

# Don't worry, be happy.

- A study of how unaccompanied refugee minors in a Norwegian refugee reception centre deal with emotions



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There is this little song I wrote  
I hope you learn it note for note  
Like good little children  
Don't worry, be happy  
Listen to what I say  
In your life expect some trouble  
But when you worry  
You make it double  
Don't worry, be happy.....  
Don't worry don't do it, be happy  
Put a smile on your face  
Don't bring everybody down like this  
Don't worry, it will soon past  
Whatever it is  
Don't worry, be happy

Verse from 'Don't worry, be happy'  
by Bobby McFerrin



# Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis has been a long and winding road, as the song goes. On my way I have met many people that have inspired and helped me, that I owe my deep respect and thanks.

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Oslo, February 2009

Stig Rune Aasheim Molvik



## Summary

The focus of this thesis is how unaccompanied refugee minors in a Norwegian reception centre deal with their emotions while waiting for their application to be processed, in relation to those that they have to relate to in their everyday life there; the other minors and residents, the reception centre staff, their teachers and their guardians.

The unaccompanied refugee minors are children and adolescents under 18 seeking refuge in Norway, without the company of their parents. The research have been conducted at a Norwegian reception centre housing unaccompanied refugee minors between 15 and 18 years old, as well as other adult refugees, waiting for a decision on their asylum application.

Away from their parents, in a foreign country, many with traumatic experiences from conflict and flight, unaccompanied refugee minors in Norwegian reception centres are facing an emotionally challenging situation.

The findings of this thesis suggests that the unaccompanied refugee minors at the reception centre put considerable effort in managing their emotions by trying to avoid and distract themselves from distressing thoughts and emotions, through seeking other activities such as talking, joking and generally keeping up a positive attitude.

At the same time the minors avoid expressing personal thoughts and emotions in interaction with others. My findings indicate that they do this to protect their emotions, their future and others respect for them. By expressing personal thoughts and emotions the minors risk reminding themselves of distressing emotions, or reveal information they believe may cause their asylum application to be declined, or that may cause them to lose others respect for them. Thus they avoid these private thoughts and emotions in interaction with the other minors.

The minors' official caretakers while staying at the reception centre; the reception centre staff, the teachers, and the legal guardians seem to offer support to varying degrees. The staff is regarded with a general distrust because of their relation to UDI and lack of resources. The teachers provide support and are positively regarded by the minors, but the support they are able to offer is generally restricted to the school. The minors' guardians are formally restricted by a narrow definition of responsibility pertaining to the legal matters of the minors. However, dedicated guardians that go beyond the formal definition and offer wider support are trusted and greatly appreciated by the minors.

In summary, the minors seem to live under conditions that can be said to foster a “don’t worry, be happy” attitude, where they avoid negative and personal thoughts and emotions in interaction with others. The minors have very few to relate to in terms of people they can get help and support in dealing with their emotions.

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# 1 The entrusted child

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Through all times there have been conflicts and wars, natural disasters, famines and other humanitarian crises, and with those there have been children and youth separated from their family and caretakers – some by death, some by circumstance, and some willingly sent away to what hopefully is safety. These are the unaccompanied refugee minors. Children, under the age of 18 seeking refuge without the company of their parents or a legally recognised guardian in their parents place. One can argue that these children are children that have been entrusted in Norway's care; some by being sent away to safety by their parents or relatives (Engebrigtsen 2004:53), but all by coming to Norway looking for a safe haven.

By coming here these minors put themselves in the hands of the Norwegian government, bound by the ratification and incorporation of UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) into Norwegian law (Ingebrigtsen et al. 2004:26) to ensure children in Norway "...such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being..." (CRC §3.2) as well as ensure a "...standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development" (CRC §27.1).

These children arrive in Norway after having fled their home country and left all they know behind them, to come to a new future in Norway. Arriving in a new country new challenges arise as Wendy Ayotte (2002:14) so accurately points out:

*On arrival a child is disoriented and in shock, facing a strange land, culture, and language, without the support of family and friends. They must negotiate an array of bureaucratic systems and the all-too-often bewildering refugee determination process that takes little, if any, account of their status as children. They must discover the mores of an alien culture and adapt to an unfamiliar educational system. All this is normally carried out in a foreign language which they are endeavouring to learn. During their adaptation they are faced with some of the emotional consequences of their departure: grief and loss, guilt that they are safe while family may not be, uncertainty over the fate of those left behind, the sequellae[!] of violence and persecution. They may be isolated from other members of their community and will most certainly feel keenly the absence of family."*

Children as these, children in their adolescence, staying in a Norwegian refugee centre after having arrived to Norway, waiting for their application to be processed, is the focus of

this thesis.

As Ayotte describes (Ayotte 2002:14), unaccompanied refugee minors that reside in Norwegian refugee centres are in an unfamiliar country, under an unfamiliar system, learning a new language, trying to adapt to a whole new range of unfamiliar processes and arrangements and at the same time deal with the emotional pressure of an extreme situation. The minors are in a situation where they more or less have to deal with emotions relating to such issues as possible traumatic experiences from conflicts and flight, loss of friends and family, guilt for being safe, the uncertainty of the asylum application process and thus their entire future, at the same time as having to live with and relate to strangers in a foreign country with a foreign language. In addition they are in their adolescence with all the changes and confusion, as well as lack of experience and wisdom, that entails. This leaves little doubt that these minors are facing an emotionally difficult and challenging situation.

The subject of this thesis is thus how do unaccompanied refugee minors such as these deal with their emotions while they live in a Norwegian refugee reception centre, waiting for their application to be processed.

## **1.1 The research questions**

The research of this thesis has been conducted at a Norwegian reception centre housing 25 adolescent unaccompanied refugee minors, as well as about twice as many adults with or without family. From the very outset the perspective of this thesis have been on how the minors deal with their emotions during their time at the reception centre and in relation to those that they have to relate to in their everyday life there; the other minors and residents, the reception centre staff, their teachers and their guardians.

### *1.1.1 MAIN QUESTION: DEALING WITH EMOTIONS*

The first, and most general, research question is:

*How do unaccompanied refugee minors in a Norwegian refugee reception centre deal with their emotions?*

Although this thesis is inspired by Arlie Russell Hochschild's theories on emotion management (see Hochschild 1979, 1983) I have chosen to use the term 'deal with' to signify how a person generally relates to his emotions. This is to avoid the calculative implications of the term 'emotion management' as well as the implication in Hochschild's theories that

emotion management is something that is mainly done to accord with social structures and expectations. In short, I use the term ‘deal with’ to mark an open approach to how the unaccompanied refugee minors relate to their emotions.

It is also important to point out that the focus is on how these minors relates to their emotions and what they do in relation to their emotions, rather than what these emotions are. For example the focus is not if the minors are angry or depressed, but what they do with their anger or depression.

How these unaccompanied refugee minors in a Norwegian refugee reception centre deal with their emotions is thus the main focus of this thesis.

### *1.1.2 IN INTERACTION WITH THE MINORS*

I also look at how the minors deal with their emotions in relations to those they have to relate to every day at the reception centre. These unaccompanied refugee minors often come alone, having to relate to a lot of new and strange people from other countries and cultures that they have to learn to live with. At the same time these are the persons they are likely to spend the most time with and make friendships with.

From that perspective the other minors are quite significant in each others’ lives while they stay at the reception centre, thus it is important to understand how the unaccompanied refugee minors deal with emotions to understand how they deal with these emotions in relation with the other minors. This question can be formulated as follows;

*How do the unaccompanied refugee minors deal with their emotions in relation with the other minors at the reception centre?*

### *1.1.3 THEIR CARETAKERS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT*

As previously pointed out the Norwegian government is obligated by the UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) into Norwegian law (Ingebrigtsen et al. 2004:26) to ensure children in Norway appropriate care for their well-being, including their mental and social development (CRC Article 3 & 27). For the minors in a reception centre, the reception centre staff, the minors’ teachers as well as the minors’ appointed guardians are those that are first in line to provide such care.

This thesis will look at how these caretakers are able to provide such care for the

minors in dealing with their emotions. A question can then be formulated as:

*What role does the unaccompanied refugee minors caretakers play in helping the minors deal with their emotions?*

#### *1.1.4 GUIDING PERSPECTIVE*

The main perspective of this thesis is thus how these unaccompanied minors staying in a reception centre deal with their emotions. This is the perspective that has guided the research and that the thesis tries to address. To understand how the minors deal with their emotions, it is important to see how they deal with these emotions in relation to those that they relate in their everyday life at the reception centre. On one hand those that they mostly socially relate to; the other minors and residents, and on the other those that are responsible for their care; the reception centre staff, their teachers and their appointed guardians.

Through addressing these questions I hope to give a better understanding of what the minors do to deal with their emotions and how this affect them. By doing so I hope to give a better insight in what can be done to make it easier for the minors to deal with their emotions, and thus provide better care for unaccompanied refugee minors in Norwegian reception centres.

## 2 What and why: the methods

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To me, doing qualitative research and writing a thesis is like setting out on a path towards something you have a vague notion of, not knowing what you will experience along the way or where you will end up. Along the way, one finds oneself making constant choices shaped by knowledge, skill, circumstances, luck and coincidence, and in the end you might not turn up where you thought you would, but you have always learned something. In this chapter I want to try to convey some of the choices made, why and how they were made.

Ragnvald Kalleberg writes that when reading books and articles of research projects it is easy to get an impression that the process has been more streamlined than it in reality was (Kalleberg 1998:34).

For me, this leaves two temptations – on one hand there is the temptation to present a streamlined product where every decision is seemingly a result of careful deliberations based on well asserted knowledge and skills; and on the other hand I am tempted to describing the process exactly as it has been with every “dirty” detail and all its confusing moments and decisions based less on assertion of knowledge and skill and more on circumstances and educated guesses.

I will try my best to balance these two temptations and give a presentation of my thesis that has the clarity of the streamlined product but also shows its weaknesses and strengths. I think this is important to give you as a reader a better basis for evaluating and understanding the information and findings that will be presented.

### 2.1 Choices, consequences and results

This thesis is based on research done at a Norwegian refugee reception centre housing more than 20 unaccompanied minors from the age of fifteen to eighteen, and about twice as many adult refugees. The data has been accumulated through casual observation at the

reception centre, as well as interviews of five unaccompanied minors, seven guardians<sup>1</sup>, two school teachers and two of the reception centre staff, all connected to this reception centre.

### *2.1.1 FOCUS AND FIELD*

In the initial approach to my project I was uncertain about the subject of my thesis. In the very beginning I was intrigued by studying emotions in an international/multi-cultural setting, and as I got in touch with my thesis supervisor unaccompanied minors became the natural focus of this thesis. This was partly due to my supervisor's experience with this group but also because of my interest in the responsibilities of the government for the care of minors.

Through the ratification of the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Norway has a responsibility the care and upbringing of unaccompanied minor refugees (Ingebrigtsen, Berger and Thorsen 2004:26). This responsibility extends not only the physical but also to the "mental, spiritual, moral and social" wellbeing of unaccompanied minor refugees (CRC Art. 27). This undeniably includes emotional well-being as well. Thus one can argue that the question of how these unaccompanied minor refugees deal with their emotions is of relevance for the care that these minors are provided by the government.

Intrigued by Arlie R. Hochschild's theories on emotions as something that can be worked and managed (Hochschild 1979, 1983) I found a natural interest in seeing how these children dealt with their emotions in relation to others. These interests are then what was the impetus for this thesis.

### *2.1.2 LOCATION AND INFORMANTS*

The choice of location was no academic exercise, but rather a choice of opportunity. My supervisor had been the advisor for the staff of a refugee reception centre, and as it turned out they had also received some funds for volunteer work and activities for the unaccompanied minor refugees at the centre. I seized this opportunity to do volunteer work to be able to do something useful while I did casual observations and got a better feel for the "field".

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<sup>1</sup> Guardians are persons appointed by the state as legal guardians of unaccompanied children, in place of their parents, that are responsible for securing the child's legal rights (*Hva er hjelpevergens oppgaver?* 2008:1<sup>st</sup> paragraph, *Veiledning til verger for enslige mindreårige asylsøkere* 2003:4-5)

When I started gathering data I was considering interviewing unaccompanied minors from more than one reception centre in order to get a wider base for my research. This would have made it easier to get more informants and different experiences from different reception centres. However I wanted study the unaccompanied minor refugees and see them in relation to those they relate to in everyday life: the other minors, the reception centre staff, their teachers and their provisional guardians. To do this, in regards to my resources, I chose to focus on one reception centre.

There are however three other categories that, due to practicality and a little hindsight were not interviewed: friends outside of the reception centre; relatives in Norway; and the public health nurse. I chose not to interview friends of the unaccompanied minors from outside of the reception centre mostly because they do not have a care responsibility for the unaccompanied minors, but also because they were seldom to be seen at the reception centre, and most of the unaccompanied minors seem to mostly be with other minors from the reception centre. I found it likely that the aspect of relating to friends would be covered by interviewing the unaccompanied minors about their relation with each other and friends.

In the case of the unaccompanied minors relatives in Norway, which some of them had, I must admit it was not something that I became aware of until quite late in the process. It seemed to be relevant to only a few of my informants, and in hindsight it would have been interesting to interview both an unaccompanied minor with relatives in Norway as well as relatives of an unaccompanied minor at the reception centre, as it is likely to have an impact on the relation between the unaccompanied minor and the staff as well as the minors provisional guardian. As this quote exemplify:

*"Ja, ja, ja.. absolutt.. og det kan også være.. i konflikter så ringte vi ofte til en onkel eller ett eller annet sånt.. nå.. oppfører den seg sånn og sånn og sånn.. og det var sjeldent populært i onkels ører.. så da kom onkel ut og pratet, hadde et møte med verge onkel og beboer og ansatt.. skikkelig.. men det.. jo... eller også noen ganger bare på telefon.. "kan du snakke med ham?"*

*- Staff member at the reception centre*

The quote is a reply to questioning if relatives can play a positive role in regards to the unaccompanied minors. The reply illustrates how relatives can affect the relations between the unaccompanied minor, the staff and their provisional guardian. Therefore, not having interviewed unaccompanied minors at the reception centre with relatives in Norway, or their relatives, does make the picture somewhat less complete.

I chose to not interview the public health nurse as she did not seem to play a significant

role in the minors' lives. On the other hand the public health nurse could possibly have shed some light on the relation between psychological and emotional situation for these children and somatic symptoms. Psychological and emotional distress given a somatic expression in unaccompanied refugee minors is observed by for example Harsløf Hjelde (2004:186).

There are several reasons why the particular informants and location were chosen. Nonetheless, in the end, the choices made is based on a focus on the relation between the minors in the refugee reception centre, and those that have a key role in taking care of them in their everyday life - the staff, the teachers and the guardians.

### *2.1.3 OBSERVATION*

Although interviews were intended as the main source of data, observation came to play a significant role in not only getting in touch with my informants but also grasping the field. As mentioned, my advisor was the advisor to the staff of a refugee reception centre. The centre wanted to start up volunteer activities, and I seized the opportunity to do something useful at the same time as getting to know the reception centre and the minors there. After talks with the reception centre, and some social meetings<sup>2</sup> with a few of the unaccompanied minors, I started up with activities once a week.

Most Mondays, I came for the afternoon and brought some games (cards, backgammon, foosball table and the like) or a video or two and often some snacks, or waffles, and lemonade. I organised these activities from early spring 2005 until the summer of 2006, when the activities was gradually taken over by a volunteer organisation. In addition to this I was there for over a week, from early morning to late afternoon as well as spending a few nights there (awake) to get a more complete picture.

I also spent two days at the school that the unaccompanied minors attended where, by courtesy of the school administration, I was allowed to sit in and follow a class through their school day.

Thus I observed the minors at the reception centre, at school and a few times while going out to see a movie together, playing billiards or bowling and during a few activity sessions (playing soccer, basketball, etc.). I did not, however, observe them with their

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<sup>2</sup> I met some of the youth a few times when they were out for a movie or out playing billiards/bowling, with one of the staff present, before the activities was started up.

guardians. Observing them with their guardians, seemed too intrusive<sup>3</sup> and I considered the data I got from interviews with both the unaccompanied minors and the guardians to be sufficient.

### ***2.1.4 INTERVIEWS***

As mentioned, in the course of my research I interviewed five unaccompanied minors, seven provisional guardians (two couples), two of the staff as well as two of their teachers.

The structure of all of the interviews was open ended. I had prepared a set of questions that I wanted to touch on during the interview, but with the intent to let the informants speak and to follow up anything that might be of interest in the conversation. By doing this, I hoped to obtain information that I had not thought to inquire or thought relevant. At the same time, I hoped the interview would feel more comfortable for the informants and allow them to tell the stories they wanted to.

#### ***The guardians***

The guardians were first contacted by mail, as I needed to ask permission to do my research with the unaccompanied minors. Next, I contacted the guardians I selected to interview by phone or e-mail. The interviews were done in the late winter of 2005 through the spring of 2006. The interviews were done at the informant's convenience. Two were conducted at the informants' homes (both couples), two at cafés and one at the informant's work. The couples were interviewed together, thinking it would be interesting to hear how they responded to each other and hoping for a dialogue between them that would bring to the surface more information. All but one of these interviews was recorded on tape. One of the informants was uncomfortable with the thought of the interview being recorded on tape, which I naturally respected.

#### ***The minors***

Interviews of the minors were done at the reception centre at a room provided for me there, with the exception of one interview where I was invited into the minor's own room. I had planned to interview more than five minors I ended up interviewing, but for ethical

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<sup>3</sup> From my viewpoint the contact between the minors and the guardians are quite important, and they have a limited time to build a relation and I found using observation as too much of an intrusion in such a process of relation building.

reasons that I will get back to later, I settled with these five.

The interviews were done over a few weeks in the late spring of 2006. One of the informants was a girl, the rest were boys. They had all been at the reception centre for minimum one year and all of them had had their asylum application rejected and were waiting for an appeal. Since this was a reception centre housing unaccompanied minors from the age of 15-18 and they had been there a while, they were all near or over 18 years old. Three of the boys I had fairly good contact with. One of the boys and the girl interviewee had spoken with me only a few times and we were not very familiar. In addition to the written information they had been given earlier, I personally contacted them and asked if I could interview them. I explained carefully what it would entail including their rights as informants and my obligations as researcher, stressing my duty to confidentiality and that any information would be kept in anonymity so they could not be identified.

### **INTERPRETER**

Due to having stayed at the reception centre for such a long time, all of my informants had a decent grasp of Norwegian and all of them spoke English fairly well. This made the question of using an interpreter difficult. There is no straight forward answer as to if it would be best to use an interpreter. On the one hand it is almost certain that the informant would be able to express themselves better in their own language, but, on the other hand there would be concerns on how this would affect the dialogue and trust between the informant and the interviewer.

In Fladstad's (1993) study of young Vietnamese refugees in exile in Norway, her informants seemed quite set on not using an interpreter, being afraid that the interpreter might leak information back to the Vietnamese exile community (Fladstad 1993:57, 86). On the other hand Knudsen (1990), in his research on unaccompanied minors in exile in Norway used staff from the informants' country of origin as interpreters. Knudsen notes that despite the staff's role as 'controllers', "*...syntes deres tilstedeværelse å ha en positiv virkning ved å redusere noe av avstanden mellom meg selv (som fremmed og intervjuer) og de unge asylsøkerne*"<sup>ii</sup> (Knudsen 1990:22).

In my case, I had the funds necessary to hire interpreters, but in the end chose not to. I felt I had sufficiently good communication with the minors. However, the unaccompanied minors were told that if they wanted to I could arrange for an interpreter. None of them seemed particularly interested in this, but I cannot guarantee that I had no influence on their

decision.

In hindsight I believe a better approach would have been to offer a professional interpreter and to have been very clear on the interpreters' obligation to the informants confidentiality and anonymity. Then, if the informant was not reluctant, provide an interpreter. Such an approach would have given the informant a more active role in deciding if there should be an interpreter. That being said, in only one of the interviews did I feel that an interpreter would have been beneficial, while in the others I felt that the interviews went reasonably well without an interpreter.

As opposed to Knudsen (1990:22) who was not familiar with his informants, I felt that the connections between me and my informants were good. The conversations were flowing fairly smoothly only having to explain or elaborate a few times. However, it is quite possible that using an interpreter and having the chance to speak in their own language would have made it easier for them to be more nuanced and precise in their formulations and in general let them speak more freely.

### ***Teachers and staff***

The teachers were interviewed after I had visited the school. One of the teachers interviewed was the teacher for the class that I observed during my two-day visit. The other had held a class in several subjects. As with the guardians, I chose to interview them together, after having checked that they thought it was ok. I found this a good method which allowed for some discussion between the informants. This often either brought out new information, or simply emphasised or modified what just had been said.

The interviews with the staff were done separately, at the reception centre. Both staff members had worked there for several years, longer than most of the rest of the staff.

## **2.2 Ethics**

Studying such a vulnerable group as unaccompanied minor refugees living in a reception centre is a challenging task. From the outset it has been important for me to avoid, as best I can, creating any extra discomfort or distress for these children.

### ***2.2.1 PERMISSIONS AND CONSENT***

Before I started the project I had reported to, and gotten the project approved by, the

Norwegian Social Sciences Service (NSD) - the Privacy Ombudsman<sup>4</sup> for all the Norwegian universities (Privacy Ombudsman for Research 2008). The guardians of the unaccompanied minors who were currently residing in the reception centre were all contacted by mail. They were given information and a consent form to return, as well as information on how to get in touch with me by phone or e-mail.

The unaccompanied minors were given the same information in writing, in both English and Norwegian. Naturally, it would be unlikely that all of them knew enough written English or Norwegian to fully understand what the information meant. I therefore tried to contact most of the unaccompanied minors personally to explain the meaning, and what my purpose was, particularly stressing that I was bound by their right to confidentiality and anonymity. This meant emphasising that I could not tell anyone (even the staff or their guardians) about what I observed them doing or what they told me, unless they permitted me to. I told them I wanted to study what it was like to be an unaccompanied minor in a reception centre - how they experienced living there - as a part of my studies and that I intended to write a paper on this. I explained that any information would be kept anonymous and what that entailed, as it was often a concept they did not immediately understand.

### *2.2.2 MY ROLE IN THE FIELD*

As I have explained earlier I started off by doing volunteer work in the reception centre, organising activities one evening a week. I used these evenings to get a feel for the reception centre and get in touch with the youth living there. There were usually a handful of the minors at these activities at a time, and it varied from time to time which minors were there, although some came more frequently than others. Providing amusements such as board games, music and films was an easy way to make contact.

Nonetheless, it was important for me not to touch on sensitive subjects unless they wanted to talk about it themselves (which only happened two or three times during my whole stay that I can recall). I was careful not to ‘interview’ someone without having asked for explicit permission to do so. So most of the conversations were light and about things relating to the present - subjects they brought up - including music, movies, school and the like.

I also did not want to come off as a “good Samaritan” or their (best) friend. I think it

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<sup>4</sup> Norsk Samfunnsvitenskapelig Datatjeneste – Personvernombud for forskning

would have been easy to make closer connections like that, but I did not want to build incorrect impressions or expectations that I could not fulfil. It was personally important to me to not build contact on false pretences, nor to be too intrusive in their lives. When if/they told me something, I wanted to be sure it was because they felt it was ok to talk to me as a person, aware of my role as a researcher, not because they thought I would save them or that I was a good best friend that would take care of them. In short, I tried to keep a reasonable distance while still being able to make my observations.

This is one of the ethical difficulties of being a researcher, as you often require good relations with, and the trust, of your informants and those you observe in order to get the information you need – while, at the same time needing to be careful of the impression you give in order to not create close relations on the wrong basis. *I believe that if it had been a different, less vulnerable group, I would not have been as reserved as I was.*

Since I needed access to the kitchen and food supply of the reception centre I often wore and used a key and I went in and out of the staff office. Thus it could have been easy to confuse me as part of the staff. As I were in the public sphere, where also the staff was present, I do not think that confusing me with an employee made my presence feel more intrusive.

*“Deltakende observasjon må inneholde både nærhet og distanse, forholdet til de utforskede må både være som en venn og som en fremmed. En forsker som ikke kommer nr nok, vil ikke kunne forstå de utforsketes verden. En forsker som ikke kommer fjernt nok fra dem, vil ikke kunne klare å oppdage og sette ord på det selvfølgelig, heller ikke å løfte analysen fra det trivielle.”<sup>iii</sup> (Album 1996:240-241)*

I experienced trying to keep this balance between intimacy and distance demanding, but I think that if I got the balance wrong it was because I erred on the side of caution. Given the vulnerable position of these unaccompanied refugee minors it felt correct to balance in favour of distance over intimacy.

### *2.2.3 INTERVIEWING UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINORS*

There were approximately twenty-five minors staying at the reception centre at any given time, and I had hoped to interview at least eight. When the time for the interviews drew near, I casually asked several of those that I had fairly good contact with if they were interested in being interviewed. Of those it was only these five that were clearly positive. That reassured me that it was ok for them to be interviewed. I got quite a few maybes and dragging “yeah sure”, which I chose not to pursue further.

The minors were all presented with consent forms, and it was explained to them once again that they had rights to confidentiality and that any information used would be held as anonymous including what that entailed. It was emphasised that they did *not* have to answer any questions and that they were free to decide what they wanted to say or not say.

John Chr. Knudsen warns about the researcher's role when in regards to interviewing minors such as these:

*"Vi må klarlegge vår egen rolle som portner (og portør) mot landskap av emosjoner og ofte ubearbejdede trauma som er forsøkt mestret gjennom taushet, tilbaketrekking og behovet for å verne omkring personenes innerste og gjerne mest private følelser. Om vi som forskere åpner opp for døren mot slike landskap, hvilke forutsetninger har vi for å ta i mot informasjonen? Hvilken evne, vilje og ansvar har vi til eventuelt å fungere terapeutisk? Hvilke forventninger har de unge til oss? Særlig i studier av barn løsrevet fra familier og andre alliansepartnere må vi tre varsomt frem. Vår oppgaver er ikke å trenene [sic] gjennom hva som for oss synes å være fiksjoner, og dermed utsette personen for ytterligere tap. Således må vi akseptere at taushet kan være et større problem i vår egen jakt etter data enn for de unge selv."* (Knudsen 1991:29)

This is a very relevant caution for a study for this thesis. Therefore, it also has been important for me to remain on the outskirts of what Knudsen terms 'the landscape of emotions'.

It is not an easy balance, considering the subject of this thesis, but I was quite aware that I am not a psychoanalyst and did not want to delve into their psyches. I was more interested in how they acted, how they related to others with these emotions and whom they talked to. Still, that meant getting into more touchy areas. For example, if they had cried; how come they cried; and what did they do then. These were questions I asked but did not try to push further. From my impression of the informants these questions seemed to be ok. The only time I experienced an informant upset during an interview were when talking about his past. Knowing that the past might be a sensitive issue for these minors, I avoided the subject in my interviews unless the minors brought it up themselves, in which case I listened but did not pursue the matter. Most of my questions touched in on how life was in the reception centre, what they did during an ordinary day, and how they related to others while there.

## *2.2.4 ANONYMITY*

All informants have a right to anonymity. I am, however, particularly concerned about keeping the unaccompanied informants identity as confidential as possible. Therefore I will not reveal information such as their nationality or specific age. Nor will I (as many do) give my informants cover names, as I want to avoid the risk of linking a series of quotes or

information that could possibly identify them. For the same reason I will refer to all the interviewed minors as he/him even though one of the minors was a girl.

I will also try to obscure the identity of the reception centre at which the research was carried out. Nonetheless, as there are few reception centres of this kind, it may be difficult to hide the identity from anyone with a slight knowledge of Norwegian reception centres.

These are facts that I deem not necessary in order to evaluate the quality or relevance of the information presented. The age group of my informants is known (about 17-19 years). Two of them are from different countries in the Middle-east; two of them are from different countries in Africa; and one is from an Eastern-European country.

My informants deserve the protection of anonymity in relation to the public in general, but in particular in relation to those that know them. For these, the smallest details can be enough to reveal my informants' identities. Therefore, I choose to be careful about information that is not strictly relevant to this research.

## **2.3 Credibility and relevance**

Thagaard (1998:20) points out, with reference to Denzin and Lincoln (1994:1-18), that "reliability" and "validity" are terms with connotations of a positivist and quantitative heritage that some consider do not entirely fit the methods of qualitative studies and are being reformulated into terms such as credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Thagaard 1998:20, Denzin and Lincoln 1994:14).

While not everyone shares this view (Silverman 2001:225), whatever the position one holds, it is the quality of the research that is the main concern. I will here point to two issues relating to the credibility and relevance of this research project: the credibility of interviews with unaccompanied minor refugees, and selection of unaccompanied minors and legal guardians in regards to relevance.

