people act concordantly with their organismic valuing process" (Joseph & Linley, 2005, p.274).

The role of personal, social, contextual, and cultural factors in the growth process

From their review, Linley & Joseph (2004) conclude that positive reinterpretation, acceptance coping, and effortful rumination done by people who are intrinsically religious, optimistic and experience high levels of positive affect, is likely to lead to reports of greater growth (p.17). Similarly, factors positively associated with adversarial growth in the mainstream literature, are extroversion and openness to experience; problem-focused-, acceptance-, and religious coping; optimism and positive re-appraisal; spirituality/religiosity; social support, and socio-demographic characteristics such as younger age and female gender (Helgeson et al., 2006; Prati & Pietrantoni, 2009; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Updegraff & Taylor, 2000).

Religiosity/spirituality is often described as a particularly strong predictor of growth (e.g., Chan et al., 2016). Broadly speaking, spirituality can refer to belief in some form of transcendent reality without necessarily including a shared set of beliefs and practices, while religiosity often entails belonging to a specific religious community and its rituals, practices, and beliefs. In common is the core concept of and search for the sacred, and the search for significance (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005. Religion/spirituality can serve as a meaning system within which people can reframe their experiences and find coping resources. In relation to growth, religion/spirituality has been identified as an important source of strength, support, meaning, self-compassion, and hope for the future (Ferriss & Forrest-Bank, 2018; Kroo & Nagy, 2011; Khursheed & Shahnawaz, 2020; Park, 2005). Moreover, Gottschald & Sierau, (2020) hypothesize that the principle of a metaphysical plan, which includes the notion that life events are predetermined, might reduce the risk that assumptions about meaningfulness are damaged in the confrontation with trauma. According to Tedeschi (Luna, 2019), research findings of more growth among religious people might also be partly explained by that they possibly are 'more tuned in to existential questions than many people

who are not religious'. Not least, religious/spiritual affiliation is often a source of community, belonging, and social support, which are central for growth.

According to the OVT, when the social environment provides the basic nutrients for growth, positive accommodation is considered to be the natural human inclination (Joseph & Linley, 2005). Joseph & Linley (2005) hypothesize that "the greater the need satisfaction afforded by the post-trauma environment to people who are in a state of distress, the more their organismic valuing process will be promoted and the more likely they are to experience growth" (p.274). The understanding of the role of social and contextual factors for growth in the OVT follows Deci & Ryan's (2002, 2012) self-determination theory (SDT), which 'defines the nutrients that the social environment must provide for intrinsic motivation (for growth) to take place' (Joseph & Linley, 2005, p.272). SDT holds that 'social contexts have their impact on individuals' optimal functioning by facilitating versus impairing satisfaction the basic psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness' (Deci & Ryan, 2012, p.87). *Autonomy* refers to being the perceived origin or source of one's own behavior; *competence* to feeling effective in one's interactions with the social environment and experiencing opportunities to use one's capacities; and, *relatedness* is about experiencing connection and belonging with other individuals and one's community (Deci and Ryan, 2002, p.8). As Deci and Ryan (2012) put it, people need to feel competent in negotiating their external and internal environments; to experience relatedness to other people and groups; and to feel autonomy or self-determination with respect to their own behaviors and lives (p.87). Research across cultures have confirmed that social contexts that allow the satisfaction of these basic psychological needs, predict psychological well-being, and are essential for optimal functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2002, 2008).

Cultural customs, values, beliefs, and knowledge are by numerous authors described as creating the basis for everyday behaviors and practices, and as shaping world-assumptions and determinants of trauma and coping (Shakespeare-Finch & Copping, 2006; Vázquez et al., 2014; Weiss & Berger, 2010). Al-Krenawi et al. (2011) emphasize that psychological adjustment cannot be understood in isolation from social and cultural context, while Hoffman et al. (2016) describe it as impossible to understand culture and meaning apart from each other. Across cultures, growth appears to be related to coping strategies, cognitive processing, social support, and spirituality/religiosity (Weiss & Berger, 2010). The role of culture in the growth process is not much elaborated on in the OVT, however, which holds that the actualization tendency is universal (Joseph & Linley, 2005). This might be true, according to

Splevins et al. (2010), yet, the ways in which people self-actualize may still differ according to culture. A commonly used approach or framework when discussing the universality of concepts, including growth, is to distinguish between collectivistic and individualistic cultures (Splevins et al., 2010). Broadly speaking, collectivistic cultures 'encourage people to develop interdependent selves, and to prioritize good relationship functioning over idiosyncratic goals (Cohen et al., 2016, p.1238). People tend to adjust to situations, and 'assume that life consists of non-linear cycles, which includes changes and possible contradictions' (Calhoun et al., 2010; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006). Individualistic cultures, on the other hand, encourage people to develop independent senses of self, and to develop one's own goals and motivations (Cohen et al., 2016, p.1238). People also tend to assume personal control over events, and view events in life as unfolding in a relatively linear way, with stable forces producing a predictable future (Calhoun et al., 2010; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006). Calhoun et al. (2010) hypothesize that these cultural differences in fundamental assumptions about stability and change over time may influence and shape rumination.

As research on growth has primarily been done in Western, individualistic cultures, Splevins et al. (2010) explain that the notion of actualization has become associated with the development of autonomy. However, in collectivistic cultures, where the ultimate goal is personal-social harmony, "the way to actualize may be via self-criticism, self-correction, and self-examination, which encourages the development of qualities such as altruism, kindness, and conscientiousness" (Splevins et al., 2010, p.265). In support of this view, are studies showing greater social cohesion as a prominent aspect of growth in collectivistic societies (Weiss & Berger, 2010). While potentially culture specific aspects are important to be aware of, Splevins et al. (2010) also have an important point in that an overly individualistic focus in growth-theories might actually have served to exaggerate the appearance of cultural differences, for example through overlooking 'collectivistic' aspects of growth in Western cultures.

Domains and outcomes of growth

Three broad domains of growth have been discussed in the literature, namely changes in interpersonal relationships, self-perception, and life philosophy (or, worldview) (Linley & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). These changes can manifest as greater appreciation of life, more intimate social relationships, increased feelings of personal strength and wisdom, greater acceptance of vulnerabilities and limitations, greater engagement with

spiritual questions, and changes in important life priorities (Linley & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Importantly, growth is described as both an outcome and a process that mostly unfolds gradually over time, as people accommodate the trauma-related material and appraise the significance of this (Joseph & Linley, 2005, p.275). Thus, an important precursor for growth is time to process trauma, in safe, stable and socially supportive environments (Park et al., 1996).

According to the OVT, 'facing own mortality is a trigger for re-evaluating personal values and priorities, and it is the process of consciously reflecting on death that leads to positive changes' (Linley, 2003, 2004). These changes include increased wisdom and pro-sociality. Linley (2003) explains that 'the recognition and acceptance of the finitude of life might lead to a transcendence of concerns that are related exclusively to the self, and a change in the personal life project towards an increased investment and engagement in acts that promote the well-being of others' (i.e., the wisdom of generativity) (p.605). Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) assume an ongoing, mutual influence between posttraumatic growth and the development of general wisdom about life (p.12). While a precise definition of the form and content of posttraumatic wisdom is lacking (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2016), Linley (2003) has identified three fundamental dimensions of wisdom as both process and outcome of post-trauma adaption. These are recognition and management of uncertainty in life, integration of affect and cognition, and recognition and acceptance of human limitation (Linley, 2003, p.604). According to Linley (2003), these processes are mediated by rumination, appraisals and attributions, social support, and meaning making. Here, openness to change allows recognition of and receptivity to the uncertainty of the world, while narrative development and integration of fragmented memories facilitate integration of affect and cognition. This allows a holistic understanding of the self, and leads to what Linley (2003) describe as a sense of connected detachment, i.e., when one has developed a coherent trauma narrative and can record emotions and somatic sensations without being blindly lead by these, and are able to accept that life has moved on (p.604).

Concerning compassion and prosocial behavior as outcomes of growth, the organismic valuing process is explicitly considered to lead to value directions that "enhance the development of the individual himself, of others in his community, and make for the survival and evolution of the species" (Rogers, 1964, p. 165). Concerning authenticity, Joseph and Linley (2005) describe that when people let go of previous models of the world that can no longer serve them, and develop new models of the world guided by their organismic valuing

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process, the self is reconstructed in such a way that individuals are more true to themselves (p.270). These processes might result in radical changes in beliefs, values, worldviews, and a sense of meaning in life, including a reduced fear of death and increased empathy (Davidov & Russo-Netzer, 2022). In the context of forced migration, direct threats to life are not uncommon, and existential concerns might generally be of a particularly acute character. One can readily imagine how this might 'force' existential crisis and confrontation with existential concerns, and thus serve as a trigger for processes leading towards growth and more authentic living.

The role of post-migration conditions for coping and growth are particularly salient in the context of forced migration. In order to further illuminate this, I have included perspectives from ecological-transactional models of development in my theoretical framework, described next.

Ecological-transactional perspectives relevant for coping and growth

Traumatic experiences often causes feelings of powerlessness and alienation, and building new relationships and restoring a sense of control in own life are essential components of resilience and mental health (Carlson et al., 2012; Edge et al., 2014; Herman, 1998). Refugees often experience significant emotional, physical and financial losses and a number of potentially traumatic events, combined with very little control over external conditions, over long periods of time. From existing research, we know that this can have significant negative effects on psychological and physical health (e.g., Laban et al., 2004; Nutting, 2019; Piguet, 2020; Sleijpen et al., 2017). On top of this, refugees have to deal with their traumatic experiences outside of their familiar environments and its protective resources, and also have to build a new life. As such, coping with trauma for refugees does not only involve dealing with one's past experiences and reorganizing one's inner world; this must be done while simultaneously rebuilding and finding a place in one's new outer world and existence.

Ecological-transactional models of development conceptualizes development, adaptation and well-being as shaped by transactional processes involving personal, social, cultural, community and structural factors. Individuals are seen as both creators and products of their circumstances, and as such, faith and responsibility is put on personal capacities and agency, as well as on social and structural factors (e.g., Bandura, 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the context of forced migration, physical safety from war and conflict is central for health and well-being, but not sufficient. People must also feel psychologically safe, which is a matter of

certainty and the possibility to plan for a future (Maurer & Daukantaitė, 2020). Furthermore, it involves having access to meaningful roles, and a sense of control and belonging. According to Nussbaum (2003), belonging entails "being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction" (p.42). Young refugees have linked success and well-being to belonging, predictability, future orientation, and autonomy. Moreover, to the opportunity to make own choices for the future, help others and make a positive contribution to society (Chase, 2013; Goodman, 2004; Lee, 2012; Luster et al., 2010; Omland & Andenas, 2017).

From a critical psychological view, societal factors and institutions regulate individuals' access to, and thus their power and control over, opportunities for experiencing participation, self-determination, and self-efficacy (Prilleltensky, 2008A; Prilleltensky et al., 2001). As follows, the tendency in much psychology to frame the effects of powerlessness in terms of individual psychopathology is seen as biased, and as hindering necessary social and structural interventions and change (Prilleltensky, 1999). As Prilleltensky (2008B) puts it, "a culture that emphasizes individualism and blames victims for their misfortune is bound to fix people and not structures" (p.126). Also Ryan et al. (2008) caution against a singular focus on individual coping abilities in understanding stress responses, partly because doing so places the responsibility for failure to manage within the individual, which has both moral and political implications (p.3). Similarly, overemphasizing the role of culture entails a risk of "disguising the fact that many of the demands refugees are exposed to concern the thwarting of psychological needs that are common to all humans" (Ryan et al., 2008, p.5). Thus, the 'degree of fit' between external demands, and personal, material, social, and cultural resources, are understood as central in determining psychological health and well-being (Hobfoll, 2001; Ryan et al., 2008).

In summary, these ecological-transactional perspectives highlight the role and responsibilities of host countries for shaping individual health- and growth outcomes, while simultaneously acknowledging individuals' agency, proactivity, responsibility, and growth potential. Distress is largely framed as a normal response to trauma and major life changes, particularly in the absence of access to adequate resources. This highlights the importance of taking transactional, multilevel processes into account when seeking to gain insights that can improve existing policies, for example concerning asylum and associated waiting and passivity, versus activity and use of capacities, facilitating control and belonging.

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Chapter 9: Literature review: Adversarial growth among refugees

The aims of the review were to provide a comprehensive overview of what is currently known about adversarial growth in refugee populations, including which factors and circumstances that seems to influence growth. Moreover, to explore how adversarial growth is experienced end expressed, and to identify understudied aspects and research gaps that my study will help fill. Based on these aims, a scoping review seemed appropriate (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The scoping review shares some features with systematic reviews, e.g., being systematic, transparent and replicable, but allows for a more general questioning and exploration of the literature, and a broader conceptual range. As follows, it does not typically assess the quality of included studies (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Grant & Booth, 2009; Peterson et al., 2017). A systematic search strategy was applied, with a qualitative synthesis of findings, following the five stages of a scoping review described by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), namely: identifying the research question; identifying relevant studies; selecting studies; charting the data; and collating, summarizing and reporting the results.

Review questions and search strategy

One broad, overarching review-question and two sub-questions:

1. What is currently known about adversarial growth in refugee populations, including which factors and circumstances seems to influence growth?
    1.1 What is still poorly understood or understudied?
    1.2 How is adversarial growth experienced end expressed?

Inclusion criteria were quantitative and qualitative empirical articles published in peer reviewed journals, and PhD-dissertations available in full text, with explicit focus on exploring growth resulting from adversity among refugees, written in English, Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish. *Exclusion criteria* were non-empirical work, review articles, books and book chapters, conference papers and presentations, intervention studies, vicarious growth, studies about prisoners of war, victims of terrorism, other non-refugee groups. Studies focusing solely on IDPs were excluded.

Search Strategy. I searched for all published research studies up until august 2020 about positive-, posttraumatic- and adversarial growth among refugees in two interdisciplinary electronic databases: SCOPUS and Web of Science. The combination of "refugee* AND

growth" covered the relevant article hits in all databases. To secure a more robust search with the use of controlled subject terms, additional searches were done in four subject-specific electronic databases: PsycINFO, CINAHL, EMBASE and MEDLINE, using combinations such as "refugee* OR asylum seeker AND posttraumatic AND growth". The searches in EMBASE and MEDLINE did not result in new hits, while six new studies were identified in PsycINFO and CINAHL.

Searches in Google Scholar resulted in the inclusion of 9 studies not found elsewhere. Together, all searches identified 12 relevant PhD dissertations. Three were not available, thus nine of them are included in the review; six as full text dissertations, three in terms of their published articles.

22 of the 38 included studies were published between 2016 and 2020, while 16 studies were published between 2003 and 2015, indicating an increased research interest on growth among refugees over the last few years. The 20 quantitative and mixed methods, and 18 qualitative studies examined growth among people originating mainly from countries in Asia and Africa. Nearly all of the quantitative studies had a cross-sectional design, while the most commonly used qualitative methods were individual semi-structured interviews analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) or thematic analysis. Descriptive information and key findings from all studies are provided in Table I, Appendix 1.

Review Findings

First presented are findings concerning the 'Prevalence, and Sociodemographic Correlates of Growth', followed by findings describing the processes, manifestations, and contributing factors to growth, presented under four main headings, namely: 'Individual and Relational Variables and Factors Influencing Growth', 'Personal, Qualitative Experiences and Manifestations of Growth', 'Religious, Cultural, and Contextual Variables and Aspects of Growth', and 'Time and Post-Migration Factors'. Throughout the text, Table I rather than all authors are referred to when findings are repeated across studies.

Prevalence, and Sociodemographic Correlates of Growth

Reported posttraumatic growth. Growth was reported in all the reviewed studies, including in clinical samples with high levels of PTSD and affective disorders. With one exception, all the quantitative and mixed methods studies used the PTGI (PTGI-SF, PTGI-C-R) to measure growth (total score range from 0-105, with higher scores indicating more perceived growth).

Eight studies reported high or relatively high PTGI mean scores (range 64.96-84.49), five reported moderate scores (range 49.11-62.54), and two reported low PTGI-scores (44.10, 47.4). Importantly, positive change co-existed with feelings of distress and worry in nearly all qualitative and quantitative studies. PTSD-symptoms and emotional distress was generally described as substantial (see Table I).

Sociodemographic correlates. The review indicate that young age and female gender is positively associated with growth, but the findings are mixed and inconclusive (see Table I). Two studies found an association between sufficiency of income and growth (Cengiz et al., 2019; Rizkalla & Segal, 2018), while two did not (Ersahin, 2020; Rosner & Powell, 2006).

Number and characteristics of adverse events. Participants across studies had experienced significant adversity and a high number of potentially traumatic events (see Table I). Findings concerning correlations between PTGI-scores and trauma load varied between significant positive associations (Acquaye et al., 2018; Hussain & Bhushan, 2011), a dose-response relationship (Rosner & Powell, 2006), and no significant relationship (Powell et al., 2003; Sleijpen et al., 2016; Ssenyonga et al., 2013). Findings indicate that trauma load might have a clearer relationship with PTSD-symptoms, than with growth (see Table I). A few studies found that trauma type and characteristics predicted PTGI-scores (Kroo & Nagy, 2011; Ochu et al., 2018). In one study sample, former refugees reported higher levels of growth than former IDPs, suggesting an association between growth and experiences based on group membership (Powell et al., 2003; Rosner & Powell, 2006). Together, these findings mirror earlier meta-review findings that trauma characteristics impact the relationship between growth and distress (Shakespeare-Finch & Lurie-Beck, 2014).

Individual and Relational Variables and Factors Influencing Growth

Capturing the essence of the findings from many of the reviewed studies, is Copelj et al's (2017) description of the process of growth as based on openness to opportunities and experience, increased awareness of personal strengths, social connectedness, and a proactive approach to dealing with situations.

Optimism and positive (re)appraisal. Having positive world assumptions and a positive disposition, and using positive appraisal and reinterpretation to find constructive aspects of one's traumatic experiences, were described as positively related to and predictive of growth across studies. Strategies such as positive refocus on planning, putting into perspective and actively suppressing competing activities significantly and positively predicted growth.

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Participants used positive reframing to modify and accept their surroundings, and positive (re)appraisal also mediated the positive effect of other variables on PTG (see Table I).

Agency, hope and future orientation. Hirad (2018) describe forward movement - in thoughts, beliefs, and actions - as an overarching theme of refugee PTG. Future orientation, forward thinking, goal-directed behavior, ability to set long-term goals, and will-full thinking was positively associated with growth in several studies. Participants reported that they had become better at tolerating uncertainty and were feeling more open to new experiences (see Table I).

Hope**,** defined as a positive motivational state resulting from (perceived) agency and available pathways towards important goals (Snyder & Lopez, 2001), was positively associated with PTG in several studies (Abraham et al., 2018; Şimşir et al., 2018; Umer & Elliot, 2019; Uy & Okubo, 2018). Participants described hope as a motivational factor that aided goal- and future oriented coping (Copelj et al., 2017; Copping et al., 2010; McCormack & Tapp, 2019). Ai et al. (2007) highlight the motivational value of the perception – whether illusory or not - of having the means to accomplish positive outcomes, and Kroo and Nagy (2011) found agency thinking necessary for all goal-directed thoughts.

Problem focused and cognitive coping. The review findings are somewhat inconclusive, but strongly indicate that problem-focused coping (i.e., coping aimed at resolving the stressful situation or altering the source of the stress) and cognitive restructuring coping strategies are positively associated with PTG (Copelj et al., 2017; Ersahin, 2020; Kopecki, 2010; Ochu et al., 2018; Rosner & Powell, 2006). Yet, Ai et al. (2007) found no effect of problem focused coping on growth, and point out that the successful use of problem-focused coping requires the ability to identify solution options, which might be difficult in a migration or post war context. Kopecki (2010) did, however, find a positive relationship between the use of problem-focused coping strategies and growth, possibly because being actively involved with a problem might increase feelings of self-efficacy, strength and new possibilities in life. Similarly, Ersahin (2020) concluded that problem-focused coping probably promoted growth through helping individuals being more active in rebuilding their lives, and seeking social support and religious togetherness.

Coping by actively doing, and consciously avoiding. In line with Hobfoll et al's (2007) action focused approach, taking action based on conscious decisions to change one's life for the better, e.g., pursuing educational and career aspirations, was found to aid coping and the

overcoming of past trauma and present stressors (Copelj et al., 2017; Teodorescu et al., 2012; Wehrle et al., 2018). Emotional avoidance is often associated with negative outcomes, e.g prolonged grief. However, avoidance have also shown to serve adaptive functions, such as helping individuals regulate or dose the emotional pain of a loss (Bonanno et al., 1995). While a negative relationship between avoidance coping and PTG was reported by Ai et al. (2007), findings from other studies indicate that avoidance coping might be beneficial in some cases. For example, Uy and Okubo (2018) found that while trauma disclosure and the construction of a trauma narrative aided coping, participants found it helpful to avoid thinking about trauma in their everyday life, through staying busy and focusing on their future goals. Conscious efforts to steer focus away from negative loop-thinking and painful memories was found to be a helpful coping strategy by Şimşir et al. (2018) and Maung (2018), as was conscious efforts during the early stages of post-migration to detach from national identity, as a defense against being reminded of painful experiences (Kim & Lee, 2009). For some participants, long-term avoidance coping, rather than attempts to integrate trauma narratives through effortful rumination, was crucial in defining a positive, future oriented life philosophy (McCormack & Tapp, 2019).

Acceptance and positive reinterpretation coping might be most adaptive in situations that are not controllable by direct action (Updegraff & Taylor, 2000). A philosophy of acceptance, particularly in processing painful experiences, was described as central for growth in several studies e.g., (Copelj et al., 2017; Copping et al., 2010; Maung, 2018; Taylor et al., 2020; Uy & Okubo, 2018). Examples of such coping were practicing patience and motivational self-talk, focusing on what could be learned from own experiences and how to move forward (Şimşir et al., 2018; Uy & Okubo, 2018), and normalizing own psychological reactions, while focusing on positive aspects of own situation and maintaining hope for the future (Abraham et al., 2018; Maung, 2018).

Social support, relating to others and sharing the trauma narrative. A consistent finding across studies was that social support predicted and facilitated growth (see Table I), while a lack of social support and connectedness was associated with lower levels of growth (Ferriss & Forrest-Bank, 2018; Taylor et al., 2020). Importantly, both giving and receiving support fostered growth, and relating to others was described both as a contributor and an outcome of growth (Copping et al., 2010; Hirad, 2018). A significant positive connection was found between the interpersonal factor of the PTGI, and distress and depression, which indicate that

those suffering the most evaluate positive relationships more highly (Cengiz et al., 2019; Powell et al., 2003; Rosner & Powell, 2006).

Collectivistic cultural values, e.g., prioritizing the benefit of others over self, and a strong collective bond helped participants cope successfully in exile, as relationships with family, friends and community were sources of purpose and hope (Hirad, 2018; Hussain & Bhushan, 2013; Shakespeare-Finch et al., 2014). Trauma disclosure and the availability of someone trusted to talk to was described as important for well-being and growth, and participants built growth-promoting relationships both with fellow refugees and with locals in the new country (Abraham et al., 2018; Kim & Lee, 2009; Şimşir et al., 2018; Sutton et al., 2006; Uy & Okubo, 2018).

Personal, Qualitative Experiences and Manifestations of Growth

Across studies, manifestations of growth were characterized by seeing oneself as a survivor, and - as described by Taylor et al. (2020) – a sense of gratitude, acceptance, strengthened spiritual and religious beliefs, and a wish of being of service to others.

Self-image as survivor with newfound strength and wisdom. Across studies, participants articulated growth outcomes in the form of increased awareness of personal strength and wisdom, and of personal and social responsibility. Many rejected a 'victim identity' and perceived themselves as survivors, emphasizing the positive outcomes of their hardships. For example, adversity had made them more mature and provided them with coping resources, life perspective and knowledge to overcome future adversity. From adversity, participants had learned to tolerate and accept challenges and uncertainty as part of life, and becoming more patient and flexible (Copelj et al., 2017; Ferriss & Forrest-Bank, 2018; McCormack & Tapp, 2019; Prag & Vogel, 2013; Shakespeare-Finch et al., 2014; Şimşir et al., 2018).

From having to rebuild life from zero, participants learned new skills, realized own strengths, and articulated feelings of pride of own accomplishments. Surviving adversity and hardship also led to increased trust in self and own capabilities, along with a stronger drive and capacity for self-actualization. Participants reported more courage to take risks and to shape their future in personally meaningful ways (Hirad, 2018; Hussain & Bhushan, 2013; Maung, 2018; Sutton et al., 2006; Wehrle et al., 2018).

Changes in life priorities and perspectives, purpose and meaning through pro-social means. Commonly described growth outcomes across studies, were changes in priorities concerning

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what is important in life, and increased appreciation for life. Through their experiences, participants were able to develop an understanding of their life purpose. The act of comparing present situation to earlier circumstances, or to those of those less fortunate, gave rise to new priorities and perspectives informed by gratitude and a wish to give back to others (see Table I). Descriptions of new insights and perspectives were often related to existential dimensions, in accordance with the organismic valuing theory of growth (Joseph & Linley, 2005). For example, many participants felt more tolerant and wanting to live at peace with all; experienced a sense of closer connections with other people and humanity as a whole, and of being closer to their 'genuine selves' after what they went through. Moreover, personal fulfillment and a more meaningful life was experienced by those concerned with (supporting) others in need (Gilpin-Jackson, 2012; Hirad, 2018; Hussain & Bhushan, 2013; Maung, 2018; Sesay, 2015).

In growth theories, meaning making involves understanding and reinterpreting the traumatic situation to rearrange one's core beliefs and goals and regain control. According to Frankl (1959/1992), the primary motivation of human beings is to find meaning and value in their lives, which is essential to surviving trauma and suffering. Tekie (2018) found that average scores on meaning in life was significantly related with PTGI scores, and across studies, participants were engaged in the search for meaning and purpose from their experiences (see Table I). A particularly salient change across the reviewed studies was that of more intimate and meaningful relationships. Participants emphasized that they created meaning and purpose in life through valuing, protecting, and caring for others (Copping et al., 2010; Gilpin-Jackson, 2012; Hussain & Bhushan, 2013; Kim & Lee, 2009; Shakespeare-Finch et al., 2014; Sutton et al., 2006; Uy & Okubo, 2018). A sense of meaning might be both a source and outcome of the many findings describing increased compassion, empathy, and pro-social engagement, described next.

Increased compassion and empathy. Across studies, participants described that their trauma and survival had broadened their consciousness and resulted in a generally more inclusive empathy and compassion, and inspired a philosophy of giving forward, which also reflected gratitude for finding safety in their new country. Enhanced concern for the welfare of others and development of a deeper understanding of other people's struggles helped participants connect socially and form meaningful relationships (see Table I).

Pro-social engagement. The search for positive learning outcomes of own experiences, combined with increased compassion, empathy and sense of responsibility, was commonly

described as inspiring pro-social engagement. Several participants described a newfound purpose in life, namely to use their experience based knowledge to help others and work to promote social justice. Their own experiences of suffering and survival provided a deepened sense of personal agency to help and empower others (Gilpin-Jackson, 2012; Hussain & Bhushan, 2013; Maung, 2018; Shakespeare-Finch et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2020; Uy & Okubo, 2018). Participants were engaging in various activities, e.g., political activism, community involvement, advocating for own people and general social justice, which fostered self-esteem, self-efficacy, and personal recovery, and provided meaning and purpose (Hussain & Bhushan, 2013; Sutton et al., 2006; Uy & Okubo, 2018). Proactive and pro-social behavior served as a catalyst for growth, through fostering closer relationships and enabling personal development (Copelj et al., 2017; Wehrle et al., 2018). These findings are closely related to Hobfoll et al. (2007) action oriented approach, which emphasize that moving from meaning cognitions to *doing* what is meaningful might promote growth.

Growth, mental health and well-being. Previous studies have found positive, negative and curvilinear relationships between growth and distress. One meta-analysis reported a significant linear relationship between PTG and PTSD-symptoms, but also a stronger curvilinear relationship when age and trauma type were accounted for (Shakespeare-Finch & Lurie-Beck, 2014). In another meta-analysis, benefit finding was related to less depression and more positive well-being, but also more intrusive and avoidant thoughts about the stressor (Helgeson et al., 2006). Findings from this review range from positive and negative linear relationships between growth and distress, to no relationship. Regarding growth and health, the findings indicate that growth is positively related with well-being, while the relationship with psychopathology is less clear (see Table I). For example, Sleijpen et al. (2016) found no significant association, while Kira et al. (2018) and Teodorescu et al. (2012) found that PTG was associated with lower psychopathology.

Religious, Cultural, and Contextual Variables and Aspects of Growth

Religiosity and spirituality as a source of strength. Religiosity and spirituality, which was explored or emerged as significant themes in 20 studies, was generally positively related to growth and PTGI-score (see Table I). Importantly, rather than a growth outcome, religious beliefs were mainly described by participants as a consistent source of strength, support and well-being. In cases of religious changes post-trauma, these mainly involved a strengthening of religiosity. Described as central in processing, accepting, and coping with life events,

religious faith, principles, and practices facilitated development of meaning and comprehension in coming to terms with trauma-impact, provided hope for the future, and helped participants let go of the past and accept fate. Religious beliefs also served to meet important emotional needs, through providing comfort and social support both in a spiritual sense, and in a more practical sense, i.e., from religious communities. Religious teachings, such as compassion and acceptance of life events based on God's will or karma, were both mirroring and fostering growth. Moreover, Hussain and Bhushan (2013) described growth and resilience as integral parts of a Buddhist upbringing, where suffering in life is considered the rule rather than an exception.

Religious coping. Ersahin (2020) found that when used as a coping mechanism, turning to religion predicted growth over and above strength of religiosity itself. Positive religious coping can include religious forgiveness and reappraising God as benevolent, while negative religious coping can include underlying spiritual struggles, and views of God as punishing. The findings concerning relationships between growth and positive versus negative religious coping were somewhat inconclusive. Kroo and Nagy (2011) found that negative religious coping was positively related to total PTGI-score, while positive religious coping was positively related only to the subscale "Relating to Others". Ochu et al. (2018), on the other hand, found that positive religious coping positively influenced PTG, both directly, and indirectly through effect on dispositional forgiveness. However, both positive and negative religious coping was weakly positively related to PTS, possibly because those who already exhibit higher levels of distress, more often use positive religious coping (Ochu et al., 2018).

Growth nourished by culture and worldviews. Several studies emphasized the importance of exploring and taking into account cultural characteristics, strengths and world-views, when trying to understand growth-mechanisms. The value of respect, gratitude and a moral approach to life were pointed out as cultural characteristics related to growth (Kroo & Nagy, 2011), and a collective identity was emphasized as important in the healing process (Prag & Vogel, 2013). Some authors described 'a tenacity for life as rooted in strong cultural values' among participants (Copping et al., 2010; Ferriss & Forrest-Bank, 2018).

Cross-cultural applicability of the five-factor model of PTG. Tedeschi and Calhoun's five-factor model (New Possibilities, Relating to Others, Personal Strength, Spiritual Change, Appreciation of Life) was not replicated in all studies. Powell et al. (2003) and Ersahin (2020) identified a three-factor model, while Kopecki (2010) and Maung (2018) identified four core categories of growth. Prag and Vogel (2013) identified a sixth theme, the ability to articulate

the social narrative, emphasizing the importance of mastering and sharing the collective story of own people over the individual story.

Participants in the qualitative studies articulated aspects of growth that were not captured by the PTGI, creating what McCormack and Tapp (2019) describe as a legacy of resourcefulness, hope, gratitude and reciprocity. Copelj et al. (2017) emphasize strengthening of social and cultural support, and increased self-awareness and proactivity as socio-cultural and behavioral components of growth not captured by quantitative measures. Shakespeare-Finch et al. (2014) point out that the strong endorsement of compassion and responsibility reported by their participants is not always apparent in Western research. Only one of the 21 PTGI-items asks about compassion, and then about accepting the compassion of others rather than becoming more compassionate.

According to Sutton et al. (2006), the role of religious beliefs in providing guidance and in meeting people's emotional needs is not well captured by the PTG-model, where the focus is on the function of religious beliefs for cognitive processing and the development of meaning or comprehensibility. Ferriss and Forrest-Bank (2018) found some dissonance between the PTG construct, and collectivism and Islamic beliefs and practices; 'new possibilities' was somewhat contrary to trust in God's plan, while 'personal strength' was challenging to translate because strengths lies in the family and not in the individual. It was also difficult for the participants to distinguish between 'before and after' trauma, as they struggled with multiple, ongoing trauma over long periods. Copping et al. (2010) participants described strength, hope and determination as coping mechanisms, rather than growth outcomes.

Resilience was positively associated with PTG, although emphasized as a separate construct and an insufficient condition for growth. Important sources of resilience were religious beliefs and practices, cultural strengths (e.g., collectivism) and worldviews, practical and emotional social support, and adequate financial resources (see Table I).

Time and Post-Migration Factors

Taken together, the findings support the assumption that the factors influencing adversarial growth cannot be easily separated, and that to understand growth, we need to understand the impact of and interplay between contexts, structures and factors at multiple levels (Price & Martin, 2018). As an illustration of this point, Gilpin-Jackson (2012) emphasized that participants' narratives of growth were influenced by various constellations of contextual factors, including war exposure, nature of trauma, sociodemographics, and refugee and

immigration experiences. In the introduction, we referred to studies showing that post-migration stressors such as social isolation, poverty, and ongoing conflict in the country of origin have been predictors of e.g., depression. A timely question is how these factors, along with (waiting) time and uncertainty, might be influencing growth processes.

Time. Often, trauma is not an isolated, pre-migration event, but manifest throughout pre- and post-migration experiences (Copelj et al., 2017). Resettlement can involve feelings of relief and new hope, but also of being overwhelmed by differences, experiences of discrimination, and a need to forget painful memories (Kim & Lee, 2009). Uy and Okubo (2018) reported that participants did not actively engage in processing trauma until years after the war, when they had more resources available and their immediate needs of survival have decreased.

An aspect discussed in previous literature, is that some amount of time after trauma might be necessary for genuine growth to develop (Park et al., 1996; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995). Moreover, that growth is more likely to be related to a good outcome when a longer time has elapsed since the trauma. That is, time modify the relationship between PTS and PTG (Blix et al., 2016; Helgeson et al., 2006).

Teodorescu et al. (2012) found a significant negative correlation between growth and PTSD in participants exposed to trauma many years ago, suggesting that "the passage of time aids in the development of an authentic growth negatively related to psychopathology". Similarly, findings from Kopecki (2010) indicate that time since trauma might be important for the development of growth.

Post-migration factors. Taylor et al. (2020) point out that growth is most likely to develop once traumatic symptoms have diminished to some degree. A major source of ongoing stress, frustration, and anxiety for their participants was the lengthy asylum-seeking process, which can thus hamper growth through maintaining or worsening psychological distress. Many of the participants in Gilpin-Jackson (2012) study described despair and re-traumatization as part of their immigration experiences, marked by endless waiting in uncertainty and the daily fear of being deported, and being 'forced' to be dependent on the system. Importantly, those who had positive immigration integration experiences did not elaborate on the impact of immigration on their narratives, while the immigration narrative was integral to the growth stories of those with less positive experiences. Tekie (2018) found that symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, and depression were strongly related to post-migration living difficulties, e.g., worries about family, unemployment, discrimination, loneliness, isolation, and boredom.

Teodorescu et al. (2012) found that weak social network and poor social integration was among the most important post-migration factors negatively correlated with growth. The participants interviewed by Ferriss and Forrest-Bank (2018) described how Western culture and values of individualism and busyness were experienced as major barriers to establishing support systems, community and friendships, causing loneliness and isolation. The stress resulting from the loss of living in a collectivistic culture negatively influenced participants' growth. Abraham et al. (2018) emphasize that practices such as moving people between municipalities cause destruction of social networks, which may create an obstacle to PTG through the loss of supportive, growth-promoting relationships.

Discussion

The main review-question was *what is currently known about adversarial growth in refugee populations, including which factors and circumstances seems to influence growth?*

In the overall findings, the dynamic and interactional nature of growth processes was evident, as characteristics of growth at the individual level clearly influences the relational domain, while contextual factors are hard to understand in separation from individual and relational factors. Together, the findings clearly indicate that neither psychological growth nor healthy adjustment are exceptional or rare phenomena among refugees, and paint a more hopeful, healthy and 'agentic' picture of post-trauma development and functioning among refugees. Simultaneously, it is important to acknowledge the severity of suffering, trauma, and the consequences of such experiences for individuals. Stereotypic discourses might ignore or 'glorify' strength and growth, and either minimize or amplify distress as well as the efforts required to overcome it. As described by McCormack and Tapp (2019), participants' positive development was born of redefining human suffering that is unimaginable to many.

Growth was reported in all studies, and in most studies co-existed with distress and worry. This support the assumption of similar underlying processes in posttraumatic growth and stress (Joseph & Linley, 2005, 2006), illustrate the inaccuracy of the victim, threat or exceptional survivor stereotypes, and show that it is possible to grow from adversity also without having healed from it (Hirad, 2018). In the mainstream literature, findings regarding the relationship between growth and mental health varies, but mainly seems to indicate a curvilinear relationship between growth and distress (Kleim & Ehlers, 2009; Shakespeare-Finch & Lurie-Beck, 2014). Inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between growth and health/adjustment outcomes have led to debates about the adaptive value of growth.

While some considers PTG a valuable outcome in itself, others deems growth meaningful in so far as it predicts important outcomes of adjustment or mental health (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014). In their Janus-Face model of self-perceived growth, Zoellner and Maercker, (2006) posits that growth can have both a self-transforming or constructive side inducing positive changes, and a dysfunctional side (e.g., positive illusions, denial), related to poor adjustment (p.639). According to growth theories, however, self-perceived growth - regardless of any observable change - is sufficient to experience positive psychological outcomes (Yanez et al., 2009). The review findings concerning the relationship between growth and mental health do not provide a basis for firm conclusions. However, they indicate a positive relationship between growth and well-being.