### ***2.3.1 INTERVIEWS AND CREDIBILITY***

In any interview situation the interview is affected by the relation between the informant and the interviewer - different aspects of the situation such as gender, localization, ethnicity, roles et cetera. It is as such (as much else) situated information, it is not "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth" as the oath goes. Information given is filtered many times. First by the initial perception of the informant; then processed by the informant; then

filtered by the questions asked by the interviewer; and again by what the informant wish and find relevant to relay. There are probably more ways that filtering has occurred as well.

This poses a challenge to the interpretation of interview data. There are various positions on how to use the information gathered, ranging from treating the interviews as reports on the truth (positivism) or as simply the result of a social interaction worthy of its own study (constructionism). In this research I am interested in how the unaccompanied minor refugees *experience* living in a Norwegian reception centre, as well as their relation to others. Of the other informants (the staff, teachers and guardians), I'm interested in both their experience of, and the actual relation to, the unaccompanied minor refugees.

Silverman asks if it is necessary to; “...*choose between seeing interviews as either potentially ‘true’ reports or situated narratives?*” and points to the need to look at the purpose of the research (Silverman 2001:113). If one treats all interview data as purely situational taking national polls would be meaningless, on the other hand if one fails to recognise the situational and relative characteristics of interviews, grave mistakes can be done.

For the purpose of the research at hand I will hold the position that information from interviews both are situational and holds the subjects perspective on, and experience of, reality, and should be analyzed as such, while taking the informants perspective and experience seriously. To me that means to treat the information given as a report on reality, given from a subjective perspective in a specific context.

### ***The challenge of silence behaviour***

It is not only an ethical challenge to interview unaccompanied refugee minors that have, or may have, adopted some form of what Harsløf Hjelde terms “silence behaviour” (Harsløf Hjelde 2004:159) but also a challenge to the credibility of these interviews. Harsløf Hjelde goes so far to conclude that; “Finally, interviews with unaccompanied minors in Oslo would hardly have given reliable information or data in a scientific sense.” (Harsløf Hjelde 2004:48). This conclusion must be seen in relation to that specific research project as well as informants.

It is clear that the silence behavior that Harsløf Hjelde describes poses a problem for interviewing unaccompanied minor refugees both ethically as well as methodologically. Silence behavior can involve strategies ranging from social withdrawal and silence to outright

lies if feeling pressured (Harsløf Hjelde 2004:34). This behavior is not an unmotivated blind behavior, but a behavior that is meant to protect certain parts of their life and their self.

Harsløf Hjelde notes that this silence behavior is mainly linked to protecting information related to immigration policies, inadequacies in exile and traumatic experiences from war and flight (Harsløf Hjelde 2004:165-166). Interviewing unaccompanied refugee minors on these issues will serve little purpose if one wants to ensure credibility, as well as it would be ethically questionable. I have therefore avoided asking questions that relate to the identity of the children (age, country of origin, religion etc), to contact with their family, and to experiences of their past (before they came to the reception centre).

It does not mean that the interviews were not affected by silence behavior, but that subjects that would elicit such behavior were avoided. Given that, I think these interviews largely should be treated as I will treat the other interviews in this research – as subjective reports on reality.

### *2.3.2 REPRESENTATIVITY AND RELEVANCE*

The primary aim of this study is to try to understand how the unaccompanied minor refugees in this particular case deal with emotions in relation to others that they relate to in their everyday life at the reception centre, not to generalise. Analyzing these unaccompanied minors situation, I hope to identify factors and mechanics that affect how these children deal with their emotions that can be used to better understand how other minors like these deal with their emotions in relation to others.

#### ***Informant selection***

In terms of observation it can be argued that the whole population of the case studied were my informants, however when it comes to informants that was interviewed, a selection was made. It is timely to ask how well this selection it reflects the population of the case, in other words the unaccompanied minors, staff, guardians and teachers related to the reception centre I was at.

#### **UNACCOMPANIED MINOR REFUGEES**

The choice of informants first and foremost rested on availability and convenience. When it comes to the unaccompanied minors interviewed, it means that I interviewed some of the more outgoing and maybe more resourceful as well as longest staying of the unaccompanied minors staying at the reception centre. These were those I most easily got a

connection with, as well as those with most fluency in English and Norwegian due to their long stay at the reception centre and therefore easiest to communicate with.

A consequence of this is that minors that had recently arrived and minors that were maybe more introverted, less resourceful or less well adapted are not represented among the interviewed unaccompanied minor refugees. My informants have also been newcomers and their view on their first period in hindsight is valuable. I find it more problematic not having been able to include what is possibly the more introverted or less resourceful or less well adapted minors.

This is not to say that my informants were exceptionally outgoing, well adapted and resourceful, but both from observation and by selection methods it is reasonable to expect that they have on average more of these qualities than others of the minors at the reception centre. This is a challenge as it is also reasonable to expect the experience of living in a reception centre, and how one deal with emotions are affected by how resourceful, outgoing or well adapted you are.

To a degree this can be taken into account, as some things can be expected to be more challenging, for less outgoing, less well adapted or less resourceful minors. But in the end I can only accept that I do not have sufficient information about these groups, and can just view their situation in relation to the information I have from the unaccompanied minors I have interviewed.

#### **GUARDIANS, STAFF AND TEACHERS**

Also the guardians, staff and teachers were chosen mainly on the basis on availability and convenience.

The teachers were those that were made available (eg. agreed on seeing me for interviews). However they were also the teachers that seemed to have the most to do with the class that I had observed (one of the teacher was the form master), and as such seemed to have good experience and information about working as teachers for unaccompanied minor refugees.

As for the staff, I chose two that had long experience at that reception centre and were two of the main staff. Again, they were chosen because I expected them to have the most information and experience with working with unaccompanied minor refugees.

I also have the impression that the guardians that I interviewed were of the more

dedicated guardians, having quite a bit of contact with their ward. I had contact with guardians that felt they had so little experience and little contact with their charge that they did not want to participate. The guardian informants are thus not fully representative of their group, but they do represent the most knowledgeable and experienced informants of these groups.

## **2.4 Practical Issues**

### *2.4.1 TRANSLATION*

I have chosen to write this research project in English, partly due to the experience of writing in English and partly to increase the accessibility of the research. An issue with writing in English is that much of the research I have and literature that I will use are only available in Norwegian. Also much of the data gathered is gathered in Norwegian. To be true to the research and literature done, as well as my informants I will quote texts in their original language. I will however provide a translation in an appendix, using endnotes for reference, for easy accessibility for non-Norwegian speakers. I consider myself fairly proficient in English, but I apologise for any mistakes done.

### *2.4.2 TERMS*

Unaccompanied minor refugees is quite a long term. I will therefore refer to them as just “minors” and sometimes “unaccompanied minors”, or use terms reflecting their age; such as “youth” or “adolescents”. I will also use the terms “refugee” and “asylum seeker” interchangeably about these minors.

## **2.5 Summary**

In this study of how unaccompanied minor refugees in a Norwegian reception centre deal with their emotions, I have chosen to focus on one reception centre. I have used both observation and interviews as methods of data gathering, and interviewed unaccompanied minors, as well as staff, guardians and teachers of unaccompanied minors at the reception centre. The study has a wide, encompassing focus that comes at the cost of in-depth information, trying to see the life of the unaccompanied minor refugees at the reception centre in a whole.

# 3 Initial theoretical perspectives

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In this chapter I will present some of the initial theoretical perspectives of this thesis. These are perspectives that have guided me both in how I have approached this study, as well as in the analysis of my research.

## 3.1 Emotion management

As mentioned in the introduction the outset for this thesis is inspired by Arlie Hochschild's theories on emotion as something that can be managed and worked (Hochschild 1979, 1983, 1990, 1998). Through her theory on emotion management Hochschild offers a perspective on emotions as something that can be "worked"; something that can be shaped and changed. Emotion is thus not just something that we more or less voluntarily experience and express, in this perspective emotion is also something we can shape and change to our purpose. I will here try to briefly present the perspective, and some of the central concepts, of Hochschild's theory on emotion management.

Hochschild's theory on emotion management is an interactionist approach (1990:117) to emotion that relates emotion to social conventions (Hochschild 1979, 1983). In this perspective emotions are something that can be managed; something that can be shaped and as such to a degree can be controlled (Hochschild 1979:561), which Hochschild again links to social structure through the existence of feeling rules (1979:551).

### *3.1.1 FEELING RULES*

In everyday life there exists a number of situations that have expectations for how to feel, some more than others. Hochschild herself uses funerals (sad), parties (merry) and weddings (happy) as examples of events that has expectations of what is appropriate to feel (1979:551-552), and it is easy to find other such more everyday situations that have expectations for what one should feel (or not feel); when being helped (gratitude), seeing your child perform in a school play (pride), your boy- or girlfriend kissing another (jealousy).

Expectations like these form norms for how to feel in a given situation. Hochschild refers to such norms for how to feel as feeling rules. According to Hochschild feeling rules

are socially shared rules about what feelings is appropriate for a given situation (Hochschild 1979:563, 1990:122). She elaborates further that feeling rules are not unsophisticated rules that tells us to simply “feel this” or “feel that”, instead she says:

*“They are more like “zoning regulations” that demarcate how much of a given feeling, held in a given way, is crazy, unusual but understandable, normal, inappropriate, or almost inappropriate for a given social context.” (Hochschild 1990:122)*

Feeling rules thus guides what we should feel, to what extent we should feel it, and the duration of the feeling (Hochschild 1979:564, 1990:122), but not in a rigid sense. So we can feel the wrong feeling, or too much or too little of the appropriate feeling, or not feel it long enough or even feel it for too long.

Feeling rules as such usually leaves a leeway, with varying room for what, how long and how much one should feel. But, as Hochschild states, feeling rules have some boundaries of what is within a spectrum of propriety and normality, and what is to be considered to be outside this spectrum; what is considered to be inappropriate or deviant from normality.

### *3.1.2 EMOTION WORK*

Emotion work is the effort, conscious or not, of attempting to evoke, suppress or in any other way alter an emotion or feeling, “in degree or quality” (Hochschild 1979:561, 1998:9). Emotion management is what you do when you, knowingly or not, try to work your feelings. You do not necessarily have to succeed at it; emotion work lies in the effort, not in the result (Hochschild 1979:561).

Hochschild distinguishes between two different modes of emotion work; “surface acting” and “deep acting” (1983:36-42, 1990:120). In “Ideology and Emotion Management” (1990) she describes them as follows; *‘In surface acting, we change feeling from the “outside in”. In deep acting, we change feeling form the “inside out”.’* (Hochschild 1990:120)

#### ***Surface acting***

Surface acting is focusing on our expression to try to express the feeling we are supposed to (or want to) feel through our outer appearance (Hochschild 1990:120). To smile and seem light-hearted when you are at a party, to put your face in a solemn expression when you enter a church ceremony trying not to think of that joke you just heard about the minister, to try to walk straight and firmly with your head high through the school yard when all you want to do is run in embarrassment. But Hochschild notes that surface acting is not about

trying to fake an emotion, but trying to feel it through (outwardly) acting it (Hochschild 1990:121). Through the expression you try to feel what you express; to feel confident through your firm walk, to evoke the reverence appropriate for a church through the solemn expression, smiling to feel merry. As she says in the quote, surface acting is changing our feeling from the “outside in”.

### ***Deep acting***

“Deep acting” starts with the inside, by trying to feel what we are supposed to (or want to) feel in a given situation, to not only express a certain emotion but to feel it (Hochschild 1990:121).

There are several ways to approach deep acting. One way is through trying to control our bodily reactions; to breathe calmly when we are nervous, to relax your body and not tense up hearing the annoying clicks of your colleague’s pen, to breathe controlled and hard, tensing your body trying to channel your fear into anger and so on.

This is *bodily deep acting*; through our bodily state we try to alter our feelings, by trying to control and change our bodily reactions (Hochschild 1979:562, 1990:121). A second way of deep acting is to remind ourselves to feel something; to remind yourself what you want to feel, to “be happy”, “don’t get mad”, “stay calm”, by prompting yourself, or trying to hold back unwanted feelings by focusing on something else (Hochschild 1990:121).

The third way of deep acting is inspired by the acting profession and the Method acting developed by the Russian theatre director, Constantin Stanislavski, from his book “An Actor Prepares” (Hochschild 1983:39, 1990:121). In this way of deep acting we use our past experiences and imagination, creating mental images trying to change how feel by changing our experience. Hochschild uses an example of the flight attendant that sees a troublesome passenger with a fear of flying as a child, which stops her from being able to be angry with him (Hochschild 1990:121).

These ways of working emotions, from surface to deep acting, from outward acting to changing of bodily reactions, prompting yourself or changing how you perceive something, are of course not mutually exclusive (Hochschild 1979:562). Rather they are all various techniques that we can use either separately or in combination to alter our emotions. So when the annoying customer comes to us we can put on our biggest smile to serve him, trying to breathe calmly, reminding ourselves to not get frustrated and that the day is soon over, and

realising that does not quite help as much as we had hoped, try to think of seeing that lovely girl you met the other day again tonight, bringing a true smile to your face.

So far I have been focusing on what the individual can do to work on their emotions, but emotion work is not only done by oneself (Hochschild 1979:562). Emotion work can also be done by others upon you (or by you upon others). When you try to cheer up your mate at your party, or comfort the child that has scrubbed his knee, or when your friend tells you how bad your ex-boyfriend treated you to help you get over him, when you are nervous and someone gives you a massage to calm down are all examples of emotion work done by one onto another, making an effort to change another's emotions. The cooperative aspect of emotion work is an important perspective for this thesis that I will return to later.

### *3.1.3 STRUCTURE AND IDEOLOGY*

Although Hochschild easily is classified within an interactionist tradition her theories on emotion management have a clear structural perspective, linking emotion management to social structures and ideology. This side of emotion management permeates her works, as clearly shown in “The Managed Heart – commercialization of Human Feeling” (Hochschild 1983) where she analyses the demands on modern day service workers for emotional management, and later in “The Second Shift: Working parents and the evolution at home” (Hochschild 1989) where she analyses how gender ideologies are mirrored in feeling rules and emotion management.

With her focus on how emotion, through feeling rules and emotions management, is linked to social structures and ideologies she shows us both that emotion is commercialized, that the management of emotion is a commodity that can be bought and sold as much as manual labour (Hochschild 1979:572), and that emotion is affected by ideologies, not only of the workplace but also in other aspects, such as in terms of gender (Hochschild 1990:125).

Thus Hochschild's impressive work makes it hard to ignore the impact of the culture we are part of on how we deal with our emotions in everyday life, both at home and at work.

## **3.2 What is emotion?**

In a thesis focusing on the management of emotions there is one question that cannot be escaped. What is emotion? Without trying to give a definite answer, I will again turn to Hochschild, for a perspective on what emotion is.

### *3.2.1 AN INTERACTIONIST ACCOUNT OF EMOTION*

According to Hochschild there are three prominent models of emotion in the social sciences; the organismic, the interactional and the social constructionist model (Hochschild 1990:119).

The organismic model and social constructionist model can each be considered to represent the extreme on a scale representing biological influence on the one side and social influence on the other side. In their most extreme interpretations the organismic model holds emotions to be in their entirety a result of physiological processes, at the best as a response to social circumstances, while an extreme social constructionist position would hold that emotions are in their entirety a result of social processes. In essence these positions can be said to present the either side of the nature versus nurture debate. This confrontation between the biological and the social is more relevant and thus more intense in the sociology of emotions than in most disciplines of sociology (Kemper 1990:20).

Although there is no sociologist that would not recognise the social influences on emotion, the importance attributed to physiology is a matter of contention in the sociology of emotion. Even so, in his article “Themes and Variations in the Sociology of Emotions” T.D. Kemper (1990:20) notes that: “*Virtually every sociologist of emotions acknowledges a physiological substrate to emotions.*”

The interactionist model of emotion is positioned between the organismic and social constructionist position, recognising both the physiological as well as social aspects of emotion. In Hochschild’s interactionist model of emotion, social and physiological factors work together interactively when experiencing emotion (Hochschild 1990:119). As shown when explaining Hochschild’s concept of emotion work, we relate reflexively to emotions. Thus most emotional experiences are complex processes of us reflexively trying to shape and form our emotions. In this sense the biological enters as a part of our emotional experience, as “ingredients” as Hochschild (1990:120) coins it, while social factors not only enter before and after an emotional experience but also *during* the emotional experience (Hochschild 1983:211, 1990:120).

Still this does not tell us what emotion is. Only that the interactionist model of Hochschild emotion recognises emotion to have a physiological aspect that we relate to reflexively, and that emotional experiences are interactive processes of social and physiological factors.

### *3.2.2 DEFINING EMOTION*

Drawing on Peggy A. Thoits' work Hochschild defines emotion as an experience composite of awareness of four elements: appraisal of a situation, changes in physical sensations, expressive gestures and a categorising of the specific constellation of the three preceding elements into a cultural emotion label (Hochschild 1990:119).

Thus you might for example see someone sneak in front of you in the queue (appraisal), feel your body tense up and possibly a rush of adrenaline (physiological change), and find yourself frowning and perhaps cursing under your breath (expressive gestures), and probably surmise quite quickly, given the particular composition of the other elements (evaluation, physiological change, and expressive gestures), that you're annoyed or maybe even angry.

Note that these elements correspond with the general types of emotion work Hochschild mentions, cognitive, bodily and expressive types of emotion work (Hochschild 1979:562). According to Thoits (1990:192) research shows that changing one of these factors (appraisal, physiological change, expressive gestures, emotional label) substantially changes an individual's interpretation of their emotional state, which supports the emotion management approach to emotions.

### *3.2.3 EMOTION AS A SENSE*

So according to Hochschild there are four elements that comes together in our awareness to create an emotional experience. In one way emotion is defined, but there is another way of asking what emotion is. And that is asking what emotion is for? What does it do? According to Hochschild emotion is a part of our sentient nature, it is a sense (Hochschild 1990:119). Emotion tells us how we "stand in the world" as Hochschild puts it, telling us in her words: "what-is-out-there-from-where-I-stand" (Hochschild 1990:119).

So in Hochschild's view emotion functions as a signal of how we relate to the world; when someone sneaks in front of you in the queue and you feel yourself tense up you know you did not like that, when you see your ex-boyfriend kissing another girl and you do not feel a pang of jealousy you know you are over him, or when you meet this girl and notice you can't help yourself staring at her or smiling sheepishly every time she says something, you know you like her (she probably does know that too if you act that obviously).

Emotions, in this view, tells us how we relate to the world, sometimes it will be

something we already know other times we may actually learn something new. As for example the first time you realise that you feel much better at the prospect of staying home in the weekends than going out for a party, realising that you may be getting older, or paraphrasing an example of Hochschild (1990:119); when you find yourself devastated at the absence of what you thought of just as an old friend, you might realise that she/he means more to you than a friend. Emotion in this perspective is a sense like hearing, seeing or smelling, helping you to orientate yourself in the world, sometimes it tells you something new but probably mostly tells you something you already knew.

### **3.3 Goffman, emotion management, and keeping face**

Erving Goffman is a prominent sociologist of the last century, an acute observer of social interaction with a strong link to the symbolic interactionist tradition. From his extensive work I want to present a perspective from Goffman's analysis of the importance of keeping face in social interaction. But first I want to briefly comment on Hochschild's emotion management theory's relation to Goffman's work.

#### *3.3.1 HOCHSCHILD'S EMOTION MANAGEMENT AND GOFFMAN*

In an early article on emotion management "Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure" (1979) Hochschild shapes out her theory of emotion between a Goffmanian "focus on consciously designed appearances" and a Freudian focus on the unconscious (Hochschild 1979:555). One could say that Hochschild juxtaposes Goffmanian interactionism with her interactionist account of emotion management. In the referenced article Hochschild criticises Goffman for being too focused on situations, disregarding social structure and personality (Hochschild 1979:556-557). While she concedes that this may be useful for Goffman's purposes, she argues that reintroducing social structure and personality is necessary for a study of feeling rules and emotion management (Hochschild 1979:556-557).

Hochschild argues that to understand how feeling rules come into existence and change, we have to take into account social structure – such as the relation between the sexes or the classes (Hochschild 1979:557). At the same time she criticises Goffman for positing a superficial actor that does not manage inner feelings but just outward appearance (Hochschild 1979:557-558). Thus the Goffman actor seems to be just surface acting, leaving us with what

she refers to as a psychological ‘black box’ (Hochschild 1979:557-558). The study of emotion management requires a deeper actor, an actor “*capable of feeling, capable of assessing when a feeling is ‘inappropriate,’ and capable of trying to manage feeling*” (Hochschild 1979:557).

Through her criticism of Goffman’s actor Hochschild seems to contribute to create a more complete ‘actor’. This is an actor that is capable of not only holding back the tears to keep up the appearances, but to try to feel good while doing it; an actor that not only manages outer impressions, but also inner emotions. At the same time Hochschild is able to place this actor, and these situations of impression and emotion management, within the frame of a larger social structure.

Hochschild’s criticism of Goffman thus seems to be based on a close relation between their respective perspectives, and a considerable respect of Goffman’s work.

### *3.3.2 KEEPING FACE*

The essay “On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction” from 1955 is one of Erving Goffman’s earliest published works, preceding “The Presentation of Self In Everyday Life” from 1959 (Goffman 2005). This essay is an early exploration of the presentation of self in social interaction. In ‘On Face-Work’ Goffman shows how we present and maintain ‘face’ in any interaction with others (Hviid Jacobsen and Kristiansen 2002:112).

Wittingly or not, through how we act and speak in interaction with others we give off an impression to others of how we see ourselves (Goffman 2005:5). Goffman refers to this series of actions as a ‘line’. Face can be said to be this self-image we present in interaction with others, through the line we have chosen. According to Goffman a person is ‘in face’ or maintaining face when he acts in a way that is consistent with the image he presents of himself, with how others treat and judge him as well as with any other information at hand (Goffman 2005:6-7).

Goffman states that when a person takes on and presents a self-image he is expected to abstain from actions that would not be in accordance with the self-image he presents, and likewise have to perform others actions that are expected of the image presented (Goffman 2005:9). Even when these actions (or inactions) come at a cost to himself (Goffman 2005:9). Goffman refers to this as ‘the rule of self-respect’ (Goffman 2005:11). The person is expected to show consistency in the face presented, to not act in ways that are beneath or above, or otherwise at odds with the face presented. To do otherwise would be to show a lack of self-

respect.

### ***Emotional attachment***

Goffman stresses the emotional attachment to the face we have established (Goffman 2005:6-9). We respond emotionally to how it is treated in interaction with others (Hviid Jacobsen and Kristiansen 2002:112, Goffman 2005:6). Being in a situation that supports a person's face usually makes him feel confident, while situations that makes the person look better or worse than he expected is likely to make him respectively feel good or bad about himself (Goffman 2005:6, 8).

Any type of information, conveyed by the person himself, those he interacts with or other sources present in the situation presented may discredit the face presented. Therefore a person is dependent on the others in the interaction to help maintain his face.

However, in the same way that we are expected to show self-respect through not acting in a way that is not in accordance with the self-image presented, we are expected to show consideration for others face. Goffman refers to this as the 'rule of considerateness' (Goffman 2005:10). At the same time we have an emotional involvement in others faces through emotional identification with them and their feelings (Goffman 2005:6, 10). Therefore we are not only expected to, but naturally inclined to want to help others maintain their face, and will go a certain length to help them save their face if necessary.

Thus we have both an emotional attachment to our own face as well as to the face of those we interact, if not as strong as to our own face. According to Goffman the 'rule of self-respect' and the 'rule of considerateness' often form a basis for social interaction where everyone accepts and maintains the others face (Goffman 2005:11).

### ***'Losing face'***

The emotional attachment to our face, to our perception of our self, makes losing face a daunting prospect. According to Goffman there is two ways to lose face; to be in the wrong face or to be out of face (Goffman 2005:8). If the face presented (the line taken) is not reconcilable with information available, a person can be said to be in wrong face (Goffman 2005:8). A person is out of face if he has no line ready, that accords with what is expected of him by the other participants in a situation (Goffman 2005:8).

While loss of face causes us shame and embarrassment here and now, it may also make

those witness to it to not show us the same respect in the future (Goffman 2005:7). Loss of face may as such mean a loss of status as well. Simultaneously loss of face can be a considerable threat to one's self image. One's face may not be just an image of self presented to others, but quite often an image that one self believes in – or as Goffman puts it – “...an image of self to which he has become emotionally attached...” (Goffman 2005:8). The loss of face may therefore not only be the cause of embarrassment and shame in the given situation, but undermine the person's self-image and confidence in general at the same time as changing how he is seen and by others for the future.

### ***Social Relationships***

The possibility of future encounters makes it important to not only present a self image that one can sustain in the given situation, but also in future situations. Goffman states that to maintain a certain face in the present, we have had to abstain from contradicting actions in the past (Goffman 2005:7).

Face carries over in social relations, and the line chosen in one encounter must be possible to reconcile with a line chosen in a previous or future encounter with the same person. Therefore keeping face in any social relationship, such as friends, relatives and colleagues, becomes extra challenging as such social relationships inevitably means more encounters and social interactions.

The more social interaction a person has with someone, the more information (through his own actions, from others or from other sources) they are likely to gain about him. Then this information needs to be incorporated into the face presented. That naturally also increases the chance of information coming to surface that is not easy to reconcile with the face presented, and thus increase the risk of losing face.

Such relationships therefore require extra consideration for the face presented, as well as an extra effort to include new information and experiences into it, compared to shorter relations where one can be less careful with how one presents oneself.

### ***Face work***

Face-work refer to the actions we do to make whatever we are doing consistent with face (Goffman 2005:12). Through face work we can incorporate information and actions that would otherwise challenge our face into the self-image presented. Face work, according to Goffman, is often habitual and standardized into common practices (Goffman 2005:13). In

doing face work the rule of considerateness applies and the person has to keep in mind the others face when trying to save his own (Goffman 2005:14).

Goffman describes two basic kinds of face-work (Goffman 2005:15, 19). The first is to avoid situations where one's face may be threaten, be it to entirely avoid an encounter, to avoid certain topics and activities, to use self-irony and other measures to avoid losing face (Goffman 2005:15-16). Goffman refers to this type of face work as "*the avoidance process*" (Goffman 2005:15). Another kind of basic face-work Goffman refers to is "*the corrective process*" (Goffman 2005:19). This is the type of face-work that a group does when something has happened that is a threat to the face of one or more of the participants, and try to correct it to minimise its consequences.

### *3.3.3 FACE WORK AND EMOTION MANAGEMENT*

Goffman's work on social-interaction, and he goes on further in describing how we present ourselves in interaction with others in "The presentation of self in everyday life" (Goffman 1959) and other works. I have chosen to focus on his article on face work because of the emphasis it puts on our emotional attachment to our self-image and the importance of maintaining face in our relations to others.

While Goffman's analysis of face work (Goffman 2005) shows a strong emotional link in our attempts to maintain face, Hochschild rightfully criticises Goffman for a lack of focus on the management of emotions that is required to do so (Hochschild 1979:557-558). Seeing "On face-work" in the light of Hochschild's theories on emotion management, we get a strong combination of the importance both emotional motivation as well as emotional management in social interaction. A combination that I believe is vital to understand social interaction from the viewpoint of a sociology of emotions.

## **3.4 Dealing with emotions – an initial approach**

I have chosen to use the term 'dealing' with emotions in my approach to this thesis, to distinguish it from Hochschild's 'emotion management', and from another oft used term; 'coping'. By 'dealing' with emotions I refer to how a person generally relates to his or hers emotions.

Hochschild's emotion management theory is a clear inspiration and of great importance for this thesis, however I have wanted to avoid making it the only perspective of

this thesis. One of the reasons for this is that I have wanted to avoid some of the implications of emotion management as something that is mostly done to accord with social expectations and structure (see Hochschild 1979:551), as well as the rational and strategic behaviour implied by the term 'management'. Similarly I have chosen to not use the term 'coping' with emotions in my approach to the field, as it seem to imply a relation to emotions that is focused on a mastering and adaptation to distressing and painful emotions.

Both these perspectives, dealing with emotions as 'emotion management' and as 'coping' with distressing emotions will be central to the thesis, however I found both perspectives as too restricting in my initial approach to the thesis and therefore chose to use the term 'deal with' emotions as a term that can also include these two perspectives as well as others where relevant.

## 4 Unaccompanied minors: facts and figures

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There have probably been children separated from their parents - fleeing from conflict, famine and natural disasters – in every refugee situation since the dawn of mankind. Through the years they have had many names: “abandoned children”, “detached children”, “foundlings”, “separated children”, “orphans”, “vagabond children” and more (Ressler, Boothby, Stenbock 1988:113). Ressler et al. argues that “unaccompanied child” is preferable because “...it avoids unsubstantiated implications about the cause of separation or the existence or intent of the parents” (Ressler et al. 1988:113). Where other terms can imply the abandonment of the child, or the death of the parents, or other implications of their separation from their parents – “unaccompanied child” is a neutral term without any misleading connotations.

In Norway unaccompanied minors are defined by the government<sup>5</sup> as children and youth under 18, coming to the country without a parent or other adult holding parental responsibilities (Utlendingsforskriften §55a). This is interpreted to be a slightly more extensive definition of unaccompanied minors than the UN definition:

*“Unaccompanied children are those who are separated from both parents and are not being cared for by an adult, who by law or custom, is responsible to do so.” (UNHCR 1994:121)*

While the UN definition does not consider children that are in the company of persons that by custom have parental responsibility to be unaccompanied the Norwegian definition of unaccompanied children does. This means that children arriving in company of their elder siblings, uncles, aunts, or other persons that could by custom or tradition be considered to have parental responsibility are defined as an unaccompanied minor by the Norwegian government.

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<sup>5</sup> Unaccompanied minors are not given a definition per se, but in a regulation (Utlendingsforskriften) to the immigrants act (Utlendingsloven – Lov om utlendingers adgang til riket og deres opphold her) only parents or other person with parental rights are considered to have responsibility for a child. This can be seen in various paragraphs in Utlendingsforskriften, most notably §55.

## 4.1 Who are they?

It is striking, when one looks at the statistics on the nationality of unaccompanied refugee minors, that majority comes from countries where we are used to hearing of conflict and a lack of security for the general population. Looking at the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration's (UDI) own numbers from 1996 to 2007 (Tall og Fakta 2007 p32), since the beginning of the last decade most of the unaccompanied minors come from Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, Eritrea or Iran. The largest groups by far are from Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia. Other than these countries unaccompanied refugee minors are spread out over a number of countries, with less than 5 coming from most other countries.

The number of unaccompanied minors arriving each year has fluctuated from a low of 107 in 1996 to peaks of 894 in 2002 and 916 in 2003. Yet for most years the numbers look fairly stable ranging from around 370 to around 550 arrivals per year (Tall og Fakta 2007 p32).

The majority of registered unaccompanied refugee minors arriving in Western Europe, including Norway, are in their late adolescence (Ayotte 2000:17). In 2006 and 2007 about 80% of unaccompanied minors applying for asylum in Norway were between 15 and 18 years old (Tall og Fakta 2006 2007:Figur 42, Tall og Fakta 2007 2008:Figur 42). In the same years 5% or less of the unaccompanied minors arrivals were registered as under 12 years old. A likely reason for this is the hardship of being in flight, where older children would be more likely to set out on and survive such a journey.

As for gender, the majority arriving in Western Europe have been boys (Ayotte 2000:17). This may be because boys are considered to be more at risk in conflict zones than girls, but less in danger travelling on their own than girls. It may also be because, in some cultures, boys are considered more valuable than girls (Ayotte 2000:17).

In summation, most unaccompanied minors arriving in Norway are registered as boys, in their late adolescence (15-17), and a majority arrive from a few countries that are in conflict, with Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia being on top of the list the last 5 years.

### *4.1.1 WHY DO THEY COME HERE?*

Wendy Ayotte (2000) has written a report entitled "Separated Children Coming to Western Europe: Why they travel and how they arrive." where she has looked into the reasons for why unaccompanied children come to Europe. She states:

*"A striking feature of many cases was the complexity of reasons or contributory causes that resulted in children leaving their country without their parents. Similarly, a Dutch study (examined on page 26) found that when examining children's asylum files, researcher could not reliably "determine the most important ground for the flight". While it is often not possible to identify one overarching reason why a child left, one particular event may have been the "last straw", as illustrated by the Somali case below." Wendy Ayotte (2000:24)*

Thus, according to Ayotte, there is no easily identifiable *single* factor to determine the reasons of flight for unaccompanied children arriving in Western Europe. Analysing more than 218 interviews with separated children from 28 countries, more than 449<sup>6</sup> flight reasons were found (Ayotte 2000:24-25). Here, I will give a short breakdown::

- § Nearly half (104) came from countries in armed conflict or with serious disturbances. Of these, 70 had been exposed to violence directly.
- § Slightly less than half (94 cases) experienced direct or indirect persecution (political, ethnic, nationality, social group, gender/sexual orientation)
- § Slightly more than a third (77 cases) were separated from parents in country of origin (or, in a few cases, in a third country), where parents were missing, imprisoned, killed, dead by natural causes, or too ill to care for the children, and in a few cases the children were abandoned by the parents.
- § Just under 14% (30) of the cases listed serious deprivation and poverty as a cause.
- § About 12% (26) were trafficked for exploitation. Mainly prostitution.
- § About 12% (25) experienced torture. Mainly by state authorities, resulting in lasting damage in 5 of the cases.
- § Categories such as; lack of educational opportunities or discrimination, abusive or problematic family situation, lack of medical care, harmful traditional practices and refusal of state military service represented less than 10% of the case studies
- § In 6 cases the causes were unknown or unclear, and in 14 cases the stories told were considered questionable.

(Ayotte 2000:25-26)

This list gives one an impression of the various reasons that motivate children to seek

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<sup>6</sup> Some cases had more than one reasons for flight, and was therefore counted in more than one category (Ayotte 2000:25)

refuge in Western Europe. This is a qualitative study though, so the numbers are not fully representative but should be considered “reflective of the significant trends” (Ayotte 2000:25).

#### *4.1.2 HOW ARE THEIR RIGHTS REGULATED?*

The rights of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers are protected through a number of laws and regulations, such as the UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Barneverntjenesteloven<sup>7</sup>, Vergemålsloven<sup>8</sup>, Utlendingsloven<sup>9</sup>, Opplæringslova<sup>10</sup> Barnelova<sup>11</sup>, Forvaltningsloven<sup>12</sup> and Personopplysningsloven<sup>13</sup> (Ingebrigtsen, Berger and Thorsen 2004:26-36).

The incorporation of the UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child into Norwegian law in 2003, giving it precedence over other laws (Ingebrigtsen et al. 2004:26) ensures children in Norway a whole range of basic rights. Article 2 ensuring children equal rights without discrimination, and article 3 stating that the child’s best interest shall be the primary principle for all governmental decisions regarding the child are two of the most prominent articles in the UN’s children’s convention. I have also mentioned Article 27 earlier which underlines children’s right to an adequate standard of living for their level of physical, mental, moral and social development and is particularly relevant for this thesis, in addition the convention covers areas such as the right to health care and education, the right to freedom of belief and speech, the right to privacy and personal integrity, the right to participation in cultural activities, the right to play and leisure and more (UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child, Ingebrigtsen et al. 2004:26-29).

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<sup>7</sup> Lov om barneverntjenester - Act relating to child welfare services; The Child Welfare Act. (unofficial translation)

<sup>8</sup> Lov om vergemål for umyndige - Act relating to guardianship for persons who are legally incapable; The Guardianship Act. (unofficial translation)

<sup>9</sup> Lov om utlendingers adgang til riket og deres opphold her - Act concerning the entry of foreign nationals into the Kingdom and their presence in the realm; The Immigration Act. (unofficial translation)

<sup>10</sup> Lov om grunnskolen og den vidaregåande opplæringa - Act relating to primary and secondary education; The Education Act. (unofficial translation)

<sup>11</sup> Lov om barn og foreldre – Act relating to children and parents; The Children Act. (unofficial translation)

<sup>12</sup> Lov om behandlingssmåten i forvaltningssaker - Act relating to procedure in cases concerning the public administration; The Public Administration Act. (unofficial translation)

<sup>13</sup> Lov om behandling av personopplysninger - Act relating to the processing of personal data; The Personal Data Act. (unofficial translation)

*Barneverntjenesteloven* (The Child Welfare Act) regulates the government's responsibility to help children who live in conditions that can harm their health or development, and their responsibility to give children a secure environment to grow up in (§1-1). The child welfare act is the law that gives the government responsibility for and the right to make decisions for children when their parents are dead; have disappeared or are otherwise unable to care for them themselves (Ingebrigtsen et al. 2004:29). The application of the child welfare act in regards to unaccompanied refugee minors has been a subject of debate. The NGOU<sup>14</sup> "Først og fremst barn – Overføring av omsorgsansvaret for enslige, mindreårige asylsøkere til barnevernet."<sup>v</sup> was a subject of the debate that led to the transfer of the care of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers under 15 years of age to the Norwegian child care services in 2008 (Mindreårige som forsvinner fra mottak 2008:8).

*Vergemålsloven* (The Guardianship Act) regulates the right to a guardian, as well rights and duties this entails. Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers have the right to get a provisional guardian appointed when they arrive in Norway, whom acts in the parents place to make sure that the minor get the necessary care and comfort (Ingebrigtsen et al. 2004:30). However, provisional guardians are not supposed to provide this care themselves, just make sure that the government provides the care that the minors are entitled to.

*Utlendingsloven* (The Immigration Act) regulates the rules of entrance and immigration Norway, and procedure relating such cases (Ingebrigtsen et al. 2004:32). As previously mention it is in a regulation to this act, Utlendingsforskriften, that one will find a legal basis for Norway's definition of an unaccompanied minor (Utlendingsforskriften §55a). Other than that unaccompanied minors are not particularly mentioned in the immigration act (Ingebrigtsen et al. 2004:32).

*Opplæringslova* (The Education Act) in conjunction with the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 2 (regarding the non-discrimination of children) and Article 28 and 29 (on the rights of children to education) gives any child (including unaccompanied minors) expected to stay in Norway for more than three months equal rights (and duty) to education as Norwegian children (Opplæringslova §2-1, §3-1). This includes primary and secondary education, though minors over 16 years old has a right to primary education for adults (Opplæringslova §4a-1).

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<sup>14</sup> Non-governmental organisations utredninger, meaning Non-governmental organisations report, a play on words on the "Norske Offentlige Utredninger" (NOU) meaning Norwegian governmental reports.

*Barneloven* (The Children Act) regulates the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents for their children (Ingebrigtsen et al. 2004:32). Parents are duty bound to provide for and give care and consideration to their children; both factual and psychological care – this responsibility befalls anyone that has the actual care for the child (Ingebrigtsen et al. 2004:32-34).

*Forvaltningsloven* (Public Administration Act) and *Personopplysningsloven* (The Personal Data Act) pertains to the legal rights of the unaccompanied minor asylum seeker. The right to get a decision, to know the grounds for a decision and the right to appeal it the right to access information about oneself, the right to have information edited, deleted or corrected as well as the right to confidentiality is regulated by these acts (Ingebrigtsen et al. 2004:34-35).

It is interesting to note here that in a letter to the UDI in 2005 Kommunal- and Regionaldepartementet<sup>15</sup> (KRD) confirms that employees at reception centers run by private operators are not bound to any duty of confidentiality in regards to the (minor or adult) residents (Taushetsplikt for ansatte i statlige asylmottak og utveksling av informasjon 2005:4<sup>th</sup> paragraph), and that it is up to the UDI to incorporate any such agreement on the residents right to confidentiality in their agreements with the reception centre operators. This is implemented in the UDI's "Reglement for drift av statlige mottak"<sup>vi</sup> (2008) section 5.3 where it is stated that:

*"Ansatte i mottak med kommunal driftsoperatør har lovbestemt taushetsplikt. UDI har pålagt ansatte i mottak med privat driftsoperatør samme taushetsplikt, men denne gjelder ikke overfor UDI".<sup>vii</sup>*

In theory this entails that those that have the daily care of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, in reception centers run by private operators, are not bound by confidentiality in regards to the one party, the UDI, that will make one of the most important decisions for these children's future.

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<sup>15</sup> Ministry of local government and regional development

### *4.1.3 WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THEY COME HERE?<sup>16</sup>*

Unaccompanied minors arriving in Norway who are seeking asylum are first registered with Politiets Utlendingsenhet<sup>17</sup> (PU). Those under 15 are sent to childcare centres run by the child service authorities where they will stay during the entire application process. Those between the age of 15 and 18 are put under the care of the immigration authorities (UDI) and are taken to a transit reception centre. (Mindreårige som forsvinner fra mottak 2008:8).

For those under 15, health examinations, an asylum interview and other such measures are done at the childcare centre they are assigned to. Those that are 15 and over stay at the transit reception centre until the health examinations and asylum interview are done. They also receive information from NOAS<sup>18</sup> about seeking asylum in Norway, the application process and their rights (Mindreårige som... 2008:10). The examination and indoctrination are all done at another transit reception centre though (Mindreårige som... 2008:10), while the interview is done at UDI's facilities in Oslo. Any age tests are also done while they stay at the transit reception centre.

After the unaccompanied minors (over 15) have gone through the necessary procedures at the transit reception centre they are relocated to a reception centre that is especially adapted (with extra funding and staff) for receiving unaccompanied minors. Adult asylum seekers may also be kept there. Unaccompanied minors as well as ordinary asylum seekers that need special medical attention are often placed at Løren transit reception centre in Oslo (Ingebrigtsen, Berger og Thorsen 2004:21). Unaccompanied minors that want to live in private quarters, for example with relatives, can in some cases do so. In those cases the local child care services are notified (Mindreårige som... 2008:10).

The unaccompanied minors stay at these adapted reception centres until their case are settled, and they are either granted a stay permit and resettled in Norway or they are sent out of the country (Ingebrigtsen et al. 2004:21).

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<sup>16</sup> This information is based on the procedures as of 2008. The procedures have changed in regards to minors of 15 years or younger as they used to be under the UDI's care but has recently been transferred to the child care services. The responsibility for minors that are 15 or more are expected to be transferred to the child care services in 2009 (Mindreårige som forsvinner fra mottak 2008:8)

<sup>17</sup> The National Police Immigration Unit (my translation)

<sup>18</sup> Norsk organisasjon for asylsøkere – Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers. An organisation for asylum seekers aiming to advance the interests of asylum seekers in Norway.

#### *4.1.4 THE APPLICATION PROCESS*

In the first phase of the minors' arrival in Norway, they are given the opportunity to fill out a self-declaration form at Tanum while they are in the transit reception centre (Utlendingsdirektoratets saksbehandlingsrutiner for enslige mindreårige asylsøkere og flyktninger 2005:9, Mindreårige som forsvinner fra mottak 2008:10, Tema: Asylprosessen for enslige mindreårige 2007: 5<sup>th</sup> point). The self-declaration form asks about who they are, their family members, how they got to Norway, why they left their homeland, what they have experienced there, what will happen to them if they return, and why they seek asylum (Tema: Asylprosessen... 2007: 5<sup>th</sup> point). There is no lawyer or guardian present at this stage.

Two-to-three weeks after this first phase, unaccompanied minors can expect to be interviewed by the UDI. The minor is appointed a guardian by the public guardian's office<sup>19</sup> (Utlendingsdirektoratets saksbehandlingsrutiner... 2005:10, Mindreårige som... 2008:10). If the asylum seeker is obviously a minor, or is documented to be a minor he/she is allocated a lawyer (Mindreårige som... 2008:10). In other cases he/she will be asked to take an age test. If a minor refuses to take such a test, this can prevent them from being allocated a lawyer and it may have other repercussions in the outcome of their application (Mindreårige som... 2008:11).

The minor has the right to representation of either his/her guardian or a lawyer. An interpreter will also be provided under the interview (Utlendingsforskriften §55a). The content of the interview forms the basis of their application. While the application is processed they stay at a reception centre waiting for a decision. This process can take quite some time. The average processing time for applications by unaccompanied minors in 2007 on average was a bit over 8 months (Mindreårige som... 2008:11).

There are basically two possible outcomes of the application process. Either the applicant is granted stay in Norway or their application is denied. If the unaccompanied minor is granted stay in Norway she/he will wait at the reception centre for resettlement in a municipality.

If the application is denied, it is possible to appeal the decision to Utlendingsnemnda<sup>20</sup> (UNE). The application will be re-evaluated, and processed by UNE. UNE estimated its

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<sup>19</sup> Overformynderiet

<sup>20</sup> The Norwegian Immigration Appeals Board.

average processing time to be 11.5 months for appeals of asylum applications (Saksbehandlingstid 2008:2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph). If the application is denied once again, the minor can stay in the reception centre until such time that it is possible to return them to their country of origin.

Minors are granted stay in Norway in only two cases; asylum, or in the case of a rejection of an application the granting of a residence permit in Norway for humanitarian reasons. To be granted status as a refugee requires documentation that the minor is being personally persecuted by the government in their home country (Engebrigtsen 2002:28). However, as Norway only returns unaccompanied minors that can be reunited with their parents or other legit caretakers in their homeland or in third party countries, the majority of unaccompanied minors that are granted stay in Norway are granted residence permits on a humanitarian basis for one year at a time, up to three years. After this, they are generally granted permanent residence (Engebrigtsen 2002:28).

This is quite an important difference for the minor. If the minor is granted asylum the minor is recognised as a refugee, which entitles them to family reunification in Norway (Engebrigtsen 2002:29). Unaccompanied minors that are granted residence on a humanitarian basis do not have such a right, and will have to show that they can financially support their parents to get a reunification. However, if the parents are found and it is possible to return the child to them, there would no longer be a reason to grant the minor stay in Norway on a humanitarian basis (*Søknad om familiegjenforening der herboende er mindreårig og er innvilget Ot.hum - uf § 24 annet ledd 2002:IIb – 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph*).

## 5 Asgard – the reception centre

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I have chosen to name the reception centre at which my research was done “Asgard” in respect and recognition of the people I met there. Asgard is a name for the home of the gods in Norse mythology, and I find my image of Asgard fitting for the strength and vitality, generosity and hospitality, as well as the diversity of the people I met there. I name it Asgard with the best of intentions and deepest respect, and hope to cause no one offense by this.

### 5.1 A brief description of Asgard and the life there

Asgard was located just outside of a city centre, taking about 20 minutes to reach by bus. The location was rural, on the outskirts of a suburban area, partly secluded and surrounded by trees.

The reception centre building itself was a long, rectangular 3 storey building, with an attached building used as a mix of cafeteria for the unaccompanied minors, and general activity and social room. The main building was a brick building reminiscent of old institutions of early last century, with concrete walls and linoleum flooring

#### ***Residents and living conditions***

The reception centre housed both adults and the unaccompanied refugee minors. Asgard was set for housing 25 minors; most of them gathered on one floor. The rooms they were living in were about 12 square meter, about the size of the rooms you will find in a typical Norwegian student dormitory. Each room was shared by two minors. The rooms were usually furnished with one simple bed on either side, and at the end of the room there was a large window.

#### ***Operation and staffing***

The operation of reception centres in Norway are contracted out by the the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) to municipal or private operators. This reception centre was thus run by another organisation on behalf of the UDI.

Asgard was one of the reception centres particularly adapted for unaccompanied minors from 15 and up, having more staff as well as funding than a normal reception centre. Being a reception centre for unaccompanied minor meant for example that they had staffing there also in the afternoon and during the night, funding for extra activities for the minors, and the minors had their food prepared and served by the reception centre.

### ***School***

Unaccompanied minors have a right to primary and secondary education (CRC Article 2, 28 and 29, Opplæringslova §2.1 and §3.1). The minors at Asgard took their classes at a local branch of Folkeuniversitetet, a countrywide established adult education organisation that hold courses ranging from self-help courses to advanced university level courses. It is possible that some of the minors that were under 16 (i.e 15) attended a regular primary school, but to my knowledge most of the minors at Asgard attended the classes at Folkeuniversitetet. The classes were adapted for immigrants and the education level of the minors.

### ***Atmosphere***

For me, as an outsider, Asgard in all its distinct “institutioness” had a calm atmosphere. Sometimes the minors and the kids were running and playing the halls, or shouting back and forth, or music could be vibrating out a door with the loud rattling bass that you can only get from a cheap boom box. But still the atmosphere struck me as relaxed and calm. There was seemingly little tension. In the time I spent there I did not register any violent or tense episodes between the residents, minors or adults.

# Prologue

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I remember the first time I met the unaccompanied minors at Asgard. It is not a crystal clear memory, rather the haze of time have left its mark but out of the haze comes the image of 5-6 youths walking up the main street in a town nearby Asgard. Walking on a row, reminiscent of a cowboy movie, up the street; smiling, looking around, joking at each other and generally in a good mood.

And there I was, slightly bewildered and anxious, suddenly feeling too old for my years and a tinge of fear of not being cool enough for these kids. Not that they were kids, they were young men or old boys depending on how you see it; adolescents. But they met me with a smile and a natural inclusion, and, as I walked with them, a flattering and reciprocal curiosity. And soon all my anxiousness were gone, though I never stopped feeling a bit too old and, to a degree, bewildered.

That was my first meeting with the minors at Asgard. There's a saying that first impressions last, and in this case it is definitely true. The smiles, the good mood and the joking are a part of how I see these youngsters, something that I met time and time again in my visits at the reception centre.

I mention this first, because it is easy to forget in the focus on the challenges and troubles these minors are faced with. These minors are not cartoon figures; they have a complex emotional life. In the remaining chapters the focus will be on the challenges and troubles these minors face, dealing with emotions in relations with others at Asgard. These children and their lives are more than the troubles and challenges they face. The smiles, the good mood and the joking are a genuine part of those that I have come to know at Asgard, and I want to bring that part with me into this discussion to balance the focus.

I will first look at how the unaccompanied refugee minors deal with their emotions from an individual perspective, and then move on in the next chapter to look at how they deal with emotions in relation with the other minors at Asgard.

# 6 Don't worry

## - avoiding negative emotions

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### 6.1 "I have many things to think about"

*"Vet du hva? Jeg har, jeg har mange ting å tenke på men jeg kan ikke tenke på noe.. vet du?" - "Jeg er kanskje oppdratt av foreldrene mine til å være glad, for jeg er alltid glad. Jeg prøver å ikke være sint eller være sur på noen eller være lei meg."<sup>xiii</sup> - minor at Asgard*

*"Så er det bare hver dag så du må bare prøve klare deg. Hvordan skal du klare deg spiller ingen rolle." - "Bare å prøve å.. når jeg tenker negativt så prøver jeg å.. jeg flirer og prater mye typ.. men.. jeg prater ikke om hva jeg tenker om de negative ting som jeg bare tenker på."<sup>xiv</sup> - minor at Asgard*

*"If I get sad I try to be positive, I try to turn it around"<sup>21</sup>. " - minor at Asgard*

*"Jeg er alltid glad, jeg liker å være glad."<sup>x</sup> - minor at Asgard*

These quotes are from the unaccompanied minors that I interviewed at Asgard. I have chosen these quotes because they illustrate one of the clearly present themes in the interviews. These minors seem to try in various ways to avoid thoughts and emotions that seem to be felt as painful or distressing.

In three of the interviews trying to be happy and avoiding negative thoughts and emotions is explicitly mentioned as a way of dealing with the minor's thoughts and emotions. In one interview, cited in the last quote, the minor says that he is always happy. I happened to learn later though that things felt more problematic than he had been prepared to admit to me, maybe even to himself. The minor's reluctance to talk about this in the interview seem to be part of the silence and protection that Knudsen talks about (Knudsen 1991:28), which I had to accept and respect as a researcher.

The last minor however did not talk about not worrying, or avoiding negative thoughts. He admitted that he was depressed, and that he had a hard time. However he did not indicate that he went the other way either by burying himself in negative thoughts. Rather the

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<sup>21</sup> The quote is paraphrased from the notes taken under the interview. The interview was mostly done in English.

impression from the interview was that he tried to go about his life as best as he could, in a difficult situation.

In the end, trying to not worry, or rather to not think negatively, seems to be an important part of how these minors dealt with their emotions at Asgard. In this chapter I will look closer at the sources of the minors' negative thoughts and the ways they try to deal with them.

### *6.1.1 UNACCOMPANIED MINORS' WORRIES AND TROUBLES*

My research has purposely not addressed the question of the basis for the minors' negative thoughts and emotions - what they think and worry about - mainly to avoid burdening the minors further by delving into potentially very difficult issues.

Various studies of unaccompanied refugee minors<sup>22</sup> show that they live under considerable psychological distress, with reports of high levels of symptoms of depression, anxiety and PTSD (Oppedal, Jensen, Seglem 2008:15, Seglem 2007:26, Bean, Eurelings-Botekoe, Spinhoven 2006:1204, Derluyn 2007:141, Geltman, Grant-Knight, Mehta, Lloyd-Travaglini, Lustig, Landgraf, Wise 2005:585, Felsman, Leong, Johnson, Felsman 1990:1251, Sourander 1998:723-724). A few studies also report of suicidal thoughts and attempts (Schancke 1995:52, Sourander 1998:723).

In this section I will rely on other research to show some of the concerns that are seen as central to unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors. These concerns and troubles may help us understand the basis for unaccompanied refugee minors' distressing emotions.

#### ***Loss, Family, Expectations and Loneliness***

Unaccompanied refugee minors face many aspects of loss. They are removed from their friends and family, in an unfamiliar country, with a different culture and a different language. There is a loss of relations as well as feelings of loss of identity and status. What may be the most serious loss though, is the loss of parents and family. In Sourander's study of unaccompanied refugee minors at a Finnish reception centre, 18 out of 46 minors reported to have experienced the death or disappearance of a parent (Sourander 1998:724). In the

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<sup>22</sup> The studies mainly refer to unaccompanied minors that have been resettled, and in one case (Sourander 1998) of minors awaiting asylum in a reception centre. The studies of resettled minors may not be directly transferred to unaccompanied minors in a reception centre, however there is little that indicates that the minors situation is changed for the worse after resettlement.

previously mentioned Dutch study by Tammy Bean more than 80% reported to have missed a “loved one” (Bean 2007:103), while the Norwegian study by Oppedal, Jensen and Seglem reports that out of 142 minors 41 reported one or both of the parents to be dead and an additional 31 reported that they do not know if one or both of their parents are alive (Oppedal et al. 2008:15 Tabell 2). At the same time it is important to note that of these 142 children, 98 reported to have contact with family in Norway or abroad, and only 32 reported to have no contact with family at all (Oppedal et al. 2008:16).

In “Alene – mellom sikkerhet og usikkerhet”<sup>xi</sup>, a study of unaccompanied refugee minors’ situation at a Norwegian reception centre for adults and unaccompanied minors, Vegard Schancke finds that grief and sorrow is a significant part of the minors’ troubles (Schancke 1995:52). Worries about their family and their situation were mixed with memories of traumatic experiences of violent abuse (Schancke 1995:52).

Schancke finds that grieving, loss and missing family/parents is a pervasive element of the informants’ lives for years after their arrival, for some to such a degree that it hinders them in everyday life in activities such as sleep; going to school; and building a social network (Schancke et al. 1995:52). The same missing and worrying for their family as a central concern for unaccompanied minors is also reported in other studies (Oppedal et al. 2008:20, Christoffersen 2007:24-25, Stein 2008:20-24, Bragason 2008:19-20, Seglem 2007:25-26, Derluyn & Broekaert 2007:143, Sjøberg 2005:45-46, Harsløf Hjelde 2004:84, Sourander 1998:723). Oppedal et al. finds that those that never worried for their family have significantly less symptoms of depression than those that worried often (Oppedal 2008:21).

According to Schancke, the family’s expectations of the minors getting an education were another source of concern and worries (Schancke 1995:53). The discrepancy between the family’s expectations and the minors’ possibilities for education makes these expectations an extra burden for the minors (Schancke 1995:53). The expectations of the family, living in a culture that may break with important aspects of their families culture, combined with a wish to shield their family from hearing about how difficult they have it, contributes to creating an extra distance between them and their family/parents (Schancke 1995:54). Other studies of resettled unaccompanied refugee minors support Schancke’s findings (Derluyn & Broekaert 2007:143, Fladstad 1993:121, Harsløf Hjelde 1990:185, Knudsen 1990:96). It is interesting to note that by shielding their parents from their own problems, the minors in practice manage their parents and families emotions as well as their own.

Oppedal, Jensen and Seglem also find that 75% of the minors report that they often feel lonesome, and that they find a strong correlation between feeling lonesome and symptoms of depression amongst the minors (Oppedal et al. 2008:16).

### ***Future***

Schancke point out that uncertainty about the future is another important concern for the minors (Schancke 1995:54). According to Schancke few of the minors are able to keep a focus on their future. Their thoughts go forth and back from hope to the deepest despair and back again when thinking about the future (Schancke 1995:55).

Schancke notes a “marked difference” in both how they speak and their body manners between the respondents that have been granted stay and those that still have a pending application for asylum (Schancke 1995:54). This is especially so for those that has had their application for asylum declined for the first or second time. Their hope is withering and previous psychological distress is reinforced (Schancke 1995:55).

This coincides with my observations. Two of my informants talked in their interviews about waiting for their applications to be processed, having had their first applications declined. One explained that he thought it was very difficult, mentioning on how he had “*already learned Norwegian and everything*”, and said that he tried to avoid thinking about it. The other told me how (as quoted earlier) he tried to not hope for getting a positive answer, to avoid getting disappointed again, and how he had resigned to staying at Asgard for however long it took for his application to be processed.