Part of the review aim was to update two previous reviews. Sims and Pooley (2017) conducted a systematic review of studies from 1980 to 2013, with the earliest study published in 2003, and the majority from 2010-2013. Of a total of 17 included studies, 12 were quantitative and 5 qualitative. Chan et al's (2016) review was not systematic, nor strictly focused on PTG among refugees. The earliest included study was from 2003, and the two newest from 2016. Chan et al. (2016) and Sims and Pooley (2017) highlight the need for more studies of the relationship between religiosity and PTG, and of the role and influence of cultural factors, time and resettlement experiences, and hope, optimism and coping styles, on the development of growth.

The current review updates those from Chan et al. (2016) and Sims and Pooley (2017), through adding a number of studies mostly published after their reviews, and through the inclusion of a greater number of qualitative studies. The current review confirms several findings from Chan et al. (2016) and Sims and Pooley (2017), such as that problem-focused coping, optimism, positive reappraisal, religious coping, and social support are positively associated with growth. The findings also provide some more information about the role of time and resettlement experiences in growth, but also show that these areas still needs research attention. In both previous reviews, quantitative studies were mainly cross-sectional, and used the PTGI or PTGI-SF to measure PTG. Moreover, Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1996) five-factor model of PTG was not always replicated. Similarly, in the current review, nearly all quantitative studies used the PTGI or PTGI-SF to measure growth. The PTGI is by far the most commonly used method to assess PTG; 94% of articles published between 2016 and 2017 used it as the main assessment of growth (Jayawickreme et al., 2018). However, the reliability and validity of quantitative measures of growth have been questioned, e.g., as the

assessment of growth is based on self-evaluation and memory, which carries the risk of hindsight bias or different interpretations of questions. Most of the reviewed quantitative studies were cross-sectional and measures of pre-trauma functioning does not exist, thus they cannot provide decisive information about causal mechanisms or tell us whether this is how people were, or if it is how they became. The characteristics, circumstances and strategies of those who most clearly experience growth, are difficult to strictly single out also due to the limited literature.

Growth was described as a 'universal phenomenon', and the main aspects of growth were identified in most studies, which lends support to descriptions of growth as a cross-cultural phenomenon (Splevins et al., 2010; Weiss & Berger, 2010). However, the PTG-model was not always replicated, reflecting 'a consistent failure to replicate the PTGI factor structure across cultures, even with adaptations designed to increase cultural applicability' (Splevins et al., 2010; Weiss & Berger, 2010). Furthermore, for people exposed to cumulative, prolonged trauma, a limitation of the PTGI might be the requirement to separate between before and after "the event". As pointed out in the reviewed articles, assessments of changes from before to after trauma is not necessarily a useful categorization for those who have endured multiple, enduring and/or ongoing trauma (e.g., Copping et al., 2010; Ferriss & Forrest-Bank, 2018). The use of the PTGI might also restrict what is being explored, according to Mangelsdorf et al. (2019), who point out that PTG also occur in areas such as self-esteem and mastery, but because these are not included in the PTGI, they received little attention (p.329). Lastly, considering that the PTGI also has been criticized for not providing a balanced picture of positive and negative changes (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014), qualitative and mixed methods studies are also useful as they provide the possibility for contextualized, in-depth descriptions capturing both stress and growth.

The sub-question *"how is adversarial growth experienced and expressed?"* and the inclusion of a high number of qualitative studies, provided rich descriptions of the complexity of growth processes, as they allow for elaboration on topics, go into depth and breadth, and make visible how various aspects are intertwined. Thus, this review shed more light on the qualitative experiences and expressions of growth, particularly pro-social outcomes, and cultural and religious aspects and issues of growth processes, domains, and measurement scales. Across the reviewed studies, participants reported increased altruism, compassion, empathy, and prosocial behavior following adversity. Despite that a strong endorsement of compassion and responsibility was a prominent aspect of growth in the review findings, this

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was described as not being well captured by the PTG-model/in Western research. As pointed out by Shakespeare-Finch et al. (2014), only one of the 21 PTGI-items asks about compassion, and then about accepting the compassion of others rather than becoming more compassionate. Moreover, the importance of collectivistic ideals, and the role of religious beliefs in providing guidance and meeting people's emotional needs was pointed out in several studies, yet also described as not being well captured by the PTG-model.

Research needs, knowledge gaps, aspects and theories for further exploration

An important aim of the review was to identify research gaps and needs, thus the question "*what is still poorly understood or understudied*?" Based on the review findings, I suggest further research into:

Cultural context, religiosity, world-views. The review findings indicate that further research might benefit from exploring and acknowledging culturally and religiously based strengths and coping strategies. Moreover, the evidence base for PTG is mainly based on quantitative top-down approaches, where growth primarily has been measured in Western samples using the PTGI. To assume the universality of these theories might be both Eurocentric and biased (Al-Krenawi et al., 2011; Patel, 2003), considering differences in how people perceive events in their world. A challenge to the assumptive world is a condition for the development of PTG (Weiss & Berger, 2010), and the style of rumination most likely to facilitate PTG involves rebuilding basic assumptions about how events unfold in one's world (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Importantly, these assumptions may be culturally and situationally dependent, and Splevins et al. (2010) point out that application of theories of PTG developed in the West – although they do not specify the nature of world assumptions, thus retaining cultural neutrality - may reflect a cultural bias representative of individualistic societies. For example, in terms of need for cognitive consistency, ways of self-actualization, belief in a just world, and a sense of controllability. The degree to which this is taken into account varies between studies and methods. Gilpin-Jackson (2012) problematizes the implicit assumption in the PTG-literature that people have a pre-trauma context with taken-for-granted notions of safety and security, as this theoretical lens does not necessarily apply to those who are born into hardship and prolonged suffering. Related to this, is Abraham et al's (2018) recommendation to investigate longitudinally which aspects of trauma that might trigger or suppress core beliefs.

Several studies found that collectivistic ideals and religiously and culturally inspired worldviews positively influenced coping and growth. Similarly, Sims and Pooley (2017)

emphasized several examples of cultural practices that may impact PTG, such as Buddhist beliefs in compassion for others and the law of karma, general beliefs in divine intervention, and the role of collectivism in promoting social support seeking.

Altruism, compassion, empathy, and prosocial behavior following adversity. Based on the review findings, qualitative studies emphasizing pro-sociality, compassion and altruism as aspects of growth are relevant and needed. Staub and Vollhardt's (2008) theory altruism born of suffering could be useful here, as it has not been systematically applied in studies with refugees. Based on the strong altruistic impulses found among their participants, Taylor et al. (2020) suggest that it may be beneficial to allow asylum seekers and refugees to use this to contribute to society. Considering the many review findings describing how participants found meaning and recovery in pro-social engagement and activities, Hobfoll et al's (2007) 'action-focused' approach might be fruitful to explore further. More knowledge about how growth can be facilitated through 'translating growth cognitions into actions' might also be useful for intervention- and policy development. Moreover, in research and practice, it would be useful to emphasize agency; both in understanding human nature as active, intentional, and goal oriented, and in terms of promoting the resources necessary to experience having agency.

Existential meaning making and growth. Based on the review, a valuable path to explore in more depth among refugees would be that of *existential meaning making and growth*. Further studies using the *organismic valuing theory*, which emphasize growth as part of human nature, would be interesting, as several review findings were in accordance with the theory's central existential aspects, e.g., psychological well-being based on mastery, autonomy, life purpose, self-acceptance, and close relationships (Hussain & Bhushan, 2013; Shakespeare-Finch et al., 2014). Moreover, meaning as significance is central for growth, according to the OVT. A spiritual and existential concerns factor was added in a recent revision of the PTGI, the PTGI-X (Tedeschi et al., 2017). However, this was not used in any of the reviewed studies.

Time and post-migration factors. Regarding the role and responsibilities of host countries for shaping outcomes, the review findings provide some information about how reception policies and other post-migration factors influence growth processes. For example, considering that PTG is most likely to occur once traumatic symptoms have diminished to some degree, Taylor et al. (2020) point out that "the protracted nature of the asylum-seeking process can be viewed as obstructive to diminishing of symptoms that might facilitate PTG"

(p.27). Yet, more studies of how time and post-migration stressors might influence growth processes are needed.

In general, as reflected in the review, many studies only assess PTG within the first year after the potentially traumatic event, and future research should include a minimum of one measurement point that lies at least one and a half year after the event (Mangelsdorf et al., 2019, p.329). According to Copelj et al. (2017), established former refugees might be able to provide a more nuanced account of growth experiences, thus a major limitation of previous studies is "that their samples were comprised of recently arrived refugees whose level of success and adaptation to the host society was not known" (p.88).

Concluding remarks

The review findings supplements and nuances the dominant pathology-oriented research, and present a more holistic understanding of development after trauma, able to account for a greater variety of outcomes. Based on the review findings, adversarial growth is clearly a process, shaped by a multiplicity of interacting individual, relational, and contextual variables.

A broadened research approach and discourse about refugees needs to acknowledge heterogeneity and include an understanding of 'refugees' as complex human beings with resources, strengths and developmental potential to handle and overcome adversity. Importantly, this does not imply that growth is an individual process or 'trait'; the factors and circumstances that influence growth include life events before, during and after flight, personal characteristics and coping styles, cultural and religious beliefs, the quality of the social network, support from formal structures of society, and more. These factors play together in determining whether the potential for growth is nourished and promoted.

I believe that continued research efforts into understanding and promoting growth processes can benefit both individuals and societies, and that increased focus on and knowledge about the complexity of outcomes of adversity related to forced migration has the potential to counteract and balance simplified, pathology-oriented and fear based understandings and discourses. I also think it would be useful - in research, clinical work and public debates - to adopt a stance of asking how we might develop and what we might learn from adversity, and from each other. Based on the review findings, I dare to conclude that there is reason to be both optimistic and ambitious regarding the potential for growth, learning and thriving after adversity.

Review limitations. In addition to the limitations already described, a general precaution when interpreting qualitative studies is reduced generalizability of findings due to small samples and purposive sampling. However, when a relatively high number of qualitative studies show corresponding findings, the transferability and trustworthiness of findings are strengthened and should not be understated. Furthermore, the current review's broad scope provides a comprehensive overview of the existing research literature. Importantly, most of the identified studies come from the field of psychology, a natural result of using psychologically based search terms, and my (the author's) background in psychology. It is possible that research on processes similar to adversarial growth among refugees exists within other fields, without having been identified.

Chapter 10: Lining the dots: highlighting the key aspects of the framework

The main aim of the current chapter is to weave together the categories of the theoretical framework. This to clarify how they are related, and highlight how the framework can contribute to address, account for and answer questions related to:

- ***The study aims****,* which were to explore processes of healthy development; shed light on the role and responsibilities of host countries for shaping outcomes; acknowledge experience-based knowledge; and, challenge stigma and pathology-oriented discourses.

- ***The overarching research question,*** i.e., *what is the role of coping, meaning making, and adversarial growth in explaining how many young refugees show healthy functioning and manage to adapt successfully in their new lives, despite their experiences of trauma and adversity?*

- ***The knowledge needs identified in the literature review***, namely more (qualitative) studies on pro-sociality and compassion following adversity, and the role of culture, world-view, religiosity/spirituality/existential meaning, time, and post-migration factors in processes of coping and growth.

Among the main contributions from humanistic and existential psychology to the framework, are the philosophical underpinnings and key theoretical aspects that fronts an understanding of human nature and development as characterized by agency, intentionality, and innate drive and capacity for self-actualization, self-transcendence, and growth. Furthermore, the emphasis on individuals' capacity and freedom to choose what they make of their circumstances, including creating meaning when confronted with adversity (Evans et al., 2017). The view of development as a lifelong and "future motivated" process, and of adversity and crises as having the potential for triggering useful learning, and as a driving force for change and development towards more authentic living. As Yalom (1980) points out, "when death is excluded, when one loses sight of the stakes involved, life becomes impoverished" (p.32). Thus, awareness, confrontation and acceptance of existential concerns are what allows a person to discover one's true personal meaning and purpose. In terms of methods, humanistic and existential psychology are methodologically rooted in phenomenology, which mainly uses qualitative approaches focusing on in-depth explorations of subjective experiences (Maurer & Daukantaitė, 2020). As such, abstract knowledge is built upon subjective

experience (Maslow, 1962/2011), which can serve to acknowledge experience-based knowledge, and to challenge stigma and pathology-oriented discourses. Not least, it is suited to meet the need identified in the literature review for more qualitative studies that can highlight cross-cultural diversity and provide a bottom-up understanding of coping, meaning making and growth among refugees.

In line with humanistic and existential thinking, the OVT, in explaining why people would be motivated towards growth, holds that "each person possesses the innate tendency to know one's own best directions in life in the pursuit of well-being and fulfillment" (Joseph & Linley, 2005, p.270). Moreover, the OVT accounts for pro-sociality and compassion following adversity, and relate this to wisdom and self-transcendence, the latter also central within religious and spiritual traditions (Ersever, 1999). In secular societies, the role of religiosity/spirituality is described as having been an under-evaluated aspect in research and clinical settings. For example, religious meaning making has been interpreted as avoidance, and spirituality has been ignored, pathologized, or reduced to underlying psychological and social functions (Copping et al., 2010; Koltko-Rivera, 2006; Snyder & Lopez, 2001). However, Pargament (American Psychological Association, 2013) argues that religion/spirituality cannot be reduced to or fully explained by other psychological and social processes, as it has a unique focus on the domain of the sacred, including transcendence and deep connectedness. And, "any psychology that overlooks these parts of life, remains incomplete" (ibid.). Here, humanistic and existential psychology contributes with an open approach that acknowledges the centrality of spiritual aspiration for the psyche and the potential value of religious faith. Without being religious themselves, both Maslow and Rogers drew inspiration from Ancient Eastern philosophies and religions, such as Buddhism and Taoism (Allen, 2020). Moreover, Ersever (1999) describe a number of shared ideas in the humanistic philosophies of the Islamic scholar, poet and Sufi Mevlana Jelaluddin Rumi (1207-73), and Carl Rogers. For example, both saw unhappiness as a result of incongruence between what a persons is versus wants to be, and perceived individuals as free to choose, with inborn capacity for awareness of difficulties - and the capability for overcoming these (Ersever, 1999).

Regarding time and post-migration factors, and the role and responsibilities of host countries for shaping outcomes, the OVT emphasize that growth requires time, and that the social environment meet individual's need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Joseph & Linley, 2005). Perspectives from ecological-transactional models aids a

more explicit focus on growth and coping as multilevel, transactional processes, influenced by societal/policy aspects of control, resources, and participation (Prilleltensky et al., 2001). This, together with the centrality of self-transcendence within humanistic-existential psychology and growth theories, might serve to address criticisms of humanistic and existential psychology for being too individualized and self-centered, and not having adequately addressed multicultural perspectives (see e.g., Robbins, 2015). Koltko-Rivera (2006) argues that recognition of the self-transcendence step in Maslow's motivational hierarchy can contribute to a more multiculturally integrated approach to psychological theory, in addition to a broader understanding of the motivational roots of altruism and wisdom, and integration of the psychology of religion and spirituality into mainstream psychology (p.302).

Through combining the foregoing theories, concepts and assumptions, I have attempted to build a holistic and inclusive psychological framework for exploring processes of coping, meaning making, and adversarial growth in the context of forced migration. A framework that accounts for both subjective experiences and transactional processes, acknowledges the expertise that comes with lived experience, and presents an alternative to approaches that risk reducing human nature and experience by pathologizing or quantifying it.

PART III
PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK, METHODS, AND ETHICS

Chapter 11: Philosophical framework

The researcher's assumptions regarding the nature of reality and knowledge are described as foundational for a research study, as this determines the choice of method, the participant-researcher relationship, the stance on issues relating to representation and truth, and the form and representation in analysis and writing (Carter & Little, 2007; Corlett & Mavin, 2018). Moreover, Denzin (2017) points out that all inquiry reflects the standpoint of the inquirer, just as all observation is theory-laden, and thus, there is no possibility of theory- or value-free knowledge. Here, axiology, or value theory, comes in, and has influenced all parts of the current study, from the choice of topic to ethical considerations in the writing of findings. Axiology is the branch of philosophy that deals with ethics, aesthetics, and religion (Lincoln & Guba, 2011), and "addresses questions related to what is considered to be desirable or 'good' for humans and society" (Biedenbach & Jacobsson, 2016, p.140). In the following sections, the ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions that have guided this study, are outlined.

Ontology, epistemology, and axiology

The ontological and epistemological framework for this study is largely in accordance with constructivist paradigms, where reality is understood as subjective and partly individually constructed, and knowledge as embedded in individual meanings and experiences. As follows, the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are participating in it (Carter & Little, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Heath et al., 2009; Vasilachis, 2009). Maslow (1962/2011) described that culture is 'the sun and food and water', but not the seed; that is, culture fosters and encourages the inherent capabilities and tendencies that exists in the individual to become actualized (p.124). As contextual factors are central influences on individuals' developmental possibilities, it was a central aim in this study to explore the role of these in processes of coping and growth. To aid this, the philosophical framework was supplemented with aspects from critical theory.

Critical theory is concerned with the often hidden aspects of power when approaching a research problem, through looking beneath the surface and develop explanations for what causes things to happen (Prilleltensky 1999, 2008A). One aim of this study was to challenge stereotypes and problem-focused discourses, and critical theory emphasize that research should aim to create an agenda for change that enhances the lives of the participants. For

example through help change dominant narratives and discourses, and influence theoretical and social awareness and change (Denzin, 2017). Moreover, critical theory involves a recognition of knowledge as normative, as it judges reality and considers how things ought to be (Scotland, 2012). This is related to axiology, which according to Lincoln & Guba (2011) has been "defined out of scientific inquiry for no larger a reason than that it also concerns religion" (p.169). Gergen (2016) describes that 'psychological science has long allied itself with the natural science aim to illuminate "what is," as opposed to "what should be'. However, while positivist claims of value neutrality "enabled the sciences to claim superiority over religious and political dogma", this claim has always been controversial in psychology, according to Gergen (2016, p.7). Humanistic psychology has strived to make its values explicit in order to subject them to critical reflection, rather than denying that its worldview is value-laden (Robbins, 2015, p.36). This form of value-sensitive orientation (Gergen, 2016) is something I have strived for in the current study, through being transparent and reflective about my subjectivity, values, and perspectives, and how this had influenced e.g., the choice of topic. Moreover, through considering the moral and political consequences of the words and formulations used in the writing of findings, as recommended by Gergen (2016).

Participatory approach and user involvement

In the philosophical as well as practical approach, I also drew inspiration from participatory research, conceptualized as a partnership where participants bring subject expertise and researchers bring academic and methodological expertise (Borg et al., 2012; Vasilachis, 2006). This was based on the aim of validating experience based knowledge, and of including user involvement as part of this study. Regarding the former, Krumer-Nevo & Sidi (2012) and Vasilachis (2006) emphasize that if peoples' voices are used simply as illustrative examples and treated in a decontextualized manner, what they say is not fully validated as knowledge. Thus, in the analysis and writing of findings, I aimed at highlighting the participants' own theories and interpretations, and emphasizing their expertise. User involvement means that people are included in research precisely because of their direct personal experience with the topic under study. This acknowledges the expertise that comes with lived experience, and ensures that it informs research (Beresford, 2005; Vara & Patel, 2012). The decision of including user involvement was also based on ethical guidelines that encourages this as an approach to strengthen the relevance of the research, through checking its perspectives with

and including the knowledge from members of the "group under study" (CIOMS, 2016; NESH, 2022).

The degree of user involvement varies, and consultation is probably the most accurate description of the form included in this study, i.e., a competence group. The group members were recruited via established contacts, and were six young adults in their 20s (one in mid-30s), three men and three women, all with a refugee background and resettled in Norway. Early involvement was crucial to ensure that the group had an actual chance of informing the project. In the course of three meetings in the planning phase of the data collection, each lasting from 1.5 to 3 hours, we discussed interview topics and their relevance, my role and potential influence as a researcher, methods and arenas for recruitment – including factors that could promote and prevent participation -, and arenas for dissemination of findings. The members were paid on an hourly basis for their participation (for information and contract, see appendix 2). Input from the group on the interview guide is described in ch.12.

In summary, constructivist, critical, and participatory paradigms share a view of reality as both subjective and shared, and as shaped by transactional processes involving personal, cultural, social, structural factors. Knowledge is largely seen as embedded in individual meanings and experiences, and thus accessible through exploring these, and human beings are understood as intentional, agentic, and knowledgeable. Taken together, these understandings are in line with the study aims, purposes, and research questions, and with humanistic and existential theory and method.

Chapter 12: Methodology, methods, and procedures

A qualitative methodological approach is more or less a given within constructivist paradigms, while critical theory uses the research problem as the point of departure and chooses the method most likely to provide insight into this (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Morrow, 2007). The aims and research questions in the current study were centered on gaining knowledge through exploring subjective meanings, experiences, and perspectives. This aligns with core characteristics of qualitative methods (Creswell, 2007; Morrow, 2007), and a qualitative approach using semi-structured in-depth interviews was thus a natural choice. It also served to meet the need for more qualitative, bottom up studies of growth among refugees (Copping et al., 2010).

In the following sections, the design and format of the interviews are described, including the input from the competence group. Thereafter follows descriptions of the recruitment strategy and participants, the procedures for conducting the interviews, including issues concerning language and transcription, and, lastly, description of how the data analysis was conducted.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews

In total, I conducted 15 individual, semi-structured in-depth interviews. This was sufficient for theoretical saturation, i.e., collecting and analyzing more data would not provide new information about the topic.

Format and design

The interview guide (appendix 3) was inspired by a strength-perspective (Saleebey, 1996), meaning that it had a particular focus on uncovering human resources and capacities. I also drew inspiration from principles from double listening, a narrative approach that focuses on both the trauma story and the persons responses to it (Marlowe, 2010B). This approach enabled exploration and validation of the participants' trauma experiences, while simultaneously uncovering and highlighting their strengths and coping resources through asking about how they had dealt with their adversity (Marlowe, 2010B). Moving beyond difficulties in this way, enabled a more holistic understanding and exploration of coping strategies and the social structures that promote these. The combination of this approach with the use of open and varied questions, might have reduced the risk of one-sidedness in terms of only looking for "the positive", and also of expectation biases, as I avoided using questions that only probed the participants to report on strengths and/or growth.

In advance of the meetings with the competence group, I had made a draft for an interview-guide, and piloted and tested themes and questions with the participants. They provided input on the relevance of these, and on language and formulations. This input was used to validate, rephrase or remove questions. Thematically, the interview guide was inspired by the study's research questions, and by central themes from the literature (i.e., the empirical and theoretical framework). Moreover, by certain elements from the PTGI-SF (Cann et al., 2010A), and the Core Beliefs Inventory (CBI, Cann et al., 2010B). The main topics covered in the interview guide, were flight- and resettlement experiences; dreams, goals and meaning making; social support and belonging; integration, inclusion and stigma/attitudes; mastery and coping; positive and negative learning about self, others and life; religion/spirituality, and future plans and perspectives.

Considerable time was spent making an interview guide that would ensure that the same overarching topics were covered in each interview, while also allowing for inclusion of or elaboration on topics that were particularly relevant to each participant. Some structure was considered necessary, but so was avoiding ending up with a guide resembling a questionnaire. I aimed for an open, 'natural flow' during the interviews, but also wanted to be prepared for cases where participants could need more helping questions to talk freely. Thus, the interview guide was quite extensive. Lastly, it was important to ensure that the participants felt comfortable in the setting and with sharing their story, and part of that was to avoid starting or ending the interview with questions that were directly focused on e.g., trauma and adversity. Thus, each interview started with an informal talk and an open question, and concluded with lighter topics and a debriefing.

Participant recruitment and introduction

The *inclusion criteria* were based on that the majority of refugees coming to Europe are younger than 35. An even gender distribution was desirable to bring out a variety of experiences and perspectives. Participants had to be between the age of 18 and 28, and could include persons who had been granted residence, or were waiting for a response to their asylum application. Based on this, purposive sampling, i.e., selecting participants who met the inclusion criteria, was a natural recruitment strategy. The participants were recruited in different ways and forums. Some via already established contacts, who sent information about the study and my contact information to their contacts with refugee backgrounds, who could then contact me directly if they were interested in participating. I also contacted municipal

offices responsible for refugees, adult learning centers (a combined municipal adult education and refugee service), and the Red Cross at various locations in Norway, and asked if I could visit them to inform about the project and potentially recruit participants. Lastly, I posted a recruitment add in a Facebook-group ("Refugees Welcome Norway"), where I informed about the project and that people could contact me via phone if they were interested in hearing more and/or participating in an interview.

The participants were eight men and seven women, on average 22-23 years old at the time of the interview (range 20 to 28 years). At the time of the interview, the participants had resided in Norway for an average of 7 years (range 1.5 to 17 years). Five participants were still taking part in the obligatory introduction program for refugees (see imdi.no/en/the-introduction-programme/). Most were established with work and/or studies and some social network, and all had been granted temporary protection or permanent residency. The participants originated from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Eritrea, and Kurdish Iraq/Iran/Syria/Turkey. Some had spent years in transit countries, while others spent months on an ongoing flight from country to country before they eventually arrived in Norway. Four participants came to Norway as unaccompanied refugee minors (URM), 4 came alone when they were 18 years or older, 2 came with family members through the UNHCR, and 5 came with their parent(s) and sibling(s) as asylum seekers when they were children. Twelve of the participants came to Europe and Norway before 2016, after which the enforcement of stricter border controls and asylum regulations have made it very difficult for people to reach Norway to seek asylum. Of the three who came to Norway after 2016, one came as an URM and two through the UNHCR. All participants were refugees as defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention, Article 1A (2).

Interview setting and procedure

In advance of the interview, and before signing the informed consent form, each participant was informed verbally and in writing about the project, their rights, my responsibilities towards them, and data security (see Appendix 4 for information letter and consent form). It was estimated that each interview would last between 1 to 2 hours. On average, however, the duration was 2.5 hours, with the shortest lasting a bit over 1 hour and the longest nearly 5 hours. Ten interviews were completed in one meeting. Three of the interviews were done in two rounds, with two of the second round interviews done via phone. Two interviews were

done in its entirety via phone- and video calls, due to particularly long travel distances and/or remote locations.

With six of the participants, I had a phone call or meeting where we would get to know each other and clarify eventual questions, before scheduling a time for the interview. The interviews were conducted at different geographical locations in Norway, and took place in an office, at a participant's home, or at a private space at a local library or cafe. Interviews at the participant's home generally felt most relaxed and natural, as it was an informal and maybe 'safe' setting for the participant. Although the interview guide was quite extensive and detailed, the interviews unfolded as free conversations, covering the interview topics with only slight cues and guidance from me as interviewer.

Language, transcription, and translation

To ensure that language was not a reason for exclusion, and that people got the right to express themselves freely in the language they were most comfortable with, potential participants were informed during recruitment that an interpreter would be arranged for if needed. Fourteen interviews were conducted in Norwegian, and one interview was conducted in Arabic with an interpreter. The interpreter was thoroughly informed about the research topic and aims, expectations during the interview, and the terms of confidentiality (see e.g., Edwards, 1998). The interpreter signed a confidentiality agreement, which I explained the content of also to the participant.

Overall, the 14 participants who did not wish an interpreter present spoke Norwegian well, although language skills varied. 2/3 were more or less fluent, while 1/3 were less fluent, mainly apparent as a more narrow vocabulary, or more challenges with pronunciation or grammar, such as finding the correct tense of verbs. Some expressed that they sometimes found it challenging to formulate their meanings correctly when describing the "deep meaning" of things. In such cases, I put particular emphasis on giving the participants sufficient time to find words and formulations. Sometimes, we searched for words together, and I asked for clarifications in cases when uncertainties arose. In one interview, we translated certain words or phrases from Arabic to Norwegian in order to clarify the meaning content. Moreover, in addition to verbal expressions, I paid attention to the participants' facial expressions and body language when interpreting meaning. Non-verbal expressions sometimes contributed to clarifying meaning, such as me pointing to the heart when

explaining a question about emotional versus physical closeness/intimacy - whereby the participant said 'we speak the same language!'

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using a combination of verbatim transcription and a denaturalized approach (Oliver et al., 2005). Denaturalized transcription grows out of an interest in the informational content of speech, and attempts a faithful depiction of speech where accuracy concerns the substance of the interview, i.e., the meanings and perceptions created and shared during a conversation (Oliver et al., 2005, p.1277). Idiosyncratic elements of speech, such as stutters, pauses, and non-verbals, were removed from the transcription, and in cases where participants made grammatical errors, such as using a verb in the wrong tense, I corrected these. This was done to highlight meaning and readability, and to avoid losing the essence of the quotes due to "grammatical distractions".

The quotes presented in the findings chapter were translated from Norwegian to English by me (the researcher). To improve clarity and readability, repetitions and remaining grammatical errors were left out. This was done carefully in order to keep the essence of meaning intact.

Data analysis

The purpose of the data analysis was to make sense of the participants' experiences and interpretations, and to identify the factors influencing these. Moreover, to highlight shared aspects of the participants' experiences and descriptions. Based on this, I chose to use thematic analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012), which allows the researcher to identify common patterns of meaning across a data set, and make sense of shared meanings, experiences and descriptions of a phenomenon. In short, TA can be described as a way of identifying what is common to the way a topic is talked about, and of understanding those commonalities (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). As a data set can contain a large number of patterns of meaning, Braun & Clarke (2012) emphasize that these "need to be important in relation to the particular topic and research question being explored" (p.57). In other words, the analysis produces the answer to a question, meaning that it will to some degree be shaped by the pre-defined aims and research questions of the study.

TA is flexible in that it is not tied to a particular theoretical or epistemological framework. Still, Braun & Clarke (2006) emphasize the importance of positioning the analysis epistemologically, as this "guides what you can say about your data, and informs how you

theorize meaning" (p.85). Based on the theoretical and philosophical framework, I chose what Braun & Clarke (2006) describe as a *contextualist position*, which is located between realism and constructionism. This position acknowledges both the ways individuals make meaning of their experiences, and the ways the broader socio-cultural context and structural conditions influences those meanings (ibid., p.81). As such, it allows the researcher to make inferences and theorize about both. Importantly, Braun & Clarke (2006) emphasize that themes do not just emerge from the data material; they are the result of the researcher's active interpretations, and are thus generated or constructed, rather than discovered.

Coding process and analysis step-by-step

After having transcribed and simultaneously anonymized the interviews, the transcripts were imported into the qualitative data analysis software NVIVO (see Dhakal, 2022), which was used to organize the analysis. My way of using NVIVO can be described as the digital equivalent of using color markers on printed transcripts to organize the material from several interviews under common codes and themes. While this might sound like a quantitative approach to qualitative analysis, I found TA and NVIVO to be a good match, as the latter aids the TA 'goal' of creating themes and identifying commonalities and shared meanings. Moreover, both NVIVO and TA make it possible to maintain depth and highlight subjective meanings and experiences, in accordance with principles form humanistic-existential psychology and qualitative methods in general.

The empirical material was analyzed in accordance with the six phases of TA specified by Braun & Clarke (2006, 2012), namely: familiarizing myself with the data (phase 1); generating initial codes (phase 2); searching for themes (phase 3); reviewing potential themes (phase 4); defining and naming themes (phase 5), and, lastly, writing up the findings (phase 6).

Phase 1, familiarizing myself with the data, involved becoming 'intimately familiar with the content of the data set, and begin to notice things that might be relevant to the research question' (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p.61). An advantage here, was that I had conducted and transcribed all the interviews myself. Still, the phase involved rereading the transcripts, re-listening to some of the recordings, and going back to thoughts I had noted down during the interview process. Moreover, I asked questions about the underlying meanings and assumptions in the participants' statements, ideas, and interpretations, such as what they emphasized as important and not, and why.

Phase 2, generating initial codes, was the first step of the systematic analysis. A code is described as a building block of a theme, and this phase involved identifying and systematically labelling features of the entire data set that were potentially relevant to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Lastly, the data that was relevant to each code was gathered. Without a list of pre-defined codes, I approached the analysis rather openly and developed codes throughout the analytic process. However, I did have some ideas for broad thematic categories, based on theory and/or topics that had been repeated across the interviews, but also changed these depending on what the material showed. Thus, I used a combination of inductive (data driven) and deductive (theory driven) analysis, meaning that the data analysis went back and forth between theory and empirical data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). That is, I started from the content of the participants' perspectives and descriptions, but was also influenced by theoretical perspectives on e.g., meaning making, coping and growth, among other from the review I had done of the empirical literature before the data analysis. This carries a risk of limiting the scope, but it might also help one identify otherwise 'hidden' aspects in the material (Malterud, 2001). Moreover, one's analytical stance is unavoidably affected by theory, according to Malterud (2001), who equates the theoretical framework with 'the reading glasses worn by the researcher when asking questions about the material' (p.486).

Phase 3, searching for themes, began with 'reviewing codes to identify areas of similarity and overlap, and identifying broad topics around which codes clustered' (Braun and Clarke, 2012, p.63). Codes that reflected and described a coherent and meaningful pattern in the data were collapsed together, to start generating themes and subthemes (Braun and Clarke, 2012, p.63). A theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Thus, it is essential that all aspects of the theme cohere around a central idea or concept. A challenge in this phase, was that several text parts and quotes were complex and thus could be representative of more than one theme. This sometimes resulted in re-coding, or development of new sub-themes. Another challenge at times, was to hold on to the individual stories as I separated them into themes and codes. In order keep the individual, coherent stories and meanings in sight, while simultaneously getting a clear idea and overview of shared meanings and experiences, it was necessary to analyze in several rounds, lastly when writing up the findings.

Phase 4, reviewing potential themes, was essentially about quality checking. That is, checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, checking

themes against each other, and back to the original data set. I also looked for variations and/or contradictions, and considered alternative readings of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). In total, the interview transcripts were coded in 4 rounds before I landed on a thematic map that worked, meaning that the themes and sub-themes were internally coherent, distinct from each other, and represented "a good descriptive fit" of their respective codes and extracts.

Phase 5, naming and defining themes, involved identifying the essence of each theme, and also of the overall story of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This meant further analysis of what each time was saying and how they related to each other, and also of how the subthemes worked together and related to their main theme. Overall, the analysis was mainly done at the semantic level, which involves "summarizing and providing a rich description of the dataset, and identifying key themes and patterns of meaning at the surface (semantic) level of the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.84).

Phase 6, writing up the findings, included a final analysis of selected extracts while writing the empirical chapter and the discussion. This was a form of refinement of themes as I was relating the analysis to the research questions and literature (Braun & Clarke, 2012). One challenge that surfaced in this phase, was that some themes made a chronological presentation meaningful, while other themes made more sense to present thematically and not necessarily in chronological order. Thus, this was a process of trying out several different alternatives for how to arrange themes and present the overall story of the data and analysis. Moreover, while writing the empirical chapters, I noted that some of the subthemes and coded extracts were better represented by other themes than initially though. This meant that some extracts and subthemes were moved, collated, and/or slightly renamed, to ensure that their overarching themes and titles accurately captured their meaning content.

As the themes were not identified in advance of the analysis, they represent empirical findings. Eventually, I ended up with a total of 9 main themes and 13 sub-themes (see ch.14), presented under three main sections in the empirical chapter. There, I aimed for inclusion of a sufficient amount of quotes to properly represent and highlight the participants' experiences and knowledge.

Chapter 13: Ethical considerations and reflections

An underlying assumption of research ethics, is that some individuals and groups, including refugees and other often marginalized groups, are at a higher risk of being harmed, misled or taken advantage of in research (CIOMS, 2016). The three following sections deals with vulnerability and the right to participate; procedural and relational ethical considerations and measures undertaken to protect the participants; and, ethical considerations in the writing and dissemination of findings.

Vulnerability and the right to participate

This study attempts to meet a call for research that promotes the voices of individuals who are often deemed too vulnerable for research (Peter & Friedland, 2017), and to respond to vulnerability in ways that "avoids stereotyping and paternalism and is consistent with the principle of respect for individual autonomy" (Lange et al., 2013, p.334). Vulnerable persons or groups should only be included as informants when they are the only ones who can provide the necessary information (Berg et al., 2018; Levine, 2004). There is, however, a risk that broad categories of vulnerability can hinder people's right to participate, and thus exclude their perspectives in research and decisions concerning them. For research to become more relevant to people's concerns and needs, it is often essential to seek information directly from the people in question. Thus, it is argued that vulnerability should not be as used a characteristic of groups, but rather explained in terms of certain traits that may render certain persons vulnerable in certain situations (Berg et al., 2018). In ethical guidelines from CIOMS (2016), vulnerability is defined as resulting from some feature of people's circumstances that makes it less likely that others will be sensitive to their interests (p.57). A dynamic definition of vulnerability as contextual and relational ensures people's right to participate, and places responsibility on me, the researcher, for making careful ethical considerations and including appropriate measures for protect the participants.

Measures undertaken to protect the participants

In the application for ethical approval of this study, which was granted by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD, ref. 197000, appendix 5), particular emphasis was placed on describing how I would protect the participants, their information, and the data material. This involved three main areas, or measures, namely: voluntary and informed consent, confidentiality and data security, and having a plan for protecting and ensuring the

participants' well-being. I based my plans and evaluations on guidelines from NESH (2022) and CIOMS (2016), on ethical reflections concerning research involving young refugees (Hopkins, 2008), and on previous research experience with vulnerable persons and groups.

A voluntary and fully informed consent

A voluntary and fully informed consent is given without any form of external pressure, based on sufficient and comprehensible information provided by the researcher about what it entails to participate in research (NESH, 2022, p.18). I emphasized provision of detailed and understandable information, both written and verbally, in the language preferred by each participant. This included information about: their rights to see their material and/or withdraw their consent at any time, without needing to give a reason; my responsibilities towards them, including ensuring their anonymity; the aims and purposes of the project; and, how the data material would be used and handled. I also explained that no information would be accessible to the authorities, and that I, the researcher, was the only person with access to their personal information. Lastly, I emphasized that it was completely up to the participants to decide what they wanted to talk about and not, including that they were free to skip - or add –interview questions and topics.

Obtaining written consent can be complicated in research involving people who have experienced persecution or lived under authoritarian regimes, because of suspicion and anxiety about the misuse of signatures, particularly on formal documents (Vara & Patel, 2012, p.79). This, however, was not a concern among the majority of participants, with the exception of one person who did not want to own signature or interview to be recorded. This was something that I naturally adhered to.

Lastly, ensuring voluntary participation included not using any form 'reward' as part of the recruitment. Each participant was given a universal gift card as a way of showing my appreciation for their contribution. With a value of 250 NOK, or around 25 euro, it was a symbolic gesture, yet it was given as a surprise after the interview, in order to avoid that it influenced voluntary participation.

Confidentiality and data security

The interviews were audiotaped, transcribed (by me) and anonymized through removing any identifiable information. The audiofiles were deleted from the recorder immediately after transcription, and the signed consent forms securely locked in. Transcripts, audiotapes,

contact information, and identification key were stored with Services for sensitive data (TSD), a platform where researchers at public research institutions can collect, store and analyze sensitive research data in compliance with the Norwegian privacy regulation. Considering the small sample size (15 persons), I found it necessary to be particularly cautious about connecting demographic and other information to individuals, in order to ensure anonymity. Thus, in the written report, I have only provided information about age and country of origin for the group as a whole, rather than connecting name (pseudonym) and gender with specific age or country of origin. No information about the participants' current location in Norway is included.

Protecting and taking care of the participants' well-being, and relational ethical considerations

Doing research that includes participants who have experienced trauma and adversity, involves a particular responsibility for minimizing the risk of burdening the participants further. As Berg et al. (2018) points out, "our ethical responsibility as researchers commits us far beyond obtaining written and informed consent" (p.16), and continuous ethical assessments should be made throughout the interview processes.

I designed the interview guide in a way that was open and allowed the participants to control what they wanted to delve into, and avoided questions that were too direct in terms of asking about e.g., trauma details. Still, I considered it likely that the interviews would bring up memories and stories of difficult periods and events in the participants' lives. Talking about traumatic events in research settings is generally considered safe, in terms of not causing re-traumatization or other problems afterwards (Griffin et al., 2003). Still, I found it important to make a plan in advance of the interviews, for how I would handle potential concerns that could surface about the participants' well-being or psychological health. Specific points included asking for permission to follow up via phone, offer advice about where to seek psychological help if needed, and informing about my responsibilities if I was worried about e.g., suicidality. I also tried to ensure that each interview was concluded in a caring and neutral way, i.e., not abruptly or directly after a difficult story, and made time for a de-briefing at the end of each interview. This also provided the possibility to ask for permission to follow up with a phone call in the days after the interview in cases of worry, to map the participant's network, and/or discuss with the participant how I could assist in getting adequate help and support if needed. Lastly, I informed all participants that they could contact me after the interview if they had any questions or concerns, no matter how big or small.

In a few cases, some concern arose about the participant's well-being during the interview, and I asked for permission to follow up with a message or phone call after a day or two. At follow up, all expressed that they were doing well, but also that they appreciated being contacted. In one case, I followed up a participant who was struggling very much at the time, via weekly phone calls during the course of 4-5 weeks. This took place before the interview, as the person – X - contacted me via a message after I had placed a recruitment add on Facebook. When I called back to inform about the interview and arrange a meeting, it became clear that X was in the middle of a crisis that we ended up talking about for a long time. X expressed appreciation for this, and also a need for someone to talk to, and after consulting with my advisors, I suggested to X that we could talk weekly if that was something X wanted. I emphasized that these talks would be separate from the project, and that X should not feel obligated to participate in an interview. We continued talking, and over a few weeks, X managed to get through the worst of the crisis. Later, X asked to participate in an interview, and I decided to say yes to that.

Relational ethical considerations concerns the recognition and value of the relationship between the researcher and participants, and the researcher's responsibility for own actions and their consequences for participants (Ellis, 2007; Vervliet et al., 2015). Morrow (2007) stresses the researcher's responsibility to treat participants with high regard and respect, due to their close relationship and the often emotional and sensitive nature of the information shared by the participants. For me, this also included a concern with how the participants experienced the interview. Several described it as a positive experience, often before I got the chance to ask explicitly about it. Examples of feedback from the participants, was that it felt good to contribute with information that might be helpful to others; to be asked about their views and experiences; and to tell their story to someone who had time and interest in listening. This feedback was in line with Clark's (2010) emphasis on that it can be a positive and meaningful experience to participate in research interviews, precisely because they have the capacity to provide people with an opportunity for self-expression, and the possibility to share important events with a sympathetic listener.

'Doing interviews is a privilege granted to us, not a right that we have': ethical considerations in the writing and dissemination of findings

Denzin's (2017, p.216) words, quoted in the heading, serve as a reminder of the rewarding experience of being allowed to interview people, and also of how the researcher's ethical

responsibilities stretches throughout the research process. All of the choices made by me as a researcher, from how I formulate the research questions, to the words I choose when writing up the findings, will influence the reader's understandings and interpretations. Not only of the validity and scientific value of the research inquiry, but also of the research participants. Considering the final status of "truth" given to written research, the representational vulnerability of the participants is great when studying people who belong to marginalized groups (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). Moreover, the participants showed me a great deal of trust by sharing their personal stories, as they depend on the researcher's interpretations, ideologies, and writing styles in the representations of them (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). These points were important for me to respect and value in the writing of findings. Thus, in addition to being concerned with the participants' experience of the interview in itself, I was also concerned with how they would feel about how the interview material was presented in the final written report. I felt a responsibility for representing them and their experiences in a truthful way that reflected both overarching, common themes and nuances.

The "topic" of refugees is high on the political agenda and in public debates, and often framed negatively. Thus, the researcher has a particular responsibility for disseminating results in ways that does not contribute to stigmatization (Fossheim & Ingierd, 2016). Due to the potential relevance of the findings both politically and for policy development, the researcher is also responsible for ensuring that the reader is provided with proper insight into the underlying mechanisms of the findings (Fossheim & Ingierd, 2016). In addition to aiming for this, I strived to write the research in a way that would be accessible, recognizable, and meaningful both to the participants and to others in similar situations. I made efforts to acknowledge and highlight not only the participants' experiences, but also their ideas and perspectives, including their capacity for analyzing and theorizing their situations (Krumer-Nevo, 2005; Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010). This was also related to another part of ensuring ethical and meaningful participation in research, namely to enable people's views and experiences to influence change, both at a personal and public level (Farrell, 2005; Faulkner, 2004; Kirby et al., 2003). This might include announcing potential shortcomings in the support system around refugees identified through the research (Vervliet et al., 2015). Lastly, it was important to share the final research results with the participants, both as my ethical obligation as a researcher, and as a way of honoring and providing meaning to their contribution through making visible its actual results (Berg et al., 2018; CIOMS, 2016; NESH, 2022).

PART IV
EMPIRICAL FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Chapter 14: Empirical Findings

To increase the readability of the findings chapter, I aimed for a presentation that was meaningful both chronologically and thematically. The empirical findings are structured according to the main themes and sub-themes from the data analysis (see table on next page), presented under three main sections:

- *Section I* deals with the participants' experiences of trauma, adversity and hardship before, during and after flight, and provide the context for understanding their accounts of coping, meaning making and growth.

- *Section II* focuses on how the participants dealt with adversity, using personal, social, cultural, and structural strengths, resources and coping strategies.

- *Section III* describes processes and outcomes of meaning making, adversarial growth, and wisdom. Useful learning, insights, perspectives, and wisdom following adversity.

Main sections, and belonging themes and sub-themes	
Section	Themes and *sub-themes*

I. Experiences of trauma, adversity and hardship	• 'I only thought about surviving': adversity and trauma before and during flight
	
	• Arriving in Norway: initial relief, then uncertainty, waiting, and forced passivity
	    o *Learning the language: 'the key to everything'*
	    o *Stigma and stereotypes causing othering, and diminished and negative expectations*

II. Dealing with adversity: strengths, resources and coping	• 'Giving up is not an option'
	    o *Not expecting life to be easy: preparedness, acceptance, and refocus*
	    o *Keeping busy and planning forward: taking charge of (inner and outer) life*
	    o *Optimism, positive re-appraisal, patience, and gratitude*
	
	• 'You need to get the pain out of the body'
	    o *The importance of extroversion and openness*
	
	• 'Keeping the best from both cultures': social and cultural resources
	    o *From early upbringing and collectivism, to a new culture and individualism*
	    o *Belonging, togetherness, and mutual learning*
	
	• 'When I look back…'': the importance of time and certainty

III. Meaning making, adversarial growth, and wisdom	• Searching for and creating meaning: framing adversity as a chance for learning
	    o *Giving meaning to own experiences through helping others*
	
	• Changes in the understanding of self, others, and life
	    o *Life priorities and values after facing suffering and death*
	    o *Feeling stronger: 'you get to see how much you are actually capable of'*
	    o *More engaged and authentic behaviors and beliefs*
	
	• Wisdom and life perspective
	    o *Useful learning and insight to share with others*

I. Experiences of trauma, adversity and hardship

In order to understand processes of coping and growth, and the determination and effort involved, one must first get an idea of what the young people have endured in terms of adversity and hardship. Thus, the current chapter deals with the participants' adverse experiences before, during and after flight, which provides a context for understanding their accounts of coping and growth.

The chapter is divided into two main themes: the first dealing with the circumstances and events that led to and were experienced during flight, and the second focusing on the experiences associated with arriving in Norway.

'I only thought about surviving': adversity and trauma before and during flight

> The only thing I thought about when I fled, was to save my life and avoid having to participate in killing [people] in the war. That was what I thought about (Fadil).

Examples of the various and often combined reasons why the 15 young participants had to leave their countries of origin, were the need to escape armed conflict, persecution of self or family members, and threats of jail, torture or kidnapping to armed groups. Before and during flight, most had experienced threats to life and health, and the loss of loved ones due to war and conflict, sometimes in the form of witnessing the murder of parents or friends.

Fadil first fled to a neighboring country, and it was the death of his mother that eventually contributed to him fleeing further away than imagined. When telling this story, it was evident from his facial expression, tone, and the many pauses made, that his mother's death and the associated circumstances had left a big wound. Fadil described that his heart was 'cut into pieces' when he heard his mother's fragile voice on the phone, upon receiving news that her health had rapidly deteriorated due to lack of treatment because of the war. Deeply shaken and determined to see his mother again before she died, Fadil decided to flee back over the border, which was guarded by armed military. Desperate to cross, he went closer, whereby they loosened warning shots in the air. However, Fadil continued, while shouting that he needed to visit his dying mother, before he started crying. And, by some chance of luck or glimpse of compassion, he was allowed to cross, and got to see his mother for the last time, before she died with him by her side. Then, he had to flee again, and this time he headed for Europe; as far away as possible from every painful memory, yet closer to the possibility of fulfilling his mother's dream for him, namely to study and get a proper education. Fadil's

story illustrated some of the complexity of flight and war experiences, including the human tragedies indirectly caused by war, and the many contributing factors to flight.

In common for the participants, was that their flight was driven by a need for survival and safety from danger, conflict, and oppression. Most of them had no perception of what it meant or entailed to be a refugee, of where they would end up, or when – if ever – they would be able to return home. As Soran put it, "I only knew that I had to leave my country". Thus, the participants were embarking on a journey into the unknown, and fleeing did not only mean leaving danger and threats; it also meant leaving everything known and loved. As Majeed pointed out, people become refugees because they are forced to, and not because they want to leave their country, culture, and people. Because, the place you are born, "that place is your homeland, it is the land of your mother – and that place is in some way holy to you".

The flight from the homeland most often involved long and dangerous journeys, undertaken by foot, in rubber boats, in car trunks, and on busses or trains, under constant fear of being asked for identification papers and sent back to what they had fled from. Several of the participants went by small, overcrowded rubber boats, which was described as a terrifying experience due to the great risk of either drowning or being killed by people smugglers. In order to avoid detection by border police, the boats went during the night, in total darkness, and people – often with no prior experience – were left by the people smugglers to steer the boats themselves. Omer remembered how shocked his father was when realizing that he and his children had to cross the sea in an overcrowded rubber dingy. Desperately, he tried to convince the smugglers to let them leave, telling them that they could keep the money, but that he and the children would not go into the boat. However:

> Then the smugglers showed us a video where they were shooting at people who had tried to leave the boats. We got the choice between getting into the boat, or getting killed (Omer).

Omer and his family got through the boat trip unharmed, while Fadil was among several participants who did not succeed at the first attempt at crossing. The boat he was in started taking in water in the middle of the sea:

> […] there was a mother who had three small children, and when the boat broke and everyone threw themselves out of it, the mother started saying "please, just save my children" […] I thought about many things at that point; I thought about my mother, about my life, about everything I had experienced from the very beginning […] Then I took one of the children and told him to hold on tightly to me. (Fadil)

As Fadil's life flashed by before his eyes, the boat eventually sunk, where after people spent hours in the cold water, before they were rescued. Fadil was so exhausted that he could barely stand or walk for days afterwards. Soran learned after the crossing, that one of the boats that had left simultaneously, had sunk - and people onboard had drowned. In addition to these frightening experiences, some of the participants were held in detention centers for shorter or longer periods of time. When trying to find the words to describe her experiences from one such place, Salima struggled to such a degree that I decided not to ask her to elaborate further. The look on her face already said a lot about this place, where "everything was hell… they treated us worse than animals... they killed people in front of us […]".

Exposure to violence and abuse committed by border police and local police along the route was not uncommon. Fadil described how police officers in Europe subjected him and other refugees, including numerous women and children, to beatings, and threw cold water at them in the middle of the winter, before they robbed them of valuables and brutally returned them back over the border they had just crossed. Afzal, who fled alone as a child, found the violence and abuse from police and border officials shockingly similar to what he had fled from. He had expected something very different, and remembered thinking that "now, I've come to Europe, but where are those human rights? Where can I find them?"

Arriving in Norway: initial relief, then waiting, uncertainty, and forced passivity

> It was cold, and I didn't have any warm clothes. I just walked down Karl Johan, up towards the royal castle, and people were out dancing… (Hamza).

Hamza arrived in Oslo on a late winter night, after the police station had closed. After having spent months on flight, he suddenly found himself walking around in the capital of Norway, in the night, among people who were joyfully drinking and dancing. This almost absurd contrast between the fear, intensity, and chaos during flight, and then suddenly and exhausted arriving in Norway, was illustrative of an experience shared by several of the participants. Moreover, some described how surprised and relieved they were by how well they were treated by the police in Norway, compared to previous experiences. Afzal explained that:

> […] the police were very kind, they only asked me some questions and [asked me] how old I was, and drove me to the [police] station. And, then I thought 'now I'm in [the right] place' (Afzal)

In many cases, however, the initial relief was soon replaced by the burdens of waiting for two or more years for an answer to the asylum application. This meant that life was put further on

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hold while facing an unknown future - a period that was described as extremely taxing for mental and physical health. Several of the participants were placed in remote asylum reception centers, where life changed from constant activity during flight, to a state of forced passivity, uncertainty and lack of control over own life and future. The combination of isolation, inactivity, uncertainty, and fear of deportation made it nearly impossible to plan for the future, or distract thoughts away from painful memories. As such, the participants were left with little to do other than worrying about what might happen, and re-experiencing previous trauma. This lead to problems with sleeping, depression, and anger, and Omer explained that making him live in that situation was "experienced as much worse than anything I had been through, [also] because I re-experienced earlier things. So, for me... I experienced it as torture". Omer elaborated further:

> [...] because earlier, we were on flight, and then we didn't sit and talk about the past, we didn't think about that. We only thought about surviving and getting further [away]. But when you have arrived here, it's a disaster. Suddenly you have nothing to do. Nothing. And you are sent to this remote, isolated reception center, and they tell you to wait for 10 weeks and then you'll get asylum and residency. And when 10 weeks have passed, when 80 weeks have passed, when 160 weeks have passed, when 400 weeks have passed... you are still there. And you don't know if you will be picked up by the police tomorrow, if you will be deported back, to where you will be killed (Omer)

Similarly, Fadil described that "we come to Norway, but we don't see Norway – we only see that we are isolated in a forest, in a big camp with a lot of strict rules". Thus, "you are alone and you have nothing to do, other than thinking", something which Soran explained as being particularly hard when the police came to pick up people from the asylum center for deportation in the middle of the night. This triggered worries and negative thinking, and questions about why that person was being deported – and, "will I be next?" Similarly, Afzal explained that until he got asylum, his mind was constantly preoccupied with concerns about what he would do and where he would go if his application was rejected, and not least, "will I have to experience even more of the painful things I've already been through?" When Fadil called UDI to ask about his case, the only answer he got for more than two years was "you just have to wait". In addition to feeling unwanted and unjustly treated, Fadil became depressed:

> [...] I suffered a lot while waiting for the answer to my asylum application... I started to get very depressed. I couldn't sleep... it's the uncertainty that... that you just sit there and don't know what will happen, without rights to school, work... (Fadil)

Furthermore, the waiting time did not necessarily end when protection was granted; some of the participants also had to wait for a long time before they were resettled in a municipality, and thus, lost more time before they could eventually start building a new life and work towards their goals of getting an education and a job.

The participants who came with their family as children had a somewhat easier start in Norway, as they were less burdened by responsibility and worries, got emotional support and care from their family, and had an easier time meeting potential friends and learning the language. Similarly, the two participants who came as resettlement refugees through the UNHCR and were settled directly in an apartment in a municipality, did not have to go through the waiting time. Still, they experienced the challenges of learning a new language, and getting used to a new country, and culture, which could be accompanied by sadness and worries about how to manage life and the future. In these and other situations, the participants were at times missing home and everything familiar and known. The place they had grown up, where they had friends and knew the food, the sounds, the smells, the customs – and where no one questioned whether or not they belonged. Salima exemplified how thoughts and feelings of missing the home country could come quite suddenly, such as while walking around in the streets, or when feeling tired or sad about something - "or, when you receive bad news, that someone died, for example". An ongoing challenge for several, was that they could not go back to visit if something happened to loved ones. As Soran explained:

> […] my mother died two years ago, and I could not [go back to] see her one last time [quiet, pause]. So that is very difficult for many of us who have been forced to flee. [...] I'm here, and I don't know what is happening to my family, my friends, my people... I wake up to see on Facebook that my neighbor was killed… (Soran)

Missing the familiar and not being able to improve the situation of those 'left behind', or even attend your mother's funeral, taps into topics of powerlessness and different aspects of safety. Getting asylum was necessary to ensure physical safety from (being deported back to) war and persecution. Thereafter, the often long process of re-building psychological safety and processing past trauma could begin. Afzal explained that he had to work hard to stop difficult and negative thoughts, through focusing hard and determined on the positive things he had achieved, such as getting residence, having started school, and managed to learn quite a bit of Norwegian on his own.

> I got motivation [to continue working for my life and future] when I learned the language. Then I could communicate and make myself understood, and I could read [and learn] about Norwegian culture and things like that on the internet. (Afzal)

> I was conscious about that to function in society and get a good life, you must first of all learn the language. (Majeed)

Common for all the participants, was their understanding of learning the language as the key to building a good life and becoming part of their new society in Norway. As illustrated by the quotes above, this provided them with motivation to work hard and determined, and strengthened their belief in the possibility of succeeding. On the one hand, learning could be particularly difficult when the mind was occupied by worries due to uncertainty, processing of trauma, or worries about loved ones. Several of the participants who came at a young age and learned the language fairly quickly, emphasized the importance of not judging people if they used a long time, precisely because it might require time to heal and free up the mental focus that is required for learning. On the other hand, several problematized that they had to wait for a long time before they got the right to language courses.

Thus, while waiting, learning was dependent upon own efforts and creativity, and the participants actively sought opportunities for learning. For example, they were asking employees at the reception center for classes, used YouTube, or, in Fadil's case, made the local library a second home. There, he took contact with people and asked for help with the language, and managed to learn much Norwegian and build social relationships - which also contributed to getting him out of a depression. Unfortunately, this was lost when the reception center he lived in was closed down, and he was being moved to a new, faraway place. Fadil became depressed again, but after some time, he managed to get work as a volunteer, which he mainly intended to use as a chance to practice Norwegian. However, he also got good colleagues, and maybe most importantly, for the first time since he came to Norway, he experienced that he did something valuable with his time and life. This points to the importance of being allowed to contribute and feeling useful, for people's sense of identity, value and meaning.

Learning the language provided feelings of mastery, hope, and potential access to new possibilities. Seeing the results of their own learning efforts proved that they were capable of reaching their goals. Knowing the language also provided more independence and a way from exclusion to inclusion in the general society, both socially and in terms of opening doors to

the pursuit of educational and occupational goals and dreams. Moreover, it was indirectly connected to well-being and psychological health, through making it easier to build social relationships and find someone to talk to about painful experiences and memories.

Stigma and stereotypes causing othering, and diminished and negative expectations

> People can say like, that if you follow Norwegian culture and traditions and stuff, then you are Norwegian. You can feel Norwegian, and then [that means] you are Norwegian, kind of. But I think that it [being Norwegian or not] depends on what the society defines you as. You can walk around and scream that you are Norwegian, but if you're being met as a foreigner, you are [still] a foreigner. (Samir)

The quote from Samir illustrates society's power to define who its members are, and the experience of othering. While stigma was a social and structural challenge that sometimes became more salient over time, it was also strongly associated with arriving in Norway.

Several participants had experienced racism and/or discrimination on the labor and housing market, based on visible markers of being a foreigner or a Muslim. While this could cause discomfort or worries about the future, such as whether wearing a hijab would make it difficult to get a job, few of the participants experienced racism as a big problem in their everyday life. What was described as more bothersome, were negative and stereotypical attitudes towards refugees and Islam/Muslims. Particularly so in social media and public debates, where Afzal experienced that there was more hate now than some years ago, something he saw as connected to politics. That is, "when people feel that they have someone [in power] who support them, they dare to write and do as they wish". Several described this as evoking feelings of frustration, unfairness and of being unwanted. Particularly when coming from politicians or others with power to shape public opinion, as Salima described:

> She [the priminister] kind of said that «[you] refugees are not working». And, I just thought «what about us who work during the night and goes to school during the day to get started in life? And she is right also, I understand that there are some people who doesn't want to work, but I'm not one of them […] if it was a regular person who said that to me, I wouldn't have cared. But when the priminister thinks like that… that was a bit negative […] she should have said «those who don't want to work even if they can work», she can talk about them. She shouldn't have included all [refugees]. (Salima)

Several emphasized that they worked hard, wanted to contribute to their new society, and would never rely on help from the welfare services. This signified personal values and

independence from an early age, but possibly also a need to distance themselves from negative stereotypes.

Not least, negative discourses were pointed out as causing separation, as well as diminished expectations towards refugees. One example of the latter, was when people got overly impressed when seeing a refugee succeeding at something, treating it as extraordinary and an exception – while barely reacting if a Norwegian did the same. As Omer explained, it gave meaning to be with other people with refugee backgrounds, who all shared the experience of being placed in the same group:

> […] and being portrayed as 'us against them'; we are [supposedly] the ones who are being oppressed, who are getting the least, who are not succeeding in life, compared to those [Norwegians] who are doing so well. (Omer)

Another topic that was often actualized in relation to stigma, was religious beliefs and Islam. Most of the participants identified themselves as Muslims, but not as particularly religious. Several described themselves as modern, which they associated with emphasizing gender equality, secularity, and/or flexibility in terms of how they practiced religion. When I asked what Islam meant or represented to them, the most commonly used descriptions were kindness, peace, love and respect for humanity, wisdom, and knowledge. As such, there was a sharp contrast between the participants' personal beliefs, practices and realities, and societal stereotypes and beliefs about Islam as encouraging violence and oppression of women, and about women wearing a hijab as being oppressed, controlled, or 'enslaved' by their husbands.

The participants expressed sadness and frustration regarding Islamophobia, which several attributed to people's fear of the unknown or lack of knowledge. On the one hand, they understood how extremism could make some people skeptical, and strongly condemned terrorist acts, and the abuse of Islam to justify such actions. It was clearly important for the participants to emphasize that terrorists are not Muslims, and that Islam does not allow killing or forcing religion on people. In fact, the only time that they firmly distinguished between "us and them", was when separating 'real Muslims' from terrorists:

> I have [even] said it publicly that ISIS and the Taliban are not Muslims, and I stand by that. I'm a Muslim, and I'm not part of those people - and they cannot be part of us. (Afzal).

> ISIS call themselves Muslims, but - sorry for my language - that fucking thing is not Islam, but something that they've made up themselves (Ashti).

Simultaneously, the participants problematized that Muslims were often made collectively responsible for the actions of a few terrorists. They emphasized the role of e.g., media in creating and maintaining prejudice, through focusing on Islam and Muslims mainly in relation to extremism, terrorism, and other negative stories. As Majeed pointed out, associating terrorism with Islam and Muslims resulted in that "you are also being marked and harassed because of it, regardless of your beliefs or behavior". It was pointed out that when acts of terrorism were committed, the common name for the perpetrator should be terrorist, regardless of the perpetrator's religious affiliation.

The participants emphasized that one cannot judge all based on the actions of one person or group, and also highlighted the importance of avoiding generalizations in general. Soran illustrated this with a saying from home, of that "even the five fingers on the same hand are not alike". Rejecting all forms of generalizations included 'positive generalizations', as Omer explained:

> It is just as negative to only point at the positive and say that everyone is a resource, as it is to say the opposite, because you lose your credibility [in either case]. The [positive] words lose their meaning, when you see in your everyday life people who are not so productive, people who are still struggling. And they are there; what we've been through is a lot [to deal with], and I [one person] might handle or tolerate things completely differently from another person. (Omer)

A point that was made by several participants, was that skepticism, racism, ignorance and lack of knowledge existed in every country and culture – and in themselves. In Omer's experience, negative ideas about religious people was a general phenomenon in Norway, and not necessarily only directed towards Muslims. For example, he was not drinking alcohol, which had experienced that some were skeptical of - because sobriety was associated with being Christian. Moreover, Shirin and her sisters used to be terrified of drunk Norwegian men, based on a belief that they were all rapists:

> […] and, we were never afraid of foreigners, but Norwegians, they were rapists. And it's kind of strange when you realize that that's how people think about foreigners. We were like 'oh, but we're afraid of you!' [laughing]. That was like completely absurd. (Shirin)

Shirin, as others, had learned from this and similar examples, to confront, challenge and change own prejudices. The participants' understanding of stigma and prejudice as a universal phenomenon and not necessarily personal, might have contributed to lessen its negative impact, and making it easier to try to understand others without judging or blaming. Still, it was described as a problem that created separation and hindered acceptance, and the

participants emphasized that all people had a responsibility for seeking knowledge before making judgements about others.

Summary points

Although the fifteen young participants had different backgrounds and flight experiences, there were a number of common themes in their stories. In relation to their flight, they had experienced severe losses and traumas, and their arrival- and resettlement experiences in Norway were marked by a mix of relief and worries. The challenges of adjusting to a new life in an unknown country, culture, system, and language were particularly acute while living in a state of uncertainty, fear, and powerlessness, while losing valuable time, which was descriptive of the situation for those who had to wait for a long time for asylum. The findings highlight the harmful health effect of prolonged periods of waiting, uncertainty, isolation and inactivity.

Another shared experience, was the additional challenges caused by stigma and stereotypes, and the discrepancy between these and the participants' actual beliefs and behaviors. The participants' 'eagerness' e.g., in separating Muslims and Islam from negative portrayals and terrorists, and their emphasis on working hard and not depending on welfare, reflected personal values and convictions, and possibly also a need to separate themselves from stereotypes and accompanying diminished expectations. The experience of being negatively judged based on group membership had also contributed to useful learning, such as avoiding generalizations in general, making efforts to try to understand why people think and behave as they do, and reflecting upon own prejudice. The participants emphasized each individuals' responsibility for educating oneself before making judgements about others.

The participants' strengths and survival capacities surfaced as they were talking about their experiences of suffering. For example, from the courage required to leave everything known and loved and fleeing into the unknown, to the efforts they put into dealing with difficulties and succeeding in their new lives. This points to the focus of the next chapter, namely the strengths, resources and coping strategies the participants have used to deal with adversity.

II. Dealing with adversity: strengths, resources and coping strategies

When analyzing the participants' accounts of how they had dealt with their experiences of adversity and hardship, I found a number of common themes and strategies. This was evident in the form of perspectives on and approaches to challenges, the types of coping strategies employed, and in personality characteristics. Moreover, there were several similarities in the participants' descriptions of how social and societal factors in Norway influenced coping, health, and positive adaption, and not least in the use and role of values and resources from family/upbringing and culture of origin.

Under four main themes, the following sections describe how the participant have dealt with adversity, using personal-, social-, and cultural strengths, resources and coping strategies. Although presented under separate headings, these were also interdependent and mutually affecting each other.

'Giving up is not an option'

> I'm a person who never gives up. I think that «tomorrow is going to be the best day»… I always think like that. And, some days are difficult, but… when the day is over, I say «thank [you] God, it worked out anyway». I learned [from earlier experiences] that if you think in a bad way, your whole day will be bad. If you get angry… no one can feel how angry you are inside your body, but you are killing yourself. (Salima)

The quote from Salima illustrates a shared, persistent attitude among the participants of keeping up hope and that giving up is not an option in how the participants generally perceived and met adversity and challenges. As Noor put it, "life is like that, you just have to keep on, you have to fight the challenges". This attitude, or perspective, seemed to facilitate motivation, acceptance, and various coping strategies, and thus serve as an overarching source of coping. This attitude was also associated with, or inspiring, a sense of control or choice as to whether or not letting past events negatively define the present and future. For example, as exemplified by Omer:

> When I tell it [my story] to people, they are kind of moved and say «oh no, did you really go through all that? Poor you!" And yes, poor me – if I had given up, if I had stopped there, if I had continued reliving it, if it had stopped me. (Omer)

The participants generally expressed strong beliefs in own capabilities to succeed, such as when Afzal firmly said that "when I tell you that I see myself somewhere in 10 years, that is the truth [I will get there]. I work hard and I'm serious". Several gave examples of how this belief in self was strengthened by earlier successes coming from persistent efforts, such as

learning Norwegian, getting a job, and not least – surviving war and flight and getting a new chance in life. It could be difficult and require hard work, both to maintain this attitude and to achieve their goals, but the participants firmly held that both were possible, as long as they continued believing in themselves, their capabilities, and life in general.

An overall observation, was that the participants were taking control and responsibility for own life and choices, and were both planning for the future and taking steps towards improving their current situation. This was evident in how they described themselves as actively seeking opportunities for language training, work, education and social networking. And, if one door was closed, they showed flexibility and creativity in seeking other options and alternatives. Taken together, the participants' approach to life was marked by agency, openness to experience, and optimism, and of acceptance of challenges and adversity as part of life.

Not expecting life to be easy: preparedness, acceptance, and refocus

> I have never had an expectation that the world is fair, and unfortunately it's not, when you look at wars and other things that happen. And [that is] not because people wish each other harm, but [because] people don't have knowledge and understanding about why we are in this world, or what kind of responsibility we have for each other and those who come after us. (Majeed)

Similar to Majeed, most of the participants did not express assumptions or expectations of a just world. All had grown up with war, conflict, poverty, and/or lack of freedom, which probably had influenced their assumptions, and also created concern and frustration with injustice in the world. Rather than describing people as evil or having bad intentions, lack of knowledge was commonly cited as an explanation for injustice, reflecting the participants' shared belief in human beings and nature as basically good.

That the participants were not expecting life to be just or easy, seemed to contribute to acceptance and preparedness for challenges and adversity, which again aided coping. Some described that adverse experiences in Europe and Norway had been particularly overwhelming or harmful, partly because these took place in places they had considered safe. Thus, they were less prepared or 'on guard', and more psychologically shocked and overwhelmed. This illustrates the role of expectations and preparedness in coping, and also how the "efficiency" of preparedness might depend on a combination of psychological and contextual factors.

Omer described the world as unpredictable, rather than unjust, and emphasized the importance of being adaptable and taking control and responsibility for own choices:

> One cannot say that the world is unfair. You can say that the world is unpredictable. Things change, and you just have to adapt to the changes if you want to move forward. Or, you can just stop and give up - it's your choice. (Omer)

While realizing and accepting that some things in life were beyond personal control, several participants described that one can still control how one choses to react and respond to events. The participants mentioned several explicit strategies to deal with difficult thoughts and memories of adverse experiences, which could show up from time to time, although they were generally described as decreasing over time. The participants used various coping strategies, some of which were directed towards getting the negative thoughts and feelings out of the heart and mind through talking to someone or writing in a journal. Other strategies were directed towards 'taking charge' of own thoughts and behaviors; Shirin explained that she would give herself a limit for how long she would allow herself to be sad about something, while a commonly described strategy was to use motivational self-talk and gratitude to remind themselves of the good things they had, and thus change focus. Moreover, Ashti pointed out that while she could not do anything about the world being unjust, she was hoping to get the chance to contribute positively through working as a doctor in poor countries after finishing her education. This exemplifies a constructive way of controlling one's response to, and somehow influence, an otherwise uncontrollable situation.

Another useful strategy that several used, was to refocus or distract themselves from dwelling on painful or negative thoughts, through being physically active, such as going to the gym or walking in the forest. Others used sleeping, praying or listening to the Quran as strategies for comfort, calm, and re-focus. Fadil described that changing his physical surroundings and activities could have a positive effect on his inner state and focus, through helping him open up to new perspectives and ideas:

> When a problem arises in my life or I go through a bad situation, [it's easy] to only think negatively and focus on what hurts […] but if I exercise or do something else… even if I still have this problem in my heart or in my mind, there is a greater chance that I will find a solution to the problem. [Because] when I shift my focus to something else, a solution will suddenly appear that I wouldn't have thought of I was just focusing [directly] on the problem. (Fadil)

Fadil's emphasis on new perspectives and solutions was representative of a general problem solving attitude among the participants, and also illustrates how positive outcomes can come

as a "by-product" of shifting focus. Moreover, it signified agency and a sense of internal locus of control, in terms of trusting and using own efforts to change a difficult situation. Agency was also evident in the participants' shared commitment to setting goals and planning forward; several described themselves as goal-oriented, proactive, and driven by their dreams for their future. This was reflected in coping behaviors such as keeping busy with studies, work, and other activities directed towards fulfillment of their future goals.

Keeping busy and planning forward: taking charge of (inner) life

Keeping busy was described as an important coping strategy, as it both served a future goal and purpose, and helped the participants avoid getting stuck with difficult emotions, worries, and negative thinking patterns. Through actively seeking relief from negative thoughts and worries through focusing all their efforts on schoolwork, or organized sports activities, some also found arenas where they experienced mastery, meaning and a sense of normality. Nader explained that while waiting for asylum, he participated in 'typically Norwegian' activities arranged by a voluntary outdoor organization, which provided experiences that contributed to inclusion, normality, and belonging:

> […] the trips there showed me a bit of Norwegian culture, what Norwegian people do, like going on cabin trips, or fishing [...] and then I could go to school afterwards and tell about these experiences, and then I felt that the distance between me - the refugee - and the Norwegian culture became smaller. (Nader)

In some situations and periods, avoidance of the negative and painful was helpful, and even necessary. Nader described how he, after several rejections and years of waiting, eventually chose to cope by 'avoiding reality' and follow school and live life as if he had gotten asylum:

> […] yet, you always go with the uncertainty, that every day I can lose it all. But then you know that if you're going to be able to survive, then you can't go around and think about it [the problems and uncertainty] all the time (Nader)

Nader's example illustrates the efforts required to maintain some level of hope and health while enduring long-lasting adversity, and also points to that stability and feelings of safety are necessary before people can start to fully process their adverse experiences. Moreover, mixed and fluctuating feelings and perspectives were something that several of the participants experienced. As Salima described, on some days, thinking about own experiences was accompanied by self-perceptions of being strong and capable of mastering anything. On other days, however, it would lead to her just sitting down and ruminate about "why is life always so hard for me?". This taps into the topic of negotiating own feelings and perspectives,

as a way of challenging self and taking charge of inner life. As described, the participants could find themselves drifting into thinking about painful memories and the unfairness of past hardship, despite the passage of time, or when life generally was experienced as good. The importance of finding a healthy balance between thinking too much and too little was emphasized. That is, neither dwell too much on difficulties, nor suppress them entirely, as both extremes could result in negativity and sadness.

One strategy that several used to avoid getting stuck in a negative spiral, was to acknowledge and accept the suffering they had been through and its negative effects, but simultaneously make efforts to extract 'the positive', such as useful learning. For example, Zainab explained that she sometimes wished that she had lived a normal life, like most Norwegians she knew, instead of having been held up in the asylum process and thus prevented from moving forward at the same pace as others. However, at the same time:

> […] maybe I hadn't come this far if I hadn't been through all that, maybe that [adversity] was what made me appreciate everything and made me work so hard. So I'm trying to see it from two sides, that it's advantages and disadvantages about it [adversity], and I'm thinking that you learn best by having gone through all kinds of things. You don't learn from having a perfect life (Zainab).

Another example of the use of acceptance and refocusing, was Nader's efforts to deal with not having a family. On the one hand, he could no longer remember what that felt like, and he also appreciated the learning and freedom coming with independence, including the possibility to choose his own family or close circle. On the other hand:

> […] then there are times where I just sit here and like… have that feeling of missing… just wish that I was with someone that are not friends, but family… you have a completely different relationship with family than friends. And that's kind of like something that I every now and then miss, but... that's how it is. […] I have lost hope that they [my parents] are alive at all. I have been taught that I may have to accept that fact as well. [*To avoid having to explain or talk about this to everyone*] when people ask about my parents, I say that I have lost them. And then people just say like 'condolences' [and don't ask more questions]. (Nader)

This example of trying to accept that what had happened, and controlling the sharing of own story, also exemplified the effort and strategy of choosing how the past would affect the present and future. The participants' efforts to search for constructive outcomes of their adverse experiences, in term of what they had gained in terms of strength, endurance, and useful learning and knowledge, also seemed related to optimism. This possibly facilitated another commonly used strategy, namely positively re-appraisal of own experiences.