Anne Barlindhaug, in her ethnographic study “Det betydelige og det ubetydelige”<sup>xii</sup> of unaccompanied refugee minors at a Norwegian reception centre, finds that waiting for the application to be processed is of central importance to the minors (Barlindhaug 2005:49). Also Lauritsen and Berg in their study of life at five Norwegian reception centres note that many of their informants dare not plan for the future, as they are afraid to be disappointed (Lauritsen & Berg 1999:147).

Again we see that the minors manage their emotions by trying to avoid focusing on something that is felt to be negative. Their application hold so much hopes and fears for them that it feels nearly unbearable to think of it. We see that an important part of dealing with emotions for the unaccompanied minors is to control what they think of. But we also see that this attempt to manage emotions cannot keep their emotions in check entirely. They spill over

into other aspects of their life, adding to their small frustrations and giving them more significance than they might otherwise have.

Asylum seekers in general are in a situation where the future of their whole life depends on one important decision; whether or not they are granted refuge (either as a refugee or protection on a humanitarian basis). Not knowing if, or when you will be granted asylum makes it very hard to make any plans for the future, especially when the decision carries so much hopes and fears.

### ***Other Concerns***

The concerns mentioned are not the only ones but they are likely to be some of the main concerns of the minors. Three recent studies of resettled unaccompanied minors in Norway found concerns relating to family, discrimination, living situation, economy and problems in regards to social- and health services as their main concerns after resettlement, with only concern for family being mentioned in all three studies. (Stein 2008:1, Bragason 2007:1, Christoffersen 2007:1). Economy is a known concern for asylum seekers in reception centres (Lauritsen & Berg 1999:139-141 & 147). Other studies describes how asylum seekers experience being treated - and thus stigmatised - as a group (Valenta 2001:78-83, Barlindhaug 2005:87-103)

Another cause of a troubled mind is the effect of what is referred to as stressful life events (Bean 2007) and traumas. Traumatic experiences are often mentioned in reference to symptoms (for example concentration difficulties; problems with sleeping; nightmares, anxiety; bodily pains; etc.), and as we have seen in relation to explaining occurrences of PTSD<sup>23</sup> and depression. As mentioned earlier, a study of Sudanese unaccompanied refugee minors show that thoughts relating to traumatic experiences was a significant part of the negative thoughts and emotions that they had to deal with (Geltman et al. 2005:588).

As we can see unaccompanied minors' have many sources for negative thoughts and emotions, as the high levels of psychological distress in studies of unaccompanied refugee minors suggests (see Oppedal et al. 2008:15, Seglem 2007:26, Bean et al. 2006:1204, Derluyn 2007:141, Geltman et al. 2005:585, Sourander 1998:723-724, Felsman et al. 1990:1251).

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<sup>23</sup> Post-traumatic stress syndrome

## 6.2 Ways to manage negative emotions

In this section I will go through some of the ways the minors seem to be working their emotions. These data are mainly based on the interviews with the minors, and only partially on observation. I am quite sure there are many other ways to deal with negative emotions and thoughts, employed both by the minors interviewed and the other minors at Asgard, as well as unaccompanied minors in other reception centres. These examples from the material at hand are, however, meant as illustrations of the type of some of the emotion work that the minors do.

The following examples can be seen as various methods the minors use to work their emotions. Emotion work is defined as trying to change emotion in degree or quality (Hochschild 1979:561). In the case of these minors we see how they try to work their emotions to deal with emotions and thoughts that are felt as negative or distressing.

### ***Fooling around and laughing***

One of the minors dealt with difficult emotions by fooling around. Asked how it had felt when he had received a letter informing him that his application for asylum had been turned down, he answered:

*"Kanskje ensom.. eller.. ja, jeg vet.. jeg sier ikke bort når det gjelder det, jeg tenker ikke en gang. Jeg vet ikke hva jeg gjorde. Det var kjempetrist vet du. Etter at jeg hadde lest, så kom jeg ut og tullet bare."<sup>xiii</sup>*

This is just one example the informant provided by the informant. Fooling around, used like this, can be seen as a way to hide his sadness (and in this case, probably disappointment), though it can seem like he hides it not only from others, but seemingly from himself as well. Jokes and smiles both changes the physical expression and the mental focus, making the sadness and possible disappointment feel less intense, and maybe even make him able to forget it momentarily.

Another informant stated, after having said that it is important to be happy, that:

*"Ja, det er viktig for det at.. må.. det er viktig som.. å le selv om det er litt vanskelig, men man må bare prøve å le fordi det er best."<sup>xiv</sup>*

Laughing in itself is seen as a remedy that alleviates feeling bad.

## ***Talking***

For another of the minors interviewed at Asgard, it was talking that seemed to be his preferred remedy:

*Det er mange som blir sint fordi jeg prater alt for mye. Jeg bare prater alt for mye fordi jeg, fordi jeg må prate. Fordi hvis jeg prater ikke så dør jeg.. hvis jeg.. så får jeg masse problemer.<sup>xv</sup>*

Talking seems to provide the distraction necessary to be able to focus on something else than the negative emotions and thoughts, maybe to a point where talking becomes to feel compulsory; "...if I don't talk I will die...". Again, by changing the focus the negative thoughts and emotions are relieved momentarily.

## ***Being with friends and being active***

Being with friends is something I will address primarily in the next chapter, and just briefly comment here. Being with friends is mentioned by all the minors; being with friends and being active seems to be a part of how they deal with emotions. From observation, doing things like watching TV, playing games, ping-pong, soccer, going to the movies, going out with friends and other such activities all seemed to keep them preoccupied and create situations that brought out a general good mood.

Talking about the application process with a minor, I asked him how he dealt with it, where upon he replied:

*"Med venner så tenker jeg aldri på det, jeg er litt sånn tenker på ingenting, ja."<sup>xvi</sup>*

For him, being with friends kept his mind off unwanted thoughts and frustrations. As with talking and joking, activities with others seem to help keep the focus away from negative thoughts and emotions.

## ***Music***

Another method to avoid negative thoughts is to listen to music also comes up a few times in the interviews, as another way of distraction:

*"Når jeg er alene så liker ikke å tenke på noe, liker bare å høre på musikk."<sup>xvii</sup>*

*Minor at Asgard*

As talking and joking, listening to music helps keeping the focus from thoughts and emotions. In another study of unaccompanied minors at a Norwegian reception centre, one of

the informants state:

*"Jeg må ikke tenke for mye på det – jeg må sitte oppe å synge inni meg selv om nettene (...) eller snakke eller skrike høyt om dagen – på en måte overdøve meg selv – når jeg begynner å tenke for mye, det er vanskelig..<sup>xviii</sup> (Schancke 1995:52)*

Jokes and laughs, talking, and listening to music can probably all be said to “drown out” the negative thoughts and emotions, pushing them into the background. They provide distraction that makes the minors able to keep their focus on something else.

### ***Lowered expectations***

Lowering expectations, to not “get your hopes up” is a way to avoid negative emotions in the future, in the shape of disappointments. In a sense it is the emotion management version of a preemptive strike. After having his application turned down twice one of the minors made a new appeal. However, he explains:

*"Så tenker jeg at jeg kommer til å få avslag nå, tenker jeg ikke på opphold. Nå bare, jeg føler på meg at det kommer til å få avslag. Kanskje det er feil, jeg håper at det er feil. Men ja, jeg vil ikke tenke positivt fordi jeg fikk avslag på det mange ganger så blir jeg skuffet hver gang. Så jeg ikke blir skuffet igjen.<sup>xix</sup> "*

It is interesting to note the contradiction in “hoping” (that he is wrong) and simultaneously say that he does not want to think positively. This type of lowering of expectation is often contradicting. One often does it with something one really wants. Hoping makes the disappointment of not getting it feel more painful and thus it feels more risky. So to reduce the pain, we “decide” to not hope for it and try to reconcile ourselves to not getting what we want. In a sense lowering expectations is like paying the cost of disappointment in advance, as you force yourself to think negatively whenever you hope of something better – so in a sense you make yourself feel bad now in order to not feel even worse later.

### ***Resignation***

Resignation is not unlike lowering of expectation, but it is not quite the same. When you lower expectations you still have a hope, against odds, of getting what you want. If you are resigned to your fate you have left hope for something different at the door.

*"Nå jeg prøver jeg å ta det som det er, åsså bare sånn si – 'okei - nå er det sånn'. Jeg kan ikke forandre situasjonen, Jeg kan ikke, jeg ikke la det bare.. jeg kan ikke bare tenke at: 'ok, nå flytter jeg, i morgen flytter jeg.. skal bare sånn ut'. Jeg skal leve på Asgard som det er<sup>xx</sup>*

This quote is from the same minor who was quoted on how he had stopped hoping for a positive verdict on his application. He explains how he thought he would stay at Asgard for a few months, and each time his asylum application was turned down he thought he would stay there for a few months more. Now he has resigned to having to stay there until further notice. Again he avoids disappointment by accepting his situation as long term and trying to avoid hoping for and thinking about something different.

### ***Religion***

One of the informants also said that going to church helped. He was connected to a congregation of a Christian denomination, which mainly consisted of people from the same region as he had come from. He stated that it made him feel more confident when he could attend church. He felt more in control. He told me that he went to church when he felt bad. Being close to god helped, he explained.

Even though the congregation were of the same nationality as the minor, it did not seem that it was the social support the minor was seeking. He did not mention having any friends in the congregation, or talk about the people he met there.

For this informant it seems like practicing his religion, and going to church made him feel more secure, perhaps strengthening his faith in that things would turn out alright somehow, and thus alleviating his anxiousness and maybe even fears for the future. Thus religion and religious practice can be an important tool for emotion management, especially for a person in a distressing situation.

### ***Writing a diary***

One of the minors said he wrote a diary:

*"Ja der skriver jeg alt som jeg tenker på. Der skriver jeg sånn, hva jeg føler på og alt mulig."*<sup>xxi</sup>

Asked if writing a diary helped him, he replied:

*"Ja det hjelper noen ganger. Men noen ganger så blir jeg mad about skrive, at jeg prater med en vegg og ingen svarer vet du. Det er litt vanskelig å dele følelser med boken, med å skrive ned. Men det hjelper litt i hvert fall."*<sup>xxii</sup>

I asked him if he knew why it helped, if he had any thoughts about why it helped:

*"Ja, så man blir litt slappet av. Litt, ikke så mye. Må bare ta ut av.. av sitt hjerne, fordi det er masse som skjer der inne."*<sup>xxiii</sup>

Writing a diary seems to give this minor an outlet for his thoughts. It allows him a chance to sort out his thoughts. For him it seems to be the emotion management version of letting out steam of a highly pressured mind.

### 6.3 Thoughts and emotions

All through the examples I have used the term ‘thoughts and emotions’ (and vice versa). The reason why I chose to put these together is that thoughts and emotions are linked.

*“Jeg må tenke på det, men jeg liker ikke å tenke så mye på det”<sup>xxiv</sup>, “Når jeg er alene så liker ikke å tenke på noe, liker bare å høre på musikk”<sup>xxv</sup>, “... jeg har mange ting å tenke på men jeg kan ikke tenke på noe...”<sup>xxvi</sup>, “Men ja, jeg vil ikke tenke positivt fordi jeg fikk avslag på det mange ganger så blir jeg skuffet hver gang”<sup>xxvii</sup>.*

In these quotes we see thoughts, or thinking, being central to the minors. It is thinking that is identified as unwanted. It is these unwanted thoughts that they try to avoid. But the thoughts are likely unwanted because of the emotions that follow.

As mentioned, Hochschild (drawing on Peggy A. Thoits) defined emotional experience as a simultaneous awareness of four elements; appraisal of a situation, changes in physical sensations, expressive gestures and a categorising of the specific constellation of the three preceding elements into a cultural emotion label (Hochschild 1990:119). Now I would argue that “appraisal of a situation” is not necessarily something that is an appraisal of the present, it may be the memory of some event that happened in the past, and you feel yourself blushing, thinking “that was stupid”, and notice you feel embarrassed thinking of this memory. Or it may be thoughts of your parents; recognising that they are not here and that you would like to be with them, feeling a pang of pain, realising that you miss them. Or any other association that comes to mind. These thoughts, memories, ideas, associations are assessed and triggers emotions.

Thoughts, as expressed by the minors becomes a term for the ideas, memories, associations, concerns, worries etc. that comes to their minds, bringing with them emotions. Controlling these thoughts then becomes important. One of the minor says he does not want to think about anything; seemingly having time to think has become a risk of having distressing thoughts and emotions. Therefore having something to distract himself from these thoughts becomes important, a distraction that can be found through doing activities, such as music and joking, or talking and being with friends.

Ezekiel, one of the Sudanese boys, in Goodman's study of unaccompanied refugee youths from Sudan, sums this up quite simply: "Thinking a lot can give you trouble." (Goodman 2004:1184). As in this study Goodman finds that the participants in their study uses distraction to keep their focus away from troubling thoughts (Goodman 2004:1184). Schancke, in a study of unaccompanied minors in a Norwegian reception centre in the early nineties, finds the same propensity for avoiding painful thoughts; "Å tvinge seg selv til ikke å tenke på det 'vonde', er derimot vanlig. I stedet forsøker en å mestre hverdagslivets rutiner og krav."<sup>xxviii</sup> (Schancke 1995:56). In other words, they try to keep their focus away from negative thoughts and emotions.

Involuntary intrusive thoughts like this, as well as cognitive and behavioural responses to avoid them, are familiar marks of responses to stressful (or traumatic) events (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Harding Thomsen, Wadsworth 2001:90). In "The 'Lost Boys of Sudan'", a study of a group of resettled unaccompanied minors from Sudan in the USA, showed that 58% of these minors experienced "recurrent thoughts of the most hurtful event", and 32-38% also reported other disturbances related thoughts of traumatic experiences (Geltman et al. 2005:588). There is really no doubt that unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors are in a stressful situation, as well as many of these minors having lived through stressful and traumatic experiences that they carry with them.

In the end it seems that thoughts and emotions are seemingly so intertwined that they cannot be easily separated; thoughts follow emotions, emotions follow thoughts, and it is not necessarily easy or useful to separate thoughts from emotions. Be as it may; for this study I will only remark that managing emotions for these minors seem to be just as much about managing their thoughts, particularly avoiding thoughts that are associated with painful or distressing emotions. I will therefore continue to variously refer to 'thoughts and emotions' when referring to how the minors deal with their emotions, in recognition of the intertwined nature of thoughts and emotions that is reflected in the minors interviews.

## 6.4 'Pain avoidance' and dealing with emotions

I have come to think of the attitude that the minors display, trying to focus on the positive and avoiding negative thoughts and emotions, as a "don't worry, be happy" attitude. However, it is not an attitude born out of philosophy but out of necessity.

*"Ja. For jeg ville ikke tenke mer på det. Jeg må tenke på det, men jeg liker ikke å tenke så mye på*

det. <sup>xxx</sup> Minor at Asgard

*"Ja, det er masse press du må.. fordi det er masse som går inn igjen i huet mitt, så hvis jeg får.. hvis jeg får ikke.. ta det ut, eller liksom, trykke det ut så.. så blir det.. store problem så.."* <sup>xxx</sup> Minor at Asgard

These quotes hint at the sheer unpleasantness of experiencing these thoughts and emotions. The minors avoid these thoughts and emotions, because experiencing them is unpleasant. The minors use words like "I can't", "I don't like", "I get tired", "it was hard".

Hochschild refers to "pain avoidance", the desire to avoid painful experiences, as one of the "principles that organize social life" (Hochschild 1983:62). As we have seen previously in this chapter, avoiding thoughts and emotions that seem hard to bear is an important part of how these minors deal with their emotions. In Jane Goodman's research on unaccompanied refugee youths from Sudan resettled in USA she quotes one of her informants, Benedict: *"Sometimes it was very hard. Whenever I heard about something new it gave me a sickness. ...If you keep something in your heart you can die of thinking. ..."* (Goodman 2004:1184-1185). I use this quote here to illustrate how severe emotions and thought can feel to an individual.

However I am not sure that 'pain' is an accurate term for what these minors experience or why they want to avoid these thoughts and emotions. For example experiencing anxiety may carry with it uncontrollable breathing, nausea, raised heartbeat and so on. While this is unpleasant and those who experience probably want it to stop, it is not necessarily best described as 'painful'. Emotions may thus be unpleasant and unwanted, but not necessarily 'painful'. The minors' interviewed used terms such as 'positive' and 'negative' to describe their emotions. For this thesis I will use the term 'negative' about thoughts and emotions that make the minors feel bad, be that because the emotion is felt as painful, distressing or similarly unpleasant<sup>24</sup>.

An important point remains, the minors motivation for working these emotions is not to comply with feeling rules or with cultural ideals of emotion, as is Hochschild's primary perspective (Hochschild 1983:62), but because the emotions and thoughts they experience make the minors feel bad. The motivation for doing the emotion work described is not primarily social, but mostly inner motivated. Their main motivation to work these emotions, to avoid, distract, reassess or process these emotions is not based on the expectations of

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<sup>24</sup> Feeling positive emotions may be considered to be 'unpleasant' in certain situations, such as feeling happy in a traditional Norwegian funeral. That is however not what I refer to by 'unpleasant' in this context.

others or how they want to appear to others. They work their emotions because they don't 'like' it, as one of the minors put it.

#### *6.4.1 AVOIDANCE, DISTRACTION, PROCESSING AND ACCEPTANCE*

The minors at Asgard deal with negative emotions in various ways. Distraction and avoiding negative emotions seems to be a vital part of working these emotions. Joking, laughing, kidding around, talking, listening to music, and generally being active and being with friends is one way to avoid negative thoughts and emotions push them into the background. By being in activity, be it talking or playing games or watching TV, they are able to keep their focus of their negative thoughts and emotions.

However, we also saw that there are other ways to work their emotions than to trying to avoid it. Lowering expectations and resignation is two ways different ways to try to reassess the situation to make it feel more tolerable. By lowering expectations one tries to reduce the importance of a future event, to make it less painful if it does not go as hoped. Similarly resignation reduces ones hopes and wishes for the situation one is in, accepting ones situation, trying to not be frustrated, angry or disappointed with the situation one is in.

Neither does writing a diary seem to avoid negative thoughts and emotions; instead it seems a way of processing the thoughts and emotions. In a sense working through them and sorting them out. As the minor testified it is a difficult process to put emotions to paper. I imagine it is hard to avoid ones negative thoughts and emotions, rather may be another way of reassessing their thoughts and emotions by seeing them in a new light, giving them structure and reducing their importance.

Seeking comfort in religion was another strategy mentioned by a minor. Other reports also show that religion and religious believes is a way to cope with hardship (Christoffersen 2007:41). While turning to religion and going to church may be focusing on the positive aspects in life and avoiding the negative thoughts and emotions, it may be just as much about seeking strength to face negative thoughts and emotions and asking for advice (from god in this case) and consolation.

Thus dealing with emotions for the minors may not be avoidance per se. As we see, they also use other ways to work their emotions such as reassessing their situation or thoughts and emotion, and seeking comfort and strength in dealing with the emotions. Avoidance is just one of several ways that is more or less available for the minors to deal with emotions. However, when that is said, avoidance and distraction seem to be the predominant method to

deal with emotions mentioned by the minors at Asgard.

## **6.5 Dealing with emotions in a mental health perspective**

Considering the stressful situation that unaccompanied refugee minors in reception centres live under, and the emotions they have to deal with, it is reasonable to ask how having to deal with the emotions and cope with the stress they are under affects their mental health.

A review of studies of the relation between coping measures by children and adolescents and their effect on the children and adolescents mental health find that generally coping strategies trying to deal directly with the problem (for example problem solving, cognitive restructuring, and positive reappraisal of the problem) are associated with a better mental health (Compas et al. 2001:118), while coping strategies based on dealing indirectly with the problem (for example cognitive and behavioural avoidance, social withdrawal, wishful thinking) are associated with a poorer mental health (Compas et al. 2001:119).

The minors at Asgard seem to use various ways to deal with thoughts and emotions, where avoiding and distracting themselves from negative thoughts and emotions are central. Joking and laughing, talking, being with friends and in activity has all been mentioned as ways to keep oneself distracted and to avoid the negative thoughts and emotions they have. Lowering expectations, seeking comfort and support in religion, writing a diary to get the thoughts out of their minds, resigning to the problem, and possibly denial as well, are other strategies. Most of these ways of dealing with emotions relate to their problems indirectly (talk, joke, laugh, activity, be with friends, denial, resignation), through distraction and avoidance, and only a few of the examples seem to deal with the problem in a more direct fashion (lowering expectation, diary, religious support). The initial report from this review suggests that the minors deal with emotions in a way that is negative for their mental health.

However, Compas et al. makes an interesting observation. Their review indicates that although coping strategies that deals directly with the problem are associated with a better mental health, and vice versa, this is not necessarily so when the problem is of such a nature that it is beyond the child or adolescent's control (Compas et al. 2001:119). The review, looking in particular at a few studies showing the opposite results than the main stream, suggests that when the problem is not within the child's or adolescent's control, trying to deal more directly with the problem had a negative effect and dealing more indirectly with the problem had a more positive effect on their mental health (Compas et al. 2001:119).

This does seem to fit the situation of the unaccompanied minors at Asgard. As Anne Barlindhaug describes in her study of unaccompanied minors in a Norwegian reception centre, “Det betydelige og det ubetydelige”, these minors are living in a situation they have little power over on many different levels (Barlindhaug 2005:154). They are waiting for an application process they have little or no influence over, which they do not know when will be finished or what the result will be. And with this situation there are a lot of aspects they to a very small degree can control.

Using avoidance and distracting strategies to deal with the negative thoughts they have and negative emotions that comes with them are some of the few options they realistically have. While they also employ other strategies such as writing a diary or seeking religious comfort, in everyday life, faced with all these concerns and worries that they have little control over, dealing with negative emotions and thoughts through seeking activity and joy becomes a vital part of dealing with their emotions. And, as the review done by Compas and his associates (Compas et al. 2001) suggests, that may be the best they can do – from a mental health perspective.

## **6.6 Concluding remarks**

This thesis is inspired by Arlie Hochschild’s perspective on emotions as something that can be worked and managed. Hochschild defines emotion work as “...the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling.” (Hochschild 1979:561). With this in mind I have in this chapter looked at how the minors at Asgard deal with their emotions.

Hochschild’s perspective on emotion management is focused on how our management of emotions is mainly socially motivated, and emotions are worked to accord with social norms and feeling rules (Hochschild 1983:62). However it is clear that to understand why and how the minors at Asgard manage their emotions one has to understand the emotional pressure they are under.

As mentioned research shows that unaccompanied refugee minors are in a severely psychologically distressing situation (Oppedal et al. 2008:15, Seglem 2007:26, Bean et al. 2006:1204, Derluyn 2007:141, Geltman et al. 2005:585, Sourander 1998:723-724, Felsman et al. 1990:1251). These minors are in situation where their future is uncertain and they have to cope with worries for and loss of family and friends, loneliness and past experiences among other things.

My interviews with the minors at Asgard suggest that they put great effort in managing emotions that they find hard to bear either because they feel painful, distressing or in other ways unpleasant to themselves. Central to the minors' emotion work seem to be avoiding or distracting themselves from these negative thoughts and emotions, and staying positive. They use methods such as talking, fooling around, listening to music, being with friends, playing games, watching TV and similar activities to distract themselves from the distressing emotions. However other methods such as reassessing the situation by lowering expectation or resigning to their fate, processing their thoughts and emotions by writing a diary, or to seek comfort and consolation in religion is also mentioned.

In this chapter I have focused on how the minor deals with their emotions from an individual perspective. In the next chapter I will look at how the minors deal with their emotions in relation to the other minors and residents at Asgard.

# 7 Be happy

## - avoiding personal emotions

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My first impression of the minors at Asgard as youths with a positive attitude was an impression that lasted through my time with them. The interaction between the minors was characterised by a joking and playful attitude, often centred on some activity such as watching TV, going to the cinemas, playing cards or videogames, being playing soccer or so on. The minors at Asgard kept up a good mood, and in conversations the topics seemed to be focused on the present or such 'light' topics as music and movies and so on.

Observing the interaction between the minors I noticed that they did not seem to openly express thoughts or emotions relating to more personal subjects such as their past, their home country, their family or friends (outside of Norway), the asylum application process, or even much about their future. Nor did there seem to be any open expression of how they felt about their situation, except maybe the occasional 'fuck Asgard' or similar comment followed by a nod or other expression of consent by those present.

Other than these small episodes of frustration, expressing thoughts and emotions relating to personal subjects such as their background, situation and future prospects seemed largely to be avoided. This gave me early an impression of a "don't worry, be happy" attitude among the minors, where negative emotions seemed to be suppressed and the focus kept on being positive and feeling good. As a minor quoted in the previous chapter stated; when he thinks about the negative he laughs and talks a lot, but he does not talk about the negative things he thinks about.

In "Det betydelige og det ubetydelige", a study of unaccompanied refugee minors in a Norwegian reception centre, Anne Barlindhaug makes a related observation (Barlindhaug 2005:155):

*"De fniser, ler og gleder seg over eller hisser seg opp over hverdagslige forhold og undertrykker samtidig de virkelig vanskelige problemene de har<sup>xxxj</sup>."*

In her study Barlindhaug finds that while the minors seem to get an outlet for their frustrations through what are seemingly small and insignificant issues, few are able to show

their frustrations about the more significant issues such as their asylum application or their traumatic experiences (Barlindhaug 2005:155). Barlindhaug sees this as a response to their relative powerlessness in respect to their situation (Barlindhaug 2005:155-156). As they have little power to do anything about their more personal problems the minors express their thoughts and emotions about seemingly everyday issues, while suppressing more pressing problems (Barlindhaug 2005:155).

Also Vegard Schancke observes that unaccompanied refugee minors have a tendency to ‘encapsulate’ their problems and not talk about them (Schancke 1995:57). According to Schancke even minors with very similar experiences, emotions and thoughts only rarely talked about these with each other (Schancke 1995:57). John Chr. Knudsen observes the same tendency to avoid the more ‘significant’ subjects in his study “De trodde jeg var fattig.” (Knudsen 1990). According to Knudsen the discussion between the minors about their such issues such as their situation, past or plans for the future was very limited (Knudsen 1990:51).

The interviews with the minors at Asgard confirm the tendency to avoid more personal problems in interaction with the other minors. In the interviews I asked the minors who they talked to when they had a difficult time or a problem.

*Me: "Men når du blir lei deg, snakker du med noen da, eller holder du det inne eller, hvis du blir trist?"*

*Minor: "Jeg holder det inne."*

*Me: "Du holder det inne?"*

*Minor: "Ja."*

*Me: "Kan jeg spørre hvorfor? Liker du ikke å snakke med andre eller?"*

*Minor: "Jeg vet ikke, jeg har ikke noen sånn 'bestevenner' som jeg kan stille opp for meg på en sånn måte."*

*Me: "Nei, nei. Ingen her på mottaket?"*

*Minor: "Ingen, ingen, jeg har ingen bestevenner. Jeg har en noen sånn som vi kan være med hverandre, men jeg kan ikke stole på dem."<sup>xxxii</sup>*

Another of the minors interviewed talked about two of his friends at the Asgard, one of them being his roommate:

*"Ja, vi er ikke like, så.. jeg.. Vi er veldig gode venner nå, veldig gode venner. Men vi kan ikke.. Vi snakker bare om noe tulle.. tuller med meg.. Dra til [city] og sånn, prater litt.. Men ikke om alvorlige ting, fordi.. fordi det er litt like.. vi er ulike.. det er det samme med sånn [friend]. [Friend] har vært på [Asgard] i nesten ett år nå. Jeg bodde med ham bare for fire-fem måneder så bodde vi først sammen, og så bodde jeg med en annen. Så, ja, så, det er litt.. ja, jeg prøver å være greie med de, og de er greie med meg. Men vi kan ikke snakke om sånne private ting."<sup>xxxiii</sup>*

These two excerpts, the transcript and the quote, are representative for the interviews

of the other minors. The minors refer to their friends (mostly minors and friends from school) as people that they can be with, but they do not seem to talk with them about more personal issues.

As in the first quote, three of the interviewed minors expressed outright that they could not trust the other minors, even those considered friends, with their troubles and thoughts. This reinforces my impression that the minors at Asgard generally avoid expressing thoughts and emotions that relate to ‘private stuff’, as the minor in the above quote call it, even with minors they deem friends. Rather, as the last quote suggests, the other minors are someone they can pass time and have fun with.

## 7.1 Avoiding the personal

Considering that the minors are on their own, separated from family and friends, in a foreign country with a foreign culture, possibly having had traumatic experiences from conflict and flight, waiting for a decision on an uncertain future, one would think that they would have experiences, feelings, concerns and hopes to share.

Nonetheless, it seems that the minors avoid expressing more personal thoughts and emotions in the company of their friends and the other minors. It is natural question to ask ourselves why this does not occur. In this section I will look at possible reasons that may explain why the minors are hesitant to share and express these kinds of thoughts and emotions in interaction with each other.