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Optimism, positive re-appraisal, patience, and gratitude

> The problem is that we [people] always focus more on negatives than positives, even though there are often more positives. […] Every day you must focus on that you got dinner, school, and you have a place to live. […] If I compare myself to a rich celebrity, then I have nothing, but if I compare myself to people in a poor country where they don't have food and water, then 'oh my God, I have everything, and they have nothing'. [So] I try to think about the things that I have […] I work with myself to feel good, and I tend to say that things will always work out somehow, but it will take time. When you say such [positive] things to yourself, you manage to be patient. (Hamza)

The quote from Hamza illustrates how optimism, positive re-appraisal, gratitude, and patience could work together as a strategy for managing hardship. The majority of the participants described themselves as having a positive and optimistic personality orientation I general, illustrated by Omer:

> I'm a very, very positive person, extremely positive in fact, and very grateful for all the little things. For example, I'm sitting now with the water bottle and thinking about that I have clean water that I can drink. [And] I feel very lucky, I feel it in my body that I am grateful. [...] I'm conscious about bringing out the positive in social media also, [because] others don't need to more see misery and negativity, [people] already have enough of that in their lives. (Omer)

Importantly, the participants did not ignore or downplay own or others' losses and suffering, but actively worked on focusing on the positive, rather than singularly on the negative and what they had lost. This also applied to "picking one's battles", i.e., cultivating patience and understanding, and choosing to ignore and avoid certain negative comments or situations. Despite having a positive orientation, it could still require conscious efforts to avoid dwelling on the negative and painful, and choosing to keep the positive. Several emphasized this as a necessary strategy for being able to move forward with life – again, giving up was not an option, and allowing oneself to get absorbed by the negative might have equaled giving up. Afzal was conscious about accepting what had happened in terms of bad experiences, while simultaneously leaving negative thinking behind and focusing on what his experiences also had taught him. For example that "if you work on being positive and on thinking positively about the future, [then] you accomplish the things you want". This also illustrated how previous experiences of mastery can strengthen belief in future capability of successful coping.

During the interviews, the participants often used humor and irony, and did not take themselves too seriously - they could easily laugh of themselves and various situations they had been through. In some cases, the participants seemed to become more engaged and

emotionally involved when talking about good memories, as compared to adversity and difficulties. Positive memories might generally feel safer to dwell into; however, the participants did not give the impression of struggling with elaborating on difficulties or hardships. Thus, their engagement when describing good memories could be understood as the result of both personality disposition, and a general and deliberate choice and attitude of emphasizing the positive rather than the negative.

'You need to get the pain out of the body'

Although giving up was not an option, continuing could be hard, such as when painful memories felt overwhelming. Several of the participants emphasized that you need to get the painful things out, almost as if in a physical sense, through crying or talking to someone. As Afzal put it, "it helps to talk, to take the painful things out [of the body]". Soran described that although the person you talk to cannot change what happened, the things that are inside you comes out, and that is helpful in itself. Similarly, Majeed said that sad feelings should be talked about and not kept 'inside the body', and was grateful that he had many good friends he could talk to, after having learned to trust people again. This was important, because "if you don't trust people, life becomes very unpredictable and difficult, and you live in your own bubble by yourself". For some, it had taken time, stability, efforts, and trusting relationships to manage to share their experiences with others. Finding someone to talk to in early phases could be particularly challenging, because of trust- and language barriers:

> […] after my interview with the UDI, they sent me to that kind of place [psychologist], but I needed an interpreter, and that meant I couldn't [open up and] say the words that were in my heart. So, it became a little difficult [to get help and relief]. Therefore, I was only given tablets to sleep. And I don't want that, it doesn't help. (Soran)

For Soran, as for others, opening up about private experiences and feelings required a feeling of trust and ease, and this was not always easy to achieve with a stranger, or with an interpreter present. A few of the participants, including Zainab, also described that they, rather than talking to someone about sadness or problems, preferred finding relief through shifting focus or trying to delay thinking about the problems, or forget about them. Yet, as Zainab pointed out, "I also know that I have family and my partner that I can talk to if I want and need it, but I'm also managing fine on my own without help from others". Knowing that someone were available if needed, could also have served as a comfort in itself.

Nader, who described himself as a person who had always talked about things immediately instead of carrying it on the inside, emphasized that for others, opening up and telling their

story to people could be very difficult and painful. To illustrate this, he referred to his experience from living with other unaccompanied refugee minors, of that none of them had ever asked him about his parents, unlike other people he met. This he believed could have to do with their fear of having to talk about things that were too painful:

> […] I feel that other unaccompanied minors didn't ask me because they feared that I would ask them in return. And [that] the other person did not want to tell their own story, but would feel a responsibility to tell if I had told my story. (Nader)

Salima had experienced a particularly traumatic event some years ago that completely overwhelmed her, to the point where she – for the first time – felt close to giving up. Luckily, she got good help from a psychologist who was still available in case nightmares or other difficulties resurfaced. She decided to tell about her experience towards the end of the interview, and explained that part of the healing process was:

> […] to try to make it normal to talk about what happened, to make it a part of my story. Otherwise, I will never be able to get over it [and move on]. And the psychologist… if he had heard me now, he would have been very satisfied with me [because I'm able to talk about it].

As exemplified by Salima, the possibility to share one experiences with supportive others and construct a coherent trauma narrative, is one of the important steps toward healing and growth (Joseph, 2011). Although there were some differences between the participants, most described it as helpful and important to talk to someone about difficult feelings and experiences. Here, extroversion and openness facilitated social support (seeking) and thus someone to talk to.

The importance of extroversion and openness

> I have been somewhat privileged in the sense that I'm extremely social. And I'm a person who initiates contact with people. (Shirin)

Similar to Shirin, most of the participants described themselves as being extroverted, outgoing and contact seeking. Majeed described that he would stop and try to talk if someone he had met before came by – something he experienced that people appreciated. Still, he had somewhat adjusted his social style after coming to Norway, as had Afzal:

> In the beginning, when I arrived, I had that thing about talking to everyone, but now I try to check with or look at the person to see whether she or he wants to talk or not. It takes some time to understand, this thing about socialization in the Norwegian culture... I've met colleagues in town who just passes by [without greeting me], so now I've learned to do the

same, to not be like very "hello!". Immigrants are a bit like [that] if you've met once, then you recognize each other, and you greet each other and talk [when you meet]. (Afzal)

Understanding 'the Norwegian' way of communicating and socializing took time, as it was quite different from the more socially open and direct style that the participants were used to. Still, being outgoing and contact seeking were valuable resources, as Norwegians were generally experienced as friendly, but also as somewhat closed, shy, and seemingly not wanting to bother or impose on others. This meant that people did not necessarily initiate contact, and that it could take both efforts and time to get to know new people. Shirin explained the contrast between Norway and her home country:

> In my home country, when you move to a new place, the neighbors usually come over to tell you who they are, and bring dinner and things like that, and that's really nice. Then they also show you that they are very open to being friends. While here [in Norway], the neighbors can get very shocked if you come over and ring their doorbell, even if you've lived next door for 15 years. (Shirin)

Naturally, there were individual differences between 'locals', and with time, most experienced that genuine bonds and friendships were built. This came somewhat easier for the participants who came at a young age and went to school with Norwegian children and youth, and also in relation to university studies. Overall, the participants were conscious about building social relations and friendships, and many also had examples of supportive people they had met in Norway, such as legal guardians, football coaches, people working at the asylum reception center, or a psychologist. Still, several were at times missing their home culture of openness and friendship between people in the community, where people were celebrating various occasions together and neighbors were treated like family, and thus, no one were left alone.

'Keeping the best from both cultures': social and cultural resources

The participants frequently referred to resources and values from their family, upbringing and culture as sources of strength. Coming from collectivistic cultures, the participants experienced differences between this and the more individualistic Norway particularly in terms of social style, community oriented values, and care for the elderly. They also described their appreciation for several aspects of Norwegian society and culture, such as equality (e.g., gender, opportunities), freedom of speech and beliefs, transparence in society, and peace. Taken together, the participants emphasized the advantages of knowing and belonging to more than one culture. Moreover, keeping the best from both cultures refers to an attitude

among the participants of acknowledging the positive and negative aspects of both their "old and new" country and culture, and choosing to keep what they liked from both.

From early upbringing and collectivism, to a new culture and individualism

During the interviews, the participants frequently described important and helpful tools and values that their culture, and family and upbringing had provided them with. This included important persons from early life, whose good advice and examples were still remembered and followed. For example, Majeed described that:

> My father always said that 'you must always think one year ahead, [consider] what will happen in one year, where you will be in one year - and not only think about today'. That is something I've taken with me, so I've always had goals for my life, and I still have goals and dreams for my life that I wish to achieve. (Majeed)

Soran emphasized what his parents had taught him about accepting differences, and about primarily focusing on what is common between people:

> From I was a child, I learned from my parents that 'you are Muslim and he is Christian, you have your religion and he has his religion. You must still be friends, and you are friends because you like being together – that is not about religion'. (Soran).

Similar to Majeed and Soran, several had learned from their parents to always have plans, goals and generally think about the future, and to respect others, regardless of religion or background. Growing up, Omer had learned important values from his parents, who regularly provided free medical treatment and other help to poor people. Moreover, several described 'personal lessons' or strengths that had been with them since childhood. Nader explained that if he really wanted something, he had always found the courage to try and eventually found a way – something he still had in him. This might have had to do with his family telling him from an early age that "you will be successful, you are so strong and talented – you are not able to do anything else than succeeding".

Collectivistic and religious beliefs and ideals were often, implicitly or explicitly, described as a source of positive guiding values for how to live life and treat others. For example, the participants had been taught to care for the elderly, to help, respect and be kind to people in general, and to share what they had with others. Moreover, to think about the community and including others in their thoughts and actions. These ideals and values reflected collectivistic ideals, as well as many of the participants' descriptions of what Islam represented to them.

Some of the most prominent differences between the culture in Norway and the cultures in country of origin, seemed to be in terms of an individualistic versus collectivistic orientation. Soran described what he experienced as a somewhat different mindset among people in his culture, compared to in Norway:

> For example, if I say hello to my neighbor, I say it from my heart [because I genuinely want to]. And if I want to help someone, I'm not doing it because of who that person is, or to get something in return, but because I really want [from the heart] to help. So, I feel very bad when someone thinks that I'm helping them because I want money, for example […] I'm thinking that if I can help, why shouldn't I? You don't need a reason to help. (Soran)

The individualistic culture in Norway was sometimes experienced as a challenge, and very different from what the participants were used to. Several, including Samir, used care for the elderly as an example:

> I could never imagine, no matter how cramped my apartment was, to take my parents to a nursing home. I wouldn't have been able to do that, because it doesn't agree with my [values]... I come from a more collectivistic society, where you take care of each other [...] in the individualistic society, everyone person is for himself, and that is something that I'm against [don't agree with] (Samir)

Similarly, Majeed pointed out that the emphasis on caring for and respecting parents and the elderly was part of his culture, and also a central value in Islam and other religions. Moreover, he also saw this value as influenced by the economic situation in a country. That is, if there are no available or affordable nursery homes or hospitals, there are no one else to care for your parents than yourself.

Economy also came up as some participants described how positive it was that this contributed to giving children in Norway the possibility of actually being children. This in contrast to own experiences of having to take adult responsibilities for own life and family from an early age. Although this could provide some useful life experience, it was described as negative, in that it excluded the opportunity of having a childhood. Further societal and cultural aspects in Norway that the participants particularly appreciated, were freedom of speech, being allowed to have your own opinion and making own choices, equal opportunities and gender equality, and a transparent society where the same laws and regulations applied to everyone, and you could trust the authorities. When asked about what constitutes a good life, Ashti stated:

> What a good life is like? I would say life in Norway. Because here, you have rights, you can say your opinions without consequences [i.e., being punished or persecuted], you can go to school, you are allowed to speak your mother tongue, and it's not war. (Ashti)

Noor explained her experience of coming from oppression and lack of rights in the country she grew up in, to tolerance, inclusion, and equal rights as citizens in Norway. As such, Noor and her family experienced something completely new, namely that "we live in a country that is also ours". Several emphasized that peace and freedom of belief were qualities to be proud of, and important to work to maintain. Zainab put it, "if everyone would think like that, life would have been so much easier for all people in the world".

Several of the participants described that they appreciated being part of two cultures, and that they deliberately chose to keep the aspects from both that they saw as constructive and positive. They emphasized that all cultures have negatives and positives, can inspire and learn from each other – and thus create feelings of belonging across cultural 'boundaries'.

Belonging, togetherness, and mutual learning

> We mustn't have that distance between Norwegians and refugees... for example, on May 17th [the Norwegian constitution day], everyone participates - regardless of whether they are Norwegian or not, everyone celebrate together, and I think that's very important. And also that Norwegians, on the Sámi national day or Eid [the main holiday celebrated in Islam] or things like that, that they also participate with us, that we do nice things together. I think it's very good that everyone participates in all the nice things that exist in a country. That you don't distinguish between 'this is for the whole country', while 'this is only for the minority groups'. (Fadil)

The quote from Fadil was related to community, belonging and togetherness, both as values, and as ideas for how society can help refugees coming to Norway. Regarding belonging, several participants emphasized the positive effect of seemingly small social efforts from people in Norway, such as neighbors greeting them, or people showing interest in their language, food, or culture. This invited to trust, and made the participants feel welcome. Nader gave an example of how some of his soon to be new classmates had approached him while he was still in the introduction class in school, to say hello and introduce themselves:

> You might not think that it means so much with small things like going over to a person and say 'Hi, you're going to start in our class, that's nice', and then leave again. It wasn't much more than that. But it meant the world to me; after that, I was ten times more excited to start in that class. (Nader)

Similarly, Rania described how nice it felt that her Norwegian neighbor simply greeted her and asked how she was, and how it was going with school and work. Rania related this effort

to the topic of inclusion and integration, which several emphasized being a two-way process that requires mutual efforts:

> You cannot integrate yourself: I don't know anyone or anything about the country, how would I integrate myself? I need to meet people. You must do what you can yourself, but Norwegians must also 'integrate themselves' with refugees. Both sides needs to give and take. (Rania)

The importance of refugees being psychologically present, in terms of accepting one's new reality and plan for a future in Norway, was emphasized by Majeed. Because, if people used their energy mainly on dreaming of returning home, it would be difficult to become integrated and a part of the new society. Moreover, Nader pointed out that society and policy should have as an overarching goal that everyone, including refugees, felt safe and accepted:

> […] we don't have to like everyone, but we must accept the fact that we live in an international world where being a multicultural society is the new normal. It is no longer the case that those who are from one place will stay in that place. We must put that [thinking] behind us. (Nader)

Regarding own sense of belonging and identity, several of the participants described that they felt both Norwegian and e.g., Afghan or Syrian. Some described that this could involve feeling like "a foreigner" in both cultures, something that Zainab had somewhat mixed feelings about:

> It can be uncomfortable in my home country, because I'm part of them, but then I'm not accepted. Whereas in Norway... I understand that I'm not Norwegian, so it's okay that I'm not accepted as Norwegian. [...] [So] when I'm in my home country and I'm asked if I'm a foreigner, then I start thinking about it. But, there's been a while since I experienced that I'm a foreigner [here] in Norway. (Zainab)

Zainab explained that it meant a lot to her that she had wonderful colleagues who contributed to making her feel included. The importance of experiences of inclusion for identity and sense of belonging was also described by Ashti, who had spent several years in Norway, and pointed out that:

> I feel that I've come to my second home country […] I feel that I'm so well mixed into the Norwegian culture, I feel that we have the same interests, we do things together, and I feel happy when I'm doing things here. So then I don't feel like a refugee. (Ashti)

Belonging to two cultures, and the knowledge and experience coming with that, was also emphasized as positive by several participants. For example, having grown up with different peoples, cultures, religions, and languages was described as making it easier to adapt to a new

country and culture. Moreover, several highlighted an interest in learning learn about different cultures, which also made it possible to see both their strengths and weaknesses. Feelings and experiences of belonging, acceptance, and inclusion came early for some, while for others, it took more time. This was among other related to reception experiences and waiting time.

"When I look back…": the importance of time and certainty

> You come here [as a refugee], and it is as if you don't exist. You don't exist [as a registered citizen with a personal ID-number], but at the same time, you are in the world. But then, suddenly, you exist. 11 digits are the proof of that you actually exist. So little was needed. 11 digits. Then it was like "welcome to the world" - then I had been born (Nader).

When looking back at their experiences, the participants actualized the importance of time, both in terms of the negative effects of waiting time, and in relation to time as necessary to process trauma and feel safe and accepted. Nader's feeling of not fully existing during his many years as a refugee illustrates some of the harmful effects of lack of control and accompanying uncertainty, while waiting for someone else to decide his fate. Moreover, it was evident from what several of the participants described, that it took time and efforts to deal with the suffering and frustration resulting from having waited for years and lost valuable time for re-building life and realizing goals. For example, Fadil said that when he finally got residency, he did not feel particularly happy, because "I mainly thought back to all the days I had spent waiting, under my blanket, crying". As described earlier, some experienced that not having to worry about the asylum decision anymore 'freed up space' to think about past hardships, and thus, had to spend more time processing both old and new adverse experiences.

Nader suggested that society could facilitate the health and well-being of people who come as refugees, through ensure feelings of belonging, trust and control in own life, as he experienced this as central for people's possibilities and courage to change and adapt:

> […] because I feel that many people come here because they have not been safe, and when they come here to an unknown country, with a different system, a totally different culture, a different language and everything… and, you have to feel safe in order to change. And that is what I feel people use time to do [feel safe]. I've heard many immigrants with the attitude "they [Norway] want to take my culture away from me" and things like that, and that is about that people have not felt safe yet. Because, [in reality] it is *you* who decide what people can take from you and what people cannot take from you (Nader).

Several of the participants, when looking back at their challenges and adversity from a place of distance, safety and stability, spoke with a sense of acceptance and renewed perspective. As Zainab pointed out, she and her family now saw what they had been through as positive,

which "I believe has something to do with us having come so far now". Moreover, several described that they often compared present difficulties with earlier hardships, as a way of motivating coping and trust in self, through reminding themselves of what they had already survived and achieved. The participants also often referred to 'others have experienced worse than me', as a way of putting things in perspective, seeing their own situation in a more hopeful way, and/or inspiring gratitude.

Summary points

The participants shared the overarching attitude that giving up is not an option, conveyed an understanding of adversity and problems as part of life, and did not expect that life should be easy. Together, this formed a psychological preparedness that might have served as a protective factor, and aided coping. The participants actively used strategies such as positive re-appraisal, keeping busy, talking to trusted others, and searching for useful learning from adversity. They were helped by personal characteristics such as extroversion, optimism, gratitude, agency, and a sense or attitude of control. The latter helped them decide what to focus on and avoid lingering on the bad, including using short-term avoidance coping as a helpful strategy. Moreover, the participants found strength and support in what they had learned from family, culture, and flight related experiences, such as to always think forward and set goals, and take responsibility for own life and choices. All came from collectivistic cultures, and the Norwegian culture could be a challenge to get used to, particularly the individualistic values and 'rules' for social interactions. At the same time, the participants were open and curious, and observed and reflected on positive and challenging aspects of both cultures – eventually deciding to keep the best from both.

At the time of the interview, all the participants had been granted temporary or permanent protection, and had resided in Norway for on average 7 years. Thus, most have had time to learn the language and system in Norway, and establish themselves with work, studies, and/or a social network. Being in that position made it possible to look back and reflect on earlier experiences and their consequences, and see that it can take time, stability, and positive experiences in order to feel safe, and rebuild trust in others and the capacity to process hardship. This highlighted the influence of social and policy factors on personal strengths, coping and well-being, and several emphasized the importance of ensuring feelings and experiences of belonging, trust and control in own life. Lastly, several of the findings touched upon meaning making, growth and wisdom, which are in main focus next.

III. Meaning making, adversarial growth and wisdom

The participants' stories indicated that meaning making, adversarial growth, and wisdom were prevalent – and closely intertwined - processes and outcomes. Central themes related to meaning making were personal perceptions of life and problems, actively searching for and creating meaning, and giving meaning to own experiences through helping others. The latter was also related to growth and wisdom.

Findings indicating growth were much in accordance with the main domains of changes in life philosophy, self-perception, and relationships (Linley & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Central themes were that of having become more aware of own strengths and capabilities, being and behaving more authentic or true to self, and that facing and surviving suffering and death seemed to have served as a "wake up call" that influenced important life priorities and values.

What struck me as wisdom and life perspective was evident across themes, topics, and situations. Thus, this represents a form of overarching theme, and was also an indication of growth. Among the aspects included in wisdom and perspective, were self-transcendence, pro-sociality, useful learning, and love for humanity.

Searching for and creating meaning: framing adversity as a chance for learning

When talking about meaning, the participants mainly focused on this in terms of what they had and could learn from their experiences, and how this could be used in positive ways, and less on searching for meaning as an explanation for 'why it happened'. In other words, meaning as significance was a more prominent finding than meaning as comprehensibility. In terms of meaning as explanation for why adversity had happened, some participants mentioned religious beliefs as a source of explanation, meaning, and comfort. For example, some, like Noor, were looking at events in life as part of God's plan, i.e., this was how life was meant to be. However, this perspective could be marked by mixed feelings, as illustrated by the following quote from Zainab:

> In Islam there is a reason for everything that happens. So, on the one hand, I'm thinking that there was a reason for it. But sometimes, I'm thinking 'damn it, why did I have to go through all that in order to get here?' (Zainab)

The primary focus on meaning in the form of useful learning might be partly explained by the amount of time that had passed since trauma for most of the participants, which had given

them time to heal, reflect and contemplate 'the deeper meaning' of their experiences. It is also possible that the preparedness for problems and challenges that many described, contributed to making it somewhat less relevant or necessary to search for an explanation in terms of meaning. Still, the participants had experienced potentially traumatic events and severe disruptions of normal life that went beyond the type of problems and challenges that many described as part of life.

Yet, overall, the participants' reflections about problems and adversity revealed what seemed like a deep seated understanding of this not only as an unavoidable part of life, but also as providing possibilities for useful learning and development of self-knowledge. Some, such as Majeed, even described it as necessary for learning how to understand life and self:

> Problems and difficulties in life are not negative at all. People learn from their mistakes, and people learn from their problems. Problems, they give you the 'blue print' of life really, of what life is about, because life is not only good [about enjoyment]. Life is a roller coaster, it goes up and down, that's the way it is. And that [up and down] is the meaning of life, of why we function in life at all. If life only moves in a positive direction, then it also becomes boring; people need challenges, people need painful times. (Majeed)

This perspective did not imply that the participants downplayed or were oblivious to the negative effects of going through adversity and suffering. Rather, it was part of a deliberate assessment of the positive and useful learning and change that the adversity they already had gone through, could bring to their lives. It also seemed connected to feelings of acceptance and control, in the sense that you cannot change what has happened, but you can choose how you deal with it and thus have some control over its effects on you.

Salima explained that she experienced the worst traumas of her life before she had too much life experience, which forced her to learn to trust herself, be independent, and take responsibility for her own safety – and for fellow refugees who had been at risk of drowning as they attempted to cross the sea. While these were difficult and terrifying experiences, Salima emphasized that they also taught her how much she is capable of doing and mastering. Several described that thinking about past adversity and hardship was a reminder to be grateful for the things they had achieved. Commonly cited examples of useful learning and insights that the participants had extracted from their experiences, were deeper knowledge of self and life, feeling better prepared for future challenges. Samir described what he saw as a stronger survival instinct among people who had survived severe trauma and adversity, which he attributed to people getting stronger and better equipped to deal with future problems when having had to adjust to - and survived – war, poverty, and generally hard times. In relation to

this, Ashti pointed out that future challenges could seem small and easier to deal with, compared to those already survived. She also emphasized that you might get better at understanding other people who suffer, because "you have walked in their shoes, and that is something you remember". Similarly, Noor explained that "before the war, I didn't know what poverty and lack of safety meant. Now I've experienced it myself, and I feel more compassion for others in similar situations". This form of perspective and experience based knowledge was something that several highlighted, also as a motivation for participating in the interview. That is, they felt that they had important insights that could help others and contribute to the general understanding of people with refugee backgrounds.

In many cases, own experiences had inspired or strengthened prosocial attitudes and ideals for a good and meaningful life, including efforts to help others. Here, meaning making was used both as coping and a motivational strategy, as when Omer explained the meaning of his survival in terms of perspective, compassion, and pro-sociality:

> Lately, I've been trying to come up with answers to why I had to experience all of this [and it is okay, i.e., acceptance] and the reason why I survived [and got the chance to study medicine] is that I'm going to help others in need so they don't have to go through the same [as I did] […] So I'm trying to motivate and inspire myself, and say [to myself] 'you know, there is a reason and a meaning behind why you survived and are still alive'. I try to find explanations like that, which may not seem logical, but that makes sense to me, so that I can continue to keep myself together and smile for each day. (Omer)

In other words, one meaning of his traumatic experiences was to teach him how it feels to go through pain and injustice, while his survival provided him with the opportunity to use this insight for the common good, through pursuing an education that he could use to help others in need. Learning and perspective might have been facilitated by time, and factors such as acceptance and positive re-appraisal. Omer had already spent several years in Norway at the time of the interview, and thus, his focus on "lately" says something about the need for time in order to process events and seek for their deeper meaning. Moreover, his goal of helping others reflected a shared emphasis among the participants on taking pro-social action, be kind to others, and help people in any way you can, while you can – remembering that life is short and without guarantees.

Giving meaning to own experiences through helping others

> My goal is to join Doctors Without Borders. I want to go out and help others, I want to be present [where I'm needed], because I was saved because of a person who didn't look at my color, didn't look at my religion, didn't look at whose son I was. He just saw a child who was

injured and felt that he had to help. It was because of that person that I survived. I don't know who that person is, but I live with gratitude. Because of that one person, I am alive today and able to help others, and that is what I want to do with my life. (Omer)

The quote from Omer illustrates that helping others can be understood as a way of giving meaning to own experiences; as a way of taking control over the impact of one's experiences on own life; and, as a form of learning and change indicative of growth. In a sense, the participants' adverse experiences had been educational, through providing them with unique knowledge, insights and perspective. The awareness of own capabilities, combined with knowing what it was like to need help and to feel abandoned by the world, motivated a wish of helping others among several participants:

I like to help people, because my [own] childhood was very, very sad. So, if I can help others who have the same problems… nobody can understand them better than me, so that's why I like to help people. (Salima)

My dream is to get an education and a job where I help people who have problems and difficulties. Not become rich. I never dream about money… it's very important that you don't only think about yourself. […] When I was little, I always dreamed that someone would come and help us and everyone else who were in the same situation. (Soran)

An appreciation for being able to help others and feeling good from doing so was commonly mentioned by the participants. This was often related to the possibility of contributing to lessening other people's suffering, through offering what they had been missing and hoping for in times of hardship. Hamza explained that he had always been concerned with giving as much love as possible to the people around him, partly because he experienced not getting enough love when growing up.

In discussions about important goals and values in life, compassion, altruism, community and fellowship between people were frequently brought up. These values were also actualized in various ways, for example through volunteer work, general efforts to help others by sharing time, advice, and money, or giving practical and motivational support to recently arrived refugees. Moreover, several described contributing positively to society as a general value, including bearing in mind how own actions influenced other people. As Majeed emphasized, "we are not supposed to think only about ourselves, but about the consequences our actions have for others; for relatives, family, friends, for the community". Religious values was sometimes mentioned as contributing to an emphasis on being kind and helpful to others, without that implying that you need a reason for helping. As several participants emphasized, if a person needs you and you can do something for that person, then just do it.

Some participants described how even brief encounters with helpful people had positively impacted their situation, as well as overall view of life and humanity. One example came from Salima, who was visibly moved when she shared the story about a stranger who helped her when she was on her way through Europe. After having survived a long journey and several situations which nearly ended with death, she had reached the point where she was completely exhausted and without money, food or warm clothing for the winter weather. She nearly collapsed on the street, while people just passed by, until a man suddenly stopped and started talking to her. He bought her clothes and gave her money, and when Salima eventually found the words to ask him why he was helping her, he answered "because you are a human being. And some years ago I was like you, new here, so that is why [I'm helping you]". Moreover, when asking how she could pay him back, his answer was that she could pay it back later in your life, when she had the possibility, by helping two other people in need. Salima described that she "cried for almost half an hour – I will remember that for the rest of my life". The attitude of paying the good things forward resonated with her own, and this meeting provided Salima not only with practical help in the situation, but also with gratitude and a confirmation of the good in people and the importance of helping others. As such, it might have confirmed rather than changed her world-view, but possibly also contributed to preventing her from losing faith in others.

Finding one's path or mission in life is one possible outcome of growth, and the participants commonly cited own experiences as an inspiration for choice of work and studies within helping professions. For example, own meetings – both good and bad - with practitioners at asylum reception centers had inspired some to choose educations within helping professions. Some participants had chosen jobs where they could use their competence to help other refugees, and others described that gratitude for the help and possibilities they had gotten in Norway had motivated a general desire to 'pay it back' through succeeding and contributing positively to society. Further indications of growth are in focus in the next section.

Changes in the understanding of self, others and life

The participants commonly described that they, through their experiences, had developed a deeper understanding of self, life and others, as well as changes in important priorities and perspectives. They commonly described feeling stronger and more capable as a result of what they had gone through, particularly in terms of having gained important life experience and become better equipped to face future challenges. In many cases, having faced suffering and

death served as a motivational force for how to lead a good life. In terms of life perspectives and priorities, materialistic gains and goals were often described as less valued and important, while relational values and goals were prioritized. This included the need for friends and trusted others, and not least love and intimacy, in order to have a good life.

Life priorities and values after facing suffering and death

> After having experienced all this, money is not a goal – it's not what I'm striving for. A roof over my head, food on the table - that's enough. (Omer).

Like Omer, most of the participants emphasized that they were not concerned with, or valued, 'running after money' or living in materialistic abundance. Several explained this perspective as related to what their experiences had taught them about what was important in life. As Shirin described:

> And people who are sitting and just [saying] "this is the dearest thing I have", and it's a material thing.. if you had to leave, is that thing what you would have taken with you? You get a different perspective on the world, you notice that your perspective is a bit different [from others'] […] I want to have a good life, and then it's not about becoming a millionaire and having the biggest house and the nicest car and the best job with as many holidays and travels as possible. No, I appreciate that I'm comfortable [in life], that we manage to put food on the table every day, and that we can hopefully raise our child to be happy. That's what means the most to me, because things are put in perspective. (Shirin)

The participants' personal experiences with the transient, unpredictable nature of life seemed to have clarified that the basic meaning of life is first and foremost to be alive, and contributed to an emphasis on relational goals and values. Several participants described the awareness of death as a sort of motivational force for how to lead a good life. For example, by making them think about how they wanted to be remembered after their death, preferably as good, helpful, honest and unselfish. Some, like Majeed, thought about the legacy they would leave behind, describing that "I have a dream that people after me will benefit from the things I have done and worked hard for". The awareness that life might suddenly end, also inspired an attitude of using the chance you have to avoid conflicts and be kind to yourself and others. As Fadil put it, "one day we are all going to leave this earth. Why should we live the short time we have here, with hate or enemies?"

Moreover, while the participants emphasized the importance of having long-term goals and plans, several also described that they had learned to accept uncertainty, which inspired an emphasis on living in the moment and appreciating each day. For example, Salima explained that although she had many future plans, she was conscious about treating each day as the best

day, and seeing the value of every accomplishment, no matter how small. Both as a step toward fulfilling her 'main plan', and because you do not know what will happen tomorrow. Similarly, Shirin pointed out that:

> There is no doubt that the older you get, the closer you get to death, and if you find out that you want to live your life when you are 70 years old, it may be too late; you never know when your time is up. So, you just have to live [now] and take things as they come, and not worry too much. This mindset is something I truly life after, and it helps me a lot. (Shirin).

Concerning personal needs and wishes for a good and meaningful life, the participants commonly associated this with living in a peaceful society that values freedom and respect for everyone, and provides people with the possibility to work and provide for oneself and one's family. Moreover, most described that having a sense of belonging with family, friends, and colleagues was central for well-being, meaning, and self-worth, and several described love and having romantic love as essential for meaning and well-being. In many cases, dreams and goals in life centered on getting an education and a job, and building a family. In other words, many were dreaming of what Samir described as a 'normal, quiet and peaceful life':

> Actually, I just imagine a normal, decent life. I don't have these "big dreams". An okay, ordinary life is fine for me. To just be able to live like a regular, normal person, I don't need more than that. And you mustn't become too greedy, nothing good will come of that. (Samir)

Zainab emphasized that living in Norway provided her the possibilities to fulfill her dreams and goals of having a job, a house, a car, and – with time - a family. As such, her experiences had contributed to what might have been growth in terms of seeing new possibilities. Another possible indication of growth, in terms of becoming aware of own limitations, was the participants' emphasis on having become more independent, but also more aware of the need for other people, realizing that 'no man is an island'. This in combination with feeling stronger and more capable.

Feeling stronger: 'you get to see how much you are actually capable of'

> I don't want to be seen as 'the poor refugee'. I've been through a lot, yes, but it made me a stronger person. The things I have been through, those are the things that have shaped me into who I am today […] I have learned that I can experience extreme events, but that I'm able to deal with it. (Omer)

In general, the participants were talking about themselves in ways that conveyed self-perceptions as survivors, rather than victims. They focused on that they had managed to cope with adversity, and what they had learned from it. This included feeling stronger and more

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capable as a result of what they had been through, particularly in terms of having gained experience and become better equipped to face future challenges. This was evident in statements such as "I know that I can handle difficulties, and that I'm strong and able to follow through". Moreover, Fadil explained that "you learn to know yourself, and how tough and strong you are, how much you are able to live with". Fadil described that his experiences had hurt him terribly, but he was still alive and had the necessary energy to fight in life, which gave him a feeling of having the strength and capacity to someday accomplish everything he wanted in life.

Self-knowledge, gratitude, perspective and learning to take responsibility for own life and choices were commonly described as outcomes of adversity:

> I appreciate things in a different way, things are put in a different perspective. I've maybe become more robust, I've learned to better know myself and what I can handle. And what I can go through and still keep my psyche [healthy]. Because it's not easy to keep your psyche when you go through something like that. […] But you are much stronger than you think, and when it matters. And [other minor] problems and dilemmas sort of become completely irrelevant and sort of become different. (Shirin).

> What I've learned from my experiences is helping me daily. If I struggle in everyday life or face a challenge, then I can look at my past and just think 'oh my God, this is NOTHING compared to what I've already been through' […] Just to develop a consequential mindset at an early age has helped me so much with being careful about the choices I make. And with understanding that I'm responsible for the choices that I make. (Nader)

Nader was put under heavy stress and pressure during many rejections and years of waiting, but things eventually went well, and he felt that all in all, the challenges had made him aware of how strong he was, more than they had harmed him. When looking back, several were surprised and amazed by the things they had managed to survive and accomplish, especially when considering how little experience they had for what would come, and how young they were. Several described that they would not have become who they were, in a positive sense, if it was not for their adverse experiences. As Fadil explained:

> What created the person I am now, is my history and the experiences I've gone through. Without that, I would never have been as strong as I am now. Not at all. [...] I was childish and spoiled in my family, but I grew up immediately when I fled. I had to find solutions myself, had to survive on my own, had to protect myself [...] You can't say that the problems I've gone through were good for me, but even if they weren't good for me, they've made me stronger. Like, I can see the positive that has come from the negative. (Fadil)

Along with increased independence and trust in self and own capabilities, most of the participants emphasized that they also needed help and support from others, and were comfortable with asking for that when needed. Moreover, several described an appreciation of mutual learning between people and cultures, and having gained a better understanding of other people and cultures was commonly mentioned as a form of useful learning. Through their experiences, the participants had learned to read other people and their intentions, and also described a deepened ability to understand and feel with others, maybe particularly those in similar situations. As described earlier, they had also learned the importance of avoiding generalizations and prejudice. Salima used herself as an example, explaining that for a long period, she had appeared curt or rude, getting easily annoyed or angry with others, apparently for no reason. However, this came from inner pain that she was unable to process or talk about at the time, and thus hid from others. And, if meeting her then:

> […] you would have thought that I was a bad person with bad behavior, but that's not me.. there was a reason for.. I was dealing with something very heavy and painful inside […] but it would have been easy [for others] to judge me negatively (Salima).

Part of Salima's healing process was learning to forgive herself. Forgiveness and humbleness were also examples of useful learning, as exemplified by Majeed:

> I have learned to forgive people, for my own sake and for the other person's sake. We are all human and we do stupid things, and we can make decisions based on misunderstandings, and also hurt others unintentionally. I'm also very conscious about saying sorry... That's something I've learned from my father and my family. And to not be an asshole, and if someone says something bad to you, say something nice back. I also always take some of the blame, even if I don't feel that I am to blame, but because [if I do so] the other person also dares to let go a little more. These things are also based on experiences from the long journey I had. (Majeed)

Similarly, Fadil emphasized the importance of accepting each other and respecting differences, and of forgiving each other and giving people a new chance. Because, "we are all human beings, and we can all make mistakes". Forgiveness could be understood as related to acceptance and choosing to focus on the positive, as it involves letting go of the negative, and allows one to look forward rather than remaining preoccupied with the past.

Most also pointed out that they trusted other people, or deliberately chose to give others a chance by trusting them. However, a few of the participants explained that earlier losses and the fear of experiencing that pain again had made it challenging to deeply trust others, or form intimate attachments. Omer explained that the things he had experienced in relation to war and persecution as a child, had made him develop "an insecurity within myself - everyone

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were potential enemies, until the proved the opposite". This insecurity could still make it difficult and time consuming to really trust someone. Nader struggled with allowing himself to get emotionally attached to someone, after repeated experiences of losing those closest to him, and the pain accompanying that. However, despite having fled from man-made disasters, and encountered many people who did not treat them well, the participants generally conveyed a conviction of the good in people and humanity. For some, this had come with time and the chance to rebuild challenged assumptions regarding the benevolence of humanity and the world.

More engaged and authentic behaviors and beliefs

> I want to be an honest, straightforward person, not someone who is like just sweet and kind. Instead, I try to be a person who dares to confront people. A person who says it if something is a problem, and don't put on a mask like many people do and pretend that everything is fine. [...] I think that if you meet people with good intentions and they take it badly… then it's not you who misses something, but that person. (Nader)

Like Nader, several of the participants described that they were concerned with being honest and direct with people, rather than putting on a mask to please others. This was also described as a way of being kind and genuine towards others, and of being true to self. Soran explained that he generally was very direct and honest, especially towards the people he cared about – which was appreciated by some, and not by others. Feeling freer to live in accordance with one's authentic self, without fear of social disapproval, is among the indications of growth and self-actualization. It could also be related to age, maturity, and life experiences, as Fadil touched upon:

> Before I turned 14-15, I was a child who looked at others and did the same as them, I didn't think about why. I never asked myself questions. But after what I've gone through and started to understand life and stuff… before I believe in or practice something, it has to have approval in my heart and brain of that it's something I think is very important and appreciate. This goes for religious things and in general. I'm not just doing what others do, without thinking about why or asking myself questions. (Fadil)

Several of the participants described being deeply engaged in matters of social injustice and double standards, which could be understood as an emphasis on honesty and authenticity also in one's wider world. For Samir, this engagement motivated his choice of studies:

> The reason why I chose this education, is that I'm very passionate about injustice and social differences and things like that. […] I want what is best for the community. That what you do in your everyday life, how you treat others, should be for the good of the community. (Samir)

A more independent and critical approach to religious beliefs and practices was another commonly described development, which resulted in more authenticity and certainty. For example, some mentioned practicing more in accordance with own understandings, rather than following what other people decided. This could involve trusting own priorities, such as helping others rather than taking the time to pray 5 times a day. As Fadil put it, "God gave us a brain so that we can think and evaluate for ourselves", and thus, God would also see that his priorities came from the heart (and were not e.g., lack of dedication).

Being critical involved problematizing conservative interpretations or some people's use of religion to create separation and conflict, and some mentioned that religion should be a private matter, and not used to govern society. Hamza described religion as the cause of all our problems, but rather than leaving religion entirely, he was educating himself about different religions and cultures in the world, to broaden his perspective and understanding. Also Noor experienced it as positive that she had gotten more knowledge about different religions after coming to Norway. The search for own ways and understandings that the participants described, seemed related to maturity, adverse experiences, greater feeling of freedom to form independent understandings, and also to having grown up in families who encouraged openness and independence. For example, Ashti explained that:

> I feel that I have become much more open-minded since I came here. There (in the home country) it is so much focus on religion and that you have to do this and that, and not everything is correct [according to the Quran] [...] you choose yourself how religious you want to be. [...] I am a Muslim, I believe in God and I pray, but I do not want to wear a hijab. And I might not fast [during Ramadan], and I want to work, and I want to have friends who are boys because I think that's normal, and that's how I was raised at home. I grew up in a family where they believe that boys and girls should be equal, and where we choose ourselves what we want to study and work with, and who we want to be with. (Ashti)

Similarly, a generally shared position was reflected in Shirin's statement that "I don't feel that I should change to fit into the religion, but rather use the religion in my everyday life to help me be a better person". Soran also pointed out what was a common attitude, namely that our common humanity comes before anything else, including religion.

Taken together, more engaged and authentic behaviors and beliefs seemed manifested in many aspects and levels of the participants' lives, such as in social interactions, as being true to self, through acceptance of differences, in goals, values, and important life choices, and in personal beliefs. Growth in terms of changes in religious/spiritual beliefs were better explained as more independent and authentic beliefs, than as stronger or weaker beliefs. These

points are related to the topic of the final part of the empirical chapter, namely wisdom and life perspective.

Wisdom and life perspective

> I don't care about what color you have or what you are wearing, or which education or how much money you have. You are a human being, and that is how we must look at each other. We must respect each other for that which we have in common. (Omer)

What struck me as wisdom was a prominent theme across interviews and topics, and as such, it represents a form of overarching summary theme, in addition to an indication of growth. The quote from Omer captures the essence of some of the common features of definitions of wisdom, such as increased perspective taking, tolerance, and acceptance (Linley, 2003; Walsh, 2015).

Further indications of wisdom that were evident in the participants' stories, were recognition of and effectiveness with uncertainty. This was central in coping, e.g., in relation to that giving up was not an option, not expecting life to be easy, and positive re-appraisal of events. Moreover, in relation to meaning making and growth, such as in framing adversity as a chance for learning, and in the awareness of the unpredictability and transience of life, and the resulting emphasis on appreciating each day. Importantly, uncertainty associated with waiting for asylum was experienced as both burdensome and harmful. Clearly, this form of uncertainty was combined with a number of other challenges, and might have been experienced as quite different from uncertainty as in 'you never know what life will bring'. Yet, it is also possible that effectiveness with uncertainty might have been among the factors that contributed to helping the participants deal with the suffering of waiting.

Wisdom in the form of increased reflection, self-understanding, perspective taking, and tolerance was evident in the participants' self-awareness, and seemingly mature and open-minded reflections and negotiations of beliefs, values and behaviors in self and others. Their perspective and efforts to avoid generalizations and trying to understand what lies beneath people's behavior and attitudes, signified humbleness and respect for differences.

Lastly, despite having experienced adversity and trauma that involved harm caused by other people, the participants conveyed prosocial attitudes and behaviors, including compassion, and a benevolent view of humanity. This was evident in their emphasis on helping others and contributing to the common good, and in their concern with solidarity, justice, and the value of sharing. When Rania and Salima described their conviction of human beings as essentially

good, but also as capable of doing bad things, they emphasized that there is always an explanation behind the latter, such as bad experiences when growing up. As Salima put it, "we are all born the same – and no one is born with bad behavior". As such, you cannot judge others until you know their story. Moreover, Rania emphasized that we all need to focus on providing each other with more love and care, because "if you give love and care, then the whole world will change".

Love was emphasized in various contexts, from describing what gives life meaning, to defining the essence of religious beliefs. The participants also made numerous references to the heart when talking about different topics, from getting difficulties and pain out of the heart, to genuine behavior and beliefs stemming from the heart. While making these references can be understood as a culturally shaped way of talking, they also seemed associated with feelings of connection to and love for humanity, which are also central aspects of self-transcendence, wisdom and growth.

Moreover, definitions of wisdom highlight the centrality of applying and actualizing one's knowledge, something that the participants did, for example through actively helping others in various ways. Fadil exemplified how helping, meaning making, wisdom, self-transcendence, and love can go together, when explaining the following:

> Maybe I was created to help a person… maybe I came to this life to build a roof for someone […] we are around 7 billion people on this earth, and my point is that every single person have their unique task, life, and thoughts […] and I'm thinking that we must accept each other. We must accept each other, because we need each other. Even if we don't have the same thoughts and interests, I still need you in order to survive, and you need me in order to survive. […] This will make a society stronger, that we accept each other and love each other. (Fadil)

According to Pascual-Leone (1990, in Le & Levenson, 2005, p.444), moving beyond automatic ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, and connecting empathetically with the experiences of others requires that one transcends the self. This again might have motivated helpful actions. Self-transcendence was exemplified by the participants' focus on interconnectedness, acceptance of, and love for humanity, both in relation to how to lead a good life, and in values and attitudes, such as that we need to love and accept each other despite our differences.

Useful learning and insight to share with others

During the interviews, I asked the participants if there were things that others could learn from them and their experiences. Some learning was explained as difficult to transfer to

others, because it required lived experience – i.e., you cannot compare countries with completely different living conditions, or expect from people that they understand what it is like to grow up with war, if they grew up with peace. Useful learning that was described as more easily transferable, had to do with gratitude, not taking things for granted, appreciation for life, patience, and belief in self. Several spoke about the importance of adopting a general attitude of living with gratitude for living in peace and safety, for having food, water, work and a home – described as the basic ingredients for a good life. The participants emphasized the importance of reminding oneself of not taking these things for granted, as many had experienced how quickly a society can change in a negative direction and crumble to pieces.

Other lessons and advice which had been especially helpful in times of challenges and hardship, were to cultivate patience and belief in self, never giving up hope and efforts, and not letting negative events or people break you. For example, several of the participants described that if others treated them badly, they would try to either ignore them, or to treat them with the same kindness and respect that they aspired to treat people with in general. Lastly, their benevolent and hopeful view of humanity stood out as a perspective that possibly motivated both coping and overall positive feelings.

Summary points

The participants' meaning making took the form of active processes of analyzing themselves and their experiences, and also served as a form of coping. Main focus was on what they could learn from their experiences, and how this knowledge could be put to use in the present and the future. This indicated a move from meaning as comprehensibility to meaning as significance, which according to the OVT is a requirement for growth (Joseph & Linley, 2005).

The findings also illustrated that both meaning making and growth were influenced by negotiations of own feelings, beliefs, and understandings, and by basic assumptions and expectations such as not expecting life to be easy, being prepared for challenges, and perceiving these as a chance for learning. Helping others was described as a way of giving meaning to own experiences and survival, and also as a central value inspired by family, upbringing, culture and religion. Moreover, it represented an indication of growth in terms of a pro-social value orientation, marked by empathy, compassion, and active efforts to help others.

Growth in the form of changes in self-perception was evident particularly as feeling stronger and more capable, and as being more concerned with living authentically and making choices based on inner convictions. Moreover, the participants described changes and/or clarifications of important values, such as prioritizing relational and community values over material gains. Growth in terms of changes of life philosophy, i.e., wisdom and perspective, was reflected in the participants' overall perspectives, attitudes, and approaches to adversity, coping, and humanity as a whole. Self-transcendence, acceptance, pro-social attitudes, and love stood out as prominent characteristics in this regard.

Chapter 15: Discussion

The findings from this study make up an impressive account of the human capacity for coping with and growing from adversity. They support explanations from humanistic and existential psychology and the OVT, both in terms of how people grow, and why they are motivated to choose healthy, 'growth oriented' options. Not least, the participants in the current study fit previous observations of young refugees as survivors, copers, and active agents eager to convey a story about their life in exile that includes more than their suffering (Pace & Sen, 2018, p.109).

In the following, the empirical findings are discussed in light of the study's theoretical, philosophical, and methodological framework. The research questions are addressed and answered throughout the discussion, which is divided into two main sections. The first is mainly focusing on *the how* of positive adaption, i.e., coping strategies and resources, and the second on *the why*, i.e., humanistic and existential thinking, meaning making, growth and wisdom.

The "how" of positive adaption: strengths, coping strategies, and resources

The *how* of positive adaption focuses on the role and use of personal, social, structural, and cultural coping strategies and resources in dealing with adversity and navigating everyday life. Taking a brief look back at the main findings, the young participants had gone through significant adversity and hardship before and during flight, several pointing out that they *only thought about surviving*. After the initial relief upon arriving in Norway, many experienced a continued existence in limbo, marked by waiting, uncertainty, and forced passivity. Yet, the participants managed to hold on to the core conviction that *giving up is not an option*, and made efforts to focus forward, keep busy, negotiate own feelings and perceptions, and positively re-appraise events. Among the factors that helped them, were their preparedness for difficulties, agency, and optimism, extroversion, and openness to experience. Not least, the participants drew on strengths and resources from their family-, cultural-, and religious background, and found their way to helpful resources their new society, i.e., *seeking and keeping the best from both cultures*.

The participants showed flexibility in that they often used a combination of strategies and resources, several of which recurred across empirical themes, signifying interplay or overarching tendencies and dispositions. For example, the attitude that 'giving up is not an

option' inspired motivation, was a form of coping, indicated agency and internal locus of control, and was related to belief in self, and a view of life as meaningful and goals as worthwhile to strive for. It also reflected perspectives and values learned from family, culture, and religion.

"I am not what happened to me; I am what I choose to become": agency, control beliefs, and perceptions of adversity and life

To a large degree, the participants' attitudes and perceptions mirrored the notion (attributed to C.G. Jung) expressed in the heading, as they positioned themselves as agents making conscious choices and taking control and responsibility in own life. Frankl (1959/1992) held that the only thing that cannot be taken from a person, is the freedom to choose one's own way in any given set of circumstances. Without reducing coping to an individual choice, this existential perspective can be seen as empowering, as it reflects faith in human capacities, and provides individuals with some degree of control, choice, and freedom, in addition to responsibility. Importantly, survival might require fundamental changes in one's general attitudes towards life; Frankl (1959/1992) described that he had to learn that "it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us" (p.37). The ability to negotiate and change perspectives and attitudes was evident among the participants, along with adaptive use of coping strategies. This overall flexibility might be partly explained by their optimism and openness to experience (see e.g., Prati & Pietrantoni, 2009; Zoellner & Maercker, 2006).

Moreover, the participants' understanding of challenges and adversity as an unavoidable part of life, and a chance for learning, seemed to contribute to a form of psychological preparedness that possibly helped them make sense of and cope with their experiences. According to Antonovsky (1987), successful coping is determined by the degree to which events in life are experienced as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful. Comprehensibility involves a deep-seated feeling that events in life are structured, predictable, and explicable (Antonovsky, 1987). At first sight, the participants' adverse experiences might not seem to fit with this description. However, it is possible that they partly did, considering the participants' preparedness, as they did not convey expectations of event in life to be just or under personal control. Moreover, in line with Antonovsky's (1987) conceptualization of meaningfulness, the participants stories reflected perceptions of events in life as a challenge rather than a burden, and of life in general is worthy of investment and engagement. These views were visible e.g., as 'giving up is not an option', and as gratitude

and appreciation for life. Not least, they were actively searching for meaning and useful learning from their experiences, signifying a concern with meaning as significance. Lastly, manageability is facilitated by the belief that one is capable of and has sufficient resources to cope, both in oneself and in one's environment (Antonovsky, 1987). Overall, the participants conveyed strong beliefs in self and own capabilities to succeed, and of being responsible for own life and choices. Moreover, they were actively searching for solutions and opportunities and made efforts to find helpful resources in their social and structural environment. This in line with the review findings of a positive relationship between problem-focused coping and growth.

The participants explicitly or implicitly defined themselves as survivors rather than victims, which has been positively associated with growth (review) and indicates internal locus of control. The latter, according to Maurer and Daukantaitė (2020), facilitates the belief that one is not a passive victim of circumstances, but rather an active force (p.3). This is similar to Deci and Ryan's (2002) concept of autonomy, and highlights its importance for motivation and drive, reflected in the participants' overall attitude of having choice and control e.g., over what they would think about, or whether or not to give up. Closely related to internal locus of control and autonomy, is agency, which involves efficacy, optimism and imagination (Seligman, 2020). Importantly, agency focuses one's energy on what can be controlled in an uncontrollable situation (Jayawickreme, Jayawickreme et al., 2019, p.160), something that the participants gave several examples of doing. Together, agency beliefs about changing one's circumstances, strong beliefs in own capabilities, and the ability to envisioning rich futures for one's life have been found to positively predict functioning (Daniel, 2019; Jayawickreme, Jayawickreme et al., 2019).

Regaining control over one's recovery and circumstances is positively associated with growth (Brooks et al., 2017; Rendon, 2015), and present, objective control is most closely associated with adjustment (Frazier & Caston, 2015). However, also the perception of having the means to influence one's own future can be an important motivator to strive to overcome the impacts of trauma (Ai et al., 2007). This taps into the value and importance of future motivation and focus, discussed next.

"For I lived my days as a sheep, but tomorrow I was always a lion": future orientation, meaning, and motivation

I used to live my days like a sheep

While I dreamed of hunting across the savannahs

And I let myself drift from fields to fencing to barns

When they said that was the best way for a sheep

And I knew that it was wrong

And I knew that it wouldn't last forever

For I lived my days as a sheep

But tomorrow I was always a lion

The excerpt from Arnhild Lauveng's (2005) memoir illustrates the power of future orientation and motivation - in Lauveng's case related to her experiences from a psychiatric ward facility, on the way towards complete recovery from schizophrenia. It also touches upon the importance of maintaining belief and trust in self when being defined as something else than one is, as is the case with stigma and stereotypes.

In the current study, the participants described future meaning, orientation and imagination as central for motivation and coping. They were living for and appreciating the present, but always kept dreams and goals for the future readily in mind. In relation to flight, future goals were described as central for motivating and maintaining the courage and hope involved in escaping death and seeking freedom and possibilities. During and flight, the participants continued to be engaged and motivated by clear goals that they worked determined toward reaching. Several had learned from an early age the importance of setting goals and always thinking about the future. In times of hardship, this forward oriented mindset provided something to hold on to, even when waiting and forced passivity threatened goals and dreams. Moreover, it facilitated motivation and efforts to take important steps aiming at goal fulfillment, whether this involved guarding their mental health or learning the language. This form of active planning and goal-setting strategies directed toward attaining improvement have been found to positively predict functioning (Jayawickreme, Jayawickreme et al., 2019, p.160).

Erich Fromm (1989/2013) described that wholehearted engagement in a clear goal facilitates focus, decision making, and determined efforts, and thus emphasized the importance of 'willing one thing'. Similarly, Frankl (1959/1992) underlined the value of identifying a goal

or meaning to fulfill, and then directing one's attention towards that. Importantly, he emphasized the human capacity of finding meaning not only in what *is*, but in what *can be*, i.e., the value of being oriented towards a goal and a meaning to fulfill in the future - particularly when it is not possible to immediately change one's circumstances (Frankl, 1959/1992; Grace, 2017). Optimism, patience, and openness to experience were among the factors that seemed to help the participants keep up hope and belief in a brighter future, even in times of severe struggles.

Optimism, positive reappraisal, openness, and gratitude

The participants generally fronted a positive outlook on life, and while they were okay with talking about experiences of hardship, they simultaneously emphasized the importance of not lingering on the bad. Several explained that they had consciously decided to leave the negative in the past, and bring the positive with them into the future. This indicated acceptance of what had happened, along with gratitude for survival, and an overall appreciation and love for life. One example illustrating the latter came from a participant from Afghanistan, who explained a culturally based view of life as beautiful and precious, and shared a local song about this. Considering that the people of Afghanistan have suffered from war, conflict and oppression for over 40 years, a bleaker outlook on life could easily have been justified.

Taken together, the participants' descriptions reflected a number of characteristics that are positively associated with growth, such as positive reappraisal and cognitions focusing on hope and aspirations for the future, ability to accept situations that cannot be changed, openness to experience, and deliberate rumination (see review, and Chan et al., 2016; Sims & Pooley, 2017). According to Frankl (1959/1992), acceptance of unavoidable suffering can facilitate coping and endurance, and contribute to protect against some of its harmful psychological effects. Khawaja et al. (2008) describe that "adaptive cognitive processing is expressed in being prepared for difficulties, talking about them, or giving them new meaning" (p.492). Positive re-appraisal and a positive orientation in general was something that the participants actively and continuously worked on. For example through focusing on the learning value of own experiences, or their own capacity for physical and emotional endurance. This also served to strengthen their belief and trust in own capability to deal with future challenges. Moreover, several described themselves as lucky compared to people whom they felt had experienced worse, e.g., in terms of more severe traumatic experiences,

mental health struggles and so on. This form of comparison seemed to provide a form of perspective that gave rise to gratitude.

An example of how factors play together is that rumination "serves to reassess the event, while positive reappraisal involves a reorientation necessary for growth to occur" (Brooks et al., 2017, p.298). Talking to someone or writing about own experiences enables the kind of deliberate rumination and narrative reframing that is required for growth (Rendon, 2015). Frankl (1959/1992) saw the creation of a narrative of one's suffering, in dialogue with a compassionate partner or even a 'second voice' within the self, as central for transforming it. The participants emphasized the importance of getting the pain out of the bod, primarily through talking to someone, but also through e.g., journaling. Despite the challenge of getting used to the Norwegian way of socializing, the participants' extroversion and openness helped them get in contact with potential friends and supportive others. They gave several examples of how legal guardians, football coaches, colleagues, employees at reception center, or a psychologist had met them with what sounded like the genuineness, acceptance, and empathy that Rogers (1961, 1959) described as a pre-requisite for positive change and growth.

Importantly, personal, social and structural factors play together in shaping outcomes. For example, agency, optimism, and goal-orientation are associated with control perceptions, and generally described as personality dispositions. Yet, these dispositions are also influenced by social and structural factors, which to a large degree determine individuals' access to resources and possibilities for utilizing their competencies, and rebuilding and controlling own life. Moreover, while previous experiences of mastery can strengthen control perceptions, and both present and future control have been found to positively predict PTG (Brooks et al., 2017), present and objective control is most closely associated with adjustment (Frazier & Caston, 2015). An example of the opposite is an insecure asylum status, which involves a total loss of personal control. This again might inhibit the processing of adverse events and thus hinder growth (Brooks et al., 2017).

Social and contextual post-migration factors

The role of post-migration factors in processes of coping and growth was both a research question and need identified in the review. The findings from the current study shed light on how challenges in the arrival- and resettlement phase, such as asylum policies and societal attitudes and stigma, influenced well-being, experiences of belonging and inclusion, and belief in future prospects.

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What the participants described as some of the most burdening, was the waiting time and uncertainty often accompanying the asylum seeking process. This was marked by isolation and loneliness, forced passivity, and lack of distractions or meaningful activities such as learning the language. Dealing with this could exhaust personal strengths, and have potentially long-lasting detrimental effects on psychological health, well-being, and sense of belonging and inclusion. Joseph & Linley (2005) emphasize that growth requires "a supportive social environment that facilitates satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for autonomy, sense of competence, and relations with others" (p. 272). Conversely, the degree to which any of these needs are unsupported will have a strong detrimental impact on wellness and growth (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Joseph & Linley, 2005). It is clear that a life situation marked by waiting, uncertainty, forced passivity and isolation does not provide people with possibility for experiencing being the perceived source of one's own behavior (autonomy), opportunities to use one's capacities (competence), or a sense of connection and belongingness with other individuals and one's community (relatedness) (Deci and Ryan, 2002, p.8). Moreover, Deci and Ryan (2012) emphasize that positive development requires that there are resources and possibilities available not only for actualizing plans and goals, but also for maintaining motivation, hope and belief. This is threatened by having life put on hold and facing an unknown future, as it also means that dreams and goals are postponed indefinitely. Frankl (1959/1992) explained that concentration camp prisoners "who could not see the end of their 'provisional existence' were not able to aim at an ultimate goal in life, and ceased living for the future" (p.35) – which meant that people also stopped living in the present. This example points to the detrimental effect that loss of control and uncertainty about the future can have on health, and is also relevant for understanding how asylum policies affects people's possibilities for utilizing their strengths and capabilities, and maintaining hope and health.

Certainty and stability are also important for lessening worries, fear, and trauma memories, and freeing up space to learn the language. This is important among other for building social relationships and getting access to social support, and through that, getting the possibility to share adverse experiences with supportive others and construct a coherent trauma narrative - considered essential for healing and growth (Rendon, 2015). In this context, time is a central factor. It can take time to find someone trustworthy to talk to, and sufficient time to heal and process trauma is necessary for development of adversarial growth (Bonanno & Diminich, 2013; Lim & DeSteno, 2016). Studies show that people might not actively engage in

processing trauma until years after the event, when they have more resources available and their immediate needs of survival have decreased (Uy et al., 2018). Similarly, findings from the current study show that several of the participants needed time and feelings of safety and stability before they were ready and comfortable with talking about and processing trauma. Initially, some used forms of short term avoidance coping to deal with painful experiences, such as diverting focus away from the trauma or things they could not control or solve. Such efforts to regulate own focus and feelings until one feels ready to process and share one's experiences can be understood as a form of agency. However, this strategy was sometimes difficult to use while waiting for asylum, as there were few – if any - possibilities for distractions or meaningful activities. Taylor et al. (2020) point out that "the protracted nature of the asylum-seeking process can be viewed as obstructive to diminishing of symptoms that might facilitate PTG" (p.27), considering that PTG is most likely to occur once traumatic symptoms have diminished to some degree.

Another example of a challenging post-migration factor was stigma and stereotypes. The participants' experiences mirrored Goffman's (2009) description of being subject to stigma, where people's "image of themselves must daily confront and be affronted by the image which others reflect back to them" (back cover). For example, several explained a sense of having to prove who they actually were, and to separate themselves and Islam from acts or stereotypes concerning terrorism and violence. The findings lend support to descriptions of more polarized attitudes towards Islam and Muslims (see Part I), including that Muslims in many European countries often feel stigma and that they are 'suspect communities' that are being forced to bear collective responsibility for the actions of a small minority (Shaheed, 2021, p.2). Despite this, the participants' concern with not making generalizations, but rather accepting and learning from differences indicated useful learning extracted from own experiences of being subject to stigma, as well as from positive experiences of growing up with different peoples, cultures and religions. At the same time, several described stigma and stereotypes as causing separation, and thus hindering feelings of belonging and inclusion. A sense of belonging to a society is described as fundamental for human well-being, and comes from feeling wanted and valued, participating in meaningful activities, having attainable goals to work towards, and experiencing control over own life and future (Ryan et al., 2008). Taylor et al. (2020) suggest, based on the strong altruistic impulses found among their participants, that it may be beneficial to allow asylum seekers and refugees to use this to contribute to society. The findings from the current study support this.

Taken together, the findings confirm those from numerous previous studies (see review and Part I) that culminate in that 'rapid but careful resolution of asylum claims is essential for reducing the duration of uncertainty, insecurity, and associated distress (Fazel et al., 2012, p.279). Moreover, the finding shed light on how receiving societies can facilitate feelings of belonging and personal control among refugees. For example, through providing possibilities for participation in meaningful activities where people can use their capabilities, from early on. The participants described several helpful factors in Norway, such as participating in organized activities, learning the language, being allowed to contribute and use their competencies, and building social relationships. Several emphasized the importance of society and policy facilitating feelings of safety and acceptance, and of aiding a sense of community between people, e.g., through coming together to celebrate events, or simply by being open and curious about each other. The findings highlight the importance of providing refugees with a sense of stability, safety, and belonging, and how this is threatened by uncertainty, waiting, and placement in numerous and isolated reception centers. Helpful interventions could be to strengthen hope and motivation by allowing people to pursue goals of language learning and an education, and facilitating opportunities for actualizing meaning and self through volunteer/regular work.

The "why" of positive adaption: meaning making, growth, and wisdom

This section is devoted to the research questions concerning the *why* of positive adaption, discussing the origins and role of meaning making, adversarial growth and wisdom, and motivation and drive to choose healthy strategies. The frame of understanding is to a large degree humanistic and existential psychology and theory, and the OVT.

Meaning making, growth, and wisdom are described as both processes and outcomes (Joseph, 2011), which was reflected in the findings. These show that the participants were actively searching for and creating meaning and useful learning, inspired by a view of life as having inherent meaning, and made own experiences the basis for helping others. This also served as a form of coping, and seemed to help the participants comprehend the world around them, find direction for their actions, and worth in their lives (Martela & Steger, 2016, p.541). In terms of growth, their experiences had left them feeling stronger and more knowledgeable about self and life, and provided them with new perspectives and wisdom.

The role of culture, upbringing, and religiosity/spirituality in the growth process

The role of culture, world-views, and religiosity/spirituality in growth processes were among the needs identified in the review. As described earlier, culture shapes determinants of both trauma and coping. Al-Krenawi et al. (2011) emphasize that psychological adjustment cannot be understood in isolation from social and cultural context, and that awareness of culturally rooted strengths and coping resources are of crucial importance when doing research with trauma survivors. Concerning what motivates people to choose healthy coping strategies and move towards growth, the OVT describes that individuals have an inner knowledge of what is right and good for them, which again motivates choices and actions towards self-actualization and growth. This actualization tendency is seen as universal. Individual differences in trauma response is explained in terms of the degree of disparity between the trauma and preexisting expectations and beliefs; whether the social environment (before and after trauma) hinder or promote individuals' organismic valuing process; and, the extent to which people act in accordance with their organismic valuing process (Joseph & Linley, 2005, p.274).

In the current study, when looking at the ways in which the participants perceived and dealt with adversity, influences from family/upbringing, culture, and religiosity/spirituality clearly surfaced. The participants described important values, life advice, and strategies from these, which together might have contributed to coping abilities and resilience. For example, through representing previous need satisfaction that promoted generalized orientations of acting concordantly with one's organismic valuing process, which serves as a resilience factor (Joseph & Linley, 2005). Additionally, exposure to adversity and hardship had forced several participants to trust their inner selves when making decisions and taking important actions. This might also have strengthened their awareness of or ability to act in accordance with their organismic valuing process. The OVT explains that in the aftermath of trauma, need satisfaction will lead to effortful appraisal processes, which facilitates positive accommodation and the search for meaning as significance (Joseph & Linley, 2005). For many of the participants, forced passivity, isolation, and lack of control took precedence while waiting for asylum, and thus, their fundamental needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness were often not met until they had received asylum, which allowed for agency, hope, and future meaning and motivation. It is thus possible that their search for meaning as significance, as well as processes of growth, mainly took place with time, and after receiving asylum. As such, the findings shed light on how particularly the protracted asylum seeking process might have hampered the participants' innate drive towards growth.

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Religiosity/spirituality is described as an important distal influence of culture on the growth-process (Calhoun et al., 2010; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006). Religious coping has been positively associated with growth in a number of studies (see review), yet the majority of the participants in the current study did not describe this as a main strategy. Influences of religiosity/spirituality seemed more clear in relation to beliefs and values such as view of life as inherently meaningful, respect for the elderly, and helping others, although it can be challenging to determine if these were inspired by religion or culture, as these are closely intertwined. On the one hand, several of the participants described holding these values to a high esteem, without necessarily connecting them to religion, or describing themselves as particularly religious or practicing. On the other hand, they mirrored the characteristics used to describe the essence of Islam, and there were also several examples of that the participants connected these values to both religion and culture.

Concerning growth and religion, Saritoprak et al. (2018) describe that growth from struggles is prominent in Islamic spirituality, and sometimes referred to as the greater jihad or spiritual jihad. Although the participants did not explicitly mention this concept, the majority were Muslims and came from predominantly Islamic societies, and thus, it is not unlikely that this concept had influenced them. Particularly when considering that it corresponded with their view of problems and adversity as expected, and as providing a chance for useful, necessary learning and development. Moreover, all the participants came from collectivistic cultures, which, compared to individualistic cultures, tend to have less fixed expectations regarding predictability and controllability of life and events. As such, people tend to adjust to situations, and assume that life consists of non-linear cycles, which includes changes and possible contradictions (Calhoun et al., 2010; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006). This was reflected in the participants' narratives, where they did not describe having basic assumptions about the world being just or predictable, and perceived adversity as a chance for learning. This indicates that Janoff-Bulman's (1992, 2014) classification concerning basic assumptions might not necessarily be universal, but contextually and culturally dependent, in line with what Splevins et al. (2010) have described. Moreover, as Gilpin-Jackson (2012) points out, a theoretical lens that assumes that people have a pre-trauma context with taken-for-granted notions of safety and security, does not necessarily apply to those who are born into hardship and prolonged suffering. This also applies to the current study and findings. The participants' world-views and previous experiences seemed to facilitate their ability to deal with adversity, in line with Schneider's (2020) description of that a worldview that does not depend on things

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being in a certain way can contribute to greater openness to experience and more flexibility of coping.

The participants' openness, curiosity, and emphasis on keeping the best from both cultures brings associations to Maslow's (1962/2011) description of self-actualized individuals as transcending their environment. More specifically, Maslow (1962/2011) observed that such individuals made decisions of what to keep and not form their culture, based on inner values and convictions rather than societal pressure or the opinions of others. As such, they seemed to be members at large of the human species, rather than simply being e.g., American. As Maslow (1962/2011) put it, "I hypothesized that these people should have less 'national character', and should be more like each other across cultural lines than they are like the less developed members of their own culture" (p.137). In other words, personal characteristics were more defining or bonded people more than did cultural characteristics or origin. Maslow (1962/2011) described transcending what he saw as the boundaries of culture as central for growth; that is, transcending from being defined by one's immediate environment and seeing the world and other people/cultures only through the prism allowed by one's culture. Perhaps one could describe this as developing from being "unconsciously" led or restricted by one's culture, towards a more "conscious" or authentic way of relating to culture. The findings from the current study support the latter, evident for example in descriptions of having become more open minded, having developed their own, authentic, critical understandings of religion, their emphasis on the value of learning from different cultures and peoples, and their emphasis on that we are all human beings – who should work to love and accept each other. Venter (2016) points out that self-transcendent people 'find meaning in life by connecting their life's journey and happiness to the condition of others, are bound together with a common purpose, and belong to a global community that defines itself by the definition of what it is to be human' (p.5). This, in combination with the foregoing, gives meaning to Venter's (2016) description of self-transcendence as Maslow's answer to cultural closeness.

"If there is meaning in life at all, then there must be meaning in suffering": *existential meaning and motivation*

Frankl (1959/1992), quoted in the heading, explained suffering as an ineradicable part of life (p,33), and thus, if one considers life itself meaningful, there must be meaning in suffering. This view was reflected in the participants' understanding of adversity as part of life, combined their view of life as having inherent value and meaning. According to the OVT, it is central for growth that individuals engage with the significance of their adverse experiences in

terms of meaning (Joseph & Linley, 2005). This engagement was evident in the participants' narratives, along with active self-reflection, also described as a pre-requisite for growth (Linley, 2004). The participants seemed to have reflected much on their experiences and the meaning of these, pondering questions concerning the purpose of their survival, and not least on own feelings and reactions in response to various events. As a result, they expressed awareness and clarity both concerning aspects of themselves they wished to work on further, and which goals and values they regarded as central to live by and strive for.

The findings exemplify the motivational value of meaning, the will to meaning, and the role of meaning as coping (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Frankl, 1959/1992; Lazarus, 1991). For example, the participants got motivation from focusing on future goals and meanings, gave meaning to own experiences through making them the basis for helping others, and managed to hold on to their belief in life and self even through the darkest of times. Martela (2017) explains that our present pursuits derive meaningfulness from being connected to some valuable goals that we strive to achieve in the future, while our past achievements derive meaningfulness from the actual positive impact they have been able to generate (p.253). A prominent finding in the current study was the importance of future meaning and orientation, pointing to growth as ongoing journey. The participants' meaning making could be understood as a way of re-writing their story and bridging past, present and future. For example, searching for meaning in terms of useful learning was useful in the present as a way of coping with painful memories of past hardship, and also strengthened their sense of preparedness and capacity for dealing with future challenges. Moreover, the participants transformed and gave meaning to past suffering through focusing on how their survival had provided them with self-knowledge, life experience, and new possibilities – which they could benefit from also in the future. Taken together, the current findings are much in line with Weathers et al's (2016) explanation of meaning as a driving force to continue moving forward in the context of adversity and trauma, through providing a sense of coherence, value, direction, and purpose in life (p.151). Similarly, Antonovsky (1987) considered meaningfulness the most important dimension of the SOC, precisely because it mediates motivation. This dimension has also been positively associated with growth (Arya & Davidson, 2015; Ragger et al., 2019).

As previously mentioned, Maslow's theory failed to explain that individuals who do not have their primary needs for survival and safety met still can be motivated by higher needs for love, meaning, self-actualization and self-transcendence (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). The participants in

the current study were in a rather stable situation at the time of their interview, something that might have positively influenced their views and narratives. Yet, many of their perspectives and attitudes seemed to have been with them through times of hardship, and even in times of need-deprivation the participants seemed to have been motivated by Maslow's higher needs, in addition to needs for survival and safety. As such, the findings lend support to Frankl's notion of that it is even more central to have a clear understanding of what you are living for, in terms of meaning and purpose, than it is to have your basic needs met (Grace, 2017) - at least for a certain period of time.

Increased personal strength, authenticity, and psychological well-being

The participants' narratives and descriptions revealed several characteristics associated with growth and positive development, such as interest in learning, optimism and hope for the future, and belief in own capabilities. Moreover, they displayed acceptance and ability to tolerate uncertainty, and openness to experience, which involves being imaginative, curious, and emotionally responsive (Linley & Joseph, 2004; Rendon, 2015; Webster & Deng, 2015). Characteristics of growth are primarily related to psychological well-being, which is associated with increased feelings of authenticity, autonomous choices, meaning, purpose, and self-efficacy (Joseph & Linley, 2005). Similarly, Maslow (1962/2011) and Rogers (1959, 1961) described that self-actualized or fully functioning persons desired authenticity in themselves and others and found purpose and meaning in life, in addition to having the ability to tolerate uncertainty, accept change as necessary and inevitable, and experience life as a process.

What the participants described having learned from their adverse experiences, were much in line with the main domains of growth, namely changes in self-perception, relationships, and life philosophy (Linley & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Particularly in the form of increased feelings of personal strength, wisdom, and preparedness for future challenges, changes or clarifications of important life priorities, and gratitude and greater appreciation of life. Several also described greater acceptance of limitations, in the form of realizing that one cannot change what has happened or control everything, yet finding peace in feeling that one did ones best under the circumstances (Linley, 2003). Moreover, recognition of new possibilities involved opportunities to pursue and fulfill their plans and goals. Growth is associated with religious openness and engagement in existential questions (Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, 2005). This was evident among the participants, e.g., in the form of questions concerning the meaning and purpose of life and events, reflections on human

interconnectedness, and as more independent and critical understandings of religion and own beliefs (Luna, 2019; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). The latter might result in the feeling of being less religious, which was the case among some participants. Several explained that they were generally concerned with living in accordance with their inner beliefs and values, whether it concerned religious beliefs, guiding values in life, or being honest and direct in their dealings with other people.