### *7.1.1 PROTECTING EMOTIONS*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a prominent reason why the minors avoid talking about personal thoughts and emotions has to do with their ways of dealing with their own thoughts and emotions. An important part of the emotion management of the interviewed minors at Asgard is the avoidance of negative thoughts and emotions that are too hard to bear. However, to avoid these negative thoughts and emotions they also have to avoid situations and subjects that remind them of such thoughts and emotions. This impacts their relations to their friends and the other minors. I found a remark made by one of the interviewed minors telling:

*“Jeg er altid med ham, så vi prater. Han snakker om ting, han snakker ikke noe som er ikke bra.”<sup>xxxiv</sup>*

The minor is describing his best friend at Asgard and their friendship. “...*he does not talk about anything that is not good.*” The quote suggests that he seeks friends that keep a positive attitude, avoiding those who talk about things that are negative. Another of the interviewed minor experienced this from the other side:

- Minor: “De fleste vet hvem jeg er... men.. jeg er.. sånn.. som de sier.. jeg har et fjes som bare smi.. som smiler alltid. Men ingen vet hva det er som skjer der inne..”*
- Me: “Nei, ikke sant..”*
- Minor: “Men jeg... og jeg vil ikke at noen skal vite det heller, fordi jeg syns at ellers.. ja.. jeg syns at det er noen som syns at.. Det er mange som ikke vil snakke med triste mennesker.”*
- Me: “Nei, nei.”*
- Minor: “De syns at det er litt vanskelig å være med. Så hvis jeg er litt trist noen ganger, så får jeg ikke noen å snakke med.”<sup>xxxv</sup>*

As the minor describes it, expressing negative emotions such as sadness comes at the risk of being avoided by the other minors at a later point. Not necessarily because the other minors do not sympathise with him and his troubles, but probably precisely because they identify with him. The minor’s sadness brings to the surface their own worries and troubles. “*They think that it is a bit difficult to be with*” as he puts it.

Not only do the minors have to manage their own negative thoughts and emotions because they find them hard to bear themselves, the minors also have to manage their negative thoughts and emotions if they want to be able to be with the other minors and make friends at Asgard.

The quoted minor literally presents a face ‘that always smiles’ to avoid distancing the other minors from him. If he is sad he will get no one to talk to, so he has to do emotion work to keep a positive ‘face’ to use Goffman’s terminology (Goffman 2005). One could say that the minors’ desire to protect themselves from negative thoughts and emotions that are too hard to bear comes at the cost of preventing others from expressing theirs.

This also makes it hard to express personal thoughts and emotions. Given the minors’ background and their situation, even talking about such things as one’s home country and the food at home comes at the risk of reminding someone else (if not one self) about thoughts and emotions they want to avoid. To avoid reminding oneself or others of negative thoughts and emotions such personal subjects are likely to be skirted and, as we have seen, instead focusing on trivial everyday issues in interaction with the other minors.

Keeping a positive attitude and avoiding personal subjects is thus both a method to avoid one’s negative emotions and thoughts, as well as necessary to keep a good relation to

the other minors. In essence the minors are protecting their emotions by keeping a positive and light attitude in interaction with other minors and avoiding those minors who do not.

### *7.1.2 PROTECTING THE FUTURE*

Another possible reason for the minors at Asgard to avoid expressing more personal thoughts and emotions is to protect their asylum application, in essence to protect their hopes for the future. They have come a long way and put a lot of hope into a future in Norway, and many are afraid to do anything that may jeopardise it. That some minors provide incorrect information in their applications in hope that it will grant them stay in Norway is a known phenomenon.

As mentioned in a previous chapter<sup>25</sup>, Karin Harsløf Hjelde finds in her thesis “Diversity, liminality and silence: integrating young unaccompanied refugees in Oslo” that minors, even after their applications have been granted, keep silent about information that they believe may jeopardise their asylum application (Harsløf Hjelde 2004:166-176). This was often information related to their age and identity as well as information about their relations to other persons and places (Harsløf Hjelde 2004:166). Ada Engebriksen finds that contact with family in the home country is a similar cause for minors’ silence, fearing that it undermines their asylum application or that they will be repatriated to their home country (Engebriksen 2002:71).

In my interviews of the minors at Asgard, two of them said they had given wrong information in their original applications. This is a transcript from the interview of one of these minors:

*Me: "Hva du tenker når du hører at andre har fått positivt eller fått negativt, før du visste sjøl hva du?"*

*Minor: "Ja da jeg fikk første jeg ble kvalm, men da jeg fikk det andre, så var jeg like god som [før <unclear>]. Hvis man måtte .. Jeg var litt sjenert fordi jeg er.. Jeg løy aldri så mye. Så litt sjenert, litt lei meg, litt sint på meg selv..."*

*Me: "Hvorfor var du sint på deg selv?"*

*Minor: "Fordi, jeg kunne bare gitt rett navn, men jeg har ikke gjort det... Så..."*

*Me: "Så det følte vanskelig at du hadde løyet? Men hadde du løyet til mottaket eller var det til venner også, eller var det bare til UDI eller?"*

*Minor: "Til alle."*

*Me: "Til alle. Ja. Så det.. også til folk som du kjente da? Ja. Var det vanskelig?"*

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<sup>25</sup> Previously referred to in relation to interviewing unaccompanied minor refugees, under ethics in the chapter ‘Methods: what and why’.

*Minor: "Ja det er ganske vanskelig for.. jeg vet ikke.. jeg følte meg litt.. jeg vet ikke hvordan var det.. jeg var kjempetrist.."<sup>xxxvi</sup>*

This minor's replies show the difficulties and emotional tax that keeping such secrets may have, adding more anger, sadness and possibly regret to his burden. It leaves him with more negative thoughts and emotions that he has to manage, and most likely – avoid.

Nonetheless, he also says that he was “shy” and that “...I never lied that much...”. This ‘shyness’, as he describes it, may have been a method to avoid lying more than he absolutely had to. When holding such secrets, especially about something as essential as ones’ name, one becomes careful with what one says and does. Any interaction and communication comes at the risk of saying something one should not. It is safer then to avoid expressing more personal thoughts and emotions, to keep conversations and interactions superficial to avoid risking revealing one’s secret(s).

Considering the literally vital importance that a positive reply on the asylum application has for their future, I believe it is difficult for outsiders to understand how important it is to avoid revealing anything that may jeopardise it. In Knudsen’s “De trodde jeg var fattig” minors define it as a matter of life or death (Knudsen 1990:42). From this perspective, avoiding doing anything that may cause the asylum application to be declined becomes paramount. So paramount that even those that in theory have nothing to hide may believe they do.

The Norwegian immigration policies are unclear, I dare say even for well informed Norwegians. According to Engebriktsen, both a UDI caseworker as well as others, such as reception centre staff, pointed out to her that there are many examples of similar asylum cases with different outcomes (Engebriktsen 2002:50, 125). Also the staff at Asgard had such examples. For a refugee, an unaccompanied minor at that, understanding the Norwegian immigration policies or their chance for a positive decision on their application may be near impossible. Schancke even reports that minors in his study believed that the decision of whom is granted stay in Norway is quite random (Schancke 1995:40). One of the minors I interviewed expressed the same view: “You need to be lucky.” This lack of clarity in Norwegian immigration policies makes the asylum application process very uncertain and confusing for unaccompanied refugee minors.

One evening that I was at Asgard I was going up the staircase when I heard a sound from the hallway. I went into the hallway and saw one of the minors I knew clearly

distressed. It turned out the minor had broken an item in frustration and was afraid of what would happen if the staff found out. I sat down with him in a common room where we were alone and talked with him to comfort him. He told that me he was worried that the staff would write it down in their reports. Then the UDI would know and what would happen to him then?

This incident says something about the fear a minor may have of the UDI and doing anything that may jeopardise his case. It was a quite understandable and fairly innocent incident but to minor it was far from innocent. It was something that might affect his asylum application. I believe the incident illustrates a central problem with a seemingly inconsistent and confusing implementation of immigration policies. It leaves the minors in uncertainty about what affects their asylum application and consequently what they have to do to avoid a negative result.

A minor pointed out to me: *“You have only once chance to have the interview”*. Then he asked rhetorically: *“Are you really ready to take it all out after just a few weeks?”* During the few hours of the single interview the minor has to reveal all the relevant information, without knowing what is relevant or not. In these few hours they lay the basis for one of the most important decisions for their future. The initial asylum application interview and the registering becomes the “truth” that the minors are held to. Any discrepancies may have severe repercussions. Or so the minor fears. Harsløf Hjelde points out how minors that have had their name misspelled when they were registered learned this new spelling to avoid questions from the police (Harsløf Hjelde 2004:172).

Even those that in reality have nothing to hide may feel they have to be careful with what they share with others in case it might be used against their case. The minors understandable confusion about what might affect their case may cause them to adopt a general strategy to be careful about what they share with others, avoiding openly expressing thoughts and emotions relating to more personal issues in fear of revealing information they believe might affect their chance to get to stay in Norway.

In this perspective keeping expressions of thoughts and emotions to trivial everyday matters and avoiding expressing personal thoughts and emotions is a way to protect their asylum application and their future.

### *7.1.3 MAINTAINING RESPECT*

Another reason for being careful with what thoughts and emotions to express is the

need to maintain the respect of the other minors, or to put it in the terms of Goffman; to maintain their 'face' (Goffman 2005:5-8).

These minors are living close together and are around the other minors most hours of the day - at the reception centre, at school and even when they are out and about. In addition, the minors are sharing rooms with one-another, making it difficult for them to have any sort of privacy. This poses a challenge for the minors. As one of them states:

*"Jeg kan ikke si noe privat til [friend]. Det som jeg er litt redd, jeg stoler sikkert på ham, men jeg vet ikke om 3-4 uker så skal jeg krangle med ham så kanskje kan komme til å si til en annen at 'Han har gjort sånn og sånn og sånn'. Eller at [minor] er sånn og sånn og sånn'. Det vil jeg ikke at noen skal vite noe om meg på [Asgard]."<sup>xxxvii</sup>*

He is referring to one of his best friends at Asgard. This illustrates a central problem in the interaction with other minors at Asgard; controlling impressions to maintain respect. Maintaining face becomes extra challenging in a reception centre such as Asgard, where one has to relate to so many in so many situations for such a long time and with few options for privacy. As Goffman states:

*"A person who can maintain face in the current situation is someone who abstained from certain actions in the past that would have been difficult to face up to later." (Goffman 2005:7)*

The minor's quote illustrates this dilemma, having to avoid actions to make sure that they do not come back to haunt you later in another situation. He 'probably' trusts his friend, but he cannot be sure that they will not have a fight at some time where what he has done or said will be used against him, or shared with others.

Expressing intimate thoughts and emotions thus becomes nearly impossible if one wants to keep the other minors' respect and maintain one's face. To cry in the wrong situation, to admit one misses one's mom, to tell about the time one fled in fear, to talk about the anxieties one feels watching the news, comes at a risk. Even if it might feel ok to express such thoughts and emotions to a friend, risking that someone else will know - someone that you do not know as well or like as much - may not be worth it. As the minor describes in his quote, friends can come at odds. In the close environment of Asgard, one's personal emotions may soon be the privy of the rest of the minors and residents.

To appear as a charming, handsome and self-reliant young man may be hard when others know that you cry yourself to bed every night missing your parents, or that you jump in fear every time you hear a loud bang or get anxious when seeing the news. To avoid losing

face, hiding such emotions and avoiding topics that may remind one about them becomes important. Not doing so may risk losing the respect of the other minors.

In my time at Asgard I only witnessed someone crying in public once. One of the minors, a girl, came silently sobbing with tears running down her cheeks walking into one of the common rooms. Another girl quickly came to her aid, putting her arm around the crying girl, escorting her out of the room. None of the others moved to do anything, and seemed to show a studied disinterest going on with whatever they were doing. The situation is very reminiscent of what Goffman refers to as ‘the corrective process’ (Goffman 2005:19). The group tries to correct an incident of threat against the face of one in the group, in this case by taking the person out of the situation at the same time as the rest of the group tries to look as that they have not noticed or that it is of no importance.

In one of the interviews with a minor we talked about what he did when he got sad:

*“I don’t like to see other people when I’m sad, I try to be positive. If I get sad I prefer not show others. Sometimes I go to church or hide in room to keep away and try to smile. I don’t want anyone to see my weak point; I don’t want others to know everything about me. And also, I don’t want to make others sad”<sup>26</sup>.*

The minor relates showing sadness to showing weakness, and hides to avoid others noticing. As he stated, he does not want the other minors to know “everything” about him. He wants to control what others know about him, to avoid them knowing his “weakness”. Managing and avoiding expressing thoughts and emotions that may cause one to lose face in the eyes of others is important to keep their respect.

I will venture to say that negative emotions such as depression, fear, anxiety and sadness are usually not associated with respect and may be interpreted as a sign of weakness and frailty. Thus these emotions, and anything that may remind one of them, are avoided in order to not risk showing the other minors “weakness”. This is typical for what Goffman refers to as “the avoidance process” describing how we do face-work to maintain face in interactions by avoiding actions that may cause us to lose ‘face’(Goffman 2005:15-16).

Keeping away from expressing personal thoughts and emotions and topics or situations that may trigger them can thus be seen as a way for the minors to maintain their face and the respect of the other minors.

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<sup>26</sup> Based on written notes taken under part of an interview where tape recorder was not used. The interview was mainly conducted in English.

### 7.1.4 WANTING GUIDANCE

The minors' need to protect their emotions and asylum application and to maintain respect may explain why expressing personal thoughts and emotions are avoided, and why the focus is kept on the present and more trivial issues. However there is an additional factor to take into consideration; it may be that the minors do not see any purpose in expressing or sharing personal thoughts and emotions with the other minors.

*"Jeg synes at han er grei. Jeg liker ham. Men, fortsatt har vi litt forskjellige tanker. Så jeg stoler på ham, men jeg kan ikke snakke med ham om noe alvorlig fordi vi er ikke like."*<sup>xxxviii</sup>

*Minor at Asgard*

This minor states that he trusts his friend, but that he cannot talk about serious things with him because they are different, implying that the friend would not be able to give him the response that he is looking for. This hints of another reason for why they do not share personal thoughts and emotions.

In Andre Sourander's research at a Finnish reception centre he found that the unaccompanied minors expressed a wish to discuss their situation and problems with an *adult* they trusted (Sourander 1998:723). Likewise Hjelde finds that the resettled minors in her research mostly prefer talking to adult compatriots about traumatic experiences (Harsløf Hjelde 2004:188). Also the minors in Christoffersen's study of resettled minors say they need the advice of adults (Christoffersen 2007:28), and I know from my research that minors talk about their problems and ask advice from the (adult) legal guardians that gain their trust.

While the minors at Asgard are in the same situation with similar experiences, emotions and thoughts, they may all feel equally helpless. At the same time they are young, and they may feel that the other minors neither have the wisdom or knowledge to be of any help. Not to mention that they are all strangers in a foreign country, in a culture and a system none of them know well. Thus, even if they did trust each other, they may feel that sharing personal thoughts and emotions has no purpose.

## 7.2 A silencing of emotions

In her study of unaccompanied refugee minors resettled in Oslo Karin Hjelde Harsløf observes that these minors;

*"...on a whole presented themselves as polite and positive young persons. Simultaneously they were*

*notably silent and watchful, showing resistance towards, close personal contact, especially with adults. Apart from that, after some time in Oslo they could seem on the surface like any other young people being together, playing and joking.”*  
(Harsløf Hjelde 2004:155)

Harsløf Hjelde terms the silence that these minors display ‘silence behaviour’. This silence behaviour could however take other forms than literal silence, depending on the minors’ relations to those they interacted with (Harsløf Hjelde 2004:157, 163). According to Harsløf Hjelde this ‘silence behaviour’ stems from ‘silenced knowing’<sup>27</sup>, a knowledge or knowing that the minors either could or would not reveal (Harsløf Hjelde 2004:159). She identifies three main types of silenced knowing in the minors; silenced knowing about *Age and identity*, about *Adaptation*, and about *Traumatic experiences* conditioned respectively by immigration policies, defeats in exile, and war and flight (Harsløf Hjelde 2004:164-166).

Though our perspectives differ I believe Karin Harsløf Hjelde’s findings on silence behaviour parallel my findings of avoidance behaviour in the minors at Asgard. The avoidance of expression of thoughts and emotions that may endanger the minors’ emotions, future and face may be seen as a silencing of these emotions. In other words, avoiding expressing these ‘dangerous’ thoughts and emotions may be seen as a form of silence behaviour, causing a silencing of knowledge and thus silenced knowing corresponding to the reasons for these thoughts and emotions.

One form of silenced knowing is the silenced knowing of information relating to the minors’ asylum application, conditioned by immigration policies and directed towards the immigration authorities as Harsløf Hjelde puts it (Harsløf Hjelde 2004:166). Another is the silenced knowing of information relating to maintaining respect with others, conditioned by what I believe is a basic human need for respect and dignity, directed at their social relations (primarily the other minors). However this silenced knowing is not conditioned exclusively by defeats in exile as in Harsløf Hjelde’s case but by anything that that may cause the loss of face such as showing emotional ‘weakness’. And lastly a silenced knowing of information relating to the negative thoughts and emotions they find hard to bear, including traumatic experiences of war and flight as Harsløf Hjelde puts it (Harsløf Hjelde 2004:166), directed at oneself.

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<sup>27</sup> Harsløf Hjelde uses the term ‘silenced knowing’ to distinguish it from the term ‘silenced knowledge’, referring to knowledge that is acquired through practice and with “...cannot easily be expressly formulated verbally...” (Harsløf Hjelde 2005:159).

However I believe the last silenced knowing may not be restricted to strictly traumatic experiences but more generally to distressing and painful emotions, whereof traumatic experiences are likely to be central. For example the minors seem to avoid talking or expressing emotions about waiting for their application to be processed. I believe this is partly because they want to avoid reminding themselves of the fears and anxiety, as well as the hopes that the application holds, in combination with a feeling of that it does no good to talk about it (to the other minors).

As Harsløf Hjelde points out, the silence behaviour she observes always take place in interaction and in a context that must be taken into account (Harsløf Hjelde 2004:160). In the case of the minors at Asgard it takes the form of a silencing of emotions meant to protect the minors' emotions and future and maintaining respect, causing a silenced knowing relating to what can be described as more personal information.

### 7.3 Avoidance and loss of personality

*Minor:* "Du bor i lamme dem.. og har ikke tid til å krangle. Har ikke tid til å ha noen problemer, så ok; jeg må være enig med dem. Så man bare føler man seg.. man mister litt.. en del av per.. sin personlighet."

*Me:* "Fordi at du hele tiden må jekke deg til andre som..?"

*Minor:* "Jammen.. Jeg kan ikke være meg sjøl her, for det går ikke! Fordi at jeg kan ikke bestemme alt selv... til og med på mitt rom. Fordi at jeg.. jeg deler rommet mitt med en annen."<sup>xxxix</sup> "

All the interviewed minors voiced frustration over the lack of privacy at Asgard and having to adjust to others even in their own room. The latter was pointed out as especially frustrating. This is a frustration that is voiced in other studies (Barlindhaug 2005:126, Valenta 2001:68, Fladstad 1993:83, Knudsen 1990:43, 79). The need to avoid conflict also comes up in some of the interviews. As this minor says, he does not "...have time to have problems". Protecting oneself from negative emotions and trying to maintain respect is hard if one gets into conflict with the others at Asgard, and some might fear that open conflicts may get out of hand and jeopardise their asylum application too.

What is interesting in this quote however is how the minor states that he is losing his personality; he cannot be himself. I think it is hard to imagine the emotion work and face work that these minors do, trying to protect their emotions and future, and to maintain respect. As I have pointed out earlier, living in such close quarters with so many others, being with the other minors for most of their waking hours, means that they constantly work at

maintaining face.

Considering that the minors are maintaining faces that withhold much of their personal thoughts and emotions the face they represent must be quite different from how they feel. It is no wonder then that this boy feels like he is losing his personality. In the same way that the emotional labour required of the flight attendants in Hochschild's "The managed heart" poses a challenge to their self (Hochschild 1983:136), the emotion and face work that the minors at Asgard have to do to maintain their face poses a challenge to the minors' selves.

The more a minor tries to avoid expressing his personal thoughts and emotions, the harder he tries to protect his emotions and future and to maintain respect, the more discrepancy it will be between how he feels and sees himself and how he presents himself to others. As Barlindhaug points out; the minors have no 'backstage' in the terms of Goffman (Barlindhaug 2005:126,). 'Backstage' can loosely be understood as somewhere where one can let down one's act and act more informal and with less consideration to the impression one gives others (Goffman 1990:129-136).

The minor's at Asgard seemingly have nowhere to let their act down and relax their emotion- and face work. Not even their own room can they find real privacy. Therefore it is understandable that the minor is feeling like he is losing his personality, that he cannot be himself. He cannot show how he really feels, or say what he really thinks. While this is true for most of people in interaction with others, there is probably more contrast between what these minors really feel and think and what they can express and say than for most of us. Having nowhere to really be alone and no one to be open to the minors at Asgard are in a situation where they may feel that they put on an act for most of their waking hours. As another of the interviewed minors stated, talking about sharing rooms and relating to the others at Asgard; "*It is hard to be who you are. Really hard, yes.*"

Citing Dana Crowley Jack Harsløf Hjelde points out that silence behaviour may be seen as a silencing of the self (Harsløf Hjelde 2004:190). In this perspective the minors at Asgard's silencing of more personal thoughts and emotions can also be seen as a silencing of their selves. Furthermore she points out that research associates such silencing of the self with depression (Harsløf Hjelde 2004:190). Thus the minors' avoidance of expressing more personal thoughts and emotions to protect their emotions and future and to maintain respect may have, as Harsløf Hjelde puts it, "*...serious psychosocial consequences for themselves*" (Harsløf Hjelde 2004:190).

This feeling of losing personality can be alleviated by providing the minors possibilities for privacy, as well as relations where they do not feel the same need to avoid expressing personal thoughts and emotions. In such a relationship a minor does not have to work as hard to keep up a self-image that they may feel estranged from. Such a relationship may provide them with a ‘backstage’, in the terms of Goffman, where the minors can let down their ‘act’ and relax without fear of losing face, risking their asylum application or reminding others of their negative emotions.

## 7.4 Collective emotion work

One thing that have intrigued and puzzled me for quite a while after my period at Asgard is the nature of the minors’ friendships. From my interviews there seem to be a great variation in the friendships, from being characterised as friendships of necessity (“*I have to be with them because I have no others*”) to more closer friendships (“*I like him*”). While I am hesitant to describe their friendships, even the more close friendships seem to find a support in each other that does not involve sharing personal thoughts and emotions. As one minor put it, talking about his roommate that he seemed close to: “*We take care of each other, but not in that way*”.

I recall one night I spent at Asgard to do my observations. Suddenly the fire-alarm went off. This is something that apparently happened often; up to several times per month, usually because it was set off by one of the residents (often the minors were suspected). Setting off the fire alarm may be what (at least to me) seemed to be a destructive way to deal with frustrations felt.

As the fire alarm was connected to a central alarm system and the fire alarm could only be shut off by a representative of the fire brigade, and everyone had to evacuate the building. This was at 1 or 2 am in the morning. As the minors and the rest of the residents evacuated the building one of the minors had found a football, and soon many of the minors and a few of the other residents had formed a circle on the ground outside the reception where they played football while they waited for the fire truck to arrive<sup>28</sup>. Instead of just standing out there in the cold being frustrated, they were doing something active, something that they –

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<sup>28</sup> From the fire alarm went off, until the fire truck had arrived, the building cleared (which was done in a disquietingly unsympathetic manner) and the fire alarm reset it had at least taken an hour.

despite the circumstances – enjoyed. In a sense they were doing collective emotion work. I view this incident as symbolic of the relations between the minors at Asgard.

In Hochschild's "The Managed Heart" the flight attendants are described as doing collective emotion work by for example avoiding talking about serious topics such as politics and religion to keep up a good mood (Hochschild 1983:115). By talking, joking, playing ball, watching TV together, playing video games, shooting pool, going to town, in short; by doing things together, the minors at Asgard were doing collective emotion work every day. Doing activities together seemed to relieve some of the emotional pressure on each of them, helping each other to avoid and distract themselves from the negative thoughts and emotions that weigh them down. Thus one could argue that they help each other to deal with their emotions as best as they can; by doing activities together and avoiding the negative emotions. Perhaps that is how some of minors' friendships seem to be close even though they state that they do not share private thoughts and emotions with each other; by being together and cheering each other up when they are down

## **7.5 Don't worry, be happy**

I started this chapter by stating that the minors at Asgard gave me an impression of having a general 'don't worry, be happy' attitude with the minors seemingly avoiding more personal thoughts and emotions in interaction with others.

This may partly be attributed to the minor's trying to deal with negative emotions that they find hard to bear by avoiding them and trying to think positive. As a minor quoted in the previous chapter stated; when he gets sad he tries to stay positive and turn it around. It also seems that avoiding expressing more personal thoughts and emotions is important. In doing so they avoid reminding themselves or others of negative thoughts and emotions, as well as avoiding risking saying or doing anything that they believe may risk their asylum application or risk their respect with the other minors.

Thus the apparent 'don't worry, be happy' attitude may be a result of dealing with negative emotions by avoiding them, as well as avoiding expressing more personal thoughts and emotions to protect their own and others emotions, their future and their respect with the other minors.

The 'don't worry, be happy' attitude is however a generalised observation that should

not be taken too far, it is not present at all times. As Barlindhaug notes, the minors does express frustration at times – but usually about issues that in comparison to their situation may seem insignificant (Barlindhaug 2005:156). But even these frustrations seem to be restricted to small comments such as ‘fuck Asgard’. Other times it might be that the pressure is too high, as it might have been with the girl crying in public or as it was with the minor that had broken something in frustration. But these latter examples seem to be the exceptions, emotions that usually are not shown in public.

Keeping up an impression void of negative emotions or more private personal thoughts and emotions comes at a price. A minor expresses that he feels that he is losing his personality. Considering the lack of privacy and all the people the minors have to relate to while keeping up a positive impression in a difficult situation, there is no wonder that one might feel like one’s personality is lost in the process. In the next chapter I will look at how the minors’ caretakers, the staff at Asgard, their teachers and their guardians, may help alleviate the pressure that the minors at Asgard are under.

## 8 Staff, Teachers and Guardians

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In the two previous chapters I have looked at how the minors at Asgard deal with their emotions, both from a personal perspective and in interaction with the other minors. In this chapter I will look at what support their caretakers, the staff at Asgard, the minors' teachers and the minor's guardians, can provide the minors in dealing with their emotions.

The Norwegian government is bound by the incorporation of the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) into Norwegian law (Ingebrigtsen et al. 2004:26) to ensure children in Norway "...such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being..." (CRC §3.2), and ensure "...a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development" (CRC §27.1). The staff at Asgard, the minors' teachers, and the minors' guardians is first in line to be able to provide the protection and care that is necessary for the minors at Asgard's well being and development.

This study indicates that the minors at Asgard try to deal with their negative thoughts and emotions mainly by avoiding them. Thus an important part of being able to give these minors social support is to establish a relation where the minors feel they are able, and that it helps, to share negative thoughts and emotions without fearing that it may jeopardise their asylum application or others respect for them.

Although one should be careful to assume that talking in itself is therapeutic (Fladstad 1993:80, Harsløf Hjelde 2004:141) or that a person's silence is only a problem (Kohli 2006:709-710), we know that social support is important for a person's well being (Seglem 2007:4-6). While Harsløf Hjelde warns about making minors talk about their traumatic experiences simply in the belief that 'it is good for them' (Harsløf Hjelde 2004:141), having someone they feel comfortable to talk to and ask for advice and help when they want to is a different matter.

In this chapter I will focus on how free the minors feel to express and share their personal thoughts and emotions with, respectively; the staff at Asgard, the teachers at the minors' school and the minors' guardians

## 8.1 The Reception Centre Staff

It is the immigration authorities, represented by Utlendingsdirektoratet<sup>29</sup>, that have the responsibility for the care and housing of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors between 15-18 years old while their application are being processed (Mindreårige som forsvinner fra mottak 2008:8). The reception centres provide the daily care for these minors (Mindreårige som... 2008:8). In the guidelines for working with unaccompanied minors in reception centres the UDI states:

*"Mottaket skal sikre at de mindreårige får nødvendig oppfølging og omsorg." and  
"Under botiden i mottak skal enslige mindreårige gis et godt omsorgstilbud i trygge omgivelser.  
Hensynet til barnets beste skal stå i sentrum for alt arbeid."<sup>31</sup> (Faglige retningslinjer for arbeidet med  
enslige mindreårige i statlig mottak 2000:4)*

The reception centre staff can thus be said to be the primary caretakers of the minors at Asgard. The reception centre is as such not only a place for food and shelter, but also a place where the minors are to receive care for their mental and physical health.