The current findings, particularly those concerning increased authenticity and clarification of goals and values, point to the potential for transformation and growth that lies in facing suffering and death. Wong and Tomer (2011) describe that the terror of death, through exposing the fragility of life, teaches us what really matters and how to live authentically. Thus, whereas existential concerns and subsequent growth may very well arise under safe and stable conditions, growth-oriented motivational states might be more easily triggered by adversity and awareness of the inevitability of death (Davidov & Russo-Netzer, 2022). The participants' narratives indicate that surviving suffering and death had led to an awareness of the transitory and unpredictable nature of life, which again inspired or taught them to be flexible, accept uncertainty as the way of life, and to make the best of life while they could. In other words, it had become clear that time is limited, and together, these insights might have contributed to clarify the participants' values, goals and perspectives, and to increase their appreciation for life and use of opportunities.

Papadopoulos (2007) describes that adversity exposes the limits of individuals and pushes people to the edge of their previous understandings, which require them to discover or develop new strategies and perspectives (p.308). This points to the potential for learning to truly know oneself through being confronted with situations that forces one to change perspectives, and develop or discover new coping strategies. The participants' commonly described that they had become aware of own strengths, and realized that they were capable of dealing with much more than previously assumed. Moreover, several stated that 'you don't learn from having a perfect life'. Without implying that experiencing trauma is positive in itself, it is highly relevant to highlight how such experiences might constructively influence people's perspectives on life. The question has even been posed of whether the experience of adversity can in fact protect from worse outcomes, i.e., further personality deterioration in the absence of challenge (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2016, p.70).

While adversity is not a requirement for growth, it might present an opportunity for discovering otherwise 'hidden' strengths and competencies, and thus learning to know oneself

and life - something that might be less accessible in the absence of trauma and adversity. As Einstein (supposedly) put it, "adversity introduces a man to himself". For example, through triggering the process of confronting own self and fears, which is required for self-actualization, self-transcendence, and growth. As such, adversity might trigger processes that have the potential to help people become aware of, and live more in accordance with, their genuine beliefs and values. Self-knowledge is described as a pre-requisite for wisdom and self-actualization, and its relation with existential stress is illustrated by Rollo May's (1950/1977) statement that "one of the blessings of living in an age of anxiety is that we are forced to become aware of ourselves" (p.7). Moreover, losses and adversity can make it more clear to people what is important and not; when you lose everything, what do you feel that you really need and miss? The participants described how perspectives had changed, after being shocked out of automatic behaviors and beliefs (or, pushed to overcome resistance to change) and forced to re-evaluate what really matters in life. As some put it, they had learned 'what life is about'. Their dreams and definitions of a good life, and valuing e.g., helping others, and family and community relations over material possessions, spoke of what they had gained in terms of perspective and wisdom.

"The reason why I survived, was to help others": the benefits of growth for individuals and society

Finding meaning in survival through helping others was a prominent finding, and the participants described numerous examples of pro-social values and actions. The participants' stories about wanting to give back through volunteering, and feeling good about helping others, were much in line with Staub and Vollhardt's (2008) theory altruism born of suffering, marked by a more positive and empathic orientation toward people, and belief in one's personal responsibility for others' welfare. Moreover, the findings correspond with Herman's (1998) observations of how trauma survivors have transformed the meaning of their personal tragedy by making it the reason for engagement in pro-social action.

Benkow (1994) wrote that "man is a social being who can only come to full expression when he means something to others and can do something for others" (p.204). This is relevant in relation to Frankl's and Maslows' emphasis on actualizing meaning and self through devoting to a cause outside oneself (i.e., self-transcendence and pro-sociality). Martela (2017) describes the meaningfulness of life as being about the positive contribution beyond oneself that one is able to make (p.241). This was reflected in the participants' emphasis on the importance of thinking about the community and contributing positively to society and your fellow human

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beings. This engagement, often described as partly inspired by own experiences, contributed to choices and actions directed towards helping others and contributing to the common good. Several of the participants expressed a deep engagement with matters of global and societal injustice and double-standards that causes people suffering. This was also visible in personal political ideals, signaling values of common humanity, solidarity, and equality, and important goals in life. The findings were similar to Daniel's (2019), of that youth with refugee backgrounds were particularly interested in improving the lives of those around them, showed a deep awareness of social problems, and a willingness to transform society (p.76). Daniel (2019) suggests that the participants' "visions of themselves as change agents to make the world a better place might be more or equally important to their identities as their histories as refugees" (p.80) – an observation that is strongly supported by the current findings.

Tedeschi describes helpful actions and lessons distributed beyond the survivor, as some of the most important outcomes of growth for the wider society (Luna, 2019). The findings add to the numerous findings from previous studies (see Part I and review), where pro-social engagement has been described as a way to find new meaning after traumatic experiences, and also serves to facilitate experiences of control, mastery, and belonging (Frazier et al., 2013; Kumar, 2016; Lifton, 1980; Staub & Vollhardt, 2008; Ungar, 2012). It is possible that the participants' helping behavior and altruistic intent also can contribute to explain their positive adjustment and health. For example, in a study with veterans in treatment for PTSD, the capacity for interpersonal relations and help intentions - predicted by empathic and altruistic concern with the needs of others - were the most significant long-term predictors of positive adjustment (Kishon-Barash et al., 1999).

The findings shed light on factors that might help explain pro-sociality and compassion following adversity. Several of the participants described that own experiences of receiving help and support had motivated a wish to 'give back' through helping others, in line with Gouldner's (1960) norm of reciprocity. The findings also indicate that adversity might lead to heightened perspective taking and empathy, and then to increased compassion and prosocial actions (in line with Batson & Shaw, 1991; Lim & DeSteno, 2016). Not least, there were number of examples of characteristics of self-transcendence in the participants' narratives, such as feelings of oneness, view of human beings as equal and interconnected, and responsibility for the welfare of all of humanity (Yaden et al., 2017). This might help explain the participants' emphasis on pro-social actions and values as related to mortality salience, self-transcendence, and posttraumatic wisdom (Linley, 2003). More specifically, in the sense

that 'reconciliation with one's finitude might lead to a transcendence of those concerns that are related exclusively to the self and to an increased investment in the well-being of others' (Linely, 2003, p.606). The participants described that their adverse experiences had contributed to clarification of goals and values, where e.g., relational values were held to a higher esteem than material gains. This might also indicate that pro-sociality and focus on helping others was an example of growth and self-actualization in accordance with collective values, e.g., as it increases social harmony, and is in line with collectivistic cultural characteristics of encouraging people to prioritize good relationship functioning over idiosyncratic goals (Cohen et al., 2016, p.1238). Moreover, pro-sociality and compassion were reflected in the participants' descriptions of religious values, such as Islam being about love, peace, respect for others, making efforts to be a good person, and taking care of people in one's community.

"Begin with yourself, but do not end with yourself": self-actualization, self-transcendence, growth, and wisdom

The part of a saying from Rabbi Nachman (in Buber, 1947, p.41) quotes in the heading, points to the importance of developing self-knowledge and healing self, and then move from self-focus (self-actualization) to outward focus (self-transcendence). This understanding is central in humanistic-existential theories of well-being and development, and in the OVT. For example, Maslow (1971, 1962/2011) understood self-transcendence as the ultimate need, and described self-transcending people among other as altruistic, compassionate, and as having concern for the welfare of humanity. With the inclusion of self-transcendence as the ultimate need, a central characteristic of 'the best developed human being' would be altruism (Koltko-Rivera, 2006; Maurer & Daukantaitė, 2020). Moreover, Rogers (1964) described it as characteristic of human beings to prefer actualizing and socialized goals when being exposed to an environment which promotes growth. Thus, as Sheldon et al. (2003) point out, the organismic valuing process does not only entail the ability to recognize own interests, but also to know and choose what will serve the interests of others and of society as a whole. This highlights, according to Koltko-Rivera (2006), that cultivating innate growth tendencies might be beneficial not only for individuals, but also for the broader communities - precisely because the transcended person is able to view their purpose in the world in relation to other human beings.

Self-transcendence is described as an essential component of wisdom, as it leads to greater feelings of connectedness, concern and responsibility towards the welfare of others and the

world at large (Curnow, 1999; Jayawickreme et al., 2017; Koltko-Rivera, 2006). Looking at conceptualizations of wisdom, these generally emphasize an increase in self-knowledge, understanding of life, self/other-enhancing values, and ethical choices, and on using these insights to enhance the common good (Webster, 2010; Webster & Deng, 2015). Webster (2010) define wisdom as the competence in, intention to, and application of, critical life experiences to facilitate optimal development of self and others (p.71). Schwartz and Sharpe (2006) emphasize that practical wisdom requires the will to do what one know is right (p.386). A timely question is what motivates this will. In the current study, I see the participants' engagement in pro-social behavior as related to among other self-transcendence and wisdom. Several described how their own experiences of suffering, through processes of growth and meaning making, had motivated a wish of helping others. This, potentially in combination with their engagement in matters of injustice, and emphasis on authenticity and community- and relational values, might have led to knowledge about what is right - and the will to act accordingly.

"It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye". These words from "The Little Prince" (de Saint-Exupéry, 1943) point to the participants' concern with love and acceptance of humanity, and their wisdom. This was a prominent finding across interviews and topics, and it is hard to describe the participants without emphasizing their 'wisdom beyond their years'. Some researchers have suggested that growth might be best represented in terms of meaningful changes in wisdom (Jayawickreme, Grimm, et al., 2019, p.344). In the current study, this was exemplified e.g., by the participants' openness, acceptance, humbleness, humor, and self-reflection. Moreover, the participants were often referring to the heart in relation to different topics, such as when equaling 'doing things from the heart' with being genuine or authentic. Historically, within philosophy and religion, the heart has been described as the center of wisdom, soul, and human qualities. For example, Aristotle identified the heart as the seat of intelligence, motion, sensation, and as the physical area of the human soul (Barnes, 1984). In the Quran, the heart is extensively referred to, among other as 'the origin of intentional activities, the cause behind all humans' intuitive deeds, responsible for deep understanding, and as the seat of the rational soul' (Rassool, 2015). In Hadith (the sayings and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad) it is written that "indeed, in the body there is a peace of flesh, if it is reformed, the whole body becomes good, and if it is spoilt, then the whole body becomes spoilt. Indeed, it is the Heart" (Sahih al-Bukhari, n.d.). An example from Hasidic Judaism of inner (heart) knowledge regarding which

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path to choose in life, is the saying that "everyone should carefully observe which way his heart draws him, and then choose that way with all his strength" ("the Seer of Lublin", in Buber, 1947, p.23). This evokes associations with organismic valuing theory, and humanistic-existential thinking in general, and the notion that all human beings have the innate knowledge about one's right path.

Closely related to the heart, is love, which several of the participants emphasized the importance of in various contexts. One example was Fadil's statement (p.136), which connects love, acceptance, and wisdom:

> We must accept each other, because we need each other. Even if we don't have the same thoughts and interests, I still need you in order to survive, and you need me in order to survive. This will make a society stronger, that we accept each other and love each other. (Fadil)

Fadil's words taps into Erich Fromm's (1957/2000) description of love as the only rational answer to our need to overcome separateness, which he saw as the fundamental problem of human existence. Overcoming separateness involves, among other, viewing human beings with love and acceptance, and as interconnected. Similarly, Maslow (1954) emphasized that "we *must* understand love; we must be able to teach it, to create it, to predict it, or else the world is lost to hostility and to suspicion" (p.181). Central in this regard, is acceptance, which Bauman (2013) connects to civility, or, "the ability to interact with strangers without holding their strangeness against them and without pressing them to surrender it or to renounce some or all the traits that have made them strangers in the first place" (p.104). Bauman (2013) acknowledges the challenge it can pose to live with differences, in describing this ability as 'an art that requires exercise'. Love and compassion is suggested as a path towards wisdom by Buddhism and Sufism (Le & Levenson, 2005), and love is central in Roger's characterization of the 'fully functioning person' (1959, 1961), in Maslow's peak-experiences (1964), and in states of self-transcendence (Yaden et al., 2017).

A central question is how love can be fostered, and what its relationship is with growth, self-transcendence, pro-sociality, and wisdom. Recent empirical research on self-transcendent experiences, such as mindfulness, awe, flow, mystical and peak experiences, indicate that these are 'potent sources of prosocial behavior (Yaden et al., 2017, p.154). The participants in the current study commonly described feelings of compassion and gratitude, which are among the self-transcendent emotions that foster connection, commitment, and attachment to others (Stellar et al., 2017). Opposite of this, is greater focus and attention directed toward the self and self-enhancement strategies, which stresses inequality and competition, and have been

found to reinforce a sense of separation from others, and to negatively predict self-transcendence and wisdom (Le & Levenson, 2005). Frankl (1966) traced "excessive concern with self-actualization to a frustration of the will to meaning" (p.99); that is, as a sign of lack of fulfillment and true meaning and purpose, which is always to be found outside the self. Moreover, calling self-transcendence the essence of existence, Frankl (1959/1992) held that "the more one forgets himself - by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love - the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself" (p.50). Similarly, Maslow (1971) described that self-actualized people were often devoted to some task outside themselves (p.2). In the current study, this "outward" dedication was evident in the participants' values, life perspectives, goals, and actions.

Taken together, the findings clearly show that the participants possessed self-transcendent qualities, and described learning outcomes associated with wisdom, such as love, self-knowledge, and compassion and pro-sociality. These insights might have been facilitated by age and length of stay, which had given most of the participants some amount of time and stability to reflect upon own experiences and perspectives. Still, it might be difficult to determine to what extent their wisdom and pro-sociality were outcomes of growth, or of personality characteristics and upbringing (i.e., pre-existing vs posttraumatic wisdom). A combination is also possible, as openness and extraversion are associated with positive emotionality and a tendency to view stressful events as leading to wisdom (Jayawickreme et al., 2017). This, together with a strong sense of mastery, has also been associated with a tendency to deal with challenges in a way that promotes wisdom and growth (Glück & Bluck, 2013). Moreover, forgiveness, gratitude, and spirituality play important roles in processes of both wisdom and growth (Plews-Ogan et al., 2019). Thus, in sum, the participants' personality characteristics might have influenced their perceptions of their adverse experiences, as well as their behavioral responses to these, in ways that promoted wisdom.

Concluding remarks

The findings, built on insights and perspectives from the young participants themselves, highlight the complexity of outcomes following trauma and adversity. They had managed to actively cope, create meaning, and grow from their adverse experiences, while gaining valuable experience-based knowledge underway. The participants' stories were filled with examples of strengths, resources, growth, and wisdom, highlighting these as central aspects of the participants' self-narratives and life stories. This, together with their endurance and

determination, stand as a contrast to portrayals of refugees as helpless victims, singularly vulnerable, or lacking agency. The participants' emphasis on the learning value of adversity, combined with their self-perceptions as agents and survivors, seemed to facilitate coping, well-being and growth. This in line with Rendon's (2015) notion that the way a person frames a traumatic event can have a significant impact on how one recovers from it. Similarly, the findings support that people who have a sense of control in own life, a commitment to meaningful goals and activities, and a view of stress as a manageable challenge, are in the long run more likely to integrate the trauma into their lives and to enjoy a satisfactory level of adjustment (Waysman et al., 2001, p. 545). Taken together, these and the other findings from this study are in line with the main findings from the scoping review (ch.9).

As Copelj et al. (2017) point out, adversity related to forced migration is not an isolated, pre-migration event, but manifest throughout pre- and post-migration experiences. The journey from trauma to growth can be described as an ongoing process, where individual outcomes are shaped in contexts and transactional processes involving personal, social, cultural and structural factors. It is evident from the findings that coping, meaning making, and adversarial growth are complex processes, and thus cannot be explained in terms of *either* personality *or* contextual factors. Rather, they are influenced by events before, during and after flight, personal characteristics and coping styles, cultural and religious beliefs, world-views and upbringing, the quality of the social network, support from formal structures of society, and more. These play together in determining whether or not coping resources and innate growth potential are nourished and promoted. The findings shed light on how social and structural factors influence feelings of safety, acceptance, belonging, and well-being, and – through that - processes of coping and growth.

Importantly, it must be emphasized that many of the participants' experiences of adversity and trauma were severe, and not easily – if at all – overcome. Coping and growth often co-existed with distress and suffering, which reflect findings from other studies, as well as descriptions from growth theories. As such, the findings support Hirad's (2018) observation of that it is possible to grow from adversity also without having fully healed from it. Taken together, the findings point to the importance of a balanced and holistic approach to understanding trauma and growth associated with forced migration. This includes the importance of looking at the interplay between individual, social, cultural, and structural factors, and of recognizing both suffering and strength. As Al-Krenawi et al. (2011) point out, "just as health cannot be defined as the absence of disease, traumatic experiences cannot

exclude competency and growth" (p.106). House et al. (2017) also make an evolutionary based argument for coping and growth capacities, pointing out that "early humans would not have survived had they not found ways to cope with stressful situations" (p.180). A balanced approach means seeing the whole person and full story, and neither pathologize everything, nor reject trauma and psychopathology. This might also serve to challenge stigma and stereotypes, which often build on dichotomous, simplified, and negatively charged portrayals of human beings.

Today, at a time of increasing polarization, and with more than 100 million people being forcibly displaced and experiencing tremendous suffering due to wars and conflicts, I find a strength-oriented perspective to be particularly relevant and important. As Carl Rogers said; "when I look at the world I'm pessimistic, but when I look at people I'm optimistic". Humanistic and existential psychology and theory offer perspectives that encourages us to look for the best in people and highlight the reasons to be optimistic, through acknowledging human strength and potential for growth, wisdom, hope, and belief in common humanity. The relationship between growth, wisdom, self-transcendence, and pro-sociality also shed light on a dimension of growth which inspires both hope and awe. The experience based knowledge from people who have survived adversity and death represents insights and perspectives that we all can learn from, and which might resonate with historical ideas from philosophy, religion, literature, and mythology that are familiar to many.

Chapter 16: Strengths, limitations, trustworthiness, and data quality

To establish rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research findings, Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed the concepts of *credibility*, *transferability, dependability*, and *confirmability*. These quality criteria can be loosely compared to internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity, and the strategies used to ensure trustworthiness and the overall quality of the study are discussed below, in conjunction with the strengths and limitations of the study and findings.

Strengths

Among the main strengths of this study, are the detailed in-depth qualitative interviews, which provide insights and knowledge based on lived experience. Rogers (1961) described experience as the highest authority, i.e., "the touchstone of validity is my own experience. No other person's ideas, and none of my ideas, are as authoritative as my experience" (p. 23). Much psychological research about refugees has been quantitative and top down, and thus, the current study contributes to fill a gap in the knowledge field for qualitative studies of growth among young refugees. Moreover, as pointed out in the review, many studies only assess PTG within the first year after the potentially traumatic event, and Mangelsdorf et al. (2019) suggest that future research should include a minimum of one measurement point that lies at least one and a half year after the event. According to Copelj et al. (2017), established former refugees might be able to provide a more nuanced account of growth experiences. The participants in the current study had lived in Norway for on average 7 years. Thus, the study serves to meet the need for studies of growth among established former refugees who have had time and stability to process and reflect on their experiences. Lastly, the inclusion of nearly as many women as men, and the participants' young age, also broadens the study relevance. This because women are underrepresented in studies among refugees, and most refugees coming to Europe are younger than 35.

One consequence of a long dominant epistemological stance of realism within much psychological research, is that research that view participants' own expertise as relevant, has been less valued (Vara & Patel, 2012, p.84). Qualitative interview approaches value the voices, experiences and knowledge of research participants, and entail an understanding of individuals as conscious creators and interpreters of meaning – that is, as intentional and purposeful agents (Kielhofner, 1982). This, along with the current study's overall approach

and the inclusion of a competence group, serve to acknowledge the validity of experience based knowledge. The inclusion of a competence group also contributed to strengthening the relevance and quality of the study, through checking its perspectives with – and including the knowledge from - members from the "group under study".

DeRobertis (2016) has pointed out that humanistic psychology can further develop its inherent potentials for multiculturalism by regularly integrating divergent cultural viewpoints into its knowledge base (p.29). Thus, potential strengths of the current study are the inclusion of participants from various cultural backgrounds and the focus on culturally rooted strengths and coping resources. Moreover, the emphasis on the role of world-views and religiosity/spirituality in processes of coping and growth, and the use of the OVT. Splevins et al. (2010) argue that the existence of a universal completion tendency, which the OVT posits, may be acceptable in many cultures that possess Buddhist or Taoist philosophies. I would say that this might also be the case in cultures shaped by e.g., Abrahamic religions and their mystical traditions. Simply put, these share an emphasis on individuals' inner struggle and orientation towards growth and self-actualization; trust in people's inner knowledge of what they need in order to live a fulfilled life; and, the belief that people are born with free will and bear responsibility for own choices. In other words, they reflect many of the core ideas of humanistic and existential psychology.

The *credibility*, or truth-value, of qualitative research is strengthened when it presents descriptions or interpretations of human experience that are so accurate that people who share that experience would immediately recognize it (Guba, 1981; Krefting, 1991). The use of thematic analysis (TA) might have served to strengthen credibility, as it aspires to represent the participants' narratives in a recognizable way, through identifying and documenting recurrent patterns and themes in the data material, and including a sufficient amount of interview extracts in the written report. Credibility was also sought through triangulation of data sources, i.e., interviews, user involvement, and the scoping review (Krefting, 1991).

Including sufficient interview quotes in the written report was also part of ensuring the *transferability*, or applicability, of the findings to other similar contexts or groups. Moreover, I attempted to provide sufficient descriptive data about the study population and context, to allow for comparison (Guba, 1981; Krefting, 1991). To ensure *dependability*, or consistency, I provided detailed descriptions of the study purpose, research methods, participant selection, and how data was collected, analyzed and interpreted (Guba, 1981; Krefting, 1991). This ensures that other researchers can follow the decision trail used, and also provide the reader

with the possibility to critically reflect upon and evaluate the trustworthiness and overall quality of the study and findings.

Limitations

Potential limitations of the study are the small sample size, and the possibility that the participants might have been particularly resilient or well functioning. That is, they displayed several of the characteristics associated with being particularly prone to draw strength from adversity (Rendon, 2015; Zoellner & Maercker, 2006). Moreover, they volunteered to participate, meaning they had the capacity and drive to contribute, something that might indicate a high level of functioning. The small sample size and characteristics of the participants might limit the transferability of the findings, e.g., to other non-clinical refugee populations in a similar age group, who have lived in their country of resettlement for some years.

In terms of what could have been done differently, one idea would have been comparison interviews with people who did not do so well, such as including clinical sample, or asylum seekers who were still waiting for an answer. I could also have done follow up interviews with the same participants, to see how indications of growth developed over time.

An important topic for reflection concerning how the methods have informed and limited what could have been found, is whether 'looking for the positive' meant that I found only that. On the one hand, the interviews were focusing both on distress and challenges, and on coping and growth. Thus, the material reflected and captured 'both sides'. I also used reflexivity as a strategy for avoiding to fall into a form of one-sidedness where I became singularly focused on the positive, and risked overlooking or downplaying contradictory findings. One the other hand, there is always the possibility that both I and the participants were particularly oriented toward the positive, which might have led to some degree of expectation bias.

Confirmability, or neutrality, of data, occurs through establishing credibility, transferability and dependability, and separating oneself from the data. Data triangulation served as a way of checking my findings with the general literature, which strengthens confirmability (Guba, 1981; Krefting, 1991). Moreover, to separate myself from the data, I used *reflexivity* as a strategy to increase transparency about own subjectivity, background, preconceptions, and perspectives (ch.1), and analyzing and accounting for the effects of this on the research process and findings (Corlett & Mavin, 2018; Malterud, 2001; Finlay, 2002; Treharne &

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Riggs, 2014). I also made efforts to follow, rather than lead, the direction of interviews. Naturally, as an interviewer, I was affected by hearing how the participants had suffered and struggled, as even short meetings can result in a feeling of connection with people, including deep sympathy for what they have been through. I made efforts to separate own emotions from the data analysis, through taking notes concerning personal feelings and reactions arising from the interviews, and from societal events related to the study population, which I then reflected on and discussed with my advisors. Moreover, I was particularly aware of how I interpreted the participants and their stories, aiming for a 'neutral' stance.

Another question, is how the overall study might have been influenced by that I – the researcher - come from a different experiential and cultural background than the participants. As Veseth et al. (2017) points out, one's own background and experiences is what enables the understanding of the research participants' descriptions. As such, being an 'insider researcher' has its unique advantages. As an 'outsider', reflexivity and awareness concerning how my experiences and beliefs might differ from the participants', was important. A topic for discussion with the competence group, was the risk that the differences between me and the participants could make it difficult for them to trust me and openly share their stories with me. The group did not anticipate that this would be a significant challenge, which turned out to reflect my experience during the interviews. Several participants expressed that it was positive that I had interest in and some knowledge about culture, food and places, and was flexible about where to meet for the interview. It is possible that some of the participants felt that these things contributed to strengthen trust or reduce our differences.

Concerning language, it was experienced as a strength in the interview situation that I knew some words and simple phrases in Arabic and had prior experience – and patience - with talking to people who are in the process of learning Norwegian. This was helpful, as I could recognize words and meanings although they were not necessarily correctly pronounced. Not least, it contributed to reducing the feelings of stress that some participants explained that they would often feel in situations where they were not able to find the correct words or pronunciations in Norwegian. Still, interviewing people in a language which is not their mother tongue will always involve limitations, for example in terms of how nuanced people can express themselves. For the researcher, this might involve a greater number of possible interpretations and thus an increased risk of misinterpretations, resulting in a greater responsibility for checking whether or not one has understood the interviewees correctly. Language was not experienced as a significant limitation in the current study, but there were

some instances where some participants described it as challenging to describe the deeper meaning of a topic in a second language they were not fully fluent in. Still, only one participant wanted an interpreter present. My impression was that the participant felt comfortable with the interpreter, as did I. However, it was somewhat more challenging to explore questions in depth, possibly due to my limited experience of doing interviews with an interpreter present.

Chapter 17: Contributions and implications

In the following sections, the research findings are related to the study aims and purposes, and their contributions and implications for theory, research, practice, and society are outlined. This also serves to highlight the scientific and social value of the study and findings, i.e., the degree to which they contribute to increase knowledge and improve relevant conditions (Ellis et al., 2007; NESH, 2022). The chapter begins with describing contributions of the study in the form of suggestions for a broadened and curious psychological approach, and concludes with avenues for further research.

Overall contributions and implications: suggestions for a broadened and curious psychological approach

Central aims of this study were to shed light on the role and responsibilities of host countries for shaping outcomes, acknowledge experience-based knowledge and, challenge pathology-oriented and stereotypical discourses about refugees, through highlighting the complexity of outcomes of adversity. The main purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of the factors and processes leading to healthy adaption and growth. This in order to provide knowledge that can be used to facilitate healthy development; nuance and expand the understanding of young refugees and development after trauma; and, show how people actively encounter, navigate and create meaning in their situation.

An overarching contribution of the study and findings, is a suggested broadened and curious psychological approach, which involves taking a strengths-based, curious, contextual, and critical stance both in research and practice. This includes acknowledging heterogeneity and an understanding of refugees as complex human beings with vulnerabilities, resources, strengths, and capacities to handle and overcome adversity. This might contribute to nuance one-dimensional portrayals of refugees and other trauma survivors. A contextual and critical stance highlights that coping and growth include, but cannot be reduced to, individual processes or traits. Rather, the factors and circumstances that influence growth include life events before, during and after flight; personal characteristics and coping styles; cultural and religious beliefs; the quality of the social network; support from formal structures of society, and more. These play together in shaping adaption and development, such as facilitating or hindering the potential for growth.

The findings from this study, and from previous research (see review), show that there is reason to be both optimistic and ambitious regarding the potential for coping, positive adjustment, and adversarial growth among refugees. Using a *strengths-based approach* involves acknowledging human complexity, by highlighting agency, capacities and growth, without ignoring its co-existence with psychological distress. This is important, as research should not under any circumstance exclude or minimize the suffering and negative consequences of adversity and trauma. Rather, the essential point is to apply a broader and more inclusive frame of understanding than that of trauma and psychopathology in research about post-trauma development. Through striving to include 'the whole picture', with all its complexity, a strength-based approach might be able to account for a greater variety of outcomes, and can thus contribute to a more representative understanding of post-trauma development. I would say that this applies not only to research about refugees, but to research concerning trauma survivors in general, as well as in the overall psychological understanding of trauma exposure and human nature.

Stories of positive development challenge what Papadopoulos (2007) refers to as the medicalization and pathologization of human suffering, and might also serve to counteract stigma and negative stereotypes. The findings from this study contribute to challenge pathology-oriented and stigmatizing understandings and discourses about refugees, through illustrating and acknowledging experience-based knowledge and the participants' strengths, resources, and survival capacities. They show, similar to the review findings, that stereotypical and dichotomous portrayals of refugees oversimplify the complexity of experiences and outcomes associated with forced migration. This goes for victim or threat stereotypes, and for portrayals of people as *either* vulnerable and dysfunctional, *or* strong and super-functional. Although the latter is more positively charged, it might also paint a picture of well-adjusted and successful refugees as exceptional – the few who 'made it', seemingly against all odds. Firstly, to avoid 'hero stereotypes', a critical and strength oriented approach must acknowledge that growth/strength and distress/vulnerability commonly co-exist. Second, it should be questioned whether positive adaption and growth really is exceptional, or if it is mainly less explored and less accepted. As described earlier, psychological research about trauma and adversity has been firmly grounded in the disease model and the assumption that the normal response to trauma is victimization and psychopathology (Al-Krenawi et al., 2011). Moreover, Lim and DeSteno (2016) point out that many studies have examined the negative consequences of adversity in populations already characterized by disproportionately

high levels of distress and psychopathology, which might have contributed to the seeming dominance of negative outcomes of adversity. However, these are not necessarily representative of the normative effects of adversity in the general population (ibid., p.180). Thus, research that explores coping and growth in non-clinical samples are important, and the findings from the current study might thus be transferable to other non-clinical populations.

The findings provide numerous examples of wisdom, growth, meaning making and useful learning following adversity. These are evidence of what Middleton (2016) describe as "an essential but relatively overlooked dimension of humanity; a capacity, above all things, to make individual, creative and adaptive sense of the situation" (p.142). This dimension can be further illuminated if researchers and practitioners are curious and adopt a stance of asking what people might learn from adversity, and also what we can learn from each other's backgrounds and experiences. Here, humanistic and existential psychology provide an alternative to problem-focused and pathologizing approaches, by offering an understanding of human nature and development built on a belief in human potential and agency, which resists portraying psychopathology as inevitable following trauma and adversity. Similarly, growth theories represent a shift from the perception that dysfunction is the normal and expected outcome of trauma, to a belief in human strength and capacity to overcome hardship (Joseph, 2015). Not least, the OVT accounts for both psychopathology and growth following adversity (Joseph & Linley, 2005).

In addition to focusing on strengths, a broader psychological approach involves applying a *contextual and critical lens* when understanding post-trauma development and adjustment. This involves exploring and identifying how social and structural factors and policies influence individuals' possibilities for growth and participation in a new society, and taking a critical look at the role and responsibilities of host countries for shaping outcomes. The findings from the current study shows that asylum policies and associated waiting time and uncertainty, along with stigma, stereotypes and dominant discourses in media, theory and research, negatively influence inclusion and belonging, people's health and well-being, and processes of coping and growth. As a researcher, taking a critical look also involves looking at how dominant discourses within psychology shape the general understanding of and approach to trauma survivors and refugees, and also influence people's self-perceptions and personal well-being. Being critical might also involve speaking up against injustice or oppressive structures, in addition to challenging stigma and stereotypes.

Lastly, a broader, contextual psychological approach involves being *open for and curious about* diverse perspectives and influences on coping and growth. When working with people from other cultural backgrounds than oneself, Kizilhan and Wenzel (2020) highlight the importance of reflecting upon one's own culture in order to understand others and of showing curiosity and flexibility in terms of being able to change perspectives. This involves adopting a stance of openness, and not simply assume universality of theories, ideas, and perspectives (Kizilhan & Wenzel, 2020). Maslow (1962/2011) was critical of what he described as ethnocentric understandings in Western psychology, including assumptions about universality of basic processes of cognition and perception. He also problematized "a persistent and assiduous neglect of the writings of philosophers, theologians and psychologists of the eastern world" (p.66). Humanistic and existential psychology contributes with theories and ideas that are relevant both historically and cross-culturally. For example, existential ideas can be found in ancient religions, such as in Zoroastrianism's emphasis on moral choice, free will, and that humans bear responsibility for their actions and behaviors (Rose, 2014). Moreover, the cross-cultural relevance of interconnectedness and self-actualization are visible in their centrality in for example the African philosophy and ethic of Ubuntu, which broadly refers to "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity" (Ilmi, 2019, p.171). Here, a person's ultimate goal should be to become a genuine human being, which can only be accomplished through relating to others in a positive way (Metz & Gaie, 2010, p.275). Metz and Gaie (2010) describe this ethic as essentially relational in a way that other Western approaches usually are not. However, I would argue that it is not necessarily so different from humanistic and existential ideas regarding authentic being, self-actualization and self-transcendence.

Taken together, the current study and findings show the importance of taking into account the role of culture, worldviews, and religion/spirituality, in research, theory development, and treatment interventions. Koltko-Rivera (2006) bridges cultural awareness, spirituality, self-transcendence, and psychology, when stating that "a culturally aware psychology recognizes that spirituality is a basic dimension of the human condition, as the variety of cultures of the world have as a common factor one or more motivational constructs similar to self-transcendence" (p.312). On a somewhat similar note, Einstein (1932) tied self-transcendence, spirituality/religiosity, and the world of science together, in describing the sense of the mysterious not only as "the deepest and most beautiful experience a person can have", but also as "the underlying principle of religion as well as of all serious endeavor in art and science" (n.p.). Recent empirical research on self-transcendent experiences, such as

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mindfulness, awe, flow, mystical and peak experiences, indicate that these are potent sources of prosocial behavior (Yaden et al., 2017, p.154). The findings from the current study illustrate that self-transcendence is relevant for understanding e.g., what motivates pro-social action in the wake of trauma and adversity, and might facilitate a richer and more inclusive understanding of human experience, coping and growth. It can also contribute to explain research findings of positive associations between spiritual or mystical experience, and psychological health (Koltko-Rivera, 2006, p.311).

Implications for research, policy, and practice

Faulkner (2017) points out that the current knowledge in the mental health sector is "dominated by professional knowledge to the exclusion of the knowledge based on lived experience can bring" (p.500). This might reflect a tradition of valuing "'objectivity', and the view that rigorous, scientifically based research can discover objective truth and meaning" (Beresford, 2005, p.6). An example of this, is that positive psychology, i.e., the scientific study of positive human functioning and flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014), managed to lift the interest and study of positive human functioning into mainstream psychology, through applying positivist, quantitative methods and claiming value neutrality (DeRobertis, 2016). Humanistic-existential psychology, on the other hand, holds a constructivist and subjective stance, mainly uses qualitative methods, and rejects the notion of value neutrality (DeRobertis, 2016). Over the years, a number of scholars have emphasized the potential for humanistic, existential and positive psychology to complement each other. For example, positive psychology has been criticized for ignoring the negative/tragic dimensions of life, for its claim of value neutrality, and for methodological narrowness (DeRobertis, 2016; Schneider, 2011). Here, Wong (2017) points out that existential psychology makes positive psychologists realize that human experience and well-being cannot be understood simply in terms of quantifiable behavior, and that it has to include the totality of human experience, both positive and negative (p.212).

Moreover, according to Wong (2017), "humanistic psychology's argument with mainstream psychology is not qualitative versus quantitative research, but whether participants rather than researchers should fashion the outcome" (p.3). That is, if researchers ask participants directly about their perspectives or reasons for doing something, the answers may question many of the widely accepted conclusions found in textbooks. Thus, such a simple participant-dominant method may revolutionize psychology research and challenge well-established psychology

findings (Wong, 2017, p.3). Asking participants directly about their experiences, theories, and ideas, combined with user involvement, was deemed the most appropriate approach for gaining relevant knowledge and acknowledge experience based expertise. One of the main reasons for 'giving a voice' to research participants through interviews, is the belief that they have the most knowledge and expertise about the research topic (Faulkner, 2017; Heath et al., 2009). Moreover, Rogers (1961) emphasized that we cannot understand human consciousness and the complexities and nuances of human meaning-making and behavior through methods derived from the natural sciences alone. Implication of the current study for research are to apply more holistic research approaches to human lives and nature, more use of qualitative inquiries and user involvement, and overall acknowledgement of experience based knowledge and expertise.

In relation to asylum policies and practice, the findings from the current study confirm earlier studies that show the negative effects of waiting, uncertainty, and passivity. Whether adversity triggers growth or vulnerability, depend on the coping resources available to the individual, including a supportive environment that is able to provide people with the resources, trust, and autonomy to develop and use their competencies (Updegraff & Taylor, 2000). In some aspects, asylum policies thus seem to work against people's health and well-being. Similar to what others have suggested, a central implications of the current findings for asylum policies, is to shorten waiting time and uncertainty. Moreover, it is essential to implement knowledge about what facilitates and hinders coping and growth, in the design of reception services and treatment interventions. The findings show that actively focusing on and working towards future goals, was central for motivation and coping. Thus, an important implication of the findings for policy, is to reduce waiting time, uncertainty, and forced passivity, e.g., through allowing people to do something active and meaningful while waiting for an answer.

In support of the above, and related to facilitating growth, is Hirad's (2018) description of forward movement - in thoughts, beliefs, and actions - as an overarching theme of refugee PTG. Similarly, Frankl (1959/1992, 1966) emphasized that meaning is to be found in some form of action and/or human encounters and relationships. In other words, individuals needs to actualize the potential meaning of their life, which primarily is to be found in the external world and not within the mind. Hobfoll et al. (2007) state that "reasserting the autonomy, sense of competence, and relations with others that are lost through trauma" (p.349) seldom can be achieved by using cognitive strategies alone, and hold that behavioral change is a

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necessary indicator of genuine growth. That is, individuals need to 'translate' their growth cognitions into growth actions for PTG to signify positive adaptation (Hobfoll et al., 2007). In relation to waiting time and asylum policy, being allowed to help others who suffer can provide experiences of successful coping, aid one's sense of self-efficacy, and increases the likelihood of experiencing compassion, e.g., through feeling that one's personal resources match the demands of the situation (Goetz et al., 2010, p.358). Moreover, interventions that facilitate pro-social engagement have the potential to illuminate personal resources and replace the passive, weak role of the victim with the active, strong role of helper (Frazier et al., 2013; Kumar, 2016; Lifton, 1980; Staub & Vollhardt, 2008; Ungar, 2012).