### 8.1.1 THE STAFF AND THE MINORS

In the guidelines the staff's responsibility for helping the minors to deal with their experiences of war, conflict, flight, loss and life in exile is explicitly stated (Faglige retningslinjer 2000:17). It is further recognised that trust is important for dealing with emotions:

*"Det er vanlig at mennesker som har opplevd vonde eller traumatiske hendelser ikke ønsker å fortelle om dette til andre enn de som de har en trygg og tillitsfull relasjon til. Det er av betydning at personalet søker å skape trygge og tillitsfulle relasjoner til beboerne og kan bidra til at de enslige mindreårige får bearbeidet sine følelser."<sup>32</sup> (Faglige Retningslinjer 2000:17)*

Trust is here emphasised as important for helping the unaccompanied minors deal with their emotions. However, it is clear from the interviews with the minors at Asgard that they in general did not feel close to the staff. The minors' description of their relation to the staff ranged from a resigned indifference, to slight frustration, to outright anger. While observation and interviews with the staff suggests that the relation between the staff and minors are more than frustrations and anger, there is a tangible lack of trust in their relation.

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<sup>29</sup> The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration

I believe there are mainly two reasons for this; the conflict of simultaneously working for the immigration authorities and being caretakers of the minors, as well as the staff's lack of time and resources.

### ***Relation to the UDI: Trust and Confidentiality***

I am not sure I really would have understood the importance of the aspect of the staffs' relation to the UDI, had I not stumbled over an incident at the reception centre during my voluntary work there.

I have already told of my encounter with a minor that had broken an item and was distraught, fearing what would happen if the UDI found out. I sat down and comforted him and reassured him that this would not happen, UDI would not know, and again that the staff would understand. He was sceptic and distraught, but I said I could talk to the staff which the minor accepted. In the end everything turned out fine, and I do not believe the incident had any negative repercussions for the minor. However, in retrospect it seemed that I had been far too naive in my assertions. At the time I was convinced that the minors were protected by right to confidentiality in regards to the staff, but it turns out that this right to confidentiality does not extend to the UDI<sup>30</sup> (Taushetsplikt for ansatte i statlige asylmottak og utveksling av informasjon 2005:4<sup>th</sup> paragraph, Reglement for drift av statlige mottak 2008:Section 5.3).

And then I found out that there is actually a possibility that incidents like these are put down in reports that have repercussions for these minors future; however this is in regards to resettlement in a municipality. According to Barlindhaug the reception centre sends a report to the UDI about the minors and their priorities when it comes to where to be resettled (Barlindhaug 2005:120). If the minor is considered to be difficult and needing more resources municipalities may decline taking the minor, prioritising minors that seem easier to resettle (Barlindhaug 2005:120).

In other words, even though this was a trivial incident, the unaccompanied minor principally had good reason not to trust the staff. Any information that was important for his case, told in confidence to one of the staff, could be turned over to the UDI.

One of the staff that I interviewed even says that not reading the minors' asylum application is a way to avoid a conflict of interests in regards to their confidentiality with the

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<sup>30</sup> See the chapter 'Unaccompanied minors: facts and figures' > 'How are their rights regulated'.

minors:

*Staff: "Ja, ja.. Så det kan jo hende at det står i asylsøknaden, men det betyr at jeg heller ikke behøver å si noe til UDI for jeg vet jo heller ikke hva som er sagt i intervjuet. Altså, om han har skrevet "mor og far er død" – han sier til meg: 'Jeg har kontakt med mor'."*

*Me: "Du behøver ikke å si noe."*

*Staff: "Ja, jeg vet jo ikke om det er motstridende av hva som sto i den søknaden, så jeg har veldig ofte tenkt at det er veldig greit å ikke lese den søknaden."<sup>31</sup>*

Not having read the minors asylum-application the staff member does not know if the minor says anything that contradicts what he or she has stated in their application, and thus the staff member is not obligated to inform the UDI of any discrepancies.

I must say that I find it very disturbing that the primary caretakers of these minors cannot guarantee the minors confidentiality in regards to the UDI. UDI is processing their asylum applications, and may be seen by the minors as the biggest threat to their future. That the minors' supposed caretakers are not only linked to the UDI but actually have an obligation to share information about the minors with the UDI is, to say the least, disconcerting. It means that a minor has to take great care to not accidentally slip information that they believe may have an impact on their application to the staff, or to anyone that could inform the staff. It makes the basis for trust very difficult.

The minor in the incident was not alone in his fear of the staff's reports. Another minor also mentions the staff's reports:

*"I don't know what they like. I have to know what they like, so they don't write down in reports. They can even open rooms without warning and check. It's a game and you have to play it well. In Norway it's harder, you don't expect it. It's a mental game."<sup>31</sup>*

Also this minor gives these reports quite an importance, which I am sure the minor would not if he did not think the reports were given to the UDI. The minor feels that he has to "know what they like" to avoid being reported, fearing the reports may have an impact on his asylum application.

This illustrates how problematic the relation between the staff and the UDI is. It creates a conflict of roles for the staff between being controllers on behalf of the immigration authorities and caretakers of the minors, as have been noted by others (Barlindhaug

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<sup>31</sup> Quote based on hand-written notes taken under the interview. The interview was mainly conducted in English.

2005:106, Engebrigtsen 2002:89, Schancke 1995:43, Knudsen 1990:37).

### ***Staff, collective rules and intimacy***

Another reason for the lack of trust between staff and minors more explicitly mentioned in the interviews was the minors' frustrations with everyday issues and conflicts with the staff.

The reception centre was manned with 2-3 personnel in the morning, 2 in the evening and 1 night watch. With this staffing the reception centre were to take care of more than 20 minors and over 40 adults (some with children). This included all the practical and administrative work as well as the social work they had to do both in regards to the minors and the adults. Even though the evening shift at the reception centre was meant to be there for the minors solely, there was not much time the personnel had for each of the minors. And with so many at one place there is not much room for individual adaption.

The UDI's guidelines for working with minors in reception centres emphasises the need for "*...ha en fast struktur på hverdagen gjennom rutiner, regler og prosedyrebeskrivelser.*<sup>xliii</sup>" (Faglige retningslinjer... 2000:4). Rules and regulations may be important to run a peaceful and organised reception centre. Structure may also be important to give the minors a sense of stability and security as claimed by the reception centres guidelines (Faglige retningslinjer 2000:9). However, with so many residents these rules and structures are collective rules and structures which the staff does not have much time to explain and discuss with the minors, much less to adapt it to the individual minor. Thus the rules and the staffs' enforcement of them becomes a source of frustration, making the staff seem less like caretakers but more (again) as controllers.

An example mentioned by the minors as well as the guardians was food. As meals were served at certain hours for a limited period of time the minors could miss meals if they were not in by that time and could risk going hungry. That they could not get food outside of these periods met with little understanding by the minors (and the guardians). From the reception centres perspective this was meant to keep some structure in the day to day life of the minors, as well as preventing that the staff had to spend the little time they had to run back and forth fixing food for the minors.

This could have been handled much more smoothly had the staff not felt pressed for time, nor having had so many minors to relate to. Then the staff would have more time to

both make food available and to talk to the minors about why they were late and perhaps how to handle this another time (could they call ahead and say they were late etc). But in such a setting, with so few in the staff and so many of the minors such individual adaptations was hard to do.

I would say that there is a lack of intimacy in the relation between the staff and the minors, in the sense that they did not have much time for the individual minor. The lack of time, in combination with the lack of possibilities for individual communication and adjustment, about the structures and rules at the reception centre, may have increased the minors' sense of the staff being more "watchers" or controllers, than helpers and caretakers.

Another of the interviewed minors at Asgard told me what I consider to be an extreme example of the lack of communication and confidentiality between the minors and the staff. According to the minor the staff had suspected he were involved with criminal activities, while he in fact had legally acquired a part-time job. The staff had opened up and searched through his room without his permission, to check for evidence of criminal activities. The minor felt this intrusion as a major violation of trust as well as an insult, making the minor feel like the reception centre was more of a prison than a safe place.

The minors' story shows how severe the lack of communication and confidentiality between staff and the minors can be. Having a more intimate situation, with fewer minors per staff member and closer contact between the staff and the minors might have fostered a confidentiality and intimacy where such a situation would have been resolved in a better manner. In such a situation searching the room without the minor's knowledge or acceptance might not have been necessary, as the staff would know that the minor had extra income from a job.

### ***Building trust***

The relation to the UDI and the lack of time and intimacy between staff and minors makes it hard for the minors to trust the staff. Nonetheless, it does not mean that trust was completely absent or that the minors did not talk with the staff.

When a member of the staff says that not reading the asylum applications of the minors is a good thing, it is *because* the minors do happen to share private information with the staff at times. The staff, as I observed them, generally seemed genuinely sympathetic and concerned for the minors. That some of the minors registered this and may have opened

themselves for the staff at times, however little or much, is highly likely.

Also one has to remember that ‘the staff’ is a very generic term, and I might have got other answers from the minors if I had asked more individually about each member of the staff. After having said that he’s “...ikke så gode venner...”<sup>xliv</sup> with the staff, a minor praises one of the staff:

- Minor:* “[Staff member] for eksempel. [Staff member] er en av de beste som jobber på [Asgard]. Jeg liker veldig godt. Ikke de andre som henne. Det er litt..”
- Me:* “Ja.. Men kan du prate med [Staff member] da hvis..?”
- Minor:* “Ja, jeg har pratet med [Staff member]noen ganger. Men nå er det blitt.. Nå synes jeg at det gjør ikke noe hvis jeg prater med henne. Så selv har det bare... I don't like to be an extra problem, jeg vil ikke gi noen mine problemer.”<sup>xlv</sup>

Although the minor does not want to burden someone else with his problems, he likes this staff member, and says that they have talked a few times. Seemingly there is *some* room for trust despite the staff’s relation to the UDI, despite having to uphold collective rules with little adaption to the individual, despite not having much time for each minor, and despite a lack of intimacy in the staff-minor relations.

### ***8.1.2 STAFF, TRUST AND DEALING WITH EMOTIONS***

There is a general lack of solid trust between the minors and the staff that makes it difficult for the minors to share their emotions, much less talk about the things that worries and concerns them. The staff’s relation to the UDI, the existence of ‘reports’ and the uncertainty surrounding them, as well as the fact that the staff is in charge of many of the things the minors want in their everyday life (money, food, activities etc), may even cause the minors to suppress emotions that they fear will impact their asylum-application or their relation to the staff if expressed.

One also has to consider the general reluctance that the minors have in expressing and sharing personal thoughts and emotions. When the situation of the staff is such that they have little time to spare to sit down with the minors and actually be alone with each minor, it makes it less likely that the minors are able or willing to share their intimate thoughts and emotions. It leaves little room for the minors to be able to open up and express more personal thoughts and emotions, thus making it very hard for the staff to be able to give the minors support in dealing with their emotions.

## 8.2 Teachers and school

The minors at Asgard seemed to have a good relation to school. In the interviews with the minors, one called it 'boring' though but did not seem to mind. Another was pleased at how far he had come with the education, but a bit frustrated that he had some trouble getting into a high school. Two of them were not currently attending school however.

As Barlindhaug observes, school seems to be a break from the reception centre that makes the days go faster (Barlindhaug 2005:66). While one of the interviewed minors said he thought it was 'boring', my general impression is that school was a welcome break for minors. Not having school would have meant having nothing to do all day, which would have made it harder to keep their minds off distressing thoughts and emotions.

School is also arena to get in touch with others of the same age (Barlindhaug 2005:65). Another benefit with the school was that the minors pretty soon picked up Norwegian, which made it easier for the minors to make friends across the language barriers. One of the minors told me that in the beginning he were only hanging with minors of the same background as him, but as he started to learn Norwegian and these friends were moving out of Asgard he got friends from other backgrounds. So going to school and learning Norwegian also made it easier for the minors to become friends across the language barriers.

### *8.2.1 SCHOOL: MASTERY AND DEALING WITH EMOTIONS*

School can be a good place for getting a sense of achievement and mastery, important for building an experience of confidence and self worth. While taking an education offers the minors a sense of achievement and self-worth, there is a rather large pitfall for the minors as well. The minors often carry with them the expectations of their family to get a good education with the possibilities it opens for getting a job, earning money and providing for themselves and possibly their family (Eide 2000:92, Engebriksen 2002:92, Schancke 1995:53). Thus failure may come at a heavy cost; not only losing the sense of mastery and self-worth that succeeding in school can give but also potentially losing face in the eyes of oneself and the family.

There may be several factors for why someone may have problems with school, where dealing with emotions is one. The minors' situation may make it difficult to keep the focus and energy necessary to do well in school. While I did not know of any at Asgard at the time that had so much problems that they could not go to school, one of the guardians told me of

such an experience. The guardian had been responsible for a minor that did not cope with school, and which the guardian had to take out of school because it caused the minor more problems than good. As such school is a double edged sword, because in the worst case scenarios it can be a source for failure and loss of self-respect.

Having to deal with the thoughts and emotions these minors are troubled with, makes coping with school difficult. One problem for the minors at Asgard was sleep. All the minors interviewed had problems with sleep. When going to bed and trying to sleep it is difficult to distract oneself from negative thoughts. Without any distractions negative thoughts and emotions easily press on. Going to bed very late, so that they were knackered when they finally went to bed and fell asleep quickly was one tactic mentioned by the minors to make it easier to sleep. Another tactic was to listen to music while waiting to sleep, presumably listening to music made it easier to keep the thoughts and emotions away.

This of course meant that some of the minors came late to school at times. Thoughts and emotions, and lack of sleep, probably both contributed to a lack of focus in class. From observation and from the interviews with the teachers it seemed that they had an understanding of the minors' situation, so they were reasonably lenient with the minors. A quote from one of the minors, asked about how it had been at school 'yesterday', illustrates the room the teachers give the minors to be unfocused:

*Minor: "Ja. Greit, Det er greit. Ellers, jeg pleier å tulle mye på skola, tuller hele tiden. Ikke være den jeg er. Jeg har ikke mye plass... Læreren min vet om det, så hun bare, hun vet om hvem jeg er, så etter.."*

*Me: "Men, kan jeg spørre om hvorfor tuller du mye?"*

*Minor: "Fordi jeg vil ikke tenke mye, fordi jeg, hvis jeg blir sånn, hvis jeg sitter sånn på en halv time, helt sliten, så begynner jeg å tenke mye. Så hvis jeg snakker så bruker, gir ikke tid til å tenke mye."<sup>16</sup>*

The minor is allowed to be unfocused, and to deal with his tiredness and the thoughts through joking and kidding around. It cannot be an easy balance for the teacher to leave room for the minor to be unfocused, and at the same time create the discipline necessary for it to not get out of hand.

Several of the minors I got to know at Asgard had had their application turned down once, which understandably is a major setback for the minors that make it very hard for them to manage with school. The teachers explain that it is very noticeable when the minors have received such bad news and explain how they think it is better for the minors to come to school for a few hours then, than that they should just stay home, and I ask them if they think

that is ok:

*"Vi synes vel ikke så veldig mye om at de kommer og går som de vil noen ganger, så vi prøver jo å oppmuntre dem til å komme om morgenen og være her utover hele dagen, og være her hver dag. Men du ser at noen de klarer det rett og slett ikke, og det ser du litt da på at de blir veldig rastløse, de klarer rett og slett ikke å sitte og konsentrere seg."*<sup>xlvii</sup>

As in Barlindhaug's observations, the teachers were not strict with the minors (Barlindhaug 2005:65). As the quote shows, the teachers were sympathetic to the minors' situation while encouraging them to be in school. However it did not mean there was a lack of discipline. Understanding the minors situation and giving them room to be unfocused, did not seem to go at the expense of the class as I could observe. In a sense there seemed to be a mutual respect, I observed minors coming too late to class – but they did not make a big number of it. I observed a minor kidding around a bit, but he did not take it too far, taking the signals from the teacher when it was enough.

The teacher thus makes it easier for the minors to cope with school, which is an opportunity for them to be active and do something meaningful, while dealing with the thoughts and emotions that they struggle with.

## *8.2.2 TEACHERS AS CARETAKERS*

The teacher is a grown up person that the minors relate to and see every week-day, and thus creates a social bond with each minor. The teachers experience that they are needed a lot more by the unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors than by others with a wider network. The teachers describe their relation to these minors like this:

*"Men det er personer du blir kjent med som betyr noe for deg også, fordi du får et helt annet forhold til de enslige mindreårige, enn du får de som har full oppbakking hjemme med familie og alt det. For de er mer sårbare, de trenger det mer og bruker deg mer som person. De kommer mer, fordi de kommer mer den der ekstra omsorgsperson. De andre har sin mor og sin far og det er også det samme med de som bor i bofellesskap<sup>32</sup>, de har på en måte sine voksne rundt seg hele tiden, som er der bare for dem."*<sup>xlviii</sup>

And:

*"De kommer med andre typer ting som de trenger hjelp til, og trenger veldig bekreftelse på at du ser dem. Og at de betyr noe for deg som lærer også. At de er med på å gi noe. Men du får veldig mye tilbake da, av omsorg og kjærlighet. Også kommer de med alle sine små og store problemer. Stort*

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<sup>32</sup> Bofellesskap –These are communal collectives provided to some of the unaccompanied minors that have been resettled in Norway.

*sett.*<sup>xix</sup>

The teacher becomes a care taker in the minors' lives, a person that they can go with their concerns. As we can see the lack of other caretakers in their life means that these unaccompanied minors turn to the teacher more than minors with social support from other adults. For some of the minors, building the trust necessary takes longer than for others. The teachers experience that some of the minors are more reclusive and less trustful:

*Teacher A: "Også litt det der at, de har nok litt sperre på hvem kan jeg stole på og hvem kan jeg ikke stole på. At de må oppleve..."*

*Teacher B: "...ja det er klart..."*

*Teacher A: "...det at, for noen må du bevise at de kan stole på deg mye mer enn for andre. Det går litt sånn på tillit. De er vel veldig vant med at folk bare plaprer videre med ting."*<sup>4</sup>

The teachers experience that trust, at least for some of the minors, is something that they have to earn gradually. When I ask them how they prove that they are trustworthy, one of the teachers reply:

*Ja, men det går vel litt på sånn på at hvis det er en som sier til meg at den har vanskeligheter med ett eller annet på der de bor da "nå er situasjonen min sånn og sånn, jeg vet ikke hvor min mor eller min far er" eller et eller annet sånt, så trenger du ikke fortelle det til de andre lærerne for eksempel. De tror ofte at vi har kontakt med UDI mens jeg ikke har noen ting med UDI å gjøre. Så det er litt sånn å få vise de linjene, og det at da ting som de har sagt til meg det sier jeg ikke til de andre lærerne. For det skjønner de helt sånn automatisk at "Åja nå vet jo [Teacher] at [Other teacher] har snakket om dette". Så det går litt på holdninger jeg har da til taushetsplikt, rett og slett."*

It is interesting to note that even with the teachers the minors suspect they have a connection to the UDI. As we saw previously in this chapter, the reception centre staff's relation to the UDI is problematic, and while the teachers at least honestly can say they have nothing to do with the UDI – the reception centre staff cannot even tell the minors that they have a right of confidentiality.

But even so the teachers feel they have to prove themselves worthy of the minors trust, keeping the minors information in strict confidence, being careful to not share it even with other teachers. Without this trust it would be hard for the minors to come to them with their concerns. Asked if the minors come for help or just someone to talk to, a teacher replies:

*"Begge deler, det er litt opp og ned, det kommer an på hva problemet er. Noen vil jo også ha hjelp til bofellesskapet, at de synes de krangler litt for mye med de de bor hos eller bor med. Både på mottak og bofellesskap og sånn. Og vil at du skal ringe dit og hjelpe dem og ordne opp og sånne ting. Eller så er det bare for å høre at det de har tenkt er riktig. Om det er lurt å ta den på den måten eller, hva man skal gjøre i forskjellige situasjoner."*<sup>iii</sup>

The other teacher agrees and replies that she experience that it is important for the minors that they are heard, that the teachers can put down what they are doing and sit down and talk with them and give them the time they want.

The teachers are also in a position to observe how the minors are doing. Asking them if they can see if a minor is sad, they respond:

*Teacher: "Da ser du bare at det er en sånn mørk vegg, som du ser at nå trenger denne egentlig bare å prate med deg."*

*Me: "Så dere ser det på dem?"*

*Teacher: "Ja, de klarer ikke å skjule det."<sup>iii</sup>*

So the teachers are not only able to provide care when approached by the minors, but in a position to see if they need help. This means that they have the possibility to step in and offer help where the minor are not able or willing to ask for it himself.

### ***Keeping face at school***

It is interesting to note how this keeping of appearances is upheld at school as well. I asked one of the teachers about how they are approached:

*"Det kan være at man står og har inspeksjon i gangen, og at de begynner med andre ting også spør de ofte, så sier de ofte, når du spør hvordan de har det. Så kommer det sånn. Men det er ofte sånn da, i litt sånn uformelle situasjoner når du er direkte med en og en. Ikke så ofte i klassen, og hvis det er så er det ikke sånn kjempepersonlig og veldig nært, da er det mere sånn litt på tull. Hvis det er flere for da må de skjule seg litt mer."<sup>iv</sup>*

This shows how important it is for a caretaker to be able to be in one-on-one situations with the minors. Being alone with a caretaker, with no one around see or hear, means that a minor does not have to worry with what impression he gives others.

### ***After school***

Also after school, or even when these minors no longer go to the school, the teachers may be looked to as caretakers. One of the teachers comments:

*Så de er egentlig veldig sånn forsiktig med å ta kontakt utenom skolen, da er de veldig redd for å bry. Og de få gangene de gjør det, så skjønner du at dette er veldig viktig for dem. Og da tar man jo de fem minuttene det tar, eller ett eller annet sånt."<sup>v</sup>*

It illustrates that the role of the teachers and thus as caretakers is limited by school, and also that the minors are aware of it. The teachers are caretakers mostly in capacity of being teachers, a role that is ultimately bound to school and school hours.

However, this also shows that the teachers can play a role as caretakers, someone to turn to, also after school, but that this is limited to situations that have a more emergent quality.

### *8.2.3 TEACHERS, SCHOOL AND DEALING WITH EMOTIONS*

School provides an arena for getting out of the reception centre, meeting other minors and to be in meaningful activity. School is also an arena where they can experience a sense of achievement and mastery, however many minors are under high expectations from their family to do well at school. School can thus be a double edged sword.

With the minors challenging situation, having to deal with difficult thoughts and emotions, coping at school may be hard. Thus, instead of mastery these minors may experience a sense of failure, and thus school may become an extra burden to minors. The teachers, however, seem to be sympathetic to the difficult situation that the minors are in, and try to encourage them to stay in school, giving them room to deal with their thoughts and emotions.

The interviewed teachers experience that the unaccompanied minors seek more support and care than minors with a wider social support network. While it is clear that the teachers have to earn some of the minors' trust, at least with some of the more sceptic minors, the minors seem to trust them and feel that they can go to them for help. The teachers are used as someone the minors can talk to, to seek advice and support. Teachers thus seem to be an important caretaker for the minors, as they have very few adults in their lives that they can rely on.

The teachers try to help the minors in regards to problems at the reception centre. They even receive calls when at home; however their role as caretakers is generally limited to the school and school hours. Even so the teachers seem to be of great importance for the care of the minors, as supported by other reports (Barlindhaug 2005:65, Engebrigtsen 2002:98).

## 8.3 The Guardians

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors are appointed a guardian in place of their parents. The minors are appointed a guardian for their asylum interview at the latest (UDI's saksbehandlingsrutiner for enslige mindreårige asylsøkere og flyktninger 2005:10, Mindreårige som forsvinner fra mottak 2008:10). These guardians are volunteers assigned by the Public Guardian's office. They are not compensated for their work for the minors and their formal responsibility for the minors is also limited as we will see.

### *8.3.1 THE GUARDIAN'S ROLE*

The guardian's responsibility is to look after the minor's legal rights, making sure that the minor receives the care that he is entitled to (Ingebrigtsen, Berger and Thorsen 2004:30). In a news bulletin on the UDI's website, announcing the need for more guardians, from September 2008 the UDI describe the guardian's role as follows:

*"Hjelpevergens oppgave er å sikre EMAs rettsikkerhet og være dens rettslige representant overfor offentlige myndigheter. Frem til vedtak i asylsaken er hjelpevergens hovedoppgave å bistå EMA i asylsaken."<sup>41</sup> (Stort behov for nye hjelpeverger 2008:5th paragraf).*

The description sums up the formal role of the guardian as presented by the public authorities, and are in line with the guidelines that the guardians are presented with by the UDI (Veiledning til verger for enslige mindreårige asylsøkere 2003:5-6). The role of the guardian is formally thus quite limited. Although it can be argued that the guardian has to know the minor well to recognise the minor's needs for care, the guardian is only to make sure that such care is provided, not to provide the care.

In practice this means that the care these guardians provide varies. Some restrict themselves to this formal role, while others go further (not to mention those guardians that prove inept at their task). The staff, teachers and the guardians I have interviewed have reported that the contact and quality of relation between the minors and guardians can vary greatly. This is supported by research (Sjøberg 2005:88, Barlindhaug 2005:62, Engebrigtsen 2002:95). It means that many minors risks not having a guardian that are able to fulfil even the formal expectations of their role as guardian for these minors.

However research also shows that this relation is highly valued by the minors when it is working well (Sjøberg 2005:88, Barlindhaug 2005:62). In my research, all the minors that had a guardian had a positive experience of the guardians and talked fondly of them. I have

chosen to interview guardians that see themselves as more than mere legal representatives for the minors. I have done so to look at the potential for social support in the relation between the guardians and the minors, to see the potential of guardians as caretakers. As mentioned in the methods chapter I have done 5 interviews, whereof two were with couples that shared the responsibility as guardians for their minors.

### *8.3.2 VARYING RELATIONS AND THE TROUBLED MINOR*

The guardians interviewed, except for one of the couples, had experience from being guardians for more than one minor. These guardians experienced that their relation with the minors could vary, where some they would have more contact while with others they would have less.

Several reasons were cited for why the contact would be less with some than for others. Different circumstances, such as the minor having family they could turn to, or that the guardian had taken on an extra minor because of the lack of guardians available and thus had overextended themselves<sup>33</sup>, were cited as possible explanations for this. Another reason that was mentioned was differences in personalities:

*"Altså jeg, jeg har jo opplevd at, ja, det er noen som jeg har hatt veldig nær kontakt med. Og jeg vet ikke riktig hvorfor. Kanskje spesielt to asylintervjuer som jeg fulgte, og de to som jeg fulgte videre da fikk jeg veldig nær kontakt med. Også er det andre som jeg har kommet til litt senere, som jeg ikke har hatt så nær kontakt. Og det har både å gjøre med liksom dette at jeg har fulgt hele veien, og også dette at dette er forskjellige personer altså. Og noen er litt mer tilbaketrukket av forskjellige grunner, og vil ikke ha så mye kontakt. Og det respekterer selvfølgelig jeg."<sup>33</sup> – Guardian*

The varying relation between these guardians and their minors shows that the guardians being committed to provide care and comfort alone are not enough for there to be a close relationship between the minors and the guardians. Circumstances and other social networks are likely to play a role, as well as difference in personalities.

This is problematic, even if seeing the guardians role as caretaker as purely a legal matter. Minors that are experienced as reserved, or reclusive, disinterested, or troublesome are also likely to be in need, maybe even more so, for care. These that cannot voice their feelings, or may express their feelings in a destructive manner, have a just as much if not more need for care and attention than others that are more vocal and well adjusted. The risk is

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<sup>33</sup> It must be noted though that all of the guardians seemed to have a guilty conscience, feeling they could do more.

that these less well-adjusted, less outgoing, minors risk not getting the care they should because they are not able to build a good relation with their guardians, nor their teachers or the reception centre staff for that manner.

That there is little to no follow up or regulations of the contact between the minors and their guardians by the public authorities, means that many minors may have little contact with their guardian and may not get the support for their asylum application or help to get the mental and physical care they are entitled to. Without a good relation to their guardians, the guardians cannot assess if the minors are given the care they need at the reception centre or school, and thus cannot make sure that the minors receive the care they are entitled to.

A better support system for the guardians by the public authorities, with a stronger focus on building a good relation between the minors and the guardians will strengthen the guardians' ability to make sure that all minors are picked up by the system and are provided the care they need.

### *8.3.3 THE GUARDIAN AS CARETAKER*

Even though the relation between these guardians and the minors could vary, they guardians all had minors that they had good contact with. Telephonic contact seemed to be quite important<sup>34</sup>. This way they could more easily keep in contact between each time they met. It also meant that the minors could get hold of the guardians when they felt distressed.