Moving from thoughts to action is also relevant for treatment interventions. Importantly, in this regard, it is somewhat limited what I can say based on the findings from this study, as it did not focus explicitly on treatment or clinical aspects, or included a clinical sample. Thus, implications for treatment should mainly be read as ideas or suggestions. Related to the above section, Linley (2003) points out that increased investment in the well-being of others may in itself lead to an improvement in adaptation among trauma survivors, evident in studies showing that higher levels of altruism are associated with lower levels of PTSD-symptomatology. Based on their findings, Kishon-Barash et al. (1999) suggest that "altruistic intentions may be important factors to consider in designing and implementing treatment programs for PTSD" (p.655). Joseph and Linley (2005) also suggest that PTSD-related distress might be reduced through clinicians fostering psychological well-being and growth, which might indirectly facilitate subjective well-being and thus reduce distress (p.269). Somewhat similarly, Frankl (1959/1992, 1966) described happiness as a 'by-product' of fulfilling a meaning, and self-actualization as a side-effect of self-transcendence. In other words, desired results – such as reducing suffering - might come indirectly, through focusing on other aspects of a person's life than the problem. In this regard, the findings from the current study illustrate the positive effects of focusing outward and forward, a point that might be transferable to other populations and/or interventions.

Tedeschi emphasize that while growth might come easier to some people than others, based on e.g., personality characteristics, it can also be facilitated (Luna, 2019). For example, Joseph (2011) developed the THRIVE model to facilitate growth, while Calhoun et al. (2010) developed expert companionship as a method for facilitating growth. According to Calhoun et al. (2010), "the likelihood of PTG may increase in this social setting of support, acceptance, and exploration of ideas about existential issues that is congruent with the client's distal and

proximate sociocultural contexts" (p.11). Joseph et al. (2012) and Sanki and O'Connor (2021) have come with a number of ideas and recommendations concerning how the development of growth can be facilitated in clinical practice. Moreover, Wong (2020) has outlined ideas for a more inclusive and integrative therapeutic approach that emphasize growth, i.e., integrative meaning therapy where he combines clinical, existential, and positive psychology.

Trauma informed care was not a topic in this study, but it is commonly recommended as an intervention for e.g., traumatized refugees. When applying trauma-informed practices to the care of young refugees, Miller et al. (2019) recommend that clinicians practice a strengths-based approach; create an immigrant-friendly healthcare environment; recognize that trauma may not end after migration; and advocate for their patients both in and outside the clinic. Moreover, Copping et al. (2010) emphasize that to be able to offer culturally competent trauma support, it is crucial to have an understanding of cultural conceptualizations of and approaches to treatment. And, as Jan Kizilhan points out, "you are not able to do psychotherapy only with modern ideas of psychotherapy founded in the West; you need to know the coping strategies which are part of the culture or even the religion (that people belong to)" (Ekin, 2018, n.p.). Thus, in clinical settings, assessment and empathy of trauma survivors' worldview and religiosity/spirituality is described as important for promoting health, coping and growth (Abraham et al., 2018). Conversely, a failure to acknowledge the significance of spirituality might negatively affect people's willingness to seek psychological help (Hall & Breland-Noble, 2011).

Avenues for further research

An overall recommendation for studies including refugees, and survivors of trauma and adversity in general, is to apply a strengths-based perspective informed by central principles from humanistic and existential psychology. It would also be interesting to see more use of second wave positive psychology (see e.g., Wong, 2017), which seeks to contribute to a more nuanced and inclusive positive psychology. This among other by moving away from a singular focus on quantitative, positivist research, and through integrating humanistic and existential themes.

Aspects of growth that needs further examination are the influences of culture, upbringing, world-views, and religiosity/spirituality on fundamental assumptions and coping. Moreover, experiences of long-term/continuous adversity versus single trauma might affect e.g., fundamental assumptions and growth differently, and this should be investigated further.

It would be interesting to see more studies examining self-transcendence, pro-sociality, and compassion as factors and outcomes of growth. One possibility would be to use Staub and Vollhardt's (2008) theory *altruism born of suffering*. The authors describe that there is a lack of systematic studies of how traumatic events motivate altruism and pro-social behavior, and of which factors that predict pro-social rather than anti-social responses to suffering (Staub & Vollhardt, 2008; Vollhardt, 2009). To my knowledge, this theory has not been used in studies with refugees.

The PTGI-X (Tedeschi et al., 2017) needs to be used in quantitative studies of growth among refugees. The PTGI-X was published by Tedeschi et al. (2017) as a revision of the PTGI, and includes items measuring existential and spiritual change/growth. However, it has not been used in studies with refugees.

Due to time and budget constraints, I was not able to recruit young people as researchers and do a full co-operative inquiry. However, an idea for future studies is to do this, i.e., develop a research approach that is grounded in the participants' context and in collaboration with people in that context (Borg et al., 2012).

Studies of adversarial growth among IDPs were excluded in the review (ch.9), both due to group differences which might affect growth, and to limit the scope. Yet, a separate review of existing studies is needed, as IDP's make up the largest percentage of the world's refugee population.

Epilogue

Think of others (Mahmoud Darwish)

As you prepare your breakfast, think of others
(do not forget the pigeon's food).
As you conduct your wars, think of others
(do not forget those who seek peace).
As you pay your water bill, think of others
(those who are nursed by clouds).
As you return home, to your home, think of
others
(do not forget the people of the camps).
As you sleep and count the stars, think of
others
(those who have nowhere to sleep).
As you liberate yourself in metaphor, think of
others
(those who have lost the right to speak).
As you think of others far away, think of
yourself
(say: "If only I were a candle in the dark").

If This Is a Man (Primo Levi)

You who live safe
In your warm houses,
You who find on returning in the evening,
Hot food and friendly faces:
Consider if this is a man
Who works in the mud
Who does not know peace
Who fights for a scrap of bread
Who dies because of a yes or a no.
Consider if this is a woman,
Without hair and without name
With no more strength to remember,
Her eyes empty and her womb cold
Like a frog in winter.
Meditate that this came about:
I commend these words to you.
Carve them in your hearts
At home, in the street,
Going to bed, rising;
Repeat them to your children,
Or may your house fall apart,
May illness impede you,
May your children turn their faces from you.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Table I: Reviewed studies: descriptives and key findings

Quantitative and mixed-methods studies (n=20).

Author (year)	Study- and sample characteristics	Outcome measures	Key findings
Acquaye (2017).	Cross-sectional. 444 adult Liberian former refugees and IDP. Age range 28-65 years. 45.7% in the 31–40 age range. 70.9% male. Religious: 99.0% (93.2% Christian, 6.1% Muslim).	PTGI. The War Trauma Screening Index (WTSI). The Revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R). The Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10). The Post-Traumatic Stress Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5).	PTGI mean: females=84.49, males=79.56. Females reporting significantly more growth than males. 79.1% met criteria for PTSD. No gender differences. Coexistence of PTG and PTSD. Finding indicate that people with dispositional optimism have a higher chance of experiencing growth after trauma than people who are pessimistic.
Acquaye et al. (2018).	Cross-sectional. 444 adult Liberian former refugees and IDP. Age range 28-65 years. 45.7% age 31–40. 70.9% male. Religious: 99% (93.2% Christian, 6.1% Muslim).	PTGI. PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5). Religious Commitment Inventory–10 (RCI-10).	PTGI mean: females = 84.49, males = 79.56 (same sample as Acquaye, 2017). Trauma and particularly religious commitment were statistically significant predictors of PTG. The results indicated that when religious commitment is great, PTG is low, demonstrating that a moderate level of religious commitment is necessary for PTG. The effect of trauma on PTG is stronger as religious commitment decreases. Religion served as a coping mechanism and provided social support that aided healing.
Ai et al. (2007).	Prospective study, 10-month follow up. 50 Kosovar war refugees resettled in USA. 54% male. Mean age 33 years, range 17-69. Muslim: 96%.	The 50-item Stress-Related Growth Scale. The 17-item PTSD Symptom Scale. The 27-item multidimensional coping scale. The 12-item Hope Scale. The Communal Traumatic Events Inventory.	Score on the 50-item Stress-Related Growth Scale not reported. No demographic correlates with either PTG or PTSD symptoms. High average trauma severity score. No significant reduction in PTS 10 months after resettlement. PTG and PTS not correlated. Coexistence of PTG and PTSD. Hope and cognitive coping positively associated with PTG. Avoidance coping negatively related with PTG. Behavior coping had no direct effect on growth (despite correlation with cognitive coping).
Cengiz, Ergun, and Çakıcı (2019).	310 Syrian refugees living in refugee camps in Turkey. Age: 38.1% between 18-29 years, 32.9% between 30-39 and 29% above 40.	PTGI. Impact of Events Scale-Revised (IES-R). Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ).	PTGI mean non-PTSD group: 56.68. PTGI mean PTSD-group: 62.54. 80 % were classified within the PTSD group. PTSD group: higher trauma and PTGI scores than the non-PTSD group. PTSD and PTG positively correlated, and co-existed.

		Connor and Davidson Resilience Scale (CDRISC)	Wish to return to home country and income variables were risk factors for PTSD.
	52.9% male		Resilience had a moderate positive correlation with growth.
Ersahin (2020).	805 Syrian refugees in Turkey Mean duration of Stay in Turkey: 6.17 years. 383 females, 329 males, 93 no-response Age range 19 to 77. Religious affiliation: 83.7% Muslim, 1.4% Christian; 0.4% Jewish; 0.6% Non-religious, 0.5% Other, 13.4% Missing	PTGI Impact of Events Scale-Revised (IES-R) Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ) The Brief-COPE Belief into Action Scale (BIAC)	PTGI mean = 49.11 Females scored slightly, but not significantly, higher on the PTGI than males (M=54.17 vs 51.15). No significant relationship between age and PTGI-scores. Higher levels of education corresponded to higher PTGI total scores. PTSD-scores represented a clinical concern for the 83% of the sample. Higher levels of PTS predicted higher levels of growth, indicating a positive linear relationship. Growth and PTS coexisted. Post-traumatic struggle predicted growth over relationships with others. Three-factor model of growth: Personal Strength, New Understandings & Appreciation of Life, and Relating to Others. Current income and perceived socioeconomic status (SES) did not correlate with PTGI scores, but perceived SES before the war negatively correlated with PTGI total scores. Emotion-focused coping hindered growth, while problem-focused coping promoted PTG, probably by helping individuals to be more active in rebuilding their lives, and seeking social support and religious togetherness. Strength of religiosity strongly related to overall PTG. When used as a coping mechanism, turning to religion predicted PTG over and above strength of religiosity itself. The strongest predictor of PTG was problem-focused coping, followed by intrusion symptoms signifying PTSD, perceived level of SES prior to the onset of war, trauma exposure load, strength of religiosity, and hyperarousal symptoms signifying PTSD.
Hussain and Bhushan (2011).	226 Tibetan refugees across two generations. 110 born in Tibet and later migrated to India, 116 born and brought up as refugees in India. 50% female, 50% male. Mean age 43.96 years.	PTGI. Refugee Trauma Experience Inventory. Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire. Impact of Events Scale.	PTGI mean = 76.68 Females reporting significantly more growth than males. Traumatic experiences significantly predicted PTS and PTG. PTS and PTG positively correlated. Generational differences in trauma, PTS, and PTG scores. Positive refocusing, refocus on planning, putting into perspective, and catastrophizing partially mediated the relationship between traumatic experiences and PTG.
Kira, Shuwiekh, Al Ibraheem, and Aljakoub (2018).	Cross-sectional. 502 Syrian IDPS and refugees (195 IDPs, 111 refugees in the Netherlands, 196 refugees in Egypt). 67.7% male. Age 17-78 (M=35.76). Religion: 96% Muslims, 4% Christians.	PTGI. The Cumulative Trauma Scale CTS-S (short form). Identity Salience Scale. The Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale (CAPS-2). Post-Cumulative Trauma-related Disorders Measure (P-CTD) (Complex PTSD). Emotion Regulation Questionnaire.	PTGI mean = 55.21 No significant sex differences in age, PTG, income, PTSD. High rate of elevated PTSD (28.7%) and complex PTSD (41.2%). PTG associated with lower depression, anxiety, somatization, and PTSD. Identity salience enhancing mental health and PTG. Reappraisal and positive appraisal mediate the positive role of identity salience on mental health and PTG. Negative appraisal and suppression mediate the negative effects of cumulative stressors and traumas on mental health and PTG. Negative appraisal associated with higher PTSD.

	Practicing religion: 36.4%, 63.6% not practicing.	Negative and Positive Tertiary Appraisal.	
Kopecki (2010)	PhD-dissertation 94 male and 109 female former Bosnian refugees, over the age of 18, who had resettled in Australia following the outbreak of war in Bosnia. 16 years after the trauma.	PTGI. The Direct and Indirect War Experiences Scales. The Posttraumatic Stress Diagnostic Scale. The Test of Self-Conscious Affect 3. The World Assumptions Scale. The COPE Scale.	PTGI mean not reported. Females reporting significantly more growth than males. Age at the time of trauma had a strong relationship to PTG, with younger participants experiencing more PTG than older participants. Almost a third experiencing high levels of distress, indicative of PTSD. Severity rather than number of trauma experiences might influence development of PTSD (weak relationship between number of events and PTSD). PTG and PTS co-existed in some participants. Moderate negative relationship between PTG and PTSD symptom severity. Positive world assumptions associated with higher PTG. Results highlight the importance of active, problem-focused coping strategies in PTG. Four-factor PTGI-structure. New Possibilities and Personal Strength loaded on one factor. Spiritual change weakly or not correlated with all independent variables. Not surprising, as participants were from a largely secular society. Time since trauma might be an important factor in the development of growth.
Kroo and Nagy (2011).	Cross-sectional. 53 Somali refugees living in Hungarian reception centers. Settled refugee status. 44 men, 9 women. Age: 83% between 18–29.	PTGI (with added open-ended item: significant life changes) Separation and distance from family. Type of trauma experienced. The revised version of the Life Orientation Test (LOT-R). The Adult Trait Hope Scale. Religiosity and religious change: five-item scale. The Brief Religious Coping Scale. Open-ended question assessing meaning making.	PTGI mean = 68.92. Males reporting significantly more growth than females (71 vs 58.6) Trauma type (having endured forced labor but not imprisonment) was significantly related to lower PTG. Satisfaction with living conditions not significantly related to PTGI score. Family status and having information or contact with family not significantly related to PTG. Hope, religiosity, negative religious coping, and satisfaction with perceived social support positively related to PTG. Cultural characteristics related to personal growth: importance of family in appreciating life; emphasis of a moral approach to life; value of respect; sincere gratitude; role of religion in processing, accepting, and coping with life events. Further categories of growth: Discovering and experiencing essential human values. Positive personal changes. Discovering the great contrast of present and earlier life. 73.6% rated themselves as a great deal religious. Central in coping and thriving. Changes in religiosity all involved a strengthening. Negative religious coping: moderate positive correlation with total PTGI score. Positive religious coping: significantly positively related to only Relating to Others. Religiosity: significantly related to total PTGI score and the Spiritual Change subscale.
Ochu, Davis, Magyar-Russell, O'Grady, and Aten (2018).	Cross-sectional. 407 adult IDP's and refugees 55.8% male, 44% female. Age range 18–76. M=36.25.	PTGI. Brief RCOPE. Heartland Forgiveness Scale. Impact of Event Scale–Revised.	PTGI mean = 74.90 Males reported more growth than females. No difference in PTSD. Trauma type: directly exposed survivors scored higher on PTS and lower on PTG relative to indirectly exposed survivors. High levels of religious coping. Positive religious coping positively related to PTG and PTS, negative religious coping positively related to PTS and inversely related to PTG.

	70.8% unemployed. Religion: 91.4% Christian, 4.2% Muslim		Dispositional forgiveness positively related to both positive religious coping and PTG. Two of the strongest predictors of PTG: problem-focused coping, and having positive perspectives of own traumatic experiences.
Powell, Rosner, Butollo, Tedeschi, and Calhoun (2003).	Bosnia and Herzegovina, two subgroups of 75 each randomly selected from two samples of 97 former refugees and 104 (former) displaced adults. Age range 16 to 65. Age groups: 16-30, 31-45, 46-65. 3.5 years after the war.	PTGI. The Posttraumatic Diagnostic Scale (PDS). The Checklist for War Related Experiences (CWE).	PTGI mean = 44.10. Considerably lower PTGI-scores than reported in most studies on other kinds of trauma. No significant sex difference in PTGI-score, or in PTS-symptoms. Younger people reported considerably more growth than older. No connection between overall PTG and number of stressful events or PTS-symptoms. Former refugees reported significantly more growth than IDP, had experienced significantly fewer traumatic events. Sample membership a better predictor of growth than number of stressful events. Identified a three-factor model (consisting of the three broad categories originally identified of PTG): Changes in Self/Positive Life Attitude. Philosophy of Life. Relating to Others Factor 1 negatively associated with PTSD-symptoms. Give some support to earlier findings that a perceived permanent change for the worse predicts PTSD symptoms. The PTGI-factor "relating to others" had a weak, but significant, positive correlation with PTS-symptoms.
Rizkalla and Segal (2018).	Cross-sectional. 250 Syrian refugees living in Jordan Age: 19+, m=35.74. 54.6% female. Religion: 95.6% Muslim. Religiosity: 11.3% secular, 43.3% traditional, 36.7% religious, 8.8% very religious. Months in camps prior to moving: M=2.66. Months resided in host community: M=14.32	PTGI. The Modified Mini Screen (NYS OASAS) for psychotic disorders. The Harvard Trauma Questionnaire. The War Events Questionnaire. The K6 screen for affective disorders. The M.I.N.I. Global well-being rating (1=poor, 2=fair, 3=good).	PTGI mean = 51.36 42.3% PTSD, 57.6% mental illness. PTSD scores not a significant factor in either well-being or PTG. Economic status one of the major obstacles in coping with new life. Enhanced PTG associated with (in order of importance) better income, greater use of NGO, absence of psychosis and affective disorder.
Rosner and Powell (2006).	Same sample as Powell et al. (2003). Age range 16-65, m=36.7. Religion: 85.3% Muslim. 3.5 years after the war.	PTGI. The Checklist of War-Related Events (CWE). The PTDS (PTSD-symptoms). The Beck Depression Inventory. The Symptom-Checklist-90 revised (SCL-90-R). The Coping Inventory of Stressful Situations (CISS).	PTGI mean = 44.10 (same sample as Powell et al., 2003). Higher income and having a secure place to live did not contribute to growth. Weak dose-response relationship between exposure to traumatic events and PTG. Some aspect of having been a refugee rather than an IDP contributes to growth. Positive correlation between all coping styles and adversarial growth, in terms of increased value given to relationships with others. Significant positive connection between the interpersonal factor of the PTGI and PTS, general distress, and depression, indicating that those suffering the most evaluate positive relationships more highly.
Simsir and Dilmac (2018).	Cross-sectional.	PTGI.	PTGI mean = 73.33 (not reported, but based on reported mean on the PTGI-subscales: New possibilities =16.87. Relationships with

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	303 Syrian refugees living in Turkey. Age: 18 to 67. 65.3% female. Time since trauma: 1+ year.	Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. The Human Values Scale	others =24.04. Personal strength =14.38. Appreciation of life =10.51. Spiritual development =7.53). The most important independent variable affecting PTG was values. Secondly, perceived social support.
Sleijpen, Haagen, Mooren, and Kleber (2016).	Cross-sectional. 111 adolescent refugees and asylum seekers living in the Netherlands. Age: 12–17 (M=14.5). 51% girls. Religious beliefs: Christian (37%), Muslim (59%). Status: Refugee (31%), asylum seeker (69%). Lived on average 3.4 years in the Netherlands; 31% granted asylum during this period.	The revised Posttraumatic Growth Inventory for children (PTGI-C-R). PTEs measured by a 26-item questionnaire based on the UCLA PTSD Reaction Index DSM-IV and part I (trauma events) of the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire. PTSD symptoms: the Children's Revised Impact of Event Scale (CRIES-13). The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). The Life Orientation Test. The Satisfaction with Life Scale.	PTGI-C-R: scoring range 0-30. Mean score: 20.2, indicating an average response of some perceived change. 46% of answers recorded in the highest PTGI response category, indicating a lot of perceived change. 14% in the lowest response category, indicating no change. PTGI total score much higher than the average outcome of a representative sample of Dutch youngsters. No significant sex differences in PTGI-score. No significant relations between socio-demographic characteristics and PTG. High levels of PTSD symptoms: 50% a probable PTSD diagnosis. PTG and PTSD symptoms coexisted, but were not related. PTSD positively related to total number of PTEs. PTEs did not significantly affect PTG. PTG positively related to satisfaction with life (SWL). Dispositional optimism and social support positively related to SWL and positively predicted PTG. Socio-demographic variables, e.g., length of stay and not having residency, had a negative relationship with SWL.
Ssenyonga, Owens, and Olema (2013).	Cross-sectional. 426 Congolese refugees living in Uganda (resettlement camp). 51.6% female. Mean age 35 years. 54.7% last displaced in 2008. 2.17 displacements.	PTGI. The 25-item Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC). Posttraumatic Diagnostic Survey (PDS).	PTGI mean: no-PTSD group: 64.96. PTSD group: 65.02. Prevalence of PTSD: 61.7%. Dose-effect relationship between trauma load and number of displacements, and PTSD. PTSD symptom severity negatively associated with PTG. PTG protected against PTSD. Resilience, PTG, number of displacements and trauma load were significant predictors of the severity of PTS-symptoms. No significant difference between refugees with and without PTSD in terms of resilience or PTG.
Taher and Allan (2020).	Mixed methods Syrian refugees living in the UK (fleeing Syria after 2011). Quantitative study: 54 participants, 57.4% male. Age range 21 to 45, mean age 29.02. Qualitative study: interviews with 5 of the participants with highest PTGI scores.	PTGI Semi-structured interviews. Five main questions, each exploring a specific area of growth, and other prompt questions.	PTGI mean for the whole sample: 70.74. 67% of participants identified themselves as middle class, might have influenced PTGI-scores positively PTGI mean for the 5 participants in the qualitative study: 84.8. Interview findings of experiences within the five areas of growth : Valuing others more: more open and less judgmental, increased appreciation of others. Pursuing a new career path: having higher career ambitions and a more meaningful career. Discovering inner strength: discovering unprecedented strength, increased independence and self-acceptance. Appreciation of life and detachment from it: appreciation of life, acceptance of death. Strengthened belief: choosing to believe, strengthened belief in the afterlife.
Tekie (2018).	PhD-dissertation	PTGI.	PTGI mean not reported.

	135 Eritrean refugees residing in Europe Age: 18 to 56 years (M = 30.14). Male = 95. Mean residence in current country = 3.6 years.	Life Events Checklist for DSM-5 (LEC-5). PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5). Post Migration Living Difficulties Scale (PMLD). Hopkins Symptom Checklist-25 (HSCL-25). Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ). Integration of Stressful Life Experiences Scale (ISLES). Social Provisions Scale (SPS).	Lower educational level associated with lower PTGI scores (m=59.13), while higher education level associated with higher PTGI scores (m=74.10). High levels of anxiety and depression (around 70%). 85% showed symptoms of PTSD. PTSD not significantly related to PTG and the number of traumatic life events. Social support was not a significant moderator between PTSD symptoms and PTG, but was a unique predictor of PTG after controlling for PTSD symptoms. Average scores on meaning in life was significantly related with PTG scores. When levels of meaning decrease, the relationship between traumatic events and PTSD-symptoms becomes positive. Findings strongly support the relationship between post-migration living difficulties and symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, and depression.
Teodorescu et al. (2012).	Cross-sectional. 55 psychiatric outpatients with a refugee background, living in Norway. 58% men. Age range 21- 61. M age men: 44, women: 39.3. Mean time in Norway: 16.7 years, all permanent residence. Religion: Christian 16.4%, Muslim 63.6%, Other 3.6%, no religion 16.4%. Mean time since trauma: 17.7 years. Main diagnostic groups: Affective (80%), anxiety (94.5%) and substance use (12.7%) disorders.	PTGI-SF. SCID-PTSD. MINI. IES-R. HSCL-25-depression scale. WHOQOL-Bref. Questions about: social network, social integration measure, employment status, religious affiliation.	PTGI-SF mean = 22.6, equals 47.4 on the PTGI. All reported PTG. 30.9 % reported a very great degree, yet the total amount of growth was low. No significant relationships between PTG and demographic variables. The majority reported PTSD symptoms and depressive symptoms at clinically significant levels. Quality of life well below the threshold for 'life satisfaction' standard. PTG had medium to strong negative correlations with PTS and depressive symptoms. Some support that PTG is negatively associated with psychopathological symptoms. PTG had the strongest association with several domains of quality of life, while PTS-symptoms had the least. Post-migration stressors moderately negatively correlated with PTG and quality of life, positively correlated with psychopathology. Significant negative correlation between PTG and PTSD symptoms in those exposed to traumatic events many years ago, suggesting that passage of time aids in the development of growth negatively related to psychopathology.
Umer and Elliot (2019)	Mixed methods. Syrian, Palestinian, Sudanese and Kurdish refugees in the UK 6 females, 10 males Age range 18–60 Had been in the UK for 1 year or less	PTGI A narrative writing guide informed by Charles Snyder's Hope theory, specifically centered on hope's five tenets, namely Goals, Pathways, Agency, Barriers, and Thought and feelings, was produced for the narrative research task.	PTGI total mean not reported. Focused on five high-PTGI (scores 79-108) and five low- PTGI (scores 40-55) participants for further in-depth probing and comparison concerning Snyder's five tenets of hope. Findings strongly endorse that PTG is associated with hope and that fostering hope can lead to higher levels of growth. Low PTGI associated with short term goals, preoccupation with pessimistic thoughts, thoughts about going back home, and living in a constant state of fear, which often curtails the pursuit of goals. High PTGI associated with long-term goals, indulging in positive thoughts, higher will-full thinking, and expanding options through actively seeking various opportunities.

Qualitative studies (n=18).

Author (year)	Study- and sample characteristics	Key findings
Abraham, Lien, and Hanssen (2018)	• 18 female Eritrean refugees who had lived in Norway for 1-8 years. • All granted asylum and living in asylum reception centers. • Age range 18–60. • Two focus group interviews with 4 participants in each group, and 10 individual semi-structured in-depth interviews. • Content analysis, within hermeneutic framework.	• All interviewees reported a multitude of difficulties and traumatic experiences before, during and after forced migration. Life in asylum centers experienced as stressful, and 'endless waiting' for news of transfer to a municipality in addition to prior trauma experiences were described as very difficult. • Support and positive attitudes from center leaders and staff gave strength to cope. Even more important was support from fellow Eritrean refugees. • Coping strategies: future orientation, positive thinking, social support, acceptance of psychological symptoms. • Resilience was associated with having a dynamic and multidimensional understanding of health. • Interpersonal relations was among the major coping strategies. However, when residents are moved, they lose their proxy 'family', which may produce renewed separation traumas and create an obstacle to PTG. • Religious belief aided coping and contributed to endurance and hope for the future, helped establish social networks, and promoted a future orientation.

Copelj, Gill, Love, and Crebbin (2017)	• 6 young adults from a refugee background (4 different countries), who had lived in Australia for 5-18 years (mean 13.16).
	• 3 men, 3 women.
	• Age range 24-34.
	• Individual semi-structured in-depth interviews.
	• Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).
		• Based on the findings, a model of the growth process was derived which included four key interconnected stages, all influenced by pre- and post migration experiences:
		  o Appreciation of life opportunities (hope, optimism, determination, ambition).
		  o Increase in self-belief (identification of personal strengths, development of positive bi-cultural identity).
		  o Strengthening of cultural and social connectedness (importance of social support, prioritizing of important life values).
		  o Proactivity (engagement with meaningful careers, acceptance).
		• Successful migration experiences appeared to be based on having an openness to new opportunities, the realization of inner strengths through facing challenges, connectedness to social and family structures, and a proactive action orientation.
		• The three common domains assessed by quantitative measures were supported in the current study: enhancement of relationships (current sample: strengthening of socio-cultural support), new self-perceptions (current study: increase in self-awareness) and changes in life philosophy and purpose in life (current study: proactivity).
		• The findings highlighted additional socio-cultural and behavioral components of PTG that are not currently captured by popular quantitative measures, namely strengthening of social and cultural supports, and proactivity.

Copping, Shakespeare-Finch, and Paton (2010)	• Two samples, total of 38 participants (White-Australian sample: 27, Sudanese-Australian sample: 11). • Narrative, episodic interview style addressing broad topics for discussion. • Constant comparison analysis, Grounded Theory.	• Sudanese-Australian sample: giving and receiving social support, and standing together aided resilience. • Difference between the White-Australian and Sudanese-Australian experience of life crises: the use of religious or spiritual coping and meaning making in the latter group. • Whereas the White-Australian sample were more likely to see themselves as being stronger because of what they experienced, the Sudanese-Australian sample cited strength, hope and determination as reasons for their survival, i.e., coping mechanisms rather than growth outcomes. • Religious changes, Relationships with Others, Strength, Appreciation of Life, and Compassion were articulated, but as cultural values that existed prior to the escalation of suffering. • The Sudanese-Australian sample articulated a sense of New Possibilities, with positive focus on staring a new life, and not wasting new opportunities. • For the White-Australian sample it appeared that PTG was a major outcome of the meaning making process, and there was a focus on the benefits that could be gained from the experience, while the Sudanese-Australian sample did not freely volunteer benefits that they had perceived, and very

		- rarely say that they had changed something about themselves. - Possible that what we see as PTG in the west is normal for these participants; not discovered post crisis. - The notion of survival despite suffering described (by authors) as ingrained in Sudanese culture.
Ferriss and Forrest-Bank (2018)	12 Somali refugees resettled in USA - Focus group interviews, two gender specific groups with 6 participants each. - Interviews guided by six overarching questions addressing the domains of PTG. - Thematic analysis .	- Sources of strength: perseverance in staying hopeful about the future, and a foundational belief in God, which helped participants make sense of the past and stay hopeful about the future. - Sources of hardship: social isolation, and stress generated by the loss of living in a collectivistic culture. Western culture and values of individualism a major barrier in establishing community, support systems and friendships. - PTG and its five domains congruent with participants' perceptions of growth. Also differences due to dissonance between the PTG construct and Somali culture, rooted in collectivism and Islamic beliefs and practices. E.g., "New possibilities" somewhat contradictory to belief in destiny, and "Personal strength" challenging to translate because strength lies in the family, and not in the individual. - Incongruent factors largely related to differences between Somali culture and the Western culture within which the PTG-theory was developed. - Hard to distinguish between before and after trauma, as many had endured multiple and ongoing trauma. - Religion did not emerge as an area of growth or change, but was a constant source of strength and hope. - Results indicate tenacity for life rooted in strong cultural values.
Gilpin-Jackson (2013)	- PhD-dissertation. 12 war survivors from six African countries, now living in Canada. 6 men and 6 women. - Age range 25-62 years. - Individual life story/narrative interviews. 6 published autobiographical texts of survivors living in Canada, US, and England. - Narrative analysis, thematic analysis.	- Data analysis identified six themes of transformation: Resonance as transformative learning moment; Realizing purpose in the post-war narrative; Social consciousness as an outcome of post-war learning; Determination as the will to achieve post-war goals; Spiritual and moral development; Value of life. - The study provides evidence to support: Cross-cultural application of the PTG model in African contexts; The role of spiritual development in the process and as an outcome of PTG; Preparedness as a psychological outcome of PTG; Resilience as a necessary but insufficient condition for growth. - Participants were actively seeking, finding, reminding, and constructing personal and collective benefits from their experiences and situation. Meaning making was signified by taking a philosophical orientation to the trauma, and awareness of the relative advantage they have compared to others. Future focus important, as well as social relationships, as trauma disclosure required trust and connection. - Findings included examples in accordance with all five PTGI-factors. In addition to the traditional PTG changes in relationships and in self, participants described a connection to humanity and increased awareness of issues of social justice, and increased adaptability, tolerance, and a desire to live at peace with all. Growth was signified by engagement in social action to help others. - Contextual influences (both pre- and post flight) impacted participants' ability to grow. Those who had positive immigration integration experiences did not elaborate on its impact on their narratives. For those who had less positive experiences, the immigration narrative was integral to their growth stories.
Hirad (2018)	- PhD-dissertation. - Refugees from Iran, Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq, resettled in the US. 13 participants had lived in the US for less than 1 year, 17 for one year or more. - Age range 25-67. 13 females, 17 males. 23 qualitative interviews with 7 couples and 16 individuals. - Constructionist grounded theory.	- The data analysis identified one overarching theme, **forward movement**, as participants described their thoughts and behavior in alignment with a desire to move forward from their traumatic experiences. They did so through what was identified as **five growth themes**: **Context awareness**: awareness of broader and local contexts, comparing previous circumstances with present and better circumstances, acknowledging life's ups and downs. Helped gain perspective and appreciation. Engaged in meaning making processes, which expanded perspective, gave purpose and aided growth. **Tolerating uncertainty**: taking risks, managing loss. Experienced growth despite the pain and void from loss, and

		in addition to ongoing distress and trauma. Having to start from zero – realizing own strengths, learning new skills, fostering growth.
		o **Spiritual/religious attunement**: relying on faith, prayer, and God's will to overcome challenges.
		o **Relationship to others**: relying on community and each other, prioritizing the benefit of others (in new country and country of origin) over the self – collectivistic cultural value. Focusing on others, sacrificing themselves, and/or living for the benefit of others contributed to personal growth. Equally valuable to give to others, as to receive from others.
		o **Integrating into society**: strong work ethics, learning new skills, awareness of gains (both outcomes and contributors to growth). A strong desire to integrate into new society. Appreciation of life.
Hussain and Bhushan (2013)	• 12 Tibetan refugees living in India. 5 born and raised in exile, 7 born in Tibet and brought to India during childhood. • Age range 25-46, mean=35 years. • 8 male, 4 female. • Individual semi-structured in-depth interviews. • Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).	• Co-occurrence of distress and growth commonly reported. Those who thrived had a clear idea about themselves and their life purpose. A constant search for meaning in life directed many to restore their life and self in positive ways, and a more meaningful life was experienced by those concerned with (supporting) others in need. • Three major PTG-themes: changes in outlook (acceptance, responsibility, compassion, optimism), personal strength (self-reliance, perception of self as survivor, experience of success and achievement), and more intimate and meaningful relationships (family, community). • Findings show that Tibetan cultural and religious factors provide necessary resources for coping and thrust for PTG. Worldviews mostly shaped by Buddhism, where PTG and resilience exist, as suffering in life is considered a rule rather than an exception. Compassion, acceptance of life events based on the law of karma, and perceiving self as survivor were clearly outcomes of Buddhist upbringing. • Personal suffering provided new insights and spiritual maturity, sensitized many to broaden their consciousness, and made them more inclusive in their empathy and compassion. • Personal strength gave courage to navigate through life and increased trauma tolerance.
Kim and Lee (2009)	• 5 North Korean refugees living in South Korea for 6 months to 6 years. • Age range 20-39. • 5-10 individual in-depth interviews with each participant, and various personal records from the participants: travel diaries, books, e-mails, family interviews. • Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).	• All participants made comments suggesting that they experienced PTG through positive coping resources, even after suffering considerable psychological trauma and post-migration distress. • Recovery factors: connection with locals an important recovery factor for psychological trauma. Participants reached out to locals for help, opened their hearts to them and tried to make a strong network. Also sought to repair disintegrated family relationships. • One strategy used during the early stages of post-migration, was a conscious effort to detach from being a North Korean, which could be seen as defense against being reminded of painful experiences.
Maung (2018)	• PhD-dissertation. • 11 female Burmese refugees resettled in the US. • Age range 22-57, mean 35 years • Length of stay from 3 to 11 years, mean 7.72 years. • Individual semi-structured in-depth interviews • Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) analysis	• **Four PTG-categories**: o Greater appreciation of life and changes in life's priorities (acceptance of events beyond one's control, including life's challenges and hardships) o Sense of strength and personal limitations (perceptions of self as survivors, deepened self-confidence gave courage to take risks and actively shape their future in meaningful ways) o Spiritual and religious development (continued or deepened faith) o Interpersonal development (growth in compassion, empathy, and desire to help others. Deepened sense of personal agency to help and empower others. Personal narratives indicated that those who already engaged in volunteer and advocacy work to assist others in their community experienced a deepened sense of personal fulfillment). • Narratives of PTG and change co-existed with memories and experiences of trauma and suffering. • Coping strategies: social support, hopefulness and aspirations for the future, personal self-care, religious and spiritual coping, and cognitive coping (attended to the positive parts of their narratives rather than on feelings or thoughts associated with negative stressors. By normalizing their

		experiences, participants learned to accept the reality of their present circumstances)
McCormack and Tapp (2019)	• 4 adults (1 male, 3 females) who all experienced refugee status as children and now have attained citizenship in a Western country. • Age range 25–46 • Individual semi-structured in-depth interviews • Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)	• Traumatic experiences provided a catalyst for newly defined character traits of resourcefulness, gratitude, reciprocation, empathy, a future-oriented vision and a philosophy of giving forward. However, it was born of redefining human suffering that is unimaginable to many. • Commonly reported psychological and interpersonal difficulties resulting from trauma was not reported. • Analysis of the interview material identified one superordinate theme, Violation and hope, and three subordinate themes: Violent detachment, refugee identity, and resourcefulness and reciprocity. One divergent: Clashing identities. • Participants rejected a 'refugee victim' identity, which allowed a passion for directing their lives forward, promoting hope and optimism. • Avoidant coping was a positive long-term tool, crucial in defining a future oriented life philosophy. • Trust in own problem-solving capabilities and survival competencies became an existential view advocating autonomy, choice and the rejection of an external locus of control. • Participants continued to contribute to society, supporting a policy of multiculturalism as one that accepts refugees and is beneficial for the betterment of all society. • Implications: validating the self-valuing domains of resourcefulness, hope, giving forward, and gratitude as juxtaposed with PTG may facilitate ongoing psychological well-being.
Prag and Vogel (2013)	• 9 adolescent Shan-migrants living in Thailand (forced migration at the age 4-12). • 4 men, 5 women. • Age range 16-19. • Photography workshops with discussions, for 5 weeks, 1 day per week. • Follow-up after 1 year of 6 of the 9 participants. Informal interviews and questionnaires. • Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)	• Six themes highlighting healthy coping and adjustment. The first five themes mirrored the common PTG-domains, while noteworthy cultural difference was reflected in the sixth theme: The Ability to Articulate the Social Narrative. PTG was observed in the desire for mastery of the story of own people. Not one mention of a personal narrative, all stories were in the context of the larger plight. • Participants moving from identifying as 'victims' to 'advocates' for their community. • Participants appeared to perceive the inclusion of cultural identity as just as important, if not slightly more important, than individual identity traits. • Findings regarding eastern cultural identification with the community, rather than the individual, shows the importance of a collective identity in the healing process.
Sesay (2015)	• PhD-dissertation. • 6 Sierra Leonean refugee women living and working in the U.K. • Age range 25-60. • Individual semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, participants' observation • Narrative analysis.	• Among the most important factors contributing to resilience and Adversity-Activated Development (AAD) was the assumption of new roles; e.g., community leaders, religious leaders, negotiators. • Participants gained personal confidence from new opportunities, and valued own ability to help others. • Participants were clearly shaken by their experiences, but realized that their losses and trauma did not prevent them from accessing previous strengths. Also became aware of own strengths and skills because of what they went through, and from re-inventing themselves. • Religion an important factor that provided continuous motivation and positive structure, and helped participants turn the negative into positive. Provided religious guidance, was a source of comfort, relief and continuity, provided a sense of belonging, and aided social community and support.
Shakespeare-Finch, Schweitzer, King, and Brough (2014)	• 25 refugees from Burma who had lived up to 1 year in Australia. • 12 men, 13 women. • Age range 20-58. • Individual semi-structured in-depth interviews. Interview protocol adapted from the Refugee Distress and Coping Interview Protocol (Miller et al., 2002, open-ended questions about life before, during, after flight). • Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)	• PTG-themes: Appreciation of life. Personal strength. Changed priorities. Religious and spiritual change. Compassion for others. • Dimensions of growth mainly about changes in important priorities and a heightened appreciation for all aspects of life. • Newfound personal strength - learning and developing as a human being - and the relativity of challenges compared to those endured before fleeing. • A strong thread of religious beliefs acting as a support and source of strength across time • Family and friends as source of purpose and hope, and as social support. Participants derived a sense of meaning and