All the guardians<sup>35</sup> said that it happened that they were phoned in the night by the minors. According to the guardians these calls generally happened when the minors felt distressed. One of the guardians that had a very close relation with his minor says:

*"Og han ringer jo meg om natten hvis det er noe. Det er jeg veldig opptatt av 'det skal du gjøre'. Og vi har snakket sånn at han gjør det og det har vært ganske stor trøkk i perioder.. eh.. om at, ikke sant.. at han ringer og gråter og noen ganger så må vi ta det på sms fordi han orker ikke å snakke."... "Men jeg tror nok.. at han kanskje skulle ha ønsket å ringe oftere enn han kanskje gjør, fordi han er redd for enda å være plagsom eller at det skal bli for mye."<sup>35</sup>*

The guardians seemed to be considered by these minors as someone that they could talk to about what was pressing on their mind. When I asked one of the guardians about which situations it was that emotional conflicts or conflicts in general came up she answered:

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<sup>34</sup> Except for one of the couples, where they minor did not have a phone yet.

<sup>35</sup> Where the minor had a phone

*"Altså, som regel per telefon. Det er veldig ofte at de sender en melding 'Kan du ringe meg?'. Eller at de ringer fra mottaket eller bofellesskapet, når de får låne en telefon så de ikke blir hørt for de er veldig opptatt av det. Også bare avtaler ofte bare et møte. Ehm.. og det er den ene måten, altså da er det krise. Da er det som regel krise. Det er den ene måten. Den andre måten er det for meg å bare å møtes og kan sitte og snakke i flere timer, også begynner.. begynner det å komme. Så.."*<sup>36</sup>

Thus telephone seems to be a very important way for the minors and guardians to keep in touch, and to allow the minor to share his thoughts and emotions with the guardian when he wants to. It allowed these guardians to play an important role in helping the minor without being present at all times.

The minors and the guardians of course talked about serious matters when they were together. However when being together the difficult matters that the minors experience may have less urgency and feel more difficult to bring up than when they call on the phone. The guardian continued<sup>36</sup>:

*"Ja, den ene er krise.. da blir vi ringt opp og da er det krise.. og den andre når vi sitter og snakker og spør litt om sånn generelt og kommer inn på sånn forskjellige ting.. og så kommer vi inn på det følelsesmessige. Begynner å fortelle historier eller om mareritt man har hatt også videre også videre. Men det tenker jeg altså, der er det helt nødvendig å sitte og snakke en god stund før det kommer, fordi det er liksom sånn at, jeg tror at, denne personen, den mindreårige, må snakke seg varm."*<sup>36</sup>

The guardian's observation underlines the importance of having time for the minor. To give the minor time to feel safe, and time to let it out in a manner that is comfortable or bearable for him.

And as we saw in the previous quote the minors were also quite concerned with not being overheard. That the guardian is able to give the minor time one-on-one, undisturbed (or unobserved rather) by others is important for the minors to feel comfortable with sharing intimate thoughts and emotions. These things; time, privacy and availability are something that the guardians can better provide than the reception centre staff and the teachers.

Although the relations between minors and guardians varied, all the guardians had experienced good contact with minors to the extent that they received calls from them and talked about issues that were intimate to the minors. To the interviewed minors the guardians were seen as someone they could trust. The guardian was the one person, if any, mentioned as someone they felt they were able to share intimate and difficult thoughts and emotions, concerns and worries, and come for advice. This coincides with other reports that show that

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<sup>36</sup> From previous quote.

having guardians that care for the minors is greatly appreciated by the minors (Sjøberg 2005:88, Barlindhaug 2005:62-63, Engebretsen 2002:95). However the formally limited role of the guardians means that there is little regulation of the relation between the minors and the guardians, as well as little support from the public authorities of this relation. Thus the relationship between guardians and minors can vary greatly.

## **8.4 Official caretakers and support in dealing with thoughts and emotions**

In this chapter I have looked at what support that the minors get from what can be considered their official caretakers: the reception centre staff, the minors' teachers and their guardians. The findings raises serious questions about the care that unaccompanied asylum seeking minors in Norwegian reception centres receive.

The reception centre staff are in theory the primary caretakers of these asylum-seeking minors while they are in Norway, and are supposed to offer the minors help to deal with their emotions (*Faglige Retningslinjer 2000:17*). However the institutional and organisational limitations of the reception centre in regards to the staff's relation to the immigrant authorities, represented by the UDI, as well as the lack of staffing at the reception centre makes it very difficult for the staff to build any trust with the minors. Thus it is very hard for the staff to play any significant role in giving the minors support in dealing with their thoughts and emotions

At the same time the minors' guardians formally only have an obligation to make sure that the minors' legal rights are respected and upheld. They have no obligation to provide social support for the minors. Nonetheless, the guardians that do go beyond their formal role seem to play an important part in the social support of the minors. The minors are able to go to these guardians for help and advice with their thoughts and worries, even in the middle of the night if they need to. This shows the potential of guardians in helping the minors to deal with their thoughts and emotions. However because of the limited formal role of guardians, many minors cannot turn to their guardians for such support.

While school is a place for experiencing a sense of achievement and mastery, it can also be a place to experience failure. The teacher is important in giving the minor room to deal with their emotions at the same time as helping them cope with school. The teacher experienced that they were appreciated by the minors and looked to for help and support,

sometimes also outside of school. However the teacher's role as caretaker is limited to school and school hours.

This leaves these minors with very few to look to for help and support to deal with their thoughts and emotions. If they are able to go to the staff or to guardians for help and support, it unfortunately seems to be *despite* of the institutional and organisational framework for the minors care, not because of it. It is *despite* the minor's lack of right to confidentiality with the staff in regards to the UDI, *despite* the staff's lack of time and resources, and *despite* that their guardian is not formally obligated to provide care beyond looking after the minors legal rights.

## 9 Summary and last remarks

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The focus of this thesis is unaccompanied refugee minors, minors coming without their parents to seek asylum and refuge in Norway. As I stated in the very beginning of this thesis<sup>37</sup> one can see these children as entrusted to the care of the Norwegian government. Through the ratification and incorporation into Norwegian law of the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child Norway is obligated to the care of these minors' care and well-being.

In my research I have met minors such as these at 'Asgard', a Norwegian reception centre housing adolescent unaccompanied asylum seeking minors as well as adult asylum seekers. This thesis addresses the question of how these minors deal with their emotions while living in a reception centre.

Unaccompanied refugee minors are in a challenging situation; many on their own in an institution in a foreign country and culture, possibly dealing with traumatic experiences from conflict and from flight, as well as the losses they have experienced having left home, family and friends. They have to deal with these challenges while waiting for their asylum application to be processed. In reality they are waiting for their future to be decided. The emotional challenge that these minors face are underlined by research that shows that unaccompanied refugee minors live under considerable psychological distress, with high levels of symptoms of depression, anxiety and PTSD, even after resettlement (Oppedal et al. 2008:15, Seglem 2007:26, Bean et al 2006:1204, Derluyn 2007:141, Geltman et al. 2005:585, Felsman et al. 1990:1251, Sourander 1998:723-724).

The description of the minors' situation and the referenced research paints a bleak picture of the minors' situation that comes in stark contrast of how I experienced the minors at Asgard when I met them. I met smiling and positive teenagers that impressed me the more I got to know them. This positivity were also clearly present in the minors interaction with the other minors, with joking, talking, laughing and doing things together being in the focus.

This contrast between the gravity of the challenges the minors have to deal with and how they appear to deal with them is at the centre of this thesis. It is important to keep in

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<sup>37</sup> See chapter 1: "The entrusted child"

mind both that they are facing tough challenges but that they seem to deal with them as best they can, by staying positive.

## 9.1 Working hard

A central perspective of this thesis is inspired by Arlie Russell Hochschild's theories on emotion management (Hochschild 1979, 1983). According to Hochschild we manage our emotions by doing 'emotion work', which she defines as the attempt to "...*change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling*" (Hochschild 1979:561). I like this metaphor of 'working' emotions, because it puts an emphasis on the effort it takes to not express emotions freely, but to keep them under control.

Seen from this perspective the minors at Asgard do hard work every day avoiding emotions that are painful and distressing. They also do emotion work to avoid expressing personal thoughts and emotions to protect themselves in several respects; from reminding themselves (and others) of negative thoughts and emotions, from revealing anything they fear may jeopardise their application, and to maintain the respect of others.

By avoiding negative and personal thoughts and emotions, working them by changing or suppressing these emotions and seeking positive emotions in their place, the minors come off as having a 'don't worry, be happy' attitude. In a sense they create a 'face' of positivity. However, we should heed Hochschild's criticism of Goffman, and recognise that the face these minors present is more than skin deep (Hochschild 1979:556). While it is a positivity that is worked hard to achieve it is also a felt positivity, and not simply an expressed positivity. The positivity they show in face of the challenges they report is a testimony to the emotion work they do.

### *9.1.1 A WORK COLLECTIVE*

As I have argued earlier the minors at Asgard can be said to be doing collective emotion work, in a sense one could say that they are an emotional work collective. They do activities such as playing games, joking, laughing and talking, in a positive mode that makes it easier for the minors to keep themselves distracted from negative thoughts and emotions.

However, at the same time, being with others also increase the minors need to manage their emotions. In the presence of the other minors they avoid expressing personal thoughts and emotions to not remind anyone of negative thoughts and emotions, to not jeopardise their

asylum application, and to avoid losing face. Thus doing activities together help the minors avoiding negative thoughts and emotions, but increases the pressure to avoid personal thoughts and emotions.

### *9.1.2 LOSS OF SELF*

A minor expressed that he felt like he was losing his personality while another stated that it was hard to be who he really was at Asgard. When the emotion work these minors have to do become arduous and it becomes hard to reconcile what one express with what one feels there is no wonder that the minor feels that he is 'losing' himself.

The situation of the minors is such that they cannot or will not express their negative nor personal thoughts and emotions. The more that such thoughts and emotions press on, the more they have to work at avoiding and holding them back, and the bigger the discrepancy between how they feel and how they act becomes. If the discrepancy between how they feel and how they act becomes too big they risk feeling like this minor; that they are losing their personality.

### *9.1.3 HELPING THE MINORS WITH THEIR EMOTION WORK*

Most of us work our emotions in our everyday life; such as trying to keep a good mood when waking up to a pouring rain, trying to stifle an outburst of anger at, smiling and laughing at the lame joke of your boss, ignoring your anxiousness for tomorrows work presentation, pretending to be happy that your brother finally got the job you always wanted and so on.

While most of us manage and work emotions such as these more or less through our day, doing emotion work seems to be central part of the minors at Asgard's everyday life. As pointed out, the minors do emotion work to relieve themselves from distressing and painful emotions as well as protecting themselves by avoiding personal thoughts and emotions. The first type of emotion work, avoiding negative thoughts and emotions, is directed at themselves while the other type of emotion work, avoiding personal thoughts and emotions, is primarily directed at others.

To help the minors with the emotion work they do one has to address both types of emotion work. The first type, avoiding negative emotions, is the most difficult to address. As the reason for the negative thoughts and emotions, the source of this emotion work, is based in aspects of their situation that may not possible to do much with. For example the loss of

close ones, missing family and parents, previous traumatic experiences and so on. These are things that may not be possible to change.

Nonetheless, it may be possible to give the minors better tools to deal with these issues. That is however a matter that lies within the field of psychology, and that psychologists and therapists are better apt at addressing. Other sources for distressing thoughts and emotions such as for example problems at school or at the reception centre, or worries about things they do not understand in this foreign country, may be solved with the help of someone that can give them advice and support.

That may however be difficult if the minors avoid sharing personal thoughts and emotions to protect themselves. Relieving this type of emotion work may be somewhat easier, as it is mainly directed at others and as such is primarily relational. Thus by providing relations where the minors feels safe to express personal thoughts and emotions the work the minors have to do to avoid these thoughts and emotions can be reduced. That means providing relations where the minors can express personal thoughts and emotions without fear of rejection because of reminding others of negative thoughts and emotions, without fear of harming their asylum application, and without fear of losing the respect of others.

I believe the minors' official caretakers are ideally the first to be able to provide such relations for the minors while in the reception centre. That being said, also helping the minors with establishing relations with the other minors where they feel less need to protect themselves and more able to entrust the others with their personal thoughts and emotion is also be important to reduce the emotion work the minors have to do. That however is not an easy task, and it needs to be balanced against the minors' need to avoid negative thoughts and emotions.

#### *9.1.4 THE MINORS' CARETAKERS*

The reception centre staff, the minors' teachers and guardians are the minors' official caretakers while they stay at the reception centre. I have looked at what support they are able to provide the minors in dealing with their emotion work. Generally all the caretakers of the minors that I interviewed, the staff, the teachers and their guardians, seemed to do as best they could in helping the minors. They all recognised the minors' need for support however at the same time the caretakers face structural and formal restrictions in their ability to help the minors in dealing with their emotions.

The minors generally have a good relationship with their teachers and school. They are

important for the minors to feel seen and heard. The teachers also experience that the minors come to them with troubles and worries. However, they are restricted by their role as teachers and thus in the support they can give outside of school without going beyond their role and duties.

It is difficult for the staff to build trust with the minors because of the reception centre's relation to the immigration authorities represented by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI). That the staff cannot offer the minors confidentiality in regards to the UDI, as well as the staff's lack of time and resources, makes it difficult for the staff to be able to offer the minors help in dealing with their emotions. Although the minors generally expressed little trust in the staff at Asgard, there were some incidents and specific relations between certain staff and certain minors that indicated a potential for building trust. Without this trust the staff can do little to help the minors with their emotion work, except for help them distract themselves from negative thoughts and emotions through activities.

The interviewed minors at Asgard had a good relation with their guardians. Also the interviewed guardians experienced that the minors felt they could talk with them about problems and personal issues. However the minors' guardians are restricted by a limited definition of their role. Formally the guardians' role and obligations are limited to ensuring that the minors' legal rights are upheld. Thus there is room for much variation of the relations between minors and guardians as it relies on the guardian's interest in providing care for the minor beyond the formal definition of the guardian's role and obligations. The guardians I interviewed had gone beyond their formal role in their care for the minors in their charge. The good relation between these guardians and the minors in their care show the potential of guardians to play an important role in supporting and helping the minors to deal with their emotions.

As I see it, the caretakers' ability to give the minors help and support in dealing with their emotions is restricted by organisational and formal limitations to the caretakers' roles. While the teachers are understandably largely limited in their ability to care for the minors to school and school hours, the reception centre staff's and guardian's roles needs to be strengthened if they are to play a significant role in the help and support of the minors. Especially the relation between the staff and the minors, and the minors' lack of right to confidentiality in regards to the UDI should be reconsidered if one intends the staff to be able to help the minors deal with their emotions.

### *9.1.5 LAST REMARKS – CONTRADICTIONS AND COMPLEXITY*

There are two things I hope I have been able to balance in my description and analysis of how the minors at Asgard deal with their emotions. I hope I have balanced the presentation of the minors' difficulties and challenges against their ability to deal with these difficulties and challenges, as well as balancing the description of their behaviour as strategic, capable, and rational against less conscious, non-deliberate, responsive and habitual behaviour<sup>38</sup>.

The minors at Asgard are not positive just on the 'outside', while dealing with distressing and negative thoughts and emotions on the inside. Nor is their positive attitude and avoidance of personal thoughts and emotions in relation to their friends just a matter of calculations and strategic behaviour.

There is a complexity and contradiction in how the minors at Asgard deal with their emotions, that I believe one has to accept and understand to understand their situation. One has to accept that they are genuinely positive, while still struggling with difficult thoughts and emotions that they cannot or will not express or share as best they can. And one has to accept that their friendships might be characterised with a lack of trust, but at the same time that the friendships are genuine friendships. Contradictions such as these exist, but it is not for me or others to put ourselves to judge over these contradictions, or to call one side of the picture true and the other false.

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<sup>38</sup> See Torunn Fladstad's discussion of coping and strategic behaviour in her study "Mestering og mening: unge vietnameseres historier om sine liv" (Fladstad 1993:33)

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**ALL SOURCES USED IN THE THESIS ARE LISTED.**

**WORD COUNT, NOT INCLUDING REFERENCES, APPENDIXES AND ENDNOTES: 39 551**

# Appendixes

In these appendixes I have included information given to the informants, consent forms and interview guides as well as translation of quotes in Norwegian used in the thesis. Due to problems with formatting when including these appendixes; the information; the consent forms; and interview guides may have a somewhat different visual appearance than they originally had.

## Appendix – Information to informants

### *LETTER TO THE MINORS' GUARDIANS*

Til: Hjelpeverger for enslige mindreårige ved Asgard mottak

#### **Undersøkelse av enslige mindreårige i asylmottaks håndtering av følelser**

Jeg er en masterstudent i sosiologi ved Universitetet i Oslo som skriver en masteroppgave om hvordan enslige mindreårige i asylmottak håndterer følelser, og har valgt meg Asgard asylmottak som et case-studie.

I den forbindelse ønsker jeg både å intervju enslige mindreårige ved Asgard og hjelpeverger for enslige mindreårige ved Asgard. Vedlagt ligger to nesten likelydende informasjonsskriv, ett til deg som er hjelpeverge for en som er bosatt på Asgard mottak og ett informasjonsskriv som blir gitt til enslige mindreårige ved Asgard mottak.

Intervjuene er underlagt strenge etiske retningslinjer med blant annet taushetsplikt for intervjuer (undertegnede) og eventuell tolk, samt at det legges stor vekt på at intervjuene ikke skal føles som en belastning for den som intervjues.

Derfor er det også viktig at jeg får ditt samtykke til å intervju den du er verge for. Hvis det er i orden at den du er hjelpeverge for deltar på intervju så fyll ut den vedlagte samtykkeerklæringen og legg i den vedlagte ferdigfrankerte konvolutten og send til meg.

Det er også ønskelig for meg å intervju deg som er hjelpeverge om dine erfaringer

med den/de du har vært verge for, blant annet i forhold til hvordan de håndterer følelser.

Har du selv mulighet til å bli intervjuet ta kontakt med meg direkte på e-post eller telefon. Intervjuet vil ta i overkant av en time og kan gjennomføres på tidspunkt og sted som passer deg.

Jeg tar med glede mot eventuelle spørsmål du måtte ha og er tilgjengelig på telefon hvis du ønsker å snakke meg.

Med vennlig hilsen

Stig Molvik

Masterstudent ved Institutt for Sosiologi og Samfunnsgeografi

**Telefon:** [REDACTED]

**E-post:** [REDACTED]

**Adresse:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Informasjon til enslige mindreårige

## **Undersøkelse av hvordan det er å være enslig mindreårig på asylmottak, med fokus på følelser**

Jeg er en er en masterstudent i sosiologi tilknyttet Institutt for Sosiologi og Samfunnsgeografi ved Universitetet i Oslo som skal skrive en avsluttende masteroppgave i forbindelse med mitt studie i sosiologi. Temaet for oppgaven er hvordan det er å være enslige mindreårig i asylmottak. Jeg ønsker å lære mer om hvordan det daglige livet på et asylmottak oppleves av enslige mindreårige, og lære mer om de følelser man har på en helt vanlig dag som enslig mindreårig på asylmottak.

For å lære mer om dette vil jeg være tilstede på asylmottaket og observere for å se selv hvordan livet på mottaket er. Jeg ønsker også senere å intervju enslige mindreårige mellom 16-18 år som bor på mottaket.

### **ANONYMITET**

Den informasjonen jeg får i forbindelse med studiet, gjennom observasjon og intervju er hemmelig for andre. Det betyr at *ingen* (selv ikke de ansatte eller mottaksleder) får vite hva jeg ser eller hører mens jeg observerer eller under intervjuene. Kun meg selv og min lærer, Hilde Krogh, vil ha tilgang på informasjonen jeg samler inn. Det jeg får vite som vil bli brukt i min hovedoppgave vil *anonymiseres* slik at det ikke er mulig å kjenne igjen hvem informasjonen kommer fra (for eksempel vil navn som kommer frem i intervju endres slik at personer ikke kan kjennes igjen).

### **INTERVJU**

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<sup>39</sup> This information was given to each minor either personally or in an envelope, as well as posted on the information boards at Asgard. Similar information sheets were also given to the other informants.

Etter at jeg har vært på mottaket og sett hvordan det er å bo her, ønsker jeg å intervju noen av dere som bor her som er enslige mindreårige mellom 16-18 år. Å være med på intervjuet er helt frivillig.

Intervjuet er ment som en samtale om hvordan dagliglivet på mottaket oppleves, og vil ta maks en og en halv time. Det vil være en tolk tilstede på intervjuet som prater ditt morsmål og kan oversette. Jeg vil bruke båndopptaker og ta notater mens vi snakker. Tid og sted for intervjuet kan vi sammen bli enige om. Opplysningene vil som nevnt anonymiseres og opptakene slettes når oppgaven er ferdig, innen utgangen av 2005.

Det er helt frivillig å være med på intervjuet, og du har mulighet til *når som helst* å trekke deg fra intervjuet, uten å gi noen grunn for hvorfor eller at det har noen konsekvenser for deg.

Hvis du har lyst til å være med på intervju kan du ta kontakt med meg enten direkte når jeg er på mottaket, legge en lapp til meg i resepsjonen, sende meg en e-post på [redacted] eller ta kontakt med meg på mobil [redacted]

Undersøkelsen er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste A/S ([www.nsd.uib.no](http://www.nsd.uib.no) / [personverombudet@nsd.uib.no](mailto:personverombudet@nsd.uib.no)).



Med vennlig hilsen

Stig Molvik

[redacted]  
[redacted]

E-post: [redacted]

Mobil: [redacted]

Lærer/veileder:

Hilde Krogh

[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]

[redacted]

## *INFORMATION SHEET SUMMARY<sup>40</sup>*

### Om: Undersøkelse av hvordan det er å være enslig mindreårig på asylmottak, med fokus på følelser

#### Kort om hva som står i brevet:

- Jeg er en student i sosiologi (samfunnsfag) ved Universitetet i Oslo
- Jeg skal skrive en skoleoppgave om hvordan det er å være enslig mindreårig og bo på Asgard.
- For å få vite litt om det skal jeg være på Asgard en stund fremover og se hvordan det er her.
- Jeg vil også gjerne snakke med/intervjue noen av dere som er enslig mindreårig

#### Det er viktig for deg å vite:

- Jeg har full taushetsplikt om hva jeg ser og hører: det betyr at jeg ikke kan prate om hva jeg har sett eller hørt til andre.
- I oppgaven jeg skal skrive så blir all informasjon gjort ugjenkjennelig: slik at det ikke er mulig å kjenne igjen noen personer fra Asgard.

#### Hvis du vil intervjues/snakke med meg så kan du:

- Snakke med meg direkte når jeg er her
- Eller ringe meg på [REDACTED] eller sende meg e-post til [REDACTED]

#### Intervjuet:

- Tar litt over en time
- Er helt frivillig – du kan si nei eller gå når som helst uten at du får problemer
- Det er med en tolk som også har taushetsplikt

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<sup>40</sup> This is a summary of the other information sheet, intended to make it easier to understand for the minors at Asgard.



Med vennlig hilsen

Stig M olvik

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

E-post: [REDACTED]

Mobil: [REDACTED]

## Appendix – Consent forms

### *CONSENT FORMS – FOR GUARDIANS, ON BEHALF OF THE MINORS<sup>41</sup>*

#### **Undersøkelse av hvordan det er å være enslig mindreårig på asylmottak, med fokus på følelser**

Jeg er en er en masterstudent i sosiologi tilknyttet Institutt for Sosiologi og Samfunnsgeografi ved Universitetet i Oslo som skal skrive en avsluttende masteroppgave i forbindelse med mitt studie i sosiologi. Temaet for oppgaven er hvordan det er å være enslige mindreårig i asylmottak. Jeg ønsker å lære mer om hvordan det daglige livet på et asylmottak oppleves av enslige mindreårige, og lære mer om de følelser man har på en helt vanlig dag som enslig mindreårig på asylmottak.

For å lære mer om dette vil jeg være tilstede på asylmottaket og observere for å se selv hvordan livet på mottaket er. Jeg ønsker også senere å intervju enslige mindreårige mellom 16-18 år som bor på mottaket.

#### **Anonymitet**

Den informasjonen jeg får i forbindelse med studiet, gjennom observasjon og intervju er hemmelig for andre. Det betyr at *ingen* (selv ikke de ansatte eller mottaksleder) får vite hva jeg ser eller hører mens jeg observerer eller under intervjuene. Kun meg selv og min veileder, Hilde Krogh, vil ha tilgang på informasjonen jeg samler inn. Det jeg får vite som vil bli brukt i min hovedoppgave vil *anonymiseres* slik at det ikke er mulig å kjenne igjen hvem informasjonen kommer fra (for eksempel vil navn som kommer frem i intervju endres slik at personer ikke kan kjennes igjen).

#### **Intervju**

Etter at jeg har vært på mottaket og sett hvordan det er å bo her, ønsker jeg å intervju noen av de som bor der og er enslige mindreårige mellom 16-18 år. Å være med på intervjuet er helt frivillig.

Intervjuet er ment som en samtale om hvordan dagliglivet på mottaket oppleves, og vil ta maks en og en halv time. Det vil være en tolk tilstede på intervjuet som prater ditt morsmål og kan oversette. Jeg vil bruke båndopptaker og ta notater mens vi snakker. Opplysningene vil som nevnt anonymiseres og opptakene slettes når oppgaven er ferdig, innen utgangen av 2005.

Det er helt frivillig å være med på intervjuet, og den som intervjues har mulighet til *når som helst* å trekke seg fra intervjuet, uten å gi noen grunn for hvorfor eller at det har noen konsekvenser for ham/henne.

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<sup>41</sup> For each minor I got consent both from the guardian as well as the minor.

Enslige mindreårige som har lyst til å bli intervjuet kan ta kontakt med meg enten direkte når jeg er på mottaket, legge en lapp til meg i resepsjonen, sende meg en e-post på [redacted] eller ta kontakt med meg på mobil [redacted]

Undersøkelsen er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste A/S ([www.nsd.uib.no](http://www.nsd.uib.no) / [personverombudet@nsd.uib.no](mailto:personverombudet@nsd.uib.no)).

### Samtykke

For å kunne intervju en person under 18 år trenger jeg samtykke fra deg som er hjelpeverge. Hvis du har noen spørsmål, ønsker å vite mer eller annet du ønsker å ta opp med meg, så ta gjerne kontakt med meg på [redacted] eller [redacted].

Hvis du føler at det er i orden at jeg intervjuer den du er verge for så signer dette arket (se nedenfor) og returner til følgende adresse:

Stig Molvik

[redacted]

[redacted]

### Erklæring

Jeg har lest igjennom overstående informasjon og deriblant forstått at:

- kun Stig Molvik og hans lærer/veileder Hilde Krogh har full tilgang på opplysningene som gis under intervjuet
- alt som blir sagt under intervjuet vil bli anonymisert slik at informanten ikke kan bli gjenkjent av andre
- det er frivillig å delta
- jeg kan når som helst trekke meg fra intervjuet, uten å gi noen forklaring og uten at det har noen konsekvenser for meg

og jeg bekrefter med dette at jeg samtykker i at \_\_\_\_\_

deltar på intervju.

(navn på person du er verge for)

Signatur: \_\_\_\_\_ Dato: \_\_\_\_\_

## *CONSENT FORM - FOR THE MINORS*

### **Undersøkelse av hvordan det er å være enslig mindreårig på asylmottak, med fokus på følelser**

Jeg er en er en masterstudent i sosiologi tilknyttet Institutt for Sosiologi og Samfunnsgeografi ved Universitetet i Oslo som skal skrive en avsluttende masteroppgave i forbindelse med mitt studie i sosiologi. Temaet for oppgaven er hvordan det er å være enslige mindreårig i asylmottak. Jeg ønsker å lære mer om hvordan det daglige livet på et asylmottak oppleves av enslige mindreårige, og lære mer om de følelser man har på en helt vanlig dag som enslig mindreårig på asylmottak.

For å lære mer om dette vil jeg være tilstede på asylmottaket og observere for å se selv hvordan livet på mottaket er. Jeg ønsker også senere å intervju enslige mindreårige mellom 16-18 år som bor på mottaket.

#### **Anonymitet**

Den informasjonen jeg får i forbindelse med studiet, gjennom observasjon og intervju er hemmelig for andre. Det betyr at *ingen* (selv ikke de ansatte eller mottaksleder) får vite hva jeg ser eller hører mens jeg observerer eller under intervjuene. Kun meg selv og min lærer, Hilde Krogh, vil ha tilgang på informasjonen jeg samler inn. Det jeg får vite som vil bli brukt i min hovedoppgave vil *anonymiseres* slik at det ikke er mulig å kjenne igjen hvem informasjonen kommer fra (for eksempel vil navn som kommer frem i intervju endres slik at personer ikke kan kjennes igjen).

#### **Intervju**

Etter at jeg har vært på mottaket og sett hvordan det er å bo her, ønsker jeg å intervju noen av dere som bor her som er enslige mindreårige mellom 16-18 år. Å være med på intervjuet er helt frivillig.

Intervjuet er ment som en samtale om hvordan dagliglivet på mottaket oppleves, og vil ta maks en og en halv time. Hvis du ønsker det vil jeg ordne en tolk som kan være tilstede under intervjuet som prater ditt morsmål og kan oversette. Jeg vil bruke båndopptaker og ta notater mens vi snakker. Opplysningene vil som nevnt anonymiseres og opptakene slettes når oppgaven er ferdig, innen utgangen av 2005.

Det er helt frivillig å være med på intervjuet, og du har mulighet til *når som helst* å

trekke deg fra intervjuet, uten å gi noen grunn for hvorfor eller at det har noen konsekvenser for deg.

Hvis du har lyst til å være med på intervju kan du ta kontakt med meg enten direkte når jeg er på mottaket, legge en lapp til meg i resepsjonen, sende meg en e-post på [REDACTED] eller ta kontakt med meg på mobil [REDACTED]

Undersøkelsen er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste A/S ([www.nsd.uib.no](http://www.nsd.uib.no) / [personverombudet@nsd.uib.no](mailto:personverombudet@nsd.uib.no)).

### **Samtykke**

Jeg har lest igjennom overstående informasjon og deriblant forstått at:

- kun Stig Molvik og hans lærer/veileder Hilde Krogh har full tilgang på opplysningene som gis under intervjuet
- alt jeg sier vil bli anonymisert slik at jeg ikke kan bli gjenkjent av andre
- det er frivillig å delta
- jeg kan når som helst trekke meg fra intervjuet, uten å gi noen forklaring og uten at det har noen konsekvenser for meg

og jeg bekrefter med dette at jeg ønsker å delta på intervju.

Signatur: \_\_\_\_\_ Dato: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix – Interview guides

### *INTERVIEW GUIDE – UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINORS<sup>42</sup>*

#### Intervjuguide for EM

##### Hovedbolker i intervjuet:

- Generelt: hvordan opplever du å være på Asgard
  - o ”En vanlig dag”
- Håndtering av følelser
- Hvem håndterer du følelser med
  - o Forholdet til: Ansatte, venner familie, lærere

Hva opplever de

Hvordan opplever de

Hvorfor opplever de

##### Hvordan er en vanlig dag

Formålet er å finne ut hvordan en vanlig dag kan fortone seg. Blant annet se hvordan de beskriver humør/følelser fra en konkret dag, og også se på om de vil beskrive dette som vanlig/uvanlig for en slik dag. Følge opp med å spørre om hvordan helgedagene er i forhold til en vanlig dag.

- når sto du opp i går
  - var du på skolen
    - o hva gjorde du på skolen
  - hva gjorde du etter skolen
  - hva gjorde du på kvelden
  - hva gjorde du på natten
  - Hvordan vil du beskrive humøret ditt i går..
    - o (hvorfor var det slik..)
  
  - Hva gjorde du sist søndag..
- 

<sup>42</sup> I only used this very rough draft in the interviews with the minors.

- Når sto du opp..
- Hva gjorde du etter på.. etc.

Oppfølgingsspørsmål:

- er dette vanlig
- (i forhold til humør) hvorfor følte du det slik

## Litt om Asgard

Jeg ønsker å høre litt generelt om hvordan de synes livet er på Asgard. Både fordi at dette er et tema som jeg tror de har mange meninger om og som det er lett å få dem i gang på, men også fordi det kan dukke opp interessante temaer som gir mulighet for å forfølge videre.

Spørsmålet blir derfor veldig åpent:

- kan du fortelle litt om hvordan det er å være på Asgard?

Videre om hvordan de håndterer følelser ved mottaket.

Hender det at de blir:

- lei seg
- sint
- glad

I så fall: i hvilke situasjoner? – og hva gjør de da?

- Dette kan følges opp med spørsmål om forholdet til andre ved mottaket:
  - Ansatte
  - Beboere
  - helsesøster

## Følelsesmedarbeidere

Jeg ønsker også å vite hvem de gjør følelsesarbeid sammen med; hvem er deres fortrolige – hvem snakker de om følelser med.

Hvem snakker du med når du har problemer, eller har noe du trenger å prate om?

- verger?
- Ansatte?
- Venner?

- Lærere?
- Helsesøster?

Hvem kan dem snakke med? Hvorfor/hvorfor ikke

Hvem stoler dem på? Hvorfor/hvorfor ikke..

Stiller de opp for deg?

### **Avslutning**

Avslutter med å spørre om:

- hva synes du det er viktigst for meg å vite for å forstå hvordan du har det her
- er det noe du vil utdype, kommentere, eller si noe mer om av det vi har snakket om, eller er det noe vi ikke har vært inne på som du vil si noe om

## **Intervjuguide for verger**

### **Formål med intervju**

Formålet med intervju er å vite litt om hvilken relasjon vergen har hatt med den/de vergebarna han/hun har hatt ansvaret for, spesielt i forhold til følelshåndtering, og også litt om hvordan vergen ser sin egen rolle som verge.

### **Intervjuguide skisse**

Jeg tenker et relativt åpent men noe strukturert intervju.

#### **Innledning**

Rekkefølgen på spørsmålene er noe tilfeldig, dvs. den er ikke fastlåst. Spørsmålene er heller ikke alltid stilt som jeg vil stille dem muntlig.

1. Hvor lenge har du vært verge?
2. Hvordan/hvorfor ble du verge?
3. Har du vært verge for flere?
4. Kan du fortelle meg litt om hvordan det er å være verge
5. Hvordan opplever du forholdet mellom deg og [vergebarn]
  - a. Har dere mye kontakt
    - i. Hva slags type; telefon/direkte/annet.
    - ii. Kan du gi et eksempel på et møte/kontakt (nå i det siste?)
  - b. Hvordan er kontakten
    - i. Er dere fortrolige?
      1. Forteller han/hun til deg om personlige ting
  - c. Hva snakker dere om?

6. Hvor godt føler du at du kjenner [vergebarn]?
7. Hender det at [vergebarnet] kommer til deg med sine følelser; sånn som glede eller sinne?
  - i. Hva skjer da?
  - ii. Hva synes du om det?
  - iii. Hender det ofte?
  - iv. Har du eksempel på en slik hendelse?
  - v. Er det viktig for deg?
8. Opplever du at du er en viktig person i livet til vergebarnet?
  - a. Vil du være det?
9. Hvordan ser du selv på rollen som verge?
  - a. Hvordan ble vergerollen fremstilt for deg første gangen
10. Hva synes du er positivt med å være verge?
11. Hva er det du savner som verge?
12. Kan du fortelle litt om ditt inntrykk av hvordan det er å være EM på mottak?
13. Hva synes du er viktigst å forstå for meg om det å være EM på mottak?
14. Har du noen spørsmål til meg, eller noe du vil tilføye eller utdype til slutt?

## **Intervjuguide for lærere**

### **Formål med intervju**

Formålet med intervju er å vite litt hvordan skolehverdagen inngår i de enslige mindreåriges håndtering av følelser, med utgangspunkt i hvordan lærerne erfarer og opplever dem. Det som er viktige punkter er relasjonen mellom lærere og de mindreårige, elevene mellom og også interaksjonen i klaserommet.

### **Intervjuguide skisse**

Jeg tenker et relativt åpent men noe strukturert intervju.

#### **Innledning**

Rekkefølgen på spørsmålene er noe tilfeldig, dvs. den er ikke fastlåst. Spørsmålene er heller ikke alltid stilt som jeg vil stille dem muntlig.

#### Innledning

1. Hvor lenge har du vært lærer ved Folkeuniversitetet?
2. I hvilken forbindelse er det du jobber med de enslige mindreårige?  
(klassestyrer, faglærer.. hvilke fag..etc)
3. Hvor lenge har du jobbet med enslige mindreårige asylsøkere?
4. Hvordan opplever du det å jobbe med enslige mindreårige asylsøkere?
  - a. Hva synes du er interessant?
  - b. Hva er utfordrende?
  - c. Hva er hyggelig?
  - d. Hva er problematisk?
5. Hvordan er din opplevelse av hvordan de enslige mindreåriges forhold til skolen?

- a. Trives de her?
  - b. Er det noe de synes er vanskelig?
  - c. Hva synes de er godt?
  - d. Hva er fælt?
6. Hender det at de uttrykker følelser i klasserommet eller til deg (av både positiv og negativ art)?
- a. Hvordan?
  - b. Hvilke følelser?
  - c. Hvor ofte?
  - d. Hva skjer da?
  - e. Hvorfor tror du at de gjør det?

#### Relasjon

7. Hvordan er forholdet ditt til de enslige mindreårige du er lærer for?
- a. Har du nært forhold til noen?
    - i. Hvordan er forholdet?
    - ii. Hvorfor (har det blitt nært)?
    - iii. Hva prater dere om?
  - b. Hvordan er forholdet til de andre?
    - i. Hvorfor er det slik (tror du)?
    - ii. Hender det at de tar opp nære ting/personlige ting?

#### Interaksjon

8. Hvordan er forholdet mellom elevene i klassen?
- a. Hvordan er elevene sammen
  - b. Hva gjør de sammen?
  - c. Viser elevene noe følelser seg i mellom?

#### Mestring

9. Opplever du at skolearbeidet har noen betydning for hvordan de har det?
- a. På hvilken måte?
    - i. Kan det ha positive sider?

ii. Kan det ha negative sider?

10. Er det noen forskjell på hvordan ulike takler skolen?

a. Hva tror du kan være årsaken?

11. Er det noen som har bedre av å være på skolen enn andre?

a. På hvilken måte?

b. Hvorfor?

Avsluttning

12. Er det noen temaer jeg ikke har vært innom som du synes er relevante?

13. Hva synes du er mest interessant eller viktigst for meg å forstå, for å forstå hvordan EM opplever og håndterer følelser på skolen?

14. Er det til slutt noe du vil tilføye, eller spørre om?

## **Intervjuguide for ansatte**

### **Formål med intervju**

Formålet med intervjuet er å lære mer om forholdene for enslige mindreårige på mottaket. Øke forståelsen om hvordan enslige mindreårige viser og håndterer følelser sett fra de ansattes ståsted, samt hvordan tillitsforholdet mellom de ansatte og barna oppleves – og hvem de ansatte ser at barna snakker med. Altså den emosjonelle samhandlingen på mottaket, relasjonen mellom ansatte og barna og barna og andre i og utenfor mottaket.

### **Intervjuguide skisse**

Jeg tenker et relativt åpent men noe strukturert intervju.

#### **Innledning**

Rekkefølgen på spørsmålene er noe tilfeldig, dvs. den er ikke fastlåst. Spørsmålene er heller ikke alltid stilt som jeg vil stille dem muntlig.

#### Innledning

15. Hvor lenge jobbet du ved Asgard?
16. Hvor lenge har du jobbet med enslige mindreårige asylsøkere?
17. Hvordan opplever du det å jobbe med enslige mindreårige asylsøkere?
  - a. Hva synes du er interessant?
  - b. Hva er utfordrende?
  - c. Hva er hyggelig?
  - d. Hva er problematisk?
18. Hvordan er din opplevelse av de enslige mindreåriges forhold til mottaket?

- a. Trives de her?
  - b. Er det noe de synes er vanskelig?
  - c. Hva synes de er godt?
  - d. Hva er fælt?
19. Hender det at de uttrykker følelser i klasserommet eller til deg (av både positiv og negativ art)?
- a. Hvordan?
  - b. Hvilke følelser?
  - c. Hvor ofte?
  - d. Hva skjer da?
  - e. Hvorfor tror du at de gjør det?
20. Hvis et barn har det vanskelig, hvordan bruker dere å få vite det?
- a. Hvordan vises det
  - b. Hvordan håndteres det?

### Relasjon

21. Hvordan er forholdet ditt til barna som er her?
- a. Har du nært forhold til noen?
    - i. Hvordan er forholdet?
      1. Snakker dere sammen om nære ting?
    - ii. Hvorfor (har det blitt nært)?
    - iii. Hva prater dere om?
  - b. Hvordan er forholdet til de andre?
    - i. Hvorfor er det slik (tror du)?
    - ii. Hender det at de tar opp nære ting/personlige ting?
  - c. Er det noen du syntes det var vanskelig å jobbe med?
    - i. Hvorfor? Hva gjorde det vanskelig?

### Interaksjon

22. Hvordan er forholdet mellom de enslige mindreårige?
- a. Hvordan er elevene sammen
  - b. Hva gjør de sammen?

- c. Viser elevene noe følelser seg i mellom?
- d. Prater de med hverandre om nære ting?

#### Avsluttning

- 23. Er det noen temaer jeg ikke har vært innom som du synes er interessant?
- 24. Hva synes du er mest interessant eller viktigst for meg å forstå, for å forstå hvordan EM opplever og håndterer følelser på skolen?
- 25. Er det til slutt noe du vil tilføye, eller spørre om?

## Appendix - Translation of quotes

These are my translations of quotes from Norwegian literature and references as well as Norwegian quotes from my research used in the thesis. My English, as you may have noticed, is not perfect and I apologise for any mistakes done. I have done my best to preserve the intent of the translated quotes.

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<sup>i</sup> “Yes, yes, yes.. absolutely.. and it can also be... in conflicts we often call an uncle or something like that.. now.. this one is behaving like this and this and this.. And this was rarely popular with the uncle... so then the uncle came out here and talked, had a meeting with the guardian, uncle and resident and staff member... proper... but it.. yeah... or also sometimes just on the phone.. ”can you talk to him?”

<sup>ii</sup> “...their presence seemed to have a positive effect by reducing some of the distance between myself (as stranger and interviewer) and the young asylum seekers.” (Knudsen 1990:22) (My translation)

<sup>iii</sup> “Participant observation must include both intimacy and distance, the relation to the researched must be both as a friend and as a stranger. A researcher that does not come close enough, will not be able to understand the researched’s world. A scientist that does not gain enough distance, will not be able to discover and put words on that which is taken for granted, nor lift the analysis from the trivial.” (Album 1996:240-241) (My translation)

<sup>iv</sup> “We must make clear our own role as a gate keeper (and gate opener) to a landscape of emotions and often unprocessed traumas attempted mastered through silence, withdrawal and the need for hedging the persons inner, and often most private emotions. If we as researchers open up the door to such landscapes, what qualifications do we have to receive the information? What capability, wish and responsibility do we have to function therapeutically? What expectations do the young have to us? Especially in studies of children torn from their families and other alliance partners we have to tread carefully. Our objective is not to penetrate what seems to us to be fictions, and thereby expose the person for further loss. Thus we must accept that silence can be a bigger problem in our own hunt for data than for the youth themselves.” (Knudsen 1991:29) (My translation)

<sup>v</sup> “First and foremost children – Transfer of the responsibility of care for unaccompanied, minor asylum seekers to the child care services.”

<sup>vi</sup> “Regulations for the operation of government reception centres”

<sup>vii</sup> “Employees in reception centers with a municipal operator are legally bound to confidentiality. UDI has bound employees in reception centers with private operators with the same confidentiality, but this does not apply in relation to the UDI.”

<sup>viii</sup> “You know what? I have, I have many things to think about, but I cannot think about anything, you know?” ... “Maybe I have been raised by my parents to be happy, because I am always happy. I try not to be angry or to be grumpy with anyone or to be sad.”

<sup>ix</sup> “So, it is just, every day you have to try to make it. How you will make it does not matter.” ... “Just try to... when I think negatively, I try to... I laugh and, like, talk a lot... but... I do not talk about what I think about the negative stuff that I think about”.

<sup>x</sup> “I am always happy, I like being happy”.

<sup>xi</sup> “Alone – between security and insecurity”

<sup>xii</sup> “The significant and the insignificant”

<sup>xiii</sup> “Perhaps lonely... or... yeah, I know... I won’t tell when it comes to that... I don’t even think. I do not

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know what I did. It was very sad you know. After I had read, I came out and just fooled around.”

<sup>xiv</sup>”Yes, it is important because that.. must.. it is important as... to laugh even if it is a bit hard, but you have to just try to laugh because it is best.”

<sup>xv</sup>”There are many that get angry because I talk too much. I just talk way too much because I, because I have to talk. Because if I don’t talk I will die... if I... then I will get a lot of problems.”

<sup>xvi</sup>”With friends I never think about it, I’m a bit like, not thinking of anything, yes..”.

<sup>xvii</sup>”When I am alone, I do not like to think about anything, I just like to listen to music.”

<sup>xviii</sup> Quote exactly as quoted in Schancke (1995:52). Translation: “I cannot think too much about it – I have to sit up and sing inside myself during the nights (...) or talk or scream aloud at day – in a sense drown out my self - when I begin to think too much, it is hard...”

<sup>xix</sup>”So I think that my application will be rejected, I don’t think about getting a residence permit. Now I just, I can feel that it will be rejected. Maybe it is wrong, I hope I am wrong. But yeah, I do not want to think positively because I have had the application rejected so many times that I get disappointed every time. So I will not be disappointed again.”

<sup>xx</sup>”Now I am trying to take things as they are, like, just saying – ‘Ok, it is like that now’. I can’t change the situation. I can’t, I can’t just let it... I can’t just think that: ‘ok, now I move out, tomorrow I move out... just out like that. I’m going to live at Asgard as it is.”

<sup>xxi</sup>”Yes, I write about all the things I think about in it. In it I write about what I am feeling and everything.”

<sup>xxii</sup>”Yes it helps some times. But sometimes I get mad about writing; that I talk to a wall and no one answer you know. It is a little difficult to share feelings with the diary, by writing it down. But it helps a little anyhow.”

<sup>xxiii</sup>”Yeah, so one can relax a bit. A bit, not much. Just have to take out.. out of your brain, because there is a lot that is happening inside there.”

<sup>xxiv</sup>”I have to think about it, but I don’t like to think so much about it.”

<sup>xxv</sup>”When I am alone, I do not like to think about anything, I just like to listen to music.”

<sup>xxvi</sup>”...I have many things to think about, but I cannot think about anything...”

<sup>xxvii</sup>”But yeah, I do not want to think positively because I have had the application rejected so many times that I get disappointed every time.”

<sup>xxviii</sup>”To force one self to not think about “the painful” is, on the other hand, common. Instead one tries to cope with every day life’s routines and demands.”

<sup>xxix</sup>”Yeah. I didn’t want to think more about it. I have to think about it, but I don’t like to think so much about it.”

<sup>xxx</sup> Yeah, there is a lot of pressure you have to... because there is a lot that goes through my head, so if I get... if I can’t... take it out, or like, push it out then.. then it will be.. big problems so..”

<sup>xxxi</sup>”They giggle, laugh and enjoy themselves or get angry over everyday issues and simultaneously suppress the really difficult problems they have.”

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<sup>xxxii</sup> Me: "But when you get upset, do you talk to anyone then, or do you keep it inside or, if you get sad?"

Minor: "I keep it inside."

Me: "You keep it inside?"

Minor: "Yes."

Me: "Can I ask why? Do you not like talking to others or?"

Minor: "I do not know, I do not have any such 'best friends' that can be there for me in that way."

Me: "No, no. No one here at the reception centre?"

Minor: "None, None. I have no best friends. I have one such that we can be with each other, but I cannot trust them."

<sup>xxxiii</sup> "Yes, we're not the same, so.. I.. We're very good friends now, very good friends. But we cannot... We just talk about silly... kidding with me.. Going to [city] and such, talk a bit.. But not about serious stuff, because... because it is a bit the same.. we are not the same.. It is the same with such [friend]. [Friend] have been at [Asgard] for almost a year now. I lived with him just for four-five months so we lived together first, and then I lived with someone else. So, yes, so, it is a bit... yeah, I try to be good to them, and they are good to me. But we cannot talk about such private stuff."

<sup>xxxiv</sup> "I'm always with him, so we talk. He talks about things, he does not talk about anything that is not good."

<sup>xxxv</sup> Minor: "Most of them know who I am... but.. I am... a... as they say... I have a face that just smi... that always smiles. But no one knows what is happening inside there."

Me: "No, right.."

Minor: "But I... and I do not want anyone to know it either, because I think that otherwise.. yeah.. I think that there are some that thinks that.. There are many that do not want to talk with sad people." (cont)

Me: "No, No"

Minor: "They think that it is a bit hard to be with. So, if I am a bit sad some times, then I don't get anyone to talk to."

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Me: "What do you think when you hear that others have gotten a positive or negative, before you knew yourself what you..."

Minor: "Yes when I got the first I got naucious, but when I got the other, I was as good as [usual <unclear>]. If you had to... I was a bit shy because I am.. I never lied that much. So a bit shy, a bit sad, a bit angry with myself..."

Me: "Why were you angry with yourself?"

Minor: "Because, I could just have given the correct name, but I have not done so."

Me: "I see.."

Minor: "So..."

Me: "So it felt hard that you had lied? But did you lie to the reception centre or was it to friends as well, or was it just to UDI or?"

Minor: "To everyone."

Me: "To everyone. Well. So it.. and also to people you knew? Yeah. Was it hard?"

Minor: "Yes it is pretty hard because.. I don't know.. I felt a bit.. I don't know how it was.. I was very sad.." (My translation)

<sup>xxxvii</sup> "I cannot say anything private to [friend]. What I am a bit afraid, I probably trust him, but I do not know in 3-4 weeks if I will have a fight with him so that he might come to say something to another that 'He has done such and such and such'. Or that '[minor] is such and such and such'. That, I do not want anyone at [Asgard] to know about me."

<sup>xxxviii</sup> "Yes, this period I have stayed at Asgard there is many that have arrived and many that have moved. The only one who is very approved is [friend], because he is the only one who I came with who has not moved so. I think he's ok. I like him. But, we still have some different ideas. So I trust him, but I cannot talk to him about anything serious because we are not the same."

<sup>xxxix</sup> Minor: "You live with them.. and don't have time to quarrel. Don't have time to have any problems,

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so ok; I have to agree with them. So you just feel... you lose a bit.. a part of per.. your personality.”

Me: “Because you all the time have to adjust to others who..?”

Minor: “Yeah but.. I can’t be myself here, because it is not possible! Because I can’t decide everything self.. even in my room. Because I.. I share my room with another.”

<sup>xl</sup> ”The reception centre shall secure the minors the necessary attention and care. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee minors are a particularly vulnerable group that additionally live every day in uncertainty, for example in regard to their future living situation (in Norway or possible return to their homeland). While living in a reception centre unaccompanied minors are to be given good care in a safe environment. The regard to the best interest of the child is to be the centre of all work.”

<sup>xli</sup> ”It is common that persons that have experienced painful or traumatic events do not want to talk about this to others than those they have a confidential and trusting relation to. It is of importance that the staff seek to establish safe and trusting relations to the residents and contribute so that the unaccompanied minors are able to process their feelings”

<sup>xlii</sup> Staff: ”Yes, yes.. So it might be that it is in the asylum-application, but it also means that I don’t have to say anything to the UDI because I do not know if what has been said in the interview either. That is, if he has written ‘mum and dad is dead’ – he says to me; ‘I have contact with mom’.”

Me: “You don’t have to say anything.”

Staff: “Yeah, I don’t know if it is contrary to what the application says, so I have quite often thought that it is quite ok to not have read that application.”

<sup>xliii</sup> ”...having a firm structure of the everyday life, through routines, rules and procedure descriptions.”

<sup>xlivxlv</sup> “...not so good friends...” (My translation)

<sup>xlv</sup> Minor: ”[Staff member] for example. [Staff member] is one of the best that works at [Asgard]. I like very much. The others not like her. That’s a bit..”

Me: “Yeah.. But can you talk to [Staff member] then if.. ?”

Minor: “Yeah, I have talked to [Staff member] some times. But now it has become.. Now I think it that is no problem if I talk to her. So personally have just... I do not want to give away any of my problems.”

<sup>xlvi</sup> Minor: ”Yes. Ok. It’s ok. Or, I use to kid around a lot at school, kidding all the time. Not being who I am. I don’t have a lot of room... My teacher knows about it, so she just, she knows who I am, so after...”

Me: “But, can I ask why you kid around so much?”

Minor: “Because I don’t want to talk a lot, because I, if I get like, if I sit like for a half hour, all tired, then I start thinking a lot. So if I talk then I use, does not give time to think much.”

<sup>xlvii</sup> ”We might not be so fond of them coming and going as they want to some times, so we try to encourage them to come in the morning and staying throughout the day, and be here every day. But you see that some just can’t do it, and you can tell it a bit on them being very restless, they just can’t sit and concentrate.”

<sup>xlviii</sup> “But it is persons that you get to know that means something for you too, because you get a whole different relationship to the unaccompanied minors, than you get to those who have full support at home with family and all that. Because they are more vulnerable, they need it more and they use you more as a person. They come more, because they come more that extra care-person. The others have their mother and their father and it is also the same with those that live in collectives, in a way they have their adults around them the whole time that are there for them.”

<sup>xlix</sup> They come with other types of stuff they need help with, and they need a lot of confirmation of being seen. And that they mean something to you as teacher as well. That they also are giving something. But you get alot back, of care and love. And they come to you with all their little and big problems. Largely.”

<sup>l</sup> Teacher A: ”And a little that with, they have a barrier of who can I trust and who can I not trust. That they have to experience...”

Teacher B: “..yeah, that is clear..”

Teacher A: “...that, for some you have to prove that you can be trusted much more than for others. It is a bit about trust. They are probably very used to that people just blabbers off with things.”

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<sup>li</sup> "Yeah, but it is probably a bit about that if there is one that tells me that he has difficulties with something or another where they live then 'now my situation is like this and this, I do not know where my mother or father is' or something like that, then you don't need to tell it to the other teachers for example. They often think that we are in contact with the UDI, while I have nothing to do with the UDI. So it is a little like getting to show them the lines, and that then things that they have said to me, I will not tell the other teachers. Because they understand automatically that 'Aha, now [Teacher] know that [Other teacher] has spoken of this.' So it is simply about the attitudes I then have to confidentiality."

<sup>lii</sup> Both, it varies a bit, it depends on what the problem is. Some wants to have help with their collective [where they live], that they think they argue a bit too much with those that they live at or live with. Both at reception-centres and collectives and such. And want you to call there and help them and set things straight and things like that. Or it is just to hear that what they have thought is right. If it is smart of them to do it like this or, what they can do in different situations."

<sup>liii</sup> Teacher: "Then you just see a dark wall, that you that now this one just needs to talk with you."

Me: "So you can see it on them?"

Teacher: "Ja, they are not able to hide it."

<sup>liv</sup> "It can be that you stand and have inspection in the hallway, and they start with other thing and then they often ask, then they often say, when you ask how they are. Then it comes. But it is often like that, in a bit informal situations when you are directly with one and one. Not so often in class, and if it is it is not very personal or intimate, then it's more for jokes. If there are more they have to hide themselves a bit more."

<sup>lv</sup> "So they are really very, like, careful with getting in contact outside of school, then they are very afraid of being a bother. And the few times they do, you understand that this is really important to them. And then you take the five minutes it takes, or one or something like that."

<sup>lvi</sup> "The provisional guardian's task is to secure EMA's [Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Minors] and be its' legal representative against the public authorities. Up to a decision has been reached in the asylum case the provisional guardian's main task is to assist the EMA in the asylum case."

<sup>lvii</sup> "So I , I have experienced that, well, there are some that I have had very close contact with. And I don't quite know why. Maybe especially two asylum interviews that I attended, and those two that I followed from then I got a very close connection with. And then there are others that I have come to a bit later, that I have not had such close contact with. And it has both to with this that I have followed all the way, and also this that they are different persons. And some are a bit more reserved for different reasons, and don't want so much contact. And I respect that of course." – Guardian

<sup>lviii</sup> "And he calls me in the night if there is anything. I'm very set on 'that you shal do that'. And we have talked abit about that he does that and there have been quite a lot of pressure in periods.. eh .. about that, you know.. that he calls and cries and sometimes we have to take it over sms because he does not bear to speak." ... "But I belive ..that he probably would wish to call more often then he doeas maybe, because he is afraid for still being a bother, or that it will be too much."

<sup>lix</sup> "That is, usually per telephone. It is very often that they send a message 'Can you call me?'. Or that they call from the reception centre or collective, when they can loan the use of a telephone so that they won't be overheard because they are quite concerned with that. Ehm.. And that is one way, and then it is a crisis. Usually then it is a crisis. That is one way. The other way is just for me to meet and sit and talk for several hours, and then it begins... it begins to come. So..."

<sup>lx</sup> "Yes, one situation is when it's a crisis, then we are called up and then it's a crisis, and the other is when we sit and talk and ask a bit about things in general and touch in on different issues.. and then we touch in on the emotiona. Begins to tell stories or about nightmares that one has had and so on and so on. But I think really, that then it is quite necessary to sit and talk quite a while before it comes, because it is kind of like that, I think that, this person, the minor, has to talk himself warm."