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		purpose from their family and through involvement in their community.
		• Survival enhanced compassion and concern for the welfare of others, and a sense of responsibility, capacity and agency to use own experiences to help others.
		• The strong endorsement of compassion and responsibility is not always apparent in Western research; only one of the 21 PTGI-items asks about compassion and that item speaks of accepting the compassion of others rather than being compassionate to others.
Şimşir, Dilmaç, and Özteke Kozan (2018)	• 15 adult Syrian refugees living in Turkey • 10 women, 5 men. • Participants came to Turkey between the age of 18 and 40. • Time since last war experience: 1-4 years. • Individual semi-structured in-depth interviews. • Phenomenological study, content analysis.	• **Data analysis identified seven themes related to PTG. Themes contributing to growth:** o Coping strategies (reading/studying, religious coping, patience, self-consolation, hope for future, adaptation). Social support (from family, friends, locals). • **Themes describing growth outcomes:** o Learned pain experiences (stronger, importance of homeland and freedom, patience, responsibility). o Relating to others (increased commitment, tolerance, toughness, and compassion). o New possibilities (education, language learning, living in a safe and peaceful environment, meeting new people and cultures). o Religious/spiritual change (increased closeness to God, increased worship, stronger religious faith). o Changed priorities (building a homeland, education, language learning, peace and security, spirituality).
Sutton, Robbins, Senior, and Gordon (2006)	• 8 unaccompanied refugee minors living in the UK 1+ year before interview. • 1 male, 7 female. • Age range 16-20. • Individual semi-structured in-depth interviews. • Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)	• **Four superordinate growth themes with sub-themes:** o Impact of trauma: A search for meaning. Dislocation and loss. o Variables influencing the process of positive change: Social support. Activity. Religion. o Positive outcomes: Positive changes in self-perception. Personal strength. Desire to live a purposive life. o Dissonance: Co-existence of ongoing distress and positive changes. • Putting the trauma into words helped participants to process what had happened. The availability of someone to confide worries to and who could offer comfort was important. • Participants described a desire to live a purposive life, including altruistic goals of wanting to help others. Engaging in activities where they could be of use to others also fostered self-esteem and self-efficacy. • Religious beliefs served as a guide for how to lead one's life, served to meet emotional needs, and facilitated development of meaning and comprehension in coming to terms with trauma. • In sum, the findings highlight the important role social support, activity and religious beliefs play in facilitating PTG. The role of religious beliefs in providing guidance and in meeting emotional needs is not well documented in Tedeschi and Calhoun's model, where emphasis is on the function of religious beliefs in influencing cognitive processing and the development of meaning and comprehensibility.
Taylor et al. (2020)	• Twelve asylum-seekers and refugees from 7 countries, based in the United Kingdom (UK). • Nine women, three men. • Age range 28 - 61. • Length of stay in the UK: 5 to 21 years. • Individual semi-structured in-depth interviews. Two-stage interview process • Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)	• Characteristics relating to resilience and PTG: gratitude, religious or spiritual beliefs, helping and being of service to others, acceptance, and awareness of personal change and growth (resilient, confident). • Religion a significant source of psychological support, promoted coping and resilience. • The importance of acceptance, particularly toward situations that were not controllable, in personal growth and processing painful experiences was a significant finding. • A common coping strategy was being of service to others, and findings implicate that it may be beneficial to harness these strong altruistic impulses by allowing asylum seekers and refugees to contribute to society, rather than being excluded and stigmatized. • PTG is most likely to occur once traumatic symptoms have diminished to some degree. Participants generally perceived a lack of social support, with feelings of alienation, stigmatization and perceived hostility from authorities, with a lack of access to legal and support services. The protracted nature of the asylum-seeking process was a major source of

		ongoing stress, frustration, and anxiety, and can be viewed as obstructive to diminishing of symptoms that might facilitate PTG.
		• The participants' experiences involved extreme suffering, including torture, attempted murder, and the murder of relatives. The fact that there was still some evidence of growth supports the finding from previous research that PTG is possible following the extreme trauma.
Uy and Okubo (2018)	• 12 Cambodian community leaders who survived the Khmer Rouge genocide, now living in the US • 8 men, 4 women • Age range 33 to 81. • Individual semi-structured in-depth interviews. • Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)	• 9 core themes capturing the process and outcome of PTG: • **1. The process of PTG**: 1. Separation, loss, enslavement, other dehumanizing experiences. 2. Distress and psychological responses to trauma. 3. Coping (acceptance; passive and active avoidance; spirituality, faith, and religion; and hope, positive thinking, optimism, will to live). 4. Healing and meaning making (resources, education, strong support; exposure and identification with other trauma survivors; trauma disclosure and narrative reconstruction). • **2. The outcome of PTG**: 1. Gratitude and greater appreciation of life. 2. New priorities and goals. 3. Importance of family and interpersonal relationships. 4. Increased personal strength. 5. Effective leadership. • Sharing traumatic experiences with others provided an opportunity to connect and form a support network • Hard work, hope and optimism, and education as foundations for recovery and growth, along with community activism. • PTG-levels were high, particularly positive changes in interpersonal relationships, new priorities and goals, appreciation of life, personal strength, and leadership effectiveness. Found meaning and purpose through political and community involvement, and in caring for family and others. • Common growth outcomes were gratitude, higher emotional connection, more intimacy in interpersonal relationships, feeling more kind and compassionate, and experiencing higher tolerance, flexibility, and strength to manage distress in life. • PTG did not take place immediately following trauma. PTS-symptoms was experienced for prolonged periods, and participants did not actively engage in processing trauma until years after the war, when resources were more available and immediate needs of survival had decreased.
Wehrle, Klehe, Kira, and Zikic (2018)	• 31 refugees from 6 countries, now living in Germany in average for 2 years and 4 months (entry dates varying from 2005-2016). • 24 men, 7 women • Average age 28 years • All held a work permit and tried to integrate into the German labor market, working in full- or part-time jobs. • Individual semi-structured in-depth interviews. • Thematic Analysis	• Resourcing strategies related to growth: proactively created opportunities, turned chance social encounters into social resources, and circumvented barriers hindering integration. • Action-, rather than only cognition-oriented coping responses. Taking action and actively addressing the negative may advance growth. • Participants actively sought to build better relationships with their in- and out-groups to gain acceptance for and protect their identities. • Needing to depend on oneself and own abilities to overcome challenges can foster personal growth. • Personal growth: more confident, mentally stronger, self-efficient, more resilient and aware of resiliency. • Career-related growth: gaining confidence in one's skills, growing internally motivated.

Appendix 2: Competence group: information and contract

Informasjon til medlemmer i kompetansegruppen

Kort om meg og min bakgrunn

Mitt navn er Mira Elise Glaser Holthe, jeg er 34 år gammel og kommer opprinnelig fra Trondheim. Jeg er nå ansatt som doktorgradsstipendiat ved Høgskolen i Innlandet Lillehammer frem til 2021, for å gjennomføre prosjektet som denne kompetansegruppen vil være en del av. Tittelen på doktorgradsprosjektet er «Vekst gjennom motgang? Unge flyktningers fortellinger om styrker, ressurser, læring og utvikling gjennom samspill med omgivelsene».

Fra tidligere har jeg mastergrad i sosial- og samfunnspsykologi, og har blant annet jobbet med forskning om enslige mindreårige asylsøkere i Norge, ADHD hos kvinner, og traumer, vold og overgrep mot barn og voksne. Jeg har også jobbet som miljøterapeut for ungdom med rusavhengighet, og med forskjellig frivillig arbeid, blant annet med flyktninger i Hellas. Generelt er jeg spesielt interessert i å utfordre stigmatisering og stereotypier av ulike grupper og personer, og i å få frem et bilde av mennesker som inkluderer mer enn problemer og hva som ikke går bra. Jeg er opptatt av å snakke og forske *med* mennesker heller enn bare *om* mennesker, og jeg synes det er viktig at folk får mulighet til å selv fortelle om sine opplevelser. Videre er jeg interessert i å finne ut mer om hva som gjør at mange mennesker klarer seg godt og finner håp og mening i livet, selv om de har opplevd motgang, tap og vanskeligheter. Jeg er opptatt både av enkeltpersoner og av hva som trengs på sosial- og samfunnsnivå for at mennesker skal ha best mulighet for å oppleve trivsel, mestring og god utvikling.

Informasjon om doktorgradsprosjektets formål og bruk av resultatene

Doktorgradsstudien har som hovedformål å undersøke og forklare hva som bidrar til at unge flyktninger har det bra (og av hva det betyr «å ha det bra») og finner håp og mening i livet. Til tross for vanskelige opplevelser før/under/etter flukt, og i forbindelse med å skape seg en ny tilværelse i et nytt land. Jeg er interessert i å høre om hva unge flyktninger har lært om seg selv som personer, og om livet generelt, gjennom sine opplevelser. Kan det komme nyttig lærdom og nye perspektiver ut av å gjennomleve motgang? Viktige mål i prosjektet er å nyansere og utvide forståelsen av unge flyktninger gjennom å fokusere på styrker, ressurser

og vekst/god utvikling. Det finnes en god del forskning på problemer og vansker blant flyktninger, men det trengs flere studier som ser på hva som faktisk går bra, og hvorfor det går bra. Jeg ønsker også å bidra til mer kunnskap om sosiale- og samfunnsmessige forhold og samspillsprosesser som støtter eller vanskeliggjør muligheter for mestring og positiv utvikling, og om hvordan denne kunnskapen kan brukes til å tilrettelegge for gode utviklingsveier.

Jeg er interessert i å få frem stemmene og synspunktene til menneskene prosjektet handler om, altså unge flyktninger, fordi jeg ser på mennesker som eksperter på eget liv og tror det er mye å lære fra erfaringsbasert kunnskap. Jeg vil derfor gjøre intervjuer med enkeltpersoner, med varighet på omtrent 1-2 timer. Spørsmålene i intervjuene vil kunne handle om håp, meningsskaping, mestring, nyttig lærdom, hvordan komme seg videre i livet, nye perspektiver på livet og seg selv. Jeg planlegger også å bruke noe som heter kunstbaserte metoder, som innebærer at intervjudeltakerne får mulighet til å bruke foto, bilder, dikt, sanger og film for å formidle tanker, følelser og erfaringer knyttet til det vi har snakket om i intervjuet.

Jeg planlegger å intervjue 15-20 kvinner og menn i alderen 18-28 år, alle med bakgrunn som unge flyktninger. Intervjuene vil først og fremst gjøres i Norge, men det kan også være aktuelt å gjøre intervjuer i Sverige og andre europeiske land.

Resultatene fra prosjektet vil formidles gjennom vitenskapelige artikler, foredrag, et informasjonshefte tilpasset unge. Kanskje vil det bli aktuelt å lage en film også, men dette er ikke planlagt enda, bare snakket litt om.

Hovedveileder i prosjektet er Kerstin Søderstrøm, som er førsteamanuensis ved HINN og klinisk psykolog ved Sykehuset i Innlandet. Medveileder er Berit Berg, som er forskningssjef ved avdeling for mangfold og inkludering, NTNU Samfunnsforskning.

Prosjektet er godkjent av Norsk senter for forskningsdata (NSD). Referanse: 197000.

Hvorfor lager jeg denne kompetansegruppen?

Grunnen til at jeg lager denne kompetansegruppen, er at jeg ønsker å få innspill fra og diskutere prosjektet med personer som selv har erfaring med å være unge flyktninger. Dette fordi egne erfaringer gir en annen type kunnskap, synspunkter og forståelser enn det jeg har, og denne kunnskapen er det veldig viktig å få med i prosjektet. Diskusjoner i gruppen kan for eksempel bidra å få frem nye tema, perspektiver og spørsmål. Hvis noen har lyst til det, så kan det være mulig å skrive noe sammen om resultatene av prosjektet, og å presentere resultater

sammen. Dette er ting vi kan snakke nærmere om når vi møtes. Eksempler på diskusjonstema og oppgaver i kompetansegruppen, er:

- Spørsmål og tema i intervjuene: utforming av spørsmål, språk og formuleringer, tanker og ideer om hva som kan være viktig å spørre om.
- Forslag til hvordan det kan være lurt å gå frem for å få med deltakere til intervjuene.
- Kan kunstbaserte metoder (foto, dikt, sanger, film) være en nyttig måte å få frem stemmer og opplevelser på?
- Hvor og hvordan kan det være lurt å presentere resultatene av studien, slik at de faktisk blir hørt og lest av personene resultatene gjelder?
- Tanker om bruk av tolk i intervjuer? Hva vil dette gjøre med samtalen?
- Utprøving (pilotering) av intervjuspørsmål.

Hvorfor blir du spurt om å være medlem i kompetansegruppen, og hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Kompetansegruppen vil bestå av ca.6 personer, pluss meg. Medlemmene skal være både kvinner og menn i alderen 18-35 år, og ha bakgrunn som flyktninger. Det er positivt om deltakerne har ulik språk-, land- og erfaringsbakgrunn, men det er viktig å kunne snakke relativt godt norsk, fordi det gjør det lettere å diskutere sammen i gruppen.

I første omgang er det ønskelig at vi treffes i Trondheim 2 (-3) ganger de neste 2 månedene (desember-januar). Det er også ønskelig å treffes igjen senere i prosjektperioden for å diskutere analyser og tolkninger av intervjumaterialet, samt måter og arenaer for tilbakeføring og formidling av resultater. Vi får låne grupperom på NTNU Samfunnsforskning (ved Dragvoll).

Utgifter i forbindelse med kompetansegruppemøter

Eventuelle utgifter til buss eller lignende for å delta på møter dekkes av prosjektet. Husk å ta vare på kvitteringer og gi dem til meg, sånn at jeg kan sende disse til regnskapskontoret. Jeg handler inn drikke og noe (smått) å spise til møtene.

Lønn for deltakelse i kompetansegruppen

Deltakelse i kompetansegruppen vil lønnes på timesbasis, eller som engangshonorar. Nøyaktig timelønn er ikke avklart enda, men vil trolig være rundt 230 kr per time, minimum.

Mer informasjon om dette kommer. Arbeidet i kompetansegruppen skal først og fremst skje i form av diskusjoner når vi samles, men hvis det er behov for at alle for eksempel leser gjennom tekstdokumenter eller lignende før et møte, så vil dette også lønnes.

Arbeidskontrakt

Alle medlemmene i kompetansegruppen vil få en egen arbeidskontrakt med informasjon om formålet med gruppen, arbeidsoppgaver, lønn, mulighet til å trekke seg osv. Mine arbeidsoppgaver og forpliktelser vil også beskrives, kontaktinformasjonen min inkluderes, og kontrakten signeres av meg og medlem.

Skriftlig og muntlig referanse/attest for deltakelse i kompetansegruppen

Alle medlemmene i kompetansegruppen vil få en skriftlig attest/referanse for deltakelse i gruppen, med beskrivelse av studien og deltakers ansvarsrolle, bidrag og oppgaver. Jeg kan også brukes som referanseperson dersom noen ønsker det i forbindelse med jobbsøking eller lignende.

Min kontaktinformasjon

- **Telefon**: 45067025
- **E-post**: mira.holthe@inn.no

Vennlig hilsen Mira Elise Glaser Holthe.

Arbeidsavtale

Avtalen gjelder deltakelse i kompetansegruppe tilknyttet doktorgradsprosjektet «Vekst gjennom motgang? Unge flyktningers fortellinger om styrker, ressurser, læring og utvikling i samspill med omgivelsene».

PhD-stipendiat og prosjektleder er Mira Elise Glaser Holthe, og kompetansegruppen består av 6 kvinner og menn med bakgrunn som flyktninger, i alderen 22-37 år. Medlemmene har ulik språk-, land- og erfaringsbakgrunn, men en forutsetning for å være med i gruppen er at alle er komfortable med å diskutere sammen på norsk. Formålet med kompetansegruppen er å diskutere ulike deler av prosjektet med personer som selv har erfaring med å være unge flyktninger. Dette fordi egne erfaringer bidrar med en annen type kunnskap, perspektiver og forståelser enn det jeg har, og dette er både verdifullt og viktig å inkludere i prosjektet.

Eksempler på diskusjonstema og arbeidsoppgaver i kompetansegruppen

- *Spørsmål og tema i intervjuene*: utforming av spørsmål, språkbruk og formuleringer, tanker og ideer om hva som kan være viktig å spørre om. *Bruk av tolk i intervjuer*: erfaringer, tanker. Utprøving (pilotering) av intervju. *Kunstbaserte metoder* (foto, dikt mm.): nyttig for å få frem stemmer og opplevelser?

- *Praktisk*: hvordan gå frem for å få med deltakere til intervjuene. Rekruttering via kompetansegruppemedlemmer og deres nettverk.

- *Formidling av resultater*: hvor og hvordan presentere resultatene av studien, slik at de når et bredt publikum? Foredrag? Film? Infohefte? Kronikk? Det er aktuelt å skrive noe sammen om prosjektet, og å presentere resultater sammen for de som ønsker det.

Praktisk om honorar og gjennomføring av kompetansegruppemøtene

- Møtested: Trondheim.
- Varighet: 2-3 timer per møte. Planlagt antall møter i PhD-perioden: 3-6. Kan endres. Frivillig deltakelse på hvert møte. Honorar kun ved deltakelse.
- Honorar: 230 NOK per time, lik prosjektleders timelønn. Reiseutgifter refunderes.
- Hver deltaker får skriftlig referanse/attest av prosjektleder for sitt arbeid.

Deltaker (navn): _____

Signatur, sted, dato: _____

Prosjektleder (navn): **Mira Elise Glaser Holthe**_____

Signatur, sted, dato: _____

Appendix 3: Interview guide

Tema- og spørsmålsguide for intervjuer (<mark>diktafon</mark>)

Innledningssamtale og deltakers bakgrunn og livssituasjon

- Uformell prat. Takk for at er her! Kan du si noe om hvorfor du ønsker å delta på intervju?

- Deltaker: kjønn, alder, opprinnelsesland. Tid på flukt. Tid i Norge. Status asylsøknad.

- Kan du si noe om livssituasjonen din i Norge (bosted, jobb, nettverk, familie)? *(Hvordan var det for deg å komme til Norge?)*

Spørsmål om håp, forventninger, drømmer og mål

1. **Hvilke mål har du for livet ditt? Hva gjør du for å nå disse?** *(hva betyr målene for valgene du tar og måten du lever på?)*
2. **Hvilke håp og drømmer har du for livet ditt?** *Har disse forandret seg fra før til etter flukt? Hva og hvem gir deg håp og hjelper deg å se fremover i livet?*
3. **Hvilke forventninger har du (og andre) til deg selv og til livet ditt?**
4. **Har du et forbilde eller noen du vil være et forbilde for?**

Spørsmål om mening og meningsskaping, et godt liv

5. **Hva gir livet mening for deg?** *(hvordan ser et godt og meningsfullt liv ut for deg)*
6. **Når du tenker på det du har vært gjennom, har du noen tanker om meningen med opplevelsene dine?** *Hva var opplevelsene dine godt for? Grunner større enn deg selv?*

Spørsmål om tilhørighet, relasjoner, sosial støtte, mestring

7. **Hva har andre mennesker betydd for deg gjennom det du har opplevd** (og for hvordan du har det nå)**?**

8. **Er det ting du trenger hjelp til av andre? Hvordan oppleves det å be om hjelp?**

9. **Hva og hvem i livet ditt støtter og hjelper deg, eller gjør livet vanskelig?** *(sosial støtte/nettverk, bomiljø, jobb- og utdanningsmuligheter, stabilitet)*

10. **Har du et sted eller en gruppe hvor du opplever å høre til?**

Spørsmål om hva du har opplevd og lært om deg selv, livet og andre

11. **Kan du fortelle noe om årsakene til at du flyktet?**

12. **Hva har <u>motgang og vanskelige opplevelser (eksempler)</u> før/under/etter flukt betydd for dine tanker om deg selv og livet?**

13. **Er det bare negativt å oppleve problemer og motgang?** *(Er motgang og problemer det samme?)*

14. **Hvordan takler du motgang og problemer?** *Har du noen gang tenkt på å gi opp? Hva gjorde du for å gå videre?*

15. **Hva har<u> gode opplevelser og ting som har gått bra (eksempler) </u>betydd for dine tanker om deg selv og livet?**

16. **Hva har du lært om deg selv (dine styrker og begrensninger) gjennom det du har opplevd?** *Hvem er du som person, hva er du stolt av og fornøyd med? Hva ønsker du å lære, endre? Gjort noe med hvordan du håndterer problemer?*

17. **Har opplevelsene dine fått deg til å tenke igjennom i hvilken grad du tror at ting som skjer med mennesker, er rettferdige? Og kontrollerbare?**

Spørsmål om integrering, inkludering, stereotypier, fordommer

18. **Hvordan er det å være deg (person og flyktning) i Norge?** *(Føler du deg som en flyktning, norsk/ikke-norsk - hva ønsker du selv å være?)*

19. **Hva tror du Nordmenn tenker om flyktninger?** *(assosiasjoner til ordet flyktning)*

20. **Er beskrivelser av flyktninger f.eks. i media noe du tenker på eller påvirkes av?**

21. **Har du eksempler på beskrivelser du kjenner deg igjen i og ikke?** *Hva skulle du ønske ble sagt, hva ville vært en «riktig» fortelling?*

22. **Hva betyr integrering for deg? Hva kan du gjøre for å bli integrert, og hva kan andre gjøre for å integrere deg?** *(er inkludering og integrering det samme?)*

Spørsmål om Gud/religion/spiritualitet, <mark>hvis det er nevnt som viktig</mark>

23. **Hva betyr Gud/religion for deg og for hvordan du ser på livet?**

24. **Hvordan 'bruker' du dette for å mestre, finne håp, forstå hendelser i livet ditt?**

25. **Har opplevelsene dine fått deg til å tenke igjennom eller forandre din spirituelle/religiøse tro?**

26. **Hvordan er det for deg å være religiøs i Norge?**

Spørsmål om fremtiden

27. **Hvis du tenker på hvordan livet du ønsker deg ser ut, hvor nærme eller langt unna er du fra å ha dette?** Skala fra 1-10, hvor 1=lengst unna og 10=nærmest.

28. **Hvordan/hvor ser du deg selv i fremtiden (om 5-10 år)?** *Hva har dine opplevelser betydd for hvordan du ser deg selv i fremtiden?*

29. **Hva har du lært om deg selv, livet og andre som du ønsker å ta med deg videre i livet? Og motsatt?**

30. **Hva har du lært av andre? Hva kan andre lære av deg?**

Avslutning

- Oppsummering av samtale - er det noe du ønsker å forandre eller legge til? Spørsmål?

- Hvordan oppleves det å ha snakket om disse tingene? Dersom noe er vanskelig: hva kan jeg gjøre for å hjelpe? (*oppfølgingssamtale, assistanse ved behov for profesjonell hjelp*)

- Påminne om min kontaktinformasjon og mulighet for å ta kontakt.

Appendix 4: Information letter and informed consent form

Spørsmål om å delta i doktorgradsprosjektet

«Vekst gjennom motgang? Unge flyktningers fortellinger om styrker, ressurser, læring og utvikling i samspill med omgivelsene»

Dette prosjektet er en doktorgradsstudie ved Høgskolen i Innlandet Lillehammer, og prosjektansvarlig er Mira Elise Glaser Holthe. I dette skrivet finner du informasjon om prosjektet og hva det vil bety for deg å være med.

Målene for prosjektet

Hovedmålet for prosjektet er å få mer kunnskap om hva som gjør at unge flyktninger klarer seg godt og finner håp og mening i livet, selv om de har opplevd vanskeligheter og motgang. Jeg er også interessert i å undersøke om vanskeligheter og motgang kan føre til nyttig lærdom eller forandringer i synet på seg selv og hva som er viktig i livet. I prosjektet ønsker jeg å få frem historiene og kunnskapen til unge flyktninger. Viktige mål med forskningsprosjektet er å gi et mer helhetlig bilde av unge flyktninger gjennom å se på styrker, nyttig lærdom og erfaring og hva som går bra. Videre å bidra til mer kunnskap om sosiale- og samfunnsmessige forhold som påvirker trivsel og utvikling.

Hva vil resultatene av prosjektet brukes til?

Resultatene av prosjektet vil brukes i vitenskapelige artikler, på konferanser og foredrag for dem som jobber med flyktninger, i et informasjonshefte og et mulig filmprosjekt. Jeg vil sende deg resultatene av studien dersom du ønsker det, og du vil få muligheten til å lese igjennom dine bidrag før jeg bruker dem.

Hvorfor blir du spurt om å delta?

I dette prosjektet skal jeg snakke med 15 til 20 kvinner og menn med flyktningbakgrunn, i alderen 18-26 (30) år. Grunnen til at du blir spurt om å delta, er at du har bakgrunn som flyktning og er i alderen 18-26 (30) år.

Hva betyr det for deg å delta i prosjektet?

Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet, betyr det at du er med på en intervjusamtale med meg, som vil vare i ca.1-2 timer. I samtalen vil vi snakke om hva som gir deg håp og mening i livet, hva du gjør for å mestre motgang og vanskeligheter, hva som er hjelpsomt og ikke i miljøet rundt deg, og hva dine opplevelser har lært deg om deg selv og om livet. Samtalen tas opp på diktafon (lydopptak) slik at jeg kan skrive ned det vi har snakket om etter at vi er ferdig, istedenfor å ta notater mens vi snakker sammen. Hvis det er spørsmål du ikke ønsker å svare på, så er det helt greit. Hvis

det er noe som er viktig for deg, men som ikke har blitt spurt om, så må du gjerne snakke om det.

Mulig filmprosjekt

Helt mot slutten av prosjektet kan det være mulig å lage en film om resultatene av prosjektet, hvor unge flyktninger deler noen av sine erfaringer. Du vil bli spurt om samtykke til at jeg kan kontakte deg igjen på et senere tidspunkt for å spørre om du kan tenke deg å bli med på et filmprosjekt. Dersom du sier ja, betyr dette bare at du gir meg lov til å ringe deg senere. Du sier ikke ja til å bli med i et filmprosjekt nå.

Mulige fordeler og ulemper ved å delta

Deltakelse i dette prosjektet og det du forteller i samtalen vil ikke ha noen innvirkning på din asylsøknad eller lignende. Du vil ikke motta lønn for å delta i prosjektet, men alle som er med får et gavekort på 250 kr.
Din deltakelse i prosjektet er viktig fordi det du forteller kan gi viktig kunnskap om unge flyktningers styrker, ressurser, tanker om og syn på livet, hva som bidrar til positiv utvikling, og hva som trengs for at unge flyktninger skal ha det bra. Ett viktig mål med prosjektet er å hjelpe unge flyktninger gjennom å bidra til en mer helhetlig og positiv forståelse av unge flyktninger. Gjennom å få frem menneskene og historiene som gjemmer seg bak ordet 'flyktning' ønsker jeg også å utfordre fordommer mot flyktninger. For å få til dette, må jeg snakke med unge mennesker med flyktningbakgrunn om deres tanker og opplevelser, og derfor er din deltakelse veldig nyttig og viktig for at prosjektet kan gjennomføres.

Tolk

Det er viktig at du får muligheten til å snakke på det språket du føler deg mest komfortabel med. Vi kan snakke sammen på norsk, svensk eller engelsk uten tolk. Hvis du ønsker å snakke på et annet språk, så lager jeg en avtale med en tolk som blir med i samtalen. Jeg trenger å vite hvilket språk du ønsker, og om du vil ha mannlig eller kvinnelig tolk.

Det er frivillig å delta

Det er helt frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du ønsker å delta, så skriver du under på samtykkeerklæringen på siste side. Selv om du sier ja til å delta nå, så kan du når som helst ombestemme deg, uten å gi noen forklaring. All informasjon om deg og det du har fortalt vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke være negativt eller problematisk for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg. Hvis du ønsker å trekke ditt samtykke, så kan du kontakte meg (Mira Elise Glaser Holthe) på telefon 45067025.

Hva skjer med opplysningene om deg?

Informasjon som blir lagret om deg, er: aldersgruppe, f.eks. 18-22 år, kjønn, opprinnelsesland, tid på flukt, oppholdsstatus og botid i Norge. Jeg vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til det jeg har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Jeg behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

For å sikre at ingen får tilgang til opplysninger om deg, vil jeg erstatte navnet og kontaktopplysningene dine med en kode som lagres på egen navneliste adskilt fra intervjuet. Navnelisten og intervjudata vil lagres i noe som heter Tjeneste for sensitive data (TSD). TSD er en nettportalløsning for sikker innsamling, bearbeiding og lagring av forskningsdata. TSD oppfyller lovens strenge krav til behandling og lagring av sensitive forskningsdata, og er ment for data som skal tas ekstra godt vare på. Bare jeg og mine veiledere har passordet til TSD.

Jeg skriver lydopptaket av intervjuet om til tekst etter intervjuet, og fjerner alle opplysninger som kan knyttes til deg, for eksempel navn og nøyaktig bosted og alder, fra teksten (dette kalles pseudonymisering). Det er bare jeg som vil ha tilgang til både intervjumaterialet og andre opplysninger om deg. Mine to veiledere har bare tilgang til transkriberte intervjuer, og ikke til annen informasjon om deg. Navnet ditt eller andre opplysninger som gjør at andre kan kjenne deg igjen vil ikke publiseres eller vises til andre enn meg. Det betyr at hverken du eller de andre deltakerne i prosjektet kan gjenkjennes i artikler og andre publikasjoner, eller i presentasjoner av forskningsresultatene på foredrag og konferanser.

Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når forskningsprosjektet avsluttes?

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes i april 2021. Alle personopplysninger - inkludert navneliste (koblingsnøkkel) og lydopptak - slettes ved prosjektslutt. Anonymiserte transkripsjoner av intervjuene, uten navn eller noen andre opplysninger som kan knyttes til deg, vil kunne oppbevares av meg etter prosjektslutt dersom det er aktuelt å bruke intervjumaterialet i senere publisering. Om ikke vil også dette slettes ved prosjektslutt.

Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få slettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få utlevert en kopi av dine personopplysninger (dataportabilitet), og
- å sende klage til personvernombudet eller Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger

Hva gir meg rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Jeg behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke. På oppdrag fra Høgskolen i Innlandet Lillehammer har Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS (NSD) vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket. Forskningsprosjektets referanse hos NSD er 197000.

Hvor kan du finne ut mer?

Hvis du har spørsmål om prosjektet, eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- Mira Elise Glaser Holthe (Prosjektansvarlig) på telefon +47 45067025 eller e-post mira.holthe@inn.no

- Vårt personvernombud: NSD. Kontaktperson v/HINN er Anne Sofie Lofthus (e-post anne.lofthus@hil.no, telefon 61288277/40854711.

- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS, på e-post personvernombudet@nsd.no eller telefon: 55 58 21 17. Forskningsprosjektets referanse hos NSD: 197000.

- Her kan du lese mer om Tjenester for sensitive data (TSD): https://www.uio.no/tjenester/it/forskning/sensitiv/

Vennlig hilsen

Mira Elise Glaser Holthe (Prosjektansvarlig)

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet «Vekst gjennom motgang? Unge flyktningers fortellinger om styrker, ressurser, læring og utvikling gjennom samspill med omgivelsene», og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til (kryss av i boksene som passer):

☐ å delta i intervjusamtale

☐ at jeg kan kontaktes senere for å bli spurt om jeg ønsker å delta i mulig filmprosjekt. Samtykket gjelder kun ja til å kontaktes igjen, og er ikke et samtykke til å delta i et filmprosjekt.

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet, ca. april 2021.

 (sted, dato, deltakers signatur, telefonnummer kun dersom samtykke til rekontakt)

Jeg, Mira Elise Glaser Holthe, bekrefter å ha gitt informasjon om studien

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 (sted, dato, prosjektansvarlig sin signatur)

Appendix 5: Ethical approval of the research (NSD)

NSD NORSK SENTER FOR FORSKNINGSDATA

NSD sin vurdering

Prosjekttittel

Positiv vekst gjennom motgang: Et styrke-, ressurs- og samspillsperspektiv på enslige unge flyktningers fungering

Referansenummer

197000

Registrert

13.09.2018 av Mira Elise Glaser Holte - mira.holthe@hil.no

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

Høgskolen i Innlandet / Fakultet for lærerutdanning og pedagogikk / Institutt for pedagogikk - Lillehammer

Prosjektansvarlig (vitenskapelig ansatt/veileder eller stipendiat)

Mira Elise Glaser Holthe, mira.holthe@hil.no, tlf: 004745067025

Type prosjekt

Forskerprosjekt

Prosjektperiode

15.10.2018 - 31.12.2020

Status

31.10.2018 - Vurdert

Vurdering (1)

31.10.2018 - Vurdert

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen, så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet 31.10.2018 med vedlegg. Behandlingen kan starte.

MELD ENDRINGER
Dersom behandlingen av personopplysninger endrer seg, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. På våre nettsider informerer vi om hvilke endringer som må meldes. Vent på svar før endringen gjennomføres.

TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET
Prosjektet vil behandle særlige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 31.12.2020.

LOVLIG GRUNNLAG

Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 nr. 11 og art. 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse, som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake.

Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes uttrykkelige samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 a), jf. art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a, jf. personopplysningsloven § 10, jf. § 9 (2).

PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER
NSD finner at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen
- om lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER
Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter (velg det som passer): åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19), dataportabilitet (art. 20).

NSD vurderer at informasjonen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER
NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må dere følge interne retningslinjer og eventuelt rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.
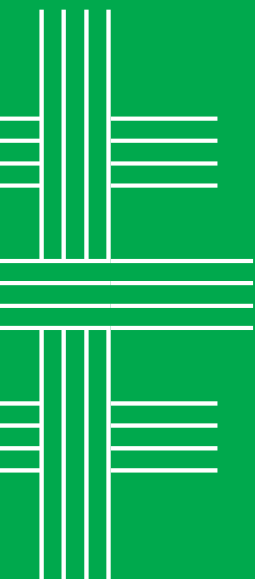
OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET
NSD vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

Kontaktperson hos NSD: Lasse André Raa

Tlf. personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

The main focus in psychological research about refugees has been on trauma and psychopathology, and researchers and practitioners have called for more holistic and strength based approaches. Theories about adversarial growth were developed to account for positive psychological changes resulting from the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances. Research among trauma survivors show that at least 70% report some positive change in one or more life domains. However, growth among refugees has received less research attention.

The main aim of this study was to explore the role of coping, meaning making, and adversarial growth in explaining how many young refugees show healthy functioning and manage to adapt successfully in their new lives, despite experiences of trauma and adversity. Data was collected through qualitative in-depth interviews with 15 young men and women with refugee backgrounds, and analyzed using thematic analysis.

The findings lend support to explanations from growth theories and humanistic and existential psychology concerning the how and the why of positive adaption. The participants emphasized the learning value of adversity and that giving up is not an option, perceived themselves as survivors, drew on cultural strengths, and were optimistic and open to experience – all of which facilitated coping. They displayed several characteristics of growth, and were giving meaning to their experiences through helping others. Taken together, the findings make up an impressive account of the human capacity for coping and growth, and highlight the importance of applying a broadened psychological approach that acknowledges the complexity of post-trauma outcomes